



Iran Gloats over Trump's Defeat

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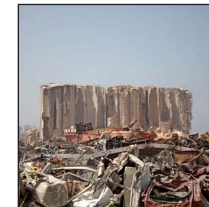
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Biden's Administration does not See Turkey as an Ally



President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris

Antony Blinken, US President Joe Biden's secretary of state accused NATO member Turkey of not acting like an ally and said Washington would review if further sanctions are required on Ankara over its acquisition of a Russian air defence system. «The idea that a so-called strategic

partner of ours would actually be in line with one of our biggest strategic competitors in Russia is not acceptable.» He added during his confirmation hearing to be Secretary of State before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Blinken noted: «I think we need to

take a look to see the impact that the existing sanctions have had and then determine whether there is more that needs to be done.» «Turkey is an ally, that in many ways... is not acting as an ally should and this is a very, very significant challenge for us and we're very clear-eyed about it,» He added.

Biden Dealt Successfully with Trump's Overturn Attempt

On January 20, Biden was inaugurated as President of the United States of America. He dealt successfully with Trump's attempt to overturn the election. Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Dominic Raab, confirmed that the recognition of Joe Biden as the next president of the United States shows «the democratic will of the US people cannot be challenged or overturned by the actions of a violent minority.» John Bolton, the former US National Security Advisor, said in an interview with the German news site «T-Online»: «Yes, I think that Trump will absolutely go down in history as the worst president of the United States.» Mitch McConnell, the Senate Minority Leader, said: «Capitol Hill mob was «provoked» by Trump.»

Iran and Turkey Continue Destabilising

In mid-January, the United Nations began talks to break the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament. However, the talks began in acrimony with Turkey and Iran blocking rival countries the thing that

sparked concern about the forum's future. Iran blocked Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from joining as observers and lashed out at Saudi Arabia's military record. Turkey blocks Cyprus from joining in a

trend that marks a significant departure from normal UN protocol. Iran's delegate said that Saudi Arabia had used the forum as a platform for a "distraction and disinformation campaign" and called

Riyadh "the largest military offender in the region". Marc Finaud, the former diplomat and security expert at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, said: "It is a sign that the Conference on Disarmament is at a

crossroads and if it wants to remain relevant and useful it has to do some soul-searching." The blockages drew criticism from other members including Britain, the United States, European Union and India.

Europe Becomes Aware of the Way Political Islam Uses the Law

2020 was rich in bloody events in several European countries which revealed the influence of radical political Islam. It seems that those organisations could heavily use European laws to extend their influence over Muslim immigrants who feel lost and insecure and get trapped by poverty and other life issues.

Only Warning .. No Action

Burkhard Freier, the head of North Rhine-Westphalia's Office for the Protection of the Constitution (LfV), testified in the parliament why political Islamists are more dangerous than Salafists in the long term. "For years, the security services in Germany have been warning more urgently about the threats of the Muslim Brotherhood, but that still doesn't seem to have arrived in politics." Jassim Mohamad, the head of European Centre for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies, commented on that warning in an exclusive interview with the Levant News.

Jassim said: "German intelligence continues to warn against the dangers of political Islamist organisations, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood. The last warning was at the end of December when Stephan Thoma, the German MP, mentioned that monitoring the political Islam becomes a must. However, Monitoring the MB political Islam is more difficult than monitoring ISIS and Al-Qaeda because political Islamist groups have covers to move behind, and this makes the task of the intelligence services difficult." «I think that activating the draft resolution to ban the MB will take longer and needs to gather votes in the parliament and this will undoubtedly take longer.» He added

Will Washington Place the Muslim Brotherhood on the Terrorist List? In France, Gérald Darmanin, the French Minister of Interior, revealed at the end of August that "The threat

of the radical Islam supporters has become a growing challenge to the intelligence services." In this regard, Jassim told Levent: "After killing Samuel Paty, France has increased security controls and taken very quick measures. France put its hand on the real problem which are the centres of radical ideology i.e. the MB ones. It closed many associations and mosque and banned some organisations.» «I see that the French Minister of Interior is in the right way.» He added

ISIS Died .. Jihadism did not

Paul van Tegelt, the head of the risk assessment body in Belgium, confirmed that «the terrorist threat has not disappeared and the "jihadist" ideology has not died, despite the dismantling of a large part of the violent networks.» He pointed out that the continuing terrorist threat still hangs over European countries "We can say that what is known as the ISIS organization is unable to send jihadists to Europe, but this does not mean that its belief has disappeared." He continues: "The extremists pose the greatest danger to Europe today. It is easy to manipulate their ideas and push them to launch attacks."



Jassim Mohamad, head of European Centre for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies

Jassim Mohamad agrees: "I think that the Europeans are aware now to the dangers of political Islam. Here we should note that countering extremism in Europe is more difficult for governments than countering terrorism because terrorism is often evident in the Islamist groups and can be countered through military campaigns.»

He added: "However, unfortunately, I find that the European countries in general, including Belgium, have not been successful in countering extremism. Counter-extremism programmes are useless, and the programmes to deradicalise the extremists who returned from conflict zones are also futile. There are no dependable statistics and results. Therefore, the Europeans became aware late and there are yet challenges in countering extremism socially, which may take longer years.»

Foreign Financing and Provocation

About the frequent terrorist attacks in Europe, Jassim said: "The supporters are now known; most notably Qatar, Turkey and others

whether individuals, organizations or governments.»

He added: "Previously, these radical groups were given legitimacy to operate as organizations, associations and forums. They get support from the supporting countries that already have investments in Europe, for example, Qatar has massive investments in European countries such as France and Germany. 50% of the most famous banks, automotive industries and other industries belong to Qatar; that's why European countries might have turned a blind eye to the flow of money to political Islamist groups. Also, it is possible the intelligence did not monitor these organisations, the thing that made them continue their work.

About Turkey, Jassim said: "Turkey has tried to take advantage of the French President's statements about Islamist Separatism. Erdogan wages war against France and European countries. His comments and statement are to use them nationally to extend his influence. Erdogan presents himself as a strong country and puts Turkey at the same level as European countries.»

Drying up the Financing Sources

Jassim said about this: "There were European calls to enact laws to cut foreign financing especially in Germany which preceded France. The terrorist attacks which France suffered made it reconsider about giving consents to associations, mosques and centres that radical groups use as a cover.

He continues: "These organisations undoubtedly receive foreign financing under the cover of supporting programs or construction, not forgetting money laundering. Certainly, cutting off foreign financing will undermine the activities of political Islam which live on the foreign financing as well as local investments in Europe."

After He Failed with al-Abadi.. Erdogan Tries with al-Kadhimi



Ahmad Qatma

The warm hospitality with which the Turks received Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi raised many questions, not the least about the agenda behind it and purpose Turkey was hoping to achieve from the visit. It was particularly surprising, given the tensions that have plagued the relationship between the two sides over the past few years, whether because of the water problem, with Turkey trying to decrease water inflows to Iraq by constructing new dams, or because of Turkey's military violations of the the Iraqi northern border, based on flimsy excuses.

