



Anyone Who Opposes Erdogan is a Terrorist

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Lavrov Refuses the Participation of the European Diplomats in the Demonstrations in Russia



Demonstrations in Moscow

The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov stated that European diplomats who joined the illegal demonstrations in Russia knew that their participation contradicts the Vienna Convention which gives privileges and immunities

to the diplomats except interfering in the internal affairs of the host countries. The diplomats joined the protests that sparked in support of the opposition activist Alexei Navalny. The Russian non-governmental organization "OVD Info"

reported that more than 10 thousand people have been arrested in Russia since the start of the pro-opposition protest movement. According to OVDInfo: 4,000 were arrested on January 23, 5,700 in the demonstrations on January 31, and 1400 on February 2.

French MPs vote on <anti-separatism> bill

The French MPs voted on <anti-separatism> bill to boost republican principles. The vote came after lengthy debates held by a special commission in a plenary session. The bill adopted 313 amendments and will be passed up to the upper house, the conservative-led Senate. The bill came after a series of Islamist attacks starting from attacks on Charlie Hebdo in 2015 to beheading Samuel Paty in October. The bill is against separatism, which plans to crack down on online hate speech and foreign funding of religious groups.

Washington Responded to Iranian-backed Militias in Iraq with Attacking Syria

The US Department of Defense announced that it targeted facilities used by Iranian-backed militias in Syria. The office of Defense Department Spokesman John Kirby said in a statement: «US conducted a defensive precision strike in Syria against the Iranian-backed Militias Kait'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Kait'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada.» The US secretary of defence Lloyd Austin confirmed the attacks were ordered by President Joe Biden.



National Cyber Force Unit for Cyberwarfare



Jassim Mohamad

Britain, along with other European countries, is still fighting the propaganda of extremist ideologies whether Islamist or far-right. This has driven Britain to develop new policies and laws to enhance its security. Given how national security, particularly cyber security, has evolved over the past years, a National Cyber Force unit (NCF) was created; which is controlled by the spy agency GCHQ and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). On February 8, 2021, Jeremy Fleming, the head of GCHQ, told the Times, the British Newspaper revealed new details about a secret cyber operation against ISIS that targeted the group's ability to fly drones, and meddled with their phones preventing them from communication in the battle field. Britain had previously carried out similar cyber offensive against ISIS in 2017. Fleming said that GCHQ has worked with the Ministry of Defence to make a «significant contribution to the coalition's efforts to fight ISIS when the terrorist organisation found it almost impossible to spread its propaganda online.»

Priti Patel, the British Secretary of State for the Home Department, wrote in the Telegraph newspaper on 1 August 2019, demanding internet companies to design a «back door» in messaging services to give security services easier access to counter terrorism. She demanded the companies not to design systems that prevent access to content. Consequently, Britain gained access to the encrypted content of social media, most notably Facebook and WhatsApp, after it signed an agreement allowing UK law-enforcement agencies to demand data from US technology companies – with reciprocal access offered to US authorities.

According to Countering Terrorism Act April 2019, the British security services have the authority to carry out pre-emptive and preventative

operations against potential terrorist attacks. According to this law, one could face a prison sentence of up to fifteen years if they visit terrorist or extremist websites and the chat rooms or glorify extremist groups.

The 13th Signal Regiment

In June 2020, the UK Ministry of Defence announced that the British Army established its first full-time cyber regiment dedicated to face foreign attacks and local and foreign terrorist organisations. The Dorset-based regiment, which is dedicated to cyberwarfare, works with the 77th Regiment; a part of the Sixth Division. The role of the regiment becomes essential, vital and strategic in warfare. The Ministry of Defence stated that the unit would provide a «digital shield» against foreign attacks and protection for the British infrastructure.

The regiment was recently established to cooperate with the army, nationally and overseas, and with the Secret Intelligence Service MI6 to counter terrorism. The regiment's mission is not confined to defensive operations; it can launch preventative and preemptive attacks against extremist organisations or

cyber threats.

The National Cyber Force Mandate

The NCF's mandate to protect the UK digital security includes:

- ▶ *Protecting Digital and Cyber Security*
- ▶ *Countering Terrorism: Preventing terrorist attacks against the United Kingdom and its interests overseas*
- ▶ *Cybersecurity: making the UK a safer place online.*
- ▶ *Strategic advantage: managing threats posed by hostile states.*
- ▶ *Fighting crime: reducing the social and financial harm caused by organised crime*
- ▶ *Supporting defence: protecting defence personnel and facilities and supporting a comprehensive approach for military conflict.*

The Goals of British Intelligence in Syria

The British intelligence gathers information about the extremist organisations, and the extent of British citizens involvement in them, the risks they pose to both international and British security. They also infiltrate and hack ISIS on the ground

and cyber space. The British daily The Independent, published a report on 12 July 2018, about the success of British intelligence in disrupting «ISIS» activity. It said that there were members of the British Intelligence who infiltrated ISIS and had key roles in defeating the terrorist organisation and leaking information about it.

The GCHQ's new cyber unit for countering terrorism and extremism is a part of the government effort to move away from traditional methods and means in fighting these organisation. The GCHQ's preventative preemptive offensive cyber campaigns are more important than the defensive ones.

The GCHQ works with the British forces in conflict zones. It has jammed ISIS's cell phones and drones, and managed to stop ISIS from carrying out drone-based exploration or attacking the British forces overseas as it did in northeastern Syria. Despite all this, the capabilities of the GCHQ are still developing comparing with the capabilities of the European and American intelligence. It is expected that the GCHQ will expand in the short term to tackle the threats of the extremist organisation more effectively.



UK National Cyber Security Centre offices

Anyone Who Opposes Erdogan is a Terrorist

Turkey always labels its opponents as «terrorists», especially the Kurdish armed movements, in an attempt to overlook the core of the cause. It is the most convenient way for any Turkish official to mask the most complex cause that is threatening Turkey's present and future, for as long as it continues to disregard political solution and resort to the easier option of brutal force, long imprisonment, and torture to death.

