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INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS  
Tel. : 01-48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01-48 24 64 66

[www.fikp.org](http://www.fikp.org)  
E-mail: [bulletin@fikp.org](mailto:bulletin@fikp.org)

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**IRAN:  
POPULAR ANGER AND MASSIVE DEMONSTRATIONS AFTER THE CRASH  
OF A CIVIL PLANE SHOT DOWN BY THE PASDARAN**

**S**everal serious events marked January in Iran, after the foundation of the Islamic regime had been already shaken by the monster demonstrations of November and their repression which reportedly killed up to 1.500 people. On the night of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, in another slap in the face to the regime, General Qasem Soleimani, architect and military leader of the country's

aggressive policy throughout the Middle East, was killed in Baghdad by a strike from an American drone. Organising a vast staging on the occasion of the funeral of the "martyr" on the 7<sup>th</sup>, which was broadcast on television from Kerman, the regime seized the opportunity to drum up support by all its supporters throughout the country; a stampede during the ceremony left more than seventy dead and

forced to delay the funerals. Then on the 8<sup>th</sup>, the regime launched its retaliation, apparently a trompe-l'oeil and above all for internal use: the dozens of missiles launched on two American bases in Iraq seem to have caused no casualties. But the same day, a Ukrainian plane that had just taken off from Tehran crashed, killing its 176 passengers, including 140 Iranians. The regime denied any

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responsibility for four days, even talking about a foreign media conspiracy. But on the 11<sup>th</sup>, the *Pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guards) had to admit having shot down the plane “by mistake”. This revelation triggered an explosion of anger, expressed in a new wave of demonstrations, repressed just as ferociously as those of November.

The month had already begun with unusual news marking the tension in the country and the regime’s concern about its growing rejection: in early January, several of those responsible for the November crackdown went to the cities where it had claimed the most victims to distribute aid, a paltry attempt to regain public support. Thus in Mahshahr and then in Ahvaz, in the Arabic-speaking province of Khuzistan, the commander-in-chief of the *Pasdaran*, Hossein Salami, arrived on 1<sup>st</sup> January to distribute financial aid to couples who had to get married and food parcels to underprivileged families. Six weeks earlier, the same *pasdaran* on their armoured tanks had left behind piles of corpses...

The next day, in an unprecedented criticism, some 100 conservative students and academics published on *Telegram* an open letter to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, warning him of the people’s total loss of confidence in his government: if this growing gap is not closed, they wrote, “there will be nothing left of the regime’s legitimacy”. Reminding Khamenei of his declarations in which he called for respect for the law, the signatories reproached him for having marginalised parliament by setting up an Economic Council composed of the heads of the executive, legislative and judicial powers: it is this Council, of which the signatories contest the

constitutional legality, that sparked everything off by deciding in mid-November to triple the price of petrol... The text also denounces the use of the terms “thugs” (used by Khamenei himself) and “rioters”, which encouraged the security forces to use violence against legitimate protests, firstly due to “political corruption, inefficiency and ignorance of the government...” (*Radio Farda*)

After the carrot of food and cash distributions, the regime continued its usual use of the stick: *HRANA* estimates that at least 7.133 participants in the November protests were arrested. There were also a number of extrajudicial executions, the latest victim being Hashim Mouradi, whose body was found in early January in Javanrud near a river, bearing traces of torture (*WKI*) – like that of Nadir Rezaei, arrested during the protests, and whose body was returned to his family at the end of December (*Kurdistan 24*). Iranian journalists working abroad have reported repeated telephone threats from Intelligence since November, especially those based in the UK, who have been threatened if they do not resign with kidnapping “on the streets of London” or retaliation against their families who have remained in Iran (*Radio Farda*).

In Kurdistan, where around 400 Kurdish activists were arrested in 2019, the government continues its repression. During the first week of the month, political prisoner Hoshmand Alipour was sentenced to death in Sanandaj for “armed rebellion against the state”, based, according to *Amnesty International*, on a confession extracted through abuse, which Alipour later retracted (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/1690/2020/en/>). Mohammed Qadir

(Ostadghader according to *HRANA*) from Saqqez, who was arrested with him, was sentenced to five years for the same reason. Their lawyer has appealed. Both were arrested in August 2018 and both deny participating in an armed attack on a security base in Saqqez. Also in Sanandaj, environmental activist Homian Bahmani was sentenced to two years and six months’ imprisonment for “membership of a Kurdish opposition party”. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the activist Madhi (or Mobin) Moradi, arrested on the 3<sup>rd</sup> in Kermanshah, was sentenced to six years imprisonment for “cooperation with an opposition group”. Being already under a suspended sentence of execution since 2013 for “membership of a Kurdish party”, he is therefore now at risk of an execution (*WKI*).

Many other activists have been arrested: Abdulrahim Nazri, also in Kermanshah, Gabriel Azizi in Sarpol Zahab, and the writer and poet Aram Fathi in Marivan... (*WKI*, *HRANA*) Sometimes, due to the regime’s blackout, arrests are known belatedly. For example, *HRANA* was only able to announce on the 9<sup>th</sup> the arrest of seven civil rights activists on December 26<sup>th</sup>: Mahrokh Rousta, Kaveh Mozaffari, Faraz Roshan, Jelveh Javaheri, Forough Saminia, Ahmad Zahedi Langeroudi and Houman Tahriri, arrested during the commemoration ceremony held forty days after the assassination of Navid Behboudi, one of the victims of the demonstrations. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, Poshtivan Afsar, arrested during the demonstrations, was sentenced in Marivan to nine years imprisonment for “belonging to an opposition group”.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, *HRANA* issued chilling reports on the casualties from the November

demonstrations. Aged between 19 and 30 years old, injured by bullets, sometimes buckshot, in their feet, chest and thorax, they dare not go to hospitals, which are under surveillance, and have life-threatening infections. In Alborz, a 19-year-old injured young man died of infection. Sometimes volunteer doctors come to treat them at home despite the danger. According to one source in Qods, "on the first night of the demonstration, 60 to 70 injured people were transferred to the hospital in police vans and were treated under police control. Some of them were interrogated and released while they were being treated". Hospitals sometimes refused to treat the wounded or demanded very large sums of money from them, as in Ahvaz, where an injured man, unable to pay US\$2,000, was held in hospital. Security sometimes entered operating theatres, taking the injured as soon as the operation was over, sometimes taking away the bodies without the families' consent. Mohammad Maleki, an injured man who died on the 26<sup>th</sup> after being interviewed in his hospital room in Tehran, had time to denounce the journalist's statements that he had been injured by other demonstrators, explaining that he had been afraid to contradict him. Sometimes the bullets that killed their relatives are billed to the families, who are forced to bury them at night. Another wounded man from Tehran, Amir Ojani, died in hospital without seeing his family because he was placed in isolation by Security in his room for the last ten days of his life...

At the end of the month, according to KMMK, several Kurdish teachers who took part in the November demonstrations received prison sentences for "treason" and "propaganda

against the Islamic Republic" ranging from three to thirteen years – a term imposed on Mohammed Ramazan, chairman of the Bojnurd Professional Teachers' Council (WKI).

At the same time, the unfortunately usual flood of condemnations in Iran has not stopped. On 1<sup>st</sup> January, we learned of the sentencing on 25 December of five common-law prisoners in Tehran to 74 lashes each in public. Other whipping sentences amounted to 99 and even 149 lashes. On the same day, it was learned that a prisoner accused of murder had been hanged on the 25<sup>th</sup>. HRANA recalls that from 10 October 2018 to 8 October 2019, 134 people were sentenced to death and 242 executions were carried out, including 16 publicly. However, these already horrifying figures only concern executions made public: according to independent sources and human rights associations, 72% of executions of prisoners remain secret.

On 11 January, the regime's official admission of its responsibility for the destruction of the Ukrainian plane caused an explosion of anger throughout the country. Over the next four days, demonstrations affected 21 cities across the country and 21 universities. Cities: Esfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Sari, Kerman, Shiraz, Amol, Babol, Gorgan, Rasht, Sanandaj, Tehran, Karaj, Semnan, Arak, Yazd, Kermanshah, Qods, Zanjan, Ahvaz, Qazvin. Universities: Arak University, Damghan University, Tehran University, Karaj Campus, Shahid Beheshti University, Esfahan University of Technology, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Khajeh Nasir Toosi University of Technology, University of Alzahra, Iranian University of Science and Technology, Babol

Noshirvani University of Technology, Kurdistan University, Bu-Ali Sina University, Razi University, Tabriz University of Islamic Art, Sharif University of Technology, Tehran University of Art and Medical Sciences, and Tabriz University. Students were at the forefront of the mobilization as many of the victims of the crash were students and academics travelling to Canada *via* Ukraine. In Tehran, demonstrations started after a vigil held for the victims at Amir Kabir University, which escalated into violence following tear gas fire by riot police and the presence of numerous provocative agents...

The demonstrations triggered by this revelation were characterized by slogans aimed particularly at the *Pasdaran* and the Supreme Leader. In Tehran, the following was frequently heard: "A government of guards ... We reject, we reject", and also "Death to liars!" and "Death to the dictator!" along with calls for the resignation of the Supreme Leader and other leaders. Security forces were deployed in large numbers around the universities. A professor at Tehran University observed that security measures were strict even around Imam Sadeq University, where students are yet carefully selected to become officials of the foreign or intelligence ministries.

In Sanandaj and Kermanshah, many students took to the streets on the news of the Tehran protests, chanting slogans against Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei similar to those of the November protests. Security forces responded by occupying Kurdish cities and repressing the demonstrators, arresting dozens of Kurds. According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Association (KMMK), the *Etelaat* (Intelligence Service) arrested

activist Sirous Abbasi, his wife and brother Azad in Dehgolan. In Sanandaj, security forces arrested three students who participated in the protests, Moslem Solimani, Zaniar Ahmedpour, and Arshad Atabak. In Kermanshah, a student from Razi University was arrested, and security forces threatened those who dared to demonstrate. In Marivan, a young man was arrested and activist Eran Rapikar was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for "membership of a Kurdish opposition party".

Security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, resulting in an unknown number of casualties. According to *Amnesty International*, officers were monitoring arrivals at hospitals, resulting in several hospitals in Tehran refusing to admit the injured for fear of arrest, and at least one woman was sexually assaulted. Two others, injured on the 12<sup>th</sup>, were still unaccounted for after a week. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the judiciary confirmed the arrest of thirty people, including the British ambassador to Iran. *HRANA* has published on its website a list of twenty people arrested (<https://www.en-hrana.org/an-upadte-on-iran-january-protests>), including Hossein Karoubi (son of Mehdi Karoubi, candidate for the 2005 presidential elections). Some were arrested for attending ceremonies to honour the victims.

According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Association *KMMK*, ten people have been arrested in Ilam, Sanandaj, Dehgolan, Marivan, Khoy and Kermanshah: 1. Amir Ali Majd was beaten and arrested by Security in his bookshop on the 18<sup>th</sup> in Ilam. 2. Arman Mohammadi was arrested by *pasdaran* in Sanandaj on the 17<sup>th</sup>. 3. Cyrus Abbasi and his wife

Farideh Veisi, arrested on 14 January by the *Etelaat* in Dehgolan, were transferred to Sanandaj. Cyrus' brother Azad, who came to the *Etelaat* office to follow the case, was also arrested. 4. Keyvan Kouti, arrested on the road at Sarpol Zahab, was interned in Kermanshah on the 14<sup>th</sup>. 5. Amanj Nikpay was arrested by *Etelaat* on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and his father, Khaled Nikpay, who came to the office to follow up on the case, was arrested, interrogated and released on bail. In addition, Mohammad Sheykh Kanlu was arrested in Khoy by the *Pasdaran*, Mohammad Sheykh Kanlu was detained by *Etelaat* in Urmia and Saman Abdolalizadeh was arrested in Kermanshah. Three videos covering the four days of demonstrations were posted on *YouTube* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfcJhhEGL1AU>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OTFhgIp-78>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbn8S532mF8>).

Soleimani's targeted murder in Iraq was a new motive for repression, as journalists who did not preface his name with the word "martyr" were bothered. According to *Hengaw*, Kurdish journalist Wahid Fatahi of Pawa (Paveh, Kermanshah province) was arrested for this reason in mid-month by the *Pasdaran* and held incommunicado. Also in Pawa, journalist and activist Muzaffar Walad-Beigi, who runs the *Dengi Nouriyaw* channel on *Telegram*, was reportedly arrested on the same charge for sharing a news article from a pro-government website, *Khabaronline (Kurdistan 24)*. At the same time, Sardar Azami, a Kurdish man who had been missing since the November demonstrations, probably abducted by Security Police, was found by his family in a Tehran

morgue after a gruelling search lasting several months.

Social media videos show crowds gathered outside Amir Kabir University of Technology in Tehran and other locations in the capital on the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> to mourn the victims and express their fury confronted by the police and tear gas. A clip shared on *Twitter* by *New York Times* reporter Farnaz Fassihi shows the crowd facing the police and chanting "Our hands are empty, put down your batons". The Center for Human Rights in Iran (*CHRI*) called on the government to stop the repression of the protests and also called on all UN bodies and the international community to put pressure on the Iranian government to guarantee the right to peaceful protest. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, *CHRI* appealed to the European Union, accusing it of giving the "green light" to the regime for its violence against civilians through its lack of reaction.

At the borders, the killings of Kurdish porters, the *kolbars*, also continued. In 2019, 71 *kolbars* had been killed and at least 138 wounded, the majority shot by the regime's repressive forces, 10% by mines or avalanches. During the first week of the month, several were wounded near Mako, Chaldiran, Sardasht, Khoy and Piranshahr, two of them seriously by border guards near Khoy and another in Chaldiran; another was killed near Sardasht. Besides, in the middle of the month, several suicides caused by desperation due to the economic situation were reported in Kamyaran, Sardasht and Bokeran (*WKI*). In the last week of January, security forces ambushed a *kolbar* vehicle in Selas-Babacani (Kermanshah), seriously injuring one of them. Two others were injured on the 24<sup>th</sup> near Sardasht and Salmas, and another on the 26<sup>th</sup> near

Piranshahr. Finally, on the 28<sup>th</sup>, two other Piranshahr bearers were hospitalized in Kurdistan of Iraq after being injured near Haji Omaran. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, another was shot and wounded near Oshnavieh (Shino). On the 31<sup>st</sup>, a Saqqez porter died of hypother-

mia when his group of porters lost its way in a snowstorm near Baneh.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, *Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI)* released its annual report on human rights violations for 2019. The 42-

page document brings together 4259 reports gathered by courageous informants, often from *HRANA*, from a variety of sources (<https://www.enhrana.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Hrana-Annual-Report-2019.pdf>).

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## IRAQ: KURDISTAN TRIES TO CALM AN OUT-OF-CONTROL IRAQI CRISIS AS ISIS RAISES ITS HEAD AGAIN

**J**anuary was truly chaotic in a country hit by a political crisis unprecedented since the fall of the Ba'athist regime. On the one hand, popular protests against corruption and the lack of public services and employment continued. Following the resignation of Prime Minister Abdul-Madi on 29 November, and faced with the impossibility of finding an acceptable successor, the caretaker government found little response other than continuing repression. On the other hand, the targeted assassination of Iranian General Soleimani at Baghdad airport on the 3<sup>rd</sup> by an American drone provoked an unprecedented escalation in the Iranian-American confrontation on Iraqi soil. Besides, the Jihadist organisation ISIS, taking advantage of the general disorder, further amplified its attacks, especially in the territories disputed between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region.

In this extremely tense context, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been very reluctant to commit itself. Indeed, the Region shares hundreds of kilometres of border with Iran, while maintaining good relations with Washington, which are indispensable in the fight against ISIS. Finally, the possibility of the departure of Prime Minister Adil Abdul-

Mahdi, with whom a *modus vivendi* had been found, also worries Erbil, because relations with his replacement could be more delicate... The KRG's representation in the United Kingdom summed up the KRG's position perfectly at the end of January in its monthly letter: "The [Iraqi] parliament [...] has adopted a resolution aimed at expelling foreign troops from Iraq [...]. If this were to happen, it would put the Kurdistan Region in a very delicate situation because [it] could lead to a security vacuum and the re-emergence of ISIS. We have therefore urged all parties to defuse conflicts and tensions, because we do not want Iraq to become the battleground for the resolution of the conflicts of the great powers".

The confrontation between Washington and Tehran on Iraqi soil had already intensified before Soleimani's death. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq renewed their December 31 attack on the American embassy. But *Al-Monitor* notes that there were fewer participants than the day before, with only members of *Kataib Hezbollah*, *Kataib Sayyed al-Shohada*, the *Badr* organization, *Saraya al-Khorasani* and *Asaib Ahl al-Haq* participating, while many other *Hashd al-Shaabi* militias abstained. Since the start of the protests on 1<sup>st</sup> October, public opinion has also quite turned

against the pro-Iranian militias, accused of murdering large numbers of protesters. Their attitude in front of the embassy has confirmed for many Iraqis their image as defenders of the Iranian regime: almost no Iraqi flags, photos of Ali Khamenei, slogans such as "Qasem Soleimani is our leader" or "USA out, free Iran!" (as opposed to the protesters' "Iran out, free Iraq!")... Finally, many wondered how these militiamen had been able to enter the Green Zone so easily when the security forces killed hundreds of demonstrators wanting to do the same!

On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, on the orders of the US President, a drone strike near Baghdad airport killed Iranian General Qasim Soleimani and the most important leader of the Iraqi militia, the Iraqi-Iranian Abu Mahdi al-Mouhandis. Immediately, many foreign workers in the oil sector, from Americans to Chinese, began to leave the country, and the Iraqi dinar lost 3% against the dollar. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, all foreign airlines except *Qatar Airways* suspended their flights to Baghdad, and the European Aviation Safety Agency imposed restrictions on overflying the country, which were not lifted until the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, militias warned the Iraqi military to stay away from American bases. On the same day, several rockets targeted Baghdad's Green Zone, Balad



Air Base, 80 km to the north, and several Mosul bases hosting anti-ISIS coalition forces. The next day, three more rockets struck near the Green Zone.

Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi condemned the American strike and called for a special session of parliament to vote on a resolution calling for the immediate expulsion of American troops. The leader of the PDK group, Vian Sabri, said that the Kurdish MPs would not participate, preferring to remain neutral “in the interests of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region”, adding that “the Sunni representatives and certain representatives of other blocs” would not participate either: “We do not want Iraq to be the scene of an inter-state conflict”. The PKU expressed a similar position: “There are many violations of Iraqi sovereignty and steps must be taken to stop them. But not only against one party”, one of its leaders told AFP on condition of anonymity. It was therefore in the absence of Kurdish legislators and the majority of Sunnis that parliament passed a resolution calling on the government to expel foreign military personnel from the country. Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr, calling it insufficient, called for tougher measures and threatened to “activate” dormant sections of his militias.

The Iranian response came on the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup>, with twenty-two ballistic missiles launched on two Iraqi bases, Ain al-Assad (Anbar) and the other near Erbil, which also host anti-ISIS coalition forces. The missiles caused no casualties. The next day, more rockets hit the Green Zone, again without causing any casualties. The three main Kurdish leaders, the President of the Region, its Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament reiterated their call

for de-escalation in a joint statement: “With regard to recent events, and in particular those of this morning, the Kurdistan Region reaffirms that a military solution will in no way solve the problems. It supports the de-escalation of the situation and seeking dialogue and diplomatic solutions to the problems. It [...] urges all parties to refrain from dragging the Kurdistan Region into rivalry”. For Kurdistan, directly confronted by ISIS, the support of the US-led military coalition remains vital, and its leaders have urged its member states not to allow the group’s revival.

On the 9<sup>th</sup>, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Iranian ambassador and notified him of its condemnation of the attack on Iraqi bases. At the same time, Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi asked Washington to prepare the withdrawal of the American military. Not only did Washington reject the request, but the next day the State Department threatened to limit Iraq’s access to a large account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York where \$35 billion of its oil revenues are deposited. These threats led to a further fall in the dinar of 3%, which necessitated intervention by the Iraqi Central bank.

After a visit by the American Assistant Secretary for the Middle East, David Schenker, the President of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, stressed at a press conference that it was not the “right time” for American forces to leave the country. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, the Iraqi Prime Minister went to Erbil, then to Sulaimaniyeh, to reassure the Kurdish leaders that he was not seeking “hostilities” with anyone, including Washington, and to defend better Kurdish-Iraqi military cooperation

against ISIS (AFP). For their part, the KRG leaders stressed their interest in an increased cooperation with the federal security forces... in coordination with the US-led coalition (ISHM).

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, eight rockets struck Balad base again, injuring four Iraqis, and on the 14<sup>th</sup>, eight rockets struck Camp Taji, another Iraqi base north of Baghdad, with no casualties. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, Moqtada Al-Sadr called from Iran for a mass demonstration on the 24<sup>th</sup> against the US presence in Iraq. Hadi al-Amiri, al-Mouhandis’ likely successor as leader of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, supported the call. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, the demonstrators demanded the closure of all US bases and the offices of US security companies in Iraq and the closure of Iraqi airspace to US fighter and intelligence aircrafts. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Iraqi parliament approved a bill terminating the judicial immunity that had been granted to the US military in 2014, when they came to support the Iraqi army against ISIS. However, President Salih called for continued cooperation with the United States in discussions with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and President Trump, which led to his being threatened by militia leaders that he would be “banned from Baghdad”. While the US military was considering protecting its settlements in Iraq by deploying anti-missile systems, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, three rockets and five mortar shells targeted the US embassy in Baghdad, injuring at least one person. The unclaimed attacks were followed by another on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Somewhat overshadowed by Iranian-American tensions, anti-government protests nonetheless continued throughout the month. Their increasingly anti-Iranian stance earned them the



hostility of the militias, to whom many attacks on demonstrators have been attributed. Not only did the authorities do nothing to prevent them, let alone bring the perpetrators to justice, but in some cases they appear to have been complicit. These attacks continued in January. On 4<sup>th</sup> January, an activist was shot dead in Baghdad by unknown perpetrators, and the following day militiamen opened fire and injured three demonstrators in Nassiriya, where an improvised explosive device killed activist Ouday al-Jabiri on the 6<sup>th</sup> January and another attack on the 8<sup>th</sup> injured at least eight demonstrators. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, protesters launched new demonstrations in Baghdad and the south of the country to force politicians to speed up the appointment of a new government. In Dhi-Qar, they issued a week-long ultimatum. According to the judicial authorities, at that time, 91 demonstrators were being held in detention awaiting criminal trials. On the same day, TV *Dijlah* reporter Ahmed Abdul-Samad and cameraman Safaa Ghali were shot dead in Basra. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the city's journalists launched a social media protest campaign against the killings of journalists entitled "I am next". On the 13<sup>th</sup>, activist Hassan Hadi Mhalhal was shot dead in Dhi-Qar. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the news channel *al-Hurra* announced the closure of its Baghdad bureau following threats from militias, denouncing the government's inaction.

Despite pressure from the streets, the appointment of a new Prime Minister continued to stall in parliament, subject to endless negotiations between the two main alliances... and to Iranian influence. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, rumours circulated of *Sayroon* and *al-Fatah's* support for a new nomination of Al-Mahdi. The *Ataa*

bloc, belonging to the *al-Fatah* coalition, asked the religious authorities in Najaf to express their support for this possibility, which had already been rejected by the street... On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the President, the interim Prime Minister and the Speaker of Parliament met to seek a solution, while parliamentary sources gave reason to hope for a forthcoming agreement on several possible candidates...

On the 17<sup>th</sup>, demonstrators blocked streets in several provinces, intensifying their pressure for a new independent Prime Minister. Again, the security forces responded with excessive use of force, using tear gas and live ammunition and killing at least ten demonstrators, including photojournalist and volunteer ambulance driver Yousouf Sattar. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, an altercation took place live between a *Dijlah* TV interviewer and a government spokesman over the number of demonstrators killed by the security forces. Following this incident, on the 28<sup>th</sup>, the police forcibly closed the TV station's Baghdad office. Also on the 20<sup>th</sup>, *Amnesty International* again called for respect for Iraqis' right to demonstrate, as two candidates appeared to be emerging from inter-party negotiations: former minister Mohammad Tawfiq Allawi and former intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kazemi.

On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the government announced the extension of the unemployment benefit programme to 900.000 people, instead of 150.000 previously. Beneficiaries will receive 175,000 dinars (about €130) per month for three months. This measure in no way convinced the demonstrators to stop their movement, and on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the authorities had to suspend oil production in Nassiriya following the blocking

of access roads to the oil field. On the same day, armed men killed a civilian near the protest site in central Basra. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Moqtada al-Sadr announced in a shock statement that he was withdrawing his support for the protesters. His supporters immediately left the protests. Immediately after this announcement, security forces in Baghdad again launched a violent operation using live ammunition, pellet guns and tear gas to clear the streets of demonstrators. In Nassiriya, unidentified gunmen opened fire on the demonstrators and set fire to their tents to disperse them. The crackdown was also very violent in Basra. In two days, a total of 12 people were killed and 230 injured. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the government violence was condemned by the ambassadors of 16 countries, including France, the United Kingdom and the United States. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the Iraqi President gave the parliamentary blocs until 1<sup>st</sup> February to appoint a new Prime Minister, warning that if they could not reach an agreement, he would use his constitutional powers to choose a candidate he deemed qualified and acceptable to parliament and the people.

At the same time, dozens of unclaimed attacks by armed men or using bombs have further increased the sense of chaos throughout the country. Protesters have been targeted, as well as militia leaders, border guards and police guarding oil fields. In Dhi-Qar province, several improvised bombs exploded on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> without causing any casualties. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, three French and one Iraqi working for the NGO "SOS *Chrétien*s d'Orient" ("Assistance for Eastern Christians") were abducted in Baghdad.

US-Iranian tensions led to the departure of several military

contingents from Coalition member countries and the suspension of its activities, officially from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> (but on the 16<sup>th</sup>, a spokesman for the Prime Minister denied their resumption). The jihadist organisation ISIS obviously took advantage of the situation. On 1<sup>st</sup> January, Kurdish security official Ranj Talabani told the *Times*: “We think [ISIS] has gone beyond regrouping [and] is now back on the scene of operations”, warning: “Next year will be worse”. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, the jihadists killed three Iraqi soldiers and kidnapped a fourth in Daquq (Kirkuk), where two more night attacks the following week left four soldiers dead and three wounded. The insecurity is such that many Kurdish villagers in the district prefer to flee. In Anana, the last remaining Kurdish village in the far south of Daquq, villagers in *Rudaw* said they were relying only on themselves, while the Iraqi military minimized the problem... On the 13<sup>th</sup>, an improvised bomb killed two policemen south of Mosul and an attack on the Jordanian border left one border guard dead and three wounded. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, a village in the area between Diyala and Salahaddin was attacked with mortars, with no casualties. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, fighting

in Tarmiyah, near Baqubah, pitted the Iraqi army against the jihadists for four hours. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the military post at Tall al-Theib (Kirkuk) was attacked and one soldier was killed. On the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, two improvised explosive devices injured four civilians in Mosul province, and on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, a resident of al-Hadar was kidnapped and killed. Other bombs killed a policeman in Diyala on the 27<sup>th</sup> and injured two civilians on the 28<sup>th</sup> in Mosul, where a third bomb killed a man and injured three children on the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the same day, a soldier was killed by a sniper in Diyala, two others were killed in an ambush on the Kirkuk-Baghdad road, and two others in an attack on their checkpoint in Daquq. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, near Qara Tepe (east of Khanaqin), seven civilians, mostly students, were kidnapped.

In Kirkuk, the publication at the beginning of the month of the Directorate of Education's recruitment list caused a crisis: out of the 2,500 names published, there were only 500 Kurds. The Kurds obviously protested, while graduates from other communities were demonstrating their opposition to a strict ethnic balance, which they condemned as preventing neces-

sary recruitments. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Bashir Hadad, disapproving of the list, announced that the Parliamentary Committee on Education would summon Kirkuk Director General of Education and the Federal Minister of Education (NRT). On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, dozens of Kurdish graduates demonstrated outside the Kirkuk Education Directorate to denounce ethnic discrimination. A complaint was lodged, and the Kurdish parties in the province sent a delegation to Baghdad on this and other issues depending from the province's administration.

Concerning Kurdistan's domestic policy, the draft law on the reform of civil servants' salaries and pensions was adopted on the 16<sup>th</sup> by Erbil parliament after months of discussion.

Finally, on the health front, *Rudaw* announced on the 26<sup>th</sup> that Iraqi and Kurdish officials had begun to apply precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus epidemic in the region, including the evacuation of Iraqi students from Wuhan, China. Travellers arriving through Erbil International Airport will be screened.

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## TURKEY: LIBYAN ADVENTURE AND ISOLATION OUTSIDE, REPRESSION OF CRITICS INSIDE

**I**f the Turkish government's warlike policy is aimed at making the population forget the economic situation, then new operations are to be expected. Indeed, the economic statistics published in January by *TurkStat* are still as bad as ever: for December 2019 inflation is 1.74%, *i.e.* 11.84% over a year (and 15.18% if we compare the aver-

ages over 12 months); the unemployment figures for October, the last known, show a rate of 13.4%, slightly down from September's, but up 1.8% from October 2018, and above all, for the 15-24 age group, the rate climbs to 25.3%, an annual increase of 3%. In addition, Ali Babacan, former AKP Minister of Economy, drew attention to the uncontrolled increase in interest paid by the State: from

57 billion Turkish pounds in 2017, 74 billion in 2018 and 103 billion in 2019, they should rise to 139 billion Turkish pounds in 2020, an increase of 144% in three years! On 17 January, the main Turkish metalworkers' unions, *Turk-Metal*, *Birleşik Metal-İş...* organising 140,000 workers, especially in the automobile industry, announced that they would call a strike in early February, after employers'

organisations had proposed wage increases below inflation for the next three years. The employers retaliated by initiating a lock-out which immediately provoked partial strikes.

Turkey does not fare much better in terms of corruption. In the 2019 “Corruption Perceptions Index” published on 23 January by *Transparency International*, it ranks 91<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries and territories with 39 points, down 11 points and 38 places from 2018. This places it in the “top three” regressions since 2013 for this index. For E. Oya Özarslan, President of the International Transparency Association, this reduces the attractiveness of the country for investors, and “urgently requires a return to a fully democratic system, where agencies and rules work and where there are control mechanisms” (*Bianet*). Among the cases of corruption that have recently emerged is that revealed by Murat Ağirel, an editorialist with the daily *Yeniçağ*, close to the party İYİ. On 1<sup>st</sup> January, just after the pro-AKP *Star* and *Güneş* dailies had closed for economic reasons, Ağirel revealed that the former Istanbul AKP municipality had spent 57 million pounds on advertising between 2017 and 2019, 40 million of which went to “pool media” (*havuz medyası*), i.e. pro-AKP media. Another recent scandal concerns the future “Kanal İstanbul”, yet another pharaonic project in the line of the new bridge over the Bosphorus and the new Istanbul airport, particularly dear to the Turkish President. The objective is to link the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara by an artificial waterway 45 km long... but perhaps also to make considerable real estate profits. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the daily *Cumhuriyet* revealed that in 2012, Berat Albayrak, the president’s son-in-law, had bought land near the planned route.

Originally classified as agricultural, its value increased enormously after it was reclassified as building land by the Ministry of the Environment and Urban Planning. On 21<sup>st</sup> of January, the HDP applied to the Istanbul Administrative Court for the cancellation of the project’s impact assessment report, approved by the Ministry on 17 January, as the affected population had not really been consulted. In 2017, the online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia* was blocked in Turkey following four articles... one of which described in a rather critical manner Albayrak’s policy as energy minister after 2015, and especially his links with the oil company *Powertrans*, which sold ISIS’s oil...

Another subject of controversy has been the question of sending Syrian fighters paid by Turkey to Libya. Following the signing on 27 November of an agreement covering military cooperation and maritime borders between the two countries (rejected by the European Union because it completely disregards Greece’s exclusive economic zone), the Turkish President submitted a motion to parliament on 30 December authorising the sending of Turkish troops to Libya to support the Government of National Unity against Marshal Haftar. The pro-AKP press applauded the return of the Ottoman Empire... Several Turkish officials mentioned the sending of Syrian fighters and the Arab League, denouncing on 1<sup>st</sup> January any unilateral action that might contribute to the military escalation, warned Turkey “not to send terrorists to Libya”. Supported by the AKP and its far-right ally MHP, the motion was approved by parliament on 2<sup>nd</sup> January by 325 votes to 184. The other parties, HDP, CHP, TIP and İYİ voted against it. On behalf of the HDP, Tülay Hatimoğulları described the motion as “the very embodi-

ment of the expansionist policy” of the government and denounced Turkish interference: “It is a long time since an arms embargo was decreed by the Security Council [...]. Who broke this embargo for the first time? Turkey”. The day before, the former editor-in-chief of *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Abdulrahman Al-Rashid, had made the same accusations in his article “Turkey, hypocrisy after hypocrisy”.

On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the President Erdoğan announced the sending of the first troops, indicating that some of the fighting units would not be Turkish soldiers. Asking the question of their identity, the CHP MP Utku Çakırözer warned the next day in an interview with *Bianet* that “Turkey could be held legally responsible for possible illegal acts or violations of the rights” of these “unidentified personnel”, members of SADAT (Turkish private military company, see the information note of the *French Centre for Research on Intelligence*: <https://cf2r.org/actualite/turquie-mercenaires-president-erdogan/>) the Free Syrian Army, or others. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, the head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, denounced the Turkish deployment. The prospect of the arrival of jihadist mercenaries in Libya worries Europe. For the French President, this dispatch, which “links two theatres of operations”, North Africa and the Middle East, risks facilitating the emergence of “terrorist centres” in the Sahel and Libya (*France 24*). This concern has given rise to several attempts at diplomatic mediation, including a conference on Libya on the 19<sup>th</sup> in Berlin in which the Turkish President participated. It ended with a joint call for an end to all interference and in particular the suspension of all military movements. But on the 29<sup>th</sup>, French *Rafale* aircrafts from the *Charles-de-Gaulle* aircraft carrier caught in the act a ship char-

tered by Ankara delivering armoured vehicles in the port of Tripoli, escorted by one of the four Turkish frigates present in Libyan waters! An even more worrying prospect, according to French intelligence, some of the 1.500 to 2.000 combatants already transported from Syria took advantage of the voyage to desert towards Italy... (*Le Monde*)

Internally, the government continues to harass its most determined opposition, the “pro-Kurdish” HDP party, from which it has already dismissed 32 elected members. It is obviously trying to prevent its next congress, scheduled for 23 February in Ankara. At the start of the month, the authorities banned several meetings of municipal councils in districts whose co-mayors had already been dismissed, in Cizre and Idil (Şırnak) and in Sur (Diyarbakir). In Lice (Diyarbakir), dozens of Kurds were arrested, including two HDP members from the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality. In Nusaybin (Mardin), ten people were arrested in several villages, including an Assyrian priest (see below), on charges of “belonging to a terrorist organization”. In Diyarbakir, the pro-AKP administrator dismissed all municipal staff, and two municipal councillors from Bağlar were replaced by administrators (WKI). On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the *Mezopotamya* agency announced that six municipal councillors in Sur (Diyarbakir) had been dismissed on the basis of pending lawsuits for “membership in a terrorist organization” (*Bianet*). The AKP also announced on the 11<sup>th</sup> the launch of a campaign to “poach” nearly one hundred opposition mayors, with a target of five rallies a week. One of the means of pressure used seems to be the promise to pay their municipality’s debts.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the Istanbul HDP

office was targeted at about 3 p.m. by a pistol attack that caused no casualties. The perpetrator of the seven shots, an apparently isolated individual, fled to the Security Directorate of Beyoğlu, located in the same street, where he was detained. An investigation has been opened. The HDP, which decided to file a complaint, blamed the government’s anti-HDP “provocative” speeches. The author was charged on 21 December with “using an unregistered firearm” and “disturbing public order”. In Izmir, 12 HDP members were arrested. In Şanlıurfa, seven people were detained in several districts while the provincial governor banned all gatherings for one month. In Mardin, a court decided to keep Nusaybin’s deposed co-Mayor Sara Kaya in detention. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, the HDP was notified by the police of an investigation launched against its spokesperson Günay Kubilay for “insulting the Turkish nation and state”. The attacks against the HDP went so far as to target the spectators of the play from *Devran* (“Destiny”), the collection of short stories by Selahattin Demirtaş, which was performed in Istanbul on the 11<sup>th</sup> in front of, among others, several prominent members of the CHP. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said in a speech the next day: “You cannot clean the blood on your hands with theatre plays”. The artist Lale Mansur answered him scathingly on *Bianet* that, instead of attacking artists, he would better do his job and solve the country’s many problems: “Investigate the files of the murdered women, the files of the victims of torture”.

Despite the pressure, the HDP announced that it had completed preparations for its February congress.

Better not to belong to a religious minority in AKP and MHP

Turkey... On the 17<sup>th</sup>, the CHP and İYİ submitted a proposal to the Istanbul Metropolitan City Council to recognize as places of worship the djemevis (*cemevi*, places of Alevi ceremonies). It was rejected by the AKP-MHP majority in the Council, which argued that it was not a matter for the municipality but for the parliament. However, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Izmir had thus recognised seven djemevis in the city, despite opposition from the AKP and MHP. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, Istanbul’s Djemevi *Pir Sultan* was attacked at night by individuals who broke a window and tagged death threats inside. An investigation was opened and the governor of Istanbul condemned a “heinous” attack.

In Nusaybin, three Syriac Christians, including a priest, Sefer (Aho) Bileçen and the head of the village of Üçköy, were arrested on the 9<sup>th</sup> and transferred to the anti-terrorist section of the Mardin gendarmerie. Although no official reason for the arrests was given, a Christian source informed *Bianet* that they were due to an anonymous testimony that they had given food to a PKK member. A total of 12 persons were detained during searches in the villages of Eskihişar, Üçköy and Üçyol. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, Bileçen was held in detention on charges of “aiding and abetting a terrorist organization”, before being released pending trial, the court having ruled that there was no risk of his absconding. It was only a few days after these arrests that it was learned that an elderly Christian couple had been kidnapped on the 11<sup>th</sup> in Mehre or Kovankaya (Şırnak), as neighbours had not reported it for fear of reprisals. The Federation of Syriac Associations (SÜDEF) reported that Christians in Kurdistan of Turkey have been subjected to killings, abductions and arrests for several months.

Abroad, Turkey will have to face new sanctions. The European Union is preparing to sanction the country for its natural gas exploration and drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean that violate the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus. On 22<sup>nd</sup>, the head of European diplomacy Josep Borrell said the EU was preparing a list of Turkish personalities to be sanctioned (*Euronews*). On the same day, the US government indicated its intention to impose fines of increasing amounts for “contempt of court” on the Turkish state-owned *Halkbank* if it persists in refusing to appear in the case of circumvention of US sanctions against Iran. The prosecutors want to double the fine each week: it would rise from \$1 million for each day of non-appearance to \$1.8 billion at the end of the eighth week! An impossible choice for the Turkish authorities: appearing would give the case publicity that would further damage its reputation, but refusing would lead to an economically disastrous break with the US financial system.

Another problem with Europe, the Belgian Court of Cassation definitively acquitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> some thirty alleged PKK members accused of recruiting young Kurds in Europe. Launched in 2006, the proceedings had already led to two similar decisions in 2016 and 2017, against which Turkey and the Brussels Prosecutor’s Office had appealed, but which were confirmed last year by the Brussels Court of Appeal. According to the final verdict, the PKK is to be considered as a “non-state armed force” involved in a “non-international” armed conflict to which the Belgian anti-terrorist law does not therefore apply. Although Belgian Foreign Minister Philippe Goffin, clearly

concerned about new tensions with Turkey, insisted that this would not prevent PKK members from being charged “for crimes and other offences under the Penal Code of which they are guilty” (*AFP*), it was nonetheless a slap in the face for Ankara, which summoned the Belgian ambassador to protest. Conversely, Zübeyir Aydar, president of the Brussels-based parliament of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK), welcomed the “historical verdict”. Lawyer Jan Fermon said he hoped the decision would allow for a “political solution to the Kurdish question at European level” (*ANF*).

In a completely different area, an earthquake struck Sivrice (Elazığ) on the 24<sup>th</sup> just before 9 pm. A magnitude of 6,7, with fourteen aftershocks of magnitude greater than 4, it was felt throughout the east of the country and caused at least 41 deaths and more than 1.500 injuries (estimates of the 27<sup>th</sup>). While the following night was icy, from -8 to -12°C, more than 1.000 homes were destroyed. The HDP accused the government of blocking aid from Kurdish organisations (*WKI*), and voices started asking what the government had done to prevent earthquakes for the past twenty years. The president Erdoğan responded furiously by asking: “Can you stop earthquakes?” and dozens of investigations have been opened for “provocative messages” on social media. But on the 28<sup>th</sup>, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu recalled that between 2004 and 2019, the state had collected thirty-four billion dollars in “earthquake tax” and asked what the funds had been used for. Two parliamentary motions on this issue by the CHP and HDP were rejected by the AKP-MHP alliance.

Turkish military operations now extend to the Syrian and Iraqi north as well as Turkish territory... In Turkey, according to a report published on the 9<sup>th</sup> by the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (*TİHV*), since August 2015, 381 curfews have been declared in 51 districts and 11 provinces, the largest number in Diyarbakir

(<http://bianet.org/english/human-rights/218336-381-curfews-declared-in-51-districts-11-provinces-in-5-years>). On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the state agency *Anatolia* announced an operation on the Calyan Plateau (Van) where, despite the cold (-20°C), 2.800 special forces commandos divided into battalions of 200 were flown in by helicopter. On the Iraqi side, the Ministry of Defence announced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> the death of two soldiers participating in Operation “Claws” in Haftanin, where an air operation was launched. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, a sergeant and a village guard from Şırnak lost their lives, also in Haftanin. The following day, an air strike targeted the town of Sinjar, where five fighters from YBŞ, Sinjar Resistance Units (Yezidis) were killed. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, several villages near Aqre (Dohouk) were hit.

Finally, Turkey has also opened a “digital front”: according to a long report published by *Reuters* on the 27<sup>th</sup>

(<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-attack-hijack-exclusive/exclusive-hackers-acting-in-turkeys-interests-believed-to-be-behind-recent-cyberattacks-sources-idUSKBN1ZQ10X>), since the end of 2018, numerous cyberattacks by hackers have targeted the communications of some thirty organizations: ministries, embassies, security services, companies, and civil society organizations in Turkey itself – even the Iraqi Government Advisor for National Security!

## ROJAVA: RESILIENCE DESPITE THE DIFFICULT SITUATION, INTRA-KURDISH NEGOTIATIONS

**I**n spite of the terrible hardships facing the Rojava, especially since the Turkish invasion last October, it has not given up resistance. This was reported in a column published on 17 January by the envoy of the American magazine *Foreign Affairs*, who visited the country in December. He expected to find a region divided and terrorized, its inhabitants stuck in a state of terror “waiting to see what the great powers would force on their future”. But, he wrote, “What I found instead was at once heartening and devastating. There were, of course, harsh scenes, “children, forced from their homes by the Turkish offensive, now sat out of school in freezing, hastily constructed camps, without coats and with their small bare feet poking out of plastic sandals covered in mud spawned by the incessant rain”. But he was also struck by the resilience: “The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces [...] has done a heroic job of holding the northeastern region together, providing some security to the region’s traumatized people under conditions that would try most nation-states, and sustaining the governance model that it had earlier established to a remarkable degree”

(<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-15/syrias-kurdish-forces-hold-back-tides>).

Yet the difficulties continue to pile up. While the Turkish invasion initially constrained most foreign NGOs to leave, the UN Security Council, reviewing the humanitarian aid programme to Syria on 10 January, took a decision that puts 2.7 million people in the north-west and 1.3 million in the north-east of Syria at humanitarian risk: after a double Russian and Chinese veto, and against the recommendations of the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Secretary-General, it adopted a resolution reducing the duration of the programme from 12 to 6 months and closing two of the four aid entry points to the territory. Those remaining are at the Turkish border. The closure of the entry points from Jordan and Iraq leaves the inhabitants of the Rojava at the mercy of the Damascus regime and Turkey. Abdulqadir Mouwahad, Director of Humanitarian Affairs of the Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria (AANES), warned on 14 February of the risk of medical shortages, adding that the decision “will give the regime a greater capacity to control the distribution [of aid]”. As for Turkey, its hostility towards the Rojava administration is well known... In concrete terms, the Kurdish Red Crescent, the Al-Hol camp and the Hassakeh hospital are likely to be severely affected. According to a WHO official, the availability of health services could be drastically reduced in the medium term (*AFP*). The aid is all the more indispensable since during the Turkish invasion many medical and agricultural facilities were destroyed in Girê Spî (Tell Abyad) and Serê Kaniyê (Ras al-Ain). The attack also prevented the cotton harvest, which was about to begin. According to Salman Bardo, head of the AANES Cereal Authority, the Turkish army and its Syrian auxiliaries seized 5.000 tons of fertilizer, about 130 factories and seven cotton ginners, as well as numerous grain silos.

At the same time, the incessant attacks and incursions by the Turks and their jihadist mercenaries continue. Seeking to seize new territories, they bombed the Girê Spî region with heavy artillery and continued their attacks on the town of Ain Issa. In Serê Kaniyê, they arrested several inhabitants who had supported the pre-invasion administra-

tion. According to several reports by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), pro-Turkish jihadists are making extensive use of heavy weapons against civilian areas. In the week of the 20<sup>th</sup>, they launched attacks on four villages near the Christian town of Tall Tamr, finally repelled on the 24<sup>th</sup> by Syriac militias affiliated to the SDF.

January 20 is also the sad anniversary of Turkey’s launch of its invasion of Afrin in 2018. Two years later, ethnic cleansing, the primary goal of the invasion, is a reality. According to the Afrin Human Rights Organization, 300.000 Kurds have been displaced by Turkey and 543 killed, 54 of them under torture or abduction by Turkey proxy groups. Many Kurds had left before the arrival of the invaders, but those who remained were subjected to such exactions, arrests, confiscations, kidnappings, blackmail, that many more were eventually forced to leave. A lawyer speaking on *Rûdaw* on January 26 counts more than 7.227 people kidnapped or imprisoned since the invasion, and at least 2.112 still missing. Some families had to marry their daughters to pro-Turkish fighters. The olive tree, the wealth of the region, has been systematically looted: between 20.000 and 150.000 trees have been felled and sold, depending on the sources, and 70.000 tonnes of olive oil have been stolen and sold. Religious sites, particularly Yezidis’, have been desecrated, many schools destroyed (*RojInfo*). In this region rich in resources, the economic situation has turned to misery, while most of the NGOs, embarrassing witnesses, have had to leave. The Afrin administration, now in exile, denounced on the 20<sup>th</sup> the deafening international silence: “We [...] condemn the continued silence of states and organizations regarding the Turkish occupation and the ongoing daily violations



against the region and the people of Afrin, and we call on them to do their part to end the occupation, remove its consequences, and allow the safe return of the people”.

Further east, the October invasion also caused many displacements. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Crisis Coordination Centre of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) reported that the number of Kurdish refugees arriving from Syria since the invasion had reached 20.011 (*Kurdistan 24*). In preparation for the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the conquered area, Turkey had begun to “secure” the area by building walls to isolate it from the rest of the country. The AANES denounced these constructions in a communiqué also condemning the recent declarations of Angela Merkel: from Istanbul where she was visiting, the German Chancellor had declared considering the support of the European Union for the construction of housing. This scandalous statement was also condemned in Germany by the international head of *die Linke*, Sevim Dagdelen, who recalled that Erdoğan was not the solution to the refugee problem, but its “main cause”.

On the 27<sup>th</sup>, Rojava’s representative in France, Khaled Issa, presented at a press conference an analysis by the Swiss laboratory *Wessling* confirming the use of phosphorus by the Turkish army in October. The abnormal presence of white phosphorus on the skin sample of a Kurdish fighter wounded in the attack, combined with chemical burns, leads to the conclusion that white phosphorus munitions were used. Authorised to create a smoke screen, to illuminate the theatre of operations, or as incendiary weapons against combatants, they are prohibited against civilians: their use against them last October hence constitutes a war crime.

Confronted with the Turkish army and its jihadist mercenaries, the SDF

must also remain vigilant against other jihadists (who are sometimes the same...): those of ISIS. At the beginning of the month, they foiled an attack on Deir Ezzor (*WKI*). In this fight against ISIS, cooperation with the American forces continues. Under the guarantee given by tribal chiefs, the SDF on the 5<sup>th</sup> freed several dozen Syrian prisoners affiliated to ISIS, taken from a list of 300, of whom only those with no blood on their hands will be released after investigation (*AFP*). Conversely, three Russian wives of jihadists who escaped with their children from the Al-Hol camp were recaptured in Hassakeh. The camp still hosts 71.000 displaced persons, including about 40.000 family members of fighters (*WKI*). For months, the AANES has been asking in vain for international assistance, and for foreigners, repatriation to their countries of origin.

For French nationals, things might change. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet, receding for the first time from the choice of a judgment in Iraq by a mixed tribunal supported by Europe, raised the possibility of repatriation. Clearly, this was the result of concern about an escape after the chaos caused by the Turkish invasion and the impossibility of transfer to an Iraq now in the midst of a political crisis: “We cannot take the risk of dispersion in the wilderness”, she stressed. Concerning the 224 orphans in Al-Hol, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, AANES transferred 21 of them to the better equipped camp of Roj. At the request of Paris, two of them will be handed over to a government representative for repatriation (*AFP*). On 30<sup>th</sup> January, faced with the persistent refusal of Western governments to receive their nationals, the AANES resolved to set up a court within three months to try them on the spot (*Reuters*).

After the Turkish invasion, the SDF had no choice but to make a military agreement with Damascus, which deployed its troops in the north of

the country, thus limiting the Turkish advance. But the political discussions that followed, which were launched with the mediation of a Russian military delegation, stumbled over the intransigence of the regime, particularly with regard to AANES’ demand for autonomy. Damascus, emboldened by its recent progress and aware of the weakening of Rojava, made contact with the Arab tribal chiefs of the North; on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the head of Syrian Security, General Ali Mamluk, went to Qamishli, mainly to dissuade them from supporting SDF. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, he met his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan in Moscow. An unnamed Turkish source told *Reuters* that a possible Turkish-Syrian coordination against the Kurds east of the Euphrates had been discussed, but this was denied by the official Syrian agency *SANA*, which said the discussion had focused on Turkish withdrawal from Syria, which Mamluk had officially requested at the end of the meeting. Discussions between AANES and Damascus should continue, again with Russian mediation.

The complexity of the situation in the Syrian North, where many actors are present: SDF, Syrian, Russian, American and Turkish soldiers... is illustrated by several skirmishes that took place at the end of the month between Russians and Americans near the Syrian oil fields in an area controlled by the SDF: no less than four in the week of the 20<sup>th</sup> in the province of Hassakeh, the last on the 26<sup>th</sup> when ten American armoured vehicles blocked the passage of a Russian convoy trying to enter the M4 motorway to reach the oil fields. A Russian helicopter was then similarly blocked by two American aircrafts (*Alwail*). A new confrontation took place on the 31<sup>st</sup> near Derik (Al-Malikiyah). The main place of tension has been the M4 motorway, which marks the boundary between the control zones of the two protagonists. In one case, the SDF intervened to defuse tensions that risked



escalating from verbal altercations to the use of weapons (VOA).

Concerning intra-Kurdish relations, hesitant discussions continued, encouraged by the United States and Europe. France, in particular, submitted a roadmap to the AANES, which accepted it, aimed at restoring confidence. The AANES is dominated by the PYD (Party of Democratic Unity), its opposition includes a dozen parties, gathered in the Kurdish National Council (*Encûmena Nîştîmanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê*, ENKS). After the Turkish invasion in October, the AANES launched an initiative towards the ENKS in an attempt to reunite the Kurds of Syria politically. The task is not easy, the ENKS being linked to the Syrian opposition, itself supported by Ankara, and most of its leaders have left the Rojava for the Kurdistan of Iraq, Turkey or Western countries. As a first step towards normalisation of relations, AANES announced that it would remove all legal obstacles

to the reopening of ENKS offices and its political activities and drop all charges against its leaders. The ENKS, not recognising AANES, had refused to ask it for authorisations to operate, leading in 2016 to arrests and the closure of its offices. But for the ENKS, the most important issue is not the offices but its political prisoners. The “French roadmap” provided for the establishment of a list of names of political prisoners of the ENKS and the setting up by AANES of a commission of inquiry into their fate. A list of ten names had been transmitted on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December by the ENKS Presidency. On 11 January, Abdullah Kadou, a member of the political bureau of the Syrian National Coalition, stated on behalf of ENKS in an interview with the pro-opposition website *Enab Baladi* that the commission, after a thorough investigation, had concluded that the trace of eight of the ten prisoners had been lost, at a time of chaos, when disappearances numbered in the

hundreds. The SDF commander Mazloum Abdi provided figures in a tweet, the sources of which he did not specify: in addition to these eight people, the number of missing persons in the areas controlled by the SDF would amount to 3.286: 544 abducted by ISIS, 2.368 by the Syrian Free Army and 374 others by the regime Security. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, Mustafa Bali, spokesman for the FDS, reiterated the importance of these negotiations, stating on *Rûdaw* that unity between the Kurdish parties was an “existential question”, while specifying that the SDF, as a military organisation, would not itself enter into political discussions. His words echo those of Mikhail Bogdanov: the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Representative of the Russian President in the Middle East similarly urged the Kurdish parties in Syria to unite for discussions with Damascus.

At the end of the month, ENKS was discussing the possible reopening of its offices in Rojava.

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## HUMAN RIGHTS: NUMEROUS CONSISTENT REPORTS OF SERIOUS VIOLATIONS IN TURKEY

A number of recent reports on the human rights situation in Turkey depict a particularly frightening picture...

Opened on 28 January in Geneva, the Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights at the UN Human Rights Council discussed the situation in Turkey over two days, in the presence of Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Faruk Kaymakçı. The last two reviews of the country date from 2010 and 2015. A preparatory report, submitted by Turkey on 14 October, was published by the UN ([https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/turkey/session\\_35\\_-\\_january\\_2020/a\\_hrc\\_wg.6\\_35\\_t](https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/turkey/session_35_-_january_2020/a_hrc_wg.6_35_t)

[ur\\_1\\_e.pdf](#)). Opening the session, Kaymakçı affirmed the country's “zero tolerance for torture”, respect for freedom of assembly and organization, which he said are protected by the Constitution, with restrictions on these freedoms being in line with the standards of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Justifying the dismissal of the HDP mayors by the criminal investigations under way against them, the Turkish delegation attempted to give credence to the idea that all is for the best. The day before, however, the human rights NGO *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) had published conclusions that were... quite different. In a state-

ment prepared for the Geneva session, Hugh Williamson, its director for Europe and Central Asia, said: “Over the past four years, the Turkish authorities have detained and prosecuted opponents, journalists, activists and human rights defenders on vague charges of terrorism and others for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression and other non-violent activities. The large number of journalists, politicians and perceived government critics imprisoned and prosecuted contradicts the Turkish government's public statements on the human rights situation in the country”. HRW called on the states participating in the Council session to urge the

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President's administration Erdoğan to: end arbitrary and prolonged detentions, stop its interference in the judiciary, suppress obstacles to freedom of peaceful assembly, immediately implement the ECHR's release decisions for Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş, and bring the Turkish Penal Code into line with international standards, including by reviewing the anti-terror law. During the session, more than fifty countries expressed criticism and recommendations regarding the situation of journalists and human rights defenders in Turkey. Criticism focused in particular on laws criminalising alleged insults to state institutions, the president or the Turkish nation, which have already been condemned in an ECHR judgment on the historian Taner Akçam. Sixteen states have criticised the systematic prohibitions of LGBTI events for several years in Ankara, Istanbul and other major cities.

The Deputy Minister Kaymakçı could only respond by denying the prohibitions and justifying those affecting Galatasaray: "Galatasaray Square being a tourist site, demonstrations by the Mothers of Saturday and the LGBTI community cannot be allowed there"... But despite his statements, two pieces of information published by *Bianet* testify to the extent to which anti-LGBTI discrimination has become current: after the pro-AKP newspaper *Yeni Akit* published an article on the Izmir Pride march containing offensive terms such as "dishonorable fags", the youth association *LGBTI+* had filed a complaint for "open degradation of a part of the population due to differences in class, religion, sect, gender, region". Considering the article as "criticism", the prosecutor decided on the 15<sup>th</sup> not to prose-

cute (*Bianet*). On the same day another court rejected the complaint against the governor of Mersin for banning an LGBTI march as "the terrorist organisation ISIS and some radical circles could have reacted" to an event thus implicitly considered provocative.

At the same time, the ECHR published its own 2019 report ([https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Annual\\_report\\_2019\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Annual_report_2019_ENG.pdf)). It emphasizes that since ECHR establishment in 1959, Turkey has been among all states the most convicted of freedom of expression violations, with 356 verdicts, 35 of them in 2019. More broadly, ECHR has since 1959 handed down 3.645 judgments concerning Turkey, which was convicted 3.225 times. Of its 59.800 pending cases, 9.236 concern Turkey, a figure exceeded only by Russia.

The previous week, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) published a preliminary report entitled *Threats to Media Freedom and Journalists' Security in Europe* (<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=28281&lang=en> or <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=28281&lang=fr> for French, rename the file "*pdf.aspx*" obtained in "*Threats.pdf*"), to be discussed on the 21<sup>st</sup> in the General Assembly in Strasbourg. Prepared by Sir George Foulkes, British MP and PACE General Rapporteur on Freedom of the Media and the Safety of Journalists, the text states that of all Council members Turkey is the country which imprisons the most journalists, arbitrarily detained for months or even years in violation of the ECHR rules on freedom of expression.

The 2019 *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) report states that Turkey is also one of the countries in the world that jails the most journalists and subjects them to "a totally arbitrary judicial system". Already, in November 2019, a report by the *International Press Institute* (IPI) had indicated that there were 120 journalists in Turkey "detained under the most serious charges of terrorism for months, sometimes years, awaiting trial, often without official charges", [...] "following a prolonged and politically motivated repression of the media".

The new European Union rapporteur on Turkey, Nacho Sanchez Amor, also made his first visit to the country at the end of January, where he met many political leaders, including the Speaker of Parliament, the Ministers of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Justice, representatives of the CHP and İYİ. In addition to Ankara, he visited Istanbul and Gaziantep, where he met the mayors Ekrem İmamoğlu (CHP) and Fatma Şahin (AKP). He also saw the dismissed Kurdish mayor of Mardin, Ahmet Türk (HDP), and executives of civil society organisations, journalists, academics and businessmen. He said he understood the trauma caused by the July 2016 coup attempt, but always asked his interlocutors: "When will you return to normality? When are you going to overcome this tense situation, this polarized situation? As you now have finally won the battle against the putschists?". He insisted: "Some situations, such as that of Mr. Demirtaş [...] or Kavala must be resolved".

Inside the country, the lawyer and deputy CHP Sezgin Tanrıkulu published on 17 January his own report, entitled *The Shipwreck of Human Rights*

under the AKP regime ([https://bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/attachments/000/002/871/original/2002-2019\\_AKP'nin\\_%C4%B0nsan\\_Haklari\\_Enkazi.pdf](https://bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/attachments/000/002/871/original/2002-2019_AKP'nin_%C4%B0nsan_Haklari_Enkazi.pdf)). Covering the 17 years of AKP rule (2002-2019), the document deals in separate chapters with violations such as extrajudicial executions, arbitrary shootings, killings by unknown perpetrators, mines, attacks by illegal organizations, killings by village guards, migrant deaths, deaths in prison, hate crimes, femicides, deaths at work, violations of children's right to life. Regarding violations of women's right to life, the text states: "Violence against women and femicides have reached the level of gender genocide in Turkey", and are increasing because women are not considered as "equal citizens" and not treated as equal to men.

The Freedom of Expression Initiative (*Düşünce Suçu(!?)na Karşı Girişim*) has also published its annual report for 2019, which summarises the violations suffered by rights defenders, social media users, opposition parties, academics and journalists in Turkey (<https://www.dusunthink.net/yillik-yayinlar/dusunceye-ozgurluk-2019/>). Among the statistics it provides are those concerning the 840 victims of torture who appealed to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV) during the first eleven months of 2019.

Another type of initiative is the open letter for the release of Osman Kavala published on 30 January in the *Financial Times* by a group of European politicians and intellectuals (<https://www.ft.com/content/23d30e52-4298-11ea-a43a-c4b328d9061c>) including several former ministers, following a first letter published on 7

November 2017. The letter concludes: "In its treatment of Mr Kavala, Turkey is in clear breach of its commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights and has, in the process, alienated almost all the friends it once had in Europe".

Since it is impossible to list all the arrests and convictions affecting journalists in January, we will only mention the continuation of the *Özgür Gündem* newspaper case, in which, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the prosecutor requested prison sentences against Eren Keskin, İnan Kızılkaya and Kemal Sancılı for "membership of a terrorist organisation" and against Zana Kaya and Aslı Erdoğan for "propaganda for a terrorist organisation". The trial was adjourned to 14 February (*Bianet, DW*).

In the last week of January, a new tactic by the government to silence journalists appeared: depriving them of press cards. In Turkey, press cards are issued by the state, not professional associations, and their issuing committee, previously depending from the Communication Directorate in the Prime Minister's Office, was attached to the Presidency after the abolition of this function. The government has prepared its action well: in 2018, the representatives of professional organisations were excluded from the commission; then the following year, the press cards, which had previously been yellow, were changed to turquoise. Journalists were informed that their old yellow cards would no longer be valid after their expiry date, and that they had to request a new one on the commission's website. Some of them, who had been waiting for months for their new cards to be issued, were surprised to discover at the end of January that the word "Revoked" appeared

online, including for journalists from the daily *Evrensel*, with its editor Fatih Polat, and Gökhan Durmuş, president of the Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS)! In Diyarbakir, many journalists were in the same case, including the local head of the TGS and former *Cumhuriyet* correspondent Mahmut Oral. Telephone calls to the commission were not answered. Faruk Balıkcı, president of the Southeast Journalists' Association, announced his intention to file a complaint and if necessary to go to the ECHR. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the TGS organised a demonstration in front of the Directorate of Communication in which HDP and CHP MPs participated. The following day, the head of the Directorate of Communication, Fahrettin Altun, downplayed the case in a press release, accusing some media of exaggerating and speaking of "applications being evaluated", in particular to check whether the candidate "really had a professional activity", his possible "links with the terrorist organisation" etc (*Bianet*). Vigilance will continue to be the order of the day in the future.

The use of the Turkish judicial system as a tool for political repression, which is mentioned in all the reports, is evident in all the denials of justice it demonstrated lately. The former co-president of the HDP Selahattin Demirtaş, speaking by video from his prison in Edirne when his trial resumed on the 7<sup>th</sup>, described the situation perfectly when he declared that there was no longer a judicial system in Turkey: "The system established here by trials like this one is more or less that of the one-man regime in Hitler's Germany. There used to be a judicial system, which worked well or badly, but now it no longer exists". Demirtaş protested that

the defence had not even had access to the documents submitted for his trial (*ANF*). In the trial of the Progressive Lawyers' Association (*ÇHD*), it emerged in January that in October an Istanbul appeal court had rejected the defence objection the day before it received the judge's opinion, thus handing down its verdict even before the thousands of pages of documents could be examined...

Another characteristic phenomenon of this "dissolution" of the judicial system is the "permanent witness". *Bianet* has published several reports on one of them, known only by his initials "İ.Ö.". Calling himself an "informer since he was ten years old", incarcerated for "armed looting" while benefitting at the same time from a witness protection program, İ.Ö. has testified in more than 100 political cases, including the trial of members of the Progressive Lawyers' Association (*ÇHD*). He even filed a complaint (unsuccessful) against a lawyer who called him a "police informer". Among others cases, İ.Ö. had condemned over his allegations alone (which moreover were inconsistent) Nazım Şafak Korkmaz, a mem-

ber of the CHP. Having proposed in 2008 by letter to the police to reveal information about a planned assassination, he had "denounced" Korkmaz, who was almost ten years later, in April 2017, charged with "attempting to overthrow the constitutional order"! Despite an Intelligence report clearing him of any links with an illegal organization, Korkmaz was then sentenced to 23 years and 9 months in prison on the sole basis of the İ.Ö. charges. He declared: "There is nothing against me, except the slander of someone who is not sane".

