

## 440 SYRIANS KILLED BY TURKISH BORDER GUARD



Turkish guards watch over Syrian refugees at the border (AFP/Getty Images) See page...05

### Amnesty accuses Turkey of 'war crimes' in Syria



Turkish forces and Syrian rebel allies have committed "war crimes" including summary executions during their offensive in northeast Syria, Amnesty International said 18 October. Amnesty accused Ankara's forces of "serious violations and war crimes, summary killings and unlawful attacks" in the operation launched on October 9. "Turkish military forces and a coalition of Turkey-backed Syrian armed groups have displayed a

shameful disregard for civilian life," Amnesty said. The charges were based on the testimony of 17 people including medical, aid and rescue workers, journalists and displaced people, as well as video footage, it said. "The information gathered provides damning evidence of indiscriminate attacks in residential areas, including attacks on a home, a bakery and a school, carried out by Turkey and allied Syrian armed groups," Amnesty said.

### The Houthis use women to lay mines in schools and markets

Security forces in Yemen's northeastern province of Al-Jawf have seized a women's cell affiliated to the Houthi militias laying mines and improvised explosive devices in popular markets, and civilian gathering areas in Al-Hazm, the capital of the province. See page...04

### ISIS leader Baghdadi killed in a US raid

Donald Trump announces that the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has been killed in a raid by US special forces on his Syrian safehouse, ending a years-long man-hunt for one of the world's most wanted terrorists.

Trump said the two-hour operation was conducted on 27 October Saturday night in the province of

Idlib, one of the last areas of the country still outside Syrian regime control, and that US officials had confirmed Baghdadi, 48, was among those killed.



### Ireland – north and south – fret about Boris's Brexit deal

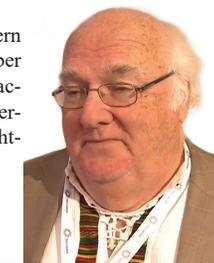
Boris Johnson's long-awaited Brexit agreement was finally reached by changing the rules for the highly sensitive issue of the future relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland after the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. See page...10



Ian Black

### Turkey, Syria and the Kurds

Turkey's current incursion into Northern Syria, which began in earnest on October 9th, has produced numerous negative reactions throughout the world as did the American withdrawal of their modest force fighting alongside the Kurdish Syrian. See page...13



Bruce Mabley

### Lawsuit exposes Qatari spymaster

While the US has been preoccupied with the furore over who was bribing whom in places like Ukraine, most Americans have no idea that a proxy war is being fought in their own country between rival Middle-Eastern powers. See page...08



Oren Litwin

### Radical Mosques and Jihad

On 3 October, a French police IT employee, at the Paris Police HQ, stabbed and killed four of his colleagues, beheading at least one of the victims. The killer, who had been serving in the police for 16 years, had a security clearance. See page...11



Olivier Guitta

### Kurds are the Only Losers from the Disgraceful American-Turkish Ceasefire Agreement in North-eastern Syria

In less than two weeks, the American president, Donald Trump, has lavished too many gifts on Turkish president Rajab Taib Erdogan. Firstly, on 10th October, Trump gave Turkey's Erdogan the green light to invade north-eastern Syria. See page...12



Jwan Dibo

### A war on their terms or ours?

The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been escalating beyond rhetoric and is fast escalating towards an actual military confrontation. Following a long round of proxy moves from Yemen – as well as attempts to stop oil tankers in the Persian Gulf. See page...09



Nir Boms

# Iran's influence in Iraq's protests

The security forces responded using water cannons, tear gas, and, for the first time, live ammunition and grenades, which resulted in more than 100 deaths and thousands of injuries. The Iraqi government also applied curfews and internet blockades in an unprecedented clampdown on the people's democratic right to protest.

Only after these events did the government call an emergency session that was concluded with proposing an economic plan to ease poverty.

According to VOA, the current protest movement has two main political objectives. The first, is to topple the corrupt Iraqi government, which is incapable of doing its most basic job i.e. providing services like electricity, water, health care and education. The second, is to challenge Iran's interference, politically and economically, in Iraq through the use of proxy militia forces.

At this time, with tensions between Tehran and Washington on the rise, Iraq could once again become a political and actual battleground, which will destabilise its fragile internal balance and deepen regional turmoil.

However, the people on the streets are in high spirits, determined and unstoppable. "It has been 16 years of corruption and injustice," said Abbas Najm, a 43-year-old unemployed engineer who was part of a rally on Saturday. "We are not afraid of bullets or death. We



will keep going and we won't back down."

Iran has used Iraq, with impunity, as its backyard and a launchpad for expanding its malign activities in the region over the 16 years since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and, more recently, to ease the impact of sanctions and for money laundering.

Therefore, the Iranian regime was shocked when the uprising suddenly erupted in 11 provinces, demonstrating that people have had enough. It was especially disturbing for Iran that the demonstrations were marked with a strong participation Shiites, who were openly protesting against Iranian interference in their country, with slogans being chanted in streets across Iraq such as "Iran out of Iraq, free Baghdad." Tehran wants the uprising to end and it was clearly behind the brutal crackdown on pro-

tests. Iraqi authorities tried to accuse unidentified snipers of shooting into crowds, and said they were searching residential neighbourhoods for those responsible. However, protestors have pointed the finger at Iran, accusing it of using its experience to teach the Iraqi forces how to crack-down, and for dispatching IRGC snipers to Iraq. One reporter said "As Iraqis protest against corruption, Iran pours fuel on the fire."

Iran maintains close ties to the militant clerics and Shiite militias it has been training and using in its proxy wars in the region. During the past months, at least ten regular Iraqi officers loyal to Iraq in the fight against ISIS, have been discharged against their will. Some Iraqis link the development to the IRGC influence in Iraq.

**Fuelled by such actions,**

demonstrators burned Iranian flags and pictures of Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, in many cities such as Basra, Diwaniyah and Nasseriah. They also torched the headquarters of the Badr Organization, a Shiite militia affiliated with Iran, and demanded that the country disconnect from Iran's electricity and water systems. Prior to the Basra protests, Iran had decided to cut off Iraq's electricity at the height of a scorching summer due to an unpaid debt, a move that made many protesters view it as a hostile country.

In a local television interview aired last Thursday, 3 October, Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officer, who was an aide to Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, said that Iran will not hesitate to target American forces in Iraq if these forces threaten his

ibn Ali was killed in battle in Karbala.

*Alongside the warning, nearly 11,000 members of Iran's special police units will be present this year in the Arbaeen Pilgrimage.*

Speaking to the state-run Mehr news agency on Monday, 7 October, the Iranian Special Unit Chief Commander, Brigadier General Hassan Karami said: **that 7,500 of his forces, forming 24 battalions, have already been deployed in Iraq and will be "directly involved" in the ritual.**

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) General noted that 3,000 of his troops would be on stand-by until the end of the week-long ceremony. The IRGC commander also disclosed that up to 30,000 of the Iranian police force would also attend the ceremony, expanding from Iran into Iraq.

There is concrete evidence that these troops have been deployed early to be used in the crackdown on protesters and other measures being taken to bring the people to heel and consolidate Iran's position of influence.

Thanks to the courage of the Iraqi people, especially the youth, and resistance units in the streets who are making these meddling tactics so visible that they cannot be ignored.

**By: Hassan.Mahmoudi**

# Protests in Lebanon

## Who governs Lebanon?

Lebanon has a confessional political system, with MPs elected and government positions allocated based on religious sect. The President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shia. The current government is headed by the Christian President Michel Aoun and the Sunni Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the leader of the Future Movement political party, who took office in 2016.

Hariri is the son of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who was assassinated in 2005, and one of the leaders of the “March 14” movement which sprung up to oppose Syria’s domination of Lebanon. The pro-Syrian “March 8” coalition was formed in response to “March 14” and headed by Hezbollah in a tactical alliance with the Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) under Aoun.