Ilisu Dam

In mid-2018, the Turco-Iraqi disputes emerged as Turkey constructed the Ilisu Dam, which caused water shortage in Iraq. Iraqi officials and civil authorities raised the alarm over the water crisis in the Tigris river. The Iraqi Minister of Water Resources, Hassan al-Janabi, said in early June that the Turkish government began filling Ilisu Dam, which was constructed on the Tigris River, the thing that led to lowering the water levels in the Iraqi part of the river.

Attacks in Iraq

Al-Abadi urged Turkey to respect Iraq's sovereignty in its approach towards Kurdish fighters, at a time when military operation were unleashed against PKK militants in the northern regions . Al-Abadi described Turkey's threats of launching a military operation in Qandil Mountain in the Kurdistan Region in the north, as part of the Justice and Development Party's electoral campaign. He, furthermore, emphasized that that Iraqi sovereignty was a «red line».

Two months later, in August 2018, Al-Abadi visited to Ankara to explore ways of strengthening cooperation



Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi

between the two countries. He emphasized that the water crisis would be a top priority in talks with Turkey. During that visit, Turkey tried to test Iraq's reactions; war aircrafts launched attacks on civilian areas in the district of Sinjar/Shengal, in western Nineveh governorate in northern Iraq. The messages that were sent from Baghdad were not encouraging; the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Ministry condemned the attacks, denying any coordination between with Ankara over them.

Turkey Flexes its Muscles

Turkey has always chosen to flaunt its power by launching attacks and wars instead of resorting to dialogue and giving ethnic communities living in Turkey their rights; the only choice that can preserve its unity and power. Nevertheless, just like consecutive Turkish governments, the most recent one led by political Islam, or AKP party, has always resorted to war; which does not require much thinking or reasoning. It has started a war in the predominantly-Kurdish areas in northern Syria, namely Afrin, and expanded to the east of the Euphrates, then Libya, the Mediterranean and Armenia. On June 20, the Iraqi Security and Defense Parliamentary Committee

called for a complaint to be lodged with the United Nations against Turkish attacks. Members of the committee urged the government to take the necessary measures to force Turkey to halt back its blatant violation and use of military force against Iraqi territories. The Kurdistan Regional Government condemned the Turkish bombardment of its territories and demanded respect of Kurdistan's sovereignty by Ankara, while emphasizing the importance of PKK evacuation from the areas it occupied. The leadership of the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region issued a statement condemning the Turkish attack on its territories, pointing out that disputes cannot be resolved through bloodshed.

Baghdad's Options

The Turkish attacks did not stop, Ankara resumed its aggression in early July, targeting areas in Dohuk Governorate with artillery. A spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Baghdad had various options to deal with the Turkish provocations in the north while asserting its commitment to a diplomatic solutions with Turkey; pointing out that it was for a response from Ankara.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign

Affairs responded to Baghdad's criticism, affirming that that it was determined to take the necessary measures to tackle the «destructive activities» emanating from Iraqi territories. «We reiterate once again that we are ready to cooperate with Iraq in combating the terrorist organization that is threatening Iraq's security and sovereignty», indicating that Turkey was trying to get Al-Kadhimi to do after failing to drag Al-Abadi into it.

After all the battles that it has fought in its volatile neighbourhood, as a result of its interventions from Syria, to Libya, to Cyprus, to Greece, to Azerbaijan and Armenia, it seems that Ankara's current agenda, is to drag Iraq and its federal government into a fight against the Kurdish fighters, which may including tightening the grip around the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government. Ankara has always been dissatisfied with the establishment of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and sees it as a historical mistake. Turkey sees any Kurdish authority as an existential threat to it because it provides an example to millions of Kurds who live in Turkey; the thing that may encourage them to conceive a similar project in the southeast of the country which is predominantly Kurdish.



Iranian president Hassan Rouhani (left) and his American Counterpart Joe Biden

It Breathes a Sigh of Relief as Biden Becomes President Iran Gloats over Trump's Defeat...

The former US President Donald Trump was undoubtedly a unique political phenomenon in the most powerful country in the world. When he came up with slogans like «America first», it was considered discriminatory and largely unacceptable to a country that claims to defend human rights and rejects discrimination on the basis of races, ethnicity or belief.

The most dramatic event in the Middle East, during Trump's tenure, was probably in 2018 when Washington withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, that was struck between Tehran and a group of world powers in 2015. This was followed by harsh sanctions which mainly sought to tighten the noose around the Governance of the Jurist in Iran. Sanctions have caused severe damage to Iran's economy; the Iranian currency lost much of its value, and Iranian people started to be embittered by the economic decline and the state's inability to pay salaries for many months.

The US Elections and Iran

With the continued economic sanctions against Tehran, it could only wait for the end of Trump's

term. Like any other party affected by Trump's policies, Tehran was waiting impatiently for any glimmer of hope that might remove Trump from power so that it could breathe a sigh of relief.

Tehran has always made sure it showed indifference to the results of the US elections for two reasons; firstly, it did not want to give its citizens the indication that their economy will deteriorate further if Trump is re-elected. Secondly, it did not want to give Americans any reason to vote for Trump, that is why it showed no support to Biden. Therefore, Saeed Khatibzadeh, the spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said on November 2, a day before the American presidential elections, «Our position is clear: we do not look at (what happens) tomorrow, we will be watching the approach of the new US administration, whichever party it is. More than the result of the election, we will pay attention to the actions of the new president, whoever he might be» he added.

Khamenei said: «The situation in the US and what they, themselves, say about their elections is a spectacle! This is an example of the ugly face of

liberal democracy in the US.» Pompeo retaliated by attacking Khamenei and accusing him of stealing hundreds of millions of dollars from his people and spending billions on proxy wars. Saeed Khatibzadeh responded saying: «it is fully understandable that Pompeo is «furious about having to leave Foggy Bottom after 2.5yrs of one embarrassing failure after another.» «Max pressure failed and so has the outlaw charlatans behind it,» Khatibzadeh said on Twitter. «Soon he'll be on ash heap of history, as proud Iranian people stand tall.»

Iran Gloats over Trump's Defeat

When Joe Biden won the elections, Tehran was gloating over Trump's defeat, although it is not certain that Biden would not adopt Trump's policy. However, it will not miss the opportunity to gloat over Trump who has damaged its economy and brought it to a sharp decline. On November 8, Saeed Khatibzadeh said: «The United States must repent and stop its economic war against us... honour its obligations and make compensations.» «The difference between the Biden and Trump camps

are clear but we're eyeing practical measures.» He added.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said, rejoicingly, on Twitter: «Trump is gone, and we and our neighbours are here to stay. Betting on foreigners does not bring security; it disappoints. We extend our hands to our neighbours to co-operate in achieving the common interests of our peoples and countries.» «We call on everyone to embrace dialogue as the only way to end differences and tensions, together to build a better future for our region.» He added. It is an invitation that Iran would certainly not have sent unless it had been seriously weakened after years of US tough sanctions during Trump's term.

Tehran wants Biden to be tolerant towards it, so that it can compensate for its economic losses and contain its people's anger. Nevertheless, the countries impacted by Tehran, especially the Arab Gulf and Israel, want Biden to pursue Trump's policies, at least towards Iran, as they were largely effective in restraining Tehran. However, many more years of sanctions are needed for the internal collapse of the state to begin.