The government regularly uses anonymous witnesses to obtain convictions. In the "Gezi trial", one of Osman Kavala's lawyers even stated that one of the prosecution witnesses in the case did not exist under that name: "The information about the identity of the witness [the court] is listening to is false. There is no one by the name of Murat Papuç". The Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), of which Papuç was a member, also questioned his mental health... On the 28<sup>th</sup>, when the court denied the witness's request for a challenge, lawyers left the hearing to

protest; the court again decided to keep Osman Kavala in detention despite the ECHR verdict, and then adjourned the case until 18 February.

To end this column with a glimmer of hope, let's mention two positive pieces of news. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, after over two years of proceedings, access to *Wikipedia* was unblocked in Turkey, following a decision of the Constitutional Court which ruled at the end of December that the banning of the online encyclopaedia on the grounds of "threat to national security" was unconstitutional, as a violation of freedom of expression. One of the offending articles linked Turkey to the support of terrorist groups, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, Tuna Altınel, a mathematician and teacher at the University of Lyon 1, was finally acquitted of "propaganda for a terrorist organization", a charge brought against him after his participation as a translator in a legal meeting of the "Association of Kurdish Friendship in Lyon". It remains to be seen whether the authorities will return his passport to him so that he can finally come back to France.



# 76 Iranian Kurdish cross-border porters died in 2019: watchdog

**SNE, Iranian Kurdistan,**— Seventy-six Kurdish Kolbars (porters) and workers died along the Iranian border in 2019, a human rights watchdog said on Tuesday.

Fifty of those were shot and killed by Iranian security forces, according to Hengaw, which closely monitors human rights abuses in Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat),

In an end of year release of data, the organization said that it had recorded 194 cases of direct fire by Iranian forces against Kolbars and associated workers. In addition to those who died, 144 others were wounded.

One Kolbar was killed and eleven others wounded by mines left over from the Iran-Iraq War, many of which still litter the rugged terrain along the border decades after the end of the conflict.

Twenty-three Kolbars and workers died and 19 others were injured in natural incidents like avalanches and severe weather or in accidents, Hengaw said.



Iranian Kurdish cross-border porters known as kolbars. They smuggle alcohol, and other goods from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran, 2019 Photo: dwarzoh.net

Two more were killed and two others injured in traffic collisions.

156 Kolbars were killed or injured by the Iranian security forces in 2018, making this past year more dangerous. A total of 231 Kurdish Kolbars died in 2018.

Kolbars carry goods across the mountainous border between Iran and Iraq on their backs. They frequently come under fire from Iranian border guards. Despite extreme temperatures in winter and summer, they risk their lives in the treacherous mountain passes to make ends meet.

Ever since its emergence in 1979 the Islamic regime imposed discriminatory rules and laws against the Kurds in all social, political and economic fields.

The Kurds in Iran experience discrimination in the enjoyment of their religious, economic and cultural rights. Parents are banned from registering their babies with certain Kurdish names, and religious minorities that are mainly or partially Kurdish are targeted by measures designed to stigmatize and isolate them.

Kurds are also discriminated against in their access to employment, adequate housing and political rights, and so suffer entrenched poverty, which has further marginalized them.

Estimate to over 12 million Kurds live in Iranian Kurdistan.

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AFP. December 31, 2019

## Syria: War monitor says 2019 death toll lowest on track

**O**ver 1,000 children among those killed in Syria in 2019, London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says

In 2019, the annual death toll in Syria's nearly nine-year-old conflict hit its lowest point on record, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Tuesday.

A total of 11,215 fighters and civilians were killed in the past year in the war that has already claimed over 370,000 lives, London-based war monitor said. Of those killed in 2019, 3,473 were civilians, including 1,021 children.

Fighting has raged on three major fronts in Syria during the past year. In March, US-backed Kurdish forces expelled Islamic State (IS) jihadists from their last patch of territory in the country's far east near the Iraqi border.

Over the summer and in recent weeks, regime forces upped their military campaign against the jihadist-run region of Idlib in the northwest of the country, recently renewing the offensive and prompting a mass exodus.

The violence over the summer alone killed around 1,000 civilians in the region of some three

million people, where rebels are also present.

And to the east, Turkey and its Syrian proxies in October launched a cross-border incursion into Syrian territory to expel Kurdish fighters they view as "terrorists".

So far, the bloodiest year of the conflict was in 2014, when around 76,000 people lost their lives as the Islamic State group launched its sweeping offensive.

Since 2015, however, forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad regained large swathes of the country from rebels and ji-

hadists with Russian military backing.

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## Will Kurds find a ray of hope in 2020?

**QAMISHLI, Syria** — Hassan Taher, a Kurdish academic who works at a grain company, breathes heavily while telling Al-Monitor about the living situation of citizens in Qamishli.

“This year [2019] has been full of sorrow and tragedies. Our areas have been plagued with killings, homelessness and missiles. Many families have been displaced or have lost their shelters. My daughter, her husband and children were our neighbors. Due to the war, they left for Kurdistan. I miss my grandchildren Asha and Mohammad a lot,” says Taher.

He adds, “It has been a year of poverty and deprivation. Every house has members displaced or sick, a deceased person or tells a sad story. Spinsterhood has soared [due to the displacement](#) of youths or their refraining from marriage. The financial situation is tough, as thousands of agricultural hectares (acres) [have been burned](#) and financial resources are scarce.”

“All this has affected people’s morale and conduct with each other. The situation killed our ambitions. People’s displacement from Serekaniye, Afrin and Kari Sapi and the threats to Kurds have prevented us from being happy. Joy has no place in our hearts, as long as children’s cries fill refugee camps. We must not give up and we must find a ray of hope, but our strength has been drained,” Taher says.

Siban Ali, 31, spreads his merchandise in front of his clothing store for children and women. He tells Al-Monitor, “Sadness is everywhere. The war has not ended, and people cannot even satisfy their basic daily needs. How can they buy clothes and products for the New Year? Some are visiting the markets, but they cannot buy anything due to high prices.”

The [Syrian pound](#) has been in-



DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP via Getty Images; A woman sits next to a grave in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli, Syria, Nov. 20, 2019.

creasingly depreciating against the US dollar, thus burdening Syrian citizens even more, especially the poor and employees who get paid in Syrian pounds.

Ayman, 37, walks around the markets along with his wife and three daughters. The teacher tells Al-Monitor, “My salary as a public school teacher is 52,000 Syrian pounds, and my wife’s salary at the self-rule administration schools is 100,000 Syrian pounds. We barely earn \$150 together. We have been walking around the markets for two days, and the prices are so high. We cannot afford new clothes for the kids. My little children wanted a Christmas tree with ornaments. But the smallest costs \$50. Christmas Eve preparations also cost no less than \$80-\$100. We cannot spend our salaries on food only.”

Hussein Salo, owner of a men’s shoe store, stands in front of his store calling on passers-by to enter. He tells Al-Monitor, “Honestly, we do not have new merchandise because of lack of security and wholesale traders’ fear of another attack on Serekaniye and Kari Sapi launched by the Free Syrian

Army’s national army and supported by Turkish forces.”

A [video posted](#) online Dec. 10 showed the deployment of national army factions in the Kurdish city of Serekaniye.

“The cost of shipping merchandise from Damascus and Aleppo is high. The rise of the dollar affects buying products, and it consequently affects the buyer. Preparations this year do not resemble last year due to the tough living circumstances imposing themselves on festivities. Besides, there is constant fear of another security breach and explosions,” says Salo.

Al-Monitor met with Ahmad Karimi, 61, who displayed sweets and different kinds of food and citrus fruits in front of his shop in the central market in Qamishli.

“This has been a very bad year. Last year on this day, we had sold more than half of the goods,” he says, adding, “It deeply hurts me to see the children watching the sweets that their parents cannot afford. Sometimes we offer some for free for children, but no one

seems to be feeling the joy and happiness in welcoming a new year. It is only a matter of days before the current year ends. I don’t think the festivities this year will be similar to those in previous years amid the poor purchasing power.”

Al-Monitor met beauty expert Orkina Sumi in the [predominantly Christian](#) neighborhood of Al-Wosta. She works in the makeup section at a hair and beauty spa. “I am in daily contact with women who talk about their concerns. They share the same sorrow and fear of bombings. They are mostly concerned about not feeling the joy of celebrating Christmas, the market’s stagnation and the high cost of living.”

Sumi adds, “Usually, women and young girls would come for a facial, tattoo or makeup before the holidays, but this year few are coming amid the difficult living conditions and the prevailing sadness due to the [Turkish war on the region](#).”

Appealing to God, she asks for peace across Syria. “May families meet their abandoned children and the economic situation be revived,” she says.



For 42-year-old Umm Khaled (a pseudonym), returning home to Serekaniye is the only thing she wishes for in 2020. She says, "The greatest celebration will be my children who left for Kurdistan and Austria to come back home so that we can meet again."

Perfume and cosmetics dealer Bakhtiyar Rasoul, 50, tells Al-Monitor, "Expatriates would come to spend Christmas Eve in their city of Qamishli. Families would reunite and fireworks would light the city's sky. Most families would gather around dinner."

He adds, "We felt our city was the most beautiful city in the world. Neighbors would celebrate together and share homemade sweets."

Rasoul recalls past years and recounts how Kurds would celebrate these holidays. "Santa Claus is not part of Kurdish culture, and our children did not wait for him to visit and bring gifts. We had a special ritual. Young Kurds would go disguised from house to house wishing families a new baby, money, gifts and foods in the New Year to come."

But according to Rasoul, there is no joy. He says, "We no longer wish for joy. Every year we say that the year before was better. This year we are experiencing a double tragedy. Listening to the displaced from Serekaniye, Afrin and Kari Sapi talking to each other in the markets, I feel the frustration of the Kurds. We have forgotten how to laugh, and this has affected our children. They no longer smile."

Rasoul has been a retail merchant for many years in the province. "Our sales have dropped substantially. The terri-

fying rise in the dollar exchange rate minimized the purchasing power. People are afraid of the future. They prefer to save money instead of spending it on the celebrations," he says.

Between the joys of Christmas, the tragedies of war, immigration and bombings, the Kurdish, Syrian, Assyrian and Arab components of the Kurdish region in Syria are left confused and in fear of the future.

**turkey**  
**purge** Jan 2, 2020

## 32 elected kurdish mayors removed from office throughout 2019: report

**T**he Turkish government has dismissed a total of 32 elected Kurdish mayors in 2019, the Mezopotamya news agency reported on Wednesday. The report also said that a total of 4,567 party members were detained throughout the year and that 797 of them were put in pre-trial detention.

The mayors face charges of membership in a terrorist organization.

Ankara accuses the the Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) of links to militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).



In August 2019, the Turkish government first removed the mayors of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van, three metropolitan cities won by the HDP.

All the mayors, who were democratically elected in local elections on March 31, have been removed from office by Turkey's Interior Ministry.

In October, a Turkish court arrested Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı on charges of "membership of a terrorist organiza-

tion" and "propagandizing for a terrorist organization."





January 02, 2020

## Turkish authorities seize 32 HDP municipalities in 2019 – report

The Turkish government seized control of 32 municipalities and arrested some 4,500 people from the country's main pro-Kurdish party last year, news site Diken cited a report by the party as saying.

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) returned 97 mayors in the polls and regained many of the municipalities the central government took over after 2014 local elections.

But the HDP has faced the same treatment since August, when the authorities arrested three HDP mayors of large cities in the predominantly Kurdish eastern provinces on terrorism charges, imposing government appointees to take over their duties. The tally of arrested mayors



has risen to 24 since then, and the authorities have taken control of 32 municipalities.

The government says the HDP has close links to the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which began an armed campaign for Kurdish self-rule in 1984.

Many of the 4,567 HDP mem-

bers the party says were arrested last year, and the 797 of these who were formally charged, are accused of supporting the PKK directly or by making propaganda for the group. Turkey, the United States and European Union list the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

Selahattin Demirtaş, a former co-chair of the HDP, has been in

prison facing a list of charges including making terrorist propaganda and directing a terrorist organisation since his arrest in November 2016.

Despite his long detention and a spell of ill health last year, Demirtaş sent the public an optimistic new year's message through a member of the main opposition Republican People's Party.

"It's a new year and a new excitement in the struggle for democracy. Our demands for freedom and peace will come true in 2020," the former HDP leader said. "We're heading for better days. Keep fighting for them with courage and determination."



By Associated Press  
January 03, 2020

## Germany Arrests Suspected Member of Kurdish Militant Group

German authorities said Friday they have arrested a suspected member of the banned Kurdish militant group PKK near Frankfurt Airport.

Federal prosecutors said the man, a Turkish citizen identified only as Gokmen C. for privacy reasons, was arrested Thursday at the railway station connected to the airport.

The man is suspected of having coordinated PKK activities in parts of central Germany between April 2018 and June 2019.

Prosecutors said the suspect



Turkish soldiers carrying the coffins of soldiers who were killed in an attack by members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) during funerals in Van, August 18, 2011.

took part in propaganda events and coordinated the collection of donations, while reporting to the group's leadership in Europe.

The PKK is considered a terror organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. Since 1984 its members have been waging a separatist insurgency inside Turkey that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

# Killing Iran's Qassem Suleimani changes the game in the Middle East

## But has Trump really thought out what comes next?

On Thursday night, the Pentagon announced that the United States killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran's paramilitary forces, in an airstrike in Iraq "at the direction of the President."

The strike that took out Suleimani also reportedly killed the leader of Kataib Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy militia in Iraq that has repeatedly attacked US and allied forces and recently launched rockets at a US military base. Those attacks killed an American contractor, which led the United States to respond and kill 25 operatives in attacks in Iraq and Syria. In separate operations, US forces have also captured and arrested leaders of other important Iraqi militias with close ties to Iran.

The killing of Suleimani, the long-time head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) is likely to prove a watershed in Washington's relations with Iraq and Iran and will substantially affect the overall US position in the Middle East. The blowback may be huge, and much depends on how well prepared the United States is for Iran's response and that of its many proxies in the Middle East.

Based on the Trump administration's record in the region, there is reason to be worried.

It's hard to overstate Suleimani's influence. Because Iran's conventional forces are weak, Tehran often works through militias, terrorist groups, and other proxies to advance its interests abroad. The IRGC takes the lead for many of these operations. In Iraq, and in other countries where Iran plays both a



military and political role — such as Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan, as well as with the Palestinians — the IRGC is often the dominant actor in Iran's foreign policy, or at least an important voice.

In April, the Trump administration took the unusual step of officially designating the IRGC as a terrorist group even though it is an arm of the Iranian state, and thus not a non-state actor, unlike most of the entities on the US list of terrorist organizations.

Suleimani has been the architect of many of Iran's most contentious foreign policy issues, and he and the IRGC-QF are responsible for the deaths of many Americans.

The Quds Force, with perhaps between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters in its organization, provides training, weapons, organizational guidance, and other support to a range of pro-Iran groups.

The IRGC, with the Quds Force in the lead, is the key Iranian liaison with the Lebanese Hezbollah, the strongest paramilitary organization in Lebanon — and one that has attacked Israel and the US at Iran's behest. The Quds Force also works with Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, among other nefarious organizations in other countries. When the United States clashed with pro-Iran forces in Iraq, the Quds

Force made them far more deadly, providing them after 2005 with sophisticated explosives that could penetrate US armored vehicles, killing almost 200 Americans.

Having been at the helm of the Quds Force since 1998, Suleimani has cultivated a power network in Iran itself and through the IRGC's many proxies. He is a symbol of Iran's power, prestige, and reach.

Iran's response to Suleimani's killing will be serious, and unpredictable

With Suleimani's death there will be hell to pay — and because of Quds Force's reach, Iran will have multiple theaters in which to attack the United States.

Attacks on US forces and facilities in Iraq are particularly likely. Tehran has spent over 15 years building up extensive networks among militia groups and politicians in Iraq. Earlier this week, before Suleimani's death, Iran was able to rapidly mobilize local proxies to violently demonstrate at the US Embassy in Baghdad, creating a grave security risk to personnel there, even as Tehran's local allies avoided killing more Americans. Now the gloves are likely to come off.

In the strike that killed Suleimani, the United States also reportedly took out the head of the pro-Iran militia Kataib Hezbollah, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and se-

veral other senior pro-Iran figures in Iraq. Kataib Hezbollah was responsible for numerous attacks on US and Iraqi forces, often at Iran's behest. This, too, will not go unpunished: In addition to wanting to please Iran, pro-Iran militias in Iraq will be angered by al-Muhandis's death and the arrests of their leaders and eager to avenge them.

Suleimani's killing is only likely to strengthen Iran's hand, politically

Many Iraqi politicians, by necessity and in some cases by choice, have close ties to Iran, and pressure will grow to oust US forces from the country. If there is a back-and-forth between the United States and Iran, it is simply the case that Iran has more allies and more influence there, and many Iraqi leaders are likely to bow to Iranian pressure.

US military forces in Afghanistan and Syria are also at risk, though both are already well defended due to threats from ISIS, the Taliban, and other dangerous groups. The IRGC and its proxies may also strike at official US embassies and other government-related targets. In 1983, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah blew up the US Embassy in Beirut as well as the Marine barracks there, killing 220 Marines, and dozens of other Americans. Civilians too may be in the crosshairs. Some of Iran's proxies lack the skill to strike at well-defended official targets, so Tehran may also seek to send a broader message in order to intimidate the United States.

Although Iran is likely to strike back, the scale and scope of its response are hard to predict.

Hardliners there will call for making the United States pay for Suleimani's death. In addition, a conflict with the United States may prove a useful way for the regime to deflect attention from Iran's declining economy and the massive protests that have rocked the country.

However, Iran has long recognized its military weakness compared to the United States, and its leaders know that it can only lose if there is an all-out confrontation. In the many years of US-Iran confrontations, Iran has provoked Washington with terrorist attacks and by supporting anti-US proxies but also tried to back down when things looked as if they might get out of control. It is not clear, however, if the same script applies after the killing of a key figure like Suleimani.

Is the Trump administration prepared for the consequences of its escalation?

Much depends on how prepared the United States is for the inevitable Iranian response. Deliberative thinking is not a strong suit of the Trump administration, and it is easy to focus on the immediate gratification that comes from killing an archenemy responsible for many American and allied deaths than thinking through the long-term implications of the strike.

What the United States most needs is allies. They are necessary to deter Iran, support further military operations against it if deterrence fails, help guard US facilities, and otherwise share the burden. Unfortunately, the Trump administration has spurned many traditional allies, thumbing its nose at NATO, Australia, and others.

In the Middle East, the administration refused to retaliate after Iran attacked a Saudi oil facility, a traditional red line, sending a

message that the Kingdom was on its own for its security. It has also stood by as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE have worked at cross-purposes in countries like Syria and Libya, rather than trying to create a common position that would increase US influence and bargaining power in conflict with Iran. It is unclear if allies will now rally to Washington's banner, and even if they do they may not be eager to stand by the United States.

President Trump himself has made no secret of his desire to end the US military presence in the Middle East. "We're getting out. Let someone else fight over this long blood-stained sand. The job of our military is not to police the world," he declared.

By killing Suleimani, however, the United States is likely to face a dilemma. It can continue to stay in the Middle East with rela-

tively limited force deployments in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan and thus be vulnerable to Iranian attacks. Or the United States can further draw down in the face of an Iranian threat and keep its forces isolated, weakening its influence and handing Iran more power in the region.

The Suleimani killing and the targeting of pro-Iranian figures in Iraq is likely to be a pivotal moment for the United States in the region. How bloody the aftermath will be, and whether the United States can emerge stronger, will depend on whether the Trump administration can be steadfast, plan for the long term, and work closely with allies. Trump's Middle East policy so far, however, suggests the opposite is more likely. In the end, Suleimani's death may prove a hollow and short-lived victory.

AL-MONITOR  Lamar Erkendi  
January 3, 2020

## Turkish offensive in northeast Syria uproots farmers, families

**HASAKAH, Syria** — Syrian farmers are suffering under the invasion of Turkey and its loyal armed Syrian factions against the Kurdish-Arab Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Following Turkey's Operation Peace Spring, which it launched in early October, farmer Sipan Ahmad said Syrian opposition factions seized house and his cotton fields — the only source of income for his family in Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye), in northeastern Syria.

The violent Turkish airstrikes against Ras al-Ain forced civilians to flee. Farmers, Ahmad included, left without harvesting their cotton. "The Turkish military operation began just as the first phase of the cotton harvest was starting," Ahmad told Al-Monitor on Dec. 18 at the Washo Kani



DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP via Getty Images  
A man farms in the village of Qahtaniyah, northeastern Syria, Oct. 5, 2016.

camp for internally displaced people in rural Hasakah province.

Syrian National Army opposition factions affiliated with Turkey are accused of looting the homes and silos of wheat of civilians in Ras al-Ain. They also have been

accused of other human rights violations.

"[They] seized homes where families and displaced people from Aleppo, Idlib, Ghouta and Homs were staying. They took over our cotton fields. We farmers lost our crops, our proper-

ties and our homes, and we were displaced to camps that can't provide for basic needs," he added.

On Dec. 19, local sources in Hasakah revealed to a reporter for SANA, the Syrian state news agency, that the Turkish state brought in 300 people whom the sources described as "terrorists," along with their families, to Ras al-Ain via buses, to seize locals' homes and properties and displace them to bring demographic change to the area.

On Dec. 17, North Press Agency said the Turkish army and its Syrian allies looted grain silos in Sharkrak village in the countryside of Tell Abyad city. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an England-based war monitoring group, reported Dec. 19 that Syrian opposition forces



transported grain from the Shar-krak silos to Turkey under the eyes of Russian forces stationed in the area.

Farmers whose lands are near the international highway also worry about losing their livelihoods.

On Dec. 17, Muhyiddin Faisal, a farmer who was plowing his land to plant wheat and barley near the strategic international M4 highway in Tell Tamr, told Al-Monitor he's concerned the battles will get closer to his land and force him to flee.

Turkish jets continue to bomb the countryside of Ain Issa camp and the village of Umm Harmala in the area of Zarkan/Abu Rasin,

and the villages of Kifiah and Qazali near Tell Abyad.

On Dec. 19, the head of the Kurdish autonomous administration's grain authority, Salman Bardo, told Al-Monitor, "Medical facilities, schools, markets, factories, cotton gins and ovens were destroyed by the Turkish invasion with opposition fighters in the cities of Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ain." The Turkish army and its Syrian factions seized an estimated 6 million dunams (almost 1.5 million acres) of agricultural land, 5,000 tons of fertilizer, about 130 factories and seven cotton gins, along with grain silos, he said.

Bardo pointed out that the Syrian factions also had seized nearly

3,000 tons of cotton, attacked wheat fields and stolen crops, and Turkish aircraft bombed wheat warehouses in Ain Issa during their military operation.

"Turkey is preventing farmers from cultivating their lands adjacent to the Turkish border in al-Darbasiyah, Ain Diwar and Kobani ... while the armed Syrian groups cut trade routes, which caused great losses in the agricultural sector," Bardo added.

Lack of security on the road between Kobani, Raqqa and Hasakah kept the cotton crop from reaching gins, most of which are now out of service, as the general manager of the cotton department in the Kurdish autonomous administration, Ahmed Yunis, told Al-Monitor by phone Dec. 20.

"Five gins have stopped working as battles intensified in the Ras al-Ain countryside, Tell Abyad, Ain Issa and Tell Tamr. Only one gin in Hasakah and the one in Deir ez-Zor started operating again, but they are under a lot of pressure to operate since the rest of the gins went out of service," Yunis added.

Hasakah farmer Abd al-Rahman Musa told Al-Monitor Dec. 19, "My brother and I suffered heavy losses during the wave of unusual fires that devoured wheat fields in late April, and we were hoping to make up for it with our cotton crops, but we fear we may not make profits once again since there are only two gins operating now."



3 janvier 2020

## Kurdistan : 80 kolbars et kasibkars tués en 2019



Des Kolbars, travailleurs qui portent des marchandises sur leur dos.

**S**elon un rapport de Kolbar-news, pas moins de 80 kolbars et kasibkars ont été tués dans les zones frontalières séparant le Nord (Turquie), l'Est (Iran) et le Sud (Irak) du Kurdistan au cours de l'année 2019. 183 autres ont été blessés suite à des explosions de mines, des attaques des forces du régime iranien ou pour des raisons liées aux conditions climatiques.

54 des kolbars et kasibkars assassinés ont été pris pour cible par les forces turques.

Par ailleurs, trois kolbars ont perdu la vie suite à des chutes depuis des falaises, 17 sont morts de froid ou ensevelis sous des avalanches, tandis que six autres sont morts d'accident ou de maladie.

168 des kolbars assassinés et blessés étaient originaires d'Ur-

mia, 70 de Sine (Sanandaj) et 25 de Kermanshah.

### QUI SONT LES KOLBARS ET LES KASIBKARS ?

« Kolbar » est un terme kurde composé des mots « kol » (épaules) et « bar » (fardeau). Les kolbars gagnent leur vie en transportant, à travers les frontières, des marchandises telles que cigarettes, téléphones portables, tissus, articles ménagers, thé et, plus rarement, alcool. Ils empruntent, pour ce faire, des itinéraires périlleux, entre le Sud et l'Est-Kurdistan. Les Kolbars qui risquent leur vie dans cette activité reçoivent des rémunérations dérisoires par rapport aux prix de vente des produits sur les marchés de Téhéran.

Quant aux Kasibkars, ce sont les intermédiaires chargés de trouver des acheteurs dans les villes.

Les kolbars et kasibkars ont

entre 13 et 70 ans. Certains n'ont été qu'à l'école primaire, tandis que d'autres ont un diplôme universitaire. Ils portent des charges, car ils ne trouvent pas d'autre emploi. Bien qu'on ne dispose pas de données exactes, on peut estimer à 300 le nombre de kolbars et kasibkars tués de sang froid au cours des 5 dernières années.

Le niveau de pauvreté au Kurdistan s'est aggravé au fil des années, ceci en raison des politiques délibérées du régime iranien consistant à ne pas faire d'investissement dans cette région et à en freiner le développement. Par conséquent, le Kurdistan connaît le taux de chômage le plus élevé.

Confrontés à des politiques de discrimination, d'oppression et d'appauvrissement, les Kurdes n'ont pas d'autres choix que le transport de marchandises de contrebande. C'est pour eux le seul moyen de survivre.



Jérémy Berlioux  
Envoyé spécial à Hasankeyf

## Turquie : à Hasankeyf, en attendant le déluge

En février, le barrage d'Illisu, dans le sud-est du pays, engloutira la ville millénaire. Si des bénéfiques énergétiques et économiques sont avancés, la population accuse Ankara de faire disparaître un site historique dans le but d'asseoir son autorité dans une région à majorité kurde.

**A**u débouché d'un étroit défilé, le village de Sikefta est une petite oasis qui domine la vallée du Tigre, majestueuse. Les eaux riches du fleuve y arrosent un sol généreux. «Ici, une pastèque pousse en quarante jours», fanfaronne Mehmet Sirin, le muhtar (représentant) du village. Le sexagénaire ne tarit pas d'éloges sur les bienfaits de sa vallée : un petit paradis que la guerre et la raison économique condamnent au déluge. Car Sikefta, comme 85 autres villages et bourgs, sera bientôt englouti par le barrage d'Illisu, ouvrage monstre d'une puissance de 1 200 mégawatts. «Pendant longtemps, c'était difficile d'imaginer que l'eau allait tout engloutir. Certains n'arrivent toujours pas à y croire», raconte Mehmet Sirin. Pourtant, plusieurs villages ont déjà disparu depuis la fin juillet et le début du remplissage du réservoir. En tout, 15 000 personnes doivent être déplacées, 75 000 selon les opposants au projet.

Une vingtaine de kilomètres en aval de Sikefta, la ville de Hasankeyf et ses 3 000 habitants kurdes et arabes sont lovés près des falaises surplombant le Tigre : un bijou négligé de l'histoire. «Vingt civilisations se sont succédé ici. D'Urartu aux Ottomans, en passant par les Perses, les Romains, les Omeyyades et les Seldjoukides, raconte Ridvan Ayhan, porte-parole



Le vieux pont de Hasankeyf, construit par les Artukides au XIIe siècle, au-dessus du Tigre. Photo Mathias Depardon;

de l'association Sauver Hasankeyf. Hasankeyf a 12 000 ans, le barrage d'Illisu est conçu pour durer soixante ans, pas besoin de comparer. C'est un massacre.»

### Téléphérique et jet-skis

La vallée n'a d'ailleurs pas fini de livrer ses secrets. Sur un chantier de fouilles ouvert en 2011 sur une butte le long du Tigre, une équipe d'archéologues turco-japonaise s'activait cet été à déblayer un champ autour des fondations d'un village néolithique,

incluant notamment les restes de ce qui s'apparente à un lieu de culte. «C'est probablement la dernière campagne que nous pouvons mener», reconnaissait alors l'un des chercheurs de l'Université de Tsukuba, au Japon. Le site est âgé de 11 500 ans. A l'époque, quelques centaines d'individus y vivaient de la cueillette, de la chasse et de la pêche. Hasankeyf a été témoin de la sédentarisation de l'humanité. Un archéologue turc, qui souhaite rester anonyme, ne

tarissait pourtant pas d'éloge pour le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, conservateur autoritaire) du président Erdogan. «Le gouvernement accorde une grande importance à l'archéologie. Tout aura été fouillé quand l'eau arrivera», assurait-il. Le déluge y est prévu pour février.

Dans la vieille ville, les dommages causés au site sont déjà irrémédiables. Le bourg est maintenant dominé par un gigantesque mur de



pierres adossé aux falaises. Sous la citadelle, qui demeurera émergée, les vallons percés de maisons troglodytes encore habitées il y a cinquante ans ont été comblés, des grottes murées et des parois «menaçantes» dynamitées. Début décembre, immédiatement après l'évacuation de la vieille ville, le bazar a été rasé. Sous les décombres, les ouvriers ont découvert des ruines romaines et seldjoukides. Elles n'ont pas été fouillées. Une route a été construite dessus afin de permettre le «sauvetage» de la mosquée Er-Rizk, datant du XVe siècle. C'est le dernier des sept monuments que l'Etat a fait déplacer dans un «parc culturel» dans la nouvelle ville construite pour accueillir les habitants, sur la rive opposée du Tigre. «Hasankeyf, c'est un tout, si on sépare ces monuments des habitations, des églises troglodytes, des falaises et du Tigre, ils perdent leur sens», s'agace Mehmet Sirin, le muhtar. La mosquée Koç (XIVe siècle), intransportable, a quant à elle été enfouie sous une chape de béton afin de la «sauver des eaux».

Selon Ankara, le barrage d'Illisu est une chance pour cette région délaissée. Lors d'une visite à Hasankeyf en 2012, le ministre des Finances, Mehmet Simsek, et celui des Eaux et Forêts, Veysel Eroglu, avaient déclaré que l'ouvrage hydraulique représentait «une opportunité de sauver Hasankeyf», une chance de transformer la région en site attractif et touristique. Au programme : des bateaux de tourisme, un téléphérique et des jet-skis. Sollicitée à ce sujet, la mairie de Hasankeyf a décliné notre demande d'interview.

Pour les habitants, de telles propositions sont aberrantes. «Hasankeyf est déjà touristique bien qu'aucun investissement n'ait été fait en ce sens. Le site remplit 9 des 10 critères de l'Unesco. Rien que ça attirerait des dizaines de milliers de personnes», enrage Ridvan Ayhan. Mais la Turquie n'a jamais demandé l'inscription de la ville sur la liste du patrimoine mondial de l'humanité. Hasankeyf, aux rues défoncées, est demeurée sous-développée. Les hôtels s'y comptent sur les doigts d'une main.

Selon les défenseurs des lieux, l'objectif du barrage d'Illisu n'est pas seulement la production d'électricité. La région est au cœur des affrontements entre le PKK et l'armée turque. Le conflit a tué plus de 45 000 personnes et déplacé des centaines de milliers d'autres depuis 1984. La guérilla kurde a longtemps utilisé les vallées de la région comme caches et lieux de transit. «La décision de construire ce barrage a été prise par le Conseil de sécurité nationale dans les années 80 [alors l'instance la plus puissante du pays, ndlr] pour bloquer le PKK et mieux contrôler le territoire», explique Cetin Bato, membre du parti d'opposition prokurde de gauche HDP. Le barrage d'Illisu a été inclus au Projet d'Anatolie du Sud-Est, initié dans les années 70. Les 22 ouvrages hydrauliques qui le composent forment autant de «frontières liquides» divisant le territoire et limitant les mouvements du PKK. L'Etat parle de «barrages de sécurité». «Avec Illisu, Ankara divise le Kurdistan et essaye d'éradiquer notre histoire et notre culture», ajoute Cetin Bato. Les défenseurs de Hasankeyf ont payé un lourd tribut pour leur attachement à leur

région et son écosystème unique. Attaques physiques, psychologiques et procès politiques sont courants. A chaque manifestation son lot de charges policières et arrestations brutales. Ridvan Ayhan a même été emprisonné un an et demi en 2011 à cause de son activisme. Il a été accusé d'appartenir à une organisation liée au PKK.

Peu à peu les habitants de la région prennent les chemins de l'exil. Alors que les villages en aval sont engloutis les uns après les autres, les dernières familles de Hasankeyf ont emménagé dans la nouvelle ville. Celle-ci est une succession de maisons grises écrasées par le soleil en été et ouvertes aux courants d'air l'hiver. Elles sont toutes identiques, sans jardin, arbre, ni ombre. Les familles ont dû les acheter entre 140 000 et 180 000 livres (21 000 à 27 000 euros) en moyenne. Les compensations reçues étant insuffisantes, la plupart des familles ont eu recours à des emprunts pour les payer. «Nous n'étions pas propriétaires, nous n'avons pas reçu de compensation», explique Mazlum, un guide touristique de 28 ans. La plupart des membres de sa famille sont au chômage. Plusieurs de ses amis sont déjà décidés à partir travailler à Antalya, ville touristique située à 1 000 km de là, sur la Méditerranée. Lui n'a pas encore tranché : «C'est un choix tellement difficile.»

### Colline désolée

Tous ne se sont pas vu offrir la possibilité de vivre dans le nouveau Hasankeyf. Eyüp, un berger cafetier de 26 ans habite sur une falaise au-dessus de la vieille ville. Sa maison sera épargnée par l'eau mais coupée du monde.

Sa famille ne pourra pas déménager de l'autre côté de la vallée. «Nous avons 140 bêtes. Il n'y a rien pour les parquer là-bas.» De plus, les autorités ont décidé que les couples mariés après 2014, tels Eyüp et sa femme, n'auraient pas accès aux nouveaux logements. Leur premier enfant vient de naître. Si au printemps ils n'ont pas trouvé de solution, ils vendront leurs bêtes. «J'irai probablement travailler sur les chantiers dans l'ouest du pays.»

A Sikefta, comme dans la plupart des villages, le gouvernement n'a pas construit de nouveaux logements pour reloger les habitants. «L'Etat nous a vendu un terrain pour tout reconstruire», explique Mehmet Sirin. Depuis son jardin, il pointe du doigt une colline désolée encore vierge de tout bâtiment. «Il n'y a pas de vie là-bas, pas d'eau. Il va falloir des années pour que nos vergers soient matures. Or nous ne touchons pas de compensation pour la perte de nos revenus», tempête-t-il. Le village vit de ses arbres qui sont recouverts de fruits en été. L'air est alors empli de l'odeur entêtante des figues, à peine dérangées par les aubergines cuites sur les braises d'un four communal. «Je n'ai jamais rien demandé, ni causé de tort à qui que ce soit. C'est injuste ce qui nous arrive», soupire-t-il. La mère de Cetin Bato, 70 ans, a emménagé dans la nouvelle ville de Hasankeyf. Depuis le toit terrasse de sa maison, elle regarde la vallée et le gigantesque mur de pierres sous la citadelle. Réajustant son voile blanc, elle demande : «Que nous reste-t-il ? Nous allons voir notre histoire et notre mémoire se noyer. Nous sommes les spectateurs de notre propre mort.»

# « Un désastre » : le nouveau barrage de la Turquie va submerger des milliers d'années d'histoire

**D**es milliers de personnes seront déplacées et leurs moyens de subsistance menacés. Certains des plus précieux trésors archéologiques du monde seront définitivement perdus. En Irak, les graves problèmes de pénurie d'eau vont encore s'aggraver.

Après des années de retards et, selon la rumeur, d'importants dépassements de budget, les ingénieurs achèveront prochainement les travaux du barrage d'Ilisu, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, à une courte distance de la frontière méridionale du pays avec l'Irak et la Syrie, et commenceront à remplir un réservoir de 400 km de long s'étendant le long du Tigre.

l'autre côté de la frontière, en particulier en Irak, observent la situation et attendent avec anxiété.

Le barrage d'Ilisu, d'une puissance de 1 200 mégawatts, large de près de deux kilomètres et d'une hauteur de 130 mètres, est une pièce maîtresse de ce qui est connu en turc sous le nom Güneyođu Anadolu Projesi (GAP), ou projet d'Anatolie du sud-est.

Ankara affirme que le barrage est essentiel pour permettre le développement de l'une des régions les plus pauvres de Turquie. Il fournira de l'électricité pour les ménages, l'agriculture et l'industrie et créera des mil-

lières turcs des Affaires étrangères fait également état d'avantages pour l'environnement, notamment l'augmentation des réserves d'énergie propre et la réduction drastique des émissions de gaz à effet de serre.

De plus, il assure que les militants ont exagéré le nombre de villages et d'habitants qui seront touchés par le projet.

Les responsables turcs ont également cherché à répondre aux préoccupations concernant l'impact du barrage sur l'approvisionnement en eau de l'Irak.

En juin et octobre dernier, des responsables avaient déclaré que les projets concernant le

l'Irak.

Mais beaucoup s'inquiètent encore vivement.

« L'ensemble du projet est un tel désastre, c'est si terrible », confie à Middle East Eye Ulrich Eichelmann, PDG de Riverwatch, une ONG basée à Vienne qui participe depuis de nombreuses années à une campagne internationale contre le projet d'Ilisu.

« Dans le sud-est de la Turquie, il submergera des milliers d'années d'histoire et en Irak, il menace des régions telles que les marais du sud du pays, l'un des plus grands sites culturels et écologiques de la planète. »

« C'est incroyable de penser que cela se produit au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. »

## Des sites antiques sous l'eau

La ville de Hasankeyf, à environ 80 kilomètres en amont du barrage d'Ilisu, a 12 000 ans et est l'une des plus anciennes colonies du monde, toujours habitée, jadis étape sur la célèbre route de la soie.

Une fois le réservoir du barrage rempli, une grande partie de Hasankeyf, ainsi que certains de ses monuments antiques et des grottes néolithiques creusées dans les rives du Tigre, se retrouveront engloutis sous plus de 30 mètres d'eau.

D'autres villages et colonies le long du fleuve risquent de disparaître.

Les 3 000 habitants de Hasankeyf sont invités à s'installer dans de nouvelles maisons construites au-dessus de la ville existante. De nombreux habitants s'y opposent, affirmant que



Un homme aide un enfant à marcher sur des planches pour rejoindre un « café » sur les eaux du Tigre, surplombé par Hasankeyf (AFP)

Les habitants de la zone, principalement des citoyens kurdes de Turquie, et ceux qui vivent de

lières d'emplois indispensables.

Dans un communiqué, le minis-

trère turc des Affaires étrangères a déclaré que le remplissage du réservoir avait été retardé en réponse aux préoccupations exprimées par





Vue d'ensemble de la ville antique de Hasankeyf au bord du Tigre (Reuters)

non seulement leur maison, mais des revenus tributaires du tourisme disparaîtraient.

« Les personnes qui n'ont pas de passé ne peuvent pas déterminer leur avenir », a déclaré l'an dernier un membre local du groupe de campagne de l'initiative Save Hasankeyf à DW, le média allemand.

« Ils ne détruisent pas seulement notre passé, mais également notre avenir en nous privant de cette source de revenus et de ce patrimoine. »

Les autorités turques sont en désaccord, affirmant que le réservoir attirera de nouveaux touristes dans la région, parmi lesquels des plongeurs désireux d'explorer les ruines submergées.

Ils ont également relugé plusieurs bâtiments et monuments historiques. Plus tôt ce mois-ci, des travaux ont débuté pour déplacer la dernière section de la mosquée Eyyubi, construite il y a 600 ans, dans un nouveau parc culturel de Hasankeyf au-dessus du niveau de l'eau.

John MacGinnis, archéologue basé au British Museum de Lon-

dres, faisait partie d'une équipe internationale qui a travaillé pendant de nombreuses années sur les fouilles archéologiques de Ziyaret Tepe, à environ 160 kilomètres en amont du barrage d'Illisu.

**« D'un point de vue archéologique, ce qui se passe est un désastre »**

- John MacGinnis, archéologue

La majeure partie du site de Ziyaret Tepe, autrefois connu sous le nom de Tushan, sera inondée lors du remplissage du réservoir d'Illisu.

Dans l'antiquité – il y a 2 800 ans – la colonie était une capitale provinciale de l'empire assyrien, un royaume centré sur le dénommé « croissant fertile » entre le Tigre et l'Euphrate et le plus grand empire que le monde ait jamais connu à l'époque.

« Toute cette zone fait partie d'une région où la civilisation est née et où il y a tellement de sites à explorer et autant de matériaux à analyser et à mettre au jour », souligne MacGinnis.

« Le problème, c'est qu'une grande partie des travaux de construction assyriens était faite

d'argile et de boue – qui ne survivront pas sous l'eau et seront perdus à jamais. D'un point de vue archéologique, ce qui se passe est un désastre. »

#### **Crise monétaire**

La région autour d'Illisu et de son réservoir s'est militarisée. Des rumeurs circulent, selon lesquelles le gouvernement aurait l'intention de se servir du barrage afin d'exercer un contrôle accru sur la population locale, principalement kurde.

Par le passé, le président Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a accusé des opposants à des projets de construction de barrages de soutenir le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), organisation interdite que la Turquie considère comme terroriste.

Depuis le début des travaux sur le projet Illisu en 2006, celui-ci est également sujet à controverse et à des retards considérables.

Des gouvernements étrangers ont refusé des crédits à l'exportation. En 2009, des entreprises étrangères se sont retirées du projet en raison du non-respect par la Turquie de divers critères contractuels en matière d'environnement et autres, et de la

pression exercée par des ONG locales et internationales.

Les banques étrangères ayant refusé de soutenir le projet, le gouvernement a fait pression sur les banques turques pour qu'elles apportent des fonds.

Une crise sur le marché financier turc plus tôt cette année, avec la chute de la valeur de la lire, a entraîné des retards et des dépassements de coûts pour un certain nombre de projets gigantesques et prestigieux entrepris par le gouvernement d'Erdoğan.

Le coût du barrage d'Illisu est officiellement évalué à 1,5 milliard de dollars, bien que des observateurs estiment que la facture finale pourrait être considérablement plus élevée. Ses détracteurs se plaignent de l'absence de transparence concernant le financement du projet et la manière dont les différents contrats ont été attribués.

#### **« Puissance hydro-hégémonique »**

L'année dernière, en plein milieu de la pire sécheresse qu'a connue l'Irak depuis 80 ans, les niveaux d'eau du Tigre en Irak, en aval du barrage d'Illisu, ont atteint des gouffres sans précédent.

Pour la première fois de mémoire d'homme, les habitants de Bagdad ont découvert qu'ils pouvaient traverser la rivière à pied. Les niveaux de l'eau sur l'Euphrate ont également chuté de façon spectaculaire.

Une grave crise de l'eau s'est développée, l'agriculture dans le sud de l'Irak étant particulièrement touchée.

À eux deux, le Tigre et l'Euphrate fournissent plus de 90 % de l'eau en Irak. La pollution des deux fleuves augmente à mesure que les pesticides et les engrais utilisés dans les projets d'irrigation en Turquie et en Irak refluent dans le réseau hydrographique.

L'Irak n'a pas tardé à reprocher

à la Turquie ses problèmes d'eau estivaux.

Chez les universitaires qui écrivent sur les conflits transfrontaliers liés à l'eau, la Turquie sert d'exemple de « puissance hydro-hégémonique », citant le projet GAP comme « exemple parfait » de « grande infrastructure permettant de capturer des ressources et de modifier de manière significative la nature de la rivalité concernant l'eau au profit du constructeur ».

Les responsables turcs ont toutefois souligné qu'ils souhaitent s'assurer que l'eau soit partagée de manière « équitable, raisonnable et optimale ».

Ils soutiennent également que le barrage permettra de gérer et de contrôler le débit de l'eau de manière à ce que cela profite à la fois à la Turquie et à ses voisins.

Au cours de l'été, des responsables turcs ont déclaré que le gouvernement avait accepté de reporter le remplissage du barrage d'Ilisu en réponse aux préoccupations de l'Irak.

Fatih Yildiz, ambassadeur d'Ankara à Bagdad, a déclaré que la décision avait été prise par Erdoğan lui-même.

« À partir de ce moment, les eaux du Tigre sont transférées en Irak sans en toucher une goutte à Ilisu », a écrit Yildiz sur Twitter.

Mais les hydrologues soulignent qu'il s'agissait d'un geste vide de sens à maints égards : pendant les mois d'été, lorsque l'annonce a été faite, peu d'eau était disponible pour le remplissage.

**À LIRE > Hasankeyf, la ville de 12 000 ans que la Turquie veut engloutir**

La Turquie ne devrait probablement commencer ses activités à Ilisu qu'après la fonte des neiges, au printemps, à la source du Tigre.



Pendant l'été 2018, l'Irak a connu, de mémoire d'homme, sa pire sécheresse (Reuters)

La cause de la sécheresse en Irak et du niveau excessivement bas du Tigre n'est pas imputable exclusivement au barrage d'Ilisu.

L'Irak a également construit un certain nombre de barrages sur des affluents qui se jettent dans le Tigre, détournant de l'eau pour ses propres projets agricoles.

L'Irak s'inquiète plus particulièrement de la construction en Iran du barrage à grande échelle de Daryan.

L'Irak est en guerre ou sous le coup de sanctions économiques paralysantes depuis près de 30 ans. Il est encore en train de se rétablir après avoir vu environ un tiers de son territoire, y compris le barrage de Mossoul, envahi en 2014 par des combattants du groupe État islamique (EI), en retrait depuis l'an dernier, mais qui continuent de menacer la sécurité.

Une grande partie de ses infrastructures, y compris les systèmes d'approvisionnement en

eau, ont été détruites. La corruption et une mauvaise gestion chronique ont également contribué aux pénuries d'eau.

Le changement climatique pourrait rendre les barrages inutiles

Avec la perspective du changement climatique, toute la région risque d'être confrontée à un avenir dans lequel les températures vont probablement grimper et les précipitations diminuer, ce qui entraînera de nouvelles baisses du niveau des rivières.

L'Irak est considéré comme le pays du Moyen-Orient le plus vulnérable au changement climatique.

Une grande partie du sud du pays est déjà en train de s'assécher, notamment les célèbres marais autour de Bassora, qui abritent une civilisation unique et un site du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO. L'augmentation de la salinité empoisonne les réseaux hydrographiques et les terres.

Les changements climatiques

pourraient également avoir de graves conséquences sur le barrage d'Ilisu et sur l'ensemble du projet GAP en Turquie.

« Les barrages sont construits sur la base de certaines projections concernant les débits d'eau et les précipitations dans leurs bassins versants », explique un climatologue qui a souhaité rester anonyme en raison des sensibilités inhérentes aux recherches dans la région.

« Et si les chutes de neige diminuaient dans les montagnes du Taurus et du Zagros en Turquie, lesquelles alimentent les niveaux d'eau dans l'Euphrate et le Tigre ? Et si la température continue d'augmenter et que l'évaporation dans les réservoirs s'accélère ? »

« Alors, tous les bâtiments du barrage, les inondations de terres, les déplacements de population et la submersion de civilisations antiques – cela aura en grande partie été vain. »

Traduit de l'anglais (original) par VECTranslation.



## Afrin : L'OSDH rapporte des exactions continues commises par les factions alliées de la Turquie

Selon l'Observatoire syrien des Droits de l'Homme, les factions alliées de la Turquie tentent de forcer les habitants d'Afrin, en particulier les Kurdes, à quitter la région, dans le cadre de la campagne de changement démographique que les services de renseignements turcs (MIT) cherchent à mettre en œuvre.

L'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) a déclaré que les factions soutenues par la Turquie poursuivaient leurs exactions contre la population qui n'a pas encore fui la région occupée d'Afrin, au nord-ouest de la Syrie.

« Ces violations sont destinées à forcer les personnes qui sont restées à Afrin à quitter leur région, dans le cadre du changement démographique que les services de renseignement turcs cherchent à mettre en œuvre, dans le silence de la communauté internationale », a déclaré l'OSDH dans un communiqué publié le 3 janvier.

Les sources de l'OSDH ont notamment rapporté que l'une des factions qui contrôle le village d'Ahmad Mastah avait arrêté sept civils accusés d'être en contact avec leurs proches réfugiés dans la région de Shehba.

L'OSDH a noté par ailleurs que deux personnes précédemment arrêtées avaient été libérées après avoir payé une rançon.

Un homme a également été



kidnappé par des membres d'une faction alliée de la Turquie, dans le village de Deir Sawwan rattaché au district de Sharran.

Des sources locales ont par ailleurs informé l'OSDH que des membres armés de la "Sécurité politique" avaient arrêté un civil du village de Mamulu, dans le district de Raju. Le civil a été arrêté dans son lieu de travail, au sein du Département des transports du Conseil civil d'Afrin. Il a été emmené vers une destination inconnue sans que les raisons de son arrestation soient révélées.

Dans ce même contexte, des membres armés soutenus par la Turquie ont arrêté deux ingénieurs et une femme.

Dans la ville de Sheikh Hadid, des membres armés affiliés à la faction "Liwa Al-Waqqas" soutenue par la Turquie ont arrêté plus de dix jeunes hommes du village d'Anqalah et les ont emmenés vers une destination inconnue. Ils ont ensuite demandé à leurs familles de payer 10 000 Dollars pour chacun d'eux, en échange de leur libération.

L'OSDH a également appris que des hommes armés de

la faction du Sultan Shah, connue sous le nom de "Al-Amshat", avaient imposé une redevance mensuelle de 1000 Livres syriennes par personne dans trois villages de Jaqla.

Pendant ce temps, la "Police Civile" soutenue par la Turquie a arrêté une famille (un homme, son épouse et sa mère) du village de Deir Sawwan, dans la ville de Sharran. Ils ont été emmenés dans une des prisons de la police civile à Sharran, sans que les motifs de leur arrestation soient connus.



04-01-2020  
Karwan Faidhi Dri

# Don't turn Iraq into a battleground: KRG president appeals to foreign powers



This handout image released courtesy of the US Department of Defense (DOD) shows US Marines with 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, assigned to the Special Purpose Marine AirGround Task Force-Crisis Response-Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC) 19.2, reinforcing the Baghdad Embassy Compound in Iraq on January 3, 2020. Photo: US Marine Corps Sgt. Kyle C. Talbot/AFP

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – The Kurdistan Region president condemned foreign states settling scores on Iraqi soil. The country must not be turned into a battleground, his office said late Friday in a statement after the deaths of senior Iraq and Iranian military commanders in a United States MQ-9 Reaper drone strike in Baghdad early on Friday morning.

The drone strike killed Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's elite Quds Force, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), locally known as the Hashd al-Shaabi, and eight members of their forces. The killings are the latest in a string of esca-

tion actions that are sparking fears of a proxy US-Iran war breaking out in Iraq. An American contractor was killed in an attack on the K-1 military base in Kirkuk on December 27. The US retaliated with airstrikes against the group it blamed for the attack, Iraq's Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia, killing 25 militiamen. After their funerals, members of the PMF and their supporters stormed the US embassy compound in Baghdad.

The US has advised its nationals to leave Iraq and is deploying an additional 3,000 troops to the Middle East.

These events "indicate there is a further exacerbation of the situation in Iraq," read the

statement from President Nechirvan Barzani's office. "Therefore, we reject all steps by other countries to settle scores on Iraqi soil and violate Iraqi sovereignty."

Iraq must not be a "battleground for other countries to settle their disputes," Barzani added, urging foreign powers to open a dialogue.

The Kurdistan Region president noted that both Soleimani and Muhandis played a role in the war against the Islamic State (ISIS) and warned against giving ISIS space to regroup.

"The continuation of these complications, actions and reactions, will push Iraq and

the region towards an abyss and an uncertain future; it will also lead to the resurgence and strengthening of extremist and terrorist groups, such as ISIS," he stated.

Soleimani was the mastermind of Iran's strategy against ISIS in Iraq. He had said that without Iran, Erbil may have been invaded by ISIS when the group emerged in 2014. Kurdistan Region officials have acknowledged Iran's role in defending the Region against the extremist group.

The US maintains that killing Soleimani was a defensive measure. US Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters on Friday evening that the risk of inaction exceeded the risk that killing him might dramatically escalate tensions with Tehran. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted on Friday that the decision to kill Soleimani was in "response to imminent threats to American lives."

Pompeo spoke to Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani late on Friday to discuss the matter. "I thanked him for his steadfast partnership. We agreed on the need for continued, close cooperation," the diplomat said on Twitter.

Barzani added via Twitter that he and Pompeo "agreed on the importance of deescalating tensions in Iraq through restraint and dialogue."



**The New York Times**  
Jan. 5, 2020  
By Thomas Gibbons-Neff  
and Eric Schmitt

# U.S.-Led Coalition Halts ISIS Fight as It Steels for Iranian Attacks

**WASHINGTON** — The American-led coalition in Iraq and Syria halted its yearslong campaign against the Islamic State on Sunday as United States forces braced for retaliation from Iran over a strike that killed a powerful Iranian commander, military officials said.

In a statement, the American command said that after repeated attacks on Iraqi and American bases in recent weeks, one of which killed an American contractor on Dec. 27, “we have therefore paused these activities, subject to continuous review.”

“We remain resolute as partners of the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people that have welcomed us into their country to help defeat ISIS,” the statement said. Using the Arabic name for the Islamic State, it added, “We remain ready to return our full attention and efforts back to our shared goal of ensuring the lasting defeat of Daesh.”

The move comes after the deaths last week of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, an Iranian security and intelligence commander responsible for the deaths of hundreds of troops over the years, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a powerful Iraqi militia commander and government official, in an American drone strike outside the Baghdad airport. About 5,200 troops in Iraq and several hundred in Syria are now focused on fortifying their outposts instead of pursuing remnants of the Islamic State and training local forces.

What remains to be seen is what, exactly, Iran will do in retribution for the strike. In recent days, tens of thousands of pro-Iranian fighters took to the streets in Baghdad, chanting



American forces in Iraq and Syria will now focus on protecting themselves. Credit...Susannah George/Associated Press

that “revenge is coming” to the United States.

In both Syria and Iraq, the United States has maintained an archipelago of outposts, bases and airfields, all connected by ground and air transport routes, where small contingents of American troops are either training local forces or working alongside them to carry out counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State.

The cessation of those missions, to instead focus on security, is likely to allow what remains of the terrorist group to reconstitute itself in the ungoverned spaces where it flourishes, much as it did when Turkey invaded northern Syria in October. Worsening the situation, Iran-backed militias that were also fighting the Islamic State have turned their attention toward the United States.

“The fight against ISIS has been significantly degraded by the tensions between the U.S. and Iran,” said Michael Knights, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He cited the fact that American forces have recently been excluded from ground operations and have had airspace closed to them in the battle against the terrorist group, as a result of pressure on the Iraqi government from Iran-backed militias operating in the country.

One way that the American-led effort stands to be further degraded is if Special Operations forces limit their missions, he said. United States troops are deployed in several joint American and Iraqi bases spread across the country where they have been keeping pressure on resurgent ISIS cells.

The administration’s decision to suspend counterterrorism oper-

ations after the strike on General Suleimani drew sharp criticism from many former intelligence and counterterrorism specialists.

“The Trump administration that promised to ‘annihilate’ ISIS has now stopped operations against ISIS to protect US troops from Iranian retaliation,” Joshua A. Geltzer, who was the senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council during the Obama administration, said on Twitter on Sunday. “So Trump stops addressing an existing threat to deal with one of his making.”

Other security analysts said the administration now faces an escalating multifront fight against an array of Sunni and Shia violent extremists.

“The entire U.S. mission in the Middle East is being repositioned from a specific and focused goal of defeating ISIS to

an amorphous and open-ended campaign to counter Iran,” Colin P. Clarke, a senior fellow at the Soufan Center, a research organization for global security issues, said in an email. “This will provide ISIS with the operational space needed to reconstitute its networks across Iraq and Syria. U.S. forces will be overstretched while also becoming more attractive targets for a broad array of adversaries.”

The American military has long had plans to contend with an Iranian military incursion in the region, according to a former senior defense official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Those plans include moving important American assets stationed in the Middle East, such as warships and aircraft, away from possible

attack points and shutting down smaller, more exposed bases, or at least withdrawing American troops from them, the official said.

At the American Embassy in Baghdad, roughly 100 Marines who have been deployed there in recent days, along with around 3,500 paratroopers and a Special Operations unit sent to the region, are preparing for a possible attack from Iranian-backed forces.

One military officer deployed to the region said an attack could include mortar and rocket fire, along with snipers.

For now, though, the atmosphere at the embassy remained relatively calm, and the Marines used only nonlethal weapons, such as tear gas, during demonstrations

last week, the officer added.

Further complicating the situation, the Iraqi Parliament voted on Sunday to expel American and other foreign troops from the nation. Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi is expected to sign the bill, though it includes no timetable for a withdrawal.

Although the Iraqi government declared the Islamic State defeated in December 2017 and the American-led coalition and Syrian fighters seized the group’s last swath of territory in Syria last March, ISIS fighters have continued attacks, albeit on a much smaller scale, in both countries.

In 2014, at the Islamic State’s height, it held territory roughly the size of Britain.

Brett H. McGurk, Mr. Trump’s special envoy to the coalition fighting the Islamic State until a year ago, warned that the departure of American troops from Iraq — on the heels of suspending counterterrorism missions — could leave the country vulnerable to a resurgent terrorist wave, as happened after United States troops pulled out of Iraq in 2011.

“If we leave Iraq, that will just increase further the running room for Iran and Shia militia groups and also the vacuum that we’ll see groups like ISIS fill, and we’ll be right back to where we were,” Mr. McGurk said on MSNBC. “That would be a disaster.”

Helene Cooper and Rukmini Calimachi contributed reporting.



5 janvier 2020

## Le massacre des abeilles de Hakkari

L’apiculture dans les provinces kurdes, en particulier à Hakkari, a été profondément touchée par la guerre menée par l’Etat turc, en particulier par l’utilisation de substances chimiques par la police et l’armée turque. Des millions d’abeilles sont mortes, sans que les apiculteurs ne reçoivent aucune indemnisation.

Les montagnes et les vallées de Hakkari, Van, Ağrı et Bitlis recèlent une flore et une faune d’une grande diversité.

L’apiculture est l’une des ressources de la population de ces régions qui attirent aussi des apiculteurs venant des provinces turques comme Ordu, Gümüşhane et Rize à la recherche de variétés de miel différentes et spéciales.

Cependant, l’apiculture est devenue impossible ces dernières années. Des millions d’abeilles ont été tuées dans de nombreuses régions du Nord-Kurdistan, en particulier à Hakkari.

Un habitant du district de Semdinli,



Les substances chimiques utilisées par les forces de sécurité turques au Nord-Kurdistan (Turquie) ont causé la mort de millions d’abeilles.

dans la province de Hakkari, apiculteur depuis de nombreuses années, a déclaré à l’Agence de presse kurde Firat News (ANF) que des milliers d’abeilles étaient mortes et que son activité ne lui avait rien rapporté depuis près de deux ans.

« Le miel de Semdinli, a dit l’apiculteur, était très demandé. Mais ces deux dernières années, nos abeilles ont soudainement commencé à mourir. Nous avons subi d’énormes dégâts. Nous n’avons pas pu produire de miel depuis deux ans à

cause de la mort de nos abeilles. Nous attribuons la mort des abeilles aux substances chimiques utilisées par l’armée turque dans les montagnes. Il ne peut y avoir d’autres explications à leur mort soudaine. »



By Daniel Benaim

The New York Times Jan. 5, 2020

Mr. Benaim was a Middle East adviser in the Obama administration.

## Trump Hurts an Ally and Helps the Terrorists

Americans will debate the American drone strike that killed the Iranian commander Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani for a long time: whether it was wise, what it means for the Middle East, and how to proceed. But so far, the most dramatic consequences have arisen from where the strike happened — in Iraq. It appears that in undertaking the strike, the Trump administration may have sacrificed a valuable American counterterrorism partnership with Iraq at the altar of a risky pressure campaign against Iran with no end in sight.

On Sunday, Iraq's Parliament took a nonbinding vote urging Iraq's government to expel American forces from the country. The strike — on Iraqi soil, killing Iraqi officials, without Iraqi consent — appears to have united the two largest rival Shiite parliamentary blocs behind expulsion. Since 2014, American troops have been in the country as invited guests of the Iraqi government to fight the Islamic State and train the Iraqi military. Iraqis deemed a shooting war with Iran and its Iraqi allies as a far cry from that mission.

Iraqi politics sometimes goes to the precipice only to pull back. That could still happen here, especially given that Kurdish and Sunni leaders boycotted the vote. But it is difficult to see how American forces can stay to conduct their mission if the Iraqi Parliament, as well as inflamed Iraqi militias, now wish them gone. Iraqi political factions have previously tried to expel American forces only to fall short. But this time is different. After popular protests against corruption, Iraq's political leadership is the weakest it has been in 15 years. So are the ties between American and Iraqi leaders.

Assuming these votes do indeed mean that America's days in Iraq are numbered, that is bad for Iraq and America, a major opportunity for the Islamic State, and also a big victory for Iran. General Suleimani would have been pleased to see American forces pushed out of a



A protester outside the American Embassy in Baghdad on Wednesday. Credit...Khalid Al Mousily/Reuters

country that shares a 900-mile border with Iran, where American troops represented one of the major counterweights to Tehran's domination.

Yet leaving Iraq would be a logical outgrowth of Mr. Trump's policies to date. Until recently, he has treated Iraq as either an afterthought or a disappointing appendage to his "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran. Despite its disastrous invasion and occupation, America has achieved both meaningful influence in Iraq and real joint successes in fighting jihadists with a combination of military and civilian engagement. Mr. Trump seemed to understand the military half of this equation. Had he set out to undermine the civilian side of the formula, he could scarcely have done better.

In his first week in office, the "Muslim ban" barred Iraqis from American soil even as they battled the Islamic State alongside American troops. Mr. Trump spoke early and often about wanting to "take the oil" from Iraq, and then said America was only there to "watch Iran." In December 2018, he visited American troops in Iraq without meeting a single Iraqi leader — indeed, he still hasn't met Iraq's prime minister. There remains no senior point person for Iraq in the Trump administra-

tion. The administration also dangerously neglected reconstruction in the areas liberated from the Islamic State.

Even as tensions between the United States and Iran spiked after Mr. Trump walked away from the Iran nuclear deal, his administration withdrew American diplomats from southern Iraq and evacuated nonessential civilian staff from Baghdad. This means military reinforcements are arriving to protect a diplomatic skeleton crew navigating a political crisis in Iraq's capital.

More American diplomats in Iraq would certainly be helpful right now: The United States should be urgently working with its remaining security and political partners, including Kurdish and Sunni leaders whose parliamentary blocs boycotted the vote, to see if it is possible to stave off complete expulsion or at least set the terms for an orderly departure. Americans' safety remains paramount and under threat. Securely removing all Americans, advanced weaponry, sensitive intelligence, and other infrastructure would be a dizzying logistical challenge, as it was in 2011 over a long timeline in a relatively permissive environment. Should American forces be permitted to stay, operating safely and ef-

fectively will be immensely challenging. So will rebuilding Iraqi good will.

It did not have to be this way. A more successful policy would have treated Iraq not simply as a battleground with Iran but as an important if flawed partner whose stability is in America's self-interest. Iraq remains ground zero for fighting the Islamic State, which only a few years ago menaced the entire region as the world's most dangerous terrorist organization. There are already signs of resurgence. That becomes more likely should the Defense Department and intelligence agencies lose their counterterrorism footprint inside Iraq.