The current government contains ministers from across all the major political parties, including Hezbollah, and is seen as a compromise government between the two major coalitions. Nabih Berri, the leader of Hezbollah’s ally Amal, is the Speaker of Parliament, while Aoun’s son-in-law Gebran Bassil of the FPM is the Foreign Minister. The Christian Lebanese Forces (LF) political party, a former Hariri ally and fierce opponent of “March 8,” holds four cabinet positions.

## What’s going on with the economy?

The Lebanese economy is in trouble. Lebanon has the third highest debt-to-GDP ratio in the world, at around 150 percent. International credit rating agency Fitch downgraded Lebanon’s

economy in August to CCC. Lebanon’s currency is pegged to the dollar, and both Lebanese pounds and US dollars can be used interchangeably in the country.

In recent weeks, this crucial peg has come under threat due to an alleged shortage of US dollars, with widespread reports of Lebanese people unable to withdraw dollars from banks. The alleged shortage has provoked an

anon’s budget deficit. The economy has also been hit by US sanctions on Lebanese entities, aimed at Hezbollah.

Under US President Donald Trump, the US has been pursuing a “maximum pressure” sanctions campaign against Iran and its proxy organizations across the region, including Hezbollah. In July, the US extended its sanctions program to target Hezbollah’s influence in

fee for using internet-based phone calls over services like WhatsApp. On top of the worsening economic situation, the fee was one of the sparks of the current protests.

## Why are people protesting?

The spark of the WhatsApp fee against a backdrop of a worsening economic crisis, political deadlock, widespread corruption, and re-

## What will happen if the government falls?

pictured holding hands. Lebanon has a long history of political uncertainty and has experienced many government changes.

A resignation from Hariri would signal the end of a defining force in Lebanon’s post-war history. Saad Hariri’s father, Rafic Hariri, near single-handedly rebuilt war-

ing the US, Saudi Arabia, and France. A new government may therefore result in the easing of US sanctions.

If Prime Minister Hariri resigns, Lebanon is likely to experience a period of political dealmaking under difficult political and economic circumstances. Eventually, elections may be held, and Lebanon will then theoretically be free to choose a new government.

However, its regional position and long-standing political traditions which tend to value confessional and familial loyalty over anti-corruption and reform mean that a true revolution in the

## Lebanese PM Hariri proposes economic reforms

political system is unlikely. Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri presented an economic plan to representatives of different political blocs to help ease the unrest that has led to mass protests across the country calling for the resignation of the government,

The reforms include: cutting the salaries of current and former ministers by 50 percent; enforcing a 25 percent tax on banks and insurance companies; setting a salary cap for judges and government officials; and putting an end to all pension cuts for army and security forces.

According to the document, several government councils and ministries, including the Ministry of Information, will be canceled. During his first address since the protests began, Hariri criticized government partners for holding up reforms and causing the protests.

**“The Lebanese people have given us many chances and expected reform and job opportunities,” said Hariri.**



Life in Lebanon remains disrupted by the closure of the streets.

ger and caused people to exchange dollars on the black market. As a result, the unofficial exchange rate has soared above the authorized trading band of LBP 1,501-1,514 to the dollar, causing fears of bread and fuel shortages.

All of this comes on top of accusations of widespread corruption and a deeply unpopular austerity budget.

The Lebanese government passed the country’s 2019 budget in July, amidst protests by public sector employees over austerity. Bassil, a political rival of Hariri, criticized the budget for not going far enough to cut Leb-

## Why are there US sanctions on Lebanon?

government, including an MP and a security chief whose task was to liaise with the Lebanese army. Recent reports suggest that further US sanctions could be expanded to hit Hezbollah’s allies in Lebanon – the FPM and Amal – which would further restrict the Lebanese government’s economic

## What is the WhatsApp fee?

freedom. Telecommunications services are already expensive in Lebanon and taxes are widely unpopular considering the government provides minimal public services.

At a Cabinet session Thursday, Lebanese ministers approved an unpopular per day

gional tensions has led to Beirut’s biggest protests in

## Have the protests been sectarian?

years. The Lebanese political system is deeply sectarian and loyalty-based, with non-religious parties struggling to make a breakthrough.

Despite that, current protests appear to be cutting across sectarian lines. Footage has surfaced of Shia Muslims attacking Amal and Hezbollah party offices, with Christians also protesting against the FPM.

Religious leaders have attended the protest and been

torn Beirut throughout the 1990s and left his lucrative real estate company Solidere to his son after his assassination in 2005.

Hariri’s historic ally Walid Joumblatt Friday spoke to Hariri about the possibility of his own resignation, to which Hariri replied “I would prefer if we resign together,” according to local media.

Hariri’s fall could lead to the fall of the compromise government and a return to factional politics. The compromise government is unpopular abroad due to its inclusion of Hezbollah, which is designated as a terrorist organization by several countries important to the Lebanese economy, includ-

# Yemeni anger at Qatar's funding of sectarian textbook

Qatar Charity has announced a tender to print the new edition of the textbook, in line with sectarian modifications of the Houthi militia to the curriculum.

The Qatari tender was designed to help the Ministry of Education in the coup government headed by Yehya Al-Houthi, brother of the militia leader Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, and cover the expenses of printing the school curriculum that was amended along sectarian lines.

Qatar Charity – Yemen Office has offered a tender, called “Yemen Children Support Project for Printing School Textbooks,” to print the curriculum that includes sectarian and ideological modifications made by

the Houthis.

The Ministry of Education in Sana, which is controlled by the Houthis, issued a new edition of the textbook which included fundamental changes to the content, consistent with the doctrine of the Houthi group. The Houthi amendments to the textbook mainly focused on “Islamic education and civic education, “which contained ideology imported from Iran.

The Yemeni government denounced the funding by Qatar Charity for the project of printing the textbook for schools controlled by the Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist militia. The Yemeni Ministry of Education said in a statement that the Iranian-backed terrorist

Houthi militia has been distorting and changing public education curricula in Yemen since its coup, in line with its malign sectarian ideology.

The ministry condemned the funding by Qatar Charity to print those poisonous and destructive curricula for the student's ideology, faith, patriotism, and future, stressing that these curricula establish intellectual, religious, and community extremism.

In its statement published by the official Yemeni News Agency, the ministry highlighted that “By adopting a sectarian curriculum printing project, Qatar Charity helps the Houthi terrorist militia poison the mind of a Yemeni student, and contributes to encroachment



on education in Yemen by slogans and ideas that conflict among the people including false doctrinal create further sectarian of the one nation.”

THR LEVANT NEWS INTERNATIONAL

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# The Houthis use women to lay mines in schools and markets

Security forces in Yemen's northeastern province of Al-Jawf have seized a women's cell affiliated to the Houthi militias laying mines and improvised explosive devices in popular markets, and civilian gathering areas in Al-Hazm, the capital of the province.

“The security services managed to defuse many of the mines planted by the militias in public markets, road corridors and student schools,” said Colonel Abdullah Al-Bareer, commander of the special security forces in Al-Jawf province.” The Houthi militias have mastered the camouflage and concealment of those

mines in ways that make them difficult to detect and to ensure the highest possible number of civilian casualties.”

“The expertise and skills acquired by Houthi militias in manufacturing of explosives and the methods of concealing and disguising them, have been acquired by experts from Hezbollah and Iran who were sent to Yemen to train militias to kill Yemenis with mines and explosive devices of various kinds,” he said.

He added: “The security forces managed to seize a number of cells sent by the Houthi militias to plant mines and IEDs in popular markets and ci-



Pro-government forces removed 300,000 landmines laid by the Houthis between 2016 and 2018

vilian gathering areas in Al-Hazm, the capital of the province. One of those cells was made up of women who had explosive devices”.