Israel is Worried about Biden's Tolerance towards Iran .. the Solution: a Regional Alliance

Since the onset of the US presidential elections, countries in the region, namely Arab Gulf states and Israel, have started to feel anxious about a change in US policies towards Iran. They have repeatedly stated that they were always ready to tackle all possibilities with new alliances.

The American and Israeli Ambassadors

David Friedman, the former United States Ambassador to Israel, told the Emirati al-Ain, on October 5, that «if Biden wins, we will see a policy shift that in my personal opinion will be wrong and will be bad for the region, including for Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.» «Joe Biden was part of the Obama administration that negotiated and implemented the Iran deal, something that President Trump — and I share his view — thinks was the worst international deal the US has ever entered into.» He added

On November 16, Ron Dermer, the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, agreed with Friedman saying: «The incoming Biden administration would be making a mistake if it returned to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. In a joint statement released in tandem with the ambassadors of the UAE and Bahrain, Dermer urged the President-elect to examine «the reality in the Middle East» before making any decision about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, suggesting, a more fruitful and positive direction for the administration would be to continue to help broker deals between Israel and its Arab neighbours rather than a rapprochement with the Islamic Republic. «Sit with your allies in the region. Talk to us to get to a common position on Iran.»

Israel Strikes Iranian Targets

Tel Aviv never stopped striking Iranian targets that are close to it. The Israeli military announced, on

November 18: «Israeli fighter jets hit eight targets belonging to the Quds Force and the Syrian army.»

Jonathan Conricus, the International Spokesperson of the Israel's Defense Forces, said: «Israel says it struck eight targets of Syrian and Iranian forces in Syria after explosive devices were planted in the Israeli-held Golan Heights last day.»

Avichay Adraee, a spokesman for the Israeli army, said: «The strikes came to convey two clear messages: first, we will not allow the continuation of the Iranian position in Syria in general and on our borders in particular, and secondly, we will not allow the Syrian regime to turn a blind eye to this positioning.»

No for Iran Nuclear Deal

Besides the Iranian military presence close to Israel, the nuclear program of Iran is the most dangerous threat to Israel and the rest of the region, which was confirmed by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister «There should be no return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal abandoned by President Donald Trump.» Netanyahu declared. «There must

be no return to the previous nuclear agreement. We must stick to an uncompromising policy to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons,” He added

The current US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed a similar view in an interview with the Israeli newspaper Jerusalem Post: «The American sanctions against Iran have had an impact on the Iranians' ability ... All possibilities are still on the table to deal with Iran.»

Pompeo also considered that «the sanctions imposed on Tehran contributed to delivering a clear message in the Middle East, and also contributed to signing peace agreements that led to further isolate Iran.» «The countries of the Middle East must understand that Israel is part of the solution in the region and that the Abraham accords are the way to do that and the policy of US President Donald Trump was the best, and it led to a more secure Middle East, especially for Israel.» He added.

Israel's work plan

There is a policy to frustrate Iran's

ambitions in the region. It was reflected in the Israeli Minister of Intelligence Eli Cohen on October 27, when he confirmed that what the region is going through now is the result of Israeli power and American insistence that led to the formation of a front including Egypt, Sudan, Bahrain and the UAE to face Iran and the Turkish president. He noted that Israel continues to communicate with a number of countries to normalize relations.

Consequently, it seems that Tel Aviv and Arab states have made up their minds, regardless of the next US administration, and are determined to frustrate Tehran's ambitions through a regional alliance that includes Arab states and Israel, which may expand to include European countries, if it would confront Ankara as well. There is unprecedented harmony between Tehran and Ankara on many major regional issues, the thing that requires a counter-alliance by the countries affected by the expansionist ambitions of Turkey and Iran that will not comply with the law unless a parallel force is exerted against them.



American president Joe Biden (Left) and Benjamin Netanyahu the Israeli PM (Right)

Ankara Fuels Hatred against the West .. Its Grey Wolves are Ready to Fight whatever it Takes

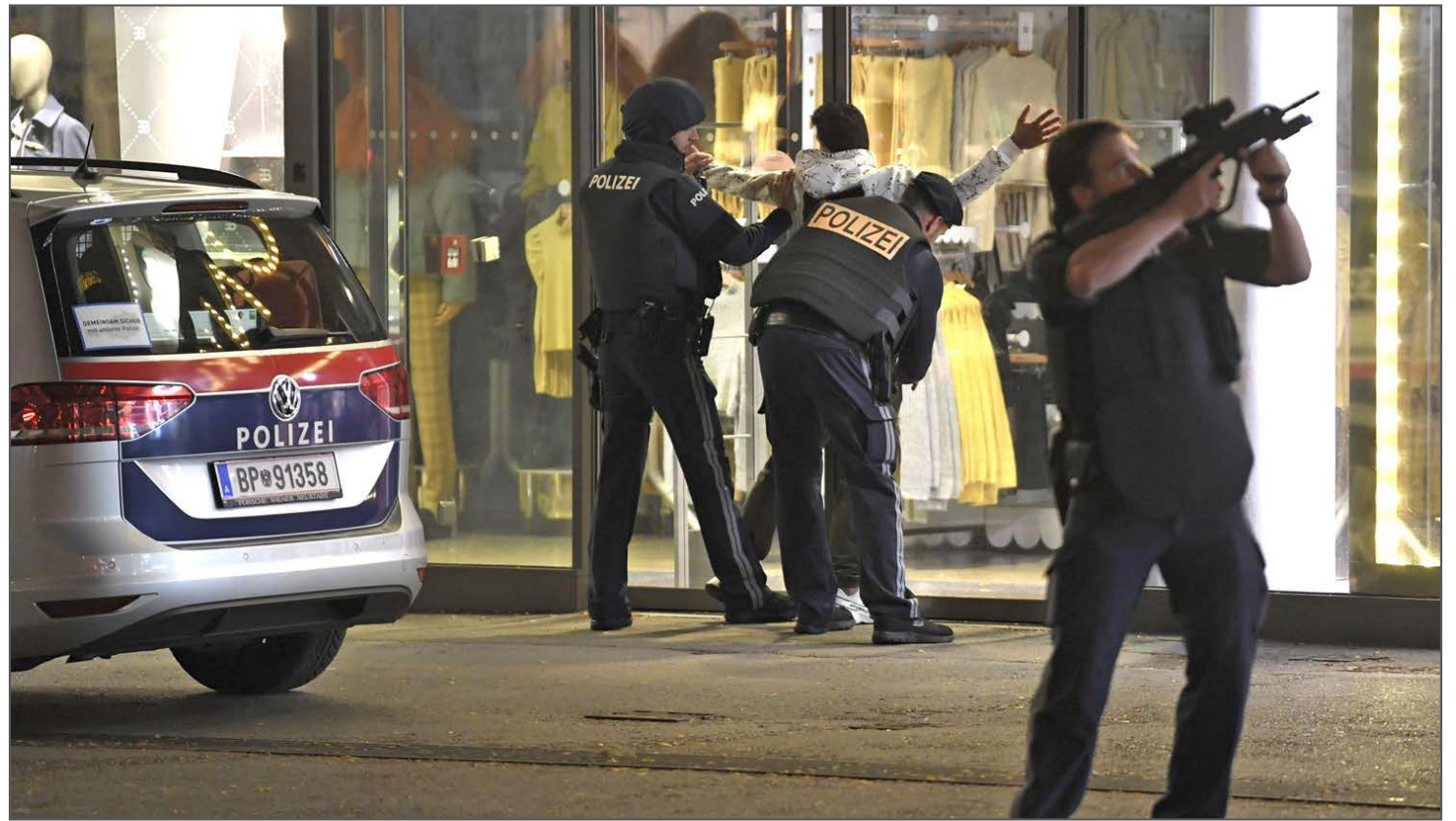
Austrian media reported on October 30, quoting police officials, that about 50 young men of Turkish origin attacked a church shouting «Allahu Akbar». The attack caused material damage to the church, which closed for security reasons after the attack. Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Chancellor, declared that Austria was determined to fight «political Islam», after a group of young men attacked a Catholic Church in the Austrian capital Vienna. Kurz stated on Twitter: «All Christians must have the right to worship freely and safely in Austria, we will firmly continue to fight political Islam and will not show any false tolerance here».