Some may argue that by leaving, the United States will make Iraq and the jihadists there into Iran's problem. But that ignores recent history, including the global chaos wreaked by the Islamic State just five years ago after American troops had left. Others suggest that, should the Islamic State re-emerge to threaten the world, America would be invited back. That is a risky bet given the nature of America's departure.

Iraq is not only a counterterrorism theater and flash point for outside powers. It is also a country of nearly 40 million still recovering from civil war. It matters to America that the risk of relapse is real, but so are Iraqis' chances to demonstrate that different sects and ethnicities can still live together in today's Middle East. A wiser American approach in Iraq would have invested in Iraqi nationalists — seeing not just counterterrorism, Iranian infiltration, and oil, but the concerns of a young population that braved militia bullets to demand reforms to corrupt, broken politics. Mr. Trump has made clear his priorities lie elsewhere.

Daniel Benaim (@danielbenaim) holds fellowships at the Century Foundation and the Center for American Progress. He served as a Middle East adviser in the Obama administration.





06/01/2020

By Ken Blackwell and David L. Phillips

## Salvaging U.S. Interests in Iraq

The killing of Qasem Soleimani is a seismic event with huge ramifications across the Middle East and worldwide. It underscores the need for a new approach in Iraq and the region. To salvage something from its invasion and occupation of Iraq, the U.S. should focus on the Kurds.

The Shiite-led Government of Iraq (GoI) has strongly protested the assassination of Qasem Soleimani. Iraqi rage will intensify, putting U.S. troops and personnel at risk. The Iraqi parliament will debate a resolution to evict U.S. troops. The spasm of violence is a reality check: Iraq is a failed state under Iran's control. Iraqis are only unified by their hatred of America. The Kurds are the only friends we have.

How did Iraq get to this point? America's failure to stand with the Iraqi Kurds created a gap that Iran has filled.

The U.S. brokered Iraq's constitution in 2005. However, Baghdad refused to implement articles favorable to the Kurds. The Obama administration demurred when it should have pushed harder to uphold Kurdish interests. Baghdad's failure, and America's acquiescence, left the Kurds little choice but to initiate a process putting Iraqi Kurdistan on the path to independence.

Though 93% voted to disassociate from Baghdad in September 2017, the U.S. failed to support the national aspirations of Iraqi Kurds. It turned a blind eye when Iranian-backed militias, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMUs), occupied the oil-rich region of Kirkuk and evicted the Kurdish governor. The current crisis arose when PMUs, the same Khataib Hezb'allah militias who seized Kirkuk and stomped on the Kurdistan flag, attacked U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria last week.

After repeated provocations, the U.S. responded with air strikes that killed 24 militia members. Tensions intensified with the killing of Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, head of Kataib Hezb'allah.

The U.S. has a big stake in Iraq, having sacrificed thousands of lives and spent trillions. In light of volatile conditions that exist today, how can Washington preserve its position and interests?

A direct line can be drawn between U.S. policy towards Iraq and Iran's aggression. Previous policies under successive administrations have marginalized the U.S. and made Iran ascendant.

Qasem Soleimani was testing U.S. resolve. In 2019, the Quds Force seized oil tankers in the Persian Gulf; shot down a U.S. surveillance drone over the Strait of Hormuz; and bombed Abqaiq, a major Saudi oil processing plant. Khataib Hezb'allah's recent aggression was intended to provoke a response. Qasem Soleimani sought to turn popular protests over Iran's role in the country, during which more than 500 people were killed, into anti-American demonstrations. Protesters chanted "death to America" and demanded that U.S. forces leave the country. Rage and popular protests are likely to intensify after the killing of Soleimani and Muhandis.

America should reconsider its strategically flawed and morally defunct "one Iraq policy." Recent events affirm America's military superiority. At the same time, they underscore America's irrelevance and diminished influence. In light of recent developments, the U.S. should pivot and support Kurdish national aspirations.

In Iraq and other countries where Kurds reside, Kurds are critical to

peace and stability. A regional approach, focusing on the Kurds, would secure U.S. interests in Iraq and the region.

Candidate Trump pledged to withdraw from "endless wars" of the Middle East. He focused on bringing home U.S. troops from Iraq and Syria. However, his plan was delayed by the rise of ISIS.

Kurdish valor helped defeat the caliphate. Iraqi Kurds helped liberate Mosul. In Syria, 11,000 Kurds died and 23,000 were wounded fighting ISIS at America's behest. When President Trump announced the withdrawal of U.S. forces, Iran responded by ratcheting up operations against the U.S.

U.S. influence is diminished without boots on-the-ground. Iran, Russia, and Turkey shaped a UN-sponsored constitutional committee to kick-start negotiations on ending Syria's civil war. Kurdish political parties, whose armed forces gained control over more than 30 percent of Syria's territory fighting ISIS, were excluded. Sustainable peace is impossible without the Kurds, rendering the committee an exercise in futility.

Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan also took advantage of U.S. ambivalence. Erdogan views the Syrian Kurds as an extension of the PKK, an armed rebel group fighting for greater political and cultural rights for Kurds in Turkey, resulting in 40,000 deaths and millions displaced since the 1980s. The PKK wants U.S. mediation, but Erdogan rejects the participation of third parties.

Erdogan uses the conflict to justify draconian policies towards the Kurds and other oppositionists. His course has marginalized America's influence, undermined Turkey's democracy, and directed Turkey into Russia's embrace.

Blood knows no borders. Just as conflict is transnational, peace-making requires a regional approach.

James Jeffrey serves as Trump's Special Envoy to Syria. Though Jeffrey is skilled and experienced, he is working with one hand tied behind his back. Current U.S. policy limits his ability to maneuver diplomatically. The killing of Soleimani and Muhandis will make his job even harder.

The Iraqi Parliament is on the verge of censuring the Trump administration and evicting U.S. forces. As the U.S. redeploys to Iraqi Kurdistan, it will need a legal basis for basing troops there. As Iraq becomes more violent, the U.S. might need to recognize Iraqi Kurdistan and an independent and sovereign state.

To manage the intricacies of U.S. policy towards the Kurds in Iraq and the region, President Trump should appoint a "Special Envoy for Kurdish Issues". The envoy's activities would be based on the recognition that Kurdish and U.S. interests align. Instead of placating our adversaries, the U.S. should support its friends.

*Ken Blackwell is the former award-winning United States Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. He is a member of the Council On Foreign Relations.*

*David L. Phillips is Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. Her served as a Senior Adviser working on Kurdish issues at the State Department during the Bush administration. His recent book is *The Great Betrayal: How America Abandoned the Kurds and Lost the Middle East*.*



January 06-2020

## Kurdish parties call for calm as regional tensions grow after Soleimani killing

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Senior members of leading political parties in the Kurdistan Region on Sunday urged for calm as regional tensions grow following the US killing of Qasim Soleimani, an Iranian general who was in charge of Iran's extraterritorial operations.

Representatives of multiple Kurdish parties, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), attended ceremonies organized in honor of Soleimani at the Iranian consular offices in Sulaimani and Erbil.

Early on Friday, an American drone killed Soleimani, the former chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the head of the Tehran-aligned Kata'ib Hizbollah (KH) militia in Iraq. [Read More: US strike kills](#)



Fazil Mirani, the Secretary-General of the KDP Politburo, speaks to reporters on the sidelines of a funeral ceremony for Qasim Soleimani in Erbil on Jan. 6, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

Qasim Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis behind the attacks.

The US operation came following several attacks on bases hosting anti-ISIS coalition troops, with one in late December killing an American contractor. Washington has accused KH, and Iran by proxy, of being

On New Year's Eve, the militias and their supporters stormed the US embassy in Baghdad and burned parts of it. Days earlier, American aircraft struck five KH bases near the Syrian-Iraqi border, killing upward to 25 fighters.

The attacks and retaliations have fueled speculation of the possibility of an all-out war between the two international foes.

Related Article: Iranian diplomat in Erbil echoes vows of 'revenge' for Soleimani killing

"We hope that Iraq will not turn into an arena for settling regional and international disputes," Fazil Mirani, the Secretary-General of the KDP Politburo, told reporters on the sidelines of a funeral ceremony for Soleimani in Erbil.

He asserted that Iraq is unable to bear the consequences of a potential conflict, saying that the Iraqi government must do all it can to calm the situation. Mirani also offered his condolences to Soleimani's family and said the KDP had sent them an official letter.



06/01/2020

Par Jérémie Berlioux, envoyé spécial à Diyarbakir (Turquie)

## En Turquie, les manifestations contre un parti prokurde encouragées par le gouvernement

A Diyarbakir, des familles protestent depuis septembre devant les locaux du parti kurde HDP. Elles l'accusent d'avoir aidé la guérilla du PKK à kidnapper leurs enfants. Une aubaine pour le gouvernement turc en pleine campagne de criminalisation du parti. Le HDP, qui nie tout lien avec le PKK, dénonce une manipulation du pouvoir.

Chaque jour depuis le 3 septembre, le même rituel se déroule devant les portes du parti d'opposition prokurde de gauche, HDP, à Diyarbakir, en Turquie. Une trentaine de familles munies de photos de leurs enfants s'installent sur les marches à l'entrée du bâtiment. Inlassablement, elles répètent les mêmes propos devant les

caméras. «Ma fille Yasemin a disparu depuis 2014. Elle a été kidnappée par le PKK [la guérilla kurde, ndlr]. Je veux la récupérer. Et si elle est morte, je veux ses os», martèle Yildiz Balli, qui a rejoint le petit rassemblement mi-septembre. La police est omniprésente, sourcilleuse quant aux discours tenus et à ceux qui les écoutent. De «simples ci-

toyens» sont venus en renfort. Ils distillent leurs analyses et invitent sur les réseaux sociaux des artistes et politiciens à venir soutenir ces «victimes du terrorisme».

Selon les familles, certains de ces enfants disparus ont rejoint la rébellion kurde ou ont été kidnappés par celle-ci. Mais

d'autres sont des membres des forces de l'ordre, soldats ou policiers prisonniers de la guérilla. Toutes ces familles accusent aujourd'hui le HDP d'être complice du PKK. Ce dernier est en guerre contre l'Etat turc depuis les années 80 pour obtenir la reconnaissance des droits politiques et culturels des Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 45 000



morts et des milliers de disparus, souvent passés entre les mains de milices paramilitaires aux ordres du pouvoir.

### Criminalisation du parti kurde

Généralement, les associations comme «les Mères du samedi» qui militent depuis des années pour que la lumière soit faite sur les milliers de cas de disparitions depuis les années 80 sont victimes d'une intense pression policière. Cette fois-ci, cependant, les médias prorégime couvrent l'affaire en multipliant les directs, les interviews d'ex-membres du PKK dénonçant la duplicité du HDP et les édits à charge. «Ces familles tombent à pic. J'espère qu'elles permettront enfin de faire comprendre que le HDP est lié au terrorisme, qu'il ne travaille pas pour les Kurdes mais seulement pour le PKK», souffle un journaliste présent sur les lieux.

La détresse de ces familles est une aubaine pour le gouvernement du président Erdogan, engagé dans une campagne de criminalisation du parti kurde qui s'est accélérée après l'arrestation, en août, des maires HDP des trois métropoles kurdes de Diyarbakir, Van et Mardin, remplacés par des kayyums («administrateurs»). Les autorités accusent les édiles d'avoir aidé le PKK. Un «putsch», selon l'opposition kurde, au cours duquel l'armée est déployée, des centaines de personnes arrêtées et les manifestations brutalement dispersées. Le 13 septembre, le ministre de l'Intérieur, Süleyman Soylu, est venu rendre visite aux parents qui manifestaient devant le siège du HDP, affirmant que ce dernier «est l'organe qui sépare des mères de leurs enfants pour les envoyer à des organisations terroristes».

Le HDP nie tout lien avec le PKK bien qu'une partie importante de sa base affiche une certaine sympathie pour la cause défendue par le groupe armé. Aussi le parti – légal – peine-t-il aujourd'hui à cacher un certain



Des mères tiennent des photos de leurs enfants, kidnappés ou engagés avec le PKK, devant le siège du HDP, en octobre 2019. Photo Sertac Kayar. Reuters

agacement. «Ces familles sont des victimes de la guerre et leur inquiétude est légitime», rappelle Hulya Alökmen Uyanik, coprésidente du HDP pour la province de Diyarbakir en marge d'un rassemblement quotidien d'opposition aux kayyums à Diyarbakir. «Mais ce sit-in est forcé par le gouvernement. Son timing, juste après la destitution des maires, le 19 août, participe à notre criminalisation», continue-t-elle.

Depuis octobre et le lancement de l'opération militaire turque «Source de paix» en Syrie contre les YPG, considérées par Ankara comme la branche syrienne du PKK, la répression s'est encore accrue dans la région. Plus de 30 mairies tenues par le HDP sont passées entre les mains de kayyums. En tout, 24 édiles démis sont emprisonnés, poursuivis pour «appartenance à une organisation terroriste» sur la base de preuves très discutables. Parmi eux, Adnan Selçuk Mizrakli, le maire métropolitain déchu de Diyarbakir est embastillé à Kayseri, en Anatolie centrale. Son acte d'accusation cite parmi les

preuves de sa culpabilité sa participation au Newroz (le nouvel an kurde) le 21 mars 2019, et ce bien que l'événement soit légal.

### «La police empêche la rencontre»

En attendant, les familles qui protestent devant le siège du HDP attendent toujours des réponses à leurs questions. Hulya Alökmen Uyanik assure les avoir invitées à venir rencontrer le parti à son siège afin de trouver des solutions, «mais la police empêche la rencontre d'avoir lieu», dit-elle. Devant les policiers, les manifestants nient avoir été contactés par le HDP.

Même son de cloche de la part de l'Association des droits de l'homme (IHD) qui surveille les violations des droits fondamentaux en Turquie. «Nous sommes prêts à aider ces parents s'ils le souhaitent. Mais la pression policière nous a empêchés pour le moment d'aller les rencontrer», explique un de ses membres souhaitant rester anonyme.

IHD, de même que le HDP, tra-

vaille depuis longtemps avec les proches de personnes prisonnières du PKK. Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan a affirmé à plusieurs reprises être prêt à en libérer certains par l'intermédiaire d'une ONG indépendante. IHD s'est maintes fois portée volontaire. «Nous avons fait des déclarations en ce sens avec des familles. Mais nous avons besoin de l'autorisation de l'Etat pour aller chercher les prisonniers, ce que nous n'avons jamais obtenu», explique le militant des droits de l'homme. Contacté à ce propos, le porte-parole du ministre de l'Intérieur n'a pas donné suite aux sollicitations de Libération.

Depuis le début du sit-in, IHD affirme qu'aucune des familles avec lesquelles elle était en contact ne répond plus à ses messages. Publiquement, les autorités n'ont pas annoncé vouloir négocier avec le PKK pour obtenir le retour de personnes concernées. Pour l'opposition kurde c'est une évidence : Ankara se préoccupe davantage de criminaliser un parti légal que du sort des personnes disparues.



07-01-2020  
Gulbahar Altash

## From Turkish prisons to world museums: the story of Zehra Dogan

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** - Imprisoned during a crackdown following the failed 2016 military coup, Kurdish artist and journalist Zehra Dogan has travelled the world displaying the art that landed her in jail.

Dogan, 30, was arrested on July 12, 2016 for a painting depicting devastation in the predominantly Kurdish town of Nusaybin, southeastern Turkey, following clashes between Turkish security forces and Kurdish insurgents.

The drawing shows Turkish tanks deployed to a neighborhood in Nusaybin. She had published the painting on social media along with a news story quoting a 10-year-old's diary of the bombings in the city.

Accused of spreading "terrorist propaganda", Dogan then spent 600 days in prisons in Diyarbakir and Tarsus.

"I faced many real challenges in prison. I eventually accepted the fate that was quite unbearable to me," in the first place, Dogan told Rudaw on Monday.

"I learnt many lessons in prison. Had I not spent sometime in prison, I might not have learned or made my artwork."

She attributes her ending up in Turkish prison to her artwork, not "taking part in demonstrations or having a political stance or affiliation."

"But I did not give up and wanted to send out the message that despite the pressures I was facing, I managed to paint in all circumstances," she added. Since she left prison, Dogan has held 20 different exhibitions in the UK and Europe.

In March 2019, she launched an



The painting of Nusaybin which led to Dogan's imprisonment. Photo: Twitter

exhibition at London's Tate Modern. Another exhibition by Dogan will be held at the same museum from January 23.

Her latest exhibition in Santa Giulia Beach museum in Brescia, Italy, has been extended by two months.

"At Santa Giulia Beach, which is one of the most important museums of Italy, I have displayed 70 paintings, attracting the attention of visitors and art lovers of Italy," Dogan said.

Italian Sakura House Publishing has decided to cover the cost of printing the catalog of the exhibition.

Dogan added that she has been pleasantly surprised by the warm reception of both her work and Kurdish culture as a whole.

"I never imagined that my paintings would receive such a warm

welcome," she said. "Artists, politicians, academics and ministers pay a lot of attention to the exhibition. I realized how much Italians are interested in Kurdish culture."

"The majority of the paintings that are on display were drawn in prison," Dogan said. "Some of the paintings tell the story of those women whom I knew at Nusaybin prison. Others depict my experiences."

Though deprived of her art materials "multiple times", she continued to draw in secret and smuggle them out of the jail. Her paintings were sketched on t-shirts and towels and painted on pillow cases using brushes made from the hair of her fellow inmates. Paints were made from parsley, potato peel, turmeric, tomato paste and tea.

"I would obtain materials in two

ways with some of them ending up confiscated by them [prison guards]. I would secretly draw my paintings during nighttime, and sometimes I would turn to some materials that were far from drawing standards."

With her work popular among Italians, state outlet Rai2TV held a 20 minute-long interview with Dogan on her story and the history of the Kurds.

"Before the interview was held, the TV presented a report on the history of Kurds and the four parts of Kurdistan telling of the sufferings of Kurds," she added. Now in Europe, Dogan is afraid to return to Turkey.

She says she has not forgotten the Kurdistan Region and has plans to open an exhibition in March this year.

Translation by Zhelwan Z. Wali





07-01-2020

## Russian delegation in Syria to foster dialogue between Damascus and Kurds

**R**ussia sent a delegation to Syria to persuade Kurdish-led administrations that control parts of the north and east of the country to reconcile with the Damascus government, pan-Arab daily Asharq al-Awsat reported on Tuesday.

The delegation brought a 10-point roadmap that would have the Kurds take their place in the constitutional committee, which is currently negotiating to end the nine-year conflict, and represent the Kurdish political movement in the Syrian government, Asharq al-Awsat quoted unnamed sources as saying.

The delegation suggested the Kurdish-led autonomous admin-



istrations and Syrian government should begin dialogue.

Asharq al-Awsat's sources said the delegation had travelled to Damascus before approaching the Kurdish side in Qamishli on Dec. 26 and will return to the capital city with suggestions

after talks there are complete.

One of the points on the roadmap suggested reopening road links between the northern Syrian governorate of Aleppo and the Iraqi border.

Kurdish-led political and armed

groups carved out a large area of control in the north and east of the country throughout the conflict, but Turkey dealt the self-governing administrations a crippling blow when it launched a military operation in October, driving Kurdish forces away from the large cities on the northern Syrian border.

The Kurds began negotiations with President Bashar Assad's government during the operation to halt the Turkish advance, but talks stalled after the United States reversed its decision to fully withdraw troops from Syria and left forces to help protect areas under Kurdish control.



07-01-2020

## State appointed mayor sacks employee who lost legs in ISIS attack

**T**he state-appointed mayor of Turkey's Kurdish-majority southeastern province of Diyarbakır has fired a staff member who lost her legs in an Islamic State (ISIS) attack in 2015, news site Duvar reported on Tuesday.

Lisa Çalan is one of eight employees dismissed from their jobs by the city's state-appointed official, who last year replaced the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) mayor, Duvar said.

Çalan, who had been working as stage designer for the municipality's department of culture since 2016, was dismissed citing redundancy, it said.

Çalan lost both her legs during an ISIS bomb attack on a HDP



rally in Diyarbakır on June 4, 2015. The attack left five dead and over 100 injured.

A total of 32 elected Kurdish mayors have been removed from their posts by state appoin-

ted officials in 2019 as part of a crackdown by the Turkish government on the HDP.

Ankara accuses the HDP of harbouring sympathies and acting in the interest of the outalwed

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group fighting for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey for over three decades. The PKK is listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, as well as the E.U. and the United States.

Many ousted HDP mayors are facing terrorism-related criminal prosecutions.

"The state appointed mayors have fired many of our colleagues since 2016 and I am one of them," Çalan said.

"Of course I am no different than those who have lost their jobs. My only difference is that my physical condition, compared to others, highly limits my employment opportunities," Çalan added.

## Iraq's Kurds weigh opportunities, risks in wake of Soleimani killing

As the tremors unleashed by the assassination of Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani continue to reverberate across the region, Iraq's Kurds are quietly weighing the opportunities and risks posed by the demise of Iran's most influential soldier and strategist ahead of a potential trip to Washington by Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani at the invitation of US President Donald Trump.

A resolution passed by the Iraqi parliament Jan. 5 urging the country's caretaker government to kick out around 5,000 American troops has added a new layer of uncertainty, and as some Iraqi Kurds see it, a chance to advance their long-cherished dream for an independent state with US help.

dressed to Iraq's Defense Ministry from Marine Brig. Gen. William Seely that speaks of "onward movement" of US forces in "due deference to the sovereignty of the Republic of Iraq, and as requested by the Iraqi Parliament and the Prime Minister."

But administration sources, speaking not for attribution, told Al-Monitor the possibility of a US withdrawal is real because of the Iraqi government's sharply hostile tone, albeit under Iranian pressure, and mounting force protection worries amid Iranian calls for revenge.

Might Washington turn to the Iraqi Kurds to redeploy US forces from Arab-dominated Iraq to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where the United States and coalition forces fighting the Is-

spond?

Sources familiar with KRG thinking say the only condition under which they might consider agreeing to a continued US military presence (if and when US forces are formally evicted by Baghdad) would be in exchange for recognition of their independent state and written guarantees that the United States would protect the KRG from attack.

Kenneth M. Pollack, a former CIA intelligence analyst and a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said, "It will seem like a great opportunity for [the Kurds]. But I see this as completely different than, say, 2014 when [IS] attacked or other moments when a US shift to the KRG could have worked well." He told Al-Monitor, "In the wake of Soleimani's killing, no one really wants to be seen as Amer-

Pollack sad moving US troops to KRG territory without Iraqi government authorization would be illegal under international law, constitute de facto American recognition of Kurdish independence and invite Iranian and Iraqi attacks on the KRG and the American forces there. Moreover, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey might all choose to blockade and close their airspace to flights to and from the KRG, which would "put tremendous economic pressure on the KRG and make it impossible for the United States to supply its troops in the KRG."

Iran could also reignite tensions between the Barzanis and the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Kurdish factions went to war in 1996, with Iran weighing in on the PUK's side to drive the Barzanis out of Sulaimaniyah.

KRG officials say they do not feel any imminent danger of an Iranian attack. Iran would be loathe to settle its scores with the United States within Iraq because this would invite US retaliation of a kind that would harm the Iraqi people and undermine Iraqi Shiite support for Iran. As US sanctions bite harder and harder, Iraq has become an economic lifeline for the Iranians.

Other analysts argue that the collapse of Iraq as a state seems increasingly inevitable. This would give IS an opportunity to regroup and the United States could feel compelled to keep troops in Iraqi Kurdistan. In chaos that might ensue, Turkey for instance might be persuaded to drop its objections to Iraqi Kurdish independence in exchange for US acquiescence for Ankara's annexation of long-coveted Mosul and for the Pentagon scrapping its support for the Syrian Kurdish People's Pro-



REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst  
US Vice President Mike Pence and his delegation meet with President of the Kurdistan region in Iraq Nechirvan Barzani in the VIP terminal at Erbil International Airport in Erbil, Iraq Nov. 23, 2019.

US Defense Secretary Mark Esper has denied reports that the United States was pulling out of Iraq; his statement came in response to a leaked letter ad-

amic State (IS) within Iraq and in neighboring Syria, already have a sizable presence? And how would the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) re-

ica's ally, and if the Kurds try to take advantage of this moment, I fear they will get collectively get hammered for doing so."



tection Units and helping eradicate the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), among other things.

A PKK source disagreed, saying the more likely outcome in the event of Iraq's collapse would be a Turkish invasion to prevent the Iraqi Kurds from declaring independence. Turkey already has several thousands troops deployed inside Iraqi Kurdistan, notionally to hold the PKK in check. "The Iraqi Kurds are dreaming if they believe Turkey will allow an independent Kurdistan anywhere," he said.

In any case, the withdrawal of US troops would be disastrous for the Iraqi Kurds under any circumstances, leaving them even more exposed, said a Western diplomat based in Erbil. "The KRG is desperate for them to stay but do they even want to? It's hard to predict with this [Trump] administration," the envoy told Al-Monitor.

Ramzy Mardini of the University of Chicago, who has written extensively about the Iraqi Kurds, said, "It's unlikely that Kurdish leaders will rely on an unstable, unpredictable and unreliable American foreign policy, certainly not when the strategic interests and risks are high." Mardini told Al-Monitor, "A pivot by Erbil away from Baghdad and Tehran and toward Washington would be a major gamble. A more prudent approach would be to aim for a foreign policy of neutral engagement. That would better safeguard the multiple strategic relationships the Kurds need to balance and offer an opportunity to act as a mediator between them in time of rising tensions in the region."

While Iraqi Kurdish leaders mull their options, their government is facing intense pressure from both Iran and the United States to pick sides.

Barzani was tentatively expected to meet with Trump at the White House this month; however, it remains unclear whether

the invitation relayed in November to the Iraqi Kurdish leader by Vice President Mike Pence during an unannounced trip to Erbil still stands.

A Trump administration official told Al-Monitor that the visit was "not going to be happening very soon." The reason for the postponement was not because of Soleimani's death but rather linked to the resignation of Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi in late November. The administration official declined to elaborate.

Barzani is, however, expected to hold talks with US officials on the sidelines of the Davos summit in Switzerland later this month, sources told Al-Monitor.

The invitation to the White House was calculated as a means to mitigate anger over Trump's greenlighting of Turkey's Oct. 9 assault against the Syrian Kurds. Mazlum Kobane, the commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces and a former PKK fighter, was supposed to be hosted there but Turkish fury proved too much of an obstacle. Barzani, who has good relations with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, emerged as a face-saving substitute, sources familiar with the administration's internal debates speculated.

Over the past month as tensions between Tehran and Washington skyrocketed, Barzani and his cousin, KRG Prime Minister, Masrour Barzani, have sought to tread a middle ground between not provoking Iran and humoring Washington. It's a near impossible task.

Today, the KRG's most influential figure and former president, Massoud Barzani, waded in with a tweet emphasizing that the Iraqi Kurds ought to remain neutral, saying, "If the process of resolving the current issue in the Middle East region is in accordance with a path of reason and wisdom, we are certainly ready to cooperate. However, we cannot be involved in any proxy

wars."

Even before Soleimani died Jan. 3 in a US drone strike, Washington was nagging the KRG to formally condemn Iranian-backed Shiite Iraqi militias who besieged the US Embassy in Baghdad last month, providing KRG officials with a draft statement, according to well-informed sources. The sources told Al-Monitor that the pressure came from David Schenker, the assistant secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and Joey Hood, the principal deputy assistant for the bureau. Schenker, a Trump appointee, was apparently disgruntled by the delay in the KRG's statement and with what he viewed as its limp wording when it finally came out, the sources said.

US officials have reminded the KRG of Soleimani's role in helping Iraqi forces retake the contested oil-rich province of Kirkuk from the Kurds following their ill-fated referendum on independence in September 2017. The Iraqi Kurds respond that the United States sat on its hands and ignored Kurdish pleas for help while this happened.

Still, all but one Kurdish lawmaker, the deputy speaker of the parliament who attended on procedural grounds, boycotted Sunday's session in Baghdad to debate the call for the ejection of US troops. KRG leaders were instrumental in persuading Sunni lawmakers to stay away as well, denying the parliament the necessary quorum. This time, Washington registered its approval.

"Kurdish parliamentarians acted very bravely by staying away from the parliamentary vote," said Bilal Wahab, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East policy. He recalled that Kurdish lawmakers had received threatening letters from Shiite militias, including Kataib Hezbollah, whose founder Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis perished alongside Soleimani in the US strike.

Unsurprisingly, the Iraqi Kurds

are sensing menacing rumblings from Iran. Tehran's man in Erbil, Nasrollah Rashnoudi, aired his displeasure in an interview with Rudaw, an Iraqi Kurdish media outlet that is close to Nechirvan Barzani. The Iranian consul general said he was disappointed at local reaction to the death of Soleimani. "We expected more on this terrorist act. We expected a clearer and louder denunciation of what happened."

Iran may well have been upset by the fact that not a single Barzani showed up at the Iranian Consulate to sign the condolence book set up for Soleimani; the KRG instead dispatched its foreign minister, Safeen Dizayee, and other senior Kurdistan Democratic Party figures.

Ominously, publications such as Iran's Kayhan newspaper have run provocative headlines accusing the Iraqi Kurds of conspiring with the United States in Soleimani's death and of supposedly being thanked by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for doing so.

Masrour Barzani, the KRG prime minister, called such claims "fake news." Nechirvan Barzani addressed a letter of condolence to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei saying Soleimani's death was "a source of grief" for the people and government of Kurdistan. Barzani lauded Soleimani for his role in standing with the Kurds in the fight against IS and said he hoped the slain commander would "rest in paradise." The Western diplomat said the move was a bid to appease Iran.

Barzani, like many fellow Iraqi Kurds fleeing slaughter from Baghdad, was born in exile in Iran and speaks fluent Farsi. He was known to have had a good working relationship with Soleimani, who rushed to Erbil's defense when it came under attack from IS in 2014, providing the KRG with weapons as Turkey looked the other way. There may have been more than a hint of sincerity in his words.



# En Irak, le camp chiite uni pour réclamer le départ de l'armée américaine

Le Parlement a voté un texte non contraignant contre la présence des troupes étrangères.

Le poing levé, brandissant des portraits du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani, et de son lieutenant en Irak, Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes, tués dans une frappe américaine, les députés de la majorité chiite au Parlement de Bagdad ont affiché, dimanche 5 janvier, leur unité. « Oui, oui à Soleimani et à Mohandes, non, non à l'Amérique et à Israël », ont-ils scandé à l'ouverture d'une séance exceptionnelle, déterminés à bouter les troupes américaines hors du pays. Le boycottage de la séance par les députés sunnites et kurdes n'a pas empêché le vote d'une résolution, non contraignante, demandant au gouvernement de mettre fin à la présence des troupes étrangères sur le sol irakien, et de révoquer l'invitation faite à la coalition internationale pour combattre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI).

« C'est un texte symbolique pour apaiser la colère de la rue. Il n'a aucune valeur. Le mandat des troupes étrangères relève du domaine du gouvernement, mais ce dernier veut un blanc-seing du Parlement pour ne pas être seul responsable des conséquences d'une telle décision », commente le député kurde Sarkawt Shams (Nouvelle Génération). Le président américain, Donald Trump, n'a d'ailleurs pas tardé à mettre en avant les implications éventuelles d'un second retrait américain d'Irak, huit ans après le départ de ses troupes fin 2011, en agitant la menace de sanctions.

## « Violations de la souveraineté »

Le départ des troupes étrangères n'est pas encore acté et



Le cortège funéraire de Ghassem Soleimani et de son lieutenant en Irak, Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes, le 4 janvier à Kerbala. ABDULLAH DHIAA AL-DEEN / REUTERS

ses modalités pourraient faire l'objet de longues tractations. Leur déploiement, à l'été 2014, pour assister et former les forces irakiennes dans la lutte contre l'EI, est le fruit d'accords diplomatiques qui devraient être renégociés. Or, le premier ministre, Adel Abdel-Mahdi, n'en a plus la légitimité constitutionnelle. Après sa démission sous la pression de la rue, le 29 novembre 2019, et en l'absence de successeur désigné, son mandat se limite à la gestion des affaires courantes. Dimanche, face aux députés, M. Abdel-Mahdi a toutefois estimé que, face à cet « assassinat politique », l'Irak n'avait que deux choix : « appeler les troupes étrangères à partir immédiatement ou revoir leur mandat par un processus parlementaire ». Invoquant l'impossibilité de garantir leur sécu-

rité, il s'est prononcé en faveur de « la première option ».

Dans la foulée, et conformément à la demande des députés, il a convoqué l'ambassadeur américain pour dénoncer des « violations de la souveraineté de l'Irak », et a annoncé avoir porté plainte auprès du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU contre « des attaques américaines contre des bases irakiennes » et « l'assassinat de commandants militaires irakiens et amis ».

## « SMS de menace »

Le texte de la résolution a plusieurs fois été remanié pour tenter de rallier le soutien des députés kurdes et sunnites. « Ils nous ont accusés d'être des traîtres à la patrie. On a reçu des SMS de menace des milices

chiites », précise Sarkawt Shams. Seuls deux députés sunnites se sont joints à ceux du camp chiite pour former le quorum de 168 députés, sur 329. « Ce projet ne doit pas être discuté au Parlement, qui est plein de va-t-en-guerre, liés à des pays étrangers. C'est au prochain gouvernement de décider. Nous, les Kurdes, voulons la paix avec l'Iran et les Etats-Unis », déclare le parlementaire kurde. « Les députés sunnites, dont les villes sont détruites et où les milices chiites développent des activités illégales, savent que 90 % de l'aide pour les réfugiés et la reconstruction vient des Etats-Unis et de la communauté internationale », ajoute-t-il.

L'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani et d'Abou Mahdi Al-Mo-

handes a donné au camp chiite, désormais uni dans un rare consensus, un sentiment de toute-puissance. Leur mort a ravivé au sein de la population un antiaméricanisme qui n'avait pas été aussi vindicatif depuis l'occupation américaine (2003-2011). Déstabilisés par trois mois d'une contestation populaire qui les a pris directement pour cible, les responsables politiques et chefs de milices chiites y voient une opportunité de prendre leur revanche et d'étouffer la mobilisation.

Plusieurs rassemblements de contestataires dénonçant « les deux occupants : l'Iran et les Etats-Unis » dans le Sud chiite ont été attaqués par des partisans du camp pro-iranien, en marge des funérailles nationales, samedi. A Bagdad, et

dans les deux villes saintes de Nadjaf et Kerbala, l'ensemble de la classe politique chiite, toutes tendances confondues, était représentée parmi les dizaines de milliers de partisans pro-Iran, qui ont accompagné le cortège funéraire.

#### Obus de mortier sur la « zone verte »

Au milieu des drapeaux américains en feu et des cris « Mort à l'Amérique », les appels à la « vengeance » se sont multipliés. « Sois-en sûr, le prix de ton sang sera le départ des troupes américaines d'Irak », a promis le chef du parti-milice Badr et du camp pro-iranien au Parlement, Hadi Al-Améri, sur le cercueil d'Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes. Apparue à Nadjaf en uniforme militaire, Qaïs Al-Khazali, le chef de la

Ligue des vertueux (Asaïb Hal Al-Haq), inscrit sur la liste des personnalités désignées comme terroristes par Washington, a promis des représailles. C'est enfin depuis l'Iran que le chef populiste chiite, Moqtada Al-Sadr, a exigé l'expulsion immédiate des diplomates et militaires américains, et annoncé son ordre de réactiver l'Armée du Mahdi. Ce groupe armé fut le fer de lance de la guerre contre l'occupation américaine à partir de 2003.

Les menaces des Brigades du Hezbollah (Kataeb Hezbollah) ont décidé la coalition internationale à annoncer, dimanche, la suspension de ses missions de formation aux forces irakiennes pour se concentrer sur la protection des bases qui accueillent ses troupes. La veille, la milice

pro-iranienne, engagée depuis le 27 décembre 2019 dans un bras de fer meurtrier avec Washington, avait sommé les forces irakiennes de se tenir à l'écart des bases qu'elles partagent avec les soldats américains dès dimanche soir. Qualifiées d'appel de « voyous » par le secrétaire d'Etat américain, Mike Pompeo, ces menaces ne s'étaient pas encore matérialisées lundi matin par une attaque de grande ampleur. Samedi soir, des roquettes et des obus de mortier se sont abattus sur la « zone verte » de Bagdad, le quartier ultrasécurisé où se trouve l'ambassade américaine, et sur une base militaire plus au nord, où sont déployés des soldats américains, sans faire de victimes. Dimanche soir, l'ambassade américaine a une nouvelle fois été visée.

**Le Monde** 07/01/2020  
Par Piotr Smolar

## Paris cherche un point d'équilibre entre Washington et Téhéran

L'Allemagne, la France et le Royaume-Uni ont appelé dimanche soir à la « désescalade » dans une déclaration conjointe, quelques jours après l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani par les Etats-Unis.

**E**n diplomatie, parler n'est jamais vain, même si la porte paraît à peine entrebâillée. Alors que l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani par les Etats-Unis a soulevé un tourbillon au-dessus du Moyen-Orient, aux conséquences encore insaisissables, Emmanuel Macron a mis en garde l'Iran. Au terme d'un entretien téléphonique, dimanche 5 janvier, avec Donald Trump, le président français a appelé Téhéran à s'abstenir « de toute mesure d'escalade militaire susceptible d'aggraver encore l'instabilité régionale » et à mettre un terme aux « activités déstabilisatrices de la force Al-Qods » dans la région. Un entretien avec le président Hassan Rohani devrait avoir lieu rapidement. Le communiqué, diffusé par l'Elysée, fait aussi état d'une « entière solidarité » avec les alliés de Paris, face aux attaques perpétrées ces dernières



Emmanuel Macron et Jean-Yves Le Drian, le 17 juin 2019 à Paris.  
LUDOVIC MARIN / AFP

semaines contre la coalition en Irak.

Le président français, qui s'est beaucoup investi depuis la fin de l'été 2019 pour sauver l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien – dont les Etats-Unis s'étaient retirés en mai 2018 –, cherche à préserver une position d'équilibre, sans formuler de critique envers l'administration Trump. « On a toujours dit qu'il fallait encadrer l'influence iranienne dans la région, il ne faut pas nous placer dans un camp ou dans l'autre », dit-on à l'Elysée. C'est une affaire de priorité et d'anticipation.

Craignant une plus grande déstabilisation régionale, M. Macron a pour horizon premier la lutte contre le djihadisme armé. L'Elysée ne mentionne pas l'élimination de Soleimani dans le communiqué, pour éviter de la qualifier. Elle n'était pas non plus évoquée dans les comptes rendus officiels qui ont suivi ses entretiens, depuis vendredi, avec d'autres acteurs de cette crise en développement, notamment le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan et Vladimir Poutine, puis le prince héritier d'Abou Dhabi, Mohammed ben Zayed. Dimanche

soir, Emmanuel Macron, la chancelière Angela Merkel et le premier ministre britannique Boris Johnson ont signé une déclaration conjointe, appelant à la « désescalade ». Le secrétaire d'Etat américain, Mike Pompeo, avait estimé que les Européens n'avaient pas été assez « utiles », en soutien de Washington.

#### « Un acte dans une guerre qui avait déjà commencé »

« Notre rôle, car nous avons gardé des contacts avec l'Iran, c'est de faire passer des appels de calme, souligne Michel Duclos, conseiller spécial à l'Institut Montaigne. Il y avait un contexte stratégique où, pour les Etats-Unis, il n'était pas absurde de rétablir la dissuasion face à l'Iran et de faire monter les enjeux. La mort de Soleimani n'est pas une déclaration de guerre, mais un acte dans une guerre qui avait déjà commencé. Les Etats-Unis y perdaient pied depuis qu'ils n'avaient pas réagi à l'attaque du 14 septembre [contre des installations pétrolières en Arabie saoudite]. Là, les Américains viennent de réécrire les règles d'engagement dans la région, en les rendant plus robustes lorsque leurs intérêts sont atta-

qués. La faiblesse, c'est que la dissuasion n'a pas été rétablie pour les alliés de l'Amérique. »

Une éventuelle remise en question de la présence militaire américaine en Irak inquiète la France sur un plan opérationnel, dans la lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI). « On n'en est pas du tout à un départ dans l'immédiat », souligne-t-on à l'Elysée. Aujourd'hui, les forces américaines déployées dans la région sont préoccupées par leur propre sécurité, en attendant de voir l'ampleur de la réponse de Téhéran. Sauver la coalition internationale : telle est la priorité de l'Elysée, dans cette phase d'escalade imprévisible. Ce message a été répété dimanche soir par le ministre des affaires étrangères Jean-Yves Le Drian au premier ministre irakien Adel Abdoul Mahdi, par téléphone.

#### Marge de manœuvre étroite

Mais la marge de manœuvre française et européenne semble étroite. « Nous sommes au cœur de la crise, qui est la quintessence même d'une escalade, avec un problème classique d'interprétation, de part et d'autre, des inten-

tions de l'adversaire, souligne Bruno Tertrais, directeur adjoint de la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS). La France n'a ni le mandat ni la légitimité pour exercer une quelconque médiation. Mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle a tort d'essayer. Avec la Russie, elle est l'un des seuls pays capables de parler à tout le monde. »

Lors de son entretien avec Vladimir Poutine vendredi, M. Macron a évoqué la situation en Libye, qui devient, après la Syrie, le théâtre de toutes les rivalités, locales et régionales. Le président français « a souligné le risque d'escalade lié au renforcement des interférences militaires étrangères ». Il a aussi abordé avec son homologue russe la situation humanitaire à Idlib, en Syrie, où Moscou demeure le principal soutien au régime. Les deux dirigeants affichent leur « volonté commune », selon le communiqué de l'Elysée, de trouver un accord d'ici au 10 janvier au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU pour préserver l'aide transfrontalière à destination de la population en détresse. Redonner de l'espace à la diplomatie, à la concertation, au compromis. Un défi considérable : les vents sont contraires.

Le Monde

07/01/2020

Par Gilles Paris

## Donald Trump multiplie les menaces et les provocations

Le président américain promet des frappes contre des sites iraniens en cas de représailles de Téhéran après l'assassinat du général Soleimani.

Un Donald Trump particulièrement vindicatif est revenu à la Maison Blanche, dimanche 5 janvier, après deux semaines de vacances en Floride marquées par l'une des décisions sans doute les plus significatives de son mandat : l'assassinat à Bagdad du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani. Trois jours après la frappe d'un drone qui avait pour objectif de restaurer la capacité de dissuasion américaine, le

président des Etats-Unis a multiplié les menaces. Quelques heures plus tôt, son secrétaire d'Etat, Mike Pompeo, s'était efforcé de dissiper les craintes soulevées par un message publié la veille par Donald Trump sur son compte Twitter dans lequel il évoquait la possibilité de bombarder des sites emblématiques de la civilisation iranienne en cas de représailles contre des ressortissants ou soldats

américains. Le secrétaire d'Etat avait semblé écarter une telle riposte, considérée par les juristes comme un crime de guerre. « Nous ferons ce qui est juste », « légalement », avait-il dit au cours d'un marathon qui l'avait vu s'exprimer dans toutes les émissions politiques dominicales du pays.

A bord de l'Air Force One qui le conduisait de Miami à la base militaire d'Andrew, près

de Washington, le président des Etats-Unis a campé sur ses positions. « On leur permet de tuer les nôtres. On leur permet de torturer et de mutiler les nôtres. On leur permet d'utiliser des bombes pour faire exploser les nôtres. Et on n'a pas le droit de toucher leurs sites culturels ? Ce n'est pas comme ça que ça marche », a assuré Donald Trump au cours d'un entretien avec la presse.

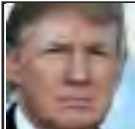




Donald Trump, le 3 janvier lors d'un discours à destination des évangéliques, à Miami (Floride). JIM WATSON / AFP

## Entorses

Dans l'après-midi, le président avait déjà provoqué la stupeur en publiant un message surprenant sur son compte Twitter, dirigé cette



Donald J. Trump  
✓ @realDonaldTrump

These Media Posts will serve as notification to the United States Congress that should Iran strike any U.S. person or target, the United States will quickly & fully strike back, & perhaps in a disproportionate manner. Such legal notice is not required, but is given nevertheless!

373K  
10:25 PM - Jan 5, 2020

Twitter Ads info and privacy

181K people are talking about this

fois-ci contre les démocrates qui avaient protesté contre le fait d'avoir été tenus à l'écart d'une inflexion aussi significative que celle qu'a consti-

tuée l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani.

« Ces messages en ligne serviront de notification au Congrès américain pour établir que si l'Iran frappe toute personne ou cible américaine, les Etats-Unis frapperont rapidement et totalement en retour », avait écrit Donald Trump, aussitôt critiqué pour sa désinvolture vis-à-vis du War Powers Act. Cette loi oblige le président à informer le Congrès dans les quarante-huit heures lorsqu'il engage les forces américaines dans un conflit armé.

Démentant déjà son secrétaire d'Etat, qui avait assuré dans la matinée que les ripostes de Washington seraient « appropriées et proportionnées aux actions qui menacent la vie des Américains », le président avait ajouté que Washington opérerait « peut-être de ma-

nière disproportionnée ». De telles représailles constitueraient pourtant d'autres entorses aux lois de la guerre.

L'acrimonie de Donald Trump s'est également étendue aux élus irakiens qui avaient voté dans la matinée une résolution pour l'instant symbolique en faveur du départ des troupes américaines stationnées en Irak. Ce vote a suscité la « déception » du département d'Etat. Le président des Etats-Unis a renoué avec son passé d'homme d'affaires pour mêler des considérations pécuniaires à des enjeux géopolitiques. « Nous avons [en Irak] une base aérienne extrêmement coûteuse. La construction a coûté des milliards de dollars. Bien avant mon mandat. Nous ne partons pas à moins qu'ils nous remboursent », a-t-il tout d'abord répondu à une question sur le vote du Parlement irakien. Et de marteler :

« S'ils nous demandent de partir, si ça ne se fait pas de manière très amicale, nous leur imposerons des sanctions comme ils n'en ont jamais vues auparavant. A côté, les sanctions iraniennes auront l'air modestes. S'il y a une hostilité, et qu'ils fassent tout ce que nous jugeons inapproprié, nous imposerons des sanctions à l'Irak, de très importantes sanctions. »

## Limites

La journée, il est vrai, n'a guère été favorable au président américain. Après le vote symbolique du Parlement irakien, la décision de Téhéran de s'affranchir une nouvelle fois des contraintes de l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien conclu en 2015, quitté unilatéralement par les Etats-Unis en 2018, a souligné les limites de la stratégie du président. Elle est survenue de surcroît moins d'une semaine après un premier acte de défiance en matière de prolifération venu de la Corée du Nord, qui a assuré le 1er janvier avoir rompu avec un moratoire sur les essais nucléaires et balistiques.

La dernière mauvaise nouvelle est venue de la coalition internationale bâtie par les Etats-Unis pour lutter contre l'organisation Etat islamique. Victimes indirectes des tensions entre Téhéran et Washington, les forces de cette coalition, principalement américaines, ont indiqué devoir se concentrer désormais sur leur protection. Constatant que ce contexte « a limité notre capacité à mener des formations avec des partenaires et à soutenir leurs opérations contre Daech, nous avons donc suspendu ces activités », a indiqué le commandement de cette coalition.

# L'Iran promet une riposte militaire

## En parallèle de cette menace, Téhéran poursuit son désengagement de l'accord nucléaire

Pression diplomatique et posture martiale :  
ace au reste du monde, l'Iran joue sur deux tableaux

Se montrer prêt à passer à l'offensive, sur le plan militaire, face aux Américains, mais accroître la pression, tout en restant dans le champ diplomatique face aux autres. Alors que, trois jours après l'assassinat dans une frappe américaine du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani, des foules colossales se pressent à Téhéran pour rendre hommage au chef des Forces Al-Qods des gardiens de la révolution, la République islamique semble jouer deux partitions distinctes. Aux États-Unis, l'Iran promet d'une manière de plus en plus agressive une « riposte militaire ». Face à la communauté internationale, il vide l'accord nucléaire, signé en 2015, de sa substance, sans pour autant s'isoler totalement.

Dimanche 5 janvier, alors que toute la région semblait prise dans un climat délétère avant-coureur d'une guerre, la République islamique a annoncé qu'elle ne se considérait plus tenue par aucune limitation du nombre de ses centrifugeuses, dernier obstacle prévu par l'accord et pesant encore sur la production d'uranium enrichi dans le pays.

Tous les soixante jours, depuis le mois de mai, l'Iran s'est graduellement désengagé de l'accord sur le nucléaire en réponse à la politique de pression maximale menée à l'encontre de la République islamique par Washington. Le franchissement d'un nouveau palier était attendu de longue date pour lundi. Il aura été annoncé avec emphase et quelques heures d'avance tandis que le monde reste suspendu à la « vengeance »



Un Iranien lors d'une cérémonie d'hommage au général Ghassem Soleimani, à Mashhad, dans le nord-est du pays, le 5 janvier. HADIS FAGHIRI / AFP

promise par la République islamique. Au regard des circonstances, toutefois, les décisions dévoilées par Téhéran dimanche paraissent mesurées.

### L'Iran s'affranchit du contenu de l'accord sur le nucléaire

De fait, les accès de l'Agence internationale pour l'énergie atomique aux sites iraniens, gage de visibilité pour la communauté internationale, restent en principe garantis. Téhéran assure que ces mesures sont réversibles et se dit prêt à y renoncer en échange d'une illusoire levée des sanctions américaines, comme l'a encore rappelé dans la soirée de dimanche le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Javad Zarif. A en croire

les éléments de langage habituels employés par Téhéran dimanche, le dossier nucléaire semble évoluer dans sa réalité propre, voire dans un monde parallèle, loin de la poudrière régionale et de ses bruits de bottes.

« Les Iraniens finissent, commente un bon connaisseur du dossier nucléaire. Ils s'affranchissent de fait du contenu de l'accord mais maintiennent intacte sa coquille car, dans leur confrontation avec les États-Unis, ils ne peuvent pas se permettre de s'aliéner totalement les autres parties signataires, Européens, Chinois et Russes. » Téhéran aurait pu, de manière plus offensive, annoncer directement un enrichissement à plus

de 20 % qui raccourcirait nettement le délai de mise au point d'une bombe nucléaire, ou encore limiter l'accès à ses sites des inspecteurs internationaux.

### Le spectre d'une guerre est dans les têtes

Prudents dans les termes, les responsables iraniens le restoront-ils toutefois dans leurs actions alors que, de Bagdad à Beyrouth, le spectre d'une guerre est dans toutes les têtes ? Sans couper les ponts avec la communauté internationale, l'Iran est, depuis dimanche soir, plus imprévisible qu'auparavant dans le dossier nucléaire. Le délai de deux mois entre chaque désengagement iranien instauré depuis mai a été abandonné.



Téhéran est désormais susceptible à tout moment de faire monter d'un coup la pression en annonçant une accélération de sa production d'uranium enrichi sous prétexte de ses « besoins techniques ».

Face aux signataires restants du pacte nucléaire, la République islamique crée donc de l'incertitude pour éviter la rupture. Face aux Etats-Unis, elle se déclare, sans ambiguïté, sur le pied de guerre.

Dimanche après-midi, alors qu'il répondait aux questions de la chaîne américaine d'information CNN, le conseiller militaire du Guide de la révolution iranien, le général de brigade Hossein Dehghan, confirmait que la riposte préparée par l'Iran à l'assassinat du général Soleimani serait « assurément militaire et contre des sites militaires ». Il ne serait donc plus question d'attaques indirectes contre des alliés de Washington comme lors de l'opération dévastatrice lancée le 14 septembre contre des sites pétroliers stratégiques saoudiens, point culminant de la stratégie d'escalade régionale de l'Iran lancée au printemps.

Dans un discours ombrageux d'une importance majeure, prononcé dimanche et retransmis depuis un lieu inconnu, le chef du Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, n'a pas dit autre chose. A la tête du plus ancien allié régional de la République islamique, il a ainsi promis que « le juste châtiement visera la présence militaire américaine dans la région : les bases militaires américaines, les navires militaires, chaque officier et soldat dans la région ».

La République islamique et ses affiliés semblent vouloir faire comprendre à l'adversaire historique de Téhéran que, après quatre décennies d'hostilités, le temps de la confrontation directe serait venu. Et c'est vers l'Irak, placé sous le double parrainage impossible de Téhéran et de Washington, que les regards se

tournent. Le Parlement de Bagdad a demandé dimanche à l'exécutif d'imposer le départ des troupes américaines déployées dans le cadre de la lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique et dans la soirée, déjà, quelques roquettes sont tombées dans les environs de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis, dans la « zone verte ».

### Donald Trump joue la sur-enchère

Face aux menaces iraniennes que son administration déclare juger très sérieuses, Donald Trump joue de son côté la sur-enchère. Dimanche, dans un Tweet, le président des Etats-Unis avait prévenu qu'à toute attaque iranienne sur une cible américaine, les Etats-Unis riposteraient, « peut-être de manière disproportionnée ».

La veille, il avait déclaré, par le même canal, que les Etats-Unis avaient identifié en Iran 52 sites

dateur de la République islamique. Il comprend d'ailleurs, selon le Tweet du président des Etats-Unis, des sites « de haut niveau et importants pour (...) la culture iranienne ».

Quelques semaines après s'être rendu responsable d'un épisode de répression d'une violence inouïe, ayant fait plusieurs centaines de morts, à la suite d'un vaste mouvement de contestation populaire lancé mi-novembre, le leadership de la République islamique n'aurait pas pu espérer de la part du président américain de secours aussi providentiel. Contesté de toute part par une population étouffée, le régime peut à présent regonfler sa légitimité conquise par le sang lors de la guerre contre l'Irak de Saddam Hussein aux sources d'un nationalisme iranien blessé.

### Ghassem Soleimani, « le symbole de la puissance de l'Iran »



Une partisane du Hezbollah lève sa main sur laquelle est écrit « puissante vengeance » avant le discours d'Hassan Nasrallah, à Beyrouth, le 5 janvier. MAYA ALLERUZZO / AP

sensibles qui seraient immédiatement visés et détruits en cas de représailles iraniennes. Le nombre de cibles a été choisi en référence au nombre d'otages américains détenus dans les locaux de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis à Téhéran à partir de novembre 1979 par des partisans de l'imam Khomeyni, fon-

De manière symptomatique, Ghassem Soleimani, son dernier grand « martyr », pur rejeton du régime et de sa frange la plus dure, est désormais porté aux nues bien au-delà de sa base.

Victime et adversaire de la censure islamique, sans affinité au-

cune avec le régime et considéré par ailleurs comme le plus grand écrivain iranien en vie, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, 79 ans, a ainsi pleuré l'un des « bons enfants » de l'Iran dans un texte de condoléances en l'honneur d'un général complice du régime sanguinaire de Bachar Al-Assad et parrain de miliciens accusés des pires exactions dans tout le Levant. Alors même que son corps d'appartenance, les gardiens de la révolution, a servi de colonne vertébrale à la répression meurtrière des manifestations de novembre, aux yeux de l'écrivain comme de nombreux Iraniens penchant vers l'opposition, Ghassem Soleimani, du fait des batailles qu'il a menées dans les pays voisins, incarne la défense des frontières nationales, à nouveau menacées.

Au sein de la société civile, ce discours nationaliste porte. « La politique interne de l'Iran a beaucoup de problèmes. Nous en sommes aussi critiques. Mais Ghassem Soleimani est le symbole de la puissance de l'Iran. Nous exigeons une féroce vengeance », a ainsi écrit au Monde une entrepreneuse iranienne proche de l'opposition, désireuse de rester anonyme, qui a eu de nombreuses fois maille à partir avec les services de sécurité du régime, dont elle a subi plusieurs interrogatoires pour ses activités civiques.

Les images des immenses processions qui ont accompagné la dépouille de la nouvelle légende du régime iranien, d'abord dans la province d'Ahvaz, parmi les plus réprimées en novembre, puis à Machhad, dans l'est, au premier des trois jours de deuil national décrété en son honneur, et plus encore à Téhéran lundi, ne signalent certes pas à elles seules l'unanimité des Iraniens derrière le régime, mais leur taille, leur intensité sont sans commune mesure avec celles des manifestations loyalistes ordinaires.

## Les Kurdes, indemnes de la tempête qui secoue l'Irak

Les factions iraniennes préparent leurs armes, les autorités s'apprêtent à expulser les soldats et diplomates américains multipliant leurs protestations vers Washington. Au milieu de ce foyer politique et social irakien, le Kurdistan a réussi à rester à l'écart.

Cette région du nord de l'Irak doit son autonomie aux États-Unis, mais partage des centaines de kilomètres de frontière avec l'Iran.

Plusieurs jours après l'assassinat par l'Iran du général iranien Qasem Soleimani lors d'une attaque à Bagdad, les autorités kurdes "interagissent avec tout le monde mais ne prennent pas position", a déclaré à l'Adel Bakawan, sociologue et spécialiste irakien.

Les communiqués des autorités kurdes se limitent à appeler à la "modération" et au "respect de la souveraineté de l'Irak". Et plus important encore, aucun député kurde n'est apparu au Parlement dimanche pour une session extraordinaire qui s'est terminée par un appel au gouvernement à expulser du pays les troupes de la coalition anti-djihadiste dirigée par les États-Unis.

Le terrain est très miné. Les députés pro-iraniens avaient averti à plusieurs reprises qu'ils dénonceraient les "traîtres à la patrie" et qu'ils ne voteraient pas comme eux.

Pour sa part, le président américain Donald Trump a déclaré que l'Irak sera soumis à "des sanctions jamais vues" s'il s'efforce de faire sortir ses soldats de son sol.

"La stratégie adoptée à court terme attend", dit Bakawan, de voir "l'orientation que prendront les événements et de ne pas transiger d'un côté ou de l'autre tant que la situation ne sera pas clarifiée".

Parce que, parfois, les événements en Irak sont déroutants. Lundi soir, les Américains ont annoncé le retrait de leurs troupes, avant de déclarer que la lettre adressée aux Irakiens pour les informer de ce retrait avait été envoyée par erreur!

Au-delà de la menace extérieure qui résulte des tensions entre Washington et Téhéran, l'Irak est déjà pris dans sa propre tempête.

Le gouvernement, qui a démissionné au milieu d'une révolte populaire sans précédent, à laquelle le Kurdistan n'a pas non plus participé, n'a pas encore été remplacé.

Dans cette confusion générale, "les députés chiites ont pris une décision radicale pour l'avenir de tout l'Irak, sous le coup de l'émotion", accuse un cadre supérieur de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du défunt président irakien Jalal Talabani, traditionnellement près de l'Iran.

"Il y a de nombreuses violations de la souveraineté irakienne et des mesures doivent être prises pour y mettre fin. Mais pas seulement contre un parti", poursuit ce politicien, l'un des rares qui accepte de s'exprimer, sous anonymat.

Parce que, comme Bagdad, depuis des années, le gouvernement régional et les partis kurdes jouent dans les deux sens. D'un côté, "si le terri-

toire du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan existe, c'est grâce à l'ingérence directe des États-Unis" qui a inscrit son statut distinct dans la constitution irakienne après son invasion de 2003, rappelle Bakawan.

Les Kurdes se sont également battus contre le groupe État islamique (IE) aux côtés de la coalition anti-IE, dirigée par Washington, ainsi que contre le général Soleimani, régulièrement vu à Erbil pendant la guerre contre les djihadistes.

Pris, les Kurdes irakiens ne sont pas prêts à risquer leur autonomie. Parce qu'ils sont les seuls au Moyen-Orient à diriger ce qui ressemble le plus à un État, tandis que les velléités d'autonomie de leurs compatriotes sont réprimées en Iran, en Turquie et en Syrie.

"L'Irak ne doit pas devenir un champ de bataille pour régler des comptes ou des conflits politiques", explique Vian Sabri, chef de la liste du Parti patriotique démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Masod Barzani, une figure de gardien à Erbil, dont le fils et le neveu dirigent le Kurdistan autonome.

Encore une fois, la prudence kurde pourrait payer. Dans un pays secoué depuis quatre décennies par les guerres, lorsque la situation dégenère ailleurs en Irak, la région autonome est un refuge pour les hommes d'affaires, les diplomates et les humanitaires.



Le 08/01/2020

## En Turquie, le procès d'un ancien dirigeant kurde

**S**elahattin Demirtas est accusé par le gouvernement turc de soutenir "une organisation terroriste". Son sort est indépendant de l'offensive turque d'octobre dans le nord syrien, mais la logique est la même: pour Erdogan, la question kurde reste une question sécuritaire. Entretien avec Ahmet Insel.

Ancien député et co-président du Parti démocratique des Peuples (HDP), Selahattin Demirtas est détenu depuis trois ans au centre pénitencier de haute sécurité d'Edirne. Le 4 novembre 2016, il a été arrêté avec douze autres députés, tous accusés de "soutenir une organisation terroriste", et de se livrer à de la "propagande terroriste".



Femme avec une photo de Selahattin Demirtas, ancien dirigeant emprisonné du principal parti prokurde en Turquie. Dans la ville de Diyarbakir, au Sud Est e la Turquie, le 19 janvier 2019. Crédits : AFP

Pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le Parti démocratique des peuples est la vitrine politique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, le PKK, dont l'insurrection armée a fait depuis les années 80

quelque 40 000 morts, et qui continue à revendiquer certaines attaques, principalement contre les intérêts militaires turcs, malgré un dialogue amorcé en 2012.

En Turquie, l'argument de la lutte contre le terrorisme est devenu le cache-sexe de l'arbitraire du pouvoir. Sous prétexte de l'ouverture d'une enquête pour soutien au terrorisme par le parquet et avant même la condamnation des personnes, le ministère de l'Intérieur a récemment dessaisi des maires kurdes de leurs fonctions, et nommé à leur place le préfet ou le sous préfet comme administrateur.

Ahmet Insel



Le 08/01/2020

## Kurdistan Region leaders discuss Iran missile attack, reiterate need for de-escalation

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Senior Kurdistan Region leaders met on Wednesday to discuss the ongoing developments in Iraq and the region following a barrage of missile strikes from Iran earlier in the morning.

The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) three presidencies, including President Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and Parliament Speaker Rewaz Faiaq, met in Erbil to speak about the incident.

In a joint statement following the meeting, the leaders reiterated that a "military solution will in no way solve the problems."



The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) three presidencies, including President Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and Parliament Speaker Rewaz Faiaq, during a meeting in Erbil, Jan. 8, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

Iran launched over a dozen ballistic missiles at airbases in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region that house US and coalition forces early Wednesday in retaliation for the US killing of top Iranian

general Qasim Soleimani last week.

Read More: Iran strikes military bases in Iraq, Kurdistan housing US forces: Pentagon

According to an Iraqi military statement, 22 ballistic missiles were launched at the Ain al-Assad air base in the western Anbar province that houses American and coalition troops as well as a base in the Kurdistan Region capital of Erbil.

The statement said two of the 17 missiles at Ain al-Assad did not detonate. The five missiles launched in Erbil targeted US-led coalition headquarters, it



added. Neither attack caused any casualties, the military said.

“The Kurdistan Region supports de-escalation of the situation and seeks dialogue and diplomatic solutions to the problems,” the joint statement by the Kurdish leaders continued.

The KRG “also seeks stability and peace and urges all parties to refrain from dragging the Kurdistan Region into the rivalries.”

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani said his government is “monitoring the developments with concern.”

“We have done, and we will do everything we can to help de-escalate the situation and return stability to the region,” he added, noting that the KRG’s “primary duty” is to protect the people of the Kurdistan Region.

Related Article: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo briefs Kurdistan PM Masrour Barzani on Iran strikes

On Tuesday, Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), called for Iraqi politicians to work toward resolving the current national turmoil amid spiking tensions between the US and both Iran and militias it backs in Iraq.

Read More: Kurdish leader urges Iraqi decision-makers to find 'reasonable solution' to crisis

Barzani expressed his willingness to participate in efforts to find a meaningful resolution, if “the process benefits the general public and all sides,” but said the Kurdistan Region would not “play any part in exposing the country to a proxy fight and into an unforeseeable future.”



January 8, 2020

## Iraq's Kurds weigh fall out from US, Iran conflict

**W**ith the risk of being caught in the cross fire of the conflict between US and Iran, Iraq's Kurds are appealing to both parties to keep the region out of the conflict.

Leaders of the Kurdish community met today to discuss the fall-out from the latest escalation in conflict which saw Iran launch a series of rockets at US air bases in Iraq.