Erdogan opted for this approach after he had failed to keep up his pledges of following a route of peace; a promise he made when he rose to power in 2002. Erdogan cannot deny that it was the Kurds who brought him to power based on his promise to solve the Kurdish cause peacefully. He had fulfilled a big part of his promise before he broke it in 2015 when the Turkish authorities imprisoned Kurdish politicians such as Selahattin Demirtaş. Since then, he reverted, like other previous Turkish politicians, to the option that does not require political work; launching wars and labelling his opponents as terrorists.

Objection to his Decision is Unacceptable

The events at the Boğaziçi University expose the false Turkish claims that anyone who opposes it inherently a «terrorist». On 2 January Erdogan appointed Melih Bulu, a member of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), as university rector despite that fact that Melih was not a member of its teaching staff. The students protested against that decision because they saw it as an attack on their educational institution.

The protests led Turkish security forces to intervene and clashed with the protesters when they chanted «Melih Bulu is not our rector», and «We do not want a university rector appointed by the state.» The academic personnel supported the protesters and said that «Bulu is the



Demonstrators protest outside Turkey's embassy in London (Archive)

first university rector to be appointed from outside the university since the 1989 coup d'état. They added: «We will not accept this because it clearly violates academic freedom and scientific independence as well as the democratic values of our university.»

Protests Continue and Grow Wider

The confrontation turned into attrition between Erdogan, who thinks he owns Turkey where no one is allowed to disobey him, and young people who are full of passion for life and freedom who have started to see the president who has ruled their country for nearly two decades as an obstacle to the prosperity and security of their country. Protests against Erdogan's decision broke out again on 1 February; as usual, the Turkish security forces used violence and detained dozens of protesting students.

Süleyman Soylu, the Turkish Minister of the Interior, claimed that «79 of those arrested were members of terrorist organizations.» He added: «the protesters were about to break into the university rector's office before the security forces arrested them.» claiming that: «108 people were arrested after the protests, 101 of them were from outside the university.» The minister said that

the detainees were members of terrorist organizations such as the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (DHKP/C) and the Turkish Communist Party/Marxist-Leninist Conference (TKP/ML).»

Melih Bulu confirmed that he did not intend to leave, despite the escalation of tensions and the mass arrests of more than 300 people two days before his statement. «I do not think at all about resigning.» Melih Bulu told reporters in Istanbul. «The crisis will be completely over within six months.» He told the newspaper Habertürk.

International Support for the Students

With the protests spreading, the students received international support for their right to protest. US State Department spokesman Ned Price said that: «freedom of expression, even speech that some may find uncomfortable, is a vital component of a vibrant functioning democracy which must be protected.»

Price's statement dismayed the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs which responded saying: «It is nobody's place to interfere in Turkey's internal affairs.» It claimed that the right to congregate and protest and freedom of expression

are guaranteed by the Constitution.» It added that it had «uncovered cases of individuals from outside the university with links to terrorist groups who instigated the events». The Ministry did not only call the protesters «terrorists» but it also warned «certain circles (abroad) not to use inflammatory language to instigate trouble and encourage groups to commit provocative and illegal actions». It added: «Images of disproportionate violence used by security forces against innocent and civilian citizens who were opposed to the government of their countries - which are described as developed and democratic - are still fresh in the memory.» In what seems to be a reference to Washington.

Turkey Accuses America Again

It seems Turkey was offended by the US recommendation to address the protesters' demands, which provoked it to renew its accusations to the US of being behind the 2016 failed coup d'état. Turkish Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu, told the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet that: «The United States had directed the coup attempt while the network of the U.S.-based opponent Fethullah Gulen carried it out.» «Europe was enthusiastic about it.» He claimed. On 5 February, Erdogan claimed in an official statement that the protesters of Boğaziçi University were terrorists. In a video broadcast to members of his conservative AK Party, he said: «This country will not be a country dominated by terrorists. We will never allow it.» It is now clear that those who control Turkey consider anyone who opposes Erdogan -whether educated or illiterate, Turk or Kurd, internal or external to be a «terrorist» who deserves whatever punishment Ankara chooses to inflict on them.

Iraqi Snap elections: Victory for the People or the Militias?



Murhaf Dwidari

Since the end of 2019, Iraq has witnessed big events; the last government resigned bowing to relentless pressure from protesters against the ruling classes who are accused of corruption and being agents to foreign states, especially Iran. Moreover, Katyusha Cells have resumed their activities, with fingers pointing to Iran too. Amid such substantial events, the Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi called for snap elections to be held on 6 June. The planned elections reflect the reality of the current political situation in Iraq; they are what the Iraqi people have demanded but they are also means for settling scores between major political powers.

Observers see these snap elections as a result of a political conflict between the parliament and the government, and that they have nothing to do with people's demands. They believe that they are merely cards that the political alliances and parties play. This might be evident in the call of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Iraq, Al-Halbousi, for earlier elections aimed at preempting what was leaked about Al-Kadhimi's request from the President Barham Saleh to dissolve the Parliament. Snap elections might save Iraq if they were held under normal circumstances under judicial supervision, a new constitution and free from quotas and confessionalism giving Iraqis the freedom of choice. However, if nothing changed there would be no point in changing the political figures and Iraq will continue to struggle on the long run in terms of national security, economy and political situation which might lead to dividing the country in the future. With the snap elections date approaching, the tension between political Islam groups and civil movements have climaxed with the Islamist sensing the threat of



Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi

competition following October uprising. The events have led to public resentment towards the political regime that is generally dominated by religious parties and factions. Competitiveness, in the upcoming elections, will depend on «how serious the government is in enforcing the political parties Act, disarming political parties, dissolving unlicensed parties and revoking the license of any party that is linked to armed groups.»

Snap Elections... A New Crisis in Iraq

The PM's office set the date for the snap elections on 6 June. Al-Kadhimi confirmed, in a meeting with the members of the Independent High Electoral Commission, that: «The current government is determined to hold the elections as scheduled because that is what the Iraqi people and political parties want. Moreover, the elections are a top priorities in the government's agenda and it is committed to them.»