According to a statement published by the media

office of a project to clear the mines (Masam) implemented by the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Action, the Houthi militias planted mines indiscriminately in densely popu-

lated areas, killing many civilians mostly women and children.

He said: “The Houthi project is a project of death and destruction aimed at killing Yemenis.”

He also highlighted the humanitarian role of the Saudi mine clearance project in Yemen, which saved thousands of civilians, secured many areas in Al-Jawf governorate, and enabled displaced people to return to their homes and farms and practice their lives safely. The head of the human rights office in Al-Jawf governorate Abdul Hadi Al Asar said that Al-Houthi's militias turned

Al-Jawf into minefields. The Houthis planted more mines than the population.

He said that the “Masam” teams were able to remove more than 17,000 mines and explosive devices from some directorates of Al-Jawf.

The Saudi-launched Demining Project in Yemen, Masam, managed to extract more than 55,000 mines, improvised explosive devices, and unexploded ordnance in the liberated areas from June last year to March in only five governorates. In 2018 alone, the National Army cleared about 500 marine mines.

# 440 Syrians killed by Turkish border guards

From one death to another on the border, while the Syrians continue trying to escape the hell of death and deteriorating living and humanitarian conditions in northwestern Syria, the number of casualties from Turkish border guards targeting cross-border refugees continues to rise, especially after the collapse of the cease-fire and the return of battels to Idlib.

**Turkish soldiers do not hesitate to shoot refugees, even though Turkey is a guarantor of the de-escalation and one of the main parties of the conflict in Syria**



Turkish guards watch over Syrian refugees at the border (AFP/Getty Images)

Turkish soldiers do not hesitate to shoot refugees, even though Turkey is a guarantor of the de-escalation and one of the main parties of the conflict in Syria, and has the responsibility of protecting refugees and displaced persons.

Turkey has also built a separation wall along its 911 kilometre border to prevent the entry of refugees, resulting in continuous civilian casualties.

The last victim was Syrian refugee "Anas Mahmoud" from the town of Al-Hbeit, south of Idlib city, who was shot while trying to cross the Turkish border. Three others were injured, and medics were unable to reach them for hours, fearing they would be shot by Turkish soldiers, who rejected calls for a ceasefire to rescue the wounded.

Gendarmes tortured and brutally beaten eight Syrian citizens for hours. Seven border guards took turns humiliating and beating them as they attempted to cross into Turkish territory near

the village of Kawarko, north of Jisr al-Shughour in Idlib countryside.

The next day they were returned to Syrian territory in a terrible state having been deprived of water and food during the hours of detention. "We stayed for hours in a closed room, under the threat of be shot," said 19-year-old Malik al-Ahmad

There was a woman and her child with us, the Turkish police refused to give her a blanket to keep her child warm through the cold night."

Many videotapes show Turkish border guards violations against young men and Syrian civilians who were detained while trying to cross the borders, including beatings and insults.

On September 23, Turkish border guards killed a young man from Hamieh village in the western Idlib countryside while trying to cross into Turkish territory from

the western countryside of Idlib. Three others were injured, including an 8-year-old child.

On August 9, Gendarme also killed young Hadeel Ahmed al-Hussein al-Dakhil with a gunshot to the chest at the Turkish-Syrian border as she tried to cross to the Turkish side. The young woman was from Buamer, Deir Ezzor

**Killing refugees have become increasingly common in the past three years**

Killing refugees has become increasingly common in the past three years, despite claims by the Turkish authorities that they are pursuing an open border policy following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war since 2011.

The Violations Documentation Center in northern Syria has so far documented 440

refugees killed by Turkish Gendarmes at the border, including (80 children under the age of 18, and 55 women).

The number of gunshot wounds and assaults has risen to 402, targeting those attempting to cross the border, residents of Syrian border villages and towns, farmers, and landowners adjacent to the borders.

On August 5, the Turkish Gendarme killed Syrian refugee "Hisham Mustafa" from the city of Al-Safira. He was living in Turkey. The Turkish authorities forcibly deported him to Syrian territory for nearly 32 days, because he did not have a temporary protection card "Kimlak", while his wife and three children remained in Turkey, prompting him to try to cross the border from Idlib near the town of Darkush, "Gendarme" fatally shot him.

Gendarmes also arrested four refugees and brutally

beat them in addition to shaving their heads and eyebrows.

The Turkish authorities deported 6160 Syrian refugees during July, according to the official website of "Bab Al-Hawa" crossing.

On Friday, August 4, a Syrian child, Maher Hassan, lost his life days after being shot by Turkish gendarmes in the village of Seftak in Kobani province on the Turkish border. Maher, 17, was shot in the head on July 30 as he helped his parents repair their roof in the village of Saftak, west of Kobani.

On Wednesday, July 24, Kaniwar Shaheen Jazair, 29, from the village of Qara Mugh, east of Kobani, was shot in the shoulder while working in his land near the village of Gharib on the Syrian-Turkish border. He was taken to Kobani Hospital and transferred to Manbij City Hospital for treatment.

On July 20, a young man from the town of Salqin was

shot dead by Turkish border guards as he passed along the road between Darkush town and the village of Al-Diriya border with Hatay province / Iskandaroun district, west of Idlib. Two IDPs in Salah al-Din refugee camp west of Jisr al-Shughour were injured by random bullets fired by Turkish border guards while they were pursuing smugglers trying to enter Turkish territory.

In Idlib on Monday (February 11), the bodies of 10 civilians were found on the border near the town of Zarzour, north of Idlib, in Darkoush area. Most of the bodies remained in Turkish territory, including children and women.

In June, three civilians, including a 10-year-old girl, were killed by Turkish gen

**The most prominent incidents were in June 2016, when 11 people, including women and children,**

darmes as they tried to cross from Darkoush area of Idlib countryside to Turkish territory.

were killed near Khirbet al-Joz crossing in the western countryside of Idlib, in addition to the killing of 9 civilians, mostly women, on 9 February 2019.

**Human Rights Watch** said in a report in February that Turkish border guards were firing indiscriminately at Syrian asylum seekers trying to cross into Turkey and collectively returning them to where they had come from.

The New York-based organization said it had spoken to 13 Syrians, all of whom said that Turkish border guards fired at them while they were still in Syria, killing ten people, including a child, and wounding several others.

# IRAN.. The World's First Executioner

10 October marked the International Day Against Death Penalty. According to Amnesty International's annual report, Iran, under the mullahs' regime, continues to rank second in the world in terms of the number of carried out executions, and globally first for its population! There is also a black record of Iran in breaching the rules of due process, blatant infringement of all international laws and treaties relating to the fairness of trial proceedings, and a bloody record of crimes against humanity in the area of interrogation and investigation and subsequent pre-trial proceedings. The Iranian regime uses the death penalty widely. In most death sentences, the punishment is discriminatory against low-income, poor, religious and ethnic minorities, political opponents and women. Last year, Khamenei, the wali al-Faqih, appointed Ibrahim Raissi, one of the perpetrators of the 1988 summer massacre, to head the judiciary. The number of executions has increased significantly since he took office.

## Executions in the past fourteen years

Iran has the highest number of executions in the region and the world. On 9 April 2019, Amnesty International released its annual report on the use of the death penalty in 2018—within a period of one year, from 1 January to 20 December 2018, not less than 253 Iranian citizens were executed. The country continues to carry out more than a third of recorded executions worldwide and 195 others have been sentenced to death; among them were six children and 13 carried out publicly. According to the Amnesty International report on 9 April 2019, more than 72 percent of executions were not reported by the government or

the judiciary, calling them “secret executions”.

## 350 death sentences in three months

According to a report by the state-run IRNA agency on Tuesday, June 18, 2019, Mo-hseni Eje'i—the first deputy head of the judiciary—announced 350 death warrants and a review of another 250 cases in the first quarter of this year. More than 40 executions in August 2019 - The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) announced in its August 8, 2019 statement that 46 executions, 39 of which were prisoners, were carried out in five weeks in July.