Kurdish President Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, Parliament Speaker Rewaz Fayiq released a joint statement expressing “deep concerns” over the rapid increase in the tensions.

The three leaders stressed that there is no solution to the dispute through military actions.

LIVE BLOG: Iran launches large attack on US-led forces in Iraq

“The Kurdistan Region urges de-escalation, dialogue and diplomatic means to resolve the tensions,” the statement continued. “It also asks all the parties to keep the Kurdistan Region out of the conflicts.”

The Kurdish top officials also stressed the international and



Prime Minister of Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Nechirvan Barzani in Erbil, Iraq on 27 January 2019 [Hemn Baban/Anadolu Agency]

US-led coalition's support for the Kurdistan Region is essential to continue the war on terror.

Iraq's Kurds, along with the other main minority group, Sunnis, have watched the escalation in violence with greater trepidation. Both harbour strong grievances against the Shia-led government in Baghdad which was imposed by the US following the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Leaders of both communities

abstained from voting on Sunday's resolution calling for the expulsion of American troops from Iraq. Some 5,000 US troops remain in the country, most in an advisory role. Their presence is viewed by many as a security umbrella against sectarian tensions.

Some Kurds, however, see the possible expulsion of American soldiers as a chance to advance their long-cherished dream for an independent state.

According to Al-Monitor, sources familiar with the Kurdistan Regional Government's thinking say that allowing the US to redeploy troops expelled by Baghdad to the Kurdish region was a possibility. However, the only condition under which they might consider agreeing to a continued US military presence would be in exchange for recognition of their independent state and written guarantees that the US would protect the KRG from attack.



08-01-2020  
By Karwan Faidhi Dri

# Several Kurds among victims of plane crash in Iran



Rescue workers carry the body of a victim of an Ukrainian plane crash among debris of the plane in Shahedshahr, southwest of the capital Tehran, Iran, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2020. Photo: AP/Ebrahim Noroozi

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – There were at least 10 Kurds among the 176 passengers and crew of the Ukrainian International Airlines plane which crashed in Iran early on Wednesday.

The Boeing 737-800 crashed only minutes after it took off from Tehran airport. No one survived.



undefined

The Canadian government confirmed that 63

of the 176 passengers were Canadian citizens. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that he and his wife were “shocked and saddened” by the news.

“On behalf of the government of Canada, Sophie and I offer our deepest condolences to those who have lost family, friends and loved ones in this tragedy,” he said in a statement.



undefined

Many Kurds and Persians live in Canada,

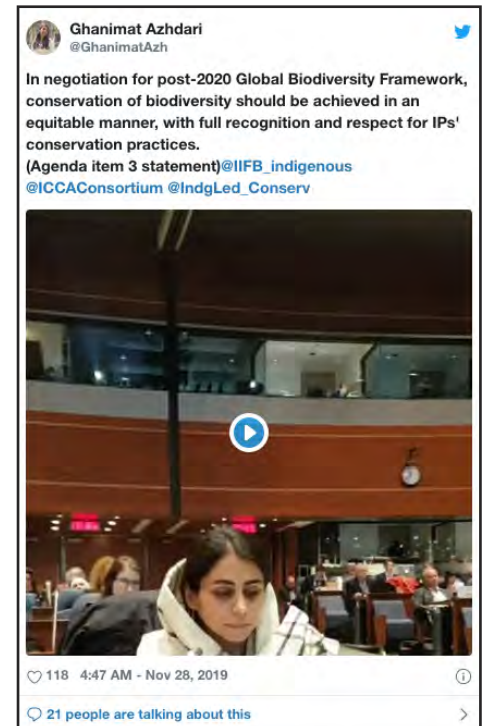
and the cheapest route between Tehran and Toronto is via Kiev. Therefore, many Iranians with dual citizenship or family ties in both countries fly with Ukrainian airlines.

According to sources on social media, at least ten Kurds are among the dead.

NNSROJ, a news outlet, named ten people - originally from Kermanshah, Sanandaj, Saqiz and Muhabad cities - who are believed to have died in the wreckage.

Ghanimat Azhdari, one of the passengers, was a PhD student who had returned to Iran to celebrate her engagement. She was an environmentalist who focused on the conservation of natural rights and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

In a video published on her Twitter account that was recorded at an environmental conference about territories being conserved by indigenous communities, Ghanimat speaks in support of indigenous communities’ right to practice conservation within the framework of their own self-determination.



Many young and well-educated Iranians of diverse backgrounds lost their lives in this tragic incident.

Photos via Iranian social media.



The New York Times

By Geraldine Brooks  
Jan. 8, 2020

## Opinion: Iranian Blood Is on Our Hands, Too

General Suleimani is not the only one who harmed civilians.

It was a hot day in June, 30 years ago. I was sweating in a chador, a speck in the black-clad throng of mourners pouring through Tehran for the funeral of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. As the keening crowd surged dangerously toward the grave site, I was lifted off my feet, lost in a heaving mass of humanity.

Then, I was a Middle East correspondent for The Wall Street Journal. My job was to understand and explain why what may have been the largest crowd of mourners ever assembled wept hysterically for a man my readers considered monstrous.

Today, three decades of diplomatic failure later, I watch from afar on cable news as a similar crowd in Iran, this time a deadly one, mourns Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani. I'm not a journalist anymore, so I'm reduced to groaning at the TV when commentators don't help us understand what's going on, but instead confound our understanding by providing incorrect information.

Watching CNN, I howl in frustration when a reporter states that in July 1988 the United States Navy warship Vincennes "accidentally" shot down Iran Air 655, a civilian passenger plane, and that nine months later, General Suleimani arranged the pipe-bombing in San Diego of a vehicle driven by the wife of the Vincennes's commander, Capt. William C. Rogers III. (She survived the blast.)

The CNN reporter implies that this demonstrates how volatile and dangerous General Suleimani was. But the F.B.I. was unable to establish that the bombing of the Rogers vehicle was an act of Iranian terrorism; the case remains open. And the attack on Iran Air 655 by the Vincennes wasn't, in any meaningful sense, accidental — and it killed 290 people, 66 of them children.

In 1988 I traveled to Iran for the funerals of those 290 civilians. Their bodies had been fished from the water of the Persian Gulf and

brought home for burial. My editor called me as I left for Tehran, asking me to consider the possibility that Iran shot down the plane itself, since she thought it odd that the recovered bodies were unclothed. "Did they put naked corpses in that plane before they shot it down?" she asked.

She could be forgiven for not knowing the relevant physics: Clothing would be torn from the passengers' bodies as the exploding plane plum-



Mourners in Iran gathered around a vehicle carrying the coffin of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani in Kerman, his hometown, on Tuesday. Credit...Atta Kenare/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

meted from the sky into the sea. It was harder to forgive her cultural unawareness: A state as obsessed with modesty as Iran was — to the extent of covering every hair on a woman's head and every male kneecap — would never consider undressing bodies before blowing them up.

Ignorance surrounded — and still surrounds — that tragedy. In the immediate aftermath of the downing of Iran Air 655, the United States military's prevarications came thick and fast: The plane wasn't in the civilian air corridor. (It was.) It didn't have its transponder turned on. (It did.) It was descending toward the Vincennes. (It wasn't.)

The truth gradually came out in the course of the Navy's own inquiries

and in later investigative reports that revealed a pattern of reckless aggression by the Vincennes captain, beginning a month earlier. David Carlson, the commanding officer of the frigate Sides, which was also deployed then in the gulf, called the downing of the Iranian airliner "the horrifying climax" of that aggressiveness. Just before firing at the plane, Captain Rogers had provoked Iranian gunboats and then followed them into Iran's territorial waters.

Yet the United States later decorated Captain Rogers "for exceptionally meritorious conduct" as commander of the Vincennes during that time. The citation made no mention of the downing of Iran Air 655. How would Americans feel if Iran pinned a medal on a man who killed 290 American civilians?

General Suleimani has American blood on his hands, as we are reminded repeatedly, not only by President Trump but also by Democratic presidential candidates. This is true. But is it wrong to remind ourselves of the Iranian blood we have on ours?

On other reporting trips to Iran, I visited Khorramshahr, a city that had been reduced to rubble by a barrage of shelling by Saddam Hussein, as

well as the civilian neighborhoods of Tehran, which had endured a similar barrage. At that time Mr. Hussein was, as the United States ambassador in Baghdad told me, "a guy we can work with." We and Israel secretly provided him with information on how best to target his missile strikes. There, too, civilian Iranian blood was on our hands.

Having witnessed that destruction, I don't find it hard to understand why Iran seeks to build up its missile capability. We would, if in its position. Israel's supporters often note that Israel's military aggression can be excused because it lives in "a bad neighborhood" — and indeed, it does. But we characterize Iran as "meddling" in Iraq, forgetting or oblivious to the fact that not long ago Iraq posed an existential threat to Iran, which the United States abetted.

General Suleimani killed Americans and, we are told, had plans to kill more. He was a military commander. Military commanders have plans to kill their enemies. And the United States is Iran's enemy, reneging on the nuclear agreement and choking its economy, impoverishing and immiserating civilians who have nothing to do with, and no say in, their government's policy.

Is Iran a brutal, murderous, repressive regime that tramples the rights of women and minorities? No doubt. But so is Saudi Arabia, and we have managed to work with that regime. Iran is just as critical to the long-term stability of the region.

Forty years is a long time for the United States to be without a diplomatic presence in a country, and Iran bears the blame for severing those relations. But the dangerous, disproportionate assassination of General Suleimani may have shut the diplomatic door for many more decades.

Geraldine Brooks covered Iran as a Middle East correspondent for The Wall Street Journal from 1987 to 1995.



# Crise entre l'Iran et les Etats-Unis : les Européens s'activent pour sauver l'accord sur le nucléaire

Les réunions se multiplient à Bruxelles afin de préserver l'accord de 2015 en dépit des tensions entre Téhéran et Washington après l'assassinat du général Soleimani.

**M**ercredi 8 janvier au matin, le collège de la Commission européenne a tenu une réunion d'urgence, après les représailles iraniennes contre les bases militaires en Irak. Sa présidente, Ursula von der Leyen prône « la fin du recours aux armes ». Le haut représentant Josep Borrell évoque « une situation extrêmement préoccupante », alors qu'il n'est « dans l'intérêt de personne de provoquer la violence ». « Les dernières attaques à la roquette contre des bases aériennes en Irak utilisées par les forces américaines et de la coalition, dont des forces européennes, sont un autre exemple d'escalade et de confrontation accrue », a déploré M. Borrell. A Londres, le chef de la diplomatie, Dominic Raab, a été l'un des premiers responsables européens à réagir, mercredi matin, en invitant l'Iran à ne pas répéter ses attaques « imprudentes et dangereuses ». L'Allemagne condamne « le plus fermement l'agression » de l'Iran qui a tiré des missiles sur des bases abritant des soldats américains en Irak, a indiqué mercredi la ministre allemande de la défense, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. « Il s'avère maintenant décisif que nous ne laissons pas cette spirale croître encore », a-t-elle souligné.

La veille, les ministres des affaires étrangères français, allemand, britannique et italien s'étaient, eux, réunis à Bruxelles. Pour parler, en principe, de la Libye, autre grave sujet de préoccupation pour les Vingt-Huit, qui veulent éviter un autre embrasement, mais surtout pour évoquer le conflit entre Téhéran et Washington, avant une réunion spéciale des 28 ministres des affaires étrangères, vendredi 10 janvier.

## Possible activation du « mécanisme de règlement des différends »

Les Européens n'ont, en fait, d'autre option que de prôner le dialogue, tout en s'accrochant à quelques éléments



La présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula von der Leyen, le 8 janvier à Bruxelles. Virginia Mayo / AP

positifs pour sauver l'accord de 2015, censé garantir la nature civile des activités nucléaires iraniennes : le chef de la diplomatie à Téhéran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, a accepté une invitation à se rendre prochainement à Bruxelles. Et les autorités iraniennes admettent toujours la présence sur leur territoire de membres de l'Agence internationale pour l'énergie atomique, chargés de contrôler les activités nucléaires.

La question d'une possible activation du « mécanisme de règlement des différends », inclus dans l'accord de 2015, sera au menu des discussions de vendredi après la décision iranienne de ne plus limiter le développement de son programme. Paris insiste sur le fait que l'activation possible du mécanisme nécessite toutefois une coordination préalable avec la Russie et la Chine et souligne qu'il ne s'agit pas de précipiter un retour devant le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. Pour la France, l'accord existe encore, mais il se vide de sa substance. L'activation du mécanisme permettrait d'acter formellement la non-application par Téhéran du traité, tout en laissant une voie politique pour la recherche d'une issue.

Mardi, s'entretenant avec le président

iranien Hassan Rohani, Emmanuel Macron a « rappelé l'attachement de la France à la souveraineté et à la sécurité de l'Irak » qui, dit-il, « doivent aussi être renforcées par la présence sur son sol de la coalition internationale » de lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI). A Téhéran, on insistait surtout sur le fait que M. Rohani avait averti son homologue que les intérêts américains au Moyen-Orient étaient désormais « en danger ».

## Angela Merkel samedi à Moscou

A l'OTAN, les ambassadeurs convoqués en urgence avaient, quant à eux, écouté, lundi 6 janvier, une délégation américaine leur expliquer que, pour Washington, la dissuasion à l'égard de Téhéran avait été rétablie depuis la mort de Qassam Soleimani et que l'administration Trump privilégiait désormais tant la « désescalade » que la poursuite de la lutte contre Daech. La mission de formation et d'entraînement de l'armée irakienne est provisoirement suspendue et une partie des personnels est repositionnée. La mission civile de l'Union européenne, de taille plus réduite, est, elle, maintenue à ce stade.

Qu'en sera-t-il des forces de la coalition internationale anti-EI alors que le

Parlement irakien a réclamé dimanche la fin de leur présence ? Après le spectaculaire cafoillage de l'envoi accidentel d'une lettre du Pentagone annonçant le retrait des troupes, les Etats-Unis assurent que leur présence (5 200 soldats) sera inchangée. Du côté européen, l'Allemagne a annoncé, mardi, le retrait d'une partie de ses 120 soldats et leur transfert en Jordanie et au Koweït. La France entend, elle, maintenir son contingent de 200 hommes. Comme la Grande-Bretagne, qui compte 400 soldats sur le terrain, mais a toutefois déplacé du personnel « non essentiel ». Deux vaisseaux de la Royal Navy ont, par ailleurs, été déployés pour protéger les bateaux naviguant sous pavillon britannique dans le détroit d'Ormuz.

La dernière initiative diplomatique de la semaine sera celle d'Angela Merkel, qui se rendra samedi à Moscou pour y rencontrer Vladimir Poutine et évoquer « les actuels foyers de conflits potentiels », selon son porte-parole. Berlin voit apparemment l'intérêt qu'il y a, en ce moment, à jouer la carte russe. Norbert Röttgen (CDU), président de la commission des affaires étrangères du Bundestag, indique qu'« avant tout, la Russie et l'Iran sont alliés dans la guerre en Syrie. La Russie, en cela, a renforcé ses positions, mais l'Iran a aussi besoin de la Russie, si bien que Poutine a de l'influence sur Téhéran. Il faut obtenir de la Russie qu'elle pèse sur Téhéran afin d'éviter une escalade ».

La députée écologiste allemande Franziska Brantner s'interroge toutefois : « Pourquoi la chancelière Merkel ne va-t-elle pas à Moscou avec Emmanuel Macron ? Ou, mieux encore, avec également Josep Borrell ? Il faut maintenant une initiative commune ». Le quotidien conservateur Bild estime, lui, que Mme Merkel se rend en Russie « avec les mains liées », faute d'une stratégie propre de son pays et de l'Europe, sur la Syrie notamment.

## « Une guerre entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran est aujourd'hui une réelle possibilité »

Pour l'ex-secrétaire d'Etat adjoint de Bill Clinton, James P. Rubin, l'assassinat du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani était justifié mais pas judicieux : les Etats-Unis sont aujourd'hui isolés diplomatiquement.

Les tirs de drones américains de la semaine dernière, qui ont causé la mort du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani, suscitent de fiévreuses spéculations quant à la possibilité d'une nouvelle guerre au Moyen-Orient, une guerre entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran. Contrairement à l'Irak, qui était l'adversaire des Américains lors des deux guerres du Golfe de 1991 et 2003, l'Iran a réellement la capacité de développer des armes nucléaires et a relancé des programmes à cette fin. Et, contrairement à Saddam Hussein, qui était peu ou pas impliqué dans le terrorisme international, la République islamique d'Iran est le premier Etat à soutenir le terrorisme au Moyen-Orient et possiblement dans le monde.

Ce qui fait dire à beaucoup que, en 2003, le président George W. Bush s'est trompé de cible s'il s'inquiétait réellement d'empêcher que des armements nucléaires ne tombent entre les mains d'un groupe terroriste ou d'un Etat voyou. Car l'Iran est le seul pays au monde à mener un programme de développement d'armes nucléaires viable, à massacrer des civils en orchestrant des actions terroristes sanglantes par dizaines et, lors de la crise des otages de 1979, à s'être montré prêt à violer toutes les règles internationales en matière de civilité.

Téhéran étant ces dernières années monté en puissance sur la scène géopolitique, une guerre entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran est aujourd'hui une réelle possibilité. Mais, malheureusement pour les Etats-Unis et leurs amis, le contexte d'une éventuelle troi-



Cérémonie funéraire du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani dans la ville de Kerman, en Iran, le mardi 7 janvier. ERFAN KOUCHARI / AP

sième guerre du Golfe est très différent de celui des deux premières.

Car, cette fois, ce sont les Américains qui se trouvent isolés sur la scène internationale, et non leurs adversaires. Cette fois, ils n'ont pas d'autre objectif militaire clair que celui, flou, de réaliser une démonstration de force pour dissuader Téhéran de mener des représailles. Et, cette fois, aussi héroïque que soit la diplomatie, il ne sera pas possible de la synchroniser avec l'action militaire. Souvenez-vous de 1991 et de 2003 : à ces époques, le recours à la force armée était légitimé, car il venait soutenir les résolutions du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur l'invasion du Koweït, puis sur le refus de l'Irak de se plier au contrôle de ses armements – condition qui faisait partie du cessez-le-feu qui avait mis un terme à la première guerre.

Ce sont ces trois facteurs – l'isolement des Américains, un objectif militaire vague et l'absence

de stratégie diplomatique – qui font que cette opération militaire, autrement louable, visant à éliminer le chef militaire le plus impitoyable d'Iran, celui dont les mains sont le plus tachées de sang, est en réalité une opération extrêmement dangereuse pour l'Occident et irritante pour les alliés traditionnels des Américains.

### Le contexte et la méthode

De fait, le général Soleimani conduisait depuis plus de dix ans une campagne militaire brutale contre les Etats-Unis et leurs alliés au Moyen-Orient. Ses unités paramilitaires ont armé et entraîné en Irak des milices qui, selon les estimations de l'armée américaine, ont causé la mort de quelque 600 soldats américains. Ses cellules terroristes sont responsables de la disparition de centaines de civils en Iran, mais aussi de dissidents établis dans des capitales européennes. Et, politique la plus pernicieuse dans tout cela, peut-être, Soleimani a personnellement mené sur le terrain la

campagne qui a permis à Bachar Al-Assad de faire basculer la situation en sa faveur (avec l'aide précieuse des attaques aériennes russes) et de vaincre la rébellion, dans une guerre civile qui fait des ravages depuis maintenant huit ans en Syrie.

Outre le déplacement de plusieurs millions de civils, la violence des campagnes de massacres systématiques menées par Assad et ses alliés a fait entrer la guerre civile syrienne dans l'histoire. Soleimani et son allié Bachar Al-Assad méritent leur place de criminels de guerre dans le même cercle de l'enfer que le chef cambodgien Pol Pot, les responsables hutu au Rwanda et la hiérarchie nazie qui a organisé l'Holocauste. Et pour cette simple raison, son assassinat est indubitablement justifié. La question est de savoir s'il est judicieux.

Comme pour beaucoup d'actions entreprises par l'administration américaine, le problème n'est pas le résultat, mais le contexte et la méthode. En matière d'affaires internationales, la manière de procéder et la préparation des choses ont leur importance. Avant l'assassinat de Soleimani, il n'y a pas eu de campagne diplomatique visant à isoler Téhéran au motif des agressions qu'il a commises contre les Américains au Moyen-Orient, en Irak, au Liban et en Syrie. Il n'y a pas eu non plus d'offensive diplomatique coordonnée qui aurait explicité la responsabilité de Soleimani dans divers crimes de guerre et actes terroristes. Au contraire, ces frappes aériennes semblent



constituer un (compréhensible) geste d'exaspération de la part de Washington, las de la détermination de Téhéran à s'en prendre aux intérêts et aux ressortissants américains.

Le fait est que toutes les mesures de dissuasion ont échoué. Il est bien possible que, à terme, ces tirs de drones contribueront à redonner du poids aux politiques de dissuasion américaines. Alors que l'Iran s'est vu imposer une ribambelle de sanctions économiques douloureuses, le pays a continué de mener des attaques terroristes et militaires en toute impunité militaire. Cette époque est désormais révolue. Et maintenant ?  
**Revoir l'accord nucléaire iranien**

Même s'il n'y a guère de chances que l'administration Trump entende ce conseil venant d'un démocrate, la voie de la sagesse est très simple. Après avoir tué l'artisan de nombre des politiques que Trump et son équipe invoquent lorsqu'ils s'opposent à un accord nucléaire, de promptes tentatives de négocier un retour des Américains dans cet accord contribueraient largement à mettre fin à l'isolement des Etats-Unis et à rediriger la pression diplomatique internationale sur Téhéran, comme il se doit.

Si le gouvernement Reagan, qui a dénoncé l'Union soviétique lorsqu'elle envahissait l'Afghanistan et soutenait les rebelles communistes d'Amérique latine et

d'Afrique, a pu parallèlement négocier avec Moscou des accords sur le contrôle des armes, alors l'administration Trump pourrait elle aussi mener de front deux politiques avec Téhéran. Cela signifie s'opposer par tous les moyens appropriés aux tentatives iraniennes d'asseoir une hégémonie régionale, et ce, en exerçant une influence sur les gouvernements et territoires du Liban, d'Irak et de Syrie (autrement dit, une bande de terre allant de la Méditerranée au golfe Persique), tout en retournant à la table des négociations pour rapidement revoir l'accord nucléaire iranien et définir un nouveau calendrier.

Si l'Amérique sort de son isolement, Washington pourra bénéficier d'un soutien en Europe et au

Moyen-Orient afin de mettre en place des mesures de plus en plus fortes pour contrer l'agressivité iranienne dans la région. Le fait que tant de pays arabes applaudissent le décès de Soleimani signifie qu'un tel objectif diplomatique ne serait pas très difficile à atteindre – à condition que la position absurde de Washington sur l'accord nucléaire ne bloque pas toute avancée.

Traduit de l'anglais par Valentine Morizot

James P. Rubin a été secrétaire d'Etat adjoint aux affaires publiques de Bill Clinton. Il est aujourd'hui conseiller stratégique à Washington et collabore au site « Politico ».

**Le Monde** 09/01/2020  
Par Allan Kaval

## Face à Trump, la « vengeance » mesurée de l'Iran

Téhéran a riposté à l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani par des frappes sur deux bases militaires en Irak.

**D**es représailles et un avertissement à demi-mot. Après avoir envoyé dans la nuit une volée de missiles sur deux sites irakiens où sont stationnées des forces américaines, en faisant, selon les informations connues mercredi matin, des dégâts limités, la République islamique a déclaré, mercredi 8 janvier, avoir accompli sa riposte à l'assassinat, cinq jours plus tôt, du général Ghassem Soleimani dans une frappe américaine. La « vengeance » promise à laquelle le monde était suspendu s'est matérialisée sans qu'une escalade militaire de grande ampleur n'entraîne pour autant la région dans un cycle de destructions aux conséquences incalculables.



Le Guide suprême iranien, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, lors d'un meeting à Téhéran, le 8 janvier (photo transmise par les autorités iraniennes). HO / AFP

« L'Iran a pris et a mené à leur terme des mesures proportionnées d'autodéfense

(...) Nous ne cherchons ni l'escalade ni la guerre, mais

nous nous défendrons contre toute agression », a ainsi dé-

claré, sur Twitter, le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, Mo-



hammad Javad Zarif : une manière d'inviter l'adversaire américain à en rester là. Mercredi matin, le guide de la révolution, Ali Khamenei, a quant à lui qualifié l'attaque de « gifle au visage » de l'Amérique, se limitant à appeler une nouvelle fois au retrait des Etats-Unis de la région sans proférer plus de menaces de représailles militaires, « insuffisantes » selon lui. « Tout va bien ! », a de son côté tweeté le président Donald Trump, en exergue d'un message annonçant une déclaration présidentielle mercredi.

Aux alentours de 1 h 30, heure irakienne, les gardiens de la révolution iraniens, qui contrôlent l'arsenal de missiles de la République islamique, avaient annoncé dans un communiqué aux accents martiaux avoir lancé « des dizaines » de projectiles vers des bases américaines, baptisant leur opération du nom du « martyr » Ghassem Soleimani.

### Pas de distinction

Pour faire bonne mesure, l'aile idéologique des forces armées iraniennes avait averti qu'elle ne ferait pas de distinction entre Israël et le « régime criminel des Etats-Unis » si des contre-mesures étaient engagées par Washington. Les Etats de la région abritant des installations militaires des Etats-Unis subiraient alors, selon le communiqué, un sort comparable. « Le temps est venu de tenir la vraie promesse », avaient inscrit les gardiens de la révolution en prélude de leur déclaration.

A Washington, le département de la défense n'a pour sa part pas tardé à confirmer, dans un premier communi-

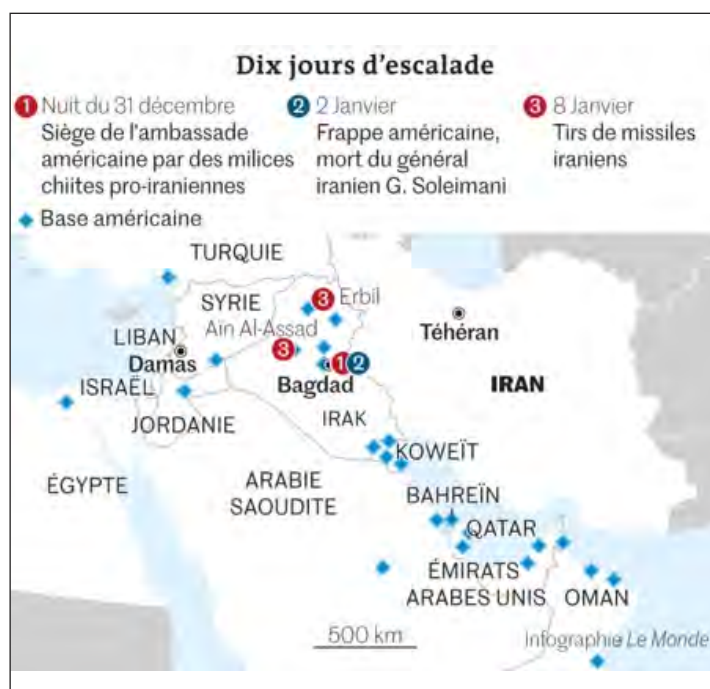
qué, une double attaque de missiles ayant visé la base aérienne d'Aïn Al-Assad, dans l'ouest de l'Irak, où les forces américaines ont repris leurs quartiers en 2014, dans le cadre de la lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique ainsi que près d'Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien. Sans qu'un bilan des dégâts humains et matériels n'ait été dévoilé à ce stade, la tension a rapidement baissé lorsqu'il est apparu évident que le président des Etats-Unis n'allait pas s'adresser formellement à la nation comme il l'aurait fait dans le contexte d'une crise majeure. Donald

tecte de l'emprise iranienne dans toute la région était porté de ville en ville, soulevant des foules de millions de personnes criant vengeance et se ralliant pour un temps au moins autour du drapeau de la République islamique, les responsables militaires du régime avaient promis l'enfer aux forces américaines présentes au Moyen-Orient. Le ton n'avait, à cet égard, pas changé mercredi matin. Contre toute évidence, la télévision publique iranienne faisait ainsi état de 80 morts parmi les militaires américains dans les attaques de la nuit précédente.

Le commandement militaire irakien a pour sa part fait état de vingt-deux missiles tirés, dont cinq dans la province d'Erbil, et assuré qu'aucune victime n'était à déplorer parmi les forces irakiennes. Le ministre britannique des affaires étrangères, Dominic Raab, a toutefois fait part de l'inquiétude de Londres concernant des rapports faisant état de blessés à la suite des frappes.

Malgré sa portée militaire limitée, l'opération menée par les gardiens de la révolution iraniens est porteuse d'une charge symbolique forte. C'est en effet la première fois que la République s'attaque directement par des moyens conventionnels et en son nom propre à des installations militaires américaines. Toute la doctrine de pression sécuritaire menée par Téhéran face à ses adversaires dans la région, qu'il s'agisse des Etats-Unis, d'Israël ou des monarchies du Golfe opposées à Téhéran, consiste traditionnellement à faire porter la responsabilité des actions hostiles à des groupes non étatiques alliés à la République islamique.

C'est ce procédé qui avait notamment été choisi, après le 14 septembre 2019, lorsqu'une attaque coordonnée de drones et de missiles avait frappé, au terme d'une opération singulièrement sophistiquée, des installations stratégiques saoudiennes. Ce sont les rebelles houthis du Yémen, soutenus par Téhéran, qui en avaient très rapidement revendiqué la paternité alors qu'une attaque menée depuis le territoire irakien ou iranien paraissait plus vraisemblable.



Trump, qui avait multiplié au cours des derniers jours, et depuis l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani, les imprécations les plus outrancières à l'égard de Téhéran, restait muet.

Au cours des jours précédents, les autorités iraniennes avaient elles aussi multiplié les menaces lors des journées de deuil décrétées en hommage au général Soleimani. Alors que le corps de l'homme qui fut l'archi-

### Première attaque directe

Les éléments qui ont commencé à filtrer côté américain et irakien pointeraient toutefois vers des dégâts matériels de faible ampleur. D'après des responsables américains cités par l'agence Associated Press mercredi, les gardiens de la révolution auraient tiré en tout 15 missiles dont dix ont atteint la base d'Aïn Al-Assad, une des installations à Erbil, et quatre se sont montrés défectueux.



09/01/2020

# 'Wikiferhang': British expat fluent in Kurdish creates largest online Kurdish dictionary

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – A British expatriate in the Kurdistan Region has embarked on a project to create the largest and most comprehensive online Kurdish dictionary.

Ibrahim Kocher is a British expatriate who has spent the last 10 years of his life in the Kurdistan Region's Duhok province with his family. During that time, Kocher has become fluent in Kurdish.

"We have to take all the necessary steps forward to standardize our language—the Kurdish language," he tells Kurdistan 24 in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish.

For the past few years, Ibrahim has been working on expanding an online Kurdish dictionary via Wikipedia's platform, Wiktionary.

He has made significant progress with the initiative and believes the Kurdish language is one of the most important in the world.

"I am delighted to see how successful this online dictionary has become. The Kurdish language is rich, but we have to work hard to standardize it," so it maintains its richness, Ibrahim explains.

"For instance, I believe there has to be attention given to the standardization of writing in Kurdish for letters in Arabic as well as letters in the Latin script. With this step, the Kurdish language will become



Ph. Ibrahim Kocher is visibly enthusiastic about his project as he explains how the platform works. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

more standardized." Wikiferheng, a web-based free content dictionary, does not only include definitions for words in Kurdish but also includes idioms and proverbs commonly used in Kurdish as well as their meanings.

"For example, I often say, 'I

of the idiom, such as, 'I'm fighting fit,' or, 'I'm fit as a fiddle.'"

Ibrahim has made significant progress in creating an extensive database of definitions as well as idioms and proverbs in the past four years since his project



Ph. Ferhad Kurdi (right) and Ibrahim Kocher work tirelessly to expand the online Kurdish dictionary. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

am busier than the groom's mother.' This is a beautiful idiom, a colorful expression. If you search for that idiom on Wikiferheng, it will define the phrase," Ibrahim tells Kurdistan 24. "The search will also provide the English variation

began. He has also provided two platforms for the online dictionary: one through the web, and another through an app.

Ferhad Kurdi, a Kurd who has helped Ibrahim with the

project, said the platform had progressed significantly since its inception.

"When we first began to develop the online Kurdish dictionary, it was ranked 13th on Wiktionary's list of online dictionaries. However, within the past four to five years, we were able to climb to eighth," he told Kurdistan 24.

"Moreover, we have increased the number of pages from 600,000 to 800,000. Our goal is to reach over one million pages," Kurdi added.

"The online dictionary provides definitions in all languages, not only Kurdish, Arabic, or English. You can search for a word or proverb in any language, and it will provide the Kurdish translation or definition."

Over 350 years ago, classical Kurdish writer, poet, and philosopher Ahmad Khani wrote the first-ever Kurdish dictionary titled "Nubehara Biçukan," or "The Spring of Children."

Since then, there have been many other Kurdish dictionaries written and published. Ibrahim says he expects his project to be the largest Kurdish dictionary because it is available to people around the world who speak different languages.

(Additional reporting by Masoud Mohamad)

January 09



January 09-2020

## Iraqi forces seize dozens of explosives, destroy 2 ISIS caves in Kirkuk

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Iraqi security forces announced on Thursday that they had seized dozens of explosive devices and destroyed two caves and Islamic State sites northwest of the disputed Kirkuk province.

An Iraqi military statement said the security forces carried out “inspections” in the Mama mountain range, including the villages of Kubaiba, Mzirir, and Mansuriya.

The operations were meant “to purify the area of terrorist elements and arrest the wanted” within the Dibis district, located in northwestern Kirkuk.

According to the security media cell, security forces found 32 explosive devices that belong to Islamic State remnants, adding



A member of the Iraqi Security Forces inspects a home during a military operation. (Photo: Archive)

that a bomb squad defused the explosives.

Two caves and three Islamic State sleeper cell hideouts were also found in the same area and “destroyed,” it added.

Elsewhere, the Islamic State launched an attack early Thursday against an Iraqi border police headquarters at the Iraq-Syria border, killing two people and wounding two others.

Iraq’s security media cell said in a statement that “terrorist elements” attacked “the third regiment in the fourth border police brigade within the Iraqi-Syrian borders, which resulted in the death of two associates and the wounding of two others.”

Read More: ISIS launches attack on Iraq-Syria border killing, wounding 4 people: military

Iraqi security forces also carried out their first military operation since the US-led coalition announced the suspension of operations in Iraq.

The operation was launched in the town of Tarmiyah, located north of Baghdad, which recently witnessed violence linked to the so-called Islamic State.

**Le Monde** 09/01/2020  
Par Allan Kaval

## Taner Akçam, auteur d’« Ordres de tuer. Arménie 1915 » : « Le déni du génocide des Arméniens est une politique d’Etat »

Un mois après la reconnaissance du génocide de 1915 par le Congrès américain paraît le nouvel essai de l’historien turc, dans lequel, accumulant les preuves, il démantèle les arguments négationnistes.

« Ordres de tuer. Arménie 1915. Les télégrammes de Talaat Pacha et le génocide des Arméniens » (Killing Orders. Talat Pasha’s Telegrams and The Armenian Genocide), de Taner Akçam, traduit de l’anglais par Gilles Berton, préface d’Annette Becker, CNRS Editions, 324 p., 24€.

**T**aner Akçam est un sociologue et historien turc, professeur au Centre pour l’étude de l’Holocauste et des génocides de l’université Clark, aux Etats-Unis, et auteur de plusieurs livres importants sur l’histoire turque contemporaine, en

particulier Un acte honteux. Le génocide arménien et la question de la responsabilité turque (Denoël, 2008). Dans son nouvel essai, Ordres de tuer. Arménie, 1915, il établit l’authenticité des télégrammes controversés par lesquels les plus hautes autorités ottomanes ordonnèrent, entre 1915 et 1917, la déportation et le massacre des Arméniens – on estime le nombre de victimes à 1,5 million. Sa parution, alors que le sujet continue de faire l’objet d’un déni officiel dans la Turquie de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, est un événement.

**Quel but avez-vous poursuivi en écrivant ce nouveau livre sur le génocide des Arméniens ?**

Avant sa publication de ce travail, le génocide des Arméniens était déjà un fait établi, non seulement dans le monde universitaire, mais aussi au sein de la communauté internationale au sens large. De nombreuses publications ont montré l’intention génocidaire des autorités ottomanes. Pourtant, les gouvernements turcs successifs ont continué de nier ce génocide. C’est pourquoi mon livre est sur-

tout destiné à démanteler les arguments négationnistes.

**Quelles ont été les réactions à la parution du livre en Turquie, en 2016 ?**

Il a été bien accueilli par les historiens et les médias progressistes. Les milieux négationnistes ont, quant à eux, préféré le passer sous silence. Un seul site Internet, celui du Centre pour les études eurasiennes, un institut parrainé par le gouvernement, a tenté de contester mes conclusions. Mais il s’agissait essen-



tiellement d'attaques ad hominem.

### En quoi votre enquête marquettelle un progrès dans l'étude du génocide ?

Les arguments négationnistes reposent essentiellement sur l'idée qu'on manquerait de sources directes : personne n'aurait découvert un seul document ottoman montrant clairement l'intention génocidaire du gouvernement ottoman au moment où il a commencé à déporter les Arméniens. Sur cette base, les négationnistes, tout en reconnaissant des pillages et même des massacres à l'encontre des convois de déportés, nient qu'ils aient correspondu à une volonté du gouvernement.

Au contraire, disent-ils, celui-ci a fait tout ce qui était en son pouvoir pour empêcher ces atrocités, lesquelles, selon eux, se seraient produites dans des zones montagneuses reculées, que le pouvoir ne contrôlait pas totalement. Ils affirment aussi que si un grand nombre d'Arméniens mouraient de faim, de soif ou d'épidémies et à cause de conditions météorologiques extrêmes, c'était du fait de la précarité créée par la guerre, et non d'une politique intentionnelle. Ordres de tuer balaye tout cela. Il montre l'existence d'ordres de mise à mort directs et prouve leur authenticité.

### Celle-ci est régulièrement contestée...

Dans un livre sur le dossier arménien publié en 1983 par la Société historique turque, contrôlée par le gouvernement, douze « thèses » sont avancées qui, en effet, sont censées invalider l'authenticité des télégrammes attribués au ministre de l'intérieur ottoman Talaat Pacha [1874-1921]. Je réfute toutes ces allégations. La plus importante porte sur le fait que le gouvernement ottoman n'aurait jamais utilisé un système de cryptage à 2 et 3 chiffres, mais seulement à 4 ou 5 chiffres. Or je publie plusieurs télégrammes contenant des systèmes de cryptage à 2 et 3 chiffres et je montre que le gouvernement ottoman avait recouru à plusieurs systèmes de cryptage simultanément. Différents services utilisaient différents systèmes, de sorte que, dans une même période, le gouvernement pouvait utiliser à la fois le cryptage à 2, 3, 4 ou 5 chiffres. Il n'y a pas de périodisation claire dans l'utilisation de ces systèmes.



Commemoration du génocide des Arméniens, à Beyrouth (Liban), en 2000. ANTOINE AGOUDJIAN

### Pensez-vous que le courant de l'histoire dissidente en Turquie, dont vous faites partie, soit en mesure de briser le négationnisme d'Etat à Ankara ?

Non, je ne le crois pas. Le pouvoir modifiera peut-être sa rhétorique, mais il ne sortira pas du déni. Cela n'a rien à voir avec le travail académique. Le déni est une politique, une idéologie profondément enracinée au sein de l'appareil d'Etat. En ce sens, il peut être comparé avec le régime d'apartheid qui a existé en Afrique du Sud. L'apartheid ne pouvait pas être détruit par la réfutation mesurée et savante des théories raciales.

Le déni ne peut être vaincu que politiquement et, à ce titre, cette lutte doit être considérée comme faisant partie de la lutte plus large pour la démocratisation en Turquie. Seul un changement de régime de ce pays entraînera la possibilité d'un changement dans le récit officiel. Mes conclusions aideront ceux qui se battent pour une Turquie démocratique. Elles fourniront de nouvelles armes à leur arsenal.

### Le 12 décembre 2019, le Congrès américain a reconnu le génocide des Arméniens et insisté pour rejeter les efforts visant à nier la réalité de ce crime. Qu'en pensez-vous ?

Quels que soient les motifs de cette résolution, c'est une décision historique. C'est la fin d'une ère et le début d'une nouvelle. J'y vois une victoire morale pour le peuple arménien, mais aussi, bien qu'il puisse être difficile pour lui de l'accepter à ce stade, pour le peuple turc. Cela ne se fera pas tout de suite, ni

même bientôt, mais cette décision devrait faire avancer la lutte des Turcs et de Kurdes pour les droits de l'homme et la démocratie en Turquie.

Il y a d'ailleurs une différence importante entre la reconnaissance américaine du génocide et celles qui ont eu lieu en France et en Allemagne. La décision du Congrès américain peut avoir un poids juridique favorisant l'ouverture de procédures judiciaires contre la Turquie. Les plaignants arméniens pourraient s'inspirer du modèle des litiges concernant la Shoah. Désormais, ceux qui s'investissent dans cette lutte ont un poids moral et juridique accru.

### Est-ce aux parlements de juger l'histoire ?

Les décisions qu'ils prennent sont d'une nature différente de la recherche historique. Je ne pense pas que les luttes des Arméniens pour la reconnaissance politique du génocide aient vraiment un rôle à jouer pour décrire les événements de 1915-1917, même si le débat public tend à confondre les deux plans. Mon livre cherche à établir des faits avec le plus de précision possible ; il ne se fonde pas sur un discours politique. De son côté, la campagne menée pour obtenir des décisions de législatures nationales s'inscrit dans le cadre de la lutte politique des Arméniens – et d'autres parties intéressées – contre le régime négationniste de la Turquie, et cette démarche, dans son ordre, est parfaitement légitime. C'est un instrument destiné à faire pression pour obtenir une reconnaissance de ce fait historique.

Nous pouvons certainement débattre des méthodes les plus efficaces pour y parvenir, mais je n'ai pas encore vu de solutions de rechange raisonnables. Que devraient faire les Arméniens, sinon ce qu'ils font ? De quel autre levier disposent-ils ? Le défi consiste à trouver d'autres moyens encore pour faire pression sur la Turquie à l'échelle internationale. De tels efforts doivent être affinés et pris en accord avec la lutte intérieure pour la démocratisation du pays. Seule une harmonisation entre la lutte à l'extérieur et la lutte à l'intérieur pourra mettre un terme au déni en Turquie, comme ce fut le cas en Afrique du Sud après l'apartheid.

### Critique

#### Une implacable démonstration

Ordres de tuer, enquête approfondie sur l'authenticité des télégrammes du gouvernement jeune-turc – du nom du mouvement révolutionnaire ottoman au pouvoir en Turquie entre 1908 et 1918 – ordonnant la déportation et l'extermination des Arméniens de l'Empire ottoman pendant la première guerre mondiale, repose sur un travail de recherche impressionnant, dont les résultats sont appelés à faire date.

Durant des années, Taner Akçam a parcouru trois continents à la recherche de la vérité sur ces documents officiels critiqués ou niés par les autorités turques depuis un siècle. En se fondant notamment sur une comparaison des archives qui étaient depuis longtemps à la disposition des chercheurs avec celles qui ont été déclassifiées au début des années 2010, il démonte une à une les thèses sur lesquelles repose le mensonge officiel de l'Etat turc. Son analyse des codages (chiffrages et mots-clés), de la nature du papier, de l'encre, des sceaux et signatures des documents aboutit à une vision rigoureuse de la planification des marches de la mort (1,5 million d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants périrent dans ce génocide).

Avec cet ouvrage-clé sur l'organisation du crime par les plus hautes instances de l'Etat ottoman, Taner Akçam met en lumière la bureaucratie des plans d'extermination d'un peuple, dont il apporte toutes les preuves. Une réponse implacable au discours négationniste qui continue de prévaloir à Ankara.

10-01-2020

The New York Times

By Mark Mazzetti, Eric Schmitt,  
Lara Jakes and Thomas Gibbons-Neff

# 3 Hours From Alert to Attacks: Inside the Race to Protect U.S. Forces From Iran Strikes

Intelligence that foreshadowed the Iranian attack set off a tense, often confusing afternoon in the White House Situation Room.

**WASHINGTON** — The alert came to the White House shortly after 2 p.m. on Tuesday, a flash message from American spy agencies that officials sometimes call a “squawk.” In the coming hours, it warned, an Iranian attack on American troops was almost certain.

A blizzard of potential threats had already come throughout the day — of attacks with missiles and rockets, of terrorist strikes against Americans elsewhere in the Middle East, even one warning that hundreds of Iran-backed militia fighters might try to assault Al Asad Air Base, a sprawling compound in Iraq’s western desert.

But the specificity of the afternoon’s latest warning sent Vice President Mike Pence and Robert C. O’Brien, the White House national security adviser, to the basement of the West Wing, where aides were assembling in the Situation Room. President Trump joined shortly after wrapping up a meeting with the Greek prime minister.

Three hours later, a hail of ballistic missiles launched from Iran crashed into two bases in Iraq, including Al Asad, where roughly 1,000 American troops are stationed. The strikes capped a frenetic day filled with confusion and misinformation, where at times it appeared that a dangerous military escalation could lead to a broader war. Mr. Trump spent hours with his aides monitoring the latest threats. Military planners considered options to retaliate if Iran killed American troops.

The early warning provided by intelligence helps explain in part why the missiles exacted a neg-



President Trump edited his speech addressing the nation on Wednesday right until he stepped up to the lectern at the White House. Credit... Doug Mills/The New York Times

ligible toll, destroying only evacuated aircraft hangars as they slammed into the desert sand in barren stretches of the base. No Americans or Iraqis were killed or wounded, and Mr. Trump, who indicated to advisers he would prefer to avoid further engagement, was relieved.

Afterward, the president and vice president spoke to Democratic and Republican congressional leaders, and some urged Mr. Trump to try to dampen the crisis.

This account of the tense hours surrounding Tuesday’s attacks is based on interviews with current and former American officials and military personnel in both Washington and Iraq.

As it turned out, the missile strikes might end up being a bloodless close to the latest chapter in America’s simmering, four-decade conflict with Iran. Mr. Trump declared on Wednesday that Iran “appears to be standing down” after days of heightened tensions since the

killing of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, although few who closely follow the dynamics of the United States’ relationship with Iran foresee a peaceful future.

“If this is indeed the sum total of Iran’s response, it is a big signal of de-escalation that we should gratefully receive,” said Kirsten Fontenrose, who handled Middle East issues on the National Security Council earlier in the Trump administration.

Hours before officials at the White House and Pentagon arrived at their desks on Tuesday, American troops in Iraq were preparing for Iran’s retaliation to avenge the death of the general.

Spy satellites had been tracking the movements of Iran’s arsenal of missile launchers, and communications among Iranian military leaders intercepted by the National Security Agency had indicated that the response to General Suleimani’s killing might come that day.

Al Asad base in Iraq’s Anbar Province was the focus of numerous vague threat reports, including one warning that hundreds of fighters from Kataib Hezbollah, an Iraqi militia trained and equipped by Iran, might launch a frontal assault on the base.

The base was relatively vulnerable; no Patriot antimissile systems protected it, according to an American military official. They had been deployed to other countries in the Middle East deemed more susceptible to Iranian missile attacks. So American commanders prepared to partly evacuate the base and assigned most other remaining forces to hardened shelters to ride out whatever attack would come.

By morning in Washington, the intelligence was still vague enough that White House officials decided to keep Mr. Trump’s planned schedule, including the meeting with the prime minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Administration officials resumed their defense of General Suleimani’s killing amid increasing criticism that they lacked, or were unwilling to share, the intelligence that they said prompted the strike. At the State Department, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters at a packed news conference that killing General Suleimani “was the right decision.”

Days earlier, he had said the killing had been necessary to prevent “imminent” attacks. On Tuesday morning, he gave a different message, citing the death of an American contractor killed in late December when Iranian-

backed Shiite militias fired rockets at a military base in Iraq.

"If you're looking for imminence, you need to look no further than the days that led up to the strike that was taken against Suleimani," Mr. Pompeo said.

Hours later, as Mr. Trump met with Mr. Mitsotakis, the White House received the squawk alert about a likely missile strike. Mr. Pence and Mr. O'Brien led the initial discussion in the Situation Room about how to confront the threat, assessing the intelligence about the Iranians' most likely targets.

Upstairs inside the Oval Office, Mr. Trump sat beside Mr. Mitsotakis as reporters peppered him with questions about the Iran crisis. The president hedged about threats he had made days earlier that the United States might consider targeting Iranian cultural sites — but he maintained a menacing tone.

"If Iran does anything that they shouldn't be doing, they're going to be suffering the consequences, and very strongly," Mr. Trump said. "We're totally prepared."

### **Confusion and Misinformation**

After the brief news conference ended, Mr. Trump descended several flights of stairs to the Situation Room.

With sandwiches piled on a sideboard in the room, the group that advised the president there at different times throughout the day included a handful of seasoned national security officials, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark A. Milley, an Army veteran of nearly 40 years; Keith Kellogg, a retired Army lieutenant general who serves as national security adviser to Mr. Pence; and Joseph Maguire, the acting director of national intelligence.

It also included Mr. Pompeo, who has become a driving force in the Trump administration's Iran policy and an advocate of

what he often calls "restoring deterrence" against Tehran's aggression in the Middle East. As a forceful proponent of the Jan. 3 strike that killed General Suleimani, Mr. Pompeo had played an instrumental role in bringing Mr. Trump to the crisis point.

But others around the long, rectangular table in the Situation Room had only modest foreign policy experience — including Mick Mulvaney, the acting White House chief of staff and a former congressman from South Carolina, and Mr. O'Brien, who was a Los Angeles lawyer before spending two and a half years as Mr. Trump's chief hostage negotiator and assumed the post of national security adviser in September.

Appearing on a video screen was Gina Haspel, the C.I.A. director, who was monitoring the crisis from the agency's headquarters in Northern Virginia. In the days before General Suleimani's death, Ms. Haspel had advised Mr. Trump that the threat the Iranian general presented was greater than the threat of Iran's response if he was killed, according to current and former American officials. Indeed, Ms. Haspel had predicted the most likely response would be a missile strike from Iran to bases where American troops were deployed, the very situation that appeared to be playing out on Tuesday afternoon.

Though Ms. Haspel took no formal position about whether to kill General Suleimani, officials who listened to her analysis came away with the clear view that the C.I.A. believed that killing him would improve — not weaken — security in the Middle East.

But at that moment days after General Suleimani's death, the president and his aides were confronting a flurry of conflicting information. Around 4 p.m., reports came in that a training camp north of Baghdad might have been hit. Officials at the White House and the State Department waited anxiously for

the Pentagon to provide damage reports about the camp, Taji air base, where American troops are stationed. It was a false alarm, though American officials said on Wednesday that they believed that several missiles fired in the barrage a day earlier were intended for the base.

As the reports about Taji came in, loudspeakers at the American Embassy in Baghdad announced that an attack could be imminent. As they had in the previous days, American and Iraqi personnel inside the compound raced toward bomb shelters.

Roughly one hour later, the first missiles bound for Al Asad streaked over their heads.

### **A Hail of Missiles**

Around 5:30 p.m. in Washington, the Pentagon detected the first of what would be 16 short- and medium-range Fateh 110 and Shahab missiles, fired from three locations in Iran.

Several slammed into Al Asad but did only minimal damage. They hit a Black Hawk helicopter and a reconnaissance drone, along with parts of the air traffic control tower, according to a military official familiar with a battle damage assessment of the strike.

The attack also destroyed several tents.

Minutes later, a salvo of missiles hit an air base in Erbil, in northern Iraq, that has been a Special Operations hub for hundreds of American and other allied troops, logistics personnel and intelligence specialists throughout the fight against the Islamic State. The damage to that base was unclear, though no personnel were killed or wounded.

Why did the Iran strikes do such little damage? Mr. Trump attributed it to the "precautions taken, the dispersal of forces and an early warning system that worked very well." A senior American military official dismissed the idea that Iran had in-

tionally avoided killing American troops by aiming instead for uninhabited parts of the two bases.

Still, American officials acknowledged that Iran's leaders showed restraint in planning the missile strikes, especially after the fiery talk from Tehran after General Suleimani's killing.

"We're receiving some encouraging intelligence that Iran is sending messages to those very same militias not to move against American targets or civilians," Mr. Pence said during an interview on Wednesday evening with CBS News. "And we hope that that message continues to echo."

After the attacks subsided, Mr. Trump and Mr. Pence made a round of calls to congressional leaders, and even some of the president's hawkish allies said that Mr. Trump should be measured in his response to the Iranian strikes.

Recounting his conversation with Mr. Trump, Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, said he told the president, "Let's just stand down and see what happens for a few days."

Advisers also discussed whether Mr. Trump should give an address, and several aides, including Jared Kushner and Stephen Miller, as well as Mr. Pence, worked on one on Wednesday morning in the hours before the president spoke on national television. More than a half-dozen drafts circulated as aides scrambled to prepare for the speech. One military official was given only 20 minutes' notice to head to the White House to stand behind Mr. Trump as he spoke in the Grand Foyer of the White House in the late morning, and the president made edits right until he stepped up to the lectern.

Reporting was contributed by Julian E. Barnes, Catie Edmondson, Michael Crowley, Helene Cooper and John Ismay from Washington, and Maggie Haberman from New York.



The New York Times

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By David D. Kirkpatrick and Ronen Bergman

# Its Missiles Did Little Damage, but Iran Has More Potent Weapons

Drones, militants and hackers: Iran has an array of stealthier and more effective options if hostilities escalate.

American military and intelligence officials were stunned at the precision, scale and sheer boldness of what they later concluded was an Iranian attack.

Four months ago, a swarm of low-flying armed drones and cruise missiles struck oil tanks in the central hub of the Saudi petroleum industry, catching Washington by surprise and temporarily knocking out 5 per-

cent of the world's oil supply. Almost no country in the region — Israel may be the exception — could have defended against it.

But with tensions between the United States and Iran at the highest level in four decades, the unexpected success of the September strike on the Saudi oil facilities is a stark reminder that Tehran has an array of

stealthier weapons in its arsenal that could pose far greater threats if the hostilities escalate.

Iran's conventional military has deteriorated severely during the country's relative isolation since the Islamic revolution of 1979. But Tehran has spent those decades cultivating less conventional capabilities that are now among the most potent in the world and which are ideally suited for carrying out asymmetrical warfare against a superpower like

from Iran or southern Iraq.

American officials rank among the most dangerous. It has also developed sophisticated armed and surveillance drones. And lacking a strong conventional navy, it has sought other ways to choke off the flow of Persian Gulf oil, with a fleet of small speedboats and a stockpile of underwater mines.

"Their offensive capability is dra-



A satellite image shows damage from the Iranian missile strike at the Asad air base in Iraq on Wednesday. Credit...Planet Labs Inc., via Reuters

cent of the world's oil supply. Almost no country in the region — Israel may be the exception — could have defended against it.

The Iranian attack on American military posts in Iraq early Wednesday — the only direct attack on the Uni-

ted States or its allies claimed by Iran since the seizure of the American Embassy in 1979 — relied on ballistic missiles and inflicted little damage.

Iran has denied responsibility for the Saudi attack. But American officials have concluded Iran was behind it, by sending the drones and missiles

the United States.

Iran commands one of the region's largest arsenals of ballistic and cruise missiles, a network of allied militant groups around the region with as many as 250,000 fighters, and teams of computer hackers that

cally greater than the defensive capability that is arrayed against them," said Jack Watling, an analyst at the Royal United Services Institute, a London security research center. "Their ability to inflict significant damage makes the cost of war with Iran quite severe."

The ineffectual attack on Wednesday demonstrated the range of Iran's ballistic missiles — some traveling more than 600 miles — but also their poor accuracy, with several landing well outside their presumed targets. Some analysts suggested that Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, may have intentionally ordered a symbolic but relatively harmless attack to show Iranian citizens a forceful response without provoking an all-out war with Washington.

"Khamenei has to calibrate the response so that it is enough for Iran not to lose face but not so much that Iran loses its head," said Karim Sadjpour, a scholar of Iran at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

But Tehran and its allies may still be plotting less overt forms of revenge for the American killing last week of the Iranian military commander Qasim Suleimani. Many analysts contend that Iran and its militant allies are reverting to their pattern of covert or indirect attacks that leave no clear evidence of Iranian responsibility.

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, who also lost one of their leaders in the drone strike that killed General Suleimani, said Wednesday that they would seek their own revenge. Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Iranian-backed Lebanese militia Hezbollah, has said that it would do so as well.

Iran has also shown a longstanding interest in assassinations, a tactic that could match the vows of Iranian officials to take "proportionate" measures to avenge General Suleimani. Several Iran experts said that killing an American official, presumably in the region, might be the eye-for-an-eye that Tehran is seeking.

"I certainly would not be going out to many public places, because the risk of getting whacked or kidnapped is very high," said Sir John Jenkins, a former British ambassador in Saudi Arabia.

But Iran has a dismal success rate in assassinating foreign officials.

Iran has tried and failed to kill Israeli diplomats in Thailand, Georgia and India, and to bomb a rally near Paris where Rudolph W. Giuliani, the for-

mer mayor of New York, was speaking. In 2011, American law enforcement agents broke up a particularly brazen and inept Iranian plot to hire thugs from a Mexican drug cartel for \$1.5 million to blow up an Italian restaurant in Washington in order to kill a Saudi diplomat.

"We almost couldn't believe it," said Ilan Goldenberg, a former Pentagon official who oversaw its Iran task forces at the time. "Everybody looking at the intelligence thought it was just crazy noise, until a first payment of \$150,000 showed up in a bank account."

The September attack against Saudi Arabia presented a frightening alternative, in part because it exposed a vulnerable spot in most missile-defense systems. Most are built to defend against ballistic rockets, and almost none are equipped to detect and stop a large number of low-flying, high-speed drones and cruise missiles.

Officials said that the attack demonstrated that Iran's technology was more advanced than American intelligence agencies had expected.

"The attack on oil fields in Saudi was stunning in the depth of its audaciousness," Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., the head of the Pentagon's Central Command, said in a recent interview.

Tal Inbar, former director of the space research center at the Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies, a now-closed Israeli research organization, said the precision of the attack could not have been achieved using only a GPS system. "Much better capabilities were deployed in this attack," he said, "possibly a camera on the missile and the drones, which compares reality with a target image."

Unlike more advanced American or Chinese drones, Iranian drones cannot fire missiles from the air. But they can be loaded with explosives, as they were thought to be in the Saudi attack, to become remote-guided missiles.

Iran's longest-range cruise missiles can strike more than 1,500 miles from Iran's borders, reaching almost anywhere in the Persian Gulf. China, Russia and North Korea

have provided Iran with technology and munitions, and Iran has produced remote-controlled drones domestically.

Until recently, though, Iran has preferred to rely on its network of militant allies around the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, an array of Iraqi militias now organized as the Popular Mobilization Forces, the Houthis in Yemen, and other groups across the region. Some, like Hezbollah or the Iraqi forces, are now so large, well-equipped and institutionalized that they more closely resemble professional militaries than informal militias.

"That is what extends Iran's power far beyond its borders," said Afshon Ostovar, a scholar of the Iranian military at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif.

The Trump administration's sweeping economic sanctions on Iran over the past year have damaged its economy and reduced its ability to fund its militant allies. But a report this week from the Center for Strategic and International Affairs concluded that the total number of fighters in the full network of Iranian-backed militias has continued to grow steadily, to an estimated range of nearly 150,000 to more than 250,000.

And despite the efforts of the United States and Israel, Iran has continued to smuggle missiles of various ranges and abilities to its proxies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, according to Israeli and American defense officials.

The latest cycle of attacks between the United States and Iran started with a rocket attack that killed an American contractor in Iraq. The United States retaliated with a strike on an Iranian-backed militia, beginning a cycle of escalation.

But far from ending such rocket attacks, some of the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq have said that even without Iranian encouragement they now intended to step up their attacks on American forces in order to drive them out of the country.

"I think we are settling in for what is going to be a bumpy period of conflict," Mr. Ostovar said.

Cyberattacks — a weapon that can cause severe damage halfway around the world with low costs and few fingerprints — may be Iran's wild card.

Cybersecurity experts and government officials have already spotted an increase in malicious activity by pro-Iranian hackers and social media users that they believe could foreshadow more serious computer attacks from Tehran.

American officials and independent cybersecurity experts say that Iranian malware attacks on Saudi Arabia have been among the most damaging of such assaults in history, causing at least tens of millions of dollars in damages.

A 2012 attack that American officials attributed to Iran overwrote the hard drives of the Saudi state oil company Aramco with the image of a burning American flag. A second attack in 2016 and 2017 destroyed files of the Saudi central bank, certain government ministries and several private companies. That time, a famous photograph of a drowned Syrian refugee child appeared on computer screens.

The former director national of intelligence Dan Coats ranked Iran as one of the four most dangerous sources of cyberthreats last year, along with Russia, China and North Korea.

"It is capable of causing localized, temporary disruptive effects — such as disrupting a large company's corporate networks for days to weeks — similar to its data deletion attacks against dozens of Saudi governmental and private-sector networks," he said.

One apparently low-level Iranian attack has already sought to avenge General Suleimani. Iranian hackers temporarily captured the website of the United States' government's Federal Depository Library Program and replaced its contents with a eulogy for the general.

"Hacked by Iran Cyber Security Group Hackers," text on the website read. "This is only small part of Iran's cyber ability!"

Eric Schmitt contributed reporting.

The New York Times

By Tom Cotton  
Jan. 10, 2020

Opinion

## The Case for Killing Qassim Suleimani

Last week, our military and intelligence services brought justice to Qassim Suleimani, Iran's terror mastermind. President Trump ordered General Suleimani's killing after months of attacks on Americans by Iran's proxy forces in Iraq. These attacks culminated in a rocket strike that killed an American and wounded others, then the attempted storming of our embassy in Baghdad. The first attack crossed the red line drawn by the president last summer — that if Iran harmed an American, it would face severe consequences. The president meant what he said, as Mr. Suleimani learned the hard way.

Mr. Suleimani's killing was justified, legal and strategically sound. But the president's critics swarmed as usual. After the embassy attack, a Democratic senator declared that the president had "rendered America impotent." Some Democrats then pivoted after the Suleimani strike, calling him "reckless" and "dangerous." Those are the words of Senator Elizabeth Warren, who also described Mr. Suleimani — the leader of a State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization plotting to kill American troops — as a "senior foreign military official." Senator Bernie Sanders likened America's killing of a terrorist on the battlefield to Vladimir Putin's assassination of Russian political dissidents.

Some Democrats seem to feel a strange regret for the killing of a monster who specialized in killing Americans. The linguist his proxies killed on Dec. 27, Nawres Hamid, was merely his last victim out of more than 600 in Iraq since 2003. His forces have instigated attacks against our troops in Afghanistan. He plotted a (foiled) bombing in Washington, D.C., and attempted attacks on the soil



Credit... EPA, via Shutterstock

of our European allies. He armed the terrorist group Hezbollah in Lebanon with rockets to pummel the Jewish state of Israel. And he was greeted moments before his death by a terrorist responsible for the bombing of our embassy in Kuwait in 1983.

Some of the president's critics will concede that Mr. Suleimani was an evil man, but many complain his killing was unlawful. Wrong again. He was a United States-designated terrorist commander. As I have been briefed, he was plotting further attacks against Americans at the time of his death. The authority granted to the president under Article II of the Constitution provides ample legal basis for this strike. Furthermore, those who accept the constitutionality of the War Powers Act should recall that Congress's 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force very much remain in effect and clearly cover the Suleimani operation. This will be a relief to the Obama administration, which ordered hundreds of drone strikes using such a legal rationale.

American forces are in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government, and they have every right and authority to defend themselves. This

legal act of self-defense was not only proportionate — it was targeted and brilliantly executed, causing essentially no collateral damage.

So the killing was justified and legally sound. It was also strategically sensible. If Iran's anemic response on Tuesday is any indication, the Suleimani strike has already restored deterrence — and our troops in the region are safer for it. To put it simply, the ayatollahs are once again afraid of the United States because of this bold action, which is forcing them to recalculate their odds. In 2019 alone, Iran's violent provocations included mining ships in the Strait of Hormuz, downing an American drone and threatening the global economy by striking Saudi oil facilities. President Trump chose restraint at the time but promised ferocious retaliation in the event of American casualties. The mullahs must have thought that he was bluffing. Now they're compelled to face the reality of America's vast overmatch of their forces.

