

How serious is the West about banning the “Muslim Brotherhood”?



In early February, members of the British House of Commons called for the “Muslim Brotherhood,” to be proscribed, arguing that it posed a clear threat to the security of the United Kingdom. Irish Democratic Unionist Party member Ian Paisley said during a February 6 session of Parliament that the threat posed by the Brotherhood must be dealt with: See page...06

Erdogan and Ottoman ambitions in Libya

The ruling Justice and Development Party in Ankara, headed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, continues to fuel the conflict in Libya by supporting the Tripoli government headed by Fayeze al-Sarraj, and advancing Ankara's ambitions in Libya. The Turkish newspaper "Daily Sabah" has quoted Erdoğan saying that Turkey will support the Tripoli government in order to impose "full control over Libya if necessary", in case the international parties fail to reach an agreement about ending the Libyan crisis. Erdoğan commented on the recently announced European plans for Libya, following the EU decision

to launch a military mission in the Mediterranean to stop the flow of weapons to the country that has been torn by the war for more than 8 years. He said: "We have been shifting the balance in the Mediterranean in favor of our country since we signed the maritime deal with Libya. Thanks to our determined stance on the issue, the status we declared in the Mediterranean has started to be accepted by regional actors, including Greece." Despite the international warnings of Turkish interference in Libya, Erdoğan seeks to impose further control on Libya, advancing his Ottoman expansionist ambitions in the region.



Two hundred steps and thirty-eight bodies

Forcibly disappeared and forgotten among the echo of screams of pain filling the corridors of prisons, voices creep from behind prison bars to tell their jailers that they are still resisting. The arrests targeted Syrian women and

peaceful activists during the Syrian revolution, who were subjected to various types of physical and psychological torture through beatings, electrocution walking over the bodies of detainees, and rape. See page...08

Syria's tragedy shames the world

In Washington on 5 February, Ambassador James Jeffrey, the US envoy for Syria engagement and special envoy to the global coalition to defeat ISIS, gave an on-the-record media briefing about the current situation. Jeffrey spoke unusually frankly.



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Ian Black

Is Turkey becoming a bad ally?

A perennial problem for British and European politicians has been the question of relations with Turkey. A candidate for membership of the European Union (EU) since 1987, Turkey has gone from being the budding pin-up boy of Islamic democracy,



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Paul Stott

Syria's tragedy shames the world

It is not easy to reduce the story in about an hour and twenty minutes. The story of the Syrians is complicated and painful, and they systematically worked on forging it and distorting it by all means and methods.



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Rima Flihan

Shutting Down Aid for Syria

The spike in fighting in Northwest Syria has forced some 900,000 people to flee their homes in the most intensive displacement of the conflict so far. Right now reports of terrified families sleeping out in the open and resorting to burning rubbish to

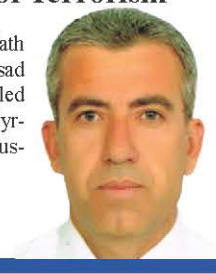


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James Denselow

Syria: From a Rogue State to a Failed State, to an Exporter of Terrorism

Over the course of about sixty years, Ba'ath Party, Hafez al-Assad, and Bashar al-Assad have turned Syria into a rogue and failed state. Then, Turkey – via its proxy, the Syrian opposition and more precisely, the Muslim Brotherhood

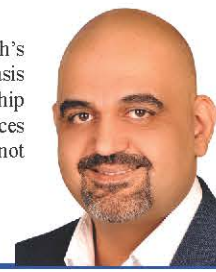


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Jwan Dibo

Forty Years after the Stolen Revolution

The Iranian revolution against the Shah's rule was not a pure religious one. The basis of the revolution was the economic hardship that people suffered at the time. The forces that contributed to the revolution were not confined to the clergy.



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Mohammed Khalil

Erdogan, the elimination of allies and monopoly of power starting with Gulen

It has become commonplace in Turkey for citizens to be arrested without prior notice, removed from a job, or even prosecuted, as means of forcing them into exile. The set accusation is membership of the "Service Movement", or, as referred to by the media, the Islamic group affiliated to the preacher Fathallah Gulen, settled in Pennsylvania USA, after his forced exit from Turkey in 1999.

After Recep Tayyip Erdogan realised that his mentor, Necmettin Erbakan, had ended, politically, after the ban of the Welfare Party in 1998, and the prohibition the Virtue Party in 2000, he had to change his political orientation slightly with the pragmatism that became a feature of his style in government.

Erdogan tried to win over the Islamic movement, while keeping a distance from the trend that was accused by the army of reactionary. He found in the Service Movement, led by the preacher Fathallah Gulen, the holy grail, he had been looking for, especially when Gulen said in his last statement, before leaving Turkey, that the regime had to be changed.

Erdogan took advantage of the speech, in an attempt to ally himself with the movement after he founded the Justice and Development Party in 2001 with a group of his partners, who broke away from the Virtue Party headed by Erbakan, who returned to found the Welfare Party in 2003. However, the discord in direction became evident between the politically outcast professor, and the pragmatic student who formed opportunist alliances in his quest to gain absolute power.

Erdogan succeeded in forming a tacit agreement with the Service Movement, given the fact that both, Gulen and Erdogan are considered to be among the followers of the Sufi Nur movement established by Said Nursi.

He won the support of Fathallah Gulen, who encouraged his followers to vote for the new Justice and Development Party.

The party won the elections and Erdogan came to power, with the help of Gulen, who stayed away from politics. He led a social movement, promoting what he called "social Islam" that supports moderation and education about Islam.



Quran memorization (Hifz) school. He then moved to become an itinerant preacher, roaming western Anatolia. In his sermons, he used to refine souls and purify them from their imperfections (according to his followers). He and his followers established charitable schools in Turkey, within existing legislation at the time.

The year 1970 marked the real beginning of the movement that did not have a known official name. It has been called the "Service," in reference to the Gulen community or the Gulen

services, as it was initially established to serve the Turkish community, which later turned into a religious movement that owned hundreds of schools both in Turkey and outside Turkey, from the Central Asian republics, to Russia, Morocco, Kenya, Uganda, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

The movement issues its own newspapers, magazines and TV channels, businesses, and charities. The movement has a wide range of global activities and operations, including the establishment of cultural centres in several countries around

the world, and organising annual conferences in Britain, Europe, and USA, in cooperation with major international universities that are interested in studying the movement and its impact and cultural and social roots. This social empire created by Fathallah Gulen led his supporters to call him "the father of social Islam", unlike Necmettin Erbakan, who was the "father of political Islam" in Turkey who tried to Islamise governance in and passed on his ideas to his student, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who abandoned him.

Fathallah Gulen: the preacher who founded "social Islam."

"Fathallah Gulen," according to the autobiography posted on his website in Arabic, is an Islamic scholar and Turkish preacher. He was born on April 27, 1941, in the village of Koroguk in the Hassan Qalaa, part of the governorate of Erzurum. He grew up in a religious fami-

ly, and is considered to be a follower of Said Nursi, or as his followers call him Badi' al-Zaman Said Nursi. In his works, Gulen focused on the concept of democracy and interfaith dialogue.