## The record of executions during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani

The human rights situation under Hassan Rouhani's presidency reflects the worsening and deteriorating human rights situation under the mullahs' regime during the past 40 years. Human rights organizations have reported that more than 4,000 people have been executed in Iran over the past five and a half years since Hassan Rouhani took office. This means that a brief survey shows that 56 people were executed each month under Mullah Hassan Rouhani's rule.

Executions are a tool to keep the mullahs in power, and this murder-based approach is not a tactic but a strategy and a pillar of the mullahs' doctrine.

Since the first day Khomeini came to power, the medieval guardianship of the Islamic jurist regime maintained power by implementing its strategy of local repression and exporting terrorism and war to the region and the world. In the mean-



Executions statistics for the last 14 years from 2005 to 2018

time, according to the mullahs' belief “triumph through terror”, i.e hold the reins of power by casting terror into the hearts of the common. Executions were a tool to spread fear and panic in society.

The regime strives to control the situation and prevent the escalation of popular protests through arrests, large-scale death sentences and executions as well as other harsh punishments such as long prison sentences with torture, and the extraction of televised confessions. Iran is also the only country where the head of the judiciary, Ibrahim Raisi, is one of the most prominent members of the death squad that ordered and carried out thousands of executions of political prisoners in 1988. Minister of Justice of Hassan Rouhani's government has also been involved in the execution of dozens of political prisoners in Dezful. It is through these living examples that we can understand the prominence of executions in the mind-set and mechanism of the mullahs' regime.

## Political executions

According to MEK statistics, at least 120,000 Iranians have been killed by the Iranian regime's puppets for political reasons. The Iranian resistance NCRI, in a book titled “Crime Against Humanity” in 2001 and in another book entitled “Fallen for Freedom”, has unveiled lists of 20,000 martyrs of MEK members and supporters. In one of the most heinous crimes against humanity in the period following World War II, the Iranian regime, under the direct order of Khomeini, executed more than 30,000 political prisoners (mostly members of the PMOI or sympathizers) in Iranian prisons. All those sentenced to death were either prisoners sentenced to imprisonment, serving their unjust sentences or had already served their sentences but remained in detention until unfair executions were carried out. It is truly an unprecedented crime for a regime to carry out the execution of 30,000 prisoners sentenced to imprisonment simply because they belong to an op-

position organization.

According to regime officials, the crime was aimed at destroying the PMOI— being considered the regime's main alternative— by killing a large number of its cadres and staff and terrorizing the rest inside and outside Iran. The executions of political prisoners from Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs and other nationalities as well as the executions of Sunnis, Baha'is, followers of other religions and sects have become commonplace.

The regime's executioners collectively executed 22 Iranian Sunni political prisoners on August 2, 2016.

## Sunni, political, and Iranian prisoners

Iranian Sunni political prisoners were executed massively on August 2, 2016

In a statement on May 22, 2019, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) wrote: On Sunday, May 18, 2019, a Tehran court presided over by criminal judge Mohammad Moqaysa'i sentenced the political prisoner Abdullah Qasim-

pour to death on groundless charges “prostitute an conspiracy against the regime”. He was sentenced for his media collaboration with the MKO. Some of the MEK supporters who were executed by the Iranian regime during 2010 to 2014 on charges of being alleged members of the MEK.

### The most repellent and shocking executions in Iran

“The most shocking execution in Iran is the execution of Zainab Skanand, who was only 17 at the time of her arrest,” Amnesty International stated in a press release. She was sentenced to death in an unfair trial for the murder of her husband who beat her and ill-treated her. The statement asserted that she was tortured while in detention, and continued to be tortured in order to extract confessions. In response to the execution of Zainab Skandand, a 24-year-old female prisoner at the time of her execution, Philip Lutter— Amnesty International’s research director for North Africa and the Middle East— said, “Man, Zeinab was only 17 at the time of the crime. Through her execution, the Iranian authorities have shown that they do not respect adolescents’ right to life.” (Amnesty International, October 4, 2018).

The Iranian regime is responsible for two-thirds of juvenile executions worldwide. Although international conventions (the Convention on the Rights of the Child) have set the age of 18 as the of punishment for both sexes, the mullahs’ regime of backwardness and darkness set the age of punishment at 15 for boys and 9 for girls. The Iranian regime is one of the few in the world that uses death penalty for children and women. According to Javed Rehman’s—Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran— report to the UN General Assembly in 2018, Iran has witnessed an increase in restrictions on freedom of expression, continued violations

of fundamental rights to life and liberty and the right to a fair trial with 253 death sentences for adults and children. (United Nations website 16 August, 2019) The Special Rapporteur (Javed Rehman) also reported on the execution of children and adolescents, “In 2018, seven executions of child offenders were reported and there are now about 90 people on death row. All of them were under 18 at the time of the alleged crime.” On April 25, 2019, two 17-year-old adolescents, Mehdi Sohrabi Farr and Amin Sadakat, were executed in Adelabad prison in Shiraz, Fars province. The two have been reportedly forced to confess under torture. “The execution of child offenders is strictly prohibited and must end immediately.” (UN website 16 August, 2019) Philip Lutter, Amnesty International’s research director for North Africa and the Middle East, spoke of juvenile executions, “Iranian authorities should prohibit the use of death penalty for anyone under the age of 18 at the time of the crime.” (Amnesty International website October 3, 2018).

### Women, victims of executions in the mullahs’ system

Women are second-class citizens under the guardianship of the Islamic jurist and under the presidency of Hassan Rouhani. Laila Zarafshan is the 95th victim of execution under Mullah Hassan Rouhani. On Thursday, September 26, 2019, Leila Zarafshan was hanged in Sanandaj Central Prison. On August 25, 2019, a 34-year-old woman was executed in Mashhad Central Prison. In July and August, four female prisoners were executed within a week. On Tuesday, July 23, 2019, Maliha Salhian was executed in Mahabad Central Prison and Zahra Safari Mokadam, 43, at the Central Prison in Nowshahr as well as Arasteh Ranjbar and Nazdar Watankhawa who spent fifteen years in Oromiy Prison.

### Iran sets record for women’s executions

During Hassan Rouhani’s presidency, at least 97 women were executed, 9 of them were executed in the last three and a half months from mid-June to late September. The Women’s Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran compiled and recorded the names of women executed during the Hassan Rouhani era. International law recommends alternative penalties for incarceration for mothers who care for their children. Yet, in Iran mothers are not only imprisoned but they are also sentenced to death. Former political prisoner Gulrach Iraii wrote in a letter published on 27 July about women sentenced to death for murdering their husbands, “The vast majority of them committed murder after all their attempts to obtain a divorce had failed and after years of living in turbulence and abuse and sometimes even tortured by their husbands. The murder was an

explosion as a result of what they have been subjected to rather than a mere desire. “Although they consider themselves to be criminals, at the same time, they believe that they would not have committed any crime if the judiciary had redressed them in the courtroom.” Speaking at a conference held on the occasion of World Day against Death on 10 October 2015, Mrs. Maryam Rajavi— President of the Republic elected by the Iranian Resistance— said, “The mullahs are the terror of society and nothing but suppressing popular protests.” “Yes, the life and authority of this regime are fed by executions,” She added. Without the executions, there would not be a mechanism to prevent the outburst of public anger and spontaneous mass gatherings. If not for the executions, how then the mullahs could restrain people’s freedoms? Were it not for the executions, the mullahs could have never

detained liberties and expanded repression, intimidation and restrictions even on the privacy of people’s lives by any other means. If not for the executions, how could the mullahs increase the prices of goods every day by multiplying and wasting the revenues and wealth of the Iranians in provoking wars or looting countries in the region for their own pleasure? Ms. Rajavi added, “Our future project is Iran without torture, execution or any kind of violations of human rights.” Our plan for the future is Iran without execution. Iran tomorrow will be a country that respects human rights. The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) is committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international instruments and conventions including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.