The weeks and months ahead will tell whether the Islamic Republic is successfully deterred — but it has been deterred in the past, for example, when Ronald

Reagan sank much of the Iranian Navy in 1988. (It has never successfully been appeased, and President Barack Obama's attempts to buy off Iran with his nuclear deal only fueled the regime's imperialism and regional campaign of terror.) Iran is not 10-foot tall. In fact, it's a weak, third-rate power.

Because of this administration's maximum-pressure campaign, the regime manages an economy trapped in a deepening depression. To remain in power, it must mass murder its own people, which it did as recently as November. If maximum pressure is maintained, the ayatollahs will eventually face a choice between fundamentally changing their behavior or suffering economic and social collapse. They may also choose to lash out in a desperate bid to escape this logic, perhaps by making a break for a nuclear bomb. Such impulses must be deterred or, if recklessly pursued, halted with swift and firm action, as the president promised on Wednesday.

This tough-minded approach is not a distraction from America's competition with more serious adversaries like China and Russia, who watch our actions closely in the Gulf for signs of commitment and resolve. Our long-term challenge with China, in particular, directly involves the Middle East's energy resources, to which access remains critical for our allies in the Indo-Pacific, and indeed for China itself — regardless of important strides in America's domestic energy production.

The future of our Iran policy is a critical part of our success in the global competition that will determine the character of this century and the safety of the American republic within it. And recent events have shown we are up to the task.



# Crash du Boeing en Iran : comment la piste d'un tir accidentel de missile s'est précisée

Le premier ministre canadien, Justin Trudeau, a affirmé jeudi que l'avion a été abattu « par un missile sol-air iranien ».

Dans la foulée, l'Iran a démenti être responsable du crash qui a causé la mort de 176 personnes, mercredi à Téhéran.

L'escalade entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran a fait 176 victimes collatérales, au cours d'une passe d'armes pourtant décrite jusqu'ici comme calibrée. Les passagers et membres d'équipage qui ont péri, mercredi 8 janvier, dans le crash d'un Boeing 737 d'Ukraine International Airlines (UIA), après son décollage de l'aéroport de Téhéran, ont été tués par un tir de missile antiaérien iranien, selon le renseignement américain. L'incident était intervenu quelques heures après une salve de missiles balistiques ordonnée par la République islamique contre des installations militaires américaines, situées en Irak. Des repréailles contre l'assassinat, à Bagdad, cinq jours plus tôt, du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani, commandant de la force des gardiens de la révolution, dans une frappe américaine.

La journée de jeudi avait été marquée par la montée des doutes sur le caractère accidentel de la catastrophe. Dans le sillage de Newsweek, les médias américains diffusaient des citations anonymes de responsables du renseignement, tandis que des photos d'impacts extérieurs de shrapnels sur la carlingue, ou de restes d'un missile Tor à proximité du crash, étaient publiées sur les réseaux sociaux. Puis une première confirmation tombait, par l'entremise de Justin Trudeau, le premier ministre du Canada, dont 63 ressortissants, pour beaucoup binationaux, sont morts dans le crash.

**« Scientifiquement, il est impossible qu'un missile ait frappé l'avion ukrainien, de telles rumeurs sont illogiques »**

« Nous avons des informations de sources multiples, notamment de



Des secouristes de la Croix-Rouge iranienne sur les lieux du crash de l'avion ukrainien, à Shahedshahr, près de Téhéran, le 8 janvier. Ebrahim Noroozi / AP

nos alliés et de nos propres services », montrant que l'avion a été abattu « par un missile sol-air iranien », a ainsi précisé M. Trudeau, lors d'une conférence de presse, avant d'ajouter que l'acte n'avait peut-être pas été intentionnel. Plus tôt, le président américain, Donald Trump, avait exprimé ses nuances sur la thèse d'un problème technique, d'abord mise en avant par Téhéran. « J'ai le sentiment que quelque chose de terrible s'est passé », avait déclaré le président des Etats-Unis, évoquant la possibilité d'une erreur.

A Téhéran, on demeurait sur la défensive après les déclarations du premier ministre canadien. Jeudi, le ministère des affaires étrangères iranien a dénoncé des « mises en scène douteuses » et appelé Ottawa à partager ses informations avec la commission d'enquête iranienne sur l'incident. « Scientifiquement, il est impossible qu'un missile ait frappé l'avion ukrainien, de telles rumeurs sont illogiques », a affirmé Ali Abedzadeh, responsable de l'organisation de l'aviation civile iranienne, cité par l'agence ISNA.

A Paris, plusieurs responsables au sein du gouvernement ont confirmé officieusement, auprès du Monde, jeudi soir, que la catastrophe avait été causée par un tir de missile. Le renseignement américain avait, dans la journée, déjà fourni des éléments : notamment le compte rendu d'une détection par satellite d'un départ de missile sur les lieux.

L'hypothèse d'un ManPAD (missile sol-air portatif) opéré par un groupe barbouze, ou par des opposants cherchant à faire porter la responsabilité du crash sur le régime de Téhéran, était évacuée par ces sources, compte tenu des conditions au moment de l'événement : il a eu lieu en pleine nuit, sans visibilité, ce qui rend les réglages difficiles, et alors que l'avion volait déjà à une altitude de 2 400 mètres. L'utilisation présumée d'un missile Tor, de fabrication russe, pouvait aussi susciter des interrogations, en raison de sa puissance – pour certains experts, il aurait dû complètement pulvériser l'avion, dont on aurait dû ne rien retrouver. Les milieux de défense français qui suivent le dossier

adhèrent au scénario d'une erreur iranienne d'interprétation.

## Violent impact explosif

Au milieu de la nuit de mardi à mercredi et du fait de l'escalade en cours, la défense aérienne iranienne était placée en alerte maximale et devait s'attendre à une riposte américaine, quelques heures seulement après la réplique – pourtant très maîtrisée, et à dessein non meurtrière –, envoyée par Téhéran contre les bases américaines en Irak. Une erreur, humaine ou technique, a pu conduire les militaires iraniens en poste (la batterie antiaérienne est mobile, placée à bord d'un camion) – à ne pas identifier sur leur radar la nature du Boeing 737 d'UIA ni le fait qu'il s'éloignait. Au contraire, ils ont pu le considérer comme une menace à l'approche, un drone ou un bombardier américain, par exemple.

Une vidéo publiée sur une chaîne publique de l'application de messagerie en ligne Telegram, très populaire en Iran, puis analysée par le site d'investigation Bellingcat, qui a accès à des sources du renseignement britannique, semble corroborer la thèse d'un tel tir. On y voit un missile lancé depuis une position au sol, située hors du champ, atteindre, dans le ciel d'une banlieue résidentielle, un aéronef volant vers l'ouest. Après un violent impact explosif, l'avion change de direction et, selon les analyses de géolocalisation de Bellingcat, amorce sa course vers le lieu du crash. Interrogée par le New York Times, la personne ayant filmé la vidéo a déclaré avoir commencé à enregistrer les images après avoir entendu une détonation, ce qui suggérerait que deux projectiles en tout auraient été tirés à ce moment.



Des secouristes de la Croix-Rouge iranienne sur les lieux du crash de l'avion ukrainien, à Shahedshahr, près de Téhéran, le 8 janvier. - / AFP

L'appareil de la compagnie Ukraine International Airlines datait de 2016 et avait subi une révision technique le 6 janvier

Divers experts rappelaient, jeudi, que l'événement, dans son déroulement, est très similaire à celui, symétrique, qui avait vu, en 1988, le croiseur américain USS Vincennes abattre, au-dessus du Golfe, un avion de ligne iranien opérant la liaison Téhéran-Dubaï, tuant 290 passagers. Le radar du navire militaire avait confondu l'Airbus d'Iran Air avec un chasseur F-14, qui avait décollé presque au même moment.

En Ukraine, quelques heures à peine après l'annonce de l'accident, et bien avant les déclarations officielles, l'idée d'un missile antiaérien heurtant, par erreur, l'avion de ligne avait déjà hanté les esprits. Le drame rappelle, à Kiev, une autre tragédie, celle du MH17 : le 17 juillet 2014, le Boeing 777 de la compagnie Malaysia Airlines s'était écrasé avec, à son bord, 298 personnes, lorsqu'il survolait la région de Donetsk, tenue par les séparatistes et leurs parrains russes, en guerre contre le gouvernement ukrainien. Après des années d'investigations, le rapport d'enquête a établi que l'appareil avait été abattu par un missile Buk, appartenant à une unité de l'armée russe, et qu'il aurait probablement été tiré par les rebelles séparatistes pensant abattre un avion de l'armée ukrainienne.

Dans la journée de jeudi, le président Zelensky s'est entretenu avec

des dirigeants de différents pays, notamment les premiers ministres du Royaume-Uni, du Canada, de la Suède, ainsi que le président iranien. Le secrétaire du conseil national de sécurité, Oleksii Danilov, confessait que l'Ukraine explorait la piste d'un missile ayant frappé accidentellement l'avion. Par ailleurs, 45 enquêteurs ukrainiens sont arrivés à Téhéran pour rechercher d'éventuels indices parmi les débris de l'appareil. La probabilité que le crash soit lié à autre chose qu'à un incident technique est jugée, de fait, « significative » à Kiev, qui annonce avoir reçu « des données importantes » sur le crash de la part des Américains.

**L'appareil de la compagnie Ukraine International Airlines datait de 2016 et avait subi une révision technique le 6 janvier.**

L'équipage – neuf Ukrainiens – faisait partie des meilleurs de l'équipe internationale de la compagnie, a affirmé Yevhen Dykhne, son dirigeant. Les deux pilotes, Volodymyr Gaponenko et Oleksii Naumkin, avaient respectivement 11 600 et plus de 12 000 heures de vol d'expérience sur Boeing 737.

En fonction de l'attitude qui sera observée par Téhéran, les implications diplomatiques de l'incident sont singulièrement sensibles. Alors que les observateurs de la crise irano-américaine pouvaient espérer une désescalade après des représailles relativement limitées de la part de l'Iran contre des cibles américaines,

mercredi, une éventuelle obstruction de Téhéran sur l'enquête du crash est susceptible d'envenimer la situation. « Si des preuves d'une responsabilité iranienne dans le crash sont avancées, il est clair que la réunion ministérielle prendra une autre tournure », expliquait une source à Bruxelles, à la veille d'un rendez-vous extraordinaire des ministres des affaires étrangères, qui devait être consacré, notamment, à la situation en Iran et en Irak. Vendredi midi, la Commission européenne a appelé la tenue d'une enquête « indépendante et crédible », sans valider la thèse d'un tir de missile. « A ce stade, il n'y a encore aucune preuve concluante de ce qui a causé l'accident. »

l'ensemble de la communauté internationale dans un moment critique ? Jeudi, Téhéran a finalement invité Boeing, le constructeur américain, à participer à l'enquête tout en persistant à nier un tir malencontreux. « Une chose est sûre, cet avion n'a pas été touché par un missile », a répété, vendredi, M. Abedzadeh, lors d'une conférence de presse à Téhéran.

« L'Iran a montré une ouverture à une implication canadienne dans l'enquête depuis le début », a pour sa part commenté M. Trudeau. « Jusqu'à quel point et de quelle manière cela se fera doit encore être précisé, mais il y a là une ouverture. » Le premier ministre canadien en a également appelé à Paris, estimant



Des secouristes de la Croix-Rouge iranienne sur les lieux du crash de l'avion ukrainien, à Shahedshahr, près de Téhéran, le 8 janvier. SERGEI SUPINSKY / AFP

**La France est l'une des rares puissances à disposer à la fois d'une expertise technique reconnue en matière d'aviation civile et d'un accès diplomatique de haut niveau à Téhéran**

La question de l'analyse des boîtes noires, qui dépend du bon vouloir de Téhéran, est décisive. Mercredi, l'agence de presse Mehr, réputée proche des ultraconservateurs, avait cité M. Abedzadeh, disant que l'Iran ne remettrait pas les boîtes noires aux Américains. Mais le ministère des transports iranien a, depuis, rejeté « les rumeurs sur la résistance de l'Iran à livrer les boîtes noires (...) aux Etats-Unis ». La République islamique pourrait-elle, en définitive, se montrer plus conciliante pour éviter de se mettre à dos

que la France devait être associée étroitement à l'enquête. Les moteurs du Boeing 737 sont, en effet, manufacturés par l'industriel français Safran, en partenariat avec General Electric. De fait, la France, avec l'Allemagne, est l'une des rares puissances internationales à disposer à la fois d'une expertise technique reconnue en matière d'aviation civile et d'un accès diplomatique de haut niveau à Téhéran. Vendredi, sur RTL, le ministre des affaires étrangères français, Jean-Yves Le Drian, a appelé à « établir la vérité dans les conditions de transparence la plus totale » et précisé que la France était « disponible » pour apporter son expertise technique.





Wladimir van Wilgenburg  
January 12, 2020

## Syrian Kurds criticize UN decision limiting humanitarian aid to Syria



Tents shelter civilians who fled ongoing battles in the countryside surrounding Syria's Idlib province and rely on foreign humanitarian assistance for their basic needs. (Photo: AFP/Aref Tammawi)

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – A Syrian Kurdish party on Saturday criticized the recent decision by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to restrict the number of border crossings that can be used to bring aid to northeastern Syria, widely seen as an attempt by Russia to limit assistance to the area in support of Damascus.

“The United Nations has voted to limit the entry of humanitarian aid through the border crossings under the control of Turkey and the Syrian regime, clearly preventing delivery of aid to those in need,” Aldar Xelil, head of the Diplomatic Relations Office for the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), said in a public statement.

“On the other hand, this measure contradicts the United Nations’ neutrality and violates its charter,” he continued, “as happened previously with respect to

the Constitutional Committee which in last September excluded the Autonomous Administration from negotiations in Geneva and elsewhere.”

The senior Kurdish official called on the UNSC to be responsible and support the northeast of Syria with aid, calling the recent vote a dangerous development.

In late December, Russia vetoed a resolution on Syria for the 14th time since the start of the nation’s protracted conflict in 2011 to block cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries from Turkey and Iraq that would benefit large numbers of Syrian civilians.

Since 2014, millions have relied on humanitarian and medical supplies brought into the country via four border crossings with Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan.

The resolution called for renewing operations, excluding one border crossing in Jordan, for up to a year. Thirteen countries voted in favor, with permanent UNSC member states China and Russia casting the votes that blocked the measure.

The 15-member Security Council on Friday allowed cross-border aid deliveries to continue from two places in Turkey (Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salameh, connecting Turkey to the northern Syrian city of Idlib), but dropped the Yaroubiyeh crossing which connects areas in Syria held by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) eastward to Iraq. Furthermore, a Jordanian border point was also closed for aid deliveries.

“Yaroubiyeh has only brought in limited quantities of aid - it’s basically all medicine - while the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salameh crossings into Turkish-

dominated northwestern Syria have been used much more frequently by the UN,” Aron Lund, a fellow with the Century Foundation, told Kurdistan 24.

“In the end, these two Turkey-Syria crossings were kept and Yaroubiyeh has now been shut down.

This means, in practice, that the UN can no longer use Yaroubiyeh to bring crucial aid into Syria without first getting the Syrian government’s permission.

“The Russians want to restore control to Assad’s government, but are also mindful of Turkey’s concerns about a worsened crisis in areas like Idlib,” Syria analyst Lund said.

“They are also eager to increase the Syrian government’s control over the northeast and over SDF, to give it more leverage in



its talks with SDF," he added. "The events in October and November and Trump's talk about 'securing the oil' has clearly angered the Russians and they now felt even more motivated to shut down UN access to northeastern Syria."

The Syrian government already allows some aid to reach northeastern Syria by land or air, but it has banned aid workers from sending medical supplies to the region, such as surgical equipment.

The UN says its Yaroubiyeh operation previously supplied 40



Aldar Xelil, head of the Diplomatic Relations Office for the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), in an interview with Kurdistan 24, Nov. 3, 2018. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

percent of the medical supplies used in SDF-run areas.

Lund continued, "That medical aid is no longer going to reach

northeastern Syria, unless the SDF can persuade Damascus to let it be trucked in from government-controlled areas. And that will probably require something in return."

"It's ultimately about who should control northeastern Syria. It's a way to use aid as leverage, to increase SDF's dependence on Damascus, and to make it less sustainable for SDF to work with Assad's American enemies."

Editing by John J. Catherine

**L'Orient  
LE JOUR**

11/01/2020

## Le Premier ministre irakien affirme aux Kurdes ne pas chercher "les hostilités" avec Washington

Le Premier ministre démissionnaire irakien Adel Abdel Mahdi est samedi en tournée au Kurdistan irakien pour rassurer les dirigeants locaux sur le fait qu'il ne recherche pas "les hostilités" avec Washington, dont il réclame le départ des troupes.

La première visite de M. Abdel Mahdi dans la région autonome du nord depuis sa prise de fonction il y a près de 15 mois intervient au lendemain d'un nouvel appel de sa part aux Etats-Unis à envoyer une délégation pour encadrer le retrait de leurs 5.200 soldats du pays.

Washington, dont le Parlement irakien réclame le départ des troupes après l'assassinat du général iranien Qassem Soleimani et de son lieutenant irakien à Bagdad, a aussitôt refusé.

A Erbil, M. Abdel Mahdi a assuré au président kurde Netchirvan Barzani, au Premier ministre Massour Barzani et à Massoud Barzani, chef du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), que Bagdad "ne veut des hostilités avec personne, les Etats-Unis inclus",



Le Premier ministre démissionnaire irakien Adel Abdel Mahdi. Photo d'archives AFP/Getty Images AFP

selon un communiqué de son bureau. Il s'est ensuite rendu à Souleimaniyeh pour rencontrer l'autre grand parti kurde, l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du défunt président irakien Jalal Talabani, afin d'évoquer également l'escalade entre Washington et Téhéran qui a menacé de faire sombrer l'Irak de nouveau dans la violence.

Les députés kurdes du Parlement fédéral à Bagdad n'ont pas participé au vote qui réclamait au gou-

vernement d'expulser les troupes étrangères du pays.

M. Abdel Mahdi passe pour être le Premier ministre le plus conciliant avec Erbil, notamment sur la question des juteux revenus du pétrole kurde. En retour, le Kurdistan a largement soutenu le gouvernement de M. Abdel Mahdi face à une révolte populaire inédite qui a éclaté le 1er octobre. Samedi, M. Abdel Mahdi a plaidé à Erbil pour que, face "à la situation actuelle dangereuse, il faut

coopérer et coordonner les efforts et combler toutes les brèches dans lesquelles les jihadistes pourraient s'engouffrer". Ces propos interviennent alors que de nombreux Kurdes plaident pour le maintien des troupes étrangères pour affronter les cellules clandestines que conserve le groupe Etat islamique (EI) malgré sa défaite territoriale.

Le Kurdistan "soutient toute décision protégeant l'intérêt et la stabilité de l'Irak", a répondu Massoud Barzani, selon le même communiqué. Depuis des jours, les factions pro-Iran menacent de répondre aux raids américains, les autorités fédérales s'activent à expulser les soldats américains et les diplomates multiplient les protestations contre Washington. Mais le Kurdistan irakien, lui, est resté à l'écart.

Cette région du nord de l'Irak doit son autonomie aux Etats-Unis mais partage des centaines de kilomètres de frontière avec l'Iran et les combattants kurdes ont participé à la guerre contre l'EI aux côtés de la coalition emmenée par Washington comme de ceux du général Soleimani.



January 12, 2020  
By Fazel Hawramy

## In Ukrainian jet crash fallout, Iran's MPs, councilors say systemic lying mars its establishment

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – Several Iranian parliamentarians and councilors vented their frustration on Sunday over the way the authorities handled the Ukrainian airliner disaster, with one Tehran city councilor describing the establishment as overrun with “systemic corruption.”

“I am ashamed of you all...I hope the authorities...for once be responsible and take a brave decision to get the country out of this vicious and never-ending circle of lying, corruption and incompetence,” Bahareh Arvin, a member of Tehran’s city council posted on her Telegram channel on Sunday.

Iranian authorities and affiliated media misled the public for three days as evidence from Western intelligence agencies and videos from Iranian social media piled in, showing that an object had hit the Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 before it crashed on the outskirts of Tehran early on Wednesday, killing all 176 people on board.

The incident came several hours after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) fired over a dozen missiles at two US bases in Iraq. The IRGC insisted that the missile be fired at the exact time of night that Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani was slain by an American drone on January 3 near Baghdad airport.

Mechanical error was touted by officials as the cause of the disaster, a line parroted by media outlets affiliated with the establishment and by coerced, non-establishment affiliated outlets, to the dismay of the public.

One parliamentarian, Fatemeh Zolqadr, revealed on Sunday



IRGC chief Hossein Salami attends parliament in Tehran to field questions on the Ukrainian airliner disaster on January 12, 2020. Photo: Ehsan Naderipour / IRNA

that a government official had gone to the national broadcaster during the three days of post-crash uncertainty and told the broadcaster without reservation that the cause of the disaster was a “mechanical failure”.

On Sunday two presenters from the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) resigned in protest over the way the corporation handled the disaster.

“This will have bad implications, people are shocked and angry,” Zolqadr said. “It would have been much better had they not said anything from the beginning, or at least said they were investigating.”

“It is clear that these friends [officials] were aware of the incident, so we need to ask - why insist on lying for a few days?” Gholamreza Haydari, a member of the parliament from Tehran said.

“Another issue is that we need to go after the highest chain of command that are responsible for this, because the poor person sitting behind the [missile] system only executes orders and the order comes from somewhere else.”

Iranian journalists living abroad continually questioned the official line presented by the IRGC and the government of President Hassan Rouhani. One official Hesameddin Ashena, an advisor to President Rouhani went so far as to threaten overseas Iranian journalists for taking part in “psychological warfare.”

Gholamali Jafarzadeh, a parliamentarian from the northern city of Rasht, said “it is painful that some individuals have committed an offense in this country and they themselves decided on when to inform the public.”

“If it was not for the Western pressure, people’s attempts to convey information and the films that were published in the cyberspace, the Misters [officials] would not tell the truth,” Jafarzadeh asserted. “Saying they wished for death is only words, they must all resign and undoubtedly, they all have to stand trial.”

IRGC aerospace commander Amir Ali Hajzadeh took responsibility for the incident on Saturday.

“I wish I was dead,” The New

York Times quoted him as saying. “I accept all responsibility for the incident,” he told reporters, unable to explain why Iranian airspace had not been closed hours after the strikes on military bases in Iraq.

On Sunday, IRGC chief Hossein Salami was questioned about the disaster by parliamentarians. “Most of the talks from the parliamentarians were to thank the IRGC and their efforts in providing security and there was little space to ask question,” parliamentary presidency representative Alireza Rahimi told the semi-official news agency ISNA.

“With regard to why the civilian flights were not halted that day, Salami said the responsibility of the civilian flights is not held by the IRGC. Therefore, the Guard has no duty to stop passenger flights,” Rahimi said.

It is not clear if the IRGC had suggested a halt to civilian airliner flights given the heightened tension and the fact that the Guards were on highest alert.

“This was a critical point but there are still many questions and ambiguities surrounding this,” Rahimi added.

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Tehran and several other cities, chant against the establishment, the IRGC and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei the country’s ultimate decision maker, on Saturday evening. In Tehran, security forces used tear gas to disperse protesters and detained the British Ambassador for attending a vigil organized for the victims of the disaster, accusing him of “organizing and provoking” protesters.

“Very concerned about the temporary detention of the UK Am-



bassador @HMATehran in Iran. Full respect of the Vienna convention is a must. The EU calls for deescalation and space for diplomacy," European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles said on Twitter.

Ambassador Rob Macaire denied the accusations held against him and said he attended the vigil to pay respect to the victims, some of whom were British.

There were reports of students protesting and chanting against the IRGC in Tehran on Sunday morning, with the authorities de-

ploying riot police in huge numbers across different universities.

For city council member Arvin, the handling of the Ukrainian airliner disaster has only compounded her weariness in battling the establishment to instigate change for her constituents.

"I entered Tehran city council two years ago with your votes, I had high hopes to try for a better life for you, but every day that passes, I become more hopeless in terms of taking a step in the existing structure in order to decrease the pain of the residents," her Telegram post read.

**L'Orient  
LE JOUR**

OLJ / AFP/ Yacine LE FORESTIER  
12/01/2020

## Etablissements turcs ou "écoles Erdogan" ? Polémique en Allemagne

Cette controverse vient s'ajouter à celle autour de l'influence que le gouvernement turc est accusé d'exercer en Allemagne via les mosquées où officient des imams payés et envoyés par Ankara.

L'ouverture possible d'écoles turques en Allemagne fait resurgir les craintes de l'influence du président Erdogan sur l'importante diaspora turque du pays, déjà régulièrement dénoncée dans les mosquées.

"Nous ne voulons pas d'écoles-Erdogan en Allemagne", a protesté samedi un des dirigeants du parti conservateur CSU, membre de la même famille politique que celle de la chancelière allemande Angela Merkel, Markus Blume, dans le groupe de presse régional RND.

Ankara demande l'ouverture en Allemagne, où vivent plus de trois millions de personnes de nationalité ou d'origine turque - la plus grande communauté au monde hors de Turquie - de trois écoles : Berlin, Cologne et Francfort. Pour Ankara il s'agit d'un pendant logique à la présence en Turquie de trois écoles allemandes, à Istanbul, dans la capitale du pays et à Izmir. Mais aussi à l'absence de cours de turc dans les écoles publiques allemandes, en dépit d'une forte demande dans la diaspora.

### Tensions

"Depuis des décennies, les autorités scolaires allemandes n'ont pas fait ce qu'il fallait pour, aux côtés d'autres langues étrangères, proposer aussi le turc" dans les cursus, regrette le président de la communauté turque du pays, Gökay Sofuoğlu, dans le quotidien Stuttgarter Zeitung. Ces cours sont aujourd'hui dispensés le



La mosquée centrale de Cologne, gérée par l'association turque Ditib, qui gère 850 mosquées et affirme représenter 800.000 fidèles, dans l'ouest de l'Allemagne, le 28 septembre 2018. Photo d'archives AFP / Patrik STOLLARZ

plus souvent par les consulats turcs en Allemagne dans des mosquées.

Les discussions sur les écoles et sur un cadre juridique bilatéral dans ce domaine n'ont toutefois pas démarré sous les meilleurs auspices. Elles interviennent dans un contexte de relations politiques tendues entre les deux pays, avec notamment l'arrestation de nombreux bi-nationaux germano-turcs ces dernières années par Ankara.

Berlin, tout en ayant fortement besoin de la Turquie pour freiner le flux de demandeurs d'asile venant du Moyen-Orient vers l'Europe, critique régulièrement ce qu'il perçoit comme les dérives autoritaires du chef de l'Etat Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ce dernier en retour accuse les autorités allemandes de laxisme contre ses opposants en Allemagne. La de-

mande scolaire d'Ankara est intervenue dans le sillage de la fermeture provisoire en 2018 de l'école allemande d'Izmir en Turquie, derrière laquelle les médias allemands soupçonnent un geste d'intimidation. Le gouvernement allemand se montre ouvert à la discussion mais entend s'assurer que le contenu des cours restera sous son contrôle.

"Il est clair que ce qui est enseigné dans les écoles allemandes doit correspondre à nos valeurs fondamentales et nos lois", a prévenu la commissaire à l'intégration du gouvernement allemand, Annette Widmann-Mauz. "Les éventuelles écoles étrangères turques devront se conformer à la législation scolaire locale, des privilèges ne sont pas prévus", lui a fait écho vendredi un porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères, Rainer Breuel.

### Mosquées

Cette controverse vient s'ajouter à celle autour de l'influence que le gouvernement turc est accusé d'exercer en Allemagne via les mosquées où officient des imams payés et envoyés par Ankara. Ces imams, au nombre d'environ un millier, relèvent de l'association turque Ditib, qui gère 850 mosquées et affirme représenter 800.000 fidèles, ce qui en fait la plus grande organisation musulmane du pays. Elle est depuis des années sous le feu de la critique, soupçonnée par ses détracteurs d'être un relais du pouvoir turc en Allemagne. Ditib a notamment été accusée après la tentative avortée de putsch contre le président Erdogan en 2016 d'espionner ses opposants dans la diaspora allemande.

Sous la pression de Berlin, l'organisation vient d'annoncer qu'une partie des imams seraient désormais formés en Allemagne et non plus systématiquement envoyés de Turquie. Le ministère allemand de l'Intérieur a parlé d'un "pas dans la bonne direction" pour réduire l'influence extérieure. "Une partie importante des responsables religieux correspondront davantage aux réalités de la vie allemande", s'est félicité cette semaine le secrétaire d'Etat Markus Kerber. Tout en ajoutant: "Il faudra encore d'autres initiatives et de temps pour retrouver la confiance perdue".



The New York Times

Jan. 13, 2020

By Alissa J. Rubin

## As U.S.-Iran Tensions Flare, Iraq Is Caught in the Middle

After U.S. airstrikes killed an Iranian leader, Iraq's Parliament voted to expel American forces. Some Iraqi officials say that would be disastrous for Iraq.

**BAGHDAD** — The walls of the American Embassy in Baghdad were still on fire and members of pro-Iranian armed groups were chanting threats outside, when Iraq's prime minister tried to explain the situation to President Trump.

"Iraq is between friends who are 5,000 miles away from us and a neighbor we've had for 5,000 years," Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said in a New Year's Day telephone call with Mr. Trump, according to a close adviser, Abdul Hussain al-Hunain. "We cannot change geography and we cannot change history, and this is the reality in Iraq."

### Iraq is caught in a vise.

Many Iraqis were furious that the United States violated their country's sovereignty by carrying out airstrikes on Iraqi soil. A spate of strikes in December killed at least two dozen members of a pro-Iranian Iraqi military unit, provoking the assault on the American Embassy.

A separate strike last week killed Iran's top military commander, the deputy chief of a coalition of Iraqi militias and eight other people, leading to a vote by Iraq's Parliament to expel American forces from the country and a counter-strike by Iran on two American military posts in Iraq early Wednesday.

But acceding to the political pressure to rid the country of American troops would be a "disaster" for Iraq, militarily and economically, a senior Iraqi official said.

The main mission of the roughly



Pro-Iranian demonstrators sprayed graffiti on the walls of the American Embassy in Baghdad. Credit... Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

5,200 American troops stationed at a handful of bases around Iraq is to help the country fight the Islamic State. If they leave, the official said, it would not only hamper that battle, but it would have a host of knock-on effects, from the departure of troops from other coalition countries to dire financial hardship if, as President Trump has threatened, the United States were to impose economic sanctions.

"Yes, there is big pressure from our people to have the troops leave," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters. "But we can bear this big pressure much better than we can bear the departure of the Americans."

For now, however, Mr. Abdul Mahdi seems to be moving ahead with plans to implement Parliament's will. On Friday, he said that he had asked Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to send a delegation from the United States to discuss steps for withdrawal.

Mr. Pompeo fired back that the United States would do no such thing, despite the military's frequent refrain that it is a guest of the Iraqi government and will comply with its host's demands.

"We are happy to continue the conversation with the Iraqis about what the right structure is," he said at a news conference on Friday. But the American mission in Iraq is to train Iraqi forces to fight the Islamic State, he said, and "we're going to continue that mission."

After the Iraqi Parliament vote on Sunday, President Trump threatened to impose "very big sanctions" on Iraq if it ousted American forces — "sanctions like they've never seen before." He also said that Iraq would have to reimburse the United States for billions of dollars it had invested in a major air base there.

But for many Iraqis, booting out the Americans was long overdue. Although many remain grateful that the United States ousted the longtime dictator Saddam Hussein, and fought alongside Iraqi forces to drive out the Islamic State, they are still pained by American military mistakes and decisions, including massive civilian casualties during the war that followed the American invasion

and the humiliating abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The recent American airstrikes killed Iranian proxy fighters who were also members of the Iraqi security forces — and considered heroes by many Iraqis for their role in helping fight the Islamic State. The final straw appears to have been the American drone strike last week that killed the Iranian military leader Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani and the deputy chief of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, the armed groups that have fought against the Islamic State.

"We are in a state of enthusiasm in Iraq," Mr. al-Hunain said. "The process of the U.S. withdrawal reclaims a part of Iraq's dignity after the airstrikes and violations of Iraqi sovereignty."

The feeling is especially strong among Shiite Muslims, who make up a majority in Iraq; many have ties to Iran's Shiite theocracy. Iran has long sought the ouster of American troops, which it views as a threat on its border.

But the unanimous vote in Parliament — taken in the heat of the moment, with no consideration of the potential consequences and costs to the country — suggests more unity than may be the case. Only 170 out of 328 members voted, with most Sunni Muslim and Kurdish members refusing to attend.

One of the few Sunni members who did attend the session, Ahmed al-Jarba, raised a red flag, saying that the departure of American troops might benefit Iran.

After the Americans leave, he asked, "Are our neighbors our friends or our masters?" referring to Iran. "Are we going to hand the country's wealth and decisions into the hands of neighboring countries?"

Mr. al-Hunain, the senior adviser to the prime minister, said that Mr.

Abdul Mahdi's hope was that if the American forces left, Iran would no longer have security concerns about them and would leave Iraq alone.

Senior Iraqi government officials, diplomats and scholars laid out the opposite scenario: Iraq, they said, could be forced into the arms of Iran, deprived of American dollars, and isolated from the West.

As worrying — even for Iran — is the risk that the Islamic State might return if there are no Americans to help fight it. The Sunni extremist group no longer controls territory in Iraq and is much diminished, but it still launches near-daily attacks.

A second senior Iraqi official and a senior Western diplomat said that if the Americans left, so would European and other coalition forces because they depend on American logistical and technical support. The American hospital at the Baghdad International Airport, for instance, treats the personnel of all 30 countries in the international coalition.

The economic sanctions that Mr. Trump threatened would be intended not only to punish Iraq, but also to effectively extend the administration's pressure campaign against Iran. The two countries' economies are closely entwined.

Iraq would risk being cut off from its main source of dollars because its account at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York could be frozen. Iraq deposits the proceeds of its oil sales there, withdrawing them to pay government salaries and contracts.

The United States could also end the waivers that allow Iraq to buy Iranian gas to fuel its electricity generators in the south, which supply at least 35 percent of the country's power. Iraq could seek another source, but it could be difficult to find one on short notice. The other option — making do

with less electricity — could spawn unrest in the south as soon as the weather heats up, as electrical shortages did in 2018.

American and other foreign companies might reduce or suspend operations if they become concerned about safety. A number of American contractors left in the days after General Suleimani's death because they wanted to stay out of the line of fire.

So far, Mr. Abdul Mahdi appears willing to face those potential consequences. If he harbors any thoughts of compromise, he has kept them to himself, perhaps wary of the anti-American political climate.

"It looks like the decision making and opinion in the prime minister's office is turning eastward," a senior Iraqi official said. "They are almost in denial about what a drastic path they are going down."

The problem, said Joost Hiltermann, the Middle East and North Africa program director for the International Crisis Group, is that no one in the government is seriously considering possible compromises.

"The Iraqis don't want either the United States or Iran, but if they have to have one, they would rather have both because they balance each other out," he said. "The U.S. is a counterweight to Iran."

### **There are a few glimmers of potential ways out.**

Mr. Abdul Mahdi's adviser, Mr. al-Hunain, said that while the American forces are not welcome now, the government does want other international forces to stay. Talks with other coalition countries could open the door to keeping at least some Americans, those arguably needed to sustain the coalition and help fight the Islamic State.

The Europeans, for their part,

would like to preserve the ability to fight the Islamic State in Iraq, fearing that any relaxing of pressure would allow the group to reconstitute.

A senior Western diplomat said the British and French were working to outline an alternative mission for the international forces relying on a smaller number of troops focused on ensuring that "the gains made against ISIS are not lost."

Perhaps the most promising sign that Mr. Abdul Mahdi might be open to compromise was his request for a briefing paper from Iraq's National Security Council on the options for proceeding with the parliamentary mandate. Mr. Abdul Mahdi is an economist and has served as finance minister, a background that gives him an understanding of the price of economic isolation even if he now seems more moved by political concerns.

The council provided three options, according to a senior official who works closely with the council: The first was to require American troops to leave as quickly as possible, an approach that could at least deter Iranian-backed armed groups from attacking them.

The second option was a negotiated withdrawal, which would slow the drawdown and potentially allow the fight against the Islamic State to go on in some places even as troops were withdrawing from others.

The third was a renegotiation of the agreement with the American-led coalition that might allow for some troops to stay, which would open the door to having other international forces stay as well.

The National Security Council recommended option three.

Falih Hassan contributed reporting.

# Iran : Américains et Européens multiplient les mises en garde

L'ambassadeur britannique à Téhéran a été brièvement arrêté après avoir participé à une cérémonie non autorisée, afin de rendre hommage aux victimes du crash de l'appareil civil ukrainien.

La volonté initiale des autorités iraniennes de cacher la vérité au sujet du crash du Boeing d'Ukraine International Airlines, puis le déclenchement de nouvelles manifestations en Iran, ont contribué d'accroître encore davantage les pressions internationales sur la République islamique. Le président des États-Unis, Donald Trump, a ainsi saisi l'occasion de ces nouveaux signes d'une contestation pour l'instant limitée. Dimanche, sur Twitter et en lettres capitales, il a mis en garde les autorités de la République islamique, leur enjoignant de ne pas tuer « leurs manifestants ». La veille, il avait fait allusion au vaste mouvement de contestation du mois de novembre 2019. « Des milliers de personnes ont déjà été tuées ou emprisonnées par vous, et le monde vous regarde », avait ainsi prévenu M. Trump sur Twitter, en ajoutant : « Plus important, les États-Unis regardent. »

Dans la soirée, une salve de roquettes a par ailleurs été tirée contre des installations américaines à Bagdad. Des attaques de cette nature s'étaient multipliées dans la semaine précédant l'escalade qui a conduit à l'assassinat du général Soleimani.

## « Etranger non identifié »

Autre source de tensions, l'ambassadeur du Royaume-Uni à Téhéran, Rob Macaire, qui participait à la cérémonie non autorisée organisée samedi à Téhéran, pour rendre hommage aux victimes du crash, a été très brièvement détenu par les forces de l'ordre. Londres n'a pas manqué de dénoncer une «



Lors d'une manifestation devant l'ambassade britannique à Téhéran, dimanche 12 janvier. ATTA KENARE / AFP

violation flagrante du droit international », vraisemblablement due davantage à la fébrilité et à la confusion des forces de sécurité qu'à une volonté des autorités de se jeter dans une nouvelle crise internationale. Le vice-ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Abbas Araghchi, a déclaré sur Twitter que l'ambassadeur Macaire avait été arrêté en tant qu'« étranger non identifié participant à un rassemblement illégal ».

L'occasion a toutefois été saisie par la frange la plus dure du régime, dont certains représentants accusent l'ambassadeur d'organiser en personne les manifestations. Dimanche, des dizaines de partisans du régime organisés au sein des milices du Bassij se sont rassemblés de-

vant l'ambassade du Royaume-Uni, réclamant l'expulsion du haut diplomate et la fermeture de la représentation britannique dans le pays.

## Efforts diplomatiques du Qatar

Dimanche, Londres a également signé avec Paris et Berlin, membres européens de l'accord nucléaire de 2015 avec l'Iran, une déclaration appelant Téhéran à renoncer à toute action violente à l'avenir et à revenir sur la série de mesures de sortie graduelle de l'accord, amorcée par la République islamique en mai, et décidée en réaction au durcissement des sanctions américaines.

Le raidissement des relations de Téhéran avec les Européens se

manifestait alors que des efforts diplomatiques de la part de voisins de l'Iran semblaient s'accélérer, dimanche, dans la capitale de la République islamique. Ce jour-là, le président iranien Hassan Rohani a ainsi accueilli l'émir Tamim Al Thani du Qatar. Le monarque, dont c'était la première visite officielle dans le pays, a également été reçu par le Guide. En crise ouverte avec les adversaires saoudiens et émiratis de l'Iran, qui lui imposent un blocus depuis 2017, le Qatar entretient de bonnes relations avec Téhéran et peut faire entendre sa voix à Washington. Shah Mehmood Qureshi, le ministre des affaires étrangères pakistanais, devait aussi se rendre en Iran, avant rejoindre l'Arabie saoudite, lundi.



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By Peter Baker, Ronen Bergman, David D. Kirkpatrick,  
Julian E. Barnes and Alissa J. Rubin

# Seven Days in January: How Trump Pushed U.S. and Iran to the Brink of War

The story of that week, and the secret planning in the months preceding it, ranks as the most perilous chapter so far in President Trump's three years in office.

WASHINGTON — The plane was late and the kill team was worried. International listings showed that Cham Wings Airlines Flight 6Q501, scheduled to take off from Damascus at 7:30 p.m. for Baghdad, had departed, but in fact, an informant at the airport reported, it was still on the ground and the targeted passenger had not yet shown up.

The hours ticked by and some involved in the operation wondered if it should be called off. Then, just before the plane door closed, a convoy of cars pulled up on the tarmac carrying Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, Iran's security mastermind, who climbed on board along with two escorts. Flight 6Q501 lifted off, three hours late, bound for the Iraqi capital.

The plane landed at Baghdad International Airport just after midnight, at 12:36 a.m., and the first to disembark were General Suleimani and his entourage. Waiting at the bottom of the gangway was [Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis](#), an Iraqi official in charge of militias and close to Iran. Two cars carrying the group headed into the night — shadowed by American MQ-9 Reaper drones. At 12:47, [the first of several missiles smashed into the vehicles](#), engulfing them in flames and leaving 10 charred bodies inside.

The operation that took out General Suleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, propelled the United States to the precipice of war with Iran and plunged the world into seven days of roiling uncertainty. The story of those seven days, and the secret planning in the months preceding them, ranks as the most perilous chapter so far in President Trump's three years in office after his decision to launch an audacious strike on Iran, and his attempt through allies and a back channel to keep the ensuing crisis from mushrooming out of control.

The president's decision to ratchet up decades of simmering conflict with Iran set off an extraordinary worldwide drama, much of which played out behind the scenes. In capitals from Europe to the Middle East, leaders and diplomats sought to head off a full-fledged new war while at the

harmless show of force, a message came back through the Swiss saying that would be the end of its reprisal for now. The message, forwarded to Washington within five minutes after it was received, persuaded [the president to stand down](#).

dent has amplified that to say [four American embassies were targeted](#).

But administration officials said they did not actually know when or where such an attack might occur and one State Department official said it was "a mistake" to use the word "imminent." And some senior military commanders were stunned that Mr. Trump picked what they considered a radical option with unforeseen consequences.

This account, based on interviews with dozens of Trump administration officials, military officers, diplomats, intelligence analysts and others in the United States, Europe and the Middle East, offers new details about what may be the most consequential seven days of the Trump presidency.

## If They Enter the Compound, Kill Them

The confrontation may have actually begun by accident. For years, Iran has sponsored proxy forces in Iraq, competing for influence with American troops who first arrived in the invasion of 2003. Starting last fall, Iranian-backed militias launched rockets at Iraqi bases that house American troops, shattering nerves more than doing much damage.

So when [rockets smashed into the K1 military base](#) near Kirkuk on Dec. 27, killing an American civilian contractor, Nawres Waleed Hamid, and injuring several others, the only surprise was the casualties. Kataib Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militia group held responsible, had fired at least five other rocket attacks on bases with Americans in the previous month without deadly results.

American intelligence officials monitoring communications between Kataib Hezbollah and General Suleimani's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps learned that the Irani-



The aftermath of the airstrike on Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani's car on Jan. 3 at the Baghdad airport. Altogether, 10 people were killed. Credit...Iraqi Prime Minister Press Office, via Associated Press

White House and Pentagon, the president and his advisers ordered more troops to the region.

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler was so alarmed he dispatched his brother to Washington for a clandestine meeting with Mr. Trump. European leaders, incensed at being kept in the dark, scrambled to keep Iran from escalating. If it did, Americans developed plans to strike a command-and-control ship and conduct a cyberattack to partly disable Iran's oil and gas sector.

But the United States also sent secret messages through Swiss intermediaries urging Iran not to respond so forcefully that Mr. Trump would feel compelled to go even further. After it did respond, firing [16 missiles at bases housing American troops](#) without hurting anyone as a relatively

When the week ended without the war many feared, Mr. Trump [boasted that he had taken out an American enemy](#). But the struggle between two nations is not really over. Iran may find other ways to take revenge. Iraqi leaders may expel American forces, accomplishing in death what General Suleimani tried and failed to do in life. And in the confusion, a Ukrainian civilian passenger jet [was destroyed by an Iranian missile](#), killing 176 people.

The episode briefly gave Mr. Trump's allies something to cheer, distracting from the coming Senate impeachment trial, but now he faces questions even among Republicans about the shifting justifications for the strike that he and his national security team have offered. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo initially cited the need to forestall an "imminent" attack and the presi-

ans wanted to keep the pressure on the Americans but had not intended to escalate the low-level conflict. The rockets landed in a place and at a time when American and Iraqi personnel normally were not there and it was only by unlucky chance that Mr. Hamid was killed, American officials said.

But that did not matter to Mr. Trump and his team. An American was dead and the president who had [called off a retaliatory strike with 10 minutes to go](#) in June and otherwise [refrained from military action](#) in response to Iranian provocations now faced a choice.

Advisers told him Iran had probably misinterpreted his previous reluctance to use force as a sign of weakness. To reestablish deterrence, he should authorize a tough response. On holiday at Mar-a-Lago, his Florida resort, the president agreed to [strikes on five sites in Iraq and Syria](#) two days later, killing at least 25 members of Kataib Hezbollah and injuring at least 50 more.

Two days later, on Dec. 31, pro-Iranian protesters backed by many members of the same militia responded by [breaking into the American Embassy compound](#) in Baghdad and setting fires. Worried about repeats of the 1979 embassy takeover in Iran or the 2012 attack on a diplomatic post in Benghazi, Libya, Mr. Trump and his team ordered more than 100 Marines to rush to Baghdad from Kuwait.

The Marines received little information about their mission or what was happening on the ground as they loaded their magazines with ammunition. All they knew was they were being sent to secure the embassy with one clear order: If protesters entered the compound, kill them.

Some of the Marines made dry jokes about the movie, "Rules of Engagement," starring Samuel L. Jackson as a commander whose unit fires on a crowd of embassy protesters, stirring an international episode and a court-martial. But when the Marines reached Baghdad, none had to open fire. They used nonlethal weapons like tear gas to disperse protesters and [the siege ended without bloodshed](#).

Still, watching television in Florida, Mr. Trump grew agitated by the chaos

and ready to authorize a more robust response. And on Dec. 31, even as the protests were beginning, a top secret memo started circulating, signed by Robert C. O'Brien, his national security adviser, and listing potential targets, including an Iranian energy facility and a command-and-control ship used by the Revolutionary Guards to direct small boats that harass oil tankers in the waters around Iran. The ship had been an irritant to Americans for months, especially after a series of covert attacks on oil tankers.



A billboard in Tehran depicting General Suleimani, left, and an Iraqi official in charge of militias and close to Iran, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was also killed in the drone strike. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

The memo also listed a more provocative option — targeting specific Iranian officials for death by military strike. Among the targets mentioned, according to officials who saw it, was Abdul Reza Shahlaei, an Iranian commander in Yemen who helped finance armed groups across the region.

Another name on the list: General Suleimani.

### Exerting Power, Praying for a Martyr's Death

General Suleimani was hardly a household name in the United States, but as far as American officials were concerned, he was responsible for more instability and death in the Middle East than almost anyone.

As the head of the elite Quds Force, [General Suleimani was effectively the second-most powerful man](#) in Iran and had a hand in managing proxy wars in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, including a campaign of roadside bombs and other attacks that

killed an estimated 600 American troops during the height of the Iraq war.

At 62, with a narrow face, gray hair and a close-cropped beard, General Suleimani was known for traveling without body armor or personal protection, collaborating with some of the most ruthless figures in the region while sharing meals with the fighters and telling them to take care of their mothers, according to a Hezbollah field commander who met him in Syria.

and Iraq thanks, in part, to ground forces he had overseen, one area where he and the United States shared interests.

For the past 18 months, officials said, there had been discussions about whether to target General Suleimani. Figuring that it would be too difficult to hit him in Iran, officials contemplated going after him during one of his frequent visits to Syria or Iraq and focused on developing agents in seven different entities to report on his movements — the Syrian Army, the Quds Force in Damascus, Hezbollah in Damascus, the Damascus and Baghdad airports and the Kataib Hezbollah and Popular Mobilization forces in Iraq.

By the time tensions with Iran spiked in May with attacks on four oil tankers, [John R. Bolton](#), then the president's national security adviser, asked the military and intelligence agencies to produce new options to deter Iranian aggression. Among those presented to Mr. Bolton was killing General Suleimani and other leaders of the Revolutionary Guards. At that point, work to track General Suleimani's travels grew more intense.

By September, the United States Central Command and Joint Special Operations Command were brought into the process to plan a possible operation. Various alternatives were discussed, some in Syria, some in Iraq. Syria seemed more complicated, both because the American military had less freedom of movement there and because General Suleimani spent most of his time with Hezbollah officers and officials did not want to bring them into the mix and risk a new war with Israel.

Agents recruited in Syria and Iraq reported from time to time on General Suleimani's movements, according to an official involved. Surveillance revealed that he flew on a number of airlines and sometimes tickets for a trip were bought on more than one to throw off pursuers. He would be delivered to his plane at the last possible moment, then sit in the front row of business class so he could get off first and depart quickly.

General Suleimani set off on his last trip on New Year's Day, flying to Damascus and then heading by car to



Lebanon to meet with Mr. Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader, before returning to Damascus that evening. During their meeting, Mr. Nasrallah said in a later speech, he warned General Suleimani that the American news media was focusing on him and publishing his photograph.

“This was media and political preparation for his assassination,” Mr. Nasrallah said.

But as he recalled, General Suleimani laughed, and said that, in fact, he hoped to die a martyr and asked Mr. Nasrallah to pray that he would.

### At Spy Headquarters, Seeing a ‘Mosaic Effect’

That same day, at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va., Gina Haspel was working to fulfill that prayer.

Ms. Haspel, the director, was shown intelligence indicating that General Suleimani was preparing to move from Syria to Iraq. Officials told her there was additional intelligence that he was working on a large-scale attack intended to drive American forces out of the Middle East.

There was no single definitive piece of intelligence. Instead, officials said, C.I.A. officers spoke of the “mosaic effect,” multiple scraps of information that came together indicating that General Suleimani was organizing proxy forces around the region, including in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq, to attack American embassies and bases. Several officials said they did not have enough concrete information to describe such a threat as “imminent,” despite Mr. Pompeo’s assertion, but they did see a worrying pattern.

While Mr. Pompeo also claimed later that such an attack could kill “hundreds,” other officials said they had no specific intelligence suggesting that. Most American facilities in the region have been heavily fortified for years and such an immense death toll would be unlikely; at no point in the last two decades, even during the worst of the Iraq war, have any hostile forces been able to pull off such a deadly assault on Americans at once.

Nonetheless, Ms. Haspel was convinced there was evidence of a coming attack and argued the

consequences of not striking General Suleimani were more dangerous than waiting, officials said. While others worried about reprisals, she reassured colleagues that Iran’s response would be measured. Indeed, she predicted the most likely response would be an ineffectual missile strike from Iran on Iraqi bases where American troops were stationed.



Pro-Iranian protesters backed by many members of the same militia broke into the American Embassy compound last month in Baghdad in response to the American airstrikes. Credit...Khalid Mohammed/Associated Press

“If past is prologue, we have learned that when we enforce a red line with Iran, when Iran gets rapped on the knuckles, they tactically retreat,” said Dan Hoffman, a former C.I.A. officer who served in Iraq. “The retreat might be ephemeral before Iran probes its enemies with more gradually escalating attacks, but we’ve seen it repeatedly.”

There was little dissent about killing General Suleimani among Mr. Trump’s senior advisers, but some Pentagon officials were shocked that the president picked what they considered the most extreme option and some intelligence officials worried that the possible long-term ramifications were not adequately considered, particularly if action on Iraqi soil prompted Iraq to expel American forces.

“The whole thing seems haphazard to me,” said Marc Polymeropoulos, a former senior C.I.A. official who retired last year.

### In the Middle East, ‘a State of Mobilization’

The Trump administration has said that General Suleimani was going to

Baghdad as part of the attack plot, but there are different theories about the purpose of his visit.

General Suleimani had long played a role as power broker in Iraqi politics, and two Iraqi politicians with links to Iran said he was coming to Baghdad to help break an impasse over replacing the prime minister [after the collapse of the government in November](#)

in the face of anti-Iran protests.

But Prime Minister [Adel Abdul Mahdi](#), still serving as a caretaker until a new government is formed, told Parliament after the drone strike that General Suleimani had another goal — to bring an Iranian response to a Saudi offer to reduce tensions. The shadow conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia had been heating up. After Iranian forces were blamed for [an attack on two Saudi oil facilities](#) in September and Mr. Trump opted against a military response, Saudi officials worried that they were vulnerable and opened a back channel.

In his speech to Parliament, Mr. Abdul Mahdi said he had planned to meet with General Suleimani a few hours after his arrival in Baghdad. “It was expected that he was carrying a message for me from the Iranian side responding to the Saudi message that we had sent to the Iranian side to reach agreements and breakthroughs,” Mr. Abdul Mahdi said.

A Saudi official said he was unaware of any message carried by General Suleimani and some analysts doubted Mr. Abdul Mahdi’s account. “That is laughable,” said Mohammed Alyahya,

the editor in chief of Al Arabiya English, a Saudi news site. “Suddenly, this man is a diplomat extraordinaire one day before he died?”

Another theory, advanced by an intelligence official involved in the operation, held that General Suleimani was visiting Iraq to quash anti-Iranian protests by having his Shia militia break them up by force. He hoped to install a new anti-American government that might even throw out United States forces.

Whatever his goals, they died with him in the mangled wreckage at Baghdad’s airport. Altogether, 10 people were killed — General Suleimani, Mr. al-Muhandis and their aides. Mr. al-Muhandis had helped found Kataib Hezbollah, the militia held responsible for the Dec. 27 rocket attack that killed the American contractor.

[But another Iranian commander escaped.](#) The same night General Suleimani died, American forces tried to kill Mr. Shahlai, the Quds Force commander in Yemen mentioned in Mr. O’Brien’s memo. Still, the attack failed because of an undisclosed problem with the intelligence.

Iran braced for more. “There was a state of mobilization to get ready in case that was the first stage in a wider plan,” said Mohammed Obeid, a Lebanese political activist with ties to Iran’s “resistance axis” in the region. “There could have been other steps that the Americans or the Israelis would take, broadening the circle of confrontation.”

### ‘We Know That Our Region Is Stormy’

Mr. Trump planned to play golf the next morning, Jan. 4, but advisers concluded it would send the wrong message as General Suleimani’s death stirred unrest around the Middle East and raised the prospect of a wider conflict with Iran.

The president was initially upbeat, expecting the operation to be greeted with applause much like [the raid](#) in October that killed [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#), the leader of the Islamic State. Indeed, Mr. Trump opened his first statement to reporters on the mission that Friday by describing General Suleimani as the [“No. 1 terrorist](#)



anywhere in the world,” much as he had opened his statement a couple of months ago calling Mr. al-Baghdadi the “world’s No. 1 terrorist leader.”

But as the president watched television over the weekend, he grew angry that critics were accusing him of reckless escalation. He sought validation from guests at his Florida clubs, recounting details of the Baghdad Embassy protests and drinking in their praise for his decisiveness. He told some associates that he wanted to preserve the support of Republican hawks in the Senate in the coming impeachment trial, naming Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas as an example, even though they had not spoken about Iran since before Christmas.

While Mr. Trump tipped off another hawk, Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, who was visiting in Florida, his administration gave no advance warning to its European allies or Persian Gulf partners in advance of the strike. The only foreign leader who appeared in the know was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who had spoken with Mr. Pompeo before the attack and later offered a cryptic public hint hours before it took place.

“We know that our region is stormy; very, very dramatic things are happening in it,” Mr. Netanyahu told reporters, unprompted, on the tarmac in Tel Aviv before departing for a visit to Athens. He went on to offer support for the United States “and to its full right to defend itself and its citizens.”

Israeli leaders were later pleased by the death of General Suleimani, one of their deadliest enemies, but remained silent lest they provoke retaliation, even as shelter supplies were checked and a ski resort near the Syrian frontier was briefly closed.

Yet some figured that if Hezbollah were to attack Israel on Iran’s behalf, it might be better to have that battle now. “This camp believes that there will be such a clash anyway and the best timing is before the U.S. elections — and that Israel may lose this president in the White House,” said Ofer Zalberg, an analyst at the International Crisis Group.

In Riyadh, the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, was unsettled. Despite his hawkish approach to

Iran, he has been recently accepting offers from Pakistanis, Omanis, Iraqis and others to mediate. Now, he immediately dispatched his younger brother, Prince Khalid bin Salman, the deputy defense minister, on an emergency mission to the White House.

The Saudi view was “hitting Suleimani is great, but what is the plan?” said Sir John Jenkins, a former



President Trump on Wednesday, when he addressed the nation. Last week, he described General Suleimani as the “No. 1 terrorist anywhere in the world.”Credit...Doug Mills/The New York Times

British ambassador to Riyadh. “If there is a plan, we are down with it. If not, we all have to de-escalate.”

Prince Khalid was pleased by whatever Mr. Trump told him, telling diplomats afterward that the royal family was glad the president had dealt Iran a serious blow — and relieved that he did not seem inclined to escalate further.

#### ‘A New Stage in the Trans-Atlantic Divorce’

But many were not sure. Mr. Trump issued bellicose threats to destroy Iran if it retaliated, including cultural treasures in violation of international law, touching off international outrage and forcing his own defense secretary to publicly disavow the threat, saying it would be a war crime.

Mr. Trump was largely alone on the world stage. No major European power, not even Britain, voiced support for the drone strike, even as leaders agreed that General Suleimani had blood on his hands. As *Le Monde*, the French newspaper, put it, the rift signaled “a new stage in the trans-Atlantic divorce over the Middle East.” [Mr. Trump’s withdrawal from the](#)

[2015 nuclear accord](#) with Iran has been a major point of contention. European leaders deeply resented the unilateral pullout, seeing that as a grave error that started a cycle of sanctions and recriminations that led to the seven-day showdown and now the restart of the Iranian nuclear program.

When Mr. Pompeo phoned his European counterparts after the strike, they

expressed concern. In a 15-minute call, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas of Germany said the killing had not made it any easier to stabilize the region. Mr. Pompeo responded that the situation was now more stable.

The French and Japanese both offered to serve as mediators, but that only annoyed Mr. Trump, who dislikes middlemen. So the Europeans focused on keeping Tehran from overreacting.

Video transcript

#### Video Shows Aftermath of U.S. Strike That Killed Top Iran Commander

**President Trump authorized the attack early Friday at Baghdad International Airport that killed Iran’s top security and intelligence commander, Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani.**

Suleimani was plotting imminent and sinister attacks on American diplomats and military personnel. But we caught him in the act. We took action last night to stop a war. We did not take action to start a war.

President Trump authorized the attack early Friday at Baghdad International Airport that killed Iran’s top security and intelligence commander, Maj. Gen.

Qassim Suleimani.CreditCredit...Ali Mohammadi/Bloomberg News

A senior German diplomat sent a text message to his Iranian counterpart urging calm. He got back a terse, though polite, message. In a series of phone calls, European officials tried to give the Iranians a sense that it was not them against the rest of the world but that in fact there was a global public beyond the United States, according to one European diplomat.

President Emmanuel Macron of France played an active role, reaching out to both sides. “Macron’s specificity is that he does not approve, but he also does not condemn,” said Michel Duclos, a former French ambassador to Syria.

Mr. Macron reached Mr. Trump on Sunday and emphasized the need for de-escalation. Mr. Trump suggested he was still open to diplomacy. All the Iranians had to do was come to him and they could make a deal, Mr. Trump said, according to a senior French official.

Two days later, Mr. Macron spoke with President Hassan Rouhani of Iran and reminded him that he had “missed a chance in September” to talk directly with Mr. Trump in a phone call Mr. Macron tried to arrange on the sidelines of the annual United Nations session.

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany spoke with Mr. Trump, too, and expressed concern for Iraq’s stability if allied troops withdrew. If the United States stayed, she said, Germany would also. Mr. Trump joked that Germany was welcome to lead the international force and replace the Americans. Ms. Merkel laughed.

#### ‘The Ball Is in Our Court’

The most important European country in these seven days, it turned out, was Switzerland, which has served as the intermediary between the United States and Iran since they broke off diplomatic relations in 1980.

Hours after the strike, Markus Leitner, the Swiss ambassador in Tehran,

headed to the Iranian Foreign Ministry for the first of two visits that day, according to a Swiss analyst. The Americans had sent a letter to the Iranians through the Swiss warning against any retaliation for the drone strike that would incite further military action by Mr. Trump.

The Americans “said that if you want to get revenge, get revenge in proportion to what we did,” Rear Adm. Ali Fadavi, the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards, told Iranian state television.

American officials disputed that characterization and analysts doubted it was that explicit, although that could be how Tehran interpreted it. In any case, Mr. Leitner went back to the Foreign Ministry at day’s end for the Iranian response.

Unbeknown to the Iranians, Mr. Trump had agreed to targeting the other sites originally considered — the oil and gas facility and the command-in-control ship — as part of any further retaliation that might be necessary if Iran responded to the drone strike. Despite Mr. Trump’s threat, none of the targets on the list were actually cultural, an official said; that was just presidential bluster, aggravated by an instinct to double down in the face of criticism.

On Tuesday, the Defense Special Missile and Astronautics Center, part of the National Security Agency, pulled together multiple strands of information, including overhead imagery and communication intercepts, to conclude that an Iranian missile strike on Iraqi bases was coming, officials said. The center sent the warning to the White House.

Vice President Mike Pence and Mr. O’Brien immediately headed to the Situation Room in the basement, joined later by the president and Mr. Pompeo. At the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper and the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff, led by its chairman, Gen. Mark A. Milley, convened in a third-floor conference room and discussed how to move troops and families in the region to safer locations.

Just after 5:30 p.m., an almost robotic voice came over a speakerphone in the Situation Room. “Sir, we have indications of a launch at 22:30 Zulu Time from western Iran in the direction of Iraq, Syria and Jordan.” Reports began coming in faster. The missiles were staggered but most were streaking toward Al Asad Air Base in Iraq, home to 2,000 American troops.

The barrage ended after an hour but base commanders ordered troops to remain in shelter in case more missiles came. Around 7:30, about an hour after the strikes concluded, Mr. Esper and General Milley headed to the White House to meet with Mr. Trump.

The missiles damaged a helicopter, some tents and other structures but, thanks to the advance warning, inflicted no casualties. And through the Swiss came another message: That was it. That was their retribution.

The Americans were struck by the speed of the communication — it was shown to Mr. Trump and Mr. Pompeo within five minutes after the Swiss received it from Tehran. They passed the message by encrypted fax to their embassy in Washington and then to Brian H. Hook, the special representative on Iran, two minutes after the Iranians gave it to them.

Mr. Esper, a veteran of the Persian Gulf war of 1991, counseled caution. “Let’s stay calm,” he said. “The ball is in our court. There’s no rush to do anything. Let’s all sleep on it.”

By the time Mr. Trump retired to the residence for the night, advisers said, he was relieved there had been no casualties and eager for a reset, a path away from a deeper conflict. He posted a reassuring tweet: **“All is well!”**

#### **“What Were the Threats?” They Shouted**

The next morning Mr. Trump addressed the nation from the White House, and while he excoriated Iran’s “campaign of terror,” he made clear he would not retaliate further.

“Iran appears to be standing down,” he said, without revealing the secret message sent through the Swiss, adding that he was “ready to embrace peace with all who seek it.”

The immediate crisis over, Mr. Trump sent top officials to brief Congress, but the closed-door sessions in a secure facility where lawmakers had to surrender their telephones did little to quell concerns about the justification for the drone strike.

In the House briefing, Mr. Pompeo offered a brief introduction followed by presentations by Ms. Haspel, Mr. Esper, General Milley and Joseph Maguire, the acting director of national intelligence. All three offered vague but emphatic assertions of intelligence indicating an imminent threat by General Suleimani. General Milley said the evidence could not be clearer and was the “best intelligence” he had seen during his career.