His religious Propagation started in Izmir in the Kestane Bazaar Mosque, at the

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, playing both sides religion and politics

Recep Tayyip Erdogan began his political career with his mentor Necmettin Erbakan in late the 1970s. However, following the military coup that took place in 1980 led by General Kanan Evren, all political parties were abolished, and by 1983 political life returned to Turkey.

Erdogan resumed his activity through the Islamic Welfare Party, especially in Istanbul. In 1989, the Islamic Welfare Party participated in municipal elections and began to achieve good results. Erdogan was nominated to represent the party in the municipality of Beyoglu but lost the

elections. In 1994, the Islamic Welfare Party nominated Erdogan to be its candidate for the elections of Istanbul mayor. He won, with the Islamic Welfare Party securing a large number of seats in those elections.

In 1998, Erdogan tried to play the religion card by

quoting verses from Turkish religious poetry saying: (Our mosques are our barracks / our domes are our helmets / our minarets are our spears / and the worshipers are our soldiers / this sacred army is guarding our religion). He was accused of inciting religious hatred. The verses led to his arrest and imprisonment. He was banned from government positions, including running for general elections. But he gained the legitimacy he wanted from his supporters, who saw him as the defender of religion in the face of secularists. After his release from prison, he turned his back on his mentor, Erbakan. He managed to get close to the Service movement that maintained a significant status in Turkish society, where he worked on cutting his links, temporarily with political Islam, led by Erbakan. He then went on to establish a temporary link

with social Islam led by Gulen to gain power, in a move that reflected opportunism, which later became obvious to all. Erdogan took advantage of the political weakening of Erbakan, following the proscription of his multiple parties that were trying to Islamize Turkish politics, on the one hand, and the absence of Fethullah Gulen from the Turkish scene after his departure from Turkey in 1999, on the other.

The vacuum of the political and social arena created a fertile environment for Erdogan to install his multiple networks to control the government in Turkey, where he founded the Justice and Development Party in 2001 with some of his partners and former members of the Virtue Party, which was dissolved after being banned by the Constitutional Court for violating the secularist articles of the Constitution.

How Erdogan exploited his relationship with the Service movement (Gulen community)

The undeclared alliance between Erdogan's Justice and Development Party and the Service movement, led by Fethullah Gulen was crucial to Erdogan, who was able to gradually control vital positions in the state, thanks to the presence of the Service movement supporters within it. They were able to reach these positions through high standard level of education they acquired in the schools and universities run by the movement across Turkey and abroad, in addition to taking advantage of the movement's media outlets.

After eight years of alliance between a growing social movement and a party trying to quietly change Turkish politics, Erdogan launched trials of senior military of-

ficers who were accused of plotting an attempted coup in 2003 against the elected government, to eliminate his opponents in the army. The quiet elimination campaign lasted for nearly ten years, in addition to isolating all his opponents in the state's sovereign institutions. The Service movement was safe from eliminations, as he needed to gain its support, little did its leaders know that their turn was coming.

The actual confrontation with the Service movement began with the emergence of differences between the movement and the Party following the defeat of the old establishment between 2010 and 2011. The first breakdown of relations between former allies came with was



what later to be known as the "National Intelligence Service crisis" in February 2012. It was interpreted to be a power struggle between the pro-Gulen police and judicial services, and the Justice Party.

In 2013, when the corruption committed by many state officials, ministers, mayors, and members of the families of the Justice and Development Party members was uncovered, in what was known as "Turkey's 2013 corruption investigations". Erdogan accused the Gulen movement of opening launching these investigations for personal reasons, in retaliation to the end of the alliance between the two entities. Erdogan accused the movement's leader and spiritual father, Fethullah Gulen, of trying to topple the Turkish government through a judicial coup in which corruption investigations are used as a pretext. He seized the group's official newspaper (Zaman, which

was a major high-circulation daily, before its closure) and several companies linked to the movement.

The Gulen movement has been banned in Turkey since December 11, 2015, when the Turkish government classified it as a terrorist organization under category "Parallel Entity." The Turkish government blamed the movement for the failed coup attempt in 2016 and arrested thousands of soldiers and judges. It also withdrew the teaching license of more than 20,000 teachers at private facilities that were linked to the Gulen movement.

Gulen condemned the attempted coup and denied his or his movement's involvement in it. Nonetheless, Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party insists that the coup is the work of the movement, as this would serve his two purposes: the elimination of a major rival in Turkish politics, and the creation of a supposed ene-

my to justify the economic collapse, and social decline caused by Erdogan's failed policies.

Erbakan and Gulen were not the only allies that Erdogan had turned against during his political career. Before the approval of the presidential system in 2017, he worked to eliminate his political allies who had always supported him, headed by former President Abdullah Gul, who stepped down as Prime Minister in favour of Erdogan, and Ahmed Davutoglu, who resigned from his position as Prime Minister before the presidential system was approved.

These measures have set alarm bells about the state of the very Turkish democracy and political pluralism that brought Erdogan to power and made him President of the Fifth Turkish Republic, despite having been imprisoned in the past because of his Brotherhood linked political orientations.

Iranian Leadership's Declining Popularity Among Iraqis, Lebanese And Young Iranians

By :Syafuruddin Arsyad

Since the early days of the Iranian Revolution, four decades ago, the Iranian regime has sought to spread its theocratic doctrine into the rest of the Middle East. The regime has, in the process, successfully turned substantial numbers of Iraqi and Lebanese civilian populations and 'armed groups' into core external support bases. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,

who spearheads the regime, had maintained his charm among these external civilian and armed support bases for almost three and a half decades. However, the situation has been changing in the Middle East for the past five years, and the Iranian regime appears to be struggling to maintain its 'civilian' support base in Lebanon and Iraq. What is worse for the regime is that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is now losing his acceptability in the minds of Iranian youths.

Iraqis frustrated with Iranian interference

Although the majority of Iraqi politicians—particularly members of parliament—are biased towards Iran. However, ordinary Iraqi people do not share the same sentiment with their politicians.

The recent anti-government protests across Iraq, have revealed growing disenchantment among the people with Iranian interference in Iraq. Protesters were, on many occasions, heard chanting slogans against Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Furthermore, the protesters attacked Iranian consulates three times in last two months: once in Karbala (on November 3, 2019) and twice in Najaf (on November 28 and December 1, 2019). During the Karbala attack, Iraqi protesters replaced the Iranian flag with the Iraqi flag, as they chanted "Iran out of Iraq". Ordinary Iraqi people have

grown frustrated over the years with Iran's interference in Iraqi politics as well as with Iran's attempt to impose Khamenei's ideology on the Iraqis way of life.

Even Shia Iraqis, who were previously deemed to be more sympathetic towards the Iranian regime, have now grown unsatisfied with Iran's attempt to impose Khamenei's ideology on them. Not all Shias in Iraq are Twelver-Shias, the version that Iran's Khamenei preaches. What is worse for Iran, is that even the Twelver-Shias are now rejecting Khamenei regime's interference in their overall way of life.

Therefore, it is very much evident that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has lost his acceptability in the minds of ordinary Iraqis —Shias and Sunnis alike. Surely, rejecting Khamenei means rejecting the entire Iranian regime.