However, it seems that the government and the political alliances and parties pledges to hold the early general elections on 6 June have not materialized into a drive to remove the

legal and financial obstacles that are obstructing organizing the elections. The real problem that might delay the elections to a further date is the lack of funding and the need for a new act for Federal Supreme Court or the amendment of the current act to guarantee ratify their results. There is disagreement over some paragraphs of the Court act; namely the role of the Islamic clergy in making decisions inside the court regarding Sharia law, how the clergy are nominated and the quota of each sect, and the mechanism of choosing the Court members and the relevant authorities that can approve their appointment so that they can do their job without any legal challenges.

There is another complicated issue in relation to how willing the parliament is to dissolve itself two months before the elections date on 6 June? The parliament has to be dissolved no later than 6 April, in accordance with Article 64 of the constitution, if it decides to commit to the set election date. However, it is believed that political alliances and parties and the parliament members are not ready to, willingly, dissolve the parliament and give up their positions and privileges under any circumstances.

The Independent High Electoral

Commission has proposed postponing the snap elections until 16 October, instead of holding them on 6 June. The commission explained that the postponement is necessary for holding fair elections and because the deadline to register political alliance had passed with just few political alliances registered for the date of the election in the schedule of the department of parties affairs. Therefore, it has argued that the deadline for registering alliances needs to extend. The commission claimed that the postponement will allow both the UN and international experts to have a role in observing the elections and making sure they are as transparent, fair and impartial as possible. It has also said that this would be in support if the Cabinet resolution relating to expanding the biometric registration and giving enough time for those who are eligible to register and finalise all the technical preparations.

After the elections .. will there be New Political Figures?

It is widely believed among the Iraqi ruling classes that the next elections will be decisive. Elections will bring about a dramatic change in the chart of the political alliances and parties which have controlled Iraq since 2003. Many have high expectations of profound change after the election law was reformed and a new Independent High Electoral Commission, with new independent judges, was appointed. It goes without saying that the first condition to make a real change in the chart of political parties and alliances, which control the Parliament and the government, is for the turnout in 2021 elections to be higher than that of 2014 and 2018 elections. The traditional powers which control the Parliament have a solid base of supporters who will vote for them no matter how narrow this base is. Therefore, the fewer voters there are, the more chances those parties have because their grassroots supporters have to come and vote.

Erbil Attack.. The Tacit Games of Iranian-backed Militias might Backfire on them

«Erbil Lives in Fearful of Further Rocket Attacks « and «Watch! Targeting American Bases in Erbil»; two shocking headlines that were used by the Iranian news channel, Al-Alm, encouraging and justifying more attacks on the capital of Kurdistan and effectively revealing the identity of those who stand behind such attacks.

Why Erbil?

Everybody, including the ordinary people of Erbil, are wondering about the agenda behind the unprecedented attack on their city. Kurdistan had never been a target for such attacks even when the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) captured Kirkuk, the predominantly-Kurdish city, from the Peshmerga in October 2017 following military clashes.

However, it seems that the most probable explanation of the attack is that it was an attempt by the Iranian-backed militias tell Washington that it has no safe place in Iraq, following suggestions and predictions about the possibility of moving the US embassy from Baghdad to Erbil. The attack is an example of what the Iran proxy militias are willing to do if they want to undermine regional security. It is not totally unexpected from those who have bombarded the Green Zone in Baghdad many times.

Previous Threats to the Americans The attack on Erbil can be linked to previous statements by leaders of the Iranian-backed militias. For example, in October 2020, Akram al-Kaabi, the founder and secretary-general of Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba in Iraq, said: «Dialogue with the U.S is pointless, it only understands the language of force; what they have witnessed before was merely fireworks (referring to the frequent attacks on the Green Zone in Baghdad).» He continued: «We gave the Americans many chances but they never change

their arrogant attitude. The resistance groups are going to confront the Americans fiercely if they do not withdraw their occupying forces from Iraq.» He claimed: «The attacks of our resistance groups have become ferocious and painful.» He added: «We want to save Iraq from the US economic control which will destroy Iraq. Removing the American occupation from Iraq has become a widely supported demand in Iraq, that is no longer confined to the Islamic resistance. «

Consequently, on 10 December, Iranian-backed militias resumed their targeted attacks. Qasim Al-Jabarin Brigade claimed responsibility for the explosions that targeted two Global Coalition vehicles on the international highway in Samawah and in Latifiyah, Baghdad. Ashab Al-Kahf militia increased their attacks on the American Embassy in Baghdad. Zulfiqar Brigade militia threatened the American Embassy in Baghdad with «very hot winter nights». Moreover, Ashab Al-Kahf militia threatened American bases from Al-Udeid to Ayn Al-Asad to Ali Al-Salem

and Al Harir, claiming that they were legitimate targets following what it described as «The government failure to seize the opportunity that it was offered by the resistance groups»

Unknown Militia Claim Responsibility for the Attack

The Iranian-backed Militias make a fool of people by giving themselves unknown names, which they might use only for one time, to target security and stability in areas that it sees as a threat to its influence. However, they dare not officially declare the organisation they are affiliated with. They merely call themselves «resistance factions» supported by Iran; this is exactly what happened this time. A group calling itself Awliya Al-Dam Brigade claimed responsibility for the attack on the US-led base, saying it targeted the «American occupation» in Iraq. It added in a statement: «On Monday at 9:15 p.m., your men in Awliya Al-Dam Brigade carried out an operation against the American occupation in our beloved north. We were 7 kilometres away from the occupation

base (Harir) in Erbil. 24 rockets hit the targets accurately and the CRAM system failed to intercept them. The aircraft, vehicles and armouries of the occupation suffered severe damages and many American soldiers were injured.»