But they refused to describe it in detail. One lawmaker said the information was no more secret than what could be found on Wikipedia. At one point, General Milley said the intelligence showed discussion by General Suleimani of potential terrorist attacks on three specific dates in late December or early January.

“What were the threats?” several lawmakers in the audience shouted, but General Milley declined to say.

Another lawmaker noted that the three dates General Milley cited were all before the strike on General Suleimani and no attacks actually occurred then.

“What really came across was a sense of disdain and contempt for the legislative branch,” said Representative Gerald E. Connolly, Democrat of Virginia. “They didn’t even pretend to be engaged in information sharing and consultation.”

Senator Mike Lee, Republican of Utah, called the session for senators **“probably the worst briefing”** in his nine years in office. “We never got to the details,” he said. “Every time we got close, they said, ‘Well, we can’t

discuss that here because it’s sensitive.”

If it was too sensitive for Congress, it was not too sensitive for Laura Ingraham, the Fox News host. In an interview broadcast on Friday, Mr. Trump told her that **the threat had been to four American embassies**, even as other officials said privately that they did not have concrete evidence of General Suleimani’s targets.

After seven days of saber rattling and fresh deployments, the immediate march to war had ended. But inside the security establishment, few consider the crisis to be over. In the months to come, they expect Iran to regroup and find ways to strike back.

“Suleimani as a person inspired the masses, he was a national icon, he symbolized the struggle,” said Ali Al-foneh, a senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington who studies Iran. “But he was also a very small part of a very large organization.”

“Yes, it is decapitated,” he added, “but the organization is not destroyed.”

Peter Baker and Julian E. Barnes reported from Washington, Ronen Bergman from Tel Aviv, David D. Kirkpatrick from London, and Alissa J. Rubin from Baghdad. Reporting was contributed by Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Lara Jakes, Mark Mazzetti, David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt, Michael D. Shear, Noah Weiland and Edward Wong from Washington; Farnaz Fassihi and Maggie Haberman from New York; Rukmini Callimachi from Balchik, Bulgaria, and Bucharest, Romania; Adam Nossiter and Constant Méheut from Paris; Steven Erlanger from Brussels; Katrin Bennhold from Berlin; Nick Cumming-Bruce from Geneva; David M. Halbfinger and Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem; Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad from Beirut; and Falih Hassan from Baghdad.

**Le Monde** 14/01/2020  
Par Ghazal Golshiri et Allan Kaval

# En Iran, le régime accusé de mensonge tandis que la contestation reprend

Les manifestants reprochent au régime d'avoir cherché à nier sa responsabilité après avoir abattu par erreur un appareil civil ukrainien.

**A**près le choc, puis l'unanimité face à l'élimination du général Ghassem Soleimani, dans la nuit du 2 au 3 janvier, par les Etats-Unis, les mensonges du régime au sujet du crash du Boeing ukrainien ont poussé à nouveau les Iraniens dans la rue. La mort de 176 passagers, majoritairement iraniens ou d'origine iranienne, et membres d'équipage qui se trouvaient à bord de l'appareil, puis la révélation du rôle des gardiens de la révolution dans la catastrophe ont soulevé une nouvelle vague d'indignation populaire que les déclarations empreintes de regrets des responsables ne suffisent pas à calmer.

Malgré la répression sanglante qui a fait plusieurs centaines de morts en novembre en s'abattant sur le mouvement de contestation déclenché par la hausse du prix de l'essence, les scènes de manifestation et les slogans hostiles à la République islamique étaient de retour, dimanche, dans les rues iraniennes, pour une deuxième soirée de manifestations marquées par une forte mobilisation des forces de l'ordre.

« Les gardiens de la révolution ont été les maîtres du jeu ce soir. Ils ne permettaient pas aux gens de se réunir en groupe de plus d'une vingtaine de personnes, explique un Téhéranais qui s'est rendu dans le centre de la capitale, où une veillée devait avoir lieu en mémoire des victimes. On a vu beaucoup d'arrestations. Leur violence a été beaucoup plus importante que les fois précédentes. » Des vidéos filmées à Téhéran, et ailleurs, montrent une large utilisation des gaz lacrymogènes et de la violence de la part des forces de l'ordre envers les manifestants. Des détonations d'armes à feu se font aussi entendre en arrière-fond de certaines vidéos publiées dimanche, tandis que d'autres montrent des manifestants blessés et des images de trottoirs souillés par des flaques sang.

**« Je n'ai plus en moi que de la colère »**

La veille, une cérémonie d'hommage aux victimes s'était déjà transformée en un rassemblement protestataire,



Rassemblement devant la porte de l'université Amri Kabir, samedi 11 janvier. EBRAHIM NOROOZI / AP

quand certains participants ont commencé à reprendre des slogans contre le régime et contre sa plus haute autorité, le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei. « Je voulais me consoler de ce grand deuil, mais dans notre société, nous sommes privés des droits les plus basiques, a raconté au Monde une participante au rassemblement de samedi devant l'Université polytechnique, dans le centre de Téhéran. Je suis donc partie avec des bougies, mais en chaussures de sport et sans sac à main, pour pouvoir échapper rapidement à la police. Les forces de l'ordre ont tiré des gaz lacrymogènes et nous ont dispersés à coups de bâton. Je n'ai plus en moi que de la colère. »

Après avoir nié qu'un tir de missile était à l'origine du crash du Boeing 737 d'Ukraine International Airlines, survenu mercredi 8 janvier dans la grande banlieue de Téhéran, peu après son décollage, les dirigeants de la République islamique ont fini par reconnaître, trois jours plus tard, leur responsabilité et leur volonté initiale de cacher la vérité.

**Le président Hassan Rohani a déclaré samedi que Téhéran regrettait profondément une « erreur désastreuse », qu'il a qualifiée d'« impardonnable »**

Après la publication d'un communiqué des forces armées iraniennes, reconnaissant que l'avion avait été abattu par des missiles de défense anti-aérienne, le président Hassan Rohani a déclaré samedi que Téhéran regrettait profondément une « erreur désastreuse », qu'il a qualifiée d'« impardonnable ». Dimanche, auditionné au Parlement iranien, le général Hossein Salami, à la tête des gardiens de la révolution, est revenu plus en détail sur l'enchaînement des événements survenus quelques heures après que l'Iran a pris pour cible des sites militaires américains en Irak. Il a indiqué que l'avion de ligne avait été pris pour un appareil ennemi à la trajectoire hostile. « Nous n'avons pas de certitude avant mercredi soir », s'est justifié le haut gradé iranien. Ce dernier a par ailleurs déclaré que les tirs de missiles, qualifiés d'action « la plus décisive » de l'histoire de la République islamique, n'avaient pas eu pour but de tuer des soldats américains, avant de rappeler que, pour l'Iran, la « guerre » n'était pas terminée. Mais les discours martiaux et la pression extérieure ne suffisent plus à contenir la colère des Iraniens.

**« Excusez-vous, démissionnez »**

A l'approche du grand festival artistique de Fajr, organisé chaque hiver

avant l'anniversaire de la révolution, le 11 février, de nombreux juges et participants, artistes ou cinéastes, ont annoncé leur retrait des compétitions, en signe de deuil et de contestation. Dimanche, aucune galerie d'art de Téhéran n'a ouvert ses portes, et de nombreux groupes théâtraux ont annulé leur représentation par mesure de solidarité. L'opposant Mehdi Karubi, assigné en résidence depuis 2011, a pour sa part pointé du doigt, dans une lettre ouverte, la responsabilité du Guide dans la situation actuelle du pays, estimant que ce dernier ne méritait pas son poste, et qu'il devrait se retirer.

L'onde de choc de la protestation a atteint jusqu'à la télévision publique iranienne, l'un des organes les plus doctrinaires du pays, où au moins deux présentatrices ont démissionné en signe de protestation contre ce média qui a d'abord relayé les dénégations mensongères du régime à propos du crash. Dimanche, les principaux titres de la presse iranienne étaient partagés entre indignation et repentance. Côté réformateur, le quotidien *Etemad* a titré : « Excusez-vous, démissionnez », tandis que *Iran*, le quotidien appartenant au gouvernement, a qualifié l'acte d'« impardonnable ». Le journal *Javan*, proche des gardiens de la révolution, responsables de la catastrophe, regrettait pour sa part une « erreur douloureuse ».

A quelques semaines des élections législatives, prévues pour le 21 février, l'affaire du vol PS 752 brise déjà l'unanimité imposée sur la scène politique de la République islamique par l'assassinat de Ghassem Soleimani. Pour le moment, sur 290 députés, des dizaines, essentiellement réformateurs et critiques du pouvoir, ont été disqualifiés par le conseil des gardiens de la Constitution, chargé d'étudier les candidatures. Cette première vague de disqualifications, si elle est maintenue, promet des élections monochromes, avec des candidats uniquement conservateurs.



# Fariba Adelkhah, une chercheuse emprisonnée en Iran en grève de la faim

Lavée de l'accusation d'espionnage, l'anthropologue franco-iranienne reste inculpée d'atteinte à la sûreté de l'Etat. Incarcérée depuis juin 2019, elle poursuit sa grève de la faim dans la prison d'Evin, à Téhéran.

**D**epuis des années, Fariba Adelkhah travaille en Iran sur le fil du rasoir, suspecte, surveillée par les services de sécurité iraniens mais néanmoins tolérée. Agée de 60 ans, cette spécialiste du monde chiite au Centre de recherches internationales (CERI) de Sciences Po, scrutée en anthropologue, et donc sur la durée, les mutations de la société iranienne sous la République islamique. L'exercice est hautement périlleux, et désormais impossible pour un chercheur étranger. Les femmes, les classes défavorisées ou les trafics transfrontaliers sont en effet des thèmes très sensibles que le régime n'aime pas voir fouillés de trop près.

« *Malgré l'opinion générale du moment, le chercheur n'est pas un agent des services de renseignements, pas plus qu'un James Bond ou un trafiquant. Le résultat de ses travaux diffère de celui des services secrets et il travaille à visage découvert. Il met ses résultats à la disposition de tous* », écrivait, en 2009, la chercheuse franco-iranienne, dans une lettre ouverte après l'arrestation d'une jeune lectrice française à l'université d'Ispahan, Clotilde Reiss, accusée d'avoir participé à des manifestations contre le régime, qui fut retenue dix mois en Iran avant d'être envoyée en France après le paiement d'une amende de 230 000 euros.

Les recherches de Fariba Adelkhah font référence depuis plus de trente ans. Cela n'a pas empêché son arrestation le 5 juin 2019 le même jour que celle de son collègue et ami Roland Marchal, spécialiste de l'Afrique orientale au CERI venu lui rendre visite dans la capitale iranienne. Le 24 décembre, elle a entamé une grève de la faim en même temps qu'une codétenue universitaire australienne, Kylie Moore-Gilbert.

## Un signal positif

La principale charge pesant à son encontre, celle d'espionnage passible de la peine de mort, a été abandonnée le 6 janvier. Un signal positif. Elle reste néanmoins inculpée d'« *atteinte à la sécurité nationale* » et de « *propagande contre la République islamique* ». Elle peut désormais recevoir les visites de sa famille et de son avocat, mais les autorités ne reconnaissant pas sa double nationalité, elle n'a pu jusqu'ici bénéficier d'aucune assistance consulaire française, à la différence de Roland Marchal.



Travailler sur l'Iran n'est pas facile, et pas seulement à cause de la paranoïa du régime. Fariba Adelkhah a des convictions, mais elle n'est pas une militante. Jamais elle ne s'est revendiquée comme opposante. « *J'ai toujours défendu l'indépendance de ma profession par rapport à la politique. Pour cela, j'ai été attaquée de toutes parts, en Iran comme à l'extérieur du pays, par des hommes de pouvoir et des intellectuels. Tout cela parce que mes écrits sont considérés comme peu islamiques par certains fondamentalistes ou pas assez laïcs par ceux qui se disent défenseurs de la démocratie* », écrivait-elle dans sa lettre ouverte de 2009 annonçant renoncer à ses recherches en Iran. Elle ne les reprit qu'après l'élection à la présidence d'Hassan Rohani, en 2013.

A la différence de nombre d'intellectuels de la diaspora, Fariba Adelkhah connaît de l'intérieur le monde très pieux et conservateur des petites classes moyennes iraniennes. Très religieux, son père croyait néanmoins à l'instruction et n'hésita pas à donner à la plus motivée de ses trois filles l'argent patiemment économisé pour un pèlerinage à La Mecque, afin qu'elle puisse aller étudier en France.

Le parcours intellectuel de Fariba Adelkhah est à bien des égards atypique. Les exigences de vérité et de justice d'Ali Shariati (1933-1977), un philosophe imprégné de la mystique chiite, et également l'un des inspirateurs de la révolution de 1979 rapide-

ment voué aux gémonies par le nouveau régime, l'ont profondément marquée, de même que la lecture du *Deuxième Sexe*, de Simone de Beauvoir, découvert à l'université dans sa traduction en farsi. « *J'ai toujours tenté d'être un pont entre mon pays d'origine et mon pays d'accueil* », aime à rappeler Fariba Adelkhah qui, après quatre ans de sociologie à Strasbourg, commence ses recherches en anthropologie à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS).

## Analyses à contre-courant

« *Cela ne la dérange pas de ne pas penser comme tout le monde* », témoigne son ancien directeur de thèse Jean-Pierre Digard, désormais retraité, qui en préface la publication sous le titre *La Révolution sous le voile ; femmes islamiques d'Iran* (Karthala, 1991).

S'appuyant sur de nombreux entretiens avec des femmes révolutionnaires islamiques, elle montrait que le voile était aussi pour elles un moyen d'investir « *de façon moralement et religieusement licite* » l'espace public. « *Le voile comme accès à la vie sociale* », résumait-elle.

« *Elle est allée au charbon, elle est restée longtemps dans ces associations de femmes pieuses et a compris comment à l'époque, pour ces dernières, le tchador était à la fois une prison et un passeport pour sortir dans la rue, pour étudier, pour jouer un rôle politique* », explique Bernard Hourcade, directeur de recherche émérite au CNRS, un des grands spécialistes français de l'Iran. Avec ses analyses à contre-courant de celles de bon nombre d'opposants iraniens réfugiés à l'étranger, le livre de Fariba Adelkhah reçut un accueil mitigé, notamment en France, où la question du port du foulard islamique reste un marqueur politique. Volontiers cinglante voire provocatrice, elle ne se fit pas que des amis à cette occasion.

« *Comment réagiriez-vous si quelqu'un vous disait que jamais nombre des femmes iraniennes n'ont été aussi libres, autonomes et dynamiques que depuis la Révolution de 1979 ? (-) Vraisemblablement en qualifiant la locutrice de ces affirmations de défenseur du régime* », écrivait-elle en 2007 dans un long article de la revue *Politix*, intitulé « *Islamophobie et malaise dans l'anthropologie* ». Elle appelait « *à ne pas réagir parfois de manière mécanique et inconsciente,*

presque "pavlovienne", à la simple évocation de la situation iranienne postrévolutionnaire, plutôt que de réfléchir à son propos ».

#### Caractère volontaire et bien trempé

Elle s'est toujours bien gardée de dénoncer publiquement le régime mais, livre après livre, elle en relève les impasses comme les changements. « *Tenter de comprendre, ce n'est pas justifier* », souligne Bernard Hourcade. *Etre moderne en Iran* (Karthala, 2006) montre comment une société civile vivante et diversifiée s'est affirmée avec de réelles dynamiques s'exprimant aussi dans les urnes malgré un processus électoral resté sous tutelle. Dans *Les Mille et Une Frontières de l'Iran* (Karthala, 2012), Fariba Adelhah étudie en anthropologue l'Iran dans ses dynamiques régionales, au-delà même

du Moyen-Orient mais aussi sur ses marches aux populations transfrontalières kurdes, arabes ou baloutches.

#### Elle s'est toujours bien gardée de dénoncer publiquement le régime mais, livre après livre, elle en relève les impasses comme les changements

La chercheuse franco-iraniennne n'a jamais hésité à payer de sa personne, se rendant malgré les talibans dans le pays des Hazara, des chiites vivant au cœur de l'Afghanistan. Ses amis soulignent son caractère volontaire et bien trempé. Dans la prison d'Evin, à Téhéran, malgré l'amélioration de ses conditions de détention, elle poursuit sa grève de la faim pour exiger d'être libérée mais aussi au nom « de tous les universitaires et cher-

cheurs emprisonnés injustement en Iran et au Moyen Orient ».

« Les scientifiques sont moins protégés que les diplomates dont l'arrestation déclenche une crise grave, et ils ont moins de notoriété que les journalistes ; ils sont des otages de basse intensité, utiles pour faire pression sur les capitales occidentales ou comme enjeu dans les rivalités entre les différentes factions au pouvoir dans la République islamique », souligne Jean-François Bayart, ancien directeur du CERI et professeur à l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement, pilier de son comité de soutien. Il appelle à « suspendre la coopération scientifique institutionnelle » avec l'Iran. De fait, elle est déjà au point mort.



14/01/2020  
Beirut (AFP)

## Syria Kurds warn of medical shortages after UN aid vote

**K**urdish authorities in northeast Syria warned Tuesday that a UN vote to scrap a key entry point for cross-border aid will lead to medical shortages and expose them to regime control.

"There will be no (UN) aid entering the region except from government-held areas, which will give the regime a greater ability to control aid distribution," said Abdel Kader Mouwahad, director of humanitarian affairs for Kurdish authorities.

The Yaroubiya crossing along the Iraqi border, was a key entry point for UN-funded medical aid reaching a Kurdish-held region where an estimated 1,650,000 people are reliant on humanitarian assistance, according to aid groups.

But it was scrapped last Friday after the UN Security Council voted to scale back cross-border aid deliveries to Syria, under pressure from regime ally Russia.

This leaves Syria's Kurds with the unofficial Samalka crossing with Iraqi Kurdistan, which is not used for UN aid.

Yaroubiya's closure will cripple at least half of the healthcare response in an area

ravaged by battles against the Islamic State (IS) group as well as a Turkish offensive in October that displaced 200,000 people.

It will disrupt "60 to 70 percent of medical assistance to Al-Hol", an overcrowded desert camp brimming with tens of thousands of civilians and IS families, said Mouwahad.

It will also threaten the delivery of UN-funded medicine and medical equipment to a key hospital in the city of Hassakeh as well as critical medical points established around two towns near the Turkish border hit hard by Turkey's latest incursion, he told AFP.

He said that UN support for the Kurdish Red Crescent may also be slashed.

#### - 'Pressure card' -

Aggravating the situation, UN-funded aid to northeast Syria must now come either from Turkey or from government-held areas with permission from Damascus, which aims to reintegrate Kurdish-held areas into the state's fold.

But Mouwahad said it was "impossible" for aid to enter from Turkey, which views

Kurdish forces in Syria as a "terrorist" offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on its own soil.

Damascus, for its part, will use aid supply lines as a "pressure card" to encourage Kurds to relinquish the semi-autonomy they have achieved during Syria's nine-year-old conflict.

"The aim is to politically intimidate the Kurdish administration," he said.

Syrian troops have already deployed in much of the northeast in recent months as part of deal with the Kurds who are seeking protection from Turkey.

Damascus has also called on the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces who have fought IS to integrate into its military, a proposal the Kurds rejected.

Redur Khalil, a senior SDF official, said the latest UN move was a "dangerous development".

"Aid will be barred from reaching the region" under the restrictions on entry points, he said on Twitter, urging the United Nations to intervene.

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## Foot turc : outil du nationalisme, ferment de la contestation

Pour le président Erdogan, le ballon rond est un important outil de légitimation. Mais tout en jouant à plein son rôle de ciment du nationalisme, le monde du foot turc est également traversé de mouvements de contestation. Que révèle le football du nationalisme turc ?

**P**our le président Erdogan, qui aime à rappeler son passé de footballeur semi-professionnel, le ballon rond est un important outil de légitimation. A travers son soutien appuyé à l'équipe nationale comme à des clubs locaux, le dirigeant touche l'intérieur du pays, tandis que ses liens affichés avec certains joueurs internationaux d'origine turque lui permettent d'atteindre la diaspora.

En retour, l'adhésion des footballeurs au régime semble sans faille, comme l'a récemment illustré le salut militaire des joueurs turcs à la fin de leur match contre la France.

Si le geste, effectué en soutien aux troupes envoyées combattre les Kurdes en Syrie, a choqué les commentateurs hexagonaux, il passe pour anodin en Turquie, où le soutien à l'armée fait consensus.

Mais tout en jouant à plein son rôle de ciment du nationalisme, le monde du foot turc est également traversé de mouvements de contestation.

C'est dans les rangs des supporters, davantage que dans ceux des joueurs, que cette dimension apparaît. Habités qu'ils sont aux confrontations avec les forces de l'ordre, ces supporters ont en effet développé une culture d'opposition à l'autorité, qui leur a conféré un rôle central dans le mouve-



Le président turc frappe donne le coup d'envoi d'un match amical après l'inauguration du stade Akyazi, sur l'île artificielle de Trabzon (mer Noire). • Crédits : Kayhan Oze - AFP

ment d'occupation du parc de Gezi, à Istanbul, en 2013.

Aujourd'hui, tous se savent surveillés, et la contestation se fait nettement plus discrète, mais si elle n'a pas disparu.

Que révèle le football du nationalisme turc ? Quels sont les liens concrets d'Erdogan et de ses proches avec ce sport, et avec les fédérations sportives en général ?

Au-delà de sa dimension politique, le foot peut-il être également un outil diplomatique ?

Six ans après le mouvement de Gezi et l'éphémère alliance d'ultras « Istanbul United », que reste-t-il de la culture d'opposition des clubs de supporters ?

*Le sport en Turquie constitue un formidable terrain d'observation de la vie politique et des contestations, on joue sur cet espace où l'on peut donner libre cours à des expressions.* **Jean-François Polo**

*Il y a toujours eu en Turquie un*

*véritable lien entre le foot et la politique, c'est le seul endroit dans l'espace public où l'on a une sorte d'armée en crampon qui va représenter le pays.* **Jean-Baptiste Guégan**

À ÉCOUTER AUSSI

*Le nationalisme en Turquie est intimement lié à l'armée, l'armée est le gardien du kémalisme.* **Gökçe Tuncel**

*Les supporters égyptiens ont été appelés en soutien au moment de la révolution.* **Suzan Gibril**



## Iran arrests civil activists in Kurdistan

**T**wo civil activists were arrested by security forces in the Kurdish town of Dehgolan on Tuesday, sources told Avatoday.

According to the received information, the Islamic Republic's intelligence services arrested Sirus Abbasi and his wife Farideh Weissi at their workplace Zanst institute, which is an educational private organization.

The intelligence agents have also arrested Azad Abbasi, the brother of Sirus Abbasi, who was present at the time of the arrest.

Sanandaj Intelligence Service has so far given no explanation about the reasons behind the arrests or the detainees' whereabouts.



The New York Times

15/01/2020  
By Ali H. Soufan

## Why ISIS Is Delighted That Suleimani Is Dead

The jihadists are poised for a comeback.

**I**n 2016, Donald Trump, then a candidate for president, described Barack Obama as the "founder of ISIS." In the end, it may be Mr. Trump who comes to be known not as the terrorist group's founder, but as its savior.

The Islamic State has been weakened considerably since its peak in 2015, when it controlled a territory the size of Britain, but the Trump administration's targeted killing of Maj. Gen. Qasim Suleimani may have poised the group for a comeback. Just as the misguided American invasion of Iraq in 2003 revitalized Al Qaeda, some 17 years later, a



Protesters calling for an overhaul of Iraq's political system in Baghdad on Friday. Instability in Iraq could open the way for an Islamic State resurgence there. Credit... Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

return to chaos in the same country may yet do the same for the Islamic State.

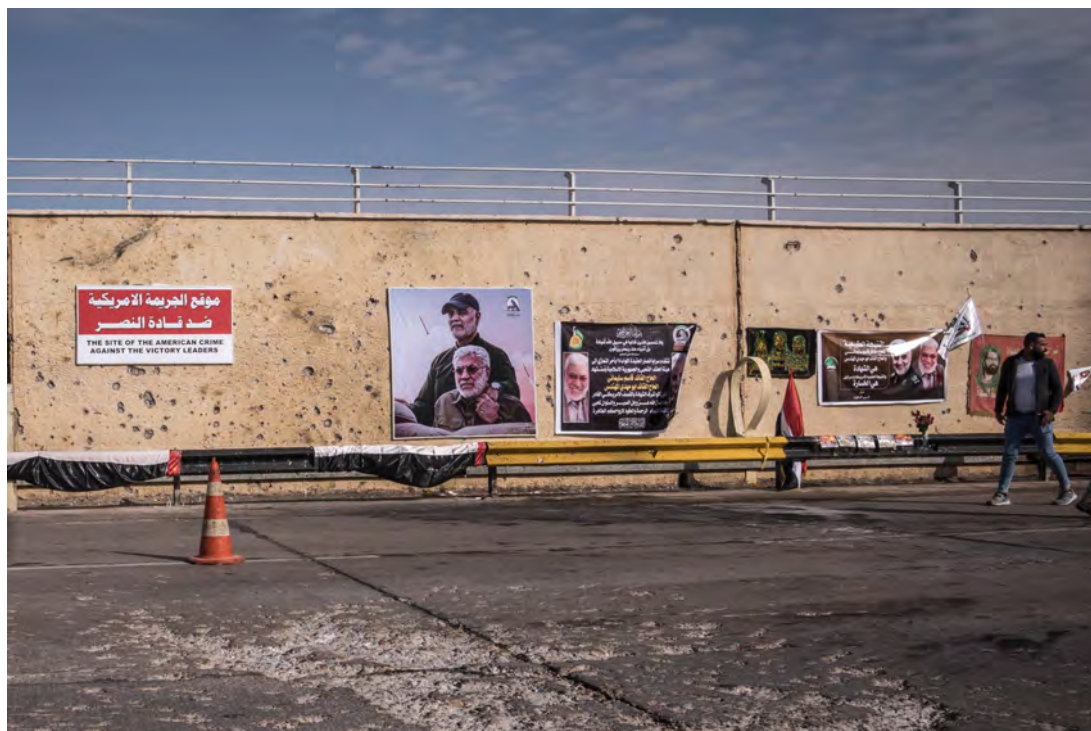
Granted, the White House was correct to identify General Suleimani, the leader of Iran's Quds Force, as an enemy of the United States. Using the militia groups he cultivated and controlled, he was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of coalition soldiers in the late 2000s and early 2010s. But war in the Middle East is nothing if not complex; General Suleimani's proxies also indirectly served American interests by fighting the Islamic State — to great effect.

Still, contrary to the breathless eulogies to him in Iran, he was not some indispensable hero who single-handedly defeated the Islamic State. Other commanders will fill his shoes, if not in star power then at least in strategic expertise. The real boon for the jihadists will be the second-order effects of his death.

First, and most obviously, American influence in Iraq is now living on borrowed time. One of those killed alongside General Suleimani, [Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis](#), was the deputy commander of the Popular Mobilization Force, a coalition of pro-Iranian militias that nominally form part of the Iraqi armed forces. For many Iraqis, that made the strike an attack against Iraq as well as Iran, and put the Iraqi government, which already has a tense relationship with the United States, in an even tougher bind.

Recognizing the heightened tensions, the 6,000 American troops in the country have switched their focus to defending Americans in Iraq, rather than fighting the Islamic State or training Iraqi forces to do so. American allies including Germany and Britain have [begun pulling their own forces](#) from the country, while the Coalition to Defeat ISIS has [suspended its activities](#) with no date set for resumption. These forces may not have been as visible as those from the United States, but their work behind the scenes — in intelligence, logistics and training — has been just as vital.

Second, the chaos threatens Iraq's stability. Tehran responded to the strike on General Suleimani with missile attacks on two American-run military bases last week. But it's unlikely this will be the end of Iran's retaliation. Iranian military strategy is defined by asymmetry — and particularly by the use of militant proxies. Under a screen of plausible deniability, Iran will most likely work to drive the United States out of Iraq.



Protesters calling for an overhaul of Iraq's political system in Baghdad on Friday. Instability in Iraq could open the way for an Islamic State resurgence there. Credit... Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

In this, the Iranians will be brutal. During the American occupation — before the rise of the Islamic State made strange bedfellows of Washington and Tehran — Iranian proxies often exceeded Sunni extremists in terms of the number of casualties they inflicted on American forces. These proxies have lost no time in returning to attacks on American interests. On Sunday, four days after Iran's missile strikes, a rocket attack on another installation that houses American forces [wounded four Iraqi service members](#).

A conflict between Iranian proxies and the United States will tear at Iraq's fragile governing structures, creating a power vacuum for the Islamic State to exploit. Iraq already has only a caretaker government. The prime minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, resigned in November and has been staying on pending his replacement. The country's governance depends on achieving a precarious balance among different ethnic, tribal and religious constituencies. When those blocs are forced to take sides between the United States

and Iran, the balance becomes all but unattainable and Iraq's viability as a state is jeopardized. Add to that the harm to counterterrorism operations brought about by the "pause" in coalition assistance, and you have a combustible mix.

Third, and perhaps worst of all, General Suleimani's death portends yet more sectarianism in Iraq. The parliamentary vote on Jan. 5 to expel American troops passed on the strength of votes from Shiite lawmakers; members of Parliament representing Iraq's other main factions, the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs, abstained.

Extremist groups thrive on this kind of division. Early last decade, the openly sectarian policies of Iraq's prime minister at the time, Nuri al-Maliki, created a wave of communal violence. Sunni Arabs looked for protection anywhere they could find it, and the Islamic State was quick to exploit that need. Having built support that way before, the Islamic State will not hesitate to do so again, given the opportunity.

Moreover, the Iranian response to General Suleimani's killing is likely to include an escalation in its conflict with Saudi Arabia, which is framed as a battle between Sunnis and Shiites. Ratcheting up these tensions will create still more openings for Sunni extremists such as the Islamic State.

Like all terrorist groups, the Islamic State draws fuel from chaos and division. The killing of General Suleimani promises much of both to come. The Islamic State still has deep pockets, affiliates around the world, and a knack for recruitment. General Suleimani's death will have its leaders rubbing their hands in anticipation.

The damage is done. Without a major cooling of tensions, a jihadist resurgence might now be all but inevitable.

Ali H. Soufan (@Ali\_H\_Soufan) is a former F.B.I. special agent and the author, most recently, of "Anatomy of Terror: From the Death of Bin Laden to the Rise of the Islamic State."





Kosar Nawzad I  
January 15-2020

## Turkish airstrike kills Yezidi militiamen in Iraq's disputed Sinjar

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – A Turkish airstrike on Wednesday killed at least five fighters in the Yezidi Protection Units (YBS) militia group, including its commander known as Sardasht Shingali, security sources said.

The incident took place close to the Syrian-Iraqi border in Sinune subdistrict that is located in Nineveh province's Sinjar (Shingal) district, territory disputed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal Iraqi government. The raid struck a YBS base in the town of Dugure, located about 20 kilometers north of the city of Shingal.

The YBS is comprised of members of the Yezidi (Ezidi) ethnoreligious minority group, whom the so-called Islamic State targeted in a genocidal campaign after the terrorist organization's rise to prominence in 2014. They are seen as close associates of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), a group that has led a decades-long insurgency against Turkey for Kurdish rights.



Sardasht Shingali, the commander of a Yezidi (Ezidi) fighting force, was killed in a Turkish airstrike on Jan. 15, 2020. (Photo: Social Media)

"I saw eight dead bodies with my own eyes and there were multiple other wounded people," a witness told Kurdistan 24.

A medical source in a Sinune hospital said, "A wounded man was taken to the hospital due to the severity of his wounds."

Kurdistan 24 has learned that the attack was carried out by Turkish warplanes and that, along with commander Sardasht Shingal, also known as Khalaf Bapir Murad Saadoun, his

brother, Ayman Saadoun, was killed as well.

"Five of the YBS forces were killed in an unknown aerial bombardment at 11:35 today, Wednesday, which targeted their vehicle in the Hattin community," the Iraqi Security Media Cell said, but did not specify who conducted the strike. Turkey, however, has previously carried out such operations against the YBS for their alleged ongoing ties with the PKK. In March 2018, the PKK said it withdrew

its forces from Shingal, handing over positions to the Iraqi army.

The PKK found a foothold there after coming down from its mountain bases on the Iraq-Iran border to back the Kurdistan Region's Peshmerga forces and Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in opening a safety corridor for Ezidis as the Islamic State took over Shingal.

Turkey also regularly carries out airstrikes in the Kurdistan Region's border against alleged PKK positions. Due to the ongoing violence and clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military, hundreds of villages along the Turkish-Kurdistan border have been evacuated.

Over the past few years, the KRG has repeatedly called on the PKK to stop using the region as a launchpad for its attacks against Turkish government forces.

Editing by John J. Catherine



January 15-2020

## Amid continued ISIS attacks, Kurds flee Kirkuk province villages

Iraqi armed forces have come under attack from Islamic State (ISIS) militants in southern Daquq, Kirkuk province on two consecutive nights over the weekend, killing four soldiers and wounding three others.

Militants move brazenly through southern Daquq. Villagers from the area are abandoning their homes in fear.

In Anana, the last Kurdish inhabited village in the southernmost region of Daquq, villagers say they are taking defense into their own hands.

However, Iraqi Operations Command in Kirkuk has downplayed ISIS activities, saying they are not affecting the security and stability of the province





## « Téhéran et Washington s'observent : demain est une inconnue »

**Chronique.** Passé le fracas des missiles, où en est l'affrontement entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran ? Question légitime. La passe d'armes du début janvier s'est achevée sur un lourd bilan : près de 230 morts si l'on prend en compte les manifestants iraniens écrasés lors des ob-sèques de Ghassem Soleimani et les 176 personnes tuées (en majorité iraniennes) dans l'avion civil abattu par la défense antiaérienne de la République islamique. Sans bouger sur le fond de leur différend, Téhéran et Washington s'observent : demain est une inconnue.

Chercheur en relations internationales à l'université Columbia de New York, le Pr Robert Jervis, l'un des observateurs les plus attentifs des conflits entre Etats, écrit sur le site *War on the Rocks* : « *Mon analyse est que ni le président Donald Trump ni les Iraniens ne savent ce qu'ils doivent faire maintenant.* » Tout a changé et rien n'a changé.

L'état du conflit entre Washington et Téhéran reste le même. Le point de départ est la décision de Donald Trump, en mai 2018, de retirer, unilatéralement, les Etats-Unis de l'accord de contrôle du programme nucléaire iranien conclu en 2015 entre Téhéran, d'un côté, et l'Europe, la Chine, la Russie, de l'autre. L'ambition était de lutter contre la prolifération nucléaire. La République islamique respectait les termes de ce pacte et, en contrepartie, obtenait la levée progressive de l'embargo auquel elle était soumise.

Le locataire de la Maison Blanche veut un autre accord, plus serré, plus gros, plus large – de quoi célébrer une énorme performance trumpienne. Pour faire revenir les Iraniens à la table de négociation, il étouffe

leur pays sous une vague de sanctions renouvelées.

Acculée et cherchant à éviter l'asphyxie, la République islamique manifeste de son côté son pouvoir de nuisance. Depuis le printemps 2019, elle a multiplié les provocations armées dans le golfe Arabo-Persique. Elle a agi avec une manière d'impunité, convaincue que Donald Trump, désireux de ne pas être entraîné dans ce qu'il appelle l'une de « *ces stupides petites guerres* » du Moyen-Orient, ne répondrait pas.

### Eviter la guerre, la vraie

Mais le président des Etats-Unis a fini par répondre – avec l'assassinat, en Irak, de Soleimani, général des gardiens de la révolution chargé de l'expansion iranienne dans le monde arabe. Donald Trump a voulu rétablir le pouvoir dissuasif de la machine militaire américaine dans la région. A-t-il recréé de la dissuasion ? Sans doute, au moins momentanément. La réaction iranienne a été pondérée, mesurée, calculée à l'aune d'un objectif qui est aussi celui de Téhéran : éviter la guerre, la vraie.

Mais les positions de fond n'ont pas bougé. Retour à la case départ. Téhéran n'entend considérer une nouvelle négociation que si Washington lève les sanctions. La République islamique ne peut pas perdre la face. Donald Trump dit qu'il veut négocier, mais, dans le même temps, prend de nouvelles sanctions... Le président américain est prisonnier d'une conception binaire des relations entre Etats : un jeu à somme nulle – ce que je perds, tu le gagnes. On en est là, comme avant la passe d'armes de janvier. Rien de changé ? Si.

La situation des Etats-Unis s'est affaiblie en Irak où leurs 5 200 hommes – dépêchés en 2014 pour lutter contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) – sont à la merci de milices pro-iraniennes désireuses de venger la mort de leur parrain (*lire à ce propos l'analyse de Jean-Pierre Filiu « L'Iran a déjà gagné sa guerre d'Irak contre les Etats-Unis »*).

Le *Financial Times* citait pour sa part récemment le mot d'un des protagonistes de *Dr. Folamour*, le film de Stanley Kubrick : « *La dissuasion est l'art de susciter la peur d'attaquer chez son ennemi* ». Téhéran a répliqué à minima : l'imprévisibilité de Donald Trump est dissuasive auprès d'un Etat. Mais au Yémen, au Liban, en Syrie, en Irak, les milices à la solde de Téhéran peuvent n'être guère intimidées.

Contrairement à ce qu'ils souhaitent, leur conflit avec l'Iran impose aux Etats-Unis de rester plus que jamais présents au Moyen-Orient. Le retrait de l'Amérique n'est pas pour demain. En attendant, Téhéran s'affranchit progressivement des termes de l'accord de 2015. La peur de la prolifération nucléaire est ravivée. Les Européens s'inquiètent et mettent les Iraniens en garde, lesquels menacent leurs interlocuteurs. Laisse tranquille, l'EI reprend vie. Donald Trump apprend qu'on ne répond pas à un problème compliqué par un assassinat.

### Loi de la maturité politique

Pour autant, la situation de la République islamique s'est, elle aussi, singulièrement détériorée depuis la passe d'armes de janvier. L'Iran sait maintenant que son adversaire est sujet aux

coups de sang : ça calme. Le pays est économiquement épuisé : 40 % de taux d'inflation, 50 % de taux de chômage des jeunes. S'il est diplomatiquement plutôt bien entouré – l'Iran vient de procéder à des manœuvres maritimes communes avec ses amis russes et chinois –, le régime est contesté à l'intérieur.

Par centaines de milliers, les Iraniens – ils sont 80 millions – ont pleuré Soleimani. Le régime pouvait se féliciter. Ce moment de deuil national était de nature à faire oublier ses échecs sur la scène domestique : incompétence économique, corruption effrénée, train de vie des dirigeants, surexposition ruineuse à l'extérieur, sur fond de répression impitoyable et d'absence totale d'Etat de droit.

Comme en novembre 2019, lorsqu'elles furent noyées dans le sang, les manifestations contre la direction iranienne ont repris. Cette fois pour dénoncer l'erreur qui a conduit les gardiens de la révolution à abattre, dans la nuit du 7 au 8 janvier, un avion civil ukrainien, parti de Téhéran et dont les passagers étaient, pour beaucoup, de jeunes Iraniens. Aujourd'hui quarantenaire, la République islamique est loin de la maturité politique.

Tout devrait inciter le Guide iranien, Ali Khamenei, et Donald Trump à négocier. Le problème est qu'ils ont, l'un et l'autre, une représentation caricaturale du monde qui les entoure – et, entre leurs mains, l'avenir du Moyen-Orient.

16/01/2020

By Peter S. Goodman

# Iran's Grim Economy Limits Its Willingness to Confront the U.S.s

Fearful of public anger over a plunging economy, Iran's leaders appear to be turning inward, pulling back from escalation.

Iran is caught in a wretched economic crisis. Jobs are scarce. Prices for food and other necessities are skyrocketing. The economy is rapidly shrinking. Iranians are increasingly disgusted.

Crippling sanctions imposed by the Trump administration have severed Iran's access to international markets, decimating the economy, which is now contracting at an alarming 9.5 percent annual rate, [the International Monetary Fund](#) estimated. Oil exports were effectively zero in December, according to Oxford Economics, as the sanctions have prevented sales, even though smugglers have transported unknown volumes.

On Tuesday, pressure intensified as [Britain, France and Germany](#) served notice that they would formally trigger negotiations with Iran toward forcing it back into compliance with a 2015 nuclear deal — a step that could ultimately lead to the imposition of United Nations sanctions.

The bleak economy appears to be tempering the willingness of Iran to escalate hostilities with the United States, its leaders cognizant that war could profoundly worsen national fortunes. In recent months, public anger over joblessness, economic anxiety and corruption has emerged as a potentially existential threat to Iran's hard-line regime.

Only a week ago, such sentiments had been redirected by outrage over the Trump administration's Jan. 3 killing of Iran's top military commander, Maj.



Portraits of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani were ubiquitous in Tehran last week. His killing briefly unified the Iranian public. Credit... Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

Gen. Qassim Suleimani. But [protests flared anew over the weekend](#) in Tehran, and then [continued on Monday](#), after the government's astonishing admission that it was — despite three days of denial — responsible for shooting down a Ukrainian jetliner.

The demonstrations were most pointedly an expression of contempt for the regime's cover-up following its downing of the Ukrainian jet, which killed all 176 people on board. But the fury in the streets resonated as a rebuke for broader grievances — diminishing livelihoods, financial anxiety and the sense that the regime is at best impotent in the face of formidable troubles.

Inflation is running near 40 percent, assailing consumers with sharply rising prices for food and

other basic necessities. More than one in four young Iranians is jobless, with college graduates especially short of work, according to the [World Bank](#).

The missile strikes that Iran unleashed on American bases in Iraq last week in response to Gen. Suleimani's killing appeared calibrated to enable its leaders to declare that vengeance had been secured without provoking an extreme response from President Trump, such as aerial bombing.

Hostilities with the most powerful military on earth would make life even more punishing for ordinary Iranians. It would likely weaken the currency and exacerbate inflation, while menacing what remains of national industry, eliminating jobs and reinvigorating public pressure on the

leadership.

Conflict could threaten a run on domestic banks by sending more companies into distress. Iranian companies have been spared from collapse by surges of credit from banks. The government controls about 70 percent of banking assets, according to a [paper by Adnan Mazarei](#), a former I.M.F. deputy director and now a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. Roughly half of all bank loans are in arrears, Iran's Parliament has estimated.

Many Iranian companies depend on imported goods to make and sell products, from machinery to steel to grain. If Iran's currency declines further, those companies would have to pay more for such goods. Banks

would either have to extend more loans, or businesses would collapse, adding to the ranks of the jobless.

The central bank has been financing government spending, filling holes in a tattered budget to limit public ire over cuts. That entails printing Iranian money, adding to the strains on the currency. A war could prompt wealthier Iranians to yank assets out of the country, threatening a further decline in the currency and producing runaway inflation.

In sum, this is the unpalatable choice confronting the Iranian leadership: It can keep the economy going by continuing to steer credit to banks and industry, adding to the risks of an eventual banking disaster and hyperinflation. Or it can opt for austerity that would cause immediate public suffering, threatening more street demonstrations.

“That is the specter hanging over the Iranian economy,” Mr. Mazarei said. “The current economic situation is not sustainable.”

Though such realities appear to be limiting Iran’s appetite for escalation, some experts suggest that the regime’s hard-liners may eventually come to embrace hostilities with the United States as a means of stimulating the anemic economy.

Cut off from international investors and markets, Iran has in recent years focused on forging a so-called resistance economy in which the state has invested aggressively, subsidizing strategic industries, while seeking to substitute domestic production for imported goods.

That strategy has been inefficient, say economists, adding to the strains on Iran’s budget and the banking system, but it appears to have raised employment. Hard-liners might come to see a fight with Iran’s arch-enemy, the United States, as an opportunity to expand the resistance economy while stoking po-

litically useful nationalist anger. “There will be those who will argue that we can’t sustain the current situation if we don’t have a war,” said Yassamine Mather, a political economist at the University of Oxford. “For the Iranian government, living in crisis is good. It’s always been good, because you can blame all the economic problems on sanctions, or on the foreign threat of war. In the last couple of years, Iran has looked for adventures as a way of diverting attention from economic problems.”

However Iran’s leaders proceed, experts assume that economic concerns will not be paramount: Iran’s leaders prioritize one goal above all others — their own survival. If confrontation with outside powers appears promising as a means of reinforcing their hold on power, the leadership may accept economic pain as a necessary cost.

“The hard-liners are willing to impoverish people to stay in power,” said Sanam Vakil, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House, a research institution in London. “The Islamic Republic does not make decisions based on purely economic outcomes.”

But Iran’s leaders need only survey their own region to recognize the dangers that economic distress can pose to established powers. In recent months, [Iraq](#) and [Lebanon](#) have seen furious demonstrations fueled in part by declining living standards amid corruption and abuse of power.

As recently as November, Iran’s perilous economic state appeared to pose a foundational threat to the regime. As the government scrambled to secure cash to finance aid for the poor and the jobless, it scrapped subsidies on gasoline, sending the price of fuel soaring by as much as 200 percent. That spurred angry [protests in the streets of Iranian cities](#), with demonstrators openly calling for the expulsion of President Hassan Rouhani.

“That’s a sign of how much pressure they are under,” said Maya Senussi, a Middle East expert at Oxford Economics in London.

In unleashing the drone strike that killed General Suleimani, Mr. Trump effectively relieved the leadership of that pressure, undercutting the force of his own sanctions, say experts.

Within Iran, the killing resounded as a breach of national sovereignty and evidence that the United States bore malevolent intent. It muted the complaints that propelled November’s demonstrations — laments over rising prices, accusations of corruption and economic malpractice amid the leadership — replacing them with mourning for a man celebrated as a national hero.

A country fraught with grievances aimed directly at its senior leaders had seemingly been united in anger at the United States.

“The killing of Suleimani represents a watershed, not only in terms of directing attention away from domestic problems, but also rallying Iranians around their flag,” said Fawaz A. Gerges, a professor of international relations at the London School of Economics.

Mr. Trump had supplied the Iranian leadership “time and space to change the conversation,” he added. Iranians were no longer consumed with the “misguided and failed economic policies of the Iranian regime,” but rather “the arrogant aggression of the United States against the Iranian nation.”

But then came the government’s admission that it was responsible for bringing down the Ukrainian passenger jet. Now, Iran’s leaders again find themselves on the wrong end of angry street demonstrations.

For now, the regime is seeking to quash the demonstrations with riot police and admonitions to the protesters to go home. But

if public rage continues, hard-liners may resort to challenging American interests in the hopes that confrontation will force Mr. Trump to negotiate a deal toward eliminating the sanctions.

Iran may threaten the passage of ships carrying oil through the Strait of Hormuz, the passage-way for more than one-fifth of the world’s consumption of liquid petroleum. Disruption there would restrict the global supply of oil, raising the price of the vital commodity. That could sow alarm in world markets while limiting global economic growth, potentially jeopardizing Mr. Trump’s re-election bid, as the logic goes.

Iran previously had a different pathway toward gaining relief from the sanctions: Under a 2015 deal forged by President Barack Obama, the [sanctions were removed](#) in exchange for Iran’s verified promise to dismantle large sections of its nuclear program.

But when Mr. Trump took office, he renounced that deal and resumed sanctions.

Whatever comes next, Iran’s leadership is painfully aware that getting out from under the American sanctions is the only route to lifting its economy, say experts.

The nuclear deal was intended to give Iran’s leaders an incentive to diminish hostility as a means of seeking liberation from the sanctions. Mr. Trump’s abandonment of the deal effectively left them with only one means of pursuing that goal — confrontation.

“They see escalation as the only way to the negotiating table,” said Ms. Vakil. “They can’t capitulate and come to the negotiating table. They can’t compromise, because that would show weakness. By demonstrating that they can escalate, that they are fearless, they are trying to build leverage.”



# Erdogan harassing pro-Kurdish party members to gain Turkish nationalists' votes: Exiled professor

**Virginia [USA], Jan 17 (ANI):** The major gains made by pro-Kurdish left-wing People's Democratic Party (HDP) in the 2014 presidential polls and 2015 general election of Turkey made President Recep Tayyip Erdogan use his power by punishing his Kurdish opponents through the judicial route to secure the votes of the Turkish nationalists, a professor said.

In an e-mail interview with ANI, Emrullah Uslu, an Assistant Professor of International Relations and Security Studies at the University of Lynchburg in Virginia state of US, explained how Erdogan has been making all-out efforts to crush secession movements aimed at creating a separate homeland for the Kurds -- Kurdistan.

He also divulged how Kurdish voters voted for HDP and not Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the elections despite the Turkish strongman initiating a peace process in 2012 in a bid to end the Kurdish-Turkish conflict which has been ongoing for over four decades.

"Back in 2012, Erdogan had initiated a peace process with the Kurds with the hope that, once he ended the conflict, Kurdish voters would support his government. However, in the 2014 and 2015 elections, the majority of Kurdish voters gave credit to HDP and not Erdogan, a first in Turkish politics. Kurdish nationalists received secular Turkish voters' support and passed 10 percent national threshold to enter the Parliament," Uslu said.

For the last few years, the Erdogan regime has launched a crackdown on thousands of HDP members who have been



Erdogan harassing pro-Kurdish party members to gain Turkish nationalists' votes: Exiled professor

arrested and prosecuted. The government alleges the pro-Kurdish party of having links with the PKK, which is designated a terrorist organisation by Turkey.

For instance, Filiz Bulutekin, mayor of the Sur district in Turkey's southeastern province of Diyarbakir, was detained in last December on charges of having 'links' with Kurdish militants.

"When Erdogan realised that it was the PKK/HDP winning -- the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) carved out an autonomous region in Syria, while HDP entered Turkish Parliament -- he decided to use the judiciary to punish his Kurdish opponents. Despite the fact that PKK's violence is at its lowest level since 2012, Erdogan continues to harass Kurdish HDP to make sure that he gets Turkish nationalists' votes," he said.

Uslu further said, "Further, PYD/YPG's alliance with the US in Syria worries Erdogan and Turkish nationalists that the West wanted to create an independent Kurdistan in the region. In order to avoid such a possibility, Erdogan has been aggress-

sively crushing Kurdish nationalist movements and Kurdish political actors."

The professor, who has been living in exile in the US since 2014, disclosed why he was forced to leave Turkey, where he was writing for a liberal Turkish daily.

"I was teaching at a university in Turkey and writing for a Turkey's liberal daily, Taraf, because of my criticisms toward Erdogan's foreign policy toward Syria, including arming the jihadists, and my criticisms toward his Kurdish policy. He sends his advisors to my university to fire me back in 2013," Uslu elucidated.

"He was not pleased with criticisms even during his tenure as prime minister. He forced my university administration to fire me because of my criticisms. Not only that, he sued me and threatened to jail me. I decided to leave the country in 2014 and came to the US and found an academic position to teach here," he stated.

Talking about the 2017 Turkey constitutional referendum, which

made the country switched to the executive presidency system from the parliamentary system, the professor said that the results of the exercise were the "end result" of Erdogan's authoritarian tendency, giving him a say over the Parliament and judiciary.

Uslu recalled that during Erdogan's tenure as the prime minister (2003-2014), he arrested a prominent Kurdish leader and over 200 journalists, closed down more than 100 media organisations and universities viewed as anti-Erdogan and sued thousands of social media users for dissent.

Asked to compare the scenario of Turkey under a parliamentary system of pre-2017 and Turkey under the post-presidential system after 2017, Uslu said, "Erdogan's authoritarian tendency had not started with the 2017 constitutional referendum. The referendum was the end result of his authoritarian tendency that enabled him to dictate his will over the Turkish Parliament and judicial system. From the beginning, Erdogan knew what he wanted and he achieved his goal."

"Even under the parliamentary system, Erdogan used his majority power in Parliament silence oppositions, including arresting the Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas, more than 200 journalists, shut down more than 100 media outlets, universities, fired 150 thousand civil servants, confiscated private properties and sued more than 70,000 social media users for insulting him. With the Turkish model presidential system, he just "legalised" and institutionalised what he had done as prime minister," the professor stated. (ANI)



Reporting by Hussein Omar  
17-01-2020

## Kurds in Afrin still suffering under Turkish-backed occupation

### ERBIL, Kurdistan Region –

People in the traditionally Kurdish city of Afrin are suffering due to severe economic crisis and a lack of law enforcement in the area. The city in northern Syria has been occupied by Turkish and Turkish-backed forces for almost two years, and many of its Kurdish inhabitants have fled.

Turkey's Syrian proxies in Afrin have been accused of looting Kurdish homes and businesses, vandalizing Kurdish cultural landmarks, and resettling Arab families in vacant homes left by fleeing Kurdish families. According to UN estimates, upwards of 150,000 Kurds have been displaced.

L.T., a citizen in Afrin who refused to reveal his real identity for security reasons, told Rudaw on Thursday that "I'm suffocating - what is happening in Afrin is unbelievable and unbearable. Everyone sold Afrin and everybody left Afrin for occupiers."

"Today a widow who was only 28 years old came and asked if she can sell her body to anyone for only 2,000 Syrian liras, which equals only three US dollars, to provide food for her children," he added, starting to cry.

He spoke bitterly about the conditions of Afrin, which are deteriorating at all levels from the absence of security and stability. Living conditions have drastically deteriorated as a result of extreme increases in the price of ordinary goods, the absence of resources, frequent robberies and looting organized by Turkish-backed armed groups.

Arbitrary arrests, kidnappings and exorbitant ransom demands also remain commonplace as judicial processes are largely a formality. Judicial structures in occupied Afrin are managed by Turkish-backed armed groups.



Turkish army tanks gather close to the Syrian border in 2018. (AFP)

More than 7227 people have been kidnapped or detained since the invasion, while at least 2112 are still missing, according to a lawyer who spoke to Rudaw on January 26.

"Most of the crimes have been conducted by the Turkish-backed rebels, and the data has been collected by a group of lawyers who are working on reporting on kidnapping cases in Afrin," the lawyer said.

L.T. stated that the case of the widow who was ready to resort to prostitution to provide food and source of income for her children is not uncommon, and there are many similar stories of people faced with desperate circumstances.

This severe poverty is caused by the high prices of equipment, food and beverages, and other daily requirements. Furthermore, there are very few international humanitarian organizations in the region to support poor families in their time of need.

"An average [monthly] salary of an employee in Afrin is 600 Turkish liras, which is equal to a little bit more than 100\$ US dollars,"

L.T. said. "However, the price of food and other daily requirements in the markets are very high, and the salary is not enough," said L.T.

L.T. criticized international humanitarian organizations for not being present in Afrin, and revealed that the only aid organizations present in the area support the Turkish government, and their aid only targets newly arrived Syrian refugees who are relocating to Afrin from Turkey.

Some Kurdish families in Afrin have daughters married to the members of Turkish-backed armed groups in order to provide security and safety for their families, and avoid being robbed, kidnapped, looted or arrested.

"There are over 150 marriages of Kurdish girls with [members of] pro-Turkish armed groups," L.T. told Rudaw.

### Olive theft

Afrin's famous olive trees are also being targeted by rebels, according to activists.

"[The] cutting of olive trees by the Turkish-backed rebels is syste-

matic and on purpose," the activist said. "Since the beginning of the Turkish invasion on Afrin city, more than 20,000 olive trees have been removed and cut by the Turkish backed rebels, and that has threatened the olive tree lands in Afrin."

More than 350 olive trees in a farmland in Bulbul district, the activist added.

Afrin is famous for its olive trees, a main source of livelihood for a considerable number of residents. After the Turkish takeover, with the help of its Syrian proxies, the olives and their by-products have been exported via Turkey and sold to other European countries under the name Afrin.

Another activist provided Rudaw with videos showing hundreds of olive trees appearing to be removed from farmland in Afrin.

"Members of Jabha al-Shamya Turkish-backed rebels removed and cut 150 olive trees in Kafr Janah village in Afrin," the activist said, adding that the land is owned by a local Kurd.

"Afrin" olive oil is now seen on grocery market shelves in Germany and Spain.

Turkey hosts some 3.6 million Syrian refugees who have fled their country's long and brutal civil war, and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has anticipated resettling as many as three million in northern Syria.

Translation by Lawk Ghafuri.



Jan 17 2020

## Iraqi Kurdish president calls for peaceful resolution in Turkey, freedom for Demirtaş

The president of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Nechirvan Barzani said Turkey should resolve the Kurdish problem via peaceful means and dialogue, not military methods, in an interview with Al Monitor published on Thursday.

Barzani said Turkey talking with the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and its jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan was in the interest of both sides, and that the former leader of the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Selahattin Demirtaş, who remains in prison despite orders for his release, has a role to play in possible peace talks.

"I definitely believe that (Demirtaş) should be freed from prison and allowed to play this role," the KRG president told Al Monitor.



The KRG's relationship with Turkey has been and will continue to be good, Barzani said.

The KRG president called on Syrian Kurds to heed Turkey's concerns and disassociate themselves from the PKK, adding that the Kurdish issue in Syria should be resolved within Syria.

"The Kurds of Syria are part of Syria," Barzani said, "Unfortunately, the Baath mentality is a

block." But, according to Barzani, Russia could make a difference and help broker a deal between Kurds and the Syrian government.

Barzani said there was a standing invitation from the White House, with no date fixed yet, adding that he would be meeting with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence in Davos, during the World Economic Forum that will start on Jan. 21.

The KRG president's visit to Tehran was also still in the books, with no date fixed, he said.

On whether U.S. troops should withdraw from Iraq, Barzani said the impression Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi gave during his recent visit to Erbil was one that favoured "dialogue rather than confrontation," and that the KRG believed the presence of U.S. forces is necessary under current circumstances.

"All the intelligence indicates that the Islamic State has regrouped itself and that they are carrying out attacks against Iraqi targets on a daily basis. Hence, it's as much in the interest of Iraqi Kurdistan as it is for the whole of Iraq that US forces remain for the time being," Barzani said.



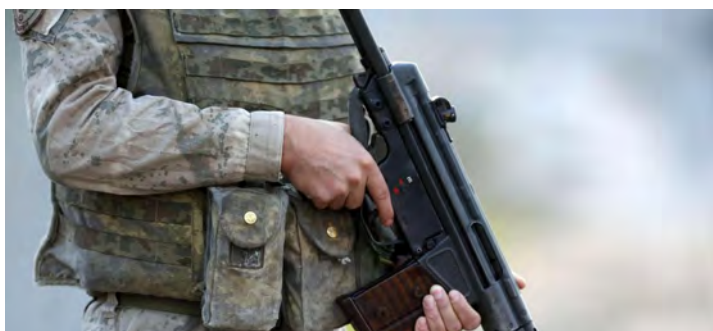
Jan 17 2020

## Three Turkish soldiers killed in car bomb attack in northeastern Syria

A car bomb explosion in the Turkish-controlled region of northeast Syria killed three Turkish soldiers on Thursday, state-run Anadolu news agency said, citing a statement by Turkey's defence ministry.

The attack took place when Turkish forces were conducting a roadside security check, Anadolu said.

Four Turkish soldiers lost their



lives in another car bomb attack in northeast Syria near the city of Ras al-Ayn on Jan. 9.

Ankara earlier blames a string of deadly car bomb attacks in the region, on the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units

(YPG), which Ankara views as terrorists due to its links to the Kurdish militants who have waged a decades-long insurgency inside Turkey.

Turkey, along with allied Syrian rebels, launched an offensive into northeast Syria targeting Kurdish forces that controlled the region in October. The Turkish forces captured the areas between Syrian border towns of Ras al-Ayn and Tel Abyad.





Kosar Nawzad I  
January 17-2020

## Kurdistan Region aid organization assists neglected north Syrian IDPs

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – An official from the Kurdish-led Northern Syrian Self-Administration said that the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) was nearly alone in providing assistance to large numbers of displaced citizens being largely neglected by international aid organizations.

“Unfortunately, humanitarian aid has become a political auction, and despite the presence of hundreds of thousands of displaced people, no international humanitarian organization has provided relief for them,” said Shekhmus Ahmed, the administration's Director of Displaced Persons Affairs, during an on-air interview with Kurdistan 24.

On Saturday, a Syrian Kurdish party criticized the recent decision by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to restrict the number of border crossings that can be used to bring aid to northeastern Syria, widely seen as an attempt by Russia to limit assistance to the area in support of Damascus.

“The United Nations has voted to limit the entry of humanitarian aid through the border crossings under the control of Turkey and the Syrian regime, clearly preventing delivery of aid to those in need,” Aldar Xelil, head of the Diplomatic Relations Office for the Move-



An overview of the Washokani displacement camp in northeastern Syria. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

ment for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), said in a public statement.

On Dec. 10, the BCF brought six convoys of aid to the Washokani camp, including 40 trailers filled with essential items to displaced families at the as the winter cold loomed.

More than 1,000 displaced families live in the camp, located between the towns of Tal Tamr and Hasakah.

The Administration's displacement director continued, “The efforts of our people in southern (Iraqi) Kurdistan, whether in Duhok, Erbil, Sulaimani, and all regions, are appreciated,” adding, “the Barzani Charity Foundation was the only one and the first to send several batches of aid,

but the needs exceed even their potential.”

“The Kurdistan Region's Doctors Federation visited camps in the area and to survey medical needs,” after which they sent batches of them, contributing to efforts to “push diseases away from children,” Ahmed added.

“We hope that this assistance will continue.”

On Tuesday, the BCF dispatched a second relief convoy displaced families in Rojava, a Kurdish term for the mostly-Kurdish inhabited parts of northern Syria. More than 1,000 displaced families live in the camp, located between the towns of Tal Tamr and Hasakah.

The families fled their areas of origin close to the Turkish-Syrian border after Ankara and militants it backs launched an assault into the areas to push the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from them. The attack killed hundreds and has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Turkey has also been accused of war crimes as the proxies it commands have committed extrajudicial killings, ethnic cleansing, and seizure of property. Local authorities also accuse them of using chemical weapons.

Editing by John J. Catherine



17-01-2020  
Mohammed Rwanduzy

## Syrian Kurds must cut ties with PKK, strike deal with Damascus: President Barzani

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – The Syrian Kurdish leadership must continue efforts to reach a solution with the Damascus regime that will guarantee Kurdish rights in the country, but they must also cut ties with the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Kurdistan Region's President Nechirvan Barzani told Al-Monitor on Thursday.

"As a matter of principle we believe that the question of the Kurds in Syria should be resolved within the boundaries of Syria. And yes, of course I believe the regime in Damascus should be more forthcoming than it is now. The Kurds of Syria are part of Syria," Barzani said in an interview with the media outlet.

"Our advice in the past, present and in the future is for the Syrian Kurds to find a way to reach an agreement with the regime," Barzani added, criticizing the regime for its lack of willingness to make concessions. "Unfortunately, the Baath mentality is a block."

Syrian Kurds, who earned global praise for their key role in the war against the Islamic State (ISIS), have been pushed into a weak position after being abandoned by their American allies in the face of a Turkish invasion, "Operation Peace Spring," that was launched on October 9, 2019. The Turkish invasion commenced following US withdrawal from border towns. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) lost two critical border towns of Gire Spi (Tel Abyad) and Sari Kani (Ras al-Ain), and Turkey and its Syrian proxies pushed 30 kilometers-deep into Syrian territory.

The Kurds asked the Syrian government to help defend their land against the Turkish incursion, inviting regime forces back to the northeast for the first time since Damascus pulled out of the Kurdish areas early in the nearly nine-year long civil war.



Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani speaks at a press conference in Erbil on November 5, 2019. Photo: Presidency office

Ceasefire deals brokered by the United States and Russia put the Turkish invasion on hold, but the situation is still unstable.

Political talks between the Kurdish-led administration and Damascus have hit an impasse. The Kurds want the fragile autonomy they have carved out for themselves to be preserved and their SDF granted special status within the Syrian Army, but the Syrian Regime, in a position of strength after military wins on the ground, has refused to budge.

"There should be constitutional protection of their rights all within the framework of a united Syria. They should be equal citizens and to express themselves freely as Kurds," said Barzani of the Kurdish population across the border.

An earlier round of talks, launched when the Kurds were in a much stronger position, failed. The current negotiations are mediated by Russia. Barzani had urged Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to get involved when he

visited Erbil last October.

The positive role Barzani and the Kurdistan Region played were recognized by Mazloum Abdi, commander-in-chief of the SDF, despite bad blood between Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the ruling party in Kurdish-held Syria.