Lebanese protesters reject Iran's proxy

The Lebanese people's frustration with their stagnant economy, rampant corruption and unemployment has recently brought them down to the streets in protest. Besides these factors, people's frustration with the Iranian interference in Lebanese society through Hezbollah, Iran's proxy in Lebanon, also played a vital role in triggering the countrywide protests. According to the Report Syndication, Lebanese protesters viewed Hezbollah's chief as the Iranian

puppet in Lebanon. In addition to financial security and government accountability, Lebanese protests reflected common aspirations of dignity and guarding Lebanon's sovereignty against Iranian interference.

When Hezbollah's chief Hassan Nasrallah tried to frame the protests as part of a foreign conspiracy, many Lebanese citizens posted sarcastic videos of themselves declaring "sponsorship of the revolution."

Iranians want Khamenei to go

Iranian people too have grown frustrated with their leadership. They have been frequently taking to the streets to protest against Khamenei regime.

Just like Iraqis, the Iranians too chanted anti-Khamenei slogans. During a protest in November 2019, Iranian protestors chanted "Down with Khamenei". This was very courageous, knowing that chanting such a slogan against Khamenei inside Iran, is considered an act against the state.

It is also worth noting that in some of the latest protests, other more serious slogan were heard from Ira-

nians. They took the "Down with Khamenei" slogan to the next level when they chanted "Death to Khamenei, Death to Rouhani".

Iran is experiencing the biggest protest wave since the Shia Revolution 40 years ago. Furthermore, the number of ordinary people participating in these protests grows every time a protest breaks out.

In many occasions, the Iranian security forces have opened fire on the unarmed protesters. There were even incidents where the security forces fired live bullets on protesters who were mostly young men between the ages of 19 and 26.

Ayatollah Khamenei losing support in Iran

In Iran, Khamenei is now left with few thousand civilian supporters, who are mostly elderly people and have financially benefited

from his regime. On the other hand, Iran's entire young population have either become mentally and ideologically distant from

Khamenei or outright turned anti-Khamenei.

Beside the few thousand supporters among the civilians, Khamenei does enjoy full support from military, para-military and other security forces which have considerable number of manpower in uniform.

Many believe that the supporters that are generally seen these days in the pro-regime and pro-Khamenei processions are actually these man-in-uniform. They are instructed to join the processions without uniform so that they look like general Iranian people. This is a clever disguise to fool the world into thinking that a substantial portion of the Iranian people supports the Khamenei regime. However, the reality is that the regime has gradually lost its charm among the civilians, particularly the young Iranians.

Therefore...

The growing protests in Iraq, Lebanon and Iran, the Lebanese protesters' rejection of Hezbollah and sectarianism, the young Iranian protesters' anti-Khamenei slogans, and the burning down of the Iranian consulates in Iraqi cities — all suggest that the Khamenei regime has now become detached from young Iranians as well as from its (civilian) support bases in Lebanon and Iraq.

Iran will continue to fund terror abroad despite money laundering regulations

Financial regulations will not stop Iran illicitly funding terrorist militant groups abroad, said experts, as the deadline for Iran to comply with global money laundering rules approaches this month. Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, has called for Tehran to abide by the rules set by the Paris-based global finance watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an unpopular move with some senior Iranian authorities, to protect ties between the sanctions-hit country and international banks. Rouhani supports currently unpassed laws that would bring Iran into FATF compliance. But experts say that even if these laws pass, it would not stop the regime from funding regional terror. "Tehran has carved out exceptions in the

bills which allow Tehran to continue what it has been doing ... The bills have created loopholes for Tehran to continue funding terrorism and bypass sanctions," said Saeed Ghasseminejad, a senior Iran and financial economics adviser at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD).

Last month the Iranian parliament passed a domestic law ostensibly aimed at curbing money laundering, which in fact had a loophole that allowed account holders to obscure their identity, allowing sanctioned individuals and companies to conceal themselves. This law is the latest example of how the regime continues to defy sanctions, international norms, and laws on money laundering and terrorism financing.

Money laundering and sanctions

Authorities have increasingly turned to money laundering as sanctions have devastated the Iranian economy. Last month the Institute of International Finance (IFF) estimated that the economy will fall into an even deeper recession, contracting 7.2 percent for the current financial year.

US sanctions have hit the country's oil sector particularly hard. Crude oil exports have dropped over 85 percent in recent months to 0.4 million barrels per day (bpd) in recent months, down from highs of 2.8 million bpd in May 2019. These figures are based on official numbers, which may understate exports as Iranian authorities have repeatedly

sought to illegally export oil and avoid sanctions.

The US special representative for Iran, Brian Hook, told Al Arabiya last year that oil sanctions on Iran alone will deny the regime \$50 billion dollars in revenue annually.

In this context, the country has increased money laundering activities in a bid to avoid sanctions. In November, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that money laundering in Iran amounts to billions of dollars.

Experts pointed out that this Iranian money laundering is far from new.

"The Islamic Republic government agencies have historically engaged in money



laundering in order to finance its non-state allies and proxies outside of Iran," said Ali Alfoneh, senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

Iran's ability to take advantage of the legitimate financial system, coupled with a control of plethora of

black-market actors, has permitted Iran to underwrite terror and aggression worldwide, added Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the FDD.

"That is how a country a myriad of financial problems remains the world's foremost state sponsor of terror," he said.

Rouhani and Khamenei split on FATF compliance

Iran's rulers are divided on the issue, despite foreign businesses saying that compliance with FATF is vital for Tehran to attract investors and avoid US penalties. Iranian President Rouhani said, last week, that Tehran should stick to the FATF rules, but senior clerics have stalled the passing of key bills. "Our national interests should not be ignored, and we should not let [US President Donald] Trump and those terrorists in the White House cut Iran's relationship with international Banks," said Rouhani.

Iran's parliament has passed

four bills required by FATF. However, two of the bills have been held up by Iran's legislative Guardian Council and advisory Expediency Council, despite initial approval by lawmakers.

A member of the Expediency Council said in January that the council has rejected the Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) bill, which would link Iran to Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions aimed at curbing transnational illicit financing.

These councils' opposition to the laws is influenced by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali

Khamenei, who has yet to make a public decision on their adoption, said experts.

"It is not a foregone conclusion that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei will give his blessing to ratifying the Palermo Convention. If he does not, then the Expediency Council is highly unlikely to do so, whether now or later," said John Calabrese, Scholar in Residence at the Middle East Institute, where he is director of the institute's project on The Middle East and Asia. The council's deadline to approve the CFT bill had ended, Iranian politician Ahmad Tavakoli told Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency, adding that the deadline will not be extended and that the case has been closed. This opposition to complying by money laundering norms is unlikely to disappear, according to experts. "This [opposition] indicates a cognizance by some elites of how essential Iran's bad business practices are to the regime," Taleblu concluded.

How serious is the West about banning the “Muslim Brotherhood”?