Acts of aggression by the grey wolves were not confined to Austria. On October 28, clashes took place between the Armenian and Turkish communities in the French province of Isère in the southwest. A group of Armenian diaspora took out to the streets, blocking a part of the A7 motorway in Isère at 7:30 am , to express their support for Armenia in the conflict with Azerbaijan in Karabakh.

Soon After, Turkish refugees arrived at the protest location, and a clashes broke out between the two sides causing many injuries. On November 2, the French Minister of Interior Gérald Darmanin revealed that the French government will be holding a cabinet meeting to sign off the decision to dissolve the Grey Wolves. The statement came after the organisation was accused of provoking to the clashes between the Turkish and Armenian communities near Lyon, eastern France. The phrase «grey wolves» was written on a monument honouring the victims of the genocide and the National Centre for Armenian Memory near Lyon.

Why Austria?

It was clear from Vienna's statements that it was not going to submit to Ankara. It is not surprising that



Police officers in Austria after the terrorist attack in Vienna last year

Austria is on Turkey's list of targets by inciting nationalistic extremists such as the Grey Wolves. Last June, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz asserted that the European Union should not allow Turkey to blackmail it and highlighted the urgency of stopping illegal immigration to the EU.

Late in the same month, the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Turkish ambassador because after a group of Turks attacked Kurdish protesters in Vienna. The police had to intervene to try and prevent clashes between the two sides, but that confrontation turned into clashes between Austrian security forces and the group. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs fiercely criticized what it called «Austria's handling of protests by Kurdish groups in Vienna», which made it obvious that Turkey supports Turkish extremists and their actions that are provoking ethnic tensions in their countries of asylum.

On September 1, Karl Nehammer stated that Austria would file

charges against a person who has confessed to spying for Turkey's secret service, and that authorities were investigating more suspected espionage activities.» «This is about an exertion of influence by a foreign power in Austria and this will in no way be accepted,” Karl Nehammer told a news conference on Tuesday. On September 24, Feyyaz Öztürk, a retired member of Turkey's MIT intelligence agency, admitted to authorities that he was ordered to assassinate Austrian-Kurdish citizen Aygül Berivan Aslan, a vocal critic of Turkish President Recep Erdogan, and that he was monitoring the Austrian Green Party member in August with the aim of killing her. An Austrian news website presented a list of Austrian politicians that are targeted by Turkish intelligence, including Aslan and a member of the European Parliament Andreas Schieder. Austrian sources pointed out that the arrest of the Turkish spy uncover the existence of a Turkish intelligence network, seeking to foment unrest between Turks and Kurds in Austria.

Terrorism Attacks in Austria

Following those events, a terrorist attack similar to the French one, took place on November 2. The Austrian authorities announced terrorist incidents in Vienna city centre. The attack took place in six different locations near the largest synagogue in the city. The police confirmed 4 dead and 23 injured in the gun attack. Hence, it would be fair to say that Vienna's terrorist attacks were the price for few things; it resistance to the way Turkey is extending its influence, blackmailing Europe with the refugee card, exposing the Turkish espionage activities against members of the Turkish community, especially Kurds, refusing to turn its territory into an arena of ethnic conflict, rejecting terrorism in France and supporting the right of France to defend its laws in the face of those who seek to divide the French people on religious basis and take Muslims hostage to serve their interests and gaining more influence by playing on religious sentiments.

Ten Presidents for the United States and Al-Assad is still our Curse



Rima Flihan

Every four years we watch the US presidential debates, vote-counting process and mechanisms to facilitate the transition of power and everything democracy and the rule of law have produced in the elections in the United States and the civilized world.

Despite the problems of the recent US elections related to Trump's refusal to accept the election results which was clear in his inciting statements and rejected election appeals which caused riots, the Constitution, the authorities (police, military, courts ...), the American political traditions and the US politicians' respect for the law; all those prevented any violation or attempt to undermine democracy and ensured a peaceful transition of power and protected the government institutions. The American democracy and the independent institutions all deserve credit for their efforts to protect

the Constitution and the people's interests.

We don't watch the US elections for the impact of the American policy on the world and our country, but because it reminds us of our recurrent stolen dream; to have real elections, to have the right to choose our presidents, to witness the inauguration of some presidents before we die or maybe to forget some of their names in later life, is that too much?

It is really strange that our presidents do not go away nor die, when they die they are careful to leave the presidency to their sons and if they inherit the presidency they oppress. They stick to power until the state takes its last breath. We die every hour of every day while they steal our air, dreams and future.

The US elections seems surreal to us who come from countries where the president is inaugurated as an eternal president «even after he dies» through appointing his son as a president and describing the dead father as the immortal, the leader, the inspirer and other calls and

descriptions. The picture becomes whole with a comic parliament whose role does not exceed reciting poems, praising and applauding the president, the president's son, the president's father and perhaps the first lady's husband. Our parliament is too flexible just like the constitution which can be changed to suit the vital interest of the president's family and the ruling class.

However, at the same time the constitution is too rigid about the laws related to freedoms, equality, development and human rights. This strictness is a part of a policy to brainwash the oppressed people. Even in reverie and dreams, the Syrian people do not dare to imagine anyone but this family on the seat of power in Damascus. Although Syria is supposed to be a republic, al-Assad family has ruled it for half a century. The customary illegitimate presidential elections in Syria are on the way. I doubt that a Syrian, whether a loyal supporter for al-Assad or an opponent, does not know that Bashar al-Assad will win the elections. Therefore, there is no

need for this electoral process and counting of votes, we are the only ones in the world who know the results of the elections before they are issued, even if fake candidates run for office ordered by the regime; candidates who say they themselves will vote for al-Assad.

The Syrians know the election results before it starts. We have not known a true election experience since al-Assad assumed office. These upcoming elections will make no change in the illegitimacy of this regime and no country but the few allies of this regime will recognize these elections.

The proverb says: «A man is known by the company he keeps», and the regime's friends are Iran, Russia, North Korea and Cuba which are dictatorships. Therefore, despite the formality of the upcoming Syrian elections, it proves once again how much this regime sticks to power instead of going into a true political process that achieves a transition of power and a transitional phase that leads to the birth of a new democratic political system in Syria.