“Conspirators should be hanged in Friday prayers for people to see them and to have more of an impact,” Rouhani told a Parliament session on July 13, 1980.

# Lawsuit exposes Qatari spymaster

While the US has been preoccupied with the furore over who was bribing whom in places like Ukraine, most Americans have no idea that a proxy war is being fought in our own country between rival Middle-Eastern powers. The battleground is Washington D.C. and the weapons are money, corruptible journalists, lobbyists, and politicians.

Qatar has been suffering under



Oren Litwin

a Saudi blockade since June 2017, imposed after Qatar refused to end its support for Al-Jazeera, the Muslim Brotherhood, and terrorist groups across the Middle East. Trying to break the chokehold, Qatar has been desperately deploying every business relationship, lobbyist, computer hacker, and politician that money can buy. And as the struggle rages on, one of the shadowy power players in the Qatari government has been forced to enter the light.

Mohammad bin Ahmed bin Abdullah Al-Masnad was once the head of Qatar's state security service, and presently holds the official title of "Secretary to the Emir for Security Affairs." In practice, Al-Masnad is a Qatari spymaster—and according to sources, one of his chief duties is to manipulate American politics.

Al-Masnad (also spelled in English as Al-Misned or Al-Misnad) is believed to be

the cousin of the powerful Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Misned, wife of the previous emir of Qatar and mother to the current emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. Al-Masnad serves as a high-level diplomatic liaison for the Qatari government, meeting with dignitaries such as EU Security Commissioner Sir Julian King, the prime minister of Iraq, and Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin. Al-Masnad has also met with American members of Congress, including a nine-member bipartisan delegation that visited the Al-Udeid airbase in Qatar over the Fourth of July.

But it has just been revealed that Al-Masnad's involvement with American politics goes much deeper.

Al-Masnad found himself in the news recently as a result of a lawsuit filed in Florida against the emir's brother, Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, who allegedly ordered his

American bodyguard to murder two people and also held his paramedic prisoner. Attorney Rebecca Castaneda sent a letter to the Qatari ambassador in August asking for official confirmation of a meeting that occurred in Qatar during June 2019, between Al-Masnad and Canadian businessman Alan Bender—who has deep ties with governments and royal officials across the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. According to a source with knowledge of the matter, Al-Masnad discussed the allegations against Khalid Al-Thani and stated that they were all accurate.

The source also met personally with Al-Masnad, and reported that Al-Masnad made shocking statements about his influence over American politicians and reporters. During these meetings, the Qatari spymaster claimed that he controlled a vast bribery operation targeting public figures. Al-Masnad

boasted, "No Western reporter or politicians would receive a dollar without my green light." The Qatari influence operation in the West is becoming more widely understood, but the idea that Qatar is actively intervening in our politics is alarming. As a country, we depend on our elected officials to uphold American interests first and foremost. If there is any danger of corruption at the highest levels of government, our law-enforcement officials need to expose it to the sunlight and protect the integrity of American politics. And if credible evidence is found, the perpetrators need to be prosecuted.

Our policy toward Qatar or any other nation ought to favour the interests of the United States, and not lean toward whichever sheikh has the biggest briefcase of cash. If public figures are proven to take foreign money to influence our policies, they belong in jail, not Congress.

## Matthew Pittard, an ex-Marine previously hired as the Qatari Sheikh's head of US security

An American who worked as the US security chief for Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, brother of the Emir of Qatar, revealed more details of the lawsuit accusing the royal of ordering him to murder two people.

In an interview with ABC Action News, Matthew Pittard, who worked as a personal bodyguard for the Sheikh and is now suing him, said that he was enlisted to kill a man who tried to collect a debt of \$6,000, to which he refused and instead paid the debt off himself.

He also said that he was told to shoot a woman and "bury her in the desert," because the Sheikh believed she was tex-

ting a man from another Middle Eastern country.

The lawsuit against the Qatari royal was filed on July 23 in a US federal court.

While in Qatar, Pittard said he discovered that the Sheikh had an American citizen locked up at one of his properties, whom he was able to aid with the help of the US embassy.

However, according to Pittard, when Sheikh Khalid found out, he held him prisoner and threatened to kill him and his family, and subsequently forced him to sign a non-disclosure agreement while holding him at gun-point.

Pittard also revealed that he once had to administer Narcan to the Sheikh, a drug used to

treat heroin overdoses, after he "OD'ed and hit the floor" at a party.

A second plaintiff Matthew Allende, who worked as a medic for the billionaire, told ABC Action News that he sometimes had to stay up for "20, 24, 36 hours straight" to watch the Sheikh while he partied, to make sure that he didn't stop breathing.

He also added that although he was finally given a day off after working for three straight weeks, he was ordered back inside the palace by an armed guard who said the Sheikh had changed his mind.

Fearing for his life, he tried to escape by scaling a 5.4-meter perimeter wall to escape, sus-

taining serious injuries that required immediate attention and surgery, according to his lawsuit, which added that he was later terminated. "The amount of fear from that point

was just like every day was a stressful day," Allende said. "You wake up and kind of wondering what exactly is going to happen today."

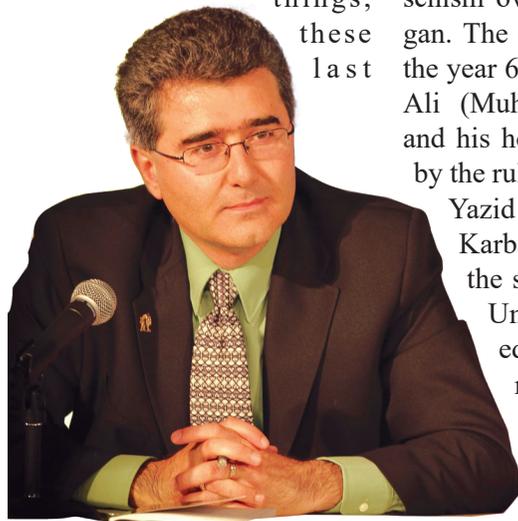


In an interview with ABC Action News, Matthew Pittard

# A war on their terms or ours?

The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been escalating beyond rhetoric and is fast moving towards an actual military confrontation. Following a long round of proxy moves from Yemen – as well as attempts to stop oil tankers in the Persian Gulf – Iran have crossed another escalation threshold with a recent a missile attack on the Saudi Abqaiq oil field. Condemnations and additional sanctions have already taken their course and seem to have frustrated the Islamic regime even further. Yet, these measures did not stop Iranian actions such as last week seize of another ship, as well as the announcement on new usage of advanced centrifuges in violation of the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Judging by the current state of things, these last



**Shayan Arya**

moves is likely to result in another round of sanctions or “limited escalations.” However, sooner or later, a new strategy will be required as the current one is having little effect on Iran’s motivation to destabilize oil markets, proceed on the nuclear path and proxy confrontations.

Few seek another war in the Middle East, but is that likely to hand victory to Iran’s supreme leader and its top military operator, Qasem Suleimani?

The rivalry between Iran’s Shi’ite Islamic regime and Sunni Saudi Arabia is not a new development nor it is the result of policy misunderstandings. It is an old dispute, almost as old as Islam itself and dating to the day Prophet Muhammad died and the Shiite-Sunni schism over his successor began. The climax took place in the year 680 when Hussein ibn Ali (Muhammad’s grandson) and his household were killed by the ruling Umayyad Caliph Yazid I, in the battle of Karbala. This battle over the succession of Islamic Umma has not yet ended. Both, the Islamic regime in Iran as well as that in Saudi Arabia claims a supreme position in the

Muslim world that has only room for one of them. And patiently, the battle continues and not without strategic calculations.