In early February, members of the British House of Commons called for the “Muslim Brotherhood,” to be proscribed, arguing that it posed a clear threat to the security of the United Kingdom. Irish Democratic Unionist Party member Ian Paisley said during a February 6 session of Parliament that the threat posed by the Brotherhood must be dealt with: “The government must move forward in banning the Brotherhood, who spread hate and attack Christians inside and outside the country.” Paisley added: “The Saudi foreign minister was here last week, and he told the lawmakers that his country banned this group because it transformed their beliefs into a tool to stir up

hatred.” He continued: “The Saudi minister expressed his surprise that the UK had not yet taken similar measures to ban the Brotherhood.” This is what MP Julian Lewis said, “This confirms and again raises my doubts that the special report on the Brotherhood’s activities in our country, commissioned by David Cameron when he was prime minister, has not yet been announced. Why?” Paisley answered him, “Thank you for raising this point .. This is an organization that exploits and violates beliefs to attack Christians and others ... This is frightening and wrong.” He continued: “It is necessary that the full facts about the Brotherhood in our country be revealed and exposed,”

while Representative Bob Stewart participated in The debate, he said, “When I visited Egypt in 2011, I met members of the Muslim Brotherhood at their headquarters, and they told me at the time that they do not have political intentions and do not want to rule the country .. but now they are considered a direct cause of what Christians are exposed to .. I totally agree with what you have said about this group.”

Representative Paisley noted: “Indeed, the model promoted by the Brotherhood last year encouraged incitement to hatred against Christians and Muslims who joined the British army and identified them as people to be targeted and killed.”



sure that the correct data exists before the listing process”, stressing that these factors must be available before you classify an individual or group as terrorist. He pointed out that it is a profound and

substantial work that “must be done the right way,” adding: “We are trying to complete this process (proscribing the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization) .. I don’t know when it will conclude ...but I

know that there is a real danger posed by the Muslim Brotherhood in many countries in the Middle East. Pompeo concluded: “We must do our part We hope our European friends will join us.”

The call is not the first

The conversation in the British House of Commons comes to complement what US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on January 14, when he stated that he was one of 8 lawmakers who presented a bill in Congress, calling on the former US administration (the Obama administration) to include the Muslim Brotherhood On the terrorism list. In response to a question about whether the US administration intends to take this step at the present time, he added, during a debate session at the Hoover

Institution at Stanford University, that the current administration (the administration of President Donald Trump) is still looking into this and evaluating the step, to ensure that this is done “correctly.” “It is more sensitive in my assessment compared to what I saw as the Kansas representative in Congress,” he said, explaining that looking at the matter from within the administration differs from looking at it from the outside, which was endorsed by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who was

conducting the debate session. “We are still trying to figure out how to achieve this. There are elements within the Muslim Brotherhood that are undoubtedly terrorists, and they are listed on the terrorism list... We are trying to ensure that we are inserting correctly, that we define the issue correctly, and ensure the legal basis for that.”, she said. He added: “listing a group as a terrorist organization may seem like a simple decision. Yet, it needs a lot of work to ensure that there is a legal basis for that, and to en-

Proscribing the Muslim Brotherhood is a lengthy procedure

Observers believe that the proscription of the Muslim Brotherhood in the US, UK, or other European countries, will contribute to the collapse of the organization’s pillars; it will limit its presence in the world, and will encourage other countries to take similar steps that restrict the group and dry up their resources. In a report published on January 18, Al-Ain news quoted Islamic scholar Tharwat Al-Kharbawi as saying that the American decision will have signifi-

cant repercussions on the organization’s status, given “its falling leaves” in Tunisia with the failure of the “Renaissance” movement, and the parliamentary pressure to vote of no confidence on Rashid Ghannouchi, in addition to the troubles of the Turkish regime. He argued that this combined with a decision by Washington would deal a crushing blow to the organization. He also noted that such a move by the US administration decision would encourage other coun-

tries to take similar measures, which would significantly disrupt the group’s finances. Amr Farouk, expert in Muslim Brotherhood studies, believes that proscribing the terrorist organisation is a lengthy procedure, as it would require several official bodies to prove the Brotherhood’s involvement in supporting and financing terrorism such as the Treasury, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Defence and the White House

Threat to American interests

In turn, the National Interest Magazine, in a report on January 23, warned the American administration of the threat posed by the Qatari-Turkish alliance to the interests of the United States in the Middle East, noting that the close relationship between the two countries and their movements to form an axis of extremism to support terrorist entities and armed organizations require an urgent American intervention. The magazine said that Turkey and Qatar have become “brothers” in pursuing joint ventures

in illicit financing and promoting extremist ideologies. Hence, Washington needs to seek a multifaceted response to force Ankara and Doha to stop these actions. The National Interest added in the report, by Aykan Erdemir, former Turkish parliamentarian, and the first director of the Turkey program at the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies, and fellow researcher, Farsha Kudovayor, that the Qatari-Turkish moves contributed to the spread of sectarian violence in the Middle

East, in addition to terrorism and anarchy, explaining that the alliance is matched by a counter bloc from both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The National Interest reported that the denominator that unites Qatar and Turkey is their support for the Muslim Brotherhood ideology. The Justice and Development Party led by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has a long history of close ties with the Brotherhood, while Qatar is one of the major financiers of the international organizations

associated with the group and the sponsors of its extremist activities. The report noted that although Turkey and Qatar are formal allies of the United States and are already hosting American bases, the reality confirms that they are working side by side to promote a desta-

bilizing extremist agenda throughout the Middle East. The report cited the recent Turkish operation of Turkey in northern Syria October 2019, explaining that Qatar was one of the few actors, besides Pakistan, that supported the treacherous campaign despite the con-

tinuous international condemnation of that aggression, as well as when the Arab Quartet countries boycotted the Emirate of Qatar, Turkey was the first to support the Qatari regime with shipments containing food commodities and among other forms of support.

Absence of seriousness

Despite what is being proposed from time to time, whether in Britain, the United States of America or European countries, what can be noted is the lack of seriousness in dealing with the group. They seem to have no concerns as long as the activities of

the group are confined to controlling government within the countries in which they are present. However, the events in Syria, Libya, and Egypt have indicated some of the group’s members involvement in supporting Turkish attacks against their

countries of origin, to the extent that many of them are willing to give up their national affiliations, in exchange of obtaining Turkish citizenship and serving the expansionist interests of Ankara in the region.