Life after Brexit



Ian Black

Less than three weeks after Britain finally agreed new trade rules and regulations with the European Union, UK consumers who had bought goods online from the continent were shocked to discover that they had to pay extra just to have their items delivered. Brexit, suddenly, had a price for individuals and companies.

Shoppers who purchased items from EU websites are facing demands of more than £100 in import duties that have to be paid before parcel firms will deliver them to their homes.

Amidst the misery of the covid pandemic and its record death toll, Britain's Conservative government is now facing a flurry of complaints that life outside the EU is not matching the promises that were made around the most divisive issue this country has faced since the second world war.

On December 30 Boris Johnson stood triumphantly in the House of Commons and proclaimed the rebirth of Britain as an independent nation, with tariff-free trade with the EU after the year-long transition period ended a day later. "We are going to open a new chapter in our national story," he declared as MP's approved his deal, which was secured on Christmas Eve after months of nerve-wracking negotiations with Brussels.

New requirements have already put thousands of specialist online businesses at risk as consumers on both sides of the English Channel balk at having to pay hefty import fees. These unwelcome novelties fuelled doubts about the claim that "global Britain" will prosper outside the EU – the world's most successful single market with nearly 450 million people.

And it is not just critics from the Labour opposition. Johnson's predecessor as prime minister, Theresa May, attacked him for abandoning Britain's "position of global moral leadership" on the eve



Boris Johnson

of the inauguration of Joe Biden as US president by threatening to break international law during the Brexit talks and by cutting the UK's commitment to devote 0.7% of GDP to relieve poverty.

Alarmingly for Johnson, it is becoming clear that Biden will prioritise dealing with the enormous damage covid has inflicted on the US economy before embarking on any new free trade agreements. A former British ambassador to Washington predicted last week that the UK would be "lucky" to strike a trade deal with the US over the next four years.

The prime minister, who was referred to by Donald Trump when he was president as "Britain Trump", is keen to establish a good working relationship with Biden, who the government hopes will attend the G7 summit in Cornwall in June.

In a rare moment of candour Johnson admitted that the deal with Brussels "does not go as far as we would like" for financial services, which employ over 1 million people and constitute a whopping 7% of British GDP. But what does that matter when Britain, as he routinely expresses it, has succeeded under his leadership in "seizing back control"?

Johnson won the election in December 2019 on the simplistic pledge to "get Brexit done." He was able to benefit from the ambivalent position of Labour and ended up with an impressively large majority in parliament. UK membership of the EU has always been a toxic subject since it joined the then European Economic Community in 1973. But many voters were simply fed up.

The reality of life outside the EU is only just starting to sink in. Attention has focused on the fishing industry, which accounts for just 0.1% of the UK economy, but that is relatively easy to understand – especially when protests involve huge trucks breaking the national lockdown and emblazoned with angry slogans outside the House of Commons. Meat prices are also plummeting due to delayed exports.

Another issue is complaints by British rock stars that their European tours could be wrecked by post-Brexit visa rules. Big names like Elton John have protested that they were "shamefully failed" by the government over the increased red tape facing musicians at the border of each individual EU member state.

In Northern Ireland – with a special status because of its proximity to

Ireland, which remains in the EU – there are logistical problems involving new border checks with hauliers complaining that these caused shortages of food, deliveries of equipment to the National Health Service and farm machinery, despite claims by the government that it was all going "smoothly" or that these were simply "teething troubles."

In one case a lorry load of potato crisps was held up for two days because the owner was unable to provide paperwork proving that the potatoes had not been imported into the UK from somewhere else. Another haulage company described the situation as "absolute carnage."

And a row erupted about the status of the EU's ambassador to the UK, with Johnson's government insisting it will not give him and his 25-strong mission the privileges and immunities afforded to diplomats under the Vienna Convention. That position was described as an "insult."

But in these dark times there is occasionally light relief. Leading Eurosceptic MP Jacob Rees-Mogg declared in parliament he thinks fish are "better and happier" because Brexit makes them more British. At least that!!

Lebanon's Insidious 2021 Crisis



James Denselow

Not all emergencies have a clear and recognised trigger or starting point. Natural disasters do and conflicts can usually be traced back to a particular violent incident. Perhaps the most insidious crises are those that lack a starting point but rather are the result of a steady increase of overlapping and interconnecting issues reaching a boiling point.

In Lebanon the country lacks the bombs and bullets of neighbouring Syria, but its economic, social and political challenges are worsening and metastasising daily. The small country already plays host to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who've had their welfare services reduced by cuts to UNRWA, meanwhile the reduction in support to the estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country has meant that nine out of 10 Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are living in extreme poverty.

This is just part of the backdrop to Lebanon's own economic crisis caused by a constellation of domestic

issues combined with regional factors like sanctions on Syria and the departure of significant Gulf money from the country. The massive devaluation of the currency and the rise in the cost of living may be about to get significantly worse providing a moment of clear stress test for the country.

Lebanon's central bank has warned it could run out of money to pay subsidies on basic goods by early 2021. The removal of subsidies from a variety of goods from bread to petrol has proven a contentious and risky business across the region over the years. The Lebanon of the past few years is no stranger to public protests, some of which have turned violent, but this could be of a different scale. Indeed, the UN has issued warnings of a looming "social catastrophe" around the removal of the subsidies. Prime Minister Diab confirmed at the start of the year that there was only \$2bn in foreign reserves left for subsidies. There is already talk of cutting subsidies whilst supporting the poor, which may seem initially a bit of a paradox but there is a good argument that the system is in need of reform regardless of the backdrop. One proposal is to replace the current subsidies with ration cards given to

some 600,000 of Lebanon's poorest families to help them through this period, although there is no obvious light at the end of the tunnel. The World Bank rebuked the Lebanese Government for not charting a way forward but it is hard to see how the country's fragile political leadership can be strategic when they are having to prioritise tactical firefighting.

The fact of the matter is that allowing Lebanon's crisis to get worse before addressing it will only make the challenge harder. The time to act is now and the right messages were heard in December by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres who announced the creation of a fund handled by the World Bank, the U.N. and the European Union to provide support for Lebanon, including food, healthcare, education and the reconstruction of the Port of Beirut.