Beleaguered by crippling sanctions, Iran’s Islamic regime sees escalation as the only way out of the corner it finds itself. It’s leaders count on a broader lack of appetite for yet another war in the Middle East as well as on Saudi’s historically cautious approach and desire to avoid a military confrontation with Iran. Saudi Arabia -with its top of the line petrochemical industries – has much more to lose from a full-scale war compared to Iran with its crippled and crumbling oil and petrochemical industries. And these are not the only reasons that help Iran assume that it can continue with a path of escalation knowing that its adversaries are not likely to turn the tables:

Trump’s resistance to another military confrontation in the region plays another important card for Iran in the Persian Gulf, where increasing frustrations may put a wedge between the US and the GCC. After all, why should the Arab Gulf countries rely on US while their infrastructures are attacked by Iran despite a significant American presence on their land? By resisting a military response to Iran’s

attack on Saudi oil fields, President Trump is unintentionally doing what Iran has tried to do for the past four decades and failed: drive The Persian Gulf countries away from US.

Iran’s leaders also seem to count on Russia and China to block a direct military attack by the U.S under UN security council support. After all, they didn’t sign lucrative economic agreements with two permanent members of the security council – China and Russia – without a tacit understanding that they will block any UN resolution authorizing an attack.

Islamic regime also assumes that this show of force and lack of Western response will help silence an increasingly restless and hostile populace. It should be noted that less than two years ago – and not for the first time – a spontaneous uprising engulfed more than 140 cities and towns in Iran with calls for the abolishment of the Islamic regime and restoration of Iranian monarchy.

In short, counting on GCC fears, Russian support and American hesitation, the Islamic regime seeks to have a war in its own terms. And unless a different strategy is enforced by the US and it’s allies, Iran will continue to appear as t h e



**Nir Boms**

winner in this dangerous chess game: it will avoid a war and see little response to it’s belligerency; continue to suppress internal dissent to assure its survival; damage the US-GCC while avoid action by UN security council and, lastly, give China and Russia the opportunity to enter the Persian Gulf.

At the end, it may also force a war that will be fought in its own terms. Changing these terms is not an easy task – but a possible one. It involves pointing to a different path of harsher responses as well as clearer help to the Iranian people who seek to change this radical revisionist regime. Hopefully, before the third Gulf war is launched.

By: Nir Boms and Shayan Arya



THR LEVANT NEWS INTERNATIONAL

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# Ireland – north and south – fret about Boris’s Brexit deal

Boris Johnson’s long-awaited Brexit agreement was finally reached by changing the rules for the highly sensitive issue of the future relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland after the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

But the British prime minister’s triumphant appearance at an EU summit in Brussels on October 17 was not, as he had hoped, followed by success in persuading MPs to vote for his “great deal.” Two days later, on what had been billed optimistically as “Super Saturday” at Westminster, they again failed to support his agreement and forced him to ask the EU for an extension beyond the October 31 deadline. The Brexit crisis continues.

Johnson has been in 10 Downing Street for three months since taking over from Theresa May. For three turbulent years she failed to deliver Brexit following the referendum in June 2016. For both Conservative leaders the Irish question has proved to be an impassable obstacle.

In the referendum, 56% of people in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU. Nonetheless, the province will leave if the rest of the UK does. Ireland, of

course, will continue to be a member of the club, as it has been since joining, along with the UK, in 1973. This means that for the first time the EU will have an external border on the island of Ireland.

For 30 bloody years of sectarian violence between Catholic Irish nationalists and pro-British Protestants, in which 3,500 people died, the 310 mile border was heavily fortified. People and goods crossing it during what were known euphemistically as “The Troubles” were subject to customs and identity checks as British army helicopters whirled overhead.

In recent times the border has all but faded away. Security measures were phased out following the Good Friday peace agreement of 1998 and the EU’s single market and customs union have banished the need for inspections of imports and exports.

Ireland is the EU member that will be most affected by Brexit. Its economy is highly integrated with the UK. Around 80% of the goods it exports are transported to or through the UK. Ireland sources 41% of its food and 55% of its fuel from the UK mainland. Ireland and Northern Ireland share a single

electricity market. The Irish Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, understandably refuses to accept the return of a “hard border.”

May ruled out the idea of Northern Ireland remaining in the EU customs union as this would mean an internal customs border within the UK. That produced the idea of a “backstop” – the option of keeping the north aligned to Europe and inside the customs union if no other solution to the border dispute could be found. Johnson’s decision – characteristically reversing his previous position – was to draw a line down the Irish Sea to carry out regulatory checks. That has infuriated the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, whose MPs helped defeat his deal on what should have been “Super Saturday.”

Irish nationalists see an open border as a crucial part of the Good Friday deal, recognising the fact that families trade and move across it, often several times a day. The border marked the sovereignty of different countries but they were treated for practical purposes as if they were the same. English nationalists by contrast, view leaving it untouched as a betrayal of their core doctrine of “seizing

back control from Brussels” as it would limit the prospects of UK trade deals with new countries.

Tony Blair, the Labour prime minister who oversaw the 1998 agreement, wrote recently that at its heart lay the following principle: “Northern Ireland would remain part of the UK for as long as a majority in the north wanted it, but in return the nationalist aspirations and identity of those who wanted a united Ireland would be recognized and given effect.” He warned that to proceed with Johnson’s deal risked undermining it.

It is part of the toxicity of Brexit that those who favour it stand accused of behaving in an arrogant and imperious way towards Britain’s former colony. Varadkar has been demonized in Brexit-supporting media. “A powerful element within British political life refuses to accept that the blind pursuit of British interests can have deeply damaging consequences for those beyond its borders,” wrote one Irish historian.

The irony is that since the referendum the number of British citizens applying for Irish passports has risen to record levels. (Anybody in the world born to an Irish citizen is entitled to an



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Irish passport while those with grandparents born in Ireland also qualify). Becoming Irish is one way for Remainer Britons to stay connected to their European identity – and rights.

Whatever happens next – and it is as hard as ever to predict – the Irish question seems certain to remain a central element of this unfinished and bitterly divisive story.

***“We could not support what is being suggested on customs and consent issues”***

Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) said it could not support the Brexit deal being proposed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the European Union. “As things stand, we could not support what is being suggested on customs and consent issues and there is a lack of clarity on VAT,” DUP leader Ar-

lene Foster and deputy leader Nigel Dodds said in a statement. “We will continue to work with the Government to try and get a sensible deal that works for Northern Ireland and protects the economic and constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom.”

DUP leader Arlene Foster Dodds



# Radical Mosques and Jihad

On 3 October, a French police IT employee, at the Paris Police HQ, stabbed and killed four of his colleagues, beheading at least one of the victims.

The killer, who had been in the police service for 16 years, had a security clearance, and had converted to Islam years ago. He showed signs of radicalisation, expressing support for Islamist actions, his reluctance to have contact with women and justification of the 2015 AQAP Charlie Hebdo attack. French Authorities found in one of his USB keys data that contained Islamic State beheading videos, and proof of close contact with a Salafist imam.

Yet again, in the case of this latest jihadist attack in Europe, there is a link to a radical mosque.

Indeed, the French jihadist behind the attack on the Paris Police HQ had been attending for years a mosque controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Furthermore, the imam of the mosque was on France's Terror watch list since 2015, one year after he came from Morocco. Despite that he was allowed to stay in France and spread his poisonous propaganda. The examples of radical mosques linked to jihad number in the dozens: from the Hamburg

mosque where some of the 9/11 hijackers radicalised to the Finsbury mosque in London that was the magnet of lots of jihadist figures in the early 2000's. As Louis Caprioli, the former head of Counter Terrorism at the French intelligence services, said "behind every Muslim terrorist there is a radical imam".