Syria: From a Rogue State to a Failed State, to an Exporter of Terrorism

Over the course of about sixty years, Ba’ath Party, Hafez al-Assad, and Bashar al-Assad have turned Syria into a rogue and failed state. Then, Turkey – via its proxy, the Syrian opposition and more precisely, the Muslim Brotherhood – has completed the mission and transformed Syria into an exporter of terrorism. Since the Ba’ath party coup and assuming power in 1963, Syria has become a police state par excellence. But the coup of Hafez al-Assad in 1970 transcended the horrific oppressive situation and shifted Syria into a farm, with the its produce reaped up by few families, mainly from the Alawite sect to which Hafez al-Assad and the successor Bashar al-Assad belonged. Hafez al-Assad transformed Syria with his destructive policies into a rogue state. He intervened militarily in Lebanon and occupied it for about two decades. He adversely affected the Palestinian

cause and stirred up severe rifts within the Palestinian political movement. He fueled infighting among different Palestinian and Lebanese parties and factions. This was in addition to the systematic repression and assassinations he practised against opponents inside Syria and Lebanon. Bashar al-Assad, who assumed power in 2000 after the death of his father has converted Syria into a failed state, in particular, following 2011. His brutal crackdown on demonstrations throughout Syria since 2011, has caused a deep and broad divisions in Syrian society. The systematic subjugation his apparatuses have been practising against dissidents turned the conflict into a fierce civil war that has been ravaging Syria since 2012. Bashar al-Assad has transformed Syria into a Russian and Iranian protectorate. Both countries, in turn, have wreaked mayhem, death and

destruction throughout the country they have occupied. The Assad regime invited dozens of Shiite militias to Syria to defend his regime. His supporters declared it since the first day of the demonstrations in Syria; “only Assad or we will burn down the country”. Indeed, they burned down the country and left most of it in ruins. They killed more than half million people and forced more than 13 million to flee their homes and become immigrants in neighbouring countries and beyond. The Syrian regime allowed Turkey to occupy many Syrian regions, killing thousands of innocent civilians, especially, Kurds, and displacing tens of thousands without any reaction worthy of mention. In short, Bashar al-Assad completed his father’s mission and transformed Syria from a rogue state to a failed and paralysed state.

In the latest new chapter of the Syrian calamity, Turkey made Syria an exporter of terrorism. It has turned thousands of the Syrian armed opposition into professional mercenaries who can be hired on demand. Turkey has turned many factions of the armed Syrian opposition into employed soldiers and sent them to Libya to support the Muslim Brotherhood’s government in the Libyan capital. On 15th of January, the Guardian newspaper published a report covering the deployment of 2000 Syrian fighters in Libya to support the Muslim Brotherhood government in Tripoli, led by the Turkey’s spoiled man, Favez al-Sarraj. According to numerous news reports, published by various media outlets, this number has recently reached 6,000 fighters. Indeed, the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition have become two sides of the same coin. What a blink fate, history and



Jwan Dibo

present brought on Syria by Ba’ath Party, Al-Assad family, and Erdogan’s Turkey through Syrian opposition, specially, the parties of political Islam led by Muslim Brotherhood! This dark chapter has prevailed over nearly sixty years without the ‘free’ world moving an inch to stop this travesty.

Two hundred steps and thirty-eight bodies



By Yasmina Benchi

Forcibly disappeared and forgotten among the echo of screams of pain filling the corridors of prisons, voices creep from behind prison bars to tell their jailers that they are still resisting.

The arrests targeted Syrian women and peaceful activists during the Syrian revolution, who were subjected to various types of physical and psychological torture through beatings, electrocution, walking over the bodies of detainees, and rape. Methods of torture practiced against detainees vary, the regime forces do not distinguish between a children, women, and the elderly.

Hind, 34, recounts the events of her arrest from a checkpoint of the regime in October 2012 when she was visiting to check on her house that was bombed by Syrian air forces in the southern region of Damascus.

As wolves above prey, the security forces gathered at the checkpoint when I was arrested, and one of them

took me to an abandoned house to search me and look for anything that could condemn me. Within moments from the search that contained glimpses of what would come next, the officer handcuffed me and took me to another checkpoint, where one of the officers was present.

Hind continues: On the way back, the scene was horrific. The bodies of the youth filled the outskirts of town, some were charred, others have swollen, and the traces of bullets were visible on their bodies. It looked like field executions. I muttered with a trembling voice, but the soldier's voice quickly interrupted, ordering me only to watch where I step.

Two hundred steps and thirty-eight bodies was the length of the road, until we reached another roadblock. The words did not stop the slapping of that officer who hit me on the face, What is your name? Hind He asks on his handheld transceiver if I was wanted by a security branch, and what was my crime? I break my silence in the face of the officer and his soldiers. He says shut up and write the names of all your family members, "It is a crime that I came to an area crowded with terrorists," the officer told me.

They put me alone in a prefabricated room at the checkpoint for an hour and

a half, and one of the officers came saying either you confess or we will kill you here without anyone knowing. The shocking statement fell on my ears along with the words of the officers outside "this girl saw everything so how can we let her live."

I did not confess to anything and I was not afraid of death despite the horrors that I saw. Meanwhile, another officer came and ordered me to prostrate, as I put my head on the floor he put his stood with his feet on my head with the full weight of his body. He insulted me with the most filthy phrases and threatened me with rape. When it started to get dark, an officer was ordered to take me to one of the security branches in Damascus.

Five officers took me on foot. I no longer counted the steps interrupted by the voices of soldiers the sound of shelling and bullets; there was no point. We reached an unknown location with an armoured military vehicle. They put me inside handcuffed, their laughter and looks seemed to suggest what I feared, the great disaster. Someone fixed my body and closed my mouth so that the rest of the officers would alternately rape me brutally and barbarically before I lost consciousness, but their conversations shocked me, "aren't you done yet? It is my turn."

I woke up in the morning

to the voices of the officers requesting that I prepare myself to go to the branch, and when I arrived at the Military Security Branch in a deplorable state, my clothes were torn, and the bruises on my body told what happened to me that night. The detainees in the dormitory tried to help me and calm me down, but every time I would wake up, I would see the nightmare I lived, and I would go back into my blackout. Three days later, I was taken for interrogation; I complained to the interrogator about what happened to me. I gave him the names of the officers who raped me, and in return for my release he asked me to sign a pledge not to mention their names, and not to speak to media or even my family about it, threatening to arrest my entire family if I uttered a word, and punish them.

I left the branch heading towards Ghouta area, worried that my family would have learned about what had happened to me. I was afraid they would be arrested if I were with them. My biggest fear was of the shame brought by what those criminals inflicted upon me.

I stayed in Ghouta with a friend for two months, during which I received treatment at the field hospital in the city of Irbeen. I was able to communicate with my family and reassure them that I was fine and hiding for fear of pros-

ecution by the security services. However, the situation in Ghouta deteriorated, the bombing intensified, and my father asked to see me urgently, so I made the decision to return to Damascus.

On December 5, 2012 I gathered my belongings and headed to Damascus, at the gate checkpoint, just like the rest of the people trying to cross, my mobile phone was searched. After few minutes of inspection the soldier said: "arrest her!" What a Disaster, I thought to myself. I was wanted for questioning by Branch 227. One of the soldiers handcuffed me, put a blindfold on my eyes and took me in a military vehicle to the branch again.

During the interrogation, I was ordered to confess to financing terrorism, and to receiving large sums of money from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and to rat on people I had never heard of before.