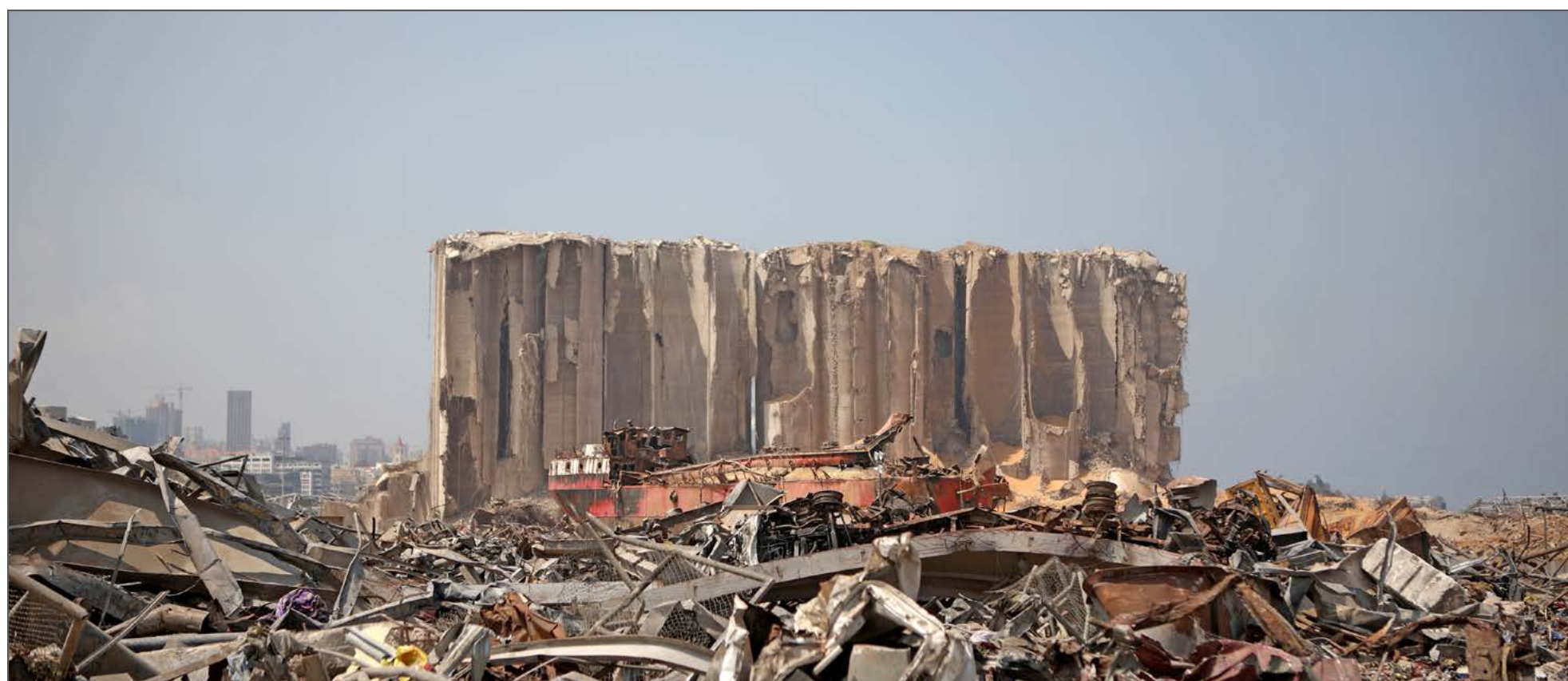
Guterres was fully on message when he explained that; "we can, together, help the Lebanese people move beyond the emergency phase and onto the path for longer-term recovery and reconstruction". Yet unless Lebanon can get its political house in order then humanitarian support will just keep the wolves from the door rather than addressing

core and systemic issues.

The contraction of the global economy that has been triggered by Covid-19 and shows no sign of ending, will inevitably place a greater premium on donor money to help a world beset by emergencies. Towards the end of 2020 the UN put out its global humanitarian overview setting out that there are 235.4 million people in need and \$35.1 billion needed from donors to help them.

Lebanon will have to compete for these funds with other emergencies and its divided body politic will arguably make it harder to attract donors. The challenge of a legacy of unresolved issues hangs over the country, most obviously the fact that last year's massive Beirut port explosion has yet to be resolved with any genuinely accountability.

On top of all of this tinder box is the fact that Lebanon may be about to enter another period of Covid-19 lockdown, with first responders saying they have been transporting nearly 100 patients a day while hospitals report near-full occupancy in beds and ICUs. Lebanon's gathering storm of crisis's are gathering pace and the world must stay engaged and not just be observers to the country's suffering.



The devastating aftermath of Beirut Port explosion last year

After HASM, Will the U.S. Designate the Muslim Brotherhood a Terrorist Organization?



Dalia Ziada

A few days before the official transfer of power, in the United States, from the Republican President Trump to the Democrat President Biden, political chaos is raging, in an unprecedented way, across the capital city of Washington, D.C. as a result of sharp political fractions between the far-right supporters of Trump and the far-left supporters of Biden. However, this did not prevent the Trump Administration from announcing some important decisions related to the Middle East, in an attempt to fulfill some of Trump's promises to pursue terrorist organizations in the region.

In the first week of January, the U.S. State Department announced designating the Iran-backed Houthi group, in Yemen, as a terrorist organization. The step came as no surprise to the observers who considered this designation as part of the Trump administration's war on Iran. But the real surprise happened, a few days after that, in mid-January, when the State Department announced the designation of the Egyptian HASM militia on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). This designation renewed hope that the U.S. may consider designating the Muslim Brotherhood, the parent organization of HASM, as a foreign terrorist organization.

Previously, in 2018, the U.S. State Department designated HASM and Liwa' al-Thawra, which is also a militia affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). HASM and Liwa' al-Thawra are armed groups affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood and have been operating in Egypt, since the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood regime, in 2013. Their goal was to cause extreme chaos that forces the military to return the Muslim Brotherhood regime back in power.



Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Jordan - Archive

HASM was formed by young members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who fled to Turkey later on, in early 2015, and from there, the leaders of HASM continued to command operations implemented by the Muslim Brotherhood young members who could not flee Egypt. HASM operations, in Egypt, targeted police and military personnel and their families. The most prominent operation by HASM was the assassination of Egypt's Attorney General, Hisham Barakat, on his way to work, in June 2015.

In the same statement, the State Department mentioned that they reviewed the FTO designation of the Gaza-based Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and decided to maintain it. PIJ operates in Gaza and is generously supported by Qatar and Iran. However, PIJ originally belongs to Hamas, which in turn is one of the military arms of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas, also, is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, Britain, and some other countries, since 1990s. The U.S. designation of HASM as FTO is a new evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood is a violent

group that qualifies to be designated as a terrorist organization. HASM, HAMAS, Liwa' Al-Thawra, and PIJ are armed factions of the Muslim Brotherhood and all of them are designated as terrorist organizations. The motto of the group, since its foundation a century ago, honors violent jihad as their way to spread the word of God. Yet, unfortunately, the U.S. is still hand-tied by legal and political considerations on this particular issue.

From the legal point of view, there is a difficulty proving that the Brotherhood is acting as a unilateral organization, where all its members, including renowned politicians affiliated to the group in several countries, incite and practice violence. The cluster structure of the Muslim Brotherhood organization and its widely spread cells, worldwide, makes it difficult to prove its unilaterality in systemic use of violence.

Politically, the Muslim Brotherhood has become an expired card for those who previously supported them, including Turkey, Qatar, and Britain, because of the severe divisions among the leaders. Yet,

the group still has got high-profile politicians acting in leading official positions in some Middle Eastern countries, such as Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization means cutting diplomatic relations with those countries and thus jeopardizing U.S. political, economic, and security interests that are, directly or indirectly, linked to them.