For proof, the Kouachi brothers that carried out the Charlie Hebdo attack were radicalised in a mosque in Paris 19th arrondissement. One of Islamic State French suicide bombers of the November 2015 was radicalised in mosque in Chartres. The terrorist behind the Amsterdam to Paris high-speed train attack, foiled by US passengers, was radicalised in a Salafist mosque in Algeciras. That's not just France: even in quiet Switzerland, the Petit Saconnex mosque in Geneva has been a vehicle of radicalisation.

The most dangerous Swiss jihadist present in Syria was radicalised there as was one of the Swiss nationals arrested for the murder of two Scandinavian girls in Morocco. Incidentally two of the imams officiating there were on France's terror watch list. Still in Switzerland, the imam at the Winterthur mosque was arrested for calling

to kill Muslims who do not attend prayers. In the UK, the Manchester mosque that Salman Abedi, the Manchester Arena jihadist, attended, was headed by a radical imam that influenced five youngsters to join ISIS. Some of his sermons called for armed jihad. In another case, a Birmingham radical imam was arrested for recruiting jihadists. Coincidentally, he was preach-

armed jihad. In Kosovo, a whopping 22 mosques were openly calling to join the jihad in 2015 in Syria. Unsurprisingly, the imam at the main mosque of Pristina was convicted for recruiting jihadists for ISIS.

But of all the cases in European jihad, the Barcelona/Ripoll terror attacks is in a way the most stunning. The mastermind behind the attack was the Moroccan imam of the mosque in Ripoll. He was linked to the 2004 Madrid al-Qaeda attack and died mishandling explosives the night before the Barcelona attack. Rather than just radicalising his followers, he had decided to be the leader of an ISIS operational cell and die as a "martyr".

As proved here, despite all the talk about radicalisation online, time and again extremist imams are behind the radicalisation of many Muslims that can lead some to carry out terror attacks or join Islamic State. The European Union Commission on Terrorism of the Parliament wisely advised to set up a list of all the radical imams to be shared between the European countries. Yet, so many radical imams are still preaching in Europe unbothered.

At the source of this radicalisation are very well-funded, ex-

remely well-organised Islamist movements.

For example, Salafism has expanded in Europe recently: from Belgium, where the federal state security agency has listed more than 100 Salafist organisations active in the country to France where the number of Salafist mosques has grown from 15 in 1990 to 60 in 2015 to 200 in 2019. Sweden is not spared as well, according to the report "Between Salafism and Salafi Jihadism", the number of Islamist extremists over the past decade there has grown tenfold, from 200 to 2,000. The German Office for the Protection of the Constitution recently warned that the largest most influential Islamist organisation in the world, the Muslim Brotherhood, is now a greater danger to Germany than the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Indeed, while going after the operatives is a must, the West needs also to have an arsenal to target the ideological terror masters. In fact, inciting terrorism has a multiplying effect: a smart preacher can "hire" tens or hundreds of jihadists. In short to make an analogy with drugs, should we go after just the user or the dealer or both? Unfortunately for the time being we have mostly gone after the user.



Olivier Guitta

ing at a mosque that one of the Bataclan jihadists attended.

In Belgium, OCAM, the government outfit to assess the level of the threat, warned in 2018 that the school within the Brussels mosque was teaching

## Multiple casualties

In the past four years, the French capital has been rocked by major attacks resulting in mass casualties.

Co-ordinated bombings and shootings by Islamist militants in November 2015 at the Bataclan theatre and other locations around Paris killed 130 people in the deadliest attacks in France since World War Two.

The knife attack unfolded just On 3 October, after midday on Thursday when the attacker, on the first floor of the police head-

quarters, used a kitchen knife to stab three policemen before taking the stairs down to the ground floor of the building.

On the staircase he came across two women staff, according to Le Parisien newspaper, which cited an internal police report on the incident.

He stabbed both of them, fatally wounding one.

He then moved out into the courtyard of the police headquarters.

There, according to the Parisien

account, a policeman responsible for security at the building issued several warnings, then fired several shots at the attacker, including to his head, killing him.

The officer used a Heckler & Koch G-36 assault rifle, the newspaper reported.

The police officer who halted the attack had recently completed his training and had been in the job for only six days, Paris police chief Didier Lallement told reporters.

*The attack reportedly happened at the police headquarters located just across the street from Notre Dame Cathedral. (File photo: AP)*



## Kurds are the Only Losers from the Disgraceful American–Turkish Ceasefire Agreement in North-eastern Syria

In less than two weeks, the American president, Donald Trump, has lavished too many gifts on Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Firstly, on 10th October, Trump gave Turkey's Erdogan the green light to invade north-eastern Syria, a region dominated by Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. Secondly, on 17th October, Trump sent vice president Mike Pence to Ankara to sign a shameful and unfair ceasefire deal between Turkish forces and their mercenaries of Syrian Arab and Turkmen militias on one side, and Kurdish-led SDF, on another side. The American – Turkish ceasefire deal over Syrian Kurdistan was in favour of the aggressor i.e. Turkey and against the victims or who were attacked, namely Kurds and SDF. These victims are considered to be Washington's partners and allies who have fought ISIL on behalf of the entire world and lost more than 11,000 martyrs during the battle against of the most powerful and dangerous terrorist organisation in the world.

The reprehensible and deplorable deal between U.S. and Turkey consists of 13 items. All

crucial items in the agreement were designed in favour of Turkey and its expansionist objectives in Syria and Rojava. Items 9-12 summarised the immoral essence of the scandalous pact that was reached by Trump and Erdogan at the expense of Kurds and SDF. These items encompass explicitly all the conditions that Turkey has always demanded in north and north-eastern Syria and meet all Turkish alleged security concerns.

According to a statement issued by American vice president's office, the joint Turkish – American statement states “9. The two sides agreed on the continued importance and functionality of a safe zone in order to address the national security concerns of Turkey, to include the re-collection of YPG [Kurdish forces] heavy weapons and the disablement of their fortifications and all other fighting positions”. 10. “The safe zone will be primarily enforced by the Turkish Armed forces”. 11. “The Turkish side will pause Operation Peace Spring in order to allow the withdrawal of YPG [SDF] from the safe zone within 120 hours. Operation Peace Spring

will be halted upon completion of this withdrawal”. 12. “Once Operation Peace Spring is paused, the US agrees not to pursue further imposition of sanctions under the Executive Order of October 14, 2019 ... Once Operation Peace Spring is halted as per paragraph 11 the current sanctions under the aforementioned Executive Order shall be lifted”.

It is axiomatic to say that Erdogan's Turkey is the fundamental triumphant in this farce agreement. The waging of this dirty war by Erdogan against Kurds and other components in the most stable and peaceful region of north and north-eastern Syria was a vital matter for the political present and future of Erdogan and his ruling party AKP. Furthermore, the disappointing ceasefire in Rojava emerged to reinforce Erdogan's position inside Turkey as victorious and protector of Turkey's security causing a great embarrassment to his opponents. This, in turn, will support Erdogan and his party, to a certain extent, to win in the forthcoming municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey. Likewise, it will relatively aid him to weed out a set

of accumulated critical economic, social and political complications inside Turkey.

On the one hand, Erdogan succeeded in imposing his own stipulations with regard to the settings, structure, dimensions and objectives of the “safe zone” in north and north-eastern Syria. On the other hand, the YPG or SDF will withdraw from the “safe zone” up to 20 miles as Turkey has commanded. Moreover, the previous, current and planned American sanctions against Turkey will be abolished.