He told me that I would die inside the branch when I told him that I had no idea what he was talking about. The journey of torment began, it was cold, he asked me to take off my coat and then put me in a large barrel filled with water. Every time he pulled my out of the barrel he would hit me with a whip then put me in front of a fan to freeze. This was not the only means of torture I was subjected to. I was also electrocuted during

interrogation. I could no longer endure the pain. I confessed to everything they said, to relieve my body a little. Sixty days later, I was transferred to Branch 291 in the Kafar Souseh area, then to Branch 215, where I could see the bodies of young men dumped in the corridors. Life in the basements of the security branches had no value, and the psychological torture was more painful than physical pain. I stayed there for 45 days, moving between the two branches until I was transferred to Adra prison to spend the rest of my time. I was brought before a terrorism court judge, without being allowed to defend myself, and without any regard to the fact that my confessions were extracted under torture. I was released in late 2014, as part of a reconciliation process between the re-

gime and the dignitaries of the area where I used to live. On that day, one of the officers approached me and whispered in my ears, "Are you Hind?" Yes sir, I replied. "I have a surprise for you", he said. He took me to a bus parked nearby, crowded with women who were to be released with us as part of that deal, to see my sister, who had stopped visiting me in prison, among these skinny detainees wearing torn clothes. She had been arrested because of her frequent visits to me. Three days after we were released from prison were enough to escape a homeland ruled by criminals. I travelled to Turkey with my family for fear of being arrested again. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented that the Syrian regime forces arrested at least 11,850 women, between March 2011 and



early 2017. About 6,580 of those women are still under arrest or enforced disappearance in detention centres run by Syrian regime forces. The dossier of detainees is used by the Syrian regime as a card to put pressure on the international community. Despite all the viola-

tions that have taken place and continue to do so in prisons, neither the United Nations nor international human rights organizations have been able to convict the regime of its crimes or even reveal the fate of a detainee or enforced disappearance. The most significant con-

straint for the detainees is the psychological pain and the memories that would stay with them for the rest of their lives. Some of them have managed to escape the nightmare, while others are still withering in the darkness of those dungeons.

Forty Years after the Stolen Revolution



Mohammed Khalil

The Iranian revolution against the Shah's rule was not a pure religious one. The root cause of the revolution was the economic hardship

that people were suffering at the time. The forces that contributed to the revolution were not confined to the clergy, there were other forces, liberals, nationalists, and leftists. They had a major and effective role in the revolution, but after the Shah's regime fell is the religious movement led by Khomeini stole the revolution and turned against the forces that participated in it. Instead of building a modern country, the Shiite clerics established the Republic of Wilayat al-Faqih. Forty years later, the Iranians are back on the streets, demanding an improvement

in their economic conditions. In a country that is assumed wealthy, at least 15% of the population live below the poverty line of \$ 8 a day. Unemployment rate has reached nearly 13%, according to official government figure. Prices rise every day, the purchasing power decreases, making living conditions more difficult. The Iranian regime has brought this economic strains upon its people as a result of its policies, domestically and internationally. This regime devoted state resources to achieving its ambitions of controlling neighbouring countries and creating a sec-

tarian empire. This has led to Iran becoming the enemy of many countries in the region and the wider world, and facing economic sanctions. The regime depleted the wealth and resources of the Iranian people to arm militias loyal to it in a number of countries, and to build a military arsenal, instead of investing in people's lives and future. Moreover, this regime confronted the demands of people with an iron fist and authoritarian rule, pushing them back to the streets. Forty years ago, the Shah's regime fell despite having many friends internationally; these friend-

ships did not help him in the face of the people's anger. The current regime in Iran does not have friends, while the anger of the people is rising every day. The regime has no choice but to submit to the demands of the people or to leave. The mullahs stole the revolution, stole the dreams of Iranians of a bright future, and subjected them to all sorts of repression and oppression. On the fortieth anniversary of the hijacking of the revolution, the Iranians are chanting in the streets of their cities and villages against this regime: "power to the people".

Syria's tragedy shames the world



Rima Flihan

It is not easy to reduce the story in about an hour and twenty minutes. The story of the Syrians is a complicated and painful one; it has been systematically twisted and distorted it by various means and methods.

The world has forgotten that what happened in Syria was a peaceful revolution by people who wanted to liberate themselves from a repressive dictatorial regime that was more than half a century old. The Syrian regime resorted to violence and massacres from the start. The militarization of the revolution was part of what happened, but it was not where the story began. Nor was chaos and the flow of Islamist groups, part of the revolution, or an extension of it, rather a third party agenda that was invoked to bury the revolution alive and serve the interests of those who wanted to thwart the will to change in the region.

The world has also forgotten the people targeted by regime bombing and mass murder, were not members of extremist groups; they have mainly been civilians, doctors, peaceful activists, children, and anyone who wanted change and ex-

pressed their aspirations through demonstrations.

Some politicians and activists are trying to remind the world of these facts through the media. However, their efforts are do not exceed few minutes of news reporting and interviews, that are challenged by the regime's commissioned propagandists and mouthpieces.

But what if you saw the reality with your own eyes? What if your heart trembled with the sound of bombs blasting or bereaved mothers wailing?

What if you felt suffocated when trying to touch the life of a new borne baby trying to make his way to oxygen after being forced out of his mother's womb who was killed by regime bombing? What if you tried to put yourself in the position of a Syrian who lived through the revolution and experienced war, love, death, and life at the same time?

You might be able to understand the strange mix of emotions that Syrians have experienced and continue to do every day. When you are able to laugh, yet you are fully aware that at that very moment someone may vanish under arrest, with a sniper bullet or under the rubble? They are capable of falling in love and proclaiming that love while the blast of barbaric bombing assassinates dreams. They can even laugh with their precious children in the darkness of the cellars as they try to avoid death by the regime's barrel coming from helicopters and Russian experimental weapons. Waad Al-Khatib, the journalist and brave mother, gave the world the opportu-

nity to experience all of that and see the truth with their own eyes with the moments she lived and documented for Sama.

Sama is not only the daughter of Waad and Hamza, the great doctor who spared no effort to save lives. Sama is a dream and hope for freedom. She is the symbol of a childhood robbed of its fundamental rights in Syria; she was born in the midst of all this death to say I want to live, and I have the right to do so!

"For Sama" is a film documented with the eyes of a mother who believed in her rights of dignity and freedom. She lived the events herself and recorded them with her camera.

The film is a historical human recording of the assassination of a city along with its population, and the sacrifices they made until the very last moment they got to spend in their town.

It is extraordinary for the film to convey, in a scene that does not exceed thirty

seconds, the depth of the cruelty of displacement from ones homeland, memories, and history, through the tears of the child who is more affected by having to leave her city, Aleppo, than fearful of death.

That helplessness of the two children in the face of the death of their younger brother symbolises our powerlessness and inability to change anything. Our hearts break in pain with the mother who bears the lifeless body of her son and runs out of the hospital, refusing to let go of it. It brings back all the funerals of our loved ones, our losses and memories of those who have left over the past ten years. It reminds of our dreams that have been killed, while we continue to hold on to what is left of them, just like that bereaved mother holds on to the body of her child.

This film is a slap in the faces of all pro regime actors of shame, writers and directors who denounced it as spin and even mocked it. It is also a slap in the face of the re-

gime, its proxies, and allies. With simple photographic equipment, the film told the story through pools of blood on hospital floors, and with the dullness of death on the faces of children; it was enough to tell the truth.