Angry Reactions to the Attack

The terrorist rocket attack that hit residential areas, in addition to the American base, and seriously injured many civilians, was strongly condemned in Kurdistan. President Nechirvan Barzani urged the UN security council to take the threats of the rocket attack on Erbil very seriously. He called for putting and end the threats posed to the people of Kurdistan by «urging the Iraqi government to implement by the constitution». The Iraqi prime minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi gave instruction for a joint investigation committee to be formed with the competent authorities in the Kurdistan Region.

Many Arab countries and Islamic organisations have condemned the attack, including Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Arab Parliament, Gulf Cooperation Council, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Several Iraqi politicians have also condemned the attack including Ayad Allawi, the former prime minister and the leader of the National Coalition, and Barham Salih, the incumbent president of Iraq.

The international and Arab outcry made the Iranian-backed militias' efforts to threaten Kurdistan's people and authorities backfire on them. The attacks may push the Global Coalition to increase its forces to protect the safest place in Iraq, which the Tehran backed militias are aiming to tarnish with terror and blood, as they had done in other in the rest of Iraq. The attack might also change the way the American administration deals with Iran.



From the aftermath of the attack in Erbil

Farouk El-Baz to «Levant»: The UAE Lead the Arab World into Space

The Hope probe reached the orbit of Mars -the first mission out of three- to study weather cycles in Mars' atmosphere. The «Hope» probe will remain in this phase for approximately two months, during which further testing will take place, until it is ready to enter the «science» orbit — when its data collection work begins. The probe will stay in the orbit for a whole Martian year (687 days). One loop around the planet will take 40 hours.

The probe blasted off from Japan last year marking significant progress in the UAE's ambitious space program. The probe is the first Arab interplanetary mission to study the red planet. Emirati Officials stressed that the maneuver to enter the orbit of Mars on Tuesday 9 February, was the «most crucial and complex», and that slowing down the spacecraft enough for it to be captured by Mars' gravity and go into orbit, is a very delicate procedure.

The Hope Probe

In September 2019, Al-Mansouri became the first Emirati astronaut to go into space. The crew (Al-Mansouri

and the other two astronauts) blasted off from Kazakhstan, on a Russian Soyuz rocket, to the International Space Station (ISS). Al-Mansouri became the first Arab to visit the International Space Station. However, the UAE's ambitions go much further. It wants to build a human settlement on Mars by 2117. In 2017, Dubai hired engineers and technicians to show how a city on Mars can be built. It is planning to build «Mars Science City», which will simulate Mars' environment, in the Emirati desert at a cost of 500 million Emirati Dirham (135 million dollars). Under UAE National Space Strategy, UAE wants to carry out other projects like space tourism; it has, therefore, signed an MoU for that purpose with Virgin Galactic owned by the billionaire Richard Branson.

The Hope Probe .. UAE-Led Arab achievement

In an exclusive interview with Levant, the director of the Center for Remote Sensing at Boston University the Egyptian space scientist Farouk el-Baz, said that he predicted that in the next decade the Arab world

would engage more in space science, following the achievements that some Arab countries have accomplished in that field. He believes that the UAE is leading the Arab world into space, referring to the Hope probe, which he sees as an Arab achievement, and the announcement of building MBZ-Sat.

He said: «As Arabs, we had not engaged much in space science, but we have certainly started. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are working on substantial projects in space science, which indicates that we will witness more Arab activities in space science over the next ten years. «In my opinion, the UAE will succeed in supporting space projects, and a large number of Emirati youth will engage in space International science and projects in the future.» He added.

El-Baz spoke to Levant about the future of space science, saying: «Since Project Apollo, more and more countries all over the world have been interested in space science and its uses in daily life, such as the use of satellites in geology and agriculture.» He pointed out that: «The UAE decided to start space projects and

specialize in them, focusing on young people and giving them support to pursue this field. This is what NASA did; it gave young people support in space science and technology and that is how America outperformed Russia in this discipline. «The future is promising. There is excellent progress in space science which aim at getting to know the universe and bringing benefits to the human race and I think this will continue.» El-Baz confirmed.

In regards to the scientific achievement of the «Hope probe», Professor Farouk El-Baz, said: «The Hope probe is a remarkable Arab achievement because it was built by Emirati hands and brains. When a country like the UAE embarks on space science projects, this means it will continue , advance and achieve more.» «The UAE leads the Arab world in space projects. Besides astrophotography, it has launched a satellite into space to provide us with more information about the upper layers of the Mars' atmosphere and this is something no Arab country has ever done before.» He added.

The Strategic Goals of «Hope Probe»

The Emirates Mars Mission (EMM) has set out seven inspiring strategic objectives of the «Hope Probe» mission, ranging from acquiring human knowledge, to enhancing the UAE's capacities and promoting international cooperation, collecting data, achieving scientific outcomes, improving the quality of life on earth by making new discoveries, encouraging global collaboration in Mars exploration and advancing the UAE standing in space research. The EMM also aims to upgrade Emirati capabilities in the field of interplanetary exploration, establish the UAE's position as a beacon of progress in the region, inspire future Arab generations to pursue space science and build scientific knowledge given that the sustainable economy in the future will be science-based.



Professor Farouk El-Baz

Administration between the global recognition and marginalization (neglect) in the Syrian Kurdish regions



Fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces



Nizar Mousa

Events unfolded in Syria during ten years ago, and various kinds of power struggle emerged on the ground in exchange for their interests and influences in the region, through local mediators. The most important matter after the failure of the international coalition to form a military opposition force against it in the fight against ISIS in the region, the United States and their allies began to think about depending on the force near of the Syrian regime to fight. It wanted to far this force form regime in the same time to achieve its plane and strategy on the Syrian ground. , this time US wanted to make kind of accordance between administer of this force which is near of the thinking of the Kurdish party labour in Qndil (Turkey Kurdish) and the silence of its ally Turkey to intering other local people from arab area in this force, so US makes the military force in the area under the

name (democracy Syria forces) QSD. After thousands of sacrifices that this military force in fighting ISIS started during several years from the beginning of its exploitation to exploit it from a quarter of it, both the (QSD) and the Democratic Union Party(PYD) are preparing to announce areas project to their control something like kind of administration of this, area .without other political Kurdish party, and did not allowing this parties to share in this administration, and (OSD, PYD) administer this administration alone.