Russia and al-Assad regime are the second winners from this one-sided and prejudicial truce because they recontrolled some areas that they had never been in since 2012. When Turkey and their Syrian militias attacked Kurds on 10th October, the latter appealed to the Russians and the Syrian regime after the Americans abandoned and betrayed them. Russia, in turn, has played the role of a mediator between SDF and Syrian regime to reach an agreement regarding the rights and future of Kurds in Syria. In return, Kurds and SDF will allow the Syrian government troops to redeploy along the border between Syria and Turkey except the area between Sere Kanieh (Ras Al-Ein) and Gere Sepi (Tell Abyad) which has been captured by Turkey to establish a “safe zone”. However, the pressing question is whether Russians and Turks will be able to understand and agree on the sticking points or the clash between the two forces on Syrian land is potential. Particularly, the situation in Idlib is fuelling their relationship from time to time.

Kurds and their military representative SDF, additionally their Self-Administration in north and north-eastern Syria are the main losers from this ceasefire agreement. They have lost, almost, 4,200 square kilometres between Ras Al-Ein and



**Jwan Dibo**

Tell-Abyad that has been occupied by Turkey. The future of their military wing SDF and their Self-Administration has become at stake under the persistent threat of Turkey. Also, hundreds of civilians and of SDF fighters have been killed and injured by Turkey and their mercenaries, in addition 300,000 who have been displaced.

The Syrian Kurds represented in SDF and the Self-Administration in north and north-eastern Syria are about to reach an agreement with the Syrian government regarding the rights and future of Kurds in Syria under the supervision of Russians. It is clear that the Kurds and SDF will accept the minimum that the Syrian regime will give them, since the imminent Turkish danger is threatening their very existence. Similarly, the options available to Kurds are very limited after the U.S. has left them an easy and lone prey under the fangs and claws of the savage Turkish wolf who is always hungry for Kurdish blood. As a result, it would be very difficult for Syrian Kurds and SDF to trust the U.S. anymore after they were abandoned and betrayed. It is also very important for Kurds and SDF to reconsider their policies, alliances and strategy at domestic and global levels before the time runs out and the glimmer of hope is lost.



## Turkey, Syria and the Kurds

Turkey's current incursion into Northern Syria, which began in earnest on October 9th, has produced numerous negative reactions throughout the world as did the American withdrawal of their modest force fighting alongside the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia. For many observers the American withdrawal was a betrayal of an ally that did much of the heavy lifting in the fight to eliminate the radical Islamist Daesh.

### Turkish Perspective

In spite of world criticism of Turkey's action seeking to clear out some of the border areas in north-eastern Syria, senior Turkish MFA officials have confided that Turkey, for years, has been fighting a number of terrorist organizations that present risk and threat to their national security. It is with this understanding that Turkey gave its full support to all international efforts to this end since day one – including the International Coalition Against DAESH. Having successfully concluded Operation Euphrates Shield in 2017 and Operation Olive Branch in 2018, Turkey cleared an area over 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> from DEASH and PYD/YPG terror, allowing more than 360,000 Syrians to return to their homes in this area. Those 360,000 returned voluntarily. They did not stay in Turkey or travel to Europe.

In the meantime, the Turks maintain that the threat of terrorism originating from Syria and targeting its borders has not yet ended. According to Turkish officials, during the last two years, PYD/YPG has perpetrated more than 320 terrorist attacks targeting Turkey or Syrians within Syria. Over a hundred of these cases targeted Turkey from the east of River Euphrates. Through tunnels dug by PYD/YPG along the bordering areas in this region,

explosives and ammunition have been smuggled into Turkey to be handed over to the PKK terrorist organization. Furthermore, the Turks assert that there is credible evidence that DEASH terrorists detained by PYD/YPG were released in exchange of infiltrating into Turkey or northwest Syria in order to conduct terrorist acts. The Turkish authorities further allege that there has been growing evidence about PYD/YPG's human rights violations such as recruiting child soldiers, intimidating dissidents, demographic engineering and forced conscription in areas under its control.

### The Americans

Middle Eastern actors have long underestimated the extent and nature of American isolationism in the world. Historically, it has benefitted from substantial domestic support especially amongst blue collar Republican voters, the very people who today constitute the power base of President Donald Trump. It is therefore not surprising to see the American withdrawal from Syria. On the one hand, since Russia's intervention in 2015, Syria has never been more than a side show for the American military. Ever since the 2011 Arab spring, it was clear regardless of the political stripe that was in the White House, America would not challenge Russian and Iranian designs on Syria and their significant efforts to support the Bashar al-Assad regime.

There is little doubt that abandoning their Kurdish allies on the field would produce negative reactions and possible even lead to a resurgence of DAESH. There is however precedent for the transition from Obama's 'leading from behind' international strategy to Trump's 'get out fast' theories. Similar choices can be seen in US efforts to disengage from Af-

ghanistan and their constant criticism of NATO allies about contributing to their own and Europe's self-defense. It remains to be seen whether American isolationism will bring about a more stable Middle East but the positive side is reserved for domestic political gain. Short sightedness abroad has short term domestic political gains on the American political chess board.

### Bashar al-Assad's Syria

The current goal of the Bashar al-Assad regime is to exert complete control over all Syrian territory. As such, the recent Turkish incursion and American withdrawal have allowed Bashar to move his military forward into territory close to the Turkish border formerly held by SDF. The remaining Syrian opposition stronghold of Idlib, in northern Syria, is now threatened. These developments have allowed Bashar to enter into a pact with the Kurdish SDF militia given the absence of any continuing of US support on the ground. Together Bashar's government troops and the Syrian Kurds can now square off against the Turks in northern Syria.

However, Bashar is far from having his hands free. He is wholly dependent on Russian and Iranian support to buttress his military presence. Without it, Bashar's own domestic military would be unable to even attempt to control its own territory. Moreover, the Turkish incursion was doubtless sanctioned by the Astana Group (Russia, Iran, Turkey) as witnessed by the absence of Russian air power over the skies of northern Syria during the Turkish incursion. Bashar's objective of imposing hegemony over all Syria is manifestly not shared yet by the Astana Group. The desire of the Kurds to cre-

ate a homeland for themselves is also not a priority for this alliance.

### The Kurds

Recent history has not been generous to the Kurds or their political cause. In 1919, despite high hopes put forward by the Wilsonian doctrine, the Kurds were denied a homeland with a defined territory. The Westphalian model of international reality was just too strong and proponents of the Kurdish cause were unable to wield sufficient power to impose their will. This curse of not being able to have a regional champion has continued. Most Turkish political parties even the Kemalists dislike the Kurds and blame the PKK for destabilizing any neo-Ottoman resurgence. Iran's Shia regime is anathema to Kurds, most of who are Sunni Muslims, and of a different ethnic origin than most Iranians. Iraq's Saddam Hussein punished the Kurds after the US invasion with poison gas as President Bush senior watched on. Under the Assad regime, the Kurds were mostly unemployed and stateless individuals. They were treated as *untermenschen*.

There was a historic opportunity to reverse these failures though. In 2011, the Syrian up-

rising against the Bashar al-Assad regime offered the Kurds a unique opportunity to unite with their Sunni opposition compatriots and overturn the Assad dictatorship. At this historic moment, they waffled. The Kurdish youth were supportive but the old guard remained aloof and refused to commit themselves. The response of the Syrian Christians was similar. In doing so, the Kurds lost the opportunity to create some regional élan. The American withdrawal of support and the pact with Bashar reaffirm a self-fulfilling prophecy of betrayal and resentment. It only magnified the suspicion of every regional state about any national loyalty the Kurds may have amongst neighboring states.

So, for now, the Kurds remain divided amongst themselves. The plethora of Kurdish political parties only confirms the obvious. The experiment in Irbid, the de-facto Kurdish capital of northern Iraq, is racked by traditional family and tribal corruption. The PKK is a political dinosaur that has yet to grow out of its Marxist straight-jacket. The YPG have their backs to the wall betrayed by their International benefactor, and now at the mercy of their regional enemies once again.



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