The film might have not won the Oscar, but it was nominated for the award and received dozens of other awards, acknowledging the power of its message. The phrase, which was written in Arabic script on the dress of Waad Al-Khatib at the Oscars, summed up the message of the Syrians who believe in the revolution, freedom and dignity. Yes, Waad, we dared to dream, and we will not regret the dignity. Words cannot sum up the appreciation you deserve. kudos to you Waad Al-Khatib and to everyone who contributed to the production of this film, and most importantly to life heroes; the doctors and medical teams who have worked in Syria and are still working amidst all this death.



Shutting Down Aid for Syria

The spike in fighting in Northwest Syria has forced some 900,000 people to flee their homes in the most intensive displacement of the conflict so far. Right now reports of terrified families sleeping out in the open and resorting to burning rubbish to keep warm and shield their children from hypothermia.

There is no sign that the offensive – which has now reclaimed the whole of Aleppo for the Regime – is winding down. Indeed President Assad himself warned on state television the war is not over, saying that “we know this liberation does not mean the end of the war or the crushing of all plots or the end of terror or the surrender of the enemy, but it definitely rubs their noses in the dirt.”

Living on freezing dirt is the life or death challenge for tens of thousands of Syrians in the coming weeks. Zooming out for a second it is unsurprising for a country that has experienced almost nine years of conflict, that the wider population of Syria is incredibly dependent on humanitarian aid to sustain many of the basic elements of a normal life.

An estimated 11.7 million

Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid. This aid, in theory, should be governed and distributed according to humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity. In reality the provision of aid – whether it is life saving medicines or critically needed food to help malnourished children – has become deeply politicised.

The fundamental issue has been who to ensure the free and safe delivery of aid in a civil war where the sovereign authority – the government in Damascus – has lost control over large chunks of the country and its population. Aid agencies – the UN heavy lifters in particular – require permissions from the government of a country to operate there and in Syria’s case permission to ‘cross lines’ to get aid to civilians in non-government controlled areas.

The amount of ‘cross line’ aid has never been enough and has been subject to the death by a thousand cuts of a bureaucracy that has delayed it at every turn. The case of Syria is not alone in this regard, around the world UN figures show that in the last decade the denial of humani-

tarian aid has increased by over a 1000%.

Arguments for why this aid is denied are either simple and made in public – that it would be used to support or prop up the non-state armed groups in control of the area – or are more insidious – that



James Denselow

a besieged and starving population is more likely to reject the status quo.

Such have been the restrictions on getting aid to Syrian’s who need it that in July of 2014 the UN Security Council agreed to Resolution 2165 granting agencies the ability to utilise border crossings outside of the Regime’s control to deliver aid.

Yet this resolution has required annual renewal and has been subject to intense criticism and push back.

This has eventually exploded in the latest attempt to extend authorisation to use six border crossings for another 12-months. High diplomatic drama in New York at the UN eventually saw a compromise that has reduced the available crossings to four and halved the time in which access is granted down to 6-months.

Aid agencies are now desperately scrambling to keep pipelines open for many critically needed programmes to continue. This involves stockpiling, planning new – and often longer and more expensive routes – and preparing for the worst case scenario of all crossings being closed come the middle of the year. Medical supplies, which often require refrigeration and cannot be delayed for long at crossing points, are a particular issue that could see a morbidity spike in Syrians if all cross border aid is shut down.

Estimates suggest that some 4m Syrians would be affected by further closures and restrictions. This is a highly

vulnerable part of the population, many of whom have been displaced multiple times and have witnessed the loss of their home and loved ones.

If the supply of aid is similar to a tap with water pouring from it, then the combination of global apathy towards a protracted conflict combined with the new restrictions to cross border aid represents a drastic reduction in needed supplies. This reduction is accentuated by the continued apparent targeting of humanitarian infrastructure in areas outside of control of the government.

Hospitals, clinics and ambulances in particular seem to be paying the highest price with dozens being hit and put out of action. Ahead of this year’s Oscars the film “For Sama” shows exactly what that looked like for the besieged population of Aleppo back in 2016. Very similar tactics are being used in the Idlib of today.

As ever events in Syria have their own unique tragedy for the population in the country but the erosion of global norms, such as the ability of aid to reach people who need it, is a global crisis.

The crisis in north-west Syria has reached a “horrifying new level”, the UN Humanitarian Affairs chief warned

The offensive that began late last year has caused the biggest single displacement of people since the conflict erupted following the repression of demonstrations demanding regime change. “The violence in north-

west Syria is indiscriminate”, Mr. Lowcock said, painting a dire picture of aid workers’ equipment and facilities being damaged as the humanitarian workers themselves are being displaced and killed.

Apart from health facilities, schools, residential areas, mosques and markets being hit, he said, schools have been suspended and many health facilities closed. Moreover, there is a serious risk of disease outbreaks as

basic infrastructure falls apart. “We are now receiving reports that settlements for displaced people are being hit, resulting in deaths, injuries and further displacement”, the Humanitarian Affairs chief ex-

plained. Although a huge relief operation, across the border from Turkey, is underway, he lamented that “it is overwhelmed”. “The only option is a ceasefire”, concluded Mr. Lowcock.

Syria's tragedy shames the world



Ian Black

In Washington on 5 February, Ambassador James Jeffrey, the US envoy for Syria engagement and special envoy to the global coalition to defeat ISIS, gave an on-the-record media briefing about the current situation. Jeffrey spoke unusually frankly. The US, he said clearly, is no longer demanding the downfall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, only that it reform and become less abusive.

"We're not asking for regime change per se, we're not asking for the Russians to leave, we're asking for what the international community and the UN... has called for, for Syria to behave as a normal, decent country that doesn't force half its population to flee, doesn't use chemical weapons dozens of times against its own civilians, doesn't drop barrel bombs, doesn't create a refugee crisis that almost toppled governments in Europe, does not allow terrorists such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and particularly Daesh/ISIS to emerge and flourish in much of Syria."

Jeffrey also talked about US pressure on Russia to modify

its behaviour towards Assad, but that only served to emphasise how little direct influence the Trump administration has with both Damascus and Moscow, nearly nine years into the most destructive conflict in the Middle East.

The immediate context is the escalating humanitarian crisis in the north-western province of Idlib. Idlib was recently described succinctly by a BBC correspondent as a place where "the dead have no peace and the living are running out of space to breathe." Hospitals, schools and bakeries have been damaged and destroyed. Ordinary people are desperate for food, clean water and medical care. Children are dying of exposure in freezing winter temperatures.

The UN, struggling to cope, is worried about refugee flows. New camps are being built near the Turkish border following the displacement of 800,000 civilians in the last two months. More land and resources are needed while airstrikes and shelling continue to devastate towns and villages.

Idlib, home to 3 million people, is the only part of Syria that is still outside Assad's control. It was supposed to be protected by a de-escalation agreement brokered in 2018 by Russia and Turkey. But in recent weeks the area has been battered by an intensifying regime assault.

The deaths of several Turkish soldiers is nothing compared to what is likely to happen next. And the US is unlikely to intervene. The risk of a wider Turkish-Syri-

an confrontation, or even a Turkish-Russian one, is now rising alarmingly. On 14 February European members of the UN security council called for an immediate end to the Idlib offensive.

David Miliband, the former British foreign secretary and now head of the International Rescue Committee, has described the looming catastrophe as an outcome of the failure of diplomacy and the international community's abandonment of Syrian civilians.