Soon, however, the region went through several military operations that expanded the unity of the region geographically, targeting this unstable administration.

Turkey has worked to establish corridors on its border according with alliance in those areas located in the geographic areas with a Kurdish majority, and has recently gone further and moved towards the stronghold of its announcement (Ain Issa) to designate it as a next target An assessment of the state of

administration on the ground, and establishing the foundations of this entity with a strong incubator as a basic component in the region, and also expressing the Kurdish case in Syria, and not an entity expressing an organization whose geography is framed within Turkey itself. Its components are components, mats, ingredients, mound of its ingredients. Papers of strength that study this approach, our science, , our knowledge, our knowledge, and its support some from administration , except at the level of some sympathetic European parliamentarians, activists and lovers of knowledge to the lowest level required, and some representative offices did not exceed them Abroad for informal representative associations,

The start-up numbers start to be implemented at the beginning of the operation in the start-up stages at the beginning of the institution's management, actors, and the management of the institution has been destroyed without marriage. A real restoration of it with time,

and I promised to get it in front of the challenges, health, living and societal by watching films that play an economic role in the shoulders of the people of the region, and their misery increased in the absence of the basics of a decent life.

Not to mention a view of a night a night a night a night a night a night a night to the area under its influence. Contribute to shooting, the ocean, the ocean, the ocean, the ocean, the ocean, the ocean can achieve success in achieving success and balance, other than searching on this page, the current reality is a reality in its perception in reality, very true. Removing the discomforts of its stability and treating it rationally as possible.

The correct state of this administration in being true to being genuinely represented, represented correctly, magnificent correctly, and a valid gain, if they are permissible, before their supporters, serve to eliminate an outward life that is satisfied with time, so it may open a door that changes the reality of the situatio.

Israel is now officially part of the Middle East – at least in the Pentagon’s eyes



Ian Black

On January 15, just five days before Joe Biden’s inauguration, the Pentagon made an important announcement. It was about the decision to transfer US military liaison with Israel from Europe to its Middle East command. But it was overshadowed by the aftermath of the far more sensational story that supporters of Donald Trump had stormed the Capitol.

Because of its timing the news about the US-Israel strategic shift made little immediate impact. But it was still a landmark development in terms of how the US views its closest ally in the region and represents a political and potentially military change that could have far-reaching implications.

Previously Israel was part of the US European Command. That arrangement enabled US generals in the Middle East to interact with Arab states without having a close association with Israel, which was still seen as an “enemy” despite its peace treaties with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Centcom’s area of responsibility stretches across the Middle East to Central Asia, including the Gulf region as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan. It encompasses 21 countries from Syria and Iraq to Yemen.

Pro-Israeli organizations in Washington have been lobbying for some time for this change. The basis for their campaign is the assumption that as the US continues to withdraw from the Middle East, it should take advantage of its most loyal friend in the region – Israel.

An additional factor is Israel’s newly-formalized relations with the UAE and Bahrain in the Abraham Accords, brokered by Trump and signed last September in the White House. Saudi Arabia is another important actor though for reasons of its own it is unlikely to follow suit, at least for



Donald Trump (Right) and Benjamin Netanyahu (Left)

the moment.

Another key assumption is that in the coming period, the main threat to regional security will emanate from Iran and its proxies – Shia militias in Iraq to Hizbullah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. Efforts by the Biden administration to rejoin the 2015 nuclear agreement, and crucially expand it to cover Tehran’s ballistic missiles program and regional ambitions, are designed to counter this.

It will not be easy for the new Democratic president to undo the damage caused by his Republican predecessor. Trump famously lambasted Obama’s 2015 agreement (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) with Iran as the “worst deal ever.” He withdrew from it in 2018 and imposed American sanctions which have devastated the Iranian economy at a time when the country has been struggling with the Covid pandemic. Iran is now in a third successive year of economic recession.

It is too soon to predict what will happen with Biden’s commitment to rejoin the JCPOA. He has little time – given presidential elections in June in Iran that are likely to pit pragmatists against hardliners.

But his appointment of the highly experienced diplomat Robert Malley as his Iran envoy has been interpreted as a sign of seriousness – even though Malley was criticized as being pro-Iranian and hostile to Israel and its new Arab allies. Biden, however, has promised to consult more closely with both Israel and the Gulf states than took place before the original JCPOA was agreed.

Trump’s decision to transfer Israel to Centcom sent a clear message about Washington’s strategic view of the region. But will Biden go along with it? The new man in the Oval Office – and key officials like Antony Blinken, his secretary of state – have spoken in favour of the normalization agreements with the UAE and Bahrain (and with Sudan and Morocco) so it is reasonable to assume that the 46th president will stick with it.

Signs are already apparent that this may have dramatic consequences. Obviously some aspects are secret, but specialist publications are already reporting that this change may have implications for intelligence-sharing and actual military cooperation to confront Iran. It is worth recalling that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei portrayed the Abraham Accords as an Emirati attempt “not only to subject

the Palestinian question to oblivion, but also to allow Israel a foothold in the region.”

Israel, of course, is the Middle East’s only (though officially undeclared) nuclear power. It also has impressive conventional military assets, and an Israeli campaign against Iranian targets could inflict serious damage on the Islamic Republic’s nuclear facilities, as well as its infrastructure. Direct access to Saudi, Bahraini or Emirati air bases could make all the difference.

Israelis have welcomed Trump’s decision because it gives them the potential to increase pressure on Iran with the support of Washington, having made clear their opposition to a return to the JCPOA – though the IDF chief of staff, Aviv Kochavi, was considered to have gone too far last week in speaking out publicly against Biden’s approach. He said that even an agreement “with a number of improvements,” would be “a very bad and mistaken thing” – echoing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Trump’s final move – described as “a parting gift” by one pro-Israeli lobby group – underlines the now familiar point that his successor will be dealing with a very different Middle East.