In fact, one can hardly be optimistic that the new US administration of President Biden may take a step towards designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. However, we must continue our efforts to document the violent atrocities practiced by the Muslim Brotherhood and educate the public opinion, around the world, about the extremist ideology of the group, which feeds the extremist rhetoric of all the Islamist terrorist organizations, known to us today. Exposing the ugly face of the Muslim Brotherhood is necessary to limit the group from abusing the current global turbulence in economic, political and health sectors to regain their power or win popular approval.

Europe worries about Turkey, Grey Wolves and Erdogan



Paul Stott

The third round of the FA Cup is a quintessentially English sporting occasion – muddy pitches, anxious managers and fans crammed into packed stadia craning for a view of that all-important upset.

This year the stadiums were emptied by Covid, and controversy came from an unexpected quarter, when the Turkish striker Cenk Tosun appeared to celebrate a goal in the Everton v Rotherham match by performing a gesture with the first and fourth fingers of his left hand, whilst bringing his thumb to the second and third fingers. This is reminiscent of the bozkurt, or wolf's head salute of the Turkish nationalist Grey Wolves organisation. Tosun denied that this was his intention, and the Football Association has cleared him of any offence. There the matter should rest.

Why the sensitivity, though, over the Grey Wolves? The first is the organisation's history of violence and extremism. The second relates to contemporary concerns about integration and community cohesion, particularly in countries with sizeable Turkish diasporas. The third is the deteriorating diplomatic relationship between Turkey and several European countries.

Known in Turkish as the Ülkü Ocakları (Idealist Hearths) the Grey Wolves are a fiercely nationalist grouping strongly opposed to minority groupings, mostly notably the Kurds. Pan-Turkic, it promotes an expansionist Turkey which would extend its borders significantly east and even into parts of China populated by the Uyghurs. Founded by Colonel Alparslan Türkeş (1917 – 1997) the Grey Wolves gained notoriety in the political violence between left and right which shook Turkey in the 1970s. In 1978 this

turned into sectarian violence and they were involved in the massacre of over 100 Alevis in the city of Maras. Having been given a long leash by the Turkish state, the 1980 military coup saw Türkeş and many of his supporters jailed. In 1981 a Grey Wolf, Mehmet Ali Ağca, attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in Rome.

Nationalists have found much to satisfy themselves with in recent years in the era of President Erdogan. Turkey's Nationalist Action Party (MHP), also created by Türkeş, has worked with Erdogan's AKP, and the Grey Wolves have expressed public support for domestic policies such as the restoration of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia mosque to Islam. The collapse of Turkey's peace process with the Kurds, aggressive language towards Greece and Cyprus, and support for Azerbaijan in the recent conflict with Armenia, further cement this relationship. With Turkish forces increasingly deployed beyond its borders, the Grey Wolves salute may be observed among both rank and file soldiers and Turkey's paid mercenaries.

Erdogan views Turkish emigres and their descendants in countries such as Germany, Austria and Holland as Turks. In 2012 he changed the law to allow Turkish citizens living abroad to vote in its elections. With at least 5.5 million Turks resident in western Europe, cities such as Rotterdam and Cologne saw huge AKP rallies. European elites had to reconcile the increasing presence of Turkish politicians with their own domestic problems – low levels of social cohesion, rising support for anti-immigration parties, and street clashes between Turkish nationalist emigres and Kurds. When Germany banned Erdogan from speaking on its territory, he responded in 2018 by holding a photo opportunity in the UK with two German footballers of Turkish descent, Ilkay Gundogan and Mesut Ozil. They were joined by Everton's Cenk Tosun.

European concerns about the need to keep Turkey's politics at arm's length, have intensified. Accusations of Turkish intelligence operations against dissidents have surfaced, with Imam's allegedly deployed as spies. Austria has accused Turkey

of fomenting street clashes on its territory. Last November, France proscribed the Grey Wolves after violence in Lyon between Turkish nationalists and Armenians. A memorial to the Armenian genocide of 1915 was vandalised with graffiti in support of both the Grey Wolves and Erdogan. The bozkurt salute is now illegal in Austria, and whilst a ban on the Grey Wolves appears to be off the table in Germany, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution has noted with concern the political influence of Turkish nationalists, as well as the actions of Turkish intelligence agencies in Germany.

In the UK, the Grey Wolves have had a much lower profile. Its actions appear more sedate, for example attending demonstrations in support of the Uyghurs in China. At the Londra Ülkü Ocakları café in north London, middle aged men rally underneath the Turkish flag, and images of Colonel Türkeş and of howling wolves. It seems a long way however from the divisions in Turkey, France or Germany. Britain will hope it remains so.



The hand sign for the Grey Wolves in Turkey



President Biden in the Oval Office

Biden's expected policy on Syria



Jwan Dibo

There is no doubt that President-elect, Joe Biden, will face an intricate reality in Syria, as one of the consequences of his predecessor legacy. More precisely, Biden will encounter the repercussions of two previous administrations' policies in Syria including Obama's one, when Biden himself was vice president. The pressing question here is: can Biden present something different than Trump's administration in Syria? This fundamental question leads us to pose another enquiry which is: does Biden really want to get rid of the effects of Obama and Trump's politics in Syria and espouse a different strategy? The answer to these questions seems to be a little gloomy.

Biden's appointed team for the Middle East, will deal with three external players in Syria with antithetical agendas and goals. Two of them are classified as traditional enemies to U.S, viz., Russia and Iran and the third one is an ally but not a friend, namely, Turkey. However,

prior to predict how Biden's crew will interact with all these unfriendly exterior actors in Syria, it is important that to highlight Syria's position in U.S foreign policy.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, American's influence in Syria was limited, and it became diminished further during Trump's era. This reflects the absence of an outright U.S strategy regarding the future of the Syrian conflict. The lack of a clear U.S strategy, indicates to Washington's indifference about the future of Syria.

When U.S began air strikes in Syria in September 2014, the stated target was defeating the Islamic State (ISIS). After a while, U.S deployed several thousands of its troops in north, northeast and south of Syria. In March 2019, U.S backed, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), declared that the Islamic State group's five years caliphate was eliminated.

Despite that decisive victory, U.S continued to supply SDF with various weapons and ammunition. Shortly thereafter, U.S withdrew most of its troops from Syria. Yet, it kept a few hundred soldiers in Kurdish areas in north and northeast

Syria to protect oil installations. At the same time, U.S allowed Turkey to occupy some Kurdish cities and towns. The point here is that there has always been inconsistency and ambiguity in U.S policies in Syria, which suggests that Syria is not one of Washington's priorities.

When Biden was Obama's vice president, he was, unlike the former secretary Hilary Clinton, sceptical of deep involvement in the Syrian civil war. He was not even enthusiastic about arming the Syrian opposition, due to fear of extremist domination, and this is what actually happened later. But after several years, the landscape has changed completely, and the Kurdish-led SDF are now Washington's main and only allies. It is likely that U.S, during Biden's presidency, will maintain its presence in Syria without substantive changes. It will, also, continue to support SDF with ammunition, weapons, and training. In addition, it will not allow Turkey and the Syrian regime to expand further at the expense of the leverage of its ally, SDF.