Turkey justified its invasion of Rojava, as Kurds call northeastern Syria, as a counter-terrorism operation, claiming that the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which forms the backbone of SDF, is affiliated with the PKK, a Kurdish guerilla organization fighting for greater Kurdish political and cultural rights in Turkey.

The YPG has denied it is the Syrian affiliate of the PKK, but the organization has embraced the ideology of jailed Abdullah Ocalan, revered founder of the PKK.

"I also told them [Syrian Kurds] repeatedly to cut their ties with the PKK in Qandil," said Barzani. "I always said they did everything to

provoke Turkey. Putting up PKK flags and huge portraits of [imprisoned PKK leader] Abdullah Ocalan immediately on the Turkish border."

He said the SDF "was probably too late" when it made concessions to Turkey's objections, dismantling defensive fortifications along the border and allowing US-Turkey military patrols in strategic areas. "We had been telling them for years to disassociate themselves from the PKK and try to understand Turkey's concerns so as to avert this result we have today," said Barzani.

This has to be done, otherwise there is "little chance of the situation getting any better," he argued.

Despite his opposition to the PKK, Barzani asserted that the only solution to the decades-long conflict between Kurds and the Turkish state is for Ankara to resume its peace process with the PKK, including re-opening discussions with Ocalan.





18-01-2020  
Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Turkey's Kurds look to strengthen political alliance

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – A group of political parties that focus on advocating for Kurdish rights in Turkey met in Diyarbakir on Friday to strengthen their united front as Kurds face challenges across the Middle East.

The two-day conference, under the slogan 'Collective struggle for national unity,' brought together eight political parties that had formed an alliance to contest Turkey's March 2019 local elections.

Opening the conference, Sinan Ciftiyurek, leader of the Communist Party of Kurdistan (KKP), said that Kurds are connected to many events now happening in the Middle East, so they need unity "to make our achievements bigger."

In addition to the KKP, the Democratic Communities Council (KCK), the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), the Revolutionary Eastern Culture Associations (DDKD), the Human and Freedom Party (PIA), the Kurdish Democratic Platform (PDK), and the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Turkey (PDK-T) were in attendance.

"We need national alliance to make the achievements permanent," said Ciftiyurek, adding that all Kurdish parties have to come together against Ankara's crackdown on the HDP. Many of the party's mayors who won in the March 2019 vote have been removed from their posts by the central government. Hundreds of HDP officials are in jail for alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Ahmet Turk, who was removed as mayor of Mardin, told Rudaw on the sidelines of the conference that with the world learning about the Kurdish struggle, now is the time for Kurdish political parties to gain the confidence of the voters and push hard for their rights.

"There are many difficulties and obstacles in the Middle East. They



A Kurdish political conference takes place in Diyarbakir under a banner reading 'For tranquility and peace: National unity.' Photo: Saliha Aydeniz/Twitter

want to remove all Kurdish achievements. However, now Kurds are lucky to be known everywhere in the world as a peace-wanting nation, but they have disagreements among themselves, especially among political parties," said the veteran politician.

"We have to give people some confidence to come to streets demanding their rights," Turk added.

HDP is the most successful pro-Kurdish party in Turkey, but smaller parties have avoided alliances with it because of alleged links to the PKK and because it positions itself as a leftist Turkish party rather than focusing solely on the struggle for Kurdish rights.

Zeyad Ceyland, head of HDP's office in Diyarbakir, told Rudaw their party plays two roles. In the Kurdish-majority provinces in the southeast, "HDP represents Kurds there." But nationwide, HDP represents "our friends" as well, he said, referring to non-Kurdish voters in other parts of Turkey. Sezai Temelli, co-leader of

HDP is a Turk. He also attended the conference.

"We have to see the differences between Kurds as enriching. Otherwise, they will not serve the achievements of Kurds," Ceylan told Rudaw early on Saturday, urging unity. "Kurds must not be divided because it has led to massacres in the past."

HDP would also like to see greater cooperation among Kurds across borders. The party sent a high-profile delegation led by Temelli to the Kurdistan Region in September to discuss "regional issues and the unity of Kurds." They met with Kurdish officials and political parties.

Kurds have two national leaders, said HDP lawmaker Leyla Guven – jailed PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan and head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in northern Iraq Masoud Barzani. "Now, the biggest responsibility falls upon Mr Masoud Barzani because Mr Ocalan is in jail while Mr Masoud Barzani is out and has the ability" to unite Kurds,

Guven said in an interview with Ote-kilerin Gundemi news outlet on Saturday.

She added that Kurdistan Region has legitimacy in the world, so Barzani as the leader of the ruling KDP must call on all Kurds to band together. "I hope Mr Barzani plays his role and carries out his mission as soon as possible because the [Kurdish] people have serious expectations," she said.

For the KDP, it's a balancing act. The party wants to advocate for Kurds everywhere, but the economic prosperity of the Kurdistan Region depends on maintaining good relations with Ankara as the Region sells its oil via Turkey.

Nechirvan Barzani, deputy head of the KDP and president of the Kurdistan Region, said Ankara should re-open talks with the PKK and Ocalan and should release the jailed former head of HDP, Selahattin Demirtas. "I definitely believe that he should be freed from prison and allowed to play this role. He should be free," Barzani told Al-Monitor.





Jan 18, 2020

## Children in Turkey's Kurdish-majority southeast face chronic hunger - report

**C**hildren in Turkey's Kurdish majority east and southeast face developmental challenges due to chronic hunger, according to a new report by the country's health and education ministries.

The Evaluation of Growth of Growth in Turkish Schoolchildren report (TOÇBİ) report, prepared with Ankara's Hacettepe University, warned of the serious consequences of inadequate nutrition in both regions of Turkey, Birgün newspaper reported on Saturday.



A total of 3.5 percent of children in the eastern region and 5.4 percent of children in the southeast region experienced stunted growth due to chronic hunger, compared to as low as 1

percent found in their peers in the western regions of the country, the TOÇBİ report found.

Turkey's southwestern region leads the country in underweight

children, with 4.2 percent measuring below weight, compared to the national average of 2 percent.

"There is a poor nutrition problem in Turkey... the numbers are serious. We don't see these figures in any European country," Chairwoman of the Health Ministry's Public Health Chamber said.

Turkey's east and southeast are among the least developed regions with the highest rates of unemployment.



January 19, 2020

## BCF distributes humanitarian aid to over 2,000 families in Mosul

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – The Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) distributed humanitarian aid to 2,000 families inside the city of Mosul on Sunday in a campaign to assist underprivileged families.

Rizgar Ubed, head of the BCF's Mosul office, told Kurdistan 24 the campaign was the second such initiative this year in Mosul. Earlier this year, the humanitarian organization distributed financial aid to 350 orphans in the city, Ubed said.

"Today, 2,000 poor families will benefit from the humanitarian aid, as they will receive one basket of dry food," he added. "The aid was provided in coordination and cooperation with Kuwait."

According to Ubed, 1,000 families will receive the aid this week and the other 1,000 will receive it next week.

The BCF opened its office in Mosul directly after the city's libe-



The Barzani Charity Foundation's (BCF) office in Mosul, Jan. 19, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

ration from the so-called Islamic State in 2017 to facilitate the return process and aid the low-income families there.

The BCF is one of the most active humanitarian NGOs in Kurdistan

that often provides a substantial amount of aid to internally displaced persons and refugees.

The organization was founded in 2005 and strives to honor the great legacy of Malla Mustafa Bar-

zani, the leader of the Kurdish Liberation Movement and influencer of the contemporary Kurdish nation.

Additional reporting by Ari Hussein

# Au Kurdistan d'Irak, les réfugiés syriens font changer les goûts et les couleurs

**A**u début, le café amer d'Abdessamad Abdelqader n'a convaincu personne. Mais aujourd'hui, ce Kurde de Syrie a ses fidèles, dont certains se risquent même à boire son breuvage sans sucre: au Kurdistan d'Irak, l'arrivée de réfugiés de Syrie voisine a changé les habitudes.

Dans la petite société fermée du Kurdistan autonome, ces nouveaux venus, arrivés à partir de 2011 lorsque la guerre en Syrie a éclaté, ont bouleversé certains us et coutumes, non seulement culinaires, mais aussi artistiques et linguistiques, selon des sociologues locaux.

Il y a six ans, Abdessamad Abdelqader, 45 ans, a quitté la Syrie pour Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien (nord). Là, il a ouvert une échoppe ne servant que des espressos et du café syrien --un café turc parfumé à la cardamome, dont il faut laisser le marc décanter longtemps.

La première semaine, raconte-t-il à l'AFP, il a offert des tasses à tous les commerçants alentour. Mais dans une région où le thé est roi, il n'a récolté que moues et autres lèvres pincées.

"La première année, mes clients étaient à 99 % des Arabes venus d'ailleurs en Irak, donc peu nombreux", dit-il en gardant un œil sur ses quatre serveurs, tous syriens.

Avec le temps, et à grand renfort de cuillerées de sucre pour alléger l'amertume, il est parvenu à vendre "200 à 300 tasses de café par jour à des clients à 90 % Kurdes irakiens".

## "Se frotter aux traditions"

Kurdes de Syrie et d'Irak ne partagent pas la même langue mais se revendiquent d'un même État qu'ils ne sont jamais parvenus à créer.

Dans la société kurde irakienne qui n'a de cesse de défendre son parti-

cularisme face aux autorités centrales de Bagdad --majoritairement arabes--, l'accueil de 300.000 réfugiés syriens n'a pas été facile, même si la majorité d'entre eux sont kurdes.

Mais au fil des années, "l'expérience des locaux face à la culture syrienne a déconstruit le rejet historique de l'étranger", affirme Hawzhen Ahmed, docteur en

sins emploient des femmes et les marchés et centres commerciaux sont bondés jusque tard. "C'est dû à l'influence des réfugiés syriens", selon Mme Tourki, qui assure qu'en Syrie, il est plus fréquent pour une femme de travailler ou de sortir le soir.

"Les réfugiés syriens ont prouvé que les cultures des nouveaux arrivants sont bénéfiques lorsqu'elles

"Les Kurdes d'Irak nous ont aidé à faire renaître notre langue. Ils parlent un Kurde moins teinté (d'arabe) que les Kurdes de Syrie car en Syrie, la langue kurde était interdite", explique Hussein Dewani, un enseignant et musicien kurde syrien arrivé à Erbil en 2012.

"A mon arrivée, j'ai entendu des mots que ma grand-mère utilisait mais qui se sont perdus au fil des



Au Kurdistan d'Irak, les réfugiés syriens font changer les goûts et les couleurs © AFP / SAFIN HAMED

études culturelles, qui relève que les mariages mixtes, notamment, ont "contribué à plus de sociabilité" entre Kurdes de Syrie et d'Irak.

Dans les restaurants, les assiettes de houmous, taboulé et salade fatouche ont fleuri sur les tables, tandis que des pâtisseries syriennes ont ouvert.

Joumana Tourki, une Arabe mariée à un Kurde de Syrie, s'est installée à Erbil en 2014.

A l'époque, dit cette diplômée en sociologie de 34 ans, très peu de femmes travaillaient --le Kurdistan comme l'Irak en général a l'un des taux d'emploi de femmes les plus bas au monde (environ 15 %). Après la tombée de la nuit, les femmes se faisaient rares dehors.

Aujourd'hui, de nombreux maga-

viennent se frotter aux traditions et normes locales", estime M. Ahmed.

## "Renaître"

Les Kurdes de Syrie ont retrouvé de l'autre côté de la frontière des racines qu'ils avaient perdues dans la République arabe syrienne, où les particularismes régionaux -- surtout kurdes-- sont étouffés.

Avant 2011, dans les régions kurdes en Syrie, porter l'habit traditionnel ou les couleurs du drapeau kurde pouvait mener en prison.

En Irak, les Kurdes de Syrie ont renoué avec les célébrations publiques de Norouz, le nouvel an kurde qui, chaque 21 mars, marque l'arrivée du printemps. Ils se sont remis à porter le pantalon bouffant traditionnel et ont retrouvé de vieux idiomes oubliés.

génération", poursuit l'homme de 33 ans, qui a appris le kurde sorani, parlé à Erbil, tandis qu'il enseignait le kurmandji, le kurde de Syrie, à ses collègues.

Selon lui, même la musique kurde irakienne s'inspire désormais de mélodies syriennes.

Rodi Hassan, arrivé de Syrie en 2008 pour terminer ses études de médecine au Kurdistan irakien, se réjouit des interactions croissantes entre les deux communautés.

"Quand je suis arrivé, on ne connaissait quasiment rien les uns des autres et on avait beaucoup de préjugés", se rappelle-t-il. "Aujourd'hui, c'est complètement différent, des amitiés et des mariages nous ont liés".

Erbil (Irak) © 2020 AFP





22-01-2020  
Karwan Faidhi Dri

## 32 HDP mayors removed, 23 detained in Turkey since last election: survey

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – The Turkish government's latest crackdown on the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has led to the removal of 32 mayors and detention of 23 others who were elected in last year's local elections, according to a survey published by the party.

A survey published on Twitter shows that 32 of their municipalities have been "confiscated," referring to the removal of their mayors.

23 co-mayors have been detained as "political hostages," it added.

A report by the HDP in early November put the number of affected mayors at 15.

The latest raid on HDP members was on Tuesday, with the detention

of 12 HDP members in Izmir province, according to pro-Kurdish outlet ANF.

The HDP on Tuesday called on authorities to end raids on the party, adding that "our party and people will continue fighting for justice and freedom."

Founded in 2012, the HDP has been subject to repressive measures from the Turkish government, including party member arrests.

The crackdown grew more pronounced after a failed coup attempt on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government in July 2016, which was blamed on Fethullah Gulen - a former ally of Erdogan living in self-imposed asylum in the US.

The first removal of the newly-elected

HDP mayors came on August 19 2019, when the mayors of major cities Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van were removed from office. This set the precedent for other party officials to also be removed from their positions.

The HDP supported the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) candidates in western provinces, where the CHP raced against Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Kurdish votes were said to have had a role in the victory of the opposition party in these areas, especially Istanbul, which is home to millions of Kurds.

The Turkish Ministry of Interior accused the HDP officials in question of financial exploitation in favor of

the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – a Kurdish armed group that has fought the Turkish state for decades to gain the cultural and political rights of Kurds in the country.

The HDP has denied the claims, blaming trustees - pro-government officials who have replaced the removed mayors - of corruption.

HDP co-chair Sezai Temelli shared the findings on Twitter, calling for cooperation to end the removal of elected officials.

"Trustee mentality will continue to be everywhere as long as [a] trustee regime and monist system exists," said Temelli, adding that "we must form a democratic alliance to end this."



21-01-2020  
Tsvi Barel

## Si les Américains quittaient vraiment l'Irak, ce serait une catastrophe

**Rester à Bagdad coûterait cher au Trésor américain et pourrait ruiner la réélection de Trump. Mais un retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak serait encore plus dangereux pour la région.**

Combien de temps une guerre d'usure entre l'Iran et les forces militaires américaines en Irak pourrait-elle durer? À en juger par l'écart entre les déclarations du président Donald Trump et ses actes, il semble que l'Iran ait encore suffisamment de temps pour jouer dans l'arène irakienne. Et ce qui n'était au départ qu'une hypothèse de travail a fini par se concrétiser : Trump n'est pas intéressé par une guerre totale, en tout cas pas davantage que l'Iran.

Mais entre une guerre totale et un calme tendu, les deux adver-

saires ont encore de la marge, une marge d'autant plus dangereuse qu'après l'assassinat du [général iranien] Qassem Soleimani aucun d'eux ne semble disposer d'un plan à même de résoudre la crise qui les oppose. Preuve en est la saga tragico-comique autour du retrait d'Irak (rapidement démenti) des forces américaines conjointement au déploiement de forces américaines supplémentaires ailleurs au Moyen-Orient.

### Menaces de Trump

Seule certitude, dans la foulée du vote par le Parlement irakien d'une loi demandant le retrait des troupes américaines, le président irakien [kurde] Barham Salih a fait savoir que l'ambassade américaine à Bagdad lui avait remis un projet de loi visant à frapper l'Irak de sanctions en cas d'expulsion des forces amé-

ricaines : gel de toutes les activités américaines en Irak, interdiction pour les sociétés américaines et irakiennes de collaborer, remboursement du coût des installations militaires américaines et, enfin, fermeture de l'espace aérien irakien et blocus maritime.

Le régime irakien ne prend pas les menaces de Trump à la légère. Les députés kurdes et arabes sunnites n'ont pas assisté à la discussion sur la loi au Parlement, à l'exception de Mohamed AlHalbousi, président sunnite du Parlement, qui a tenté de convaincre ses "grands frères" chiites d'"agir conformément aux intérêts de l'État" et de ne pas laisser passer cette loi. Une résurgence de Daech Cependant, le sentiment anti-américain s'est révélé trop fort et la loi a été promulguée. Quoi qu'il ait pu dire par le passé, le

Premier ministre irakien démissionnaire Adel Abdel-Mahdi comprend pourtant bien la portée d'un tel vote pour l'Irak. Il a tenté de soumettre aux députés une version plus souple, qui verrait l'Irak poursuivre les négociations sur un accord de coopération militaire qui définirait le nombre de soldats autorisés à rester dans le pays, ainsi que la nature de leur mission. Abdel-Mahdi craint que, sans le soutien aérien américain et la poursuite d'un programme qui a formé près de 200 000 soldats irakiens à ce jour, l'Irak ait du mal à résister à une nouvelle tentative de résurgence de Daech.

Ce n'est pas seulement Daech qui menace l'Irak. Les troubles civils qui ont commencé il y a environ trois mois et les manifestations à grande échelle qui ont





21-01-2020  
Karwan Faidhi Dri

# European Council report calls on Turkey to stop abusing law to silence journalists

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – A draft report by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has called on Ankara to amend or remove two laws that have been used to detain and prosecute journalists in Turkey.

PACE has prepared a draft report, Media Freedom and Journalists' Security in Europe, which calls on Turkey to "stop abusing criminal and anti-terrorism laws in order to silence media and journalists," reported the Euronews Turkish service on Sunday.

Prepared by George Foulkes, a British MP and General Rapporteur on media freedom and the safety of journalists for PACE, the draft is scheduled for discussion during the PACE General Assembly meeting in Strasbourg on Tuesday.

Turkey is the most prolific jailer of journalists among all members of the European Council, the report states. Ankara is also one of the biggest jailers of journalists in the world, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF)'s 2019 annual report.

"Although the number of detained journalists fell for the second year running, Turkey continues to be one of the world's biggest jailers of media personnel and continues to expose them to an entirely arbitrary justice system," reads the RSF report.

Many people have been detained and prosecuted in Turkey for "insulting the president" or "committing crimes against the signs of the state's sovereignty and disrespecting its organs". The PACE report



Protesters gather near Turkey's embassy in Vienna, Austria on May 3, 2017 to mark World Press Freedom Day. File photo: Javier Luque / IPI

calls for the removal or amendment of these articles.

The report also accuses Ankara for arbitrarily detaining journalists for months and even years, claiming this violates the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) statute on freedom of expression.

Kamil Aydin, an MP for the Turkish Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and a member of the PACE cultural and educational media committee, has rejected the report's findings. The MHP is an ally of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government launched a crackdown on dissidents in the wake of the failed coup in July 2016, which Erdogan believes was orchestrated by his former ally Fethullah Gulen. Thou-

sands of suspected members of Gulen's Hizmet organization have been arrested and a large number of journalists have been swept up in the clampdown.

Leaders, officials and members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) have also been detained despite their opposition to the putsch. Its then-co-chair Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag remain in jail despite never being formerly charged.

Critics accuse Erdogan of exploiting the failed coup to crack down on his opponents – claims denied by Ankara.

Kurdish journalists are frequently accused of terrorism offenses. The arrest of Aziz Oruc, a Kurdish journalist from Diyarbakir province, in late 2019 was just one recent example.

"Dozens of journalists and media representatives were released over the course of the year after completing their prison sentences or as a result of a new court ruling, but around ten others opted for self-imposed exile in order to avoid an arbitrary trial," reads RSF's 2019 report.

A late 2019 report by the International Press Institute (IPI) said 120 journalists remained in Turkish jailed as of November "as a consequence of an extended, politically motivated crackdown against the media."

"Behind those figures lies a story of egregious violations of fundamental rights, with dozens of journalists held on the most serious terrorism-related charges for months, sometimes years, pending trial, in many cases without an official indictment," it added.



Hiwa Shilani |  
January 22-2020

## Iraqi president at Davos: 'Our interest does not lie in being drawn into conflicts that are not of our making'

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Iraqi President Barham Salih on Wednesday, at the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 50th Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, emphasized that no outside country should impose its policies on Iraq.

"We seek good relations with all sides, and our interest does not lie in being drawn into conflicts that are not of our making," he said while delivering a speech on the second day of the 50th World Economic Forum, in a clear reference to the current aggressions between the United States and Iran playing out on Iraqi soil over the past several weeks.

"No country should tell us with whom we can develop ties as it is not in our interest to choose an ally [at] the expense of another," added Salih.

The Iraqi president also stressed that the existence of US troops in Iraq is not a "sign of aggression," a view championed by Iran and Iraqi politicians and militias it backs.

Iran launched over a dozen ballistic missiles at airbases in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region that house US and coalition forces in retaliation for the US killing of top Iranian general Qasim Soleimani.

Read More: Multiple rockets hit Iraq's Balad airbase, 4 wounded: military



Iraqi President Barham Salih delivers a speech at World Economic Forum's (WEF), Davos, Jan. 22, 2020. (Photo: Archive)

Over the past several days, multiple rockets have also appeared to have targeted the US Embassy in Baghdad, a facility attacked by mobs of Iran-backed militias of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in late December.

Read More: Iraq finds rocket launch pad it says targeted US embassy in Baghdad

In his speech, Salih also mentioned that the Iraqi parliament's recent session in which many lawmakers voted for a non-binding resolution to oust US forces from Iraq "was not a sign of ingratitude or hostility, but rather a

reaction to what many Iraqis see as violations of their country's sovereignty."

Salih added that Iraq owes gratitude to the US-led anti-Islamic State Coalition for its "military and economic support in the fight against ISIS that is still ongoing."

He also called for early national elections to end the political crisis in Iraq caused by a popular movement raging since early October that protests the low standard of living caused by institutional corruption and which has resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Adil Abdul

Mahdi and his cabinet. Salih pointed out that elections "will restore Iraqis' trust of the government."

"He explained that protesters want a "democratic system that reflects the Iraqi identity and to restore their dignity. They want a clean and fair election."

The WEF holds its annual meeting in late January. This year's summit is titled, "Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World," and is focusing on pressing global economic, political, and security issues.

Editing by John J. Catherine



## Bernard-Henri Lévy : «Rendons Justice aux Kurdes»

Le philosophe Bernard-Henri Lévy s'est rendu en Syrie, en Irak et aux portes de l'Iran pour retrouver trois branches du peuple martyr.

**A**u Rojava, le Kurdistan Syrien. Les voici, les Français de Daech. C'est une prison moderne, à Derik, sud de Qamishli, la capitale. Un missile turc est tombé tout près, comme pour les inciter à s'évader. Mais la prison est tenue. Les gardiens sont casqués, masqués, vêtus de noir. Et l'on n'accède au quartier de haute sécurité qu'après avoir franchi une série de couloirs, de grilles et de portes blindées. Ils sont une douzaine, regroupés au fond de la cellule, de dos et, à notre arrivée, en train de prier. Mais, à l'appel de leur cerbère posté derrière le judas, ils se retournent comme un seul homme et je me trouve face à ces djihadistes qui furent, m'a-t-on prévenu, les pires assassins de Raqqa mais qui, dans cette pièce trop éclairée, sentant la vieille cave et où s'entassent des couvertures aux couleurs criardes, ont l'air de pauvres hères, joggings et polos crasseux, yeux ternes, résignés. Sauf un, blessé, les jambes prises dans un appareillage de pinces et de ferrailles, qui me hurle, avec un accent chtî : «On vous a reconnu !» Puis, déclenchant un brouhaha de plaintes maigres : «Est-ce que vous savez qui va nous juger et quand ?» Ces hommes qui ont terrorisé le monde sont, aujourd'hui, coupés de tout. Sans lumière du jour, sans portables, leur unique téléviseur leur ayant été repris au début de l'offensive turque, ils ignorent par exemple que Baghdadi, leur calife, est mort. Ils n'ont, à cet instant, qu'une idée : être extradés du Rojava ; ne pas finir à Bagdad où règne la peine capitale ; revenir en France, pays des droits de l'homme et des droits de la défense... Pathétique. Et diabolique.

Quelques kilomètres plus loin, deuxième prison. Celle des enfants. En réalité, c'est une sorte de cloître bordé d'arcades et transformé en maison de correction. Et il y a là une centaine d'adolescents, tous des garçons, qui, comme le New-Yor-



En Irak, en décembre 2019. De profil à dr., le héros des peshmergas : Sirwan Barzani, surnommé « le Tigre noir », le général que BHL avait fait inviter à l'Élysée, sous François Hollande, en 2015.

kais Nelson ou le petit Toulousain Ahmed, disent n'avoir commis d'autre crime que d'avoir un père ou une mère terroristes. Ils semblent des petits animaux traqués. Beaucoup ne savent pas si leurs parents sont encore en vie. Et ils ont cet air d'anxiété désœuvrée qui est le signe des gamins privés d'avenir. Mais, très vite, on nous conduit dans une pièce fermée où attendent deux Français qui resteront les yeux baissés pendant l'essentiel de l'entretien. L'un raconte avoir, fort du savoir-faire acquis en arrachant les yeux aux chats du souk de sa bourgade, à 8 ans, égorgé un voisin qui

manquait de respect à sa grande sœur. L'autre, visage d'ange, beaux yeux gris bizarrement sans regard, ramassait les têtes que son père, bourreau à Raqqa, décapitait. Mon Dieu ! Que faire de ces aveux ? Quelle déradicalisation, quel rachat pour ces enfants monstres ? Et le pire crime de Daech n'est-il pas d'avoir voulu faire de ces «lionceaux» les garants d'une infamie qui passerait de génération en génération ? Je demande au second, le fossoyeur en herbe, s'il lui arrive de repenser à ces visages sans corps, d'en rêver la nuit. Il me fait répéter la question. Il me fixe pour la



Parmi des soldates des YPJ, la brigade féminine des forces kurdes syriennes, devant le portrait d'Abdullah Ocalan, fondateur du PKK. © DR

première fois, mais avec un air d'in-définissable stupidité. Il ne sait plus ce que rêver veut dire.

Kurdistan est son nom de guerre. C'est un petit bout de femme, jolie, les cheveux nattés, qui commande un bataillon d'une centaine de filles stationné quelque part à proximité de la ligne de front. Les soldates, lorsque nous arrivons, à l'aube, sont à l'exercice. Mais elle nous entraîne dans une bâtisse où, avec une poignée de camarades s'asseyant, comme elle, la kalachnikov au sol, sur un tapis qui nous évite la froideur matinale du ciment brut, elle va raconter, d'une voix musicale, en prenant bien son temps, comment l'unité a vécu l'invasion turque. Le bruit des avions couvrant l'avancée des tueurs au sol venus d'Afrin. Les deux blessées qu'on est allé chercher sur la route, sous le feu. Cette jeune héroïne, tuée à bout portant, dans un faubourg de Tall Abyad, dont le souvenir les hante. Et puis le moment où l'on a compris que les Américains allaient vraiment partir et qu'il fallait se replier pour sauver ce qui pouvait l'être de la Commune du Rojava et, un jour, contre-attaquer. Je pense aux femmes combattantes qui, dans «L'Iliade», étaient les protectrices des villes. Je pense à Penthésilée, reine des Amazones, qui aime Achille, l'affronte en combat singulier et, dans la version de Kleist, parvient à le tuer. La différence, c'est que ces jeunes femmes n'aiment ni leur ennemi ni quiconque. Ces guerrières sont mariées avec le Rojava comme des moniales avec le Christ. Ni séduction ni passion : le puritanisme laïque d'un peuple d'Antigones qui veille sur ses 11 000 morts de la guerre contre Daech et, désormais, contre Erdogan.

Des Kurdes, on dit qu'ils n'ont pas d'amis, sauf les montagnes. Dans ce Kurdistan syrien, tout en plaines, en longs villages à demi-construits



et en puits de pétrole rudimentaires, il n'y a même pas de montagnes. Est-ce à dire qu'ils n'ont, ici, pas d'amis du tout ? Je pose la question à Fawza Youssef, écrivaine, féministe et membre de la direction collégiale du Rojava. Non, proteste-t-elle en substance, à Qamishli, dans les bureaux surchauffés de l'Administration for Self-Management of Northern and Eastern Syria. Les démocraties sont nos amies. Les sociétés civiles sont nos amies. Et cette société-ci, la nôtre, celle que nous sommes en train de bâtir, est encore notre amie. C'est une société égalitaire. Elle ne tient compte ni des différences de religion ni des races. Et, contre la loi du patriarcat qui est la vraie maladie de l'islam, elle met femmes et hommes sur le même pied. Fawza n'est pas marxiste. Elle est au courant, s'exclame-t-elle dans un éclat de rire qui adoucit son visage de passionaria marqué par les luttes, du débat, en Occident, sur la fin du marxisme, et de la réputation faite au Rojava d'en abriter l'une des ultimes variantes. Mais on n'a pas besoin d'être marxiste pour, «comme en République française», conjuguer liberté, égalité, fraternité. Et ce mélange d'horizontalité et de génie spartiate, d'esprit libertaire et de discipline révolutionnaire, de communalisme écologique et d'internationalisme, c'est, insiste-t-elle, le pilier du Rojava et l'âme de sa résistance.

Aldar Khalil n'a pas de fonction officielle. Il est un vétéran parmi d'autres de ce peuple en armes qui construit, depuis 2011, sa République des Egau. Et il n'est rien, m'assure-t-il d'un geste vague de la seule main qui lui reste, qu'un des inspireurs d'une coalition de partis kurdes qui s'appelle le Mouvement pour une société démocratique. Mais, au respect dont chacun l'entoure, à l'empressement des sentinelles qui, lorsqu'il est arrivé, ont interrompu leur partie de backgammon et à son ton de feinte modestie quand il concède qu'il lui arrive bien de donner, oui, une recommandation par-ci, une directive par-là, je comprends que les choses sont plus compliquées et que, dans l'organisation réelle du Rojava, au sein de son comité invisible où nul ne doit, en principe, prendre le pas sur les autres, il est celui dont l'ascendant s'impose. Contrairement à

Fawza, il a reçu une formation marxiste. Il est d'ailleurs le seul de nos interlocuteurs à assumer avec fierté le lien avec le PKK de Turquie. Et, lorsqu'il évoque et justifie les renversements d'alliance auxquels les Kurdes de Syrie, lâchés par l'Amérique, dos au mur, sont désormais condamnés, il me fait penser à Lénine, dont Isaac Babel disait qu'à l'inverse du Dieu de Pascal il écrit courbe avec une ligne droite. Même inflexibilité de la volonté. Même froideur dans l'analyse de la mécanique des événements. Et même art de la dialectique pour théoriser, comme le Lénine de Brest-Litovsk, l'amer compromis avec Bachar El-Assad et Poutine.

«Bonjour, mon général. Quelle est

pour s'inquiéter de l'état des forces kurdes et de ce qu'elles attendent de la France. Le général Mazloum Abdi est le commandant en chef de l'armée kurde à qui l'on doit le fameux «entre le génocide (Erdogan) et le compromis (Bachar), nous choisissons la vie» et que, depuis ce jour, les drones turcs traquent et ciblent partout où il est signalé. Et nous sommes là, pressés autour de mon iPhone et d'un interprète improvisé, dans le recoin le mieux connecté du lieu parfaitement improbable, mi-hôtel désaffecté, mi-faux Club Med en déshérence, où a été fixée la rencontre : il nous est apparu là, à la nuit tombée, sans armes, accompagné de deux officiers, en haut d'un escalier absurde et qui ne menait nulle part. Il ne

Kollontaï, il est, lui, Mazloum, son Trotski. Et, parmi les points en discussion avec la Syrie, il en est un qui est de son ressort et dont il a bien dit à son ami français, entre deux coupures de réseau et d'une voix que la pénombre rendait plus solennelle encore, qu'il n'est pas négociable : l'autonomie de son armée ; le maintien de sa chaîne de commandement ; et l'assurance qu'affectée à la seule défense du Rojava elle n'aura pas à tremper, du côté d'Idlib par exemple, dans telle sale bataille décidée par les criminels contre l'humanité de Damas. Cette exigence, à la fois vitale et dictée par l'honneur, la France, cette nuit-là, en a pris note...

De l'autre côté du Tigre, Daech est de retour. Nous sommes, à 40 kilomètres au nord d'Erbil, sur la crête de Karachok qui est la position la plus élevée des peshmergas depuis qu'en octobre 2017, après le référendum d'autodétermination, les milices pro-iraniennes du général Qassem Soleimani les ont chassés des territoires «disputés». Et Daech est là, oui, à 800 mètres de nous, en contrebas. Un obus de mortier a atterri ici il y a une heure. Puis un tir de sniper qui a frôlé le toit des casemates. Et l'on aperçoit même, avant que ne les enveloppe la brume qui gagne la vallée, deux pick-up suspects sur une piste déserte. Le général Sirwan Barzani n'a pas l'air plus surpris que cela. Il a toujours dit, rappelle-t-il tandis qu'il observe un grand oiseau qui tourne sans presque remuer les ailes et fond dans le creux avant de remonter, très vite, vers les nuages, que les djihadistes rempliraient immanquablement le vide laissé par ce re-



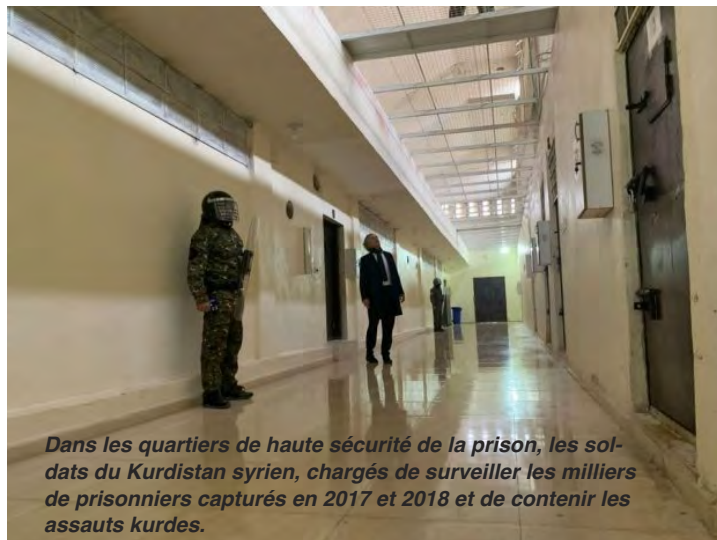
Cinq ans après le tournage de "Peshmerga", son film sur leur lutte contre Daech, BHL a rencontré les combattants kurdes et leurs prisonniers.

la situation sur le terrain ?» La voix hachée, au téléphone, est celle d'un jeune président qui, là-bas, dans Paris en proie aux grèves, prend quarante minutes de son temps

m'appartient pas de donner la te- neur de l'échange entre Emmanuel Macron et l'ennemi public numéro un d'Ankara. Mais, si Aldar est le Lénine caché du Rojava et Fawza sa



Au Rojava, au Hourî Center, le centre de réhabilitation de Qamishli pour les orphelins de Daech. © DR



Dans les quartiers de haute sécurité de la prison, les soldats du Kurdistan syrien, chargés de surveiller les milliers de prisonniers capturés en 2017 et 2018 et de contenir les assauts kurdes.





Près d'Erbil, le commandant Sirwan Barzani découvre la liste des soutiens du comité Justice for Kurds. © DR



Conversation téléphonique entre le président Macron, Mazloum Abdi, le chef militaire kurde syrien dont la tête est mise à prix par la Turquie, et BHL. Au milieu, l'interprète. © DR

trait forcé des Kurdes. Et le voilà donc, ce tycoon condottiere, ce président-fondateur de la compagnie nationale de télécoms, qui passe à nouveau ses jours et ses nuits ici, à la dure, au milieu de ses hommes, montant la garde face aux barbares. C'est cet héroïsme civique que j'ai aimé chez les peshmergas. C'est ce côté citoyens soldats, tous âges et conditions confondus, les seigneurs des collines de Barzan mêlés aux paysans frustes sortis de la nuit kurde, les joues salies de barbe. Et c'est cette fraternité inquiète et joyeuse que je retrouve ici, aujourd'hui.

L'idée a-t-elle été validée par Washington ? Est-ce plutôt de son seul chef que Steven Fagin, consul général des Etats-Unis au Kurdistan d'Irak, a voulu cette projection de «Peshmerga» dans la minizone verte bunkerisée où, dans le quartier chrétien d'Ankawa, au cœur d'Erbil, l'Amérique a son siège ? Je ne le saurai pas. Mais ce qui ne fait pas de doute, c'est l'émotion partagée au moment des scènes les plus dramatiques du film : le jeune général aux cheveux blancs, sans casque, face à Daech, fauché d'une balle en pleine tête ; Ala Tayyeb,

mon chef opérateur, sautant sur une mine, l'épaule broyée ; ou le bataillon de femmes montant à l'assaut du barrage de Mossoul. Je sais qu'il y a là, dans cette salle de ci-

néma improvisée, des commandants de forces spéciales. Des membres de la CIA. Des professionnels de la diplomatie, aguerris aux turpitudes de la realpolitik. Or tous,

quand la lumière revient, semblent s'accorder sur la même note d'embarras et, peut-être, de remords : toujours, dans toutes les guerres, les hommes libres ont du sang sur les mains ; mais, d'habitude, c'est celui de leurs ennemis ; alors que, là, au Kurdistan, c'est celui de leurs amis, de leurs plus braves et loyaux alliés ; et comment la nation de Pershing et de Patton, la plus ancienne démocratie du monde, leur patrie, a-t-elle pu céder à pareille trahison de soi ?

Massoud Barzani était, alors, président. Il a passé le flambeau à Netchirvan, son neveu, après le référendum désavoué. Et je le retrouve dans le palais où j'étais venu plaider que, comme de Gaulle obtenant d'Eisenhower, in extremis, qu'une division française libère Paris, il devait obtenir des Etats-Unis le feu vert pour entrer dans Mossoul occupé par Daech. Il a gardé la même autorité silencieuse. La même prestance malgré sa petite taille. Et les mêmes tenue et turban d'éternel peshmerga. Avec, pourtant, un soupçon d'amertume quand il raconte l'histoire de la bataille d'Altun Kupri, où l'un de ses commandants sut, tel Léonidas aux



Près d'Erbil, l'ex-président du Kurdistan Massoud Barzani découvre la liste des soutiens du comité Justice for Kurds.



Thermopyles, tenir plusieurs jours en respect une colonne encadrée par des Gardiens de la révolution iraniens commandés, en personne, par Qassem Soleimani. Puis celle de Shila où ses troupes détruisirent 57 véhicules blindés et dont nul, en Occident, n'a parlé. Se peut-il qu'une bataille de cette importance passe sous les radars de l'Histoire ? J'aime, en tout cas, qu'il ait, comme les généraux de Valmy, de Tsahal et de la jeune révolution soviétique, tenu tête au reste du monde. J'aime son côté perdant magnifique, errant dans son palais désert, tel un vieux roi déchu, sans divertissement mais glorieux. Et j'aime que, comme Cincinnatus revenu à sa charrue, ou Camille rendu à la sagesse après avoir sauvé Rome de l'invasion gauloise, il demeure le père de la nation.

C'est une scène du «Désert des Tartares» ou du «Rivage des Syrtés». Nous sommes à trois heures de route d'Erbil, vers l'est, tout près de la frontière iranienne. C'est ici que le troisième Kurdistan, que l'on appelle le Rojhelat, a des combattants en exil qui servent sous uniforme peshmerga. Et il y a là, dispersés dans un paysage de roches sauvages et menaçantes, postés dans des abris de pierre inlassablement fortifiés et équipés d'armes que l'on fourbit avec une patience digne de Sisyphe, une poignée d'hommes en état d'alerte perpétuelle qui prient depuis quarante ans que tombe le régime des molahs. L'enjeu est immense. Ces guérilleros de l'arrière, qui n'en finissent pas de se préparer à un assaut qui ne vient pas, sont parmi les plus endurcis des peshmergas. Mais cette vie d'attente et d'héroïsme retenu, ce pressentiment d'un affrontement constamment différé, cette succession de jours où les armes s'endorment et où l'on peut finir par mourir d'avoir crié «qui vive» face à un invisible ennemi, ces nuits sans horizon où les guetteurs s'aveuglent et semblent, à force, des ermites sur leur colonne, ce temps immobile où ne tombent que la neige en hiver, le soleil tous les soirs et le vent qui, dans ses bons jours, porte, à travers la montagne, l'illusion d'une voix qui pourrait être celle des six millions de frères iraniens sous la botte – tout cela désespère.

Et puis, tout à coup, ce n'est plus le



Les peshmergas du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan d'Iran (PDKI), près de leur base à la frontière iranienne

désert des Tartares. Et les pasdars, de l'autre côté, exaspérés par ces infatigables résistants et leurs incursions clandestines, décident de frapper et lancent, comme l'an passé, une salve de trois missiles qui s'abattent, ici, à Koya, sur le QG du PDKI dont ils sont le bras armé. Nous sommes dans la petite pièce où le bureau exécutif du parti qui siégeait, ce jour-là, au complet s'est réfugié après le premier tir et a été fauché, quelques secondes après, par le deuxième et le troisième. Khalid Azizi, son secrétaire général, parce qu'il s'était attardé pour porter

secours à un blessé, a été miraculeusement épargné. Mais le reste du bureau a été exterminé. Et il me montre, aux murs du mémorial qu'est devenu cette chambre de la mort, les portraits des disparus et, pieusement disposés dans des vitrines le long des murs, des cartes d'identité, des sandales, des portables, des paires de lunettes, un peigne, une montre, une plaquette de médicaments, une arme de poing, un turban taché de sang, une médaille. Les Kurdes sont un peuple oublié. Mais ces Kurdes-ci, ces riverains des nouvelles Syrtés

qui ont mis un point d'honneur à reconstruire à l'identique cette amitié fantôme sont, comme leurs frères que l'on pend, torture ou emprisonne entre Mahabad et Marivan, les plus oubliés des oubliés.

Sur la route du retour, dans un dernier village au pied de la montagne, nous tombons sur un bazar de fortune où s'amoncellent des marchandises dans de vagues emballages. Il y a là des ordinateurs et des cantines de conserves, des médicaments, de la quincaillerie et des couches pour bébés. Il y a tout ce dont le Kurdistan iranien, affamé par le régime et les sanctions internationales, a besoin pour ne pas mourir. Et des hommes de tous âges sont en train d'entasser ces paquets dans des guimbardeuses qui vont prendre la route de la montagne. Parce qu'ils franchiront les crêtes du Zagros, portant à dos d'homme leurs ballots de misère et de survie, on appelle ces contrebandiers des «kolbars» : kol comme le dos, bar comme porter – ils seraient des dizaines de milliers, comme ceux-là, dans toute la province... Mais parce qu'ils vont prendre tous les risques, défilent sur des pistes verglacées et une soldatesque iranienne qui tire sans sommation, parce qu'ils nous font aussi penser aux Bosniaques qui ravitaillaient Sarajevo par la piste du mont Igman ou aux internationaux qui franchissaient les Pyrénées pour rallier la République espagnole, nous les voyons comme des résistants d'une autre sorte. C'est à l'un d'eux, 70 ans, en deuil de son fils aîné qui était son compagnon de piste et qu'il a laissé là-haut, au début de l'hiver, pétrifié dans la neige, que je cède le dernier mot de cette traversée des trois Kurdistan. «Les enfants de mes enfants, leurs enfants sont-ils condamnés, a-t-il dit, avant que ne se mette en route la cordée des portefaix, à cette existence de fourmis humaines ? Continueront-ils de vivre, de faire vivre et de mourir pour ces bouts de plastique et ces cartons ? Et combien de générations faudra-t-il pour que leur espérance ne leur soit plus ce fardeau ?» La nation kurde a payé trop cher son endurance et son rêve vaincu d'un Kurdistan indépendant, libre et sans frontières. Rendons-lui justice. Il est temps.



Avec Fawza Youssef, écrivaine, membre de la direction collégiale du Rojava; © DR.



## SDF commander says Kurds ready for dialogue if Ankara is sincere

**T**ens of thousands of people have been displaced by the fighting, and dozens of civilians have died. US forces have re-deployed and Russian and Syria regime forces have stepped in to fill the vacuum. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to expand military operations in northeastern Syria, all the way to the Iraqi border. An atmosphere of fear and quiet defiance prevails in northeastern Syria or Rojava (western Kurdistan). Mazlum Kobane, the famously calm commander of the SDF, is doing his utmost to navigate these stormy waters, seeking on the one hand to balance relations between Russia, the United States and the regime while trying to unite the Syrian Kurdish political parties.

**Al-Monitor sat down with Mazlum Kobane in a secret location in northeastern Syria for over an hour.**

Here are the highlights of the interview that was conducted in Turkish and lightly edited for clarity:

**Al-Monitor: A lot has happened since we last met in March 2019. Turkey invaded parts of the northeast, a move that you said at the time would trigger "Syria's second great war." How has Turkey's Oct. 9 Operation Peace Spring impacted your region?**

Kobane: The Turkish invasion caused tremendous harm to our people. Turkey invaded a part of Syria. It brought terrorist groups into the areas inhabited by our people. I am referring to al-Qaeda-linked groups, radical Islamic groups. Our people suffered mass displacement. They were subjected to demographic engineering and ethnic cleansing. Those Kurds can no longer return to their homes. Should they do so they face death. Arabs displaced by the conflict are also unable to return. They are viewed as traitors by Turkey for having co-existed with us and accepted our administration's rule. They have become targets as well. They are

forced to survive in miserable conditions, to live in camps and deprived of their livelihoods.

In operational terms, prior to the Turkish invasion we only used to work with the US-led coalition. Now the Russians are here and Syrian regime forces are on the border.

We are trying to adjust. It's a time consuming and a delicate business dealing with these different actors in a more complex environment. But we are managing.

**Al-Monitor: There were reports that the Iranians helped broker that agreement.**

threat to its national security. That argument is now dead. They can no longer accuse us of seeking to dismember Syria, of seeking to break away from Syria.

Then there is the massive outpouring of support for the Kurds from across the globe. The support was particularly striking in the United States where we saw members of Congress from both sides of the aisle rush to our defense and condemn [US President Donald] Trump's decision to withdraw US troops. President Trump has since called me. Vice President Mike Pence has called me. The whole world knows who the Kurds are and

will contribute greatly in helping us reach an agreement with the Syrian regime.

**Al-Monitor: Yet by your own admission there has been no progress in your talks with the regime. If Russia is as keen to help you as you say it is, why has there been no movement so far? Russia has also developed close ties with Turkey. Turkey's national intelligence chief, Hakan Fidan, and his Syrian counterpart Ali Mamlouk met in Moscow recently. It seems Russia is using its relationship with Turkey to pressure you into breaking off your alliance with the United States.**



*It has been more than three months since Turkey launched its most recent offensive against the United States' Syrian Kurdish partners who lead the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).*

Kobane: No they did not. On the positive side, our people continue to stand with us, to trust us fully. No changes there. Moreover, we no longer have any point of contact with the Turkish forces. The regime forces are currently deployed along the length of the Turkish border in northeastern Syria — that is to say, they replaced our forces there. Turkey would constantly cite our presence along its border as a

feels sympathy for us. Unlike Turkey, we do not need to spend millions of dollars on lobbying to defend ourselves. And it is because we have a just cause.

Finally, I believe that Russia's presence will have a positive effect in terms of solving the problems of northeastern Syria. Russia has great influence in Syria and we know it is eager for a solution and

Kobane: It's true that Russia is looking out for its own interests and as such there is a parallel track of Russia trying to patch up relations between Ankara and Damascus. We told them we understand their relations with Turkey but that these should not be used against us. Yet we know that such a risk exists. If they choose that path it will not be in their interest. Syria is not the Syria of pre-2011. And we can never

go back to the old Syria. Take the Adana agreement [signed between Ankara and Damascus in allowing Turkey to pursue Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, fighters inside Syrian territory]. Russia is talking about reviving it by way of getting Turkey and Syria to shake hands. It won't work.

**AI-Monitor: Why not?**

Kobane: Because Turkey is openly supporting opposition groups against the regime and most significantly the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey's ties with the Muslim Brotherhood are strategic in nature and are not confined to Syria. Turkey will not easily forfeit its relations with them. And for as long as this holds true Turkey cannot make peace with the Syrian regime.

AI-Monitor: But Russia's dealings with Turkey go beyond Syria. Its overarching goal appears to be to use Turkey to drive a wedge inside NATO. And as we saw in Afrin, Russia doesn't hesitate to offer Kurdish carrots to Turkey when it deems fit. Are you not worried that this scenario could be repeated east of the Euphrates? Erdogan constantly talks about expanding operations all the way to the Iraqi border. There are claims that Turkey wants to go after al-Qahtaniyah next, which is mainly Arab and has oil. He has also asked the Russians to "give us the oil" in and around Rmeilan. He says it is to help pay for housing for Syrian refugees in Turkey in order to resettle them inside Syria, in the border areas east of the Euphrates. This presumably ties in with Turkey's alleged plans for thinning out the Kurdish population along the border.

Kobane: Yes, we are aware of these plans. We know that Erdogan wants to go after Kobane as well. He views Kobane as an obstacle to linking the areas Turkey just invaded with Idlib. We do not dismiss any of these threats as empty rhetoric. We take them seriously. Erdogan wants to implement the map that he held up during his address at the United Nations General Assembly. That map was of Rojava.

**AI-Monitor: Will Russia allow Turkey to pursue such plans?**

Kobane: There are two agreements. The one between Erdogan

and [Russian President Vladimir] Putin that was signed in Sochi. Then there is the other agreement signed in Ankara with US Vice President Pence. Both stand in the way of further Turkish intervention in our territory. We accepted both of those agreements. We were consulted about them and are a party to them. We complied with all of our obligations, but Turkey has not. It is violating the provisions of the agreement with the United States. That agreement protects the rights of minorities living in the areas under Turkish control. Yet Turkey is changing the demographic makeup of the area. It is abusing the rights of ethnic and religious minorities living there. It is the responsibility of Russia and the United States to ensure that Turkey does not embark on any further adventures.

**AI-Monitor: So far Erdogan has pretty much done everything he has said he will do. And neither Russia nor the United States has stopped him.**

Kobane: Sadly not.

**AI-Monitor: Our sources tell us that the US State Department's Syria team has floated the idea of sending oil to Turkey via Tell Abyad as a way of easing tensions with you.**

Kobane: The Americans never mentioned anything of the kind to us. In any case, the oil belongs to all of the Syrian people and all of the Syrian people should benefit from it. We have controlled the oil for several years now and we have done our utmost to ensure that all of the Syria people, not only those living in the areas under our control, benefit from the oil. Syrian oil can be sold to foreign countries only with the consent of the Syrian people and that of the central government in Damascus.

**AI-Monitor: But Trump says US troops are staying in Syria "for the oil" and has talked about getting US oil companies extracting and selling it.**

Kobane: The oil is a form of justification for keeping US troops here. They say they will defend the oil against the Islamic State [IS] and that they will defeat IS remnants to prevent them from regrouping, from staging a comeback. US troops are

redeploying in our region in line with this new plan. The redeployment is still ongoing. In fact, there is still no clarity about whether or how long US troops will continue to be here. It is up to Trump.

Eradicating IS is very hard. The withdrawal of US troops [from the Turkish border] gave IS a big boost. This problem cannot be resolved in months. It will take years.

**AI-Monitor: So you believe US troops must stay here for the long haul?**

Kobane: We aren't saying as Trump did that America will remain here for hundreds of years, or that they should remain to defend us against attacks from other forces. But the United States bears a responsibility toward us. We fought against IS together and we made many enemies because of our partnership with the United States. For example, before the Americans came we had good relations with Turkey. The United States has a responsibility now to help ensure a just political solution to the Syrian conflict, to help ensure that all the Syrian people, including the Kurds, are given their full rights in a new, democratic Syria, all enshrined in a democratic constitution.

**AI-Monitor: Are we any closer to the outcome you describe?**

Kobane: If we stay the course, we might just get there this year. But this is our foremost expectation from the Americans, to help us get there. Their withdrawal should be pegged to a political solution in Syria. And it is true that oil and other resources in the territory under our control provide leverage to this end.

**AI-Monitor: You mention oil and IS, but the other reason the United States says it is remaining in Syria is Iran — and we just saw Iran's top commander Qasem Soleimani die in a US drone attack in Iraq. Soleimani was the man who led and organized Iranian proxy forces in Syria. What impact has his death had on the balance of power in Syria? Iran is Syrian President Bashar al Assad's biggest backer. Has the Assad regime been weakened by his death? Does this provide an opportunity for Russia to have more influence over Assad and help wrest concessions for the**

**Kurds among other things? Because we know that Iran is resisting granting rights to the Kurds for fear it will encourage its own Kurds to ask for the same.**

Kobane: Soleimani's assassination will without question have an impact in Syria. And it will weaken Iran's influence in Syria. It was totally unexpected.

**AI-Monitor: Were you surprised by his death?**

Kobane: Yes. And all of those who believe in a military solution to the Syrian issue need to draw lessons from Soleimani's fate. Only a political solution can work for Syria, not brute military force.

**AI-Monitor: So has this freed Russia's hand for a political solution?**

Kobane: We will need to wait and see. But it needs to be noted that once again IS will benefit from this situation.

**AI-Monitor: Because Iranian proxies were fighting IS?**

Kobane: Yes. We haven't yet experienced the effects of this within the territories under our control, but it is easy to observe this happening elsewhere in Syria [in areas under the regime's control].

**AI-Monitor: Could US forces in Syria become a target for Iran? Or could Iran target the SDF by way of punishing the United States?**

Kobane: We have not observed any such moves of this nature so far. Much hangs on the degree of control and support our forces are able to maintain.

**AI-Monitor: Going back to Oct. 9 when Turkey launched its attack. Can you walk us through what happened exactly? Because you had through US mediation been negotiating with Turkey and agreed to let Turkish troops to carry out joint patrols in your territory. You agreed to pull back your forces up to 30 kilometers [19 miles] from the Turkish border in some areas. You removed your heavy weapons, filled in your trenches. Then Turkey invaded. Did Trump capitulate to Erdogan in a single phone call?**

Kobane: Erdogan has good personal relations with Trump and Putin. But rather than focus on indi-

viduals we need to look at the broader picture. The determining factor is the interests of states. The interests of the United States, Russia and Turkey. They cast aside the sacrifices of our people in the name of such interests, setting the stage for the betrayal of the Kurds.

**AI-Monitor: How are America's interests served by Turkey attacking you, their allies?**

Kobane: Turkey is a NATO member. Erdogan has played that card well against the United States and Russia. The United States does not want to lose Turkey and does not want Turkey to break away from NATO, because this means Turkey will join the Russian camp. Therefore, Erdogan has been permitted to do everything he wants. But time will tell whether all of this is in Turkey's own interests or not.

**AI-Monitor: People here in Rojava seem very focused on Libya now. Libya has become something of a barometer of how much more Turkey can flex its muscles unhindered, and also a test of its relations with Russia with its attendant consequences for their partnership in Syria.**

Kobane: Turkey and Russia want to create a new Astana in Libya, but it is highly questionable whether they can succeed. Libya is quite different to Syria. There are many different states and actors intervening in Libya. Besides, when it is obvious to all how the Astana process has fared thus far it is unlikely that the Libyan people will allow a similar scenario to unfold in their country. Nor will the other states get involved in Libya.

**AI-Monitor: There is speculation that Russia is using Libya as a bargaining chip with Turkey over Idlib. In exchange for Turkish acquiescence for a full-scale regime assault on Idlib Russia will humor Turkish ambitions in Libya, or something along those lines.**

Kobane: I disagree. It is bigger than that. Erdogan wants to become a regional superpower. At the same time he wants to buoy his domestic standing through his posturing in Libya. He made a move. He signed a military and maritime agreement with the [Tripoli-based] Government of National Accord and in doing so elevated Turkey's role in Libya. He

holds this card now. But the other states involved in Libya are surely unhappy with this and will push back. Turkey will have a tough time in Libya.

**AI-Monitor: Is Erdogan aware of this?**

Kobane: I think Erdogan is either deluding himself or that those around him are either intentionally or unintentionally misleading him. Libya is not Syria. Syria and Turkey share borders. Libya and Turkey do not. Turkey is now carrying Syrian rebel mercenaries to Libya. Turkey used them against the Syrian regime. It whipped up Arab chauvinism and used them against the Kurds. None of this will fly in Libya. I know these groups. They fought us. They went for money to Libya but they will fail. The same people in [Turkey's national spy agency] who dealt with the Syria file have been advising Erdogan on Libya. I suppose they want to repeat their operations in Syria, which they deem to be successful, in Libya now.

**AI-Monitor: Do you mean Hakan Fidan?**

Kobane: His team. But they will not get what they want. We are hearing reports that the Syrian mercenaries who were sent to Libya are already beginning to unravel. One group went for the sole purpose of seeking asylum in Europe. Seventeen of these guys went from Tripoli to Italy.

**AI-Monitor: Getting back to your own relations with Turkey. Your people have suffered immensely and there is a lot of anger. But despite all of this do you see any chance of resuming some form of dialogue with Turkey, or more precisely with Erdogan? After all, you did have direct talks with Turkey when the peace process between Turkey and imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was still ongoing. Your forces worked with the Turkish Armed Forces to transport the remains of Suleiman Shah from their site near Kobani to their current location in Esme near the Turkish border to protect them from an IS attack. Ocalan called this the "Esme spirit." Can the spirit of Esme be revived?**

Kobane: Why not? We know that Turkey wants to return Suleiman Shah's remains to Kobani and to rebuild his tomb there. Provided that

Turkey does not mistake our goodwill for weakness we would be happy to help Turkey, to coordinate with the Turkish Armed Forces and to conduct such an operation in a spirit of peace and based on the understanding that this spirit of peace will be reciprocal.

There are other confidence-building, goodwill gestures that we would be prepared to consider.

As you know, I made a call to the people of Idlib. I told them they are welcome to seek shelter in the areas under our control, that our doors are open to them. We know that Turkey, which already has a huge burden with nearly 4 million Syrians living there, is deeply concerned by a fresh influx of up to a million Syrian refugees from Idlib because of escalating regime attacks on Idlib. Our call to the people of Idlib helps relieve Turkey's burden. Again, in the spirit of goodwill and above all on humanitarian grounds we are ready to work with Turkey if and when the need arises to help move civilians out of harm's way in Idlib and bring them here. If such actions help the Syrian people, serve the interests of my people living in the areas that we are responsible for, and contribute to peace, security and stability in our region — why not. But Turkey should never mistake our goodwill for weakness and should be prepared to reciprocate our goodwill.

**AI-Monitor: Objectively speaking the Kurds did Turkey a huge favor by helping destroy the IS caliphate. IS were right on Turkey's border and staged deadly attacks inside Turkey. That might be another area for potential cooperation?**

Kobane: In the past the Turkish state facilitated IS' movements inside Turkey and our assessment is that the threat to Turkey from IS remains significant. IS counts what it calls "Konstantiniye" or Turkey among its so-called provinces. IS leaders we capture and interrogate tell us that they still have cells inside Turkey. IS foreign fighters without exception all came to Syria via Turkey and are now escaping Syria via Turkey. This, in turn, suggests that there remains a secret, unwritten pact between Turkey and IS. Turkey used IS against the Kurds. It then used IS as a pretext to invade Syria. All of this will have a boomerang effect on

Turkey. The risk for Turkey is great. We would be prepared to share our intelligence on IS to help Turkey fend off this threat provided it is sincere about such cooperation. But Turkey has its own very unique relationship, unlike any others, with IS.

**AI-Monitor: Part of the problem with Turkey seems to be that its own Kurdish problem is held hostage to Turkey's relations with your administration and vice versa. One of the main reasons the peace process between Turkey and the PKK collapsed in 2015 was over its demands that the Syrian Kurds join the opposition and fight for regime change, and that the PKK give up its fight in exchange for Turkey not attacking you. Do you believe that your life would be a lot easier if Turkey and your administration just dealt with each other on a bilateral basis with more modest goals, while you go about your business of seeking accommodation with Damascus?**

Kobane: First of all, the Kurdish problem in Turkey and Syria are intertwined. The Kurds in Iraq are also part of this equation. We cannot separate them. Whenever a step toward peace is taken in Turkey its positive effects are felt here in Rojava. Likewise, any positive gesture by Turkey toward Syria's Kurds has a positive impact on the Kurds in Turkey. By the same token hostile moves by Turkey have a negative impact on both sides of the border.

I know that the United States is keen to help broker peace between us and Turkey. President Trump gave me his word in our first telephone call. He said, "I will talk to Erdogan and we must fix the problem in Syria." I said "OK, please do." We do want to end our differences with Turkey.

And if we do, this will definitely ease the situation of the Kurds in Turkey and help shift Turkish public opinion in favor of peace. In my letter to him I emphasized the need for Turkey to address the Kurdish problem within its own borders as well. He promised to do whatever it takes to help us.

I repeat, we have tried our best to fix our problems with Turkey. As the SDF, as the YPG [People's Protection Units], we have had direct talks with Turkey in the past and are ready to do so again. We want peace.



That said, none of this means that Turkey is responsible for fixing Syria's Kurdish issue or that we are responsible for fixing Turkey's Kurdish issue. We have repeatedly said we are not a party to the conflict inside Turkey. The Kurdish problem here is Syria's domestic problem. And we can help resolve it with the help of all the countries that are currently involved in Syria — Turkey included. But ultimately this needs to be negotiated with the government in Damascus. We are all Syrians and I am confident that we can.

**AI-Monitor: Ocalan lived in Syria for 20 years and is hailed by many Syrian Kurds as a leader. He could in theory weigh in?**

Kobane: He mentioned this in his most recent statement [in May 2019 — the Syrian Kurds should take Turkey's security concerns into consideration] and we supported it.

**AI-Monitor: Turning to your relations with members of the Syrian Kurdish opposition, the parties gathered under the umbrella of the Kurdistan National Council [KNC]. There are efforts initiated by you for reconciliation. How are they going?**

Kobane: Kurdish national unity is an extremely important matter, particularly now in Rojava. We have embarked on a new process to resolve our differences. Not out of weakness or because of the recent setbacks we suffered as some claim. We the SDF are a military force. Our political representative up to now is the Autonomous Administration [of northeastern Syria] and Democratic Unity Party [PYD]. We said that the SDF should be represented by all the Syrian Kurdish political parties. The PYD should not be the only party to represent the Kurds in talks with Damascus. We met with all of these parties on this basis and all of them, the KNC included, said they were ready. Nobody refused.

The KNC asked for some confidence building measures. And we complied. That they be able to operate and organize freely in Rojava — they can. That we free all prisoners — we have. The remaining issue is missing people. There are eight such people and seven of them disappeared eight years ago. It is not new. Nobody has disappeared since our Autonomous Administration and the SDF were

formed. This is a huge achievement considering the thousands of people who have disappeared elsewhere in the country. After all, we are in a conflict situation. Since 2014 nobody has gone missing in our area save for one KNC member. We found those responsible for his disappearance. We are continuing our inquiry.

And don't forget that we did sign three agreements with the KNC that were brokered by the Kurdistan Regional Government [but were never implemented] in the past. The issues cited by the KNC predate our existence so in that sense don't obstruct a new agreement.

**AI-Monitor: What does then?**

Kobane: There are different factions within the KNC. Those who live here in Rojava with us and operate here who want to work with us for the collective good of our people. But then there are those in the diaspora, and particularly in Turkey, who are opposed to this.

**AI-Monitor: Can the Kurdistan Regional Government help sway them as before?**

Kobane: I think so, particularly brother Nechirvan [Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq]. I spoke to him about this and he agreed to help. Brother Massoud [Barzani, chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party] has made some positive remarks in this regard. But I really think they could be doing more. If they really want to they can get all of the KNC to agree.

We would like to see results this year. And I am announcing this for the first time to you.

Everybody is ready and we are going to hold a conference soon on the unity of Rojava.