Russian military in Syria

Russia's Syrian Laboratory



James Denselow

Which country in the world has a record 12.4 million people struggling to find enough food to eat whilst at the same time may find itself home to a strategic nuclear bomber fleet? The paradoxes of the situation in Syria a decade into the conflict is typified by the Russian role in the country. Ten years of conflict in Syria have included over five years of direct Russian military involvement which has helped the Regime win back 30% of the country's territory. According to a new Institute for the Study of War (ISW) report "the Russian military identifies its deployment to Syria as the prototypical example of future war—an expeditionary deployment to support a coalition-based hybrid war". Russia and Iran are taking every opportunity to increase their influence in Syria. They recently urged private security companies to open offices across Syria, offering young men large amounts of money to work for them amid deteriorating economic conditions and a lack of job opportunities in the Syrian regime-controlled areas. Russia

started to establish a military unit consisting of local elements in Syria's northeastern al-Hasakah province, according to local sources.

Russia has been developing the Hmeimim Air Base in Latakia in western Syria in preparation for it to receive strategic nuclear bombers as part of plans to strengthen the Russian presence in the country, Russian *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported. As the ISW report recognises Syria has become a laboratory and a training ground for the Russians to test out equipment and allow their soldiers to gain real world experience. They describe it as a "foundational shaping experience for the development of the Russian Armed Forces" which explains the significance of the investment to date.

The military and security presence that Russia has in Syria seems to be so deeply in the country's post-civil war DNA that it is hard to envisage a separation in future. The two countries relationship has evolved from an alliance into a more disproportionate set up whereby the Regime and the Syrian 'state' is beholden to Moscow like never before. And vice versa Moscow sees Assad and his forces as simply one piece on the complex chessboard that typifies the state of power

dynamics in the country.

The fact that the Regime only truly controls 15% of its own borders, according to *Asharq al-Awsat*, is testimony to the incredible loss of power suffered by Damascus in order to maintain any power at all. Meanwhile Moscow continues to parallel its military strategic investment and control of the country with a monopoly over the most effective strands of mediation. The UN Special Envoy for Syria said there had to be "constructive international diplomacy" if the peace process is to move forward in any way, appearing before the Security Council behind closed doors on Tuesday. Later that same week in a two-day meeting, Turkey, Russia, and Iran are expected to discuss the situation on the ground in Syria and the political process as well as efforts to draw up a new constitution for the country. The Astana process guarantors meeting in the 15th round of Syria peace talks in Sochi following recent failures of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva – the first such meetings since late 2019.

Russia has been allowed to develop its Syria strategy regardless of whether a Democrat or a Republican was in the White House and when

the ISW report recommends that "the United States and its allies must prepare to confront an increasingly effective Russian military that is intent on further developing expeditionary capabilities and using them in coalition environments", it is hard to spot the obvious political will.

In many senses Syria has been surrendered as a zone of strategic concern by America allowing regional powers (Iran, Israel, Turkey) to compete along with Russia as the single largest power operating in the country. The likelihood of Washington trying to rebalance the scales, despite their continued light footprint presence in the northeast of the country, is minimal. Instead, the US and others will have to see what signposting comes from Russia's actions in Syria towards the future of warfare elsewhere.

Hybrid coalition efforts, the use of drones and advanced technology as well as the hyper localisation of ceasefires and local agreements around sovereignty and access are all issues that will manifest in other fragile states or post-civil war environments across the globe. Syria has become Russia's playground but what it does there cannot be ignored any longer.

After Brexit, What Next for the Brexit Party?



Paul Stott

The European Union has got itself into a mess over the procurement of anti-Covid vaccines. Its inability to act promptly, and the complicated political, diplomatic and legal processes required to salve the needs of the European Commission, 27 member states and domestic pharmaceutical interests, contrasts with the nimble response of the British government, and its vaccine task force by Kate Bingham. For many Brexiteers, the vaccine debacle, and the failure of statecraft that it represents, is a core example of why they argued to leave the European Union – that Britain is better taking its own decisions, plotting its own route, and making alliances as it sees fit. Having ‘got Brexit done’ however, Boris Johnson is mistaken if he believes that some of the unruly political forces of the past decade will now go gently into the good night. A whole host of pro-Brexit parties wait in the wings for any stumble or sign of weakness from the Prime Minister towards Brussels, sniffing the air for the big campaigning issue that would allow them to make their mark. Some, like the rejuvenated Social Democratic Party (SDP) enjoy a strong intellectual base, but without electoral progress risk remaining chiefs without Indians. Others, like Lawrence Fox’s Reclaim Party, or David Kurten’s Heritage Party, possess articulate leaders, but lack regional, never mind national presence. Having suffered

a disastrous showing in the 2019 European parliament elections, the party for so long associated with Brexit, UKIP, is trying to re-establish itself after a characteristic period of internecine conflict. The arrival of social media controversialist Katie Hopkins to its ranks will bring renewed publicity, if not stability.

Perhaps the politician most associated with Brexit, and capable of appealing to both Conservative voters in the south of England and former Labour voters in red wall seats, is Nigel Farage. The Conservative party in particular observes Farage with a degree of nervousness. In 2019 the ex-UKIP leader was able to form the Brexit Party from scratch, and within a few months lead it to an astounding victory in the 2019 EU election. Its 5.2 million votes were 30% of those cast, more than Labour and Conservative combined,

and won it 29 seats (the equal largest party in the Brussels parliament). The Conservatives were pushed down to 8.8%, a humiliation from which Theresa May’s premiership never recovered. Farage has now turned the Brexit Party into Reform UK, and seeks to again break the political mould. Richard Tice, the party’s Chairman, is questioning the economic effects of lockdown, and is reportedly interesting in standing against Sadiq Khan as London Mayor. Whilst Khan’s lead in the polls appears unassailable, a strong showing could help Reform UK gain seats in the Greater London Assembly. There, Tice would relish questioning Khan, who tends to become distinctly prickly when challenged on his record. Elections to the Welsh assembly, where pro-Brexit parties have in the past done well, plus those in the English regions present

further opportunities.