On the level of political solution path, Biden's administration will try to contribute more effectively. It will

endeavour to involve Kurdish-led SDF as an independent delegation within the negotiations for a political solution between Assad regime and the Syrian oppositions. In this context, U.S envoy, William Rubak, has led, for more than a year, reconciliation efforts between various Kurdish political forces in Syria, with the aim of creating a joint Kurdish representative body. It can be argued that Biden's policies in Syria will be more consistent and rational than his predecessor. Biden will attempt, through his local partner, SDF, for America to have a prominent role in shaping the future of Syria. He will make U.S a strong rival to Russia about the future of the political system in Syria. Turkey will be deterred relatively over its infringements in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and the Eastern Mediterranean, because such Turkey's behaviour does not serve US interests. Biden will continue to support Israel to deter Iran in Syria, which will also benefit Russia in the long run.

Overall, Biden's policy in Syria may not be a much promising policy, especially, for the Kurds, but it is likely to be much better than Trump's reckless policies.

McGurk joined Biden's NSC: Another nightmare for Erdogan



Zara Saleh

The former American special envoy for the global coalition to defeat Islamic State, Brett McGurk has been appointed to join the U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's team. Brett McGurk will be among the National Security Council as senior director for the Middle East and North Africa. In other words, this new McGurk's position is highly important in terms of US military presence in Syria and expected to become a big concern for President Erdogan.

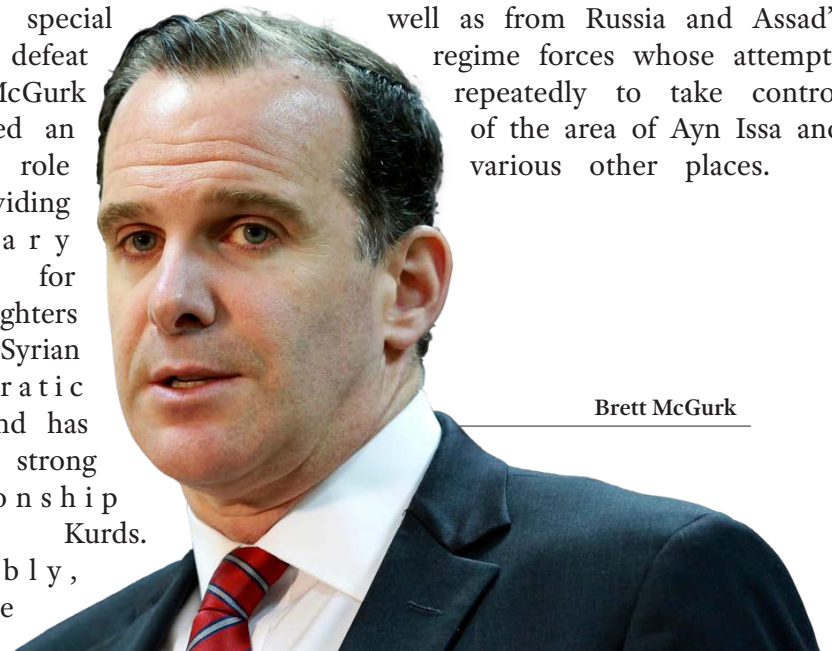
Despite the fact that the return of Brett McGurk as a director of NSC that do not allow him a direct role in Syria as he was in his previous post a special envoy under Obama's administration. It will be the most concern and challenge for Turkey. Firstly, McGurk is well-known as staunch ally and the most pro-Kurdish US diplomat with the new-elected President

Joe Biden, and he was against Turkey's policy and occupation in northeast Syria. Secondly, McGurk's resignation in December 2018 was over Donald Trump's decision to withdraw US troops from northeast Syria; additionally, Turkey with Syrian mercenaries launched a military offensive against the US allies the Kurdish Democratic Forces (SDF) that led to the more Turkish occupation. Added to that, the new Middle East coordinator on the National Security Council B. McGurk has criticized the Erdogan's policy on Syria and especially against Kurds, and even he accused Erdogan on harbouring the IS leader by asking "How exactly was Baghdadi living in a safe house with well-prepared tunnels less than 5km from your border?"

After the announcement of B. McGurk in the new appointed NSC's Cabinet, the Turkish officials were disappointed regarding the rise of tension with US and said, "McGurk has harmed Turkish-American

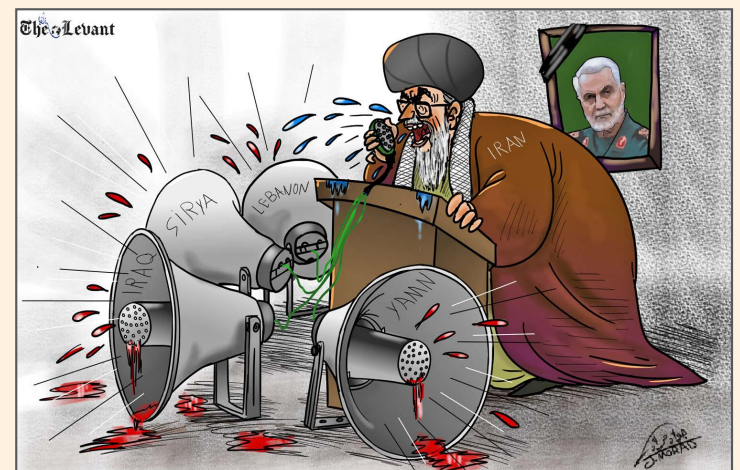
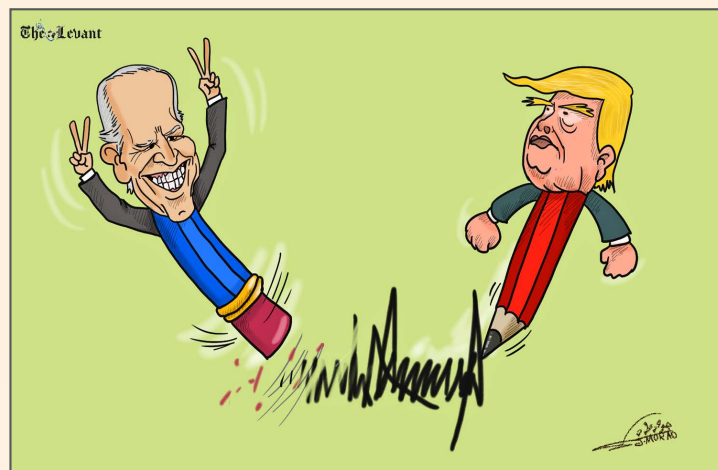
relations" and they accused him in supporting the Kurdish forces. On the other hand, the Kurds are more optimistic and welcoming back the returning McGurk's new position that, definitely, will strengthening the Kurdish-American relations, and preventing more Turkish attacks on Kurds. Furthermore, during former US president Obama/Biden administration, the former special envoy to defeat IS Brett McGurk has played an essential role in providing military support for Kurdish fighters and the Syrian Democratic Forces and has built a strong relationship with Kurds. Arguably, under the

new-elected US President Joe Biden's administration and the newly appointed coordinator for the Middle East and Syria Brett McGurk, the Kurds are expecting more military presence and support from the US. Bringing stability to the Kurdish-controlled region will be the main Kurdish concern and hope simultaneously with protecting the region from Turkish threats as well as from Russia and Assad's regime forces whose attempts repeatedly to take control of the area of Ayn Issa and various other places.



Brett McGurk

The Levant
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