Looking back critically at the inconsistency of US and other policies is necessary to understand this grim story so far. Last week, near Qamishli in the northeast, there was a rare clash between US and Syrian forces, underlining the fact that ever since Trump suddenly severed the anti-ISIS pact with the Kurds last October – green-lighting a Turkish offensive – what remains of the US presence in Syria has faced mounting difficulties.

Still, not everything can be blamed on the unpredictable and disruptive Twitterer-in-chief in the Oval Office. Barack Obama famously called for Assad to go in 2011 – setting the tone for US allies – but then fatefully failed to observe his own "red line" when the regime, supported then as now by Moscow and Tehran, used chemical weapons to kill 1400 people in Eastern Ghouta in August 2013.

Samantha Power, Obama's UN ambassador, described what she hoped would happen then: "Diplomacy had been ineffective in part because Assad had become convinced that no-one would stop him from using even the most merciless tactics against his own people," she wrote in her memoir. "If the US government looked away from this incident, signaling that Assad could gas his citizens at will, I worried he would never feel sufficient pressure to negotiate." Power's fears were spot-on. Russia's direct military interven-

tion two years later radically altered the parameters of the war.

Fast-forwarding to the present, nobody now expects Assad to be overthrown. The best that can be hoped for is some sort of peaceful transition in Damascus. And the optimal way to achieve that, it is now argued, is for the US to actively support Turkey's intervention – raising the stakes for both Vladimir Putin and Assad himself and conditioning post-conflict reconstruction aid on his departure. Next month Syria's war will enter its 10th year. Half a million people have died and nearly 15 million have been displaced at home and abroad. It is hard to be optimistic about the country's future. But Waad al-Kataeb, who made the acclaimed film *For Sama* about Aleppo, transmitted a defiant but sad message, in beautiful Arabic script, on the dress she wore for the recent Oscar ceremony: "We dared to dream, and we don't regret demanding our dignity."



Is Turkey becoming a bad ally?

A perennial problem for British and European politicians has been the question of relations with Turkey. A candidate for membership of the European Union (EU) since 1987, Turkey has gone from being the budding pin-up boy of Islamic democracy, to a disgruntled neighbour which western countries cannot necessarily do without, but cannot do much with either. The emergence of Turkey as an issue in the Brexit referendum, and its occasional use as a rhetorical device by angry Remainers since, is characteristic of the emotive rhetoric that has flared since 2016. In using Turkey as a stick with which to dismiss Leave voters as ill-informed conspiracists, prejudiced, or indeed both, Remain activists showed themselves not just to be out of step with public opinion, but dangerously ill-informed themselves.

Whilst European conservatives had often doubted the wisdom of Turkish accession, in Britain there were historically few such reservations among political elites. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy took the view that a country with 98% of its land mass outside Europe, and a cultural basis rooted in an Islam that has never fully embraced liberal democracy, was suitable only for some form of associative agreement, rather than EU membership. Keeping out a country with a bigger population than any existing member state, would also ensure that the EU's delicate political balances, and Franco-Ger-

man dominance, endured.

Perhaps seeing an opportunity to upset the Paris-Bonn/Berlin axis, Britain expressed fewer concerns, and it is unlikely the United Kingdom (UK) would have ever vetoed Ankara's accession. All three of Britain's main parties – Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats – officially supported Turkey's EU accession. Among their number was even a youthful Boris Johnson and then Prime Minister David Cameron. From 2013-2018 the Conservatives managed to join with Erdogan's party, the Islamist AKP, in an international grouping of like-minded parties, the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists. In the last declaration of the Cameron government's position, just before the referendum, David Liddington, the then Minister of State for Europe, stated 'The UK supports Turkey's EU accession process, which remains the most effective mechanism for continuing reform in Turkey. Turkey's accession itself is not on the cards for many years to come.'

This was diplomatic guff. By 2016, the most discernible reform in Turkey was a process the AKP and its Islamist partners had been spearheading since 2002, at first gradually then aggressively as Erdogan sought the establishment of a 'pious generation'. The crushing of the 2013 Gezi Park protests was part of a broader onslaught which included the

repression of journalists, academics, Kurdish representatives and opponents of the AKP's stripe of Islamism. Despite all this, Britain continued to formally support Turkey's membership application. During the referendum campaign, when Vote Leave's prediction of eventual Turkish membership of the EU was dismissed as outlandish, or a position rooted in racism, there was considerable embarrassment when screenshots from the British embassy in Ankara illustrated that part of the embassy's duties was to deploy British civil servants to assist Turkish accession. Our vote to Leave the European Union brought an end to this activity once and for all.

If a shift has occurred in attitudes towards Turkey in recent years, it has been a recognition on the European continent that Erdogan, and the organisational structures he deploys, are authoritarian. Countries working to improve the integration of sizeable Turkish minorities, especially Germany, have become exasperated by the realisation that Ankara has a different agenda, rooted in maintaining difference. Whilst liberal opinion in Britain became fixated complaining that the Leave campaign had cheated by running 'fake news' conspiracy theories Turkey would join the EU, the Austrian, Dutch, German and Swiss governments were wrestling with more immediate issues. All objected to or moved against pro-AKP rallies on their territory. With Turkey's Presi-

dent banned from political campaigning in Germany, the wily Erdogan simply flew to the UK, to be pictured with two German footballers of Turkish heritage, Ilkay Gundogan and Mesut Ozil. The German Football Association, which had once used Ozil as an example of the successful integration of minorities, was aghast.

Erdogan's intentions are not merely to avoid the integration of Turkish minorities living in Europe, or to ensure they keep voting for his party. Aggressive intelligence operations against Turkish and Kurdish dissidents are now conducted on the soil of supposedly friendly countries (although Turkey remains a NATO member) and pro-government exile organisations, such as Milli Gorus in Germany, hold strongly anti-western, anti-democratic and anti-Semitic positions. The relationship between Ankara and Muslim Brotherhood related groups, across the world, is deepening and the Diyanet, Turkey's Ministry of Religious Affairs, works tirelessly to maintain its interpretation of religious orthodoxy, at home and overseas. These developments have led analyst Lorenzo Vidino to conclude Turkey is 'pursuing interests and promoting views within Muslim communities that are on a collision course with those of European governments.'

Through the good sense of those who voted to leave the EU in 2016, the UK is no longer encouraging the

myth that future political and economic integration with Turkey is desirable or possible. Rather than wasting time arguing about whether it was ever a likely candidate for EU accession, debate now needs to move to the next level. Is it wise to continue in a military alliance, NATO, with Turkey? The strategic importance of Turkey is such that in military terms, its departure would be a grievous blow to an alliance that has worked successfully, for so long. Moscow would be delighted at such a development. There are also contrary arguments – most importantly that the Erdogan project is past its peak. The 2019 election of an opposition mayor in a twice-run contest in Istanbul appeared a body blow for a leader without an obvious, capable successor. But if Erdogan has succeeded in rooting his authoritarian politico-religious beliefs in the country, does NATO wish to be tied to a country whose values are increasingly different in nature to its own?



Paul Stott