Success, however, is far from a given. Reform UK appears set to copy the Brexit Party’s unusual organising structure, of having paid up supporters, rather than full party members. Instead of one member one vote, registered supporters of the Brexit Party were asked to vote by email on potential policy options. As Reform UK develops, that may not be enough to keep committed activists happy. Whilst Farage is undoubtedly a big beast in political terms, he is a marmite politician (either loved or hated) and his parties have traditionally done far better in elections decided by versions of proportional representation (as London, Scotland and Wales will be) than first past the post. As the Covid vaccine is distributed across the country, Reform UK will be under pressure from lockdown sceptics to

oppose ongoing restrictions, and press for the quickest possible return to normality. However, critics of lockdown have tended to overlook that however damaging to the economy, public support for it, in opinion poll data, has tended to be strong.

For now, though, optimism is the watchword. Consider Jonathan Bullock, former Brexit Party MEP for the East Midlands, who has warmly welcomed Reform UK stepping up its activity. He said: “It is clear with the two major parties supporting an extreme lockdown, costly green energy policies and wasteful schemes such as the HS2 rail project, that there is a need for a real opposition party in the U.K. which will also hold the Government to account on Brexit delivery and control of immigration.” Brexit may be done. But the Brexit Party, in its new guise as Reform UK, may yet have some life in it.



Love and War from the Greeks to Hulusi Akar



Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar



Dalia Ziada

It is February, the month of love. Sociologists say that love and politics, respectively, are the top two topics people like to conversate about. Mixing the two topics in one conversation makes it even more spicy and appealing to the receiving audience, especially on social media platforms. Last week, I found my name caught up in a smearing campaign on Twitter that did just that; mixed the topics of love and politics to discredit me, as part of a bigger campaign targeting Turkey's Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar. It was not a surprise to discover, later on, that the campaign against me was launched by Greek tweeps. On the eve of electing the new executive authority in Libya, I published an article discussing the future of Turkey in Libya, after the Government of National Accord (GNA) steps down and the newly elected government takes the lead. In 2019, GNA opened the door for Turkey's intervention in Libya, through signing two military and maritime agreements, which a Libyan

court, in January, ruled that they are illegal. The engineer of Turkey's intervention in Libya is the Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar. He succeeded, in a record time, to create a presence for Turkey inside Libya, which benefited Turkey in pursuing other interests in the region. That included giving Turkey a relative leverage in its historical conflict with Greece over seabed rights in eastern Mediterranean. With the GNA leaving, Turkey's interests and future ambitions in Libya are at risk. That is a rough summary of what I published in a long analysis report, titled "Hulusi Akar's Dilemma in Libya." A few hours after publishing the link of the report on Twitter, I found dozens of tweets from random accounts with anonymous identities, mentioning my name. Some of these tweets were also quoting my "Hulusi Akar's Dilemma in Libya" report. They were not discussing the topic of the report. Actually, I hardly doubt that they even read it, before tweeting at me. Rather, they were blatantly stating, with much confidence, that I am having "a secret crush on Hulusi Akar" and thus my romantic love to him is blinding my political analysis. At the beginning, I thought this was a silly joke, and I responded to some of these tweets, trying to understand

where they brought such a foolish assumption. My conversation with them was reminiscent of teenagers' conversations in high school about the sexy teacher whom the girls are fantasizing about. Why my name got caught up in such nonsense? That was the question I could not answer, unless with the help of two friends, after three long days, through which the smearing campaign against me did not stop. My first friend, who is an expert on social media algorithms, discovered that at least 90% of the accounts that were tweeting these rumors are internet bots. That was not surprising to me. I know the Greeks hate Hulusi Akar because of the long history of conflicts between Turkey and Greece. But what this has to do with me? My second friend, who is an anthropologist, gave me the answer in very interesting analysis on the social media war between Turkey and Greece. The anthropologist explained that the Greeks spreading the rumor that I am romantically blinded by Hulusi Akar, is not a random tweet or a silly joke that became popular. This was an organized campaign by the Greeks, and I am not their first victim. Anyone who writes anything positive

or neutral about Turkey, or Hulusi Akar in particular, falls under their radar and then they target him/her by personal distortion campaign that affects his/her credibility and deters them from writing on this topic in the future. I am an Egyptian. Due to the ongoing political rift between Egypt and Turkey, the Greek tweeps could not easily claim that I am biased to Turkey. Also, they could not claim that Hulusi Akar or Turkey are paying me money to write what I wrote. Even, they could not claim that I am a Twitter bot or a random person, because of my established professional reputation. The only claim they could make to discredit me and raise doubts around the credibility of my report is to come up with this super silly assumption that I am romantically in love with Hulusi Akar! As funny as these rumors were, I was sad to see the Greek tweeps choosing the word "love" to attack me, within their fight with Hulusi Akar. Love is an amazing emotion that should bond us together, rather than being used as a tool of war. It is, perhaps, not the best story for Valentine's Day, but I thought I should share this unique experience of an Egyptian getting in the social media war between the Turks and the Greeks.

The Caliphate for Quraysh: Why Meccan ancestry is vital for ISIS



Sami Moubayed

When the self-proclaimed caliph of ISIS Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in October 2019, The Guardian ran a story about his successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi. It said: “His last name suggests that he, as did Baghdadi, claims a lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, a position that offered legitimacy in some quarters.”

The last two words, “some quarters,” raised red flags for anybody familiar with the history of Islam, and that of its caliphate. It should have been “all quarters” across Muslim society, be it conservative, pious, or jihadiradicalized. Sunni Muslims go by the Prophet’s hadith (compilation of sayings) arguing that only a member of his Meccan tribe, Quraysh, is eligible for the caliphate. Shiites go even further, claiming that only members of the Prophet’s bloodline, or Al Al-Bayt, can be considered for the highest post in Islam, which literarily means “successor to the prophet.” There is only one school of Islam that waives these two conditions, being that of the Hanafis. And that is why the Ottoman sultans took it up as an official sub-sect, to justify their claim to the caliph, although they were neither Meccan notability nor from Quraysh.

That also explains why many ambitious figures in Islamic history never claimed the caliphate for themselves, like Osama Bin Laden. The founder of the modern state of Saudi Arabia King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud would have loved to declare himself caliph, but he did not dare tamper with such a sacred and long-respected tradition. It made him shiver with rage when his prime rival in Arabian politics, Sharif Hussein Bin Ali, laid claim to the post after it was abolished by Kemal Ataturk in Turkey in March 1924. Back then, so



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

serious was the matter that a group of learned Syrians set up a society to headhunt for a new caliph, inspired by the Caliphate Movement in India. This was no joking matter. It is not something that can be amended, ignored, or sidelined. And it explains why when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi addressed the world from a mosque in Mosul almost seven years ago, ISIS media made careful mention of his full name, “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Qurashi al-Hassani.” That is how the terror group referred to him in all of their official statements from 2014 until his killing in 2019. They were reminding everybody that he hailed from Quraysh and was a direct descendant of the Prophet’s grandson, Imam al-Hasan. They even came up Western journalists and non-Muslims tend to drop both titles for practicality, but ISIS media never referred to him without both. Its also worth mentioning that Baghdadi ripped phrases from one of his namesake speeches, being Abu Bakr al-Saddiq, the first caliph of Islam.

Sacred dream

The idea of a caliphate has been a sacred dream, passed down from one generation of Islamists to another. Celebrated jihadis harbor the exact same dream, from Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Mohammad al-Golani. Even moderate Islamic politicians dream of restoring the caliphate. Shortly after they won the post-Arab Spring elections in Tunisia in October 2011, Secretary-General of the Islamic al-Nahda Party Hamadi al-Jbeli said: “We are in the sixth caliphate, God willing.” By sixth he was referring to the four Salaf caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman, Ali) and adding a fifth, Omar Ibn Abdul-Aziz of the Umayyad Dynasty. Tunisian leader Rashid al-Ghannouchi added that a caliphate was the hope and desire of all Muslims. The leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammad Badie, went further, saying that an Islamic state governed by the laws of sharia and headed by a caliphate was his ultimate goal, and

those of his party.

Abu Ibrahim al-Qarashi

Fast forward to 2021. This month Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s successor was in the news, after a BBC documentary revealed the full story behind his real identity. The new caliph, whose real name is Amir al-Salbi, was not on the US hitlist prior to 2019. Few had heard of him before Baghdadi personally chose him as a successor in July 2019. His only credentials, according to the new documentary, are that he spent prison time at Camp Bucca, and came from Quraysh. So did his newly appointed spokesman Abu Hamzah al-Qurashi, speculating that just like Arab despots often do, Qurashi is removing Baghdadi’s men from top positions and replacing him with new figures who owe him—and him only—direct allegiance. That is one glue that keeps them together and so is the fact that they are all Iraqi natives, with no Syrian or foreign fighter at top command. And all trace their family lineage to Quraysh.

The Resurgence of ISIL in Iraq And Syria



Jwan Dibo

In December 2017, Iraq's Prime Minister officially announced the liberation of the city of Mosul from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In March 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) declared the total defeat of ISIS after taking control of its last stronghold in the town of Baghuz in Eastern Syria. However, after both decisive victories, ISIS is back again.

ISIS operations in Iraq and Syria have enlarged significantly during 2020. It was a demonstration that ISIL is not totally over yet. The resurgence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria has internal and external dimensions and connotations. This phenomenon cannot be attributed only to some of ISIS movable remnants or to its sleeper cells. It is something systematic and linked to the agendas and volitions of some regional states. Since the emergence of ISIL in 2014 in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, there was an implicit relationship

between Turkey and ISIL at the intelligence level. This was very stark in the comedian play presented by Turkish intelligence and ISIL together in June 2014 in the city of Mosul. In June 2014, ISIL alleged that it detained 49 Turkish people who were working with the Turkish consulate in Mosul. After 100 days, ISIL released all of them and when they came back home, their appearance was suggesting that they were on a tour, not kidnapped. Meanwhile, they were the only ones who survived after being captured by ISIS!

Since then, whenever the pressure on ISIS in Syria and Iraq intensified by the international coalition and local allies, Turkey was engaged in counteractivities aiming at relieving the pressure on ISIS. This is what happened in October 2019 when Turkey and its backed-Syrian militants invaded two large areas in north and north east Syria controlled by the Kurdish-led SDF. The assault occurred in the wake of the decisive victory by the American-led international coalition and its local partner SDF against the last ISIS

stronghold in Syria.

What is striking here is that all the Turkish military operations that took place on the Syrian lands since 2014 were primarily targeting the Kurdish fighters who were and are still fighting ISIS. Every military victory that Turkey had against the Kurdish fighters was in favour of ISIS. In other words, every loss the Kurdish fighters received during their asymmetric battles with Turkey was considered a victory for ISIS and a revival of its activities.

Dozens of ISIS detainees fled from a camp in north-eastern Syria, which was under the control of SDF as a result of the Turkish attack in October 2019. Many of SDF were forced to postpone fighting against ISIS and started fighting the Turkish occupier instead. Thus, ISIS once again was able to hold out and survive after Turkey eased the pressure on it.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate ISIS as long as there are states such as Turkey and Qatar supporting and financing terrorism. If U.S and EU are really interested in fighting terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa, then, Turkey



and Qatar must inevitably be held accountable, punished, and deterred. Failure to do so, would put the credibility of fighting terrorism at the stake, and turn it into mere allegations with the aim of propaganda and misleading. In addition, that Turkey will continue to use terrorism against EU, as happened recently in France and Austria. The eradication of the roots of ISIS in the Middle East and North Africa must take place in Ankara and Doha, not in Iraq and Syria.

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