**AI-Monitor: When?**

Kobane: We will be holding it. Most of the parties in Rojava are ready for this and to take part. And our hope is that the KNC will join us.

**AI-Monitor: Isn't part of the problem that you are asking the KNC to leave the Turkish-based Syrian opposition?**

Kobane: We never put forth any such demand. On the contrary, it is the Syrian opposition that probably wants them to stay away from us. We

want them to stay in the Geneva talks as part of the opposition so they can achieve something on behalf of the Kurdish people.

**AI-Monitor: What about the KNC linked Roj Pesh forces. Are they on the table?**

Kobane: It is no longer an issue regardless of whether they operate under our command or not. The SDF is a very large force.

**AI-Monitor: How large?**

Kobane: Together with our internal security forces — the Asayish — there are more than 100,000 of us.

**AI-Monitor: Who pays their salaries?**

Kobane: The Autonomous Administration does.

**AI-Monitor: Didn't the United States pay SDF fighters' salaries?**

Kobane: No, that was in the past. They paid a portion of their salaries and their contribution represents a very small part of our budget.

**AI-Monitor: We hear that you have become more of a diplomat than a military commander in recent months, traveling to places like Geneva and Dubai. What is the nature of your relations with the Gulf states?**

Kobane: I will speak about these relations generally. Our relations with Arab countries are good. We have good political relations with Egypt and we are working together with the Egyptians to hold a Cairo Congress.

**AI-Monitor: What is that?**

Kobane: It is a platform for seeking a solution to the Syrian conflict. It is not new. We participated in the past, but it was not a very successful experience. This time we are going to be full-blooded participants.

**AI-Monitor: We heard that the SDF has an office in Cairo now.**

Kobane: Yes, we do. To sum up we have good working relations with Arab countries including those in the Gulf. A lot of it is to do with our cooperation against IS, exchanging intelligence on IS. I want to stress that none of this is directed against other countries and especially not against Turkey. Syria is an Arab country and it is natural that fellow Arab countries should want to help find a solution to the conflict there.

**AI-Monitor: Finally, there are the IS prisoners, the foreign fighters and their families who are a big burden on your administration. Are you making any progress in getting their governments to take them back.**

Kobane: It is mostly a political problem. And none of these countries are doing enough to help fix it. Take Iraq. There are 30,000 Iraqi nationals in al-Hol. They haven't taken a single one back even though they keep promising they will. We have Iraqi prisoners they aren't repatriating. So, it is not just the Europeans.

**AI-Monitor: What about Turkey? Are there many Turkish IS fighters and their families.**

Kobane: There are hundreds of them. But Turkey hasn't taken this up with us in any serious way. If they do we would be happy to cooperate. We have 12,000 IS prisoners and tens of thousand of their family members. This problem cannot be solved piece meal and through secret deals, and secret thanks behind closed doors. I repeat, it is a political issue. They committed crimes against our people and it is our right to prosecute them. But we need political support for this, to be treated as political interlocutors. So far no country has treated us as such. And the presence of these fighters is a source of strength and inspiration for IS. The camp in al-Hol functions like IS headquarters. Therefore, the IS prisoner issue need to be treated as a political problem and addressed with the SDF and the Autonomous Administration.

**AI-Monitor: Critics say you are using the IS detainees to win political legitimacy.**

Kobane: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed something to that effect. He claimed that the SDF was releasing various IS prisoners in exchange for money. This is untrue. We have been working closely with the Russian authorities on Russian IS fighters and their families, of which there are many. We have handed over 70 IS fighters to them so far. We were offended by Lavrov's comments. These people came from Europe, from Asia, from across the globe and fought against us and committed crimes against us — and we fought back. Our people, the SDF and the Autonomous Administration, are owed big thanks for their sacrifice.



Ariane Griessel  
23 janvier 2020

## Un réseau soupçonné d'avoir aidé 10 000 migrants à passer clandestinement en Grande-Bretagne démantelé

**P**our les migrants, l'espoir d'eldorado passait par des aires de repos, en bord de route, entre Le Mans et Poitiers. C'est dans ces lieux que leur était fixé le rendez-vous, celui du dernier trajet vers la Grande-Bretagne.

Venus majoritairement du Kurdistan irakien, mais aussi d'Iran, d'Afghanistan et de Syrie, 10 000 personnes ont ainsi répondu à l'appel des passeurs, selon les organismes Europol et Eurojust, chargés d'aider à la coordination des actions des différents services de police.

### 7 000 euros par trajet

Démarrée en août 2018, l'enquête menée par les douanes et la police française, ainsi que par la police néerlandaise, a mené, en ce début de semaine, à l'arrestation de 23 suspects qui se trouvaient encore, ce jeudi, en garde à vue. Parmi eux, 19 ont été interpellés en France, et quatre aux Pays-Bas.

Chaque trajet, facturé 7 000 euros par passagers, se faisait dans des conditions décrites par les autorités comme "potentiellement mortelles", dans des camions frigorifiques dans lesquelles s'entassaient les candidats à la traversée. Une fois atteintes les côtes de la Manche, le reste du "voyage" se faisait en bateau pneumatique, jusqu'au Royaume-Uni.



Patrouilles de sgandrame pour empêcher les migrants de tenter la traversées de la Manche sur des petits bateaux, depuis les plages de la Côte d'Opale © Radio France / Matthieu Darriet

Lors de leurs investigations en France, menées sous l'égide du parquet de Rennes, les enquêteurs ont repéré l'implication de véhicules immatriculés aux Pays-Bas, les incitant à collaborer avec leurs homologues néerlandais.

La suite des recherche a permis de mettre au jour un système de paiement "hawala",

sorte de paiement via des intermédiaires, de la main à la main. Ce système les a menés jusqu'à un suspect interpellé aux Pays-Bas, chargé de collecter les fonds.

La nationalité des personnes interpellées n'avait pas été précisée ce jeudi. Cinq lieux différents ont également été fouillés lors de cette enquête, et des armes saisies.

**Le Point**

EXCLUSIF

Quentin Raverdy  
23/01/2020

## « L'Occident cède au chantage d'Erdogan »

C'est depuis sa cellule que le leader kurde Selahattin Demirtas s'est confié au « Point ». Sa santé se dégrade, mais il refuse d'implorer un geste du président turc.

Il y a trois ans et demi, dans le chaos de l'après-coup d'État manqué, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan portait un coup dévastateur à l'opposition démocratique de son pays. En novembre 2016, avec une dizaine d'autres élus, le coprésident du parti prokurde HDP Selahattin Demirtas était jeté en prison.



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan. © ERCIN TOP / ANADOLU AGENCY / Anadolu Agency

tiens en [Turquie](#) et dans le monde et les demandes de libération de la [Cour européenne des droits de l'homme](#), l'avocat droit-de-l'homme est maintenu en prison par le régime turc. Noyé sous un torrent d'enquêtes et d'accusations, il risque aujourd'hui 142 années de prison. Bien qu'affaibli physiquement, il semble ne rien avoir perdu de sa détermination. Pour *Le Point*, Selahattin Demirtas revient

sur sa vie en prison, ses conditions d'incarcération, la « trahison de l'Occident », Erdogan, le futur du HDP ou encore le pouvoir de la littérature.

**Le Point : Ces dernières semaines, des inquiétudes concernant votre état de santé sont apparues. Votre sœur a même affirmé que l'on refusait de vous soigner. Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui, comment allez-vous ?**

**Selahattin Demirtas :** J'ai malheureusement été confronté à des problèmes de santé qui ne peuvent pas être traités en prison. Les conditions de vie difficiles en détention favorisent le développement de ma maladie et il est absolument impossible que l'état inquiétant de mon estomac, de mes veines et de mon œsophage s'améliore ici. Mais je garde malgré tout un moral fort.

*Ma femme représente aujourd'hui ma voix, mon souffle et mon plus grand soutien.*

**Vous êtes incarcéré à Edirne, dans l'extrême ouest de la Turquie, à plus de 1 300 kilomètres de votre famille. Comment vivez-vous cet éloignement forcé ?**

C'est en effet une décision qui vise spécifiquement à punir ma famille.

**Dehors, votre femme, Basak, joue un rôle important pour continuer de faire entendre votre message. Pouvez-vous nous en parler ?**

Basak est depuis vingt-cinq ans ma partenaire de vie, mais aussi ma camarade. Quand j'étais en liberté, nous nous sommes toujours soutenus. Elle représente aujourd'hui ma voix, mon souffle et mon plus grand soutien, s'efforçant avec dévouement de continuer à lutter à l'extérieur. Elle est une grande source d'honneur et de fierté pour moi. Elle agit de plus pour que soit mise à l'agenda la situation de nombreux détenus politiques, et pas seulement la mienne.

*L'écriture, un acte révolutionnaire qui me libère, détruit les murs.*

**Depuis votre incarcération, vous avez écrit deux livres\*, un troisième est en cours de parution. Pouvez-vous expliquer le rôle de l'écriture dans cette nouvelle vie ?**

L'écriture est mon acte de protestation le plus fort ici. C'est un acte révolutionnaire qui me libère, détruit les murs et me permet d'aller à la rencontre du monde extérieur.

**Vous publierez prochainement Leylan : quelques mots sur ce nouveau projet ?**

*Leylan* est un roman que j'écris depuis près de deux ans. « Leylan », en kurde, signifie mirage. Dans cette fiction constituée de couches entremêlées, j'ai essayé de raconter, au



Selahattin Demirtas est incarcéré depuis 2016. © Alexander Zemlianichenko /AP/ SIPA

travers de deux histoires d'amour différentes, le lien entre les particularités des relations humaines et les développements politiques et sociaux. Du point de vue philosophique, ce roman a aussi été l'occasion de débattre du sens de la vie, du bonheur et de liberté. Il ne m'a tout de même pas été facile d'écrire sur ces sujets depuis ma cellule. Le vrai verdict reviendra évidemment aux lecteurs. J'attends leur réaction avec impatience.

**Abdullah Zeydan est un camarade du HDP, mais, depuis deux ans et demi, il est aussi votre compagnon de cellule et votre premier lecteur. Pouvez-vous nous parler de lui et de votre vie commune ?**

Mon camarade Abdullah Zeydan, également collègue député, est une personne très précieuse avec laquelle j'ai noué une amitié de lutte depuis de nombreuses années. Il est mon plus proche soutien et ma force psychologique au quotidien ici. J'ai beaucoup bénéficié de sa présence à mes côtés au cours de l'écriture de mes livres, de la préparation de mes discours de défense pour les procès et sur bien d'autres sujets. L'un pour l'autre, comme des âmes sœurs, nous avons réussi ici à créer une vie productive à deux.

*Nous estimons que ce serait déshonorant de demander notre libération à Erdogan.*

**Vous vous considérez comme « un otage politique » et, lors de vos procès, vous refusez de demander au président Erdogan votre libération. Pouvez-vous nous expliquer ?**

Nous avons tous été mis en prison sur les instructions et les menaces brandies par Erdogan en direct dans les médias. Le gouvernement Erdogan a démis de leurs fonctions près de 5 000 juges et procureurs (ce qui représente la moitié de leurs effectifs). Les magistrats ont peur d'être renvoyés ou incarcérés s'ils prennent une décision susceptible de provoquer la colère d'Erdogan. Il est donc impossible que nous soyons libérés sans qu'il donne son accord. Nous estimons que ce serait déshonorant de demander notre libération à Erdogan. Notre sort dépendra donc de l'issue de notre lutte politique.

**Malgré les appels de vos nombreux soutiens en Turquie et en Europe, les demandes de libération de la CEDH et d'un tribunal turc, vous êtes maintenu en prison. Pourquoi ces résistances des autorités à appliquer ces décisions ? En tant que figure du mouvement politique kurde, représentez-vous une trop grande « menace » pour Erdogan si vous êtes libéré ?**

Erdogan se méfie beaucoup de moi, il a même peur. Depuis trois élections, il essaie de gagner en me gardant en prison. Mais, dorénavant, mon maintien en détention ne lui

permet plus de gagner. Il a d'ailleurs subi une lourde défaite aux dernières municipales, et je suis sûr qu'elle sera encore plus grande aux prochaines élections législatives.

**Même si vous n'êtes plus à la tête du HDP et que vous êtes retiré, de force, de la vie publique. Espérez-vous encore pouvoir jouer un rôle politique dans le pays ?**

Les relations que j'entretiens avec le peuple et avec mon parti sont très fortes et fondées sur la confiance. Je peux donc jouer un rôle politique tout en n'étant pas à la tête du parti, car le peuple croit en moi et me fait confiance. J'écoute le peuple et prends mes décisions en fonction de lui.

*Le monde occidental ferme les yeux sur les violations graves des droits de l'homme*

**En Turquie, les arrestations d'opposants, les procès politiques et le musellement de la presse se poursuivent. Une situation face à laquelle les gouvernements occidentaux semblent s'être résignés. Selon vous, pourquoi nous sommes-nous habitués à « co-exister » avec cette Turquie autocratique ?**

Le monde occidental ferme les yeux sur les violations graves des droits de l'homme et l'arbitraire en Turquie en cédant au chantage d'Erdogan sur des sujets comme la crise des réfugiés, la Syrie, la Méditerranée orientale. C'est, selon moi, une grande honte et un déshonneur pour les gouvernements membres de l'UE car, ce faisant, ils tournent avant tout le dos à leurs propres valeurs et aux valeurs de l'UE.

**Même élus démocratiquement l'an dernier, les maires du HDP ont été systématiquement remplacés de force par des administrateurs aux pouvoirs extraordinaires (financiers, sécuritaires, culturels). Comment convaincre alors les électeurs de continuer à vous soutenir et continuer à militer ?**

Nos électeurs font preuve d'une grande capacité à défendre leur dignité, malgré une répression féroce.



Au fur et à mesure, il est évident que leur foi dans les urnes s'affaiblit. La direction du parti cherche néanmoins à maintenir l'espoir des électeurs en persistant sur la voie de la

politique démocratique en dépit des circonstances. Si cette tâche est difficile, nous n'avons pourtant d'autre choix que de réussir. Au-delà des élections, notre parti accorde égale-

ment une grande importance au développement de la lutte par des actions dans la société civile, comme des événements politiques, des meetings, ou des manifestations ;

c'est d'ailleurs de cette façon que nous parvenons à nous maintenir debout.

*\*Et tournera la roue et L'Aurore* aux Éditions Emmanuelle Collas.



Jan. 23, 2020

## Iraqi governor calls on Kurdish leader to help resolve national crises

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – The governor of the Iraqi province of Muthanna, Ahmed Menfi, met on Wednesday with senior Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani to discuss ongoing domestic unrest and international hostilities playing out on the ground in the embattled nation.

Menfi led a provincial delegation to the office of Barzani—who is the former president of the Kurdistan Region and the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)—located at KDP headquarters outside the city of Erbil.

Aside from discussing “the political situation and the latest developments in Iraq,” read a statement, the governor “expressed his appreciation for Barzani’s stances regarding the ongoing political turmoil in Iraq,” and for aiding the provinces in southern parts of the country.

The delegation also called on Barzani to take an active role in resolving the two simultaneous national crises now enveloping Iraq.

Since early October, anti-government protesters have taken to the streets by the



KDP leader Masoud Barzani (right) and the governor of Iraq's Muthanna province, Ahmed Menfi (left), meet in Erbil, Jan. 23, 2020. (Photo: Barzani's office)

tens of thousands to express long-held grievances resulting from the lack of jobs, inadequate public services, and institutional corruption. Unofficial statistics estimate that close to 600 protesters have been killed in clashes with security forces and Iran-backed militias.

At the same time, as tensions between arch-foes Iran and the US have boiled over on Iraqi soil, Baghdad has struggled to balance its relations with the US—Iraq's ally in the fight against the so-called Is-

lamic State—and Iran, which backs militia groups and has entrenched itself in Iraqi politics.

Related Article: Iraqi president at Davos: 'Our interest does not lie in being drawn into conflicts that are not of our making'

Governor Menfi has visited Erbil on multiple occasions, meeting with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities to coordinate on many fronts, most notably on issues relating to last year's

discovery of mass graves in Muthanna.

Read More: In 2019, a total of 18 mass graves discovered in Iraq

In mid-2019, Manfi told Kurdistan 24 that teams had found two mass graves containing Kurds believed to have been killed during the former Baathist regime's deadly Anfal campaign.

Editing by John J. Catherine

# "Usage de phosphore blanc au Rojava" Rapport Médical

**J'**aimerais vous exprimer mes sincères remerciements pour avoir participé à cette conférence.

Je m'appelle Abbas Mansouran, je viens de Shiraz, en Iran, et je suis de nationalité suédoise depuis 1991. Dans la publication des documents concernant l'usage de bombes chimiques au Rojava par l'armée turque, nous avons brièvement fourni :

Un rapport publié par Les Initiatives de Défense des Droits au Rojava (RDI), en date du 10/01/2020, et qui sera disponible en fin de conférence

Un document remis aujourd'hui publiquement pour la première fois, qui est le résultat du laboratoire qui confirme l'usage de phosphore blanc par le régime turc, pourtant interdit d'après l'OPCW (Organisation pour l'Interdiction des Armes Chimiques) et la Convention sur Certaines Armes Classiques (CCW) des Nations Unies.

Le troisième document est une copie des échanges de mails de l'OPCW les 21-22 Janvier 2020.

Permettez-moi s'il vous plaît de faire quelques brèves observations sur le Rojava :

J'ai voyagé au Rojava pour la première fois en 2018. Ma motivation pour aller au Rojava sans pour autant être membre de quelconque parti politique était volontaire et représentait un devoir de solidarité. Là-bas, j'ai vu des Kurdes, Arabes, Assyriens, Arméniens, Turkmènes... issus de différentes cultures, origines ethniques et croyances, qui luttent côte à côte pour bâtir un nouveau monde, avec une dignité humaine et contre les ennemis de l'humanité, l'EI. L'EI a choisi cette région comme le centre de leur gouvernement pour exporter le terrorisme à travers le monde. Là-bas, j'ai bien vu toutes les forces réactionnaires allant de l'EI jusqu'à

terrorisme d'Etat de la Turquie, de l'Iran, de la Syrie...qui occupent et détruisent le territoire.

Le Rojava était complètement occupé et privé d'éducation, de besoins élémentaires médicaux et de laboratoires. Bien que la fumée et les flammes des champs d'haricots et d'olives qui brûlaient recouvraient le ciel, la volonté pour une humanité digne, l'établissement de l'Université de Mésopotamie, des académies, des hôpitaux et des cliniques, des projets urbains et ruraux, l'électricité et des approvisionnements en eaux, détruits et régulièrement exploités par la Turquie et l'EI, les constructions continuaient dans l'espoir d'un futur meilleur.

La Turquie a lancé une invasion militaire le Mercredi 9 Octobre 2019. Cette nouvelle invasion turque au Rojava a commencé avec le bombardement de Qamichli, Serekaniyé (Ras al Ayn) et Grê Spî (Tel Abyad), situés dans la région de Djézireh.



Enfant brûlé à Serê Kañîyê

Depuis le 10 octobre, les embuscades et les massacres se sont intensifiés dans la région. Du 12 au 20 Octobre, les blessés étaient transportés à l'hôpital de Hassaké qui dispose d'installations élémentaires pouvant répondre à des besoins ordinaires et à des urgences qui ne sont pas issues de combats de guerre. Les installations médicales,

les blocs opératoires et l'équipement, l'anesthésie, les chirurgiens et les infirmières qui auraient pu accueillir un si grand nombre de blessés manquaient cruellement.

La Croissant Rouge Kurde, qui est indépendant de la Croix Rouge et qui est organisé uniquement par la population locale du Rojava, a également aidé à transporter les blessés de guerre au centre médical le plus proche, à Tel Tamir et Hassaké. Pour la première fois, nous étions confrontés à des blessures radicalement différentes.

## Caractéristiques des blessés

Les signes et symptômes observés sur les victimes, majoritairement des civils, étaient compatibles avec une exposition aux armes chimiques. L'Armée Turque a pu utiliser non seulement du phosphore blanc mais aussi d'autres formes de bombes chimiques comme les Explosifs de Métaux Inertes Denses

(DIME). Ces alliages s'avèrent être des causes de cancer.

Il a été demandé à une équipe de chercheurs internationaux de venir au Kurdistan d'Irak, où certains brûlés étaient hospitalisés, mais ils ont refusé d'examiner les échantillons de tissus prélevés sur les blessés. L'Organisation pour l'Interdiction

des Armes Chimiques aurait pu envoyer une équipe d'experts pour enquêter.

Vingt d'entre eux sont décédés et plus de 40 avaient été gravement brûlés par des bombes chimiques, dans une région spécifique du canton de Djézireh (régions de Serekaniyé et Tel Abyad) du 10 au 20 Octobre 2019. Plus d'un millier de civils furent tués, des milliers furent blessés. Le siège actuel et complet de la ville et le manque de médicaments ont causé la perte de plusieurs vies. Les Forces Armées Turques et les groupes affiliés soutenus par la Turquie ont attaqué les villages au sol et par des attaques aériennes, en les brûlant jusqu'à les réduire en cendres. Il y a actuellement près de 400.000 réfugiés de guerre déplacés qui n'ont pu prendre avec eux un minimum d'affaires essentielles pour leur survie. Ils sont actuellement à l'abri mais vulnérables aux maladies contagieuses et aux épidémies.

Quoiqu'il en soit, le refus d'analyser les échantillons des victimes ne nous a pas empêché de demander confirmation ailleurs. Nous sommes parvenus à envoyer quelques échantillons à d'autres laboratoires compétents en Europe. Le rapport du laboratoire confirme qu'il y a une corrélation entre les symptômes et les bombes chimiques. Désormais, nous avons les preuves convaincantes.

Il est important de souligner que même avant l'annonce du cessez-le-feu officiel le 18 Octobre, il ne s'est passé un seul jour sans bombardements, par drones ou par des bombardiers et des explosions. Nous avons également relevé des blessés dans la région de Der-e-Zor, qui a été confrontée à la réapparition de Daech 220 kilomètres plus loin, dans la zone occupée depuis Octobre.

Ensuite, la Turquie a mobilisé tous les bandits sous le drapeau turc afin



de tenter de détruire le Rojava; massacres, incendies, viols, kidnapping, meurtres, occupation des villes et villages, des entrepôts, pillages des silos.

La résistance populaire a permis de vaincre l'EI pour sauver les terres occupées par l'EI. Si aujourd'hui les gens peuvent se sentir en sécurité

et à l'abri des marchés d'esclaves, tout comme l'EI et ses associés firent à Shengal, à Mossoul... ils le doivent à la résistance au Rojava. Le mouvement du Rojava a payé un lourd tribut avec au moins 12.000 vies perdues et des dizaines de milliers de blessés. Ils ont sacrifié leurs vies en combattant pour bâtir un monde plus sûr. Vaincre les enne-

mis sans la résistance du Rojava était impossible, c'est pourquoi l'être humain et même l'éco-système sont redevables à tous ces sauveurs du Rojava.

Ainsi, nous avons maintenant en notre possession des preuves médicales et documentaires qui confirment que la Turquie a utilisé des

armes chimiques interdites contre les habitants des zones rurales et des villes, particulièrement à Serekaniye et Tel Abyad.

Nous espérons que les criminels et les terroristes comparaitront devant les Tribunaux Criminels Internationaux.



24/01/2020

par Aurélie Kieffer et Nadine Epstain

GRAND REPORTAGE

## Du Mont Sinjar à Mâcon, l'exil des Yézidis

**500 Yézidis, victimes des pires atrocités en Syrie et en Irak, ont été accueillis en France en un an. 100 femmes veuves et leurs enfants ont été installés aux quatre coins de l'hexagone. Rencontres dans trois villages de Bourgogne avec ces rescapés des griffes de Daech.**

recensés en Irak, 5 000 à 10 000 auraient été tués, ceux qui le pouvaient se sont enfui, la plupart vivent dans des camps de réfugiés dans des conditions de vie précaires.

Fin 2018, Nadia Murad obtenait d'Emmanuel Macron la promesse

Malgré la peur et l'horreur, et sans comprendre pourquoi le simple fait d'être Yézidi est devenu synonyme de persécutions, les rescapés des griffes de Daech et de ses appuis, certains de ces réfugiés commencent à doucement relever la tête.

Au début de l'année 2019, après d'autres phases d'accueil, le Quai d'Orsay a demandé à la Communauté de Taizé, communauté religieuse historiquement engagée aux côtés des minorités persécutées, si elle pouvait recevoir deux familles yézidies. Et, en août 2019, deux veuves et leurs sept enfants sont arrivées dans le village de Saône-et-Loire. Les maris ont été assassinés en Irak par Daech, il y a cinq ans.

"Chaque famille yézidie peut rapporter la même histoire, l'une plus horrible que l'autre, du fait du génocide". Cette phrase extraite du discours de la lauréate du Prix Nobel de la Paix 2018 Nadia Murad, elle-même Yézidie et ancienne captive de Daech, résume le triste sort de cette petite communauté ancestrale du Moyen-Orient. Pratiquant une religion monothéiste qui rappelle celle de l'Iran antique, ce peuple kurdophone est persécuté depuis la nuit des temps et victime des pires atrocités en ce début de XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Meurtres, viols, trafic d'êtres humains, esclavage sexuel, crimes, nettoyage ethnique et religieux, exils, exode, indéniablement les Yézidis ont subi une politique de destruction. Principalement installés dans le Sinjar, dans le Nord de l'Irak, ils étaient protégés par la Constitution avant que leurs vies ne basculent avec l'arrivée de l'organisation Etat islamique. Pour Daech, les Yézidis sont des hérétiques et les enfants ont été convertis de force et enrôlés, les femmes réduites à l'esclavage sexuel, les hommes exécutés. Sur les 600 000 Yézidis



*Basma et Nadiat, deux veuves et mères de trois et quatre enfants accueillies dans la communauté de Taizé par frère Charles Eugène et frère David. • Crédits : Nadine Epstain - Radio France*

que la France accueille 100 femmes yézidies avec leurs enfants. L'engagement auprès de cette minorité religieuse victime de génocide en Irak et en Syrie a été honoré. En un an, et par groupes de 20 femmes, les 100 mono-familles ont été sorties du Moyen-Orient et accueillies et installées aux quatre coins de la France.

16 mères et leurs 67 enfants ont d'abord été installées en région parisienne. Quelques mois après la fin du califat de l'organisation Etat islamique en Syrie, le 10 mai 2019, la France noue un partenariat avec l'OIM (Organisation internationale pour les migrations) sur l'hospitalité de 100 mères yézidies et leurs enfants, originaires du Sinjar.

Frère David et frère Charles Eugène les entourent : "Nous avons aménagé une grande maison que nous avons dans le village, en la divisant en deux logements pour chacune des familles. Il y a un grand jardin pour les enfants. Pour eux, ça va bien, tous les enfants sont scolarisés, les 4 ados vont à Cluny, à 10 km. Et maintenant ils se débrouillent bien en français".

Des associations comme le Pont contribuent à l'adaptation des nouveaux villageois. Les mères sont épaulées par des bénévoles et des assistantes sociales pour les rendez-vous médicaux, les démarches administratives ou leur déplacement. Les deux femmes suivent un cours de français, trois fois par semaine.

Du Mont Sinjar à Mâcon, l'exil des Yézidis. Un "Grand Reportage" de Nadine Epstain.





24/03/2020

## Kurdish protesters claim hiring practices in Kirkuk are ethnically-motivated

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Dozens of Kurdish university graduates demonstrated in front of the Education Directorate in Kirkuk on Thursday to protest what they see as intentionally disproportionate representation among those the public sector has recently hired in the ethnically-diverse province.

Some demonstrators pelted raw eggs at the directorate building as members of a security force unit stationed at the main gate prevented them from entering the compound. Kurdistan 24 was at the site where protesters voiced their anger at the local administration and symbolically stepped on posters of the head of the education authority.

Participants in the crowd claimed that the Education Directorate had shown in practice that it is ethnically biased against Kurds in its hiring of university graduates. They called for increasing the percentage of Kurds employed by the local government to be a representative sampling of the ethnic makeup of Kirkuk.

While exact statistics on the population of Kirkuk is unclear,

Kurds are thought to be a majority of the population, with unofficial estimates showing that they make up about 52 percent. The rest are Arabs, Turkmen, and various minority communities.

An informed source told Kurdistan 24 that above 50 percent of



*Demonstrators pelt eggs at the Education Directorate building to protest what they see as recent unfair hiring practices in the ethnically-diverse province of Kirkuk, Jan. 23, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)*

the job postings available in Kirkuk had been reserved for Arabs, while Kurds only been allowed fewer than 20 percent of the positions.

“I graduated from university in 2013, and I applied for many positions, but have not been ac-

cepted,” one of the protesters told Kurdistan 24.

“There is great injustice... the Kurdish people have been marginalized,” he added, claiming that the situation only became tense after security forces blocked any and all constituents

controversial figure Rakan Saeed as provincial governor.

Since then, local Kurds have repeatedly accused the administration of carrying out a systematic campaign to remove members of the ethnic minority from government posts and replace them with officials from the local Arab and Turkmen communities.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal Iraqi government have been working to normalize the security and political situations in the province as well as other disputed territories, but progress has slacked due to anti-government protests in central and southern parts of the country.

“The biggest problem here is that a chauvinist mindset rules this city,” another protester said.

Editing by John J. Catherine

Additional reporting by Kurdistan 24 correspondent in Kirkuk Soran Kamaran

from entering the directorate building to air their grievances.

Following the late 2017 assault of Iraqi forces and Iranian-backed militias on Kirkuk province, Baghdad appointed its own bureaucrat to head the local government, notably installing



Wladimir van Wilgenburg  
January 24-2020

## Syrian Kurdish refugees arriving in Kurdistan Region surpass 20,000: KRG

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – The influx of refugees from northern Syria into the Kurdistan Region continues to increase, with over 20,000 arrivals since the start of October, the Kurdistan Re-

gional Government’s (KRG) Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCC) said on Friday. In a post on Twitter, the JCC said 27 Syrian Kurdish refugees had just arrived through the Sehela border

crossing, taking the total number of arrivals from Syria to 20,011 people.

According to the latest official numbers of the JCC, there are a total of 242,944 Syrian

refugees currently living in the autonomous Kurdish region.

The KRG says that it needs close to \$1 billion annually to sustain aid to over one mil-

lion refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) who fled their homes to escape violence and instability.

The current camps in the Kurdistan Region were built as a rapid response to the crisis of refugees and displaced persons that followed the sudden rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2014.

Hoshang Mohammed, Director-General of the JCC, told Kurdistan 24 that the impact on the Kurdistan Region, its population, and displaced people had been direct and severe.

“The negative consequences of a displacement crisis of this scale will be generational and have a cumulative impact beyond our ability to calculate and cope with,” he stated.



The Kurdistan Region is home to over 1 million IDPs and refugees who fled from Syria and other parts of Iraq. (Photo: Twitter/JCC)

Mohammed said the KRG’s lack of access to international financial institutions, including the opportunity to secure loans and funds, has had a direct effect on the refugee crisis.

“In the face of such restrictions, the KRG is not able to

secure the required resources to address the challenges of a protracted displacement, while responding to new emergencies and waves of displacement, including the new influx of Syrian refugees and the continued arrivals of the IDPs from areas once under ISIS

[control],” he explained.

“Increased international funding and more efficient use of available resources are critically needed.”

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Editing by Laurie Mylroie



24/01/2020

## 13 kurdes emprisonnés à Diyarbakir

Le 8 décembre 2019, 24 personnes ont été arrêtées lors de perquisitions dans 8 quartiers différents des districts Çınar, Bağlar et Kayapınar dans la province d’Amed (Diyarbakir). Accusé d’« appartenance à une organisation terroriste », 21 personnes ont été placées en détention préventive.

Dans le cadre de la même opération, 20 autres personnes, dont Mesut Bağcık, membre du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), ont également été arrêtées.

Après 11 jours de garde à vue,



déféré devant le tribunal, 17 des détenus ont été accusés «d’aide à une organisation armée» et de mené «des actions au nom d’une organisation armée».

Alors que M. Bağcık et 12 autres personnes ont été placées en détention préventive pour « appartenance à une organisation terroriste », trois autres ont fait

l’objet d’une liberté sous contrôle judiciaire.

D’autre part, les membres du Conseil de la Jeunesse du HDP, Mesut Ağırtaş et Yılmaz Uzun, qui ont été arrêté le 19 janvier, ont vu leur période de garde à vue prolongée de 4 jours supplémentaires.

À la suite d’une ordonnance de confidentialité émise pour l’enquête, les accusations portées contre les membres du Conseil de la Jeunesse sont méconnues à ce jour.





Wladimir van Wilgenburg |  
January 25-2020

## Syrian Kurdish officials take emergency steps to deal with economic crisis

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** - The Kurdish-led Self-Administration for the Northeast of Syria told Kurdistan 24 on Friday that it had taken several steps to deal with the worsening economic situation in Syria caused by the collapse of the Syrian pound, US sanctions, and a crisis in neighboring Lebanon.

Areas under the control of the Syrian government are suffering from severe fuel and gas shortages due intensified sanctions, but so far the local administration has been able to deal with the situation.

“The Autonomous Administration has taken a new decision to respond to the current economic situation. One of the previous decisions was that export of cattle to outside of north and east Syria was banned – and that was due to the increase in the prices, and by exporting the livestock, the people might not be able to provide food essentials like meat,” Administration Spokesperson Luqman Ahmi told Kurdistan 24.

“As you know, the Syrian pound has significantly lost its value recently,” he continued. “Therefore, the Autonomous Administration had taken other economic decisions as well, including provision of most critical goods like sugar, oil, rice, baby milk, and tea – and that would be sold to the people at the same prices which they have been bought.”

Abdulsalam Hemsork, co-chair of the Social Affairs of Raqqa Civilian Council, told Kurdistan 24 that the Autonomous Administration has also increased salaries of local employees.

“But, still it is not enough. The US dollar reaching to about 900



Residents shop in a market in the Syrian city of Qamishli, located along the northern border with Turkey, April 11, 2016. (Photo: Reuters/Rodi Said)

Syrian pounds has made it difficult for the people. The prices for necessities like bread, diesel, and gas have not been increased, but the market has been negatively impacted.”

This was one of the reasons, he said, the administration started to provide these crucial necessities for residents at original prices and to keep the cost of fuel and bread stable. Moreover, the administration will begin providing construction material, such as cement and iron, to prevent further price increases in the region.

According to the Rojava Information Centre, for this reason, a distribution center was opened in the city of Kobani that provides reduced-priced essentials because “Kobane is particularly affected by the economic crisis, since the arterial M4 road connecting it to the rest of North and East Syria has been severed by the Turkish invasion.”

He said that the economy has also been affected by US sanctions against the Syrian government in Damascus, adding, “The Caesar Act has been enforced upon Syria. We are trying to minimize the damages of the sanctions on our people.”

“The recent vote by the UNSC [UN Security Council] to stop crossing of humanitarian aid from Tel Kocer border crossing is yet another challenge facing north and east Syria that will surely have negative effects.”

In late December, Russia vetoed a resolution on Syria, blocking humanitarian aid from being transported through a border crossing that previously supplied 40 percent of the medical supplies used in areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), leading to an increase in medicine prices.

Read More: Syrian Kurds criticize UN decision limiting human-

itarian aid to Syria

Ahmi continued, “Unfortunately, humanitarian issues have also been used as tools in the interests of states.”

“As you know, Turkey and Syria have only left 3 border points to provide humanitarian aid to reach the Syrian people: two points bordering Turkey [in Idlib] where Turkish-backed forces are, and another point run by Damascus,” he explained.

“As a result, the people in North-eastern Syria have been left out from the humanitarian aid – that will make our people to find local solutions, self-manage, and work towards self-sufficiency in order to minimize the damages of the current economic crisis – similar to our areas’ experience of minimizing the military challenges of Syrian crisis in [the] Northeast of the country.”

Editing by John J. Catherine



# La mobilisation contre la présence américaine se poursuit en Irak

Le leader chiite populiste Moqtada Al-Sadr, qui veut éviter toute confrontation avec les contestataires anti-pouvoir, est au centre du mouvement.

**S**ous les drapeaux irakiens et des bannières conspuant le président américain Donald Trump, des dizaines de milliers de personnes ont défilé dans les rues de Bagdad, vendredi 24 janvier, aux cris de « non à l'Amérique, non à l'occupant ». Arrivés dans des bus affrétés depuis les faubourgs de la capitale et les villes du Sud chiite, ils ont répondu à l'appel du chef populiste chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr à une « marche du million ». Après un discours lu par son porte-parole, dans lequel il a exigé le retrait des forces américaines d'Irak et l'annulation des accords sécuritaires entre Bagdad et Washington, en disant privilégier la voie pacifique et diplomatique, la foule s'est dispersée dans le calme.

Ce nouveau coup de pression du camp anti-américain intervient alors que les discussions entre Bagdad et Washington sur le retrait des 5 200 soldats américains d'Irak sont au point mort, malgré le vote d'une résolution non-contraignante en ce sens par la majorité politique chiite au Parlement irakien le 5 janvier. L'administration américaine y oppose jusqu'à présent une fin de non-recevoir. Si M. Trump a confié à son homologue irakien Barham Salih, mercredi en marge du sommet économique de Davos, être disposé à retirer ses troupes dès lors que ce retrait s'effectuerait sans humilier Washington, son envoyé spécial James Jeffrey a précisé qu'un tel retrait n'était pas à l'ordre du jour.

Trublion de la politique irakienne, qui a pris la tête de la première force parlementaire en 2018 sur une feuille de route pro-réformes et nationaliste, Moqtada est déterminé à s'imposer en leader de la résistance face aux Américains, un registre sur lequel il détient une légitimité certaine. Depuis l'assassinat du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani et de son lieutenant en Irak, Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes, dans une frappe américaine à Bagdad, le 3 janvier, le responsable politique de 46 ans a renoué avec l'anti-américanisme

dont il fut le fer de lance sous l'occupation américaine (2003-2011). Jusqu'à sa dissolution en 2007, sa milice l'Armée du Mahdi a harcelé sans relâche les troupes de la coalition américano-britannique. Début janvier, il a annoncé la réactiver et a appelé les autres factions armées chiites à s'unir dans un front de la résistance.

Moqtada Al-Sadr joue surtout sa propre partition. Destabilisé lui aussi par la contestation anti-pouvoir qui fait rage depuis octobre 2019, il réaffirme son ascendant sur la rue en démontrant sa capacité à mobiliser parmi ses millions de partisans au sein des classes populaires chiites. « Moqtada Al-Sadr veut prouver qu'il est le seul à pouvoir mobiliser des foules et à remplir le vide politique qu'a laissé la mort de Soleimani et de Mohandes, alors que le pays est en pleine recomposition politique et que les factions armées sont déstabilisées », analyse Hasan Harith, du Centre Carnegie pour le Moyen-Orient. Il entend donner des gages à l'Iran – où il réside et étudie en ce moment, à Qom, mais avec qui les relations sont en dents de scie – et montrer qu'il peut être un partenaire fiable. Mais il adresse surtout un message à ses rivaux au sein du camp chiite.

## « Le début de la révolution »

Les factions armées proches de l'Iran n'ont eu d'autre choix que de soutenir et mobiliser leurs partisans, pour une « marche du million » entièrement encadrée par le mouvement sadriste. Eternel rival, Qaïs Al-Ghazali, le chef de la milice Asaïb Ahl Al-Haq («La Ligue des vertueux»), a salué « le début de la révolution contre l'occupation américaine ». « Eux n'ont pas la capacité de mobiliser un tel nombre. Ils ont besoin de Moqtada Al-Sadr pour montrer qu'il existe un soutien populaire au retrait des troupes américaines. Mais ce à quoi il a appelé dans son discours – dialogue, moyens pacifiques, diplomatie – n'est pas ce qu'ils préconisent », commente Farhad Alaaldin, ancien

conseiller politique du président Barham Salih et directeur de l'Iraqi Advisory Council.

Moqtada Al-Sadr campe sur cette position centriste depuis l'assassinat de MM. Soleimani et Mohandes. « Il appelle à utiliser tous les moyens politiques et légaux pour bouter les Américains hors d'Irak et ne prône l'usage de moyens militaires et militants que si cela échoue. Les autres groupes armés proches de l'Iran ont plus facilement recours à un discours et à une stratégie militaire », explique Abbas Kadhim, du think tank américain Atlantic Council. Ils n'ont toutefois pas la capacité d'imposer une autre

gent : si les manifestants mobilisés à Bagdad et dans le Sud chiite depuis octobre 2019 rejettent toute ingérence étrangère en Irak, aussi bien des Etats-Unis que de l'Iran, ils réclament avant tout des élections anticipées, un premier ministre indépendant et la fin de la corruption. Et ils redoutent que les tensions entre l'Iran et les Etats-Unis soient instrumentalisées par Téhéran et ses alliés locaux chiites, pour renforcer leur mainmise en Irak et étouffer leur mouvement.

Alors que le blocage politique reste entier pour nommer un successeur au premier ministre Adel Abdel Mahdi, qui a démissionné le 29 no-



Manifestation à l'appel de Moqtada Al-Sadr, à Bagdad, le 24 janvier. THAIER AL-SUDANI / REUTERS

orientation. « Tous reconsidèrent leurs positions et leur stratégie après la mort de Mohandes et de Soleimani, qui les a profondément déstabilisés », poursuit Hasan Harith.

## Le blocage politique reste entier

Moqtada Al-Sadr a aussi veillé à éviter toute confrontation avec les contestataires anti-pouvoir, qui comptent de nombreux sadristes dans leurs rangs et dont il a soutenu les revendications. Il a organisé sa « marche du million » dans le quartier de Jadriya, à l'écart de la place Tahrir. Leurs revendications diver-

vembre 2019, les protestataires font face à un regain de la répression. Depuis octobre, elle a déjà fait 470 morts. Dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi, deux manifestants ont été tués à Bagdad, portant à 14 le nombre de victimes en une semaine dans la capitale et le Sud, et le sit-in de Bassora a été démantelé. Selon un journaliste de l'Agence France-Presse, les forces de sécurité ont reconquis, samedi matin, deux ponts et une autoroute où se concentraient les manifestants à Bagdad, après que Moqtada Al-Sadr a décidé de retirer son soutien à la contestation, au risque de la condamner.



January 25-2020

## Death toll climbs from quake in Turkey's Kurdish-majority southeast

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Turkish authorities announced Saturday that the number of fatalities had risen to 22 with close to 1,000 others wounded following an earthquake that rocked southern and southeastern parts of the country, most of them Kurdish-majority cities.

A 6.8 magnitude earthquake was centered in the town of Sivrice, in Elazig province, causing buildings to collapse for miles around. Tremors were felt in neighboring countries, including in northeastern Syria.

Elazig witnessed at least 10 aftershocks, the strength of which exceeded 4 degrees on the Richter scale, with the total estimated to have reached 148.

After going to the area with other ministers to oversee rescue operations, Minister of Health Fahrettin Koca said that 13 people had died in Elazig and five others in the neighboring province of Malatya. Later, state-run media Anadolu



Rescue teams at the site of a collapsed building after Friday's 6.8 magnitude earthquake that shook mostly Kurdish-majority areas in southeast Turkey, Jan. 24, 2020. (Photo: AA)

Agency reported that the death toll had risen to 19.

Interior Minister Suleiman Solyu said that rescue teams were searching for people under the rubble of collapsed buildings. He noted that more than 500 people had been injured.

Solyu described the quake as a "level three" event, according to the country's emergency response plan. This means aid would be provided at the national level, not at the international level.

Authorities warned people not to return to the damaged buildings be-

cause of the possibility of more injuries from additional collapses. They have also said that beds, blankets, and tents are being sent to the area as overnight temperatures drop below zero.

Official media in both Syria and Iran reported that the earthquake was felt in both countries. Local Lebanese media reported that the quake was also felt in Beirut and Tripoli.

Turkey has a history of strong earthquakes. In August 1999, more than 17,000 people were killed when a 7.6 magnitude quake struck the city of Izmit in the west of the country, 90 km southeast of Istanbul, reportedly displacing about 500,000 people.

In 2011, a 7.1 earthquake occurred in the Kurdish city of Van, on Turkey's eastern border with Iran, killing close to 600 people.

Editing by John J. Catherine



Par Marie Jégo Publié  
le 27 janvier 2020

## Acquittement du mathématicien turc Tuna Altinel, enseignant en France

Le maître de conférences de Lyon avait été arrêté pour participation à une réunion prokurde et a passé 81 jours en détention préventive à la prison de Balikesir.

« **A**cquitté ! », a statué le président du tribunal de Balikesir, une ville de la région de Marmara, où s'est tenue, vendredi 24 janvier, la dernière audience du procès de Tuna Altinel, ressortissant turc et maître de conférences à l'université Claude-Bernard Lyon-I, accusé de « propagande terroriste ».

C'est la fin du cauchemar pour Tuna Altinel, victime d'un acharnement kafkaïen, puisqu'il a passé 81 jours en détention préventive à la prison de Balikesir, au printemps 2019, et que son passeport turc lui a été



Le mathématicien turc, Tuna Altinel, à Balikesir, le 19 novembre 2019. YASIN AKGUL / AFP

confisqué sans raison. Une telle mesure, devenue routinière en Turquie pour de nombreux prévenus, illustre le délitement du système judiciaire. Un passeport ne peut normalement être confisqué sans une décision de justice. Lorsqu'elle fait défaut, comme dans le cas du mathématicien, les autorités turques mentionnent le passeport comme « perdu ».

Les autorités turques lui reprochaient d'avoir participé à la réunion, légale, d'une amicale kurde organisée le 21 février 2019 à la mairie de Villeurbanne (Rhône) en France. L'enseignant avait alors tra-



duit le récit d'un intervenant, Faysal Sariyildiz, un député en exil du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP, prokurde, troisième formation au Parlement de Turquie) qui avait raconté le calvaire vécu à l'hiver 2015-2016 par la ville de Cizre, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, majoritairement peuplée de Kurdes.

#### « Nombreux témoignages »

Cet hiver-là, la petite localité avait été encerclée et détruite par les combats ayant opposé l'armée turque aux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), la bête noire d'Ankara depuis 1984. Plusieurs centaines de civils réfugiés dans les sous-sols de trois immeubles du quartier de Cudi avaient péri brûlés ou asphyxiés, les secours n'ayant pas été autorisés à intervenir.

« Je suis allé moi-même à Cizre après ces événements, où j'ai en-

tendu de nombreux témoignages », a martelé Tuna Altinel lors de son audition. « Evoquer ce qui s'est passé à Cizre n'est pas illégal. De nombreux rapports en ont parlé, y compris celui de la Commission de droits de l'homme de l'ONU, sans compter les reportages parus dans les médias », a souligné Inan Yilmaz, son avocat, lors de sa plaidoirie.

Depuis le putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016, le système judiciaire turc a sombré dans l'arbitraire

La liberté d'expression était l'argument principal brandi par la défense. Avant tout, les trois avocats de Tuna Altinel ont insisté sur la décision rendue le 26 juillet 2019 par la Cour constitutionnelle, la plus haute juridiction du pays, qui a qualifié de « violation de la liberté d'expression », les poursuites entamées par l'Etat contre des milliers d'universitaires ces dernières années.

De 2016 à aujourd'hui, nombre d'enseignants ont été mis au ban de la société – limogés, jugés et souvent condamnés – pour avoir signé une pétition en faveur de la paix dans les régions à majorité kurdes du sud est du pays où des combats ont fait rage à l'hiver 2015-2016 entre le PKK et les forces turques.

Si la décision de la Cour constitutionnelle n'a rien changé à la situation de ces universitaires, privés de leurs passeports et de leurs emplois, elle sert de garde-fou aux magistrats turcs. Depuis le putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016, depuis le renforcement en 2018 des pouvoirs constitutionnels du président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le système judiciaire turc a sombré dans l'arbitraire, des purges massives ayant été ordonnées par l'exécutif, qui a mis la justice au pas. L'acte d'accusation de Tuna Altinel illustre cette dérive. « Fait de suppositions et

d'approximations, il ne tenait pas debout », selon l'avocat Inan Yilmaz.

Le verdict a été accueilli dans les couloirs du tribunal par les applaudissements et les cris de joie des quelque 80 personnes venues soutenir le mathématicien, parmi lesquelles de nombreux collègues français ayant fait le voyage depuis Paris et Lyon. Deux bus étaient partis d'Istanbul tôt le matin, affrétés par les comités de soutien.

Adrien, un jeune mathématicien ancien élève de Tuna Altinel, se réjouit de cet heureux dénouement qui, selon lui, « prouve que la position du président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'est pas aussi solide qu'on pourrait le penser ». Le verdict reste cependant suspendu à la décision du procureur, qui a une semaine pour faire appel de l'acquiescement.



Monday, January 27, 2020

By David L. Phillips

## Eliminating Iranian-Backed Militias in Iraq

In the wake of the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the United States faces the issue of what to do with the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) of Iraq. The PMF are a veritable deep state in Iraq destabilizing the country and threatening US forces.

The PMF includes dozens of Iraqi Shia militias that worked with Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Quds Force, a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Abu Mehdi al Muhandis, a prominent PMF member of the Kata'ib Hezbollah militias, was also killed in the attack. Khata'ib Hezbollah, which the US government considers a terror group, vows revenge.

The PMF are deeply embedded in Iraqi society and security structures. They arose during Iraq's sectarian civil war, beginning in 2006. The PMF killed hundreds of American



soldiers and civilians, using explosively formed penetrator devices provided by Iran. The PMF are also responsible for systematic and widespread war crimes against Iraq's Sunni population.

When the Islamic State invaded Iraq in June 2014, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most revered Shia cleric in Iraq, issued a fatwa summoning the faithful to defend holy shrines. The

PMF played a leading role in the fight to drive ISIS out of Iraq. Along the way, they evolved from a militia into an army – trained, equipped and financed by Iran. The PMF endure, though the caliphate has been defeated.

The Iraqi constitution stipulates that militias are illegal, but the government has been unable to demobilize them. Instead, Baghdad has sought

to co opt the PMF by bringing them under the nominal control of the prime minister's office and appointing their leaders to government positions.

Iran claims the PMF act independently, outside of its control. While Iran pledged to de-escalate after launching ballistic missiles against US bases in Iraq on January 8, the PMF's vow of revenge is a serious threat.

On January 12, the PMF launched rocket attacks against Balad Air Base that killed four Iraqi service men. Though no American trainers were injured at Balad, the attack is a harbinger of future conflict.

PMF leaders such as Falih Al-fayyadh (Chairman of Popular Mobilization Committee), Hadi al-Amiri (Commander of the Badr Brigade), Ali al-Yasiri (Khorosan), and Qais al-Khazali (Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq) threaten



US forces in Iraq. After Soleimani and Muhandis were killed, Khazali ordered his fighters to prepare for an upcoming battle against the US. He vowed that America's military presence in Iraq would end soon.

The PMF are proven adversaries targeting US interests, as well as America's Kurdish allies. For example, Muhandis and other PMF leaders were involved in seizing Kirkuk in October 2017, and trying to kill the pro-American Kirkuk Governor Najmaldin Karim.

After Soleimani's killing, 170 Iraqi lawmakers approved a resolution asking the Iraqi government to end the agreement under which Washington sent forces to Iraq more than four years ago to help in the fight against ISIS. The resolution barely garnered a majority, with Sunni and Kurdish legislators boycotting the vote. The Trump administration dismissed the vote, concerned that pulling out 5,200 U.S. troops could cripple counterterrorism efforts and allow the resurgence of ISIS.

### Washington's Options

The United States could withdraw its forces from Iraq. However, President Trump is adamant about maintaining the American military presence, despite the Iraqi parliament's request that US forces leave the country and demands by Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

The US could ignore the PMF and hope they go away. This is unlikely given their integration into Iraqi security structures and base of popular support with Iraq's Shia majority.

Washington could urge Baghdad to control the PMF. To date, however, the Iraqi government has shown little willingness or capacity to rein them in.

Not acting is not an option. The leaders of the PMF—Falih Al-fayyadh, Hadi al-Amiri, Ali al-Yasiri, and Qais al-Khazali — have been identified as terrorists by the United States. The bombing of the Balad Base is the first

salvo in a campaign to avenge the killing of Soleimani and Muhandis. The PMF represent an imminent threat, plotting more attacks to drive the US out of Iraq. Under such circumstances, targeted killings are allowed under international law.

The US government faces a credibility gap, created by President Trump's claim that Soleimani was killed to prevent an imminent threat. Targeted killings in the future must be based on verifiable evidence that an attack is imminent. The after action report should be transparent and detailed.

Iraq's Sunnis and Kurds would welcome the removal of Shia extremists, and some Shia politicians would also approve. The removal of Shia extremists would open more space for moderate Shia groups, reducing sectarian polarization. There is no love lost between the PMF and Iraqi politicians, who are struggling to stabilize the country and form a new government.

Iraq can never be secure with the PMF unfettered. Getting rid of the PMF would catalyze an Iraqi-owned process to stabilize the country, enhance national sovereignty, and eventually rid the country of foreign forces. It would also professionalize the Iraqi army, as the first line of defense against violent extremism.

Iraqis resent Iran's control of their country. They know the PMF are gangsters who run a parallel state. Iraqis crave stability and effective governance, which will not be achieved with the PMF at-large.

Phillips is Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. He worked on "The Future of Iraq Project" as a Senior Adviser and Foreign Affairs Expert to the State Department during the Bush administration. Phillips is the author of *Losing Iraq: Inside the Post-War Reconstruction Fiasco*.

The New York Times

By Farnaz Fassihi  
JAN. 27, 2020

## Anatomy of a Lie: How Iran Covered Up the Downing of an Airliner

For three days, Iranian military officials knew they had shot down a Ukrainian jetliner while the government issued false statements, denying any responsibility.

**W**hen the Revolutionary Guards officer spotted what he thought was an unidentified aircraft near Tehran's international airport, he had seconds to decide whether to pull the trigger.

Iran had just fired a barrage of ballistic missiles at American forces, the country was on high alert for an American counterattack, and the Iranian military was warning of incoming cruise missiles.

The officer tried to reach the command center for authoriza-

tion to shoot but couldn't get through. So he fired an anti-aircraft missile. Then another.

The plane, which turned out to be a Ukrainian jetliner with 176 people on board, crashed and exploded in a ball of fire.

Within minutes, the top commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards realized what they had done. And at that moment, they began to cover it up.

For days, they refused to tell even President Hassan Rouhani, whose government



First responders collected bodies after a Ukrainian jetliner with 176 people on board was shot down over Tehran this month. Credit: Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

was publicly denying that the plane had been shot down. When they finally told him, he gave them an ultimatum: come clean or he would resign.

Only then, 72 hours after the plane crashed, did Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, step in and order the government to acknowledge its fatal mistake.

The New York Times pieced together a chronology of those three days by interviewing Iranian diplomats, current and former government officials, ranking members of the Revolutionary Guards and people close to the supreme leader's inner

the unresolved debate over accountability.

TUESDAY



A candlelight vigil mourning the death of Gen. Qassim Suleimani. His killing in an American drone strike briefly united Iran. Credit... Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Guards' Aerospace Force, said later that his units had asked officials in

The officer on the missile launcher near the airport heard the warnings but did not hear a later message that the cruise missile alert was a false alarm.

The warning about American warplanes may have also been wrong. United States military officials have said that no American planes were in or near Iranian airspace that night.

When the officer spotted the Ukrainian jet, he sought permission to fire. But he was unable to communicate with his commanders because the network had been disrupted or jammed, General Hajizadeh said later.



An Iranian couple killed in the crash was buried in a Tehran cemetery. Credit: Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

Tehran to close Iran's airspace and ground all flights, to no avail.

Iranian officials feared that shutting down the airport would create mass panic that war with the United States was imminent, members of the Guards and other officials told The Times. They also hoped that the presence of passenger jets could act as a deterrent against an American attack on the airport or the nearby military base, effectively turning planeloads of unsuspecting travelers into human shields.

The officer, who has not been publicly identified, fired two missiles, less than 30 seconds apart.

General Hajizadeh, who was in western Iran supervising the attack on the Americans, received a phone call with the news.

"I called the officials and told them this has happened and it's highly possible we hit our own plane," he said later in a televised statement.

By the time General Hajizadeh arrived in Tehran, he had informed Iran's top three military commanders: Maj. Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi, the army's commander in chief, who is also the chief of the central air defense command; Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Armed Forces; and Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guards.

circle and by examining official public statements and state media reports.

The reporting exposes the government's behind-the-scenes debate over covering up Iran's responsibility for the crash while shocked Iranians, grieving relatives and countries with citizens aboard the plane waited for the truth.

The new details also demonstrate the outsize power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which effectively sidelined the elected government in a moment of national crisis, and could deepen what many Iranians already see as a crisis of legitimacy for the Guards and the government.

The bitter divisions in Iran's government persist and are bound to affect the investigation into the crash, negotiations over compensation and

Around midnight on Jan. 7, as Iran was preparing to launch a ballistic-missile attack on American military posts in Iraq, senior members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps deployed mobile anti-aircraft defense units around a sensitive military area near Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport.

Iran was about to retaliate for the American drone strike that had killed Iran's top military commander, Gen. Qassim Suleimani, in Baghdad five days earlier, and the military was bracing for an American counter-strike. The armed forces were on "at war" status, the highest alert level.

But in a tragic miscalculation, the government continued to allow civilian commercial flights to land and take off from the Tehran airport.

WEDNESDAY



Pieces of the Ukrainian jetliner landed in Shahedshahr, southwest of Tehran. Credit... Ebrahim Noroozi/Associated Press

After Iran's missile attack began, the central air defense command issued an alert that American warplanes had taken off from the United Arab Emirates and that cruise missiles were headed toward Iran.

The Revolutionary Guards, an elite force charged with defending Iran's clerical rule at home and abroad, is separate from the regular army and answers only to the supreme leader. At this point, the leaders of both militaries knew the truth.

General Hajizadeh advised the generals not to tell the rank-and-file air defense units for fear that it could hamper their ability to react quickly if the United States did attack.





Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Aerospace Force, far right, mourning the death of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani. Credit...Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader, via Associated Press



President Hassan Rouhani, center, during a cabinet meeting in Tehran before learning the truth about the crash. Credit...Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader, via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

“It was for the benefit of our national security because then our air defense system would be compromised,” Mr. Hajizadeh said in an interview with Iranian news media this week. “The ranks would be suspicious of everything.”

The military leaders created a secret investigative committee drawn from the Guards' aerospace forces, from the army's air defense, and from intelligence and cyberexperts. The committee and the officers involved in the shooting were sequestered and ordered not to speak to anyone.

The committee examined data from the airport, the flight path, radar networks, and alerts and messages from the missile operator and central command. Witnesses — the officer who had pulled the trigger, his supervisors and everyone involved — were interrogated for hours.

The group also investigated the possibility that the United States or Israel may have hacked Iran's defense system or jammed the airwaves.

By Wednesday night, the committee had concluded that the plane was shot down because of human error.

“We were not confident about what happened until Wednesday around sunset,” General Salami, the commander in chief

of the Guards, said later in a televised address to the Parliament. “Our investigative team concluded then that the plane crashed because of human errors.”

Ayatollah Khamenei was informed. But they still did not inform the president, other elected officials or the public.

Senior commanders discussed keeping the shooting secret until the plane's black boxes — the flight data and cockpit voice recorders — were examined and formal aviation investigations completed, according to members of the Guards, diplomats and officials with knowledge of the deliberations. That process could take months, they argued, and it would buy time to manage the domestic and international fallout that would ensue when the truth came out.

The government had violently crushed an anti-government uprising in November. But the American killing of General Suleimani, followed by the strikes against the United States, had turned public opinion around. Iranians were galvanized in a moment of national unity.

The authorities feared that admitting to shooting down the passenger plane would undercut that momentum and prompt a new wave of anti-government protests.

“They advocated covering it up because they thought the country couldn't handle more crisis,” said a ranking member of the Guards who, like others interviewed for this article, spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. “At the end, safeguarding the Islamic Republic is our ultimate goal, at any cost.”

That evening, the spokesman for the Joint Armed Forces, Brig. Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, told Iranian news media that suggestions that missiles struck the plane were “an absolute lie.”

On Thursday, as Ukrainian investigators began to arrive in Tehran, Western officials were saying publicly that they had evidence that Iran had accidentally shot down the plane.

A chorus of senior Iranian officials — from the director of civil aviation to the chief government spokesman — issued statement after statement rejecting the allegations, their claims amplified on state media.

The suggestion that Iran would shoot down a passenger plane was a “Western plot,” they said, “psychological warfare” aimed at weakening Iran just as it had exercised its military muscle against the United States.

But in private, government officials were alarmed and questioning whether there was any

truth to the Western claims. Mr. Rouhani, a seasoned military strategist himself, and his foreign minister, Javad Zarif, deflected phone calls from world leaders and foreign ministers seeking answers. Ignorant of what their own military had done, they had none to give.

Domestically, public pressure was building for the government to address the allegations.

Among the plane's passengers were some of Iran's best and brightest. They included prominent scientists and physicians, dozens of Iran's top young scholars and graduates of elite universities, and six gold and silver medal winners of international physics and math Olympiads.

There were two newlywed couples who had traveled from Canada to Tehran for their weddings just days earlier. There were families and young children.

Their relatives demanded answers. Iranian social media began to explode with emotional commentary, some accusing Iran of murdering its own citizens and others calling such allegations treason.

Persian-language satellite channels operating from abroad, the main source of news for most Iranians, broadcast blanket coverage of the crash, including re-



ports from Western governments that Iran had shot down the plane.

Mr. Rouhani tried several times to call military commanders, officials said, but they did not return his calls. Members of his government called their contacts in the military and were told the allegations were false. Iran's civil aviation agency called military officials with similar results.

"Thursday was frantic," Ali Rabiei, the government spokesman, said later in a news conference. "The government made back-to-back phone calls and contacted the armed forces asking what happened, and the answer to all the questions was that no missile had been fired."

#### FRIDAY



Debris from the plane crash. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

On Friday morning, Mr. Rabiei issued a statement saying the allegation that Iran had shot down the plane was "a big lie."

Several hours later, the nation's top military commanders called a private meeting and told Mr. Rouhani the truth.

Mr. Rouhani was livid, according to officials close to him. He demanded that Iran immediately announce that it had made a tragic mistake and accept the consequences.

The military officials pushed back, arguing that the fallout could destabilize the country.

Mr. Rouhani threatened to resign.

Canada, which had the most foreign citizens on board the plane, and the United States, which as Boeing's home country was invited to investigate the crash, would eventually reveal their evidence, Mr. Rouhani said. The damage to Iran's reputation and the public trust in the government would create an enormous crisis at a time when Iran could not bear more pressure.

As the standoff escalated, a member of Ayatollah Khamenei's inner circle who was in the meeting informed the supreme leader. The ayatollah sent a message back to the group, ordering the government to prepare a public statement acknowledging what had hap-

pened.

Mr. Rouhani briefed a few senior members of his government. They were rattled.

Mr. Rabiei, the government spokesman who had issued a denial just that morning, broke down. Abbas Abdi, a prominent critic of Iran's clerical establishment, said that when he spoke to Mr. Rabiei that evening, Mr. Rabiei was distraught and crying.

"Everything is a lie," Mr. Rabiei said, according to Mr. Abdi. "The whole thing is a lie. What should I do? My honor is gone."

Mr. Abdi said the government's actions had gone "far beyond" just a lie.

"There was a systematic cover-up at the highest levels that makes it impossible to get out of this crisis," he said.

Iran's National Security Council held an emergency meeting and drafted two statements, the first to be issued by the Joint Armed Forces followed by a second one from Mr. Rouhani.

As they debated the wording, some suggested claiming that the United States or Israel may have contributed to the accident by jamming Iran's radars or hacking its communications networks.

But the military commanders op-

those involved in firing the missiles and be done with it, officials said. The missile operator and up to 10 others have been arrested but officials have not identified them or said whether they had been charged.

Mr. Rouhani has demanded a broader accounting, including an investigation of the entire chain of command. The Guards' accepting responsibility, he said, is "the first step and needs to be completed with other steps." His spokesman and lawmakers have demanded to know why Mr. Rouhani was not immediately informed.

Mr. Rouhani touched on that concern when he put out his statement an hour and 15 minutes later. The first line said that he had found out about the in-



Remembering the victims of the crash outside Amirkabir University in Tehran on Jan. 11. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

posed it. General Hajzadeh said the shame of human error paled compared with admitting his air defense system was vulnerable to hacking by the enemy.

Iran's Civil Aviation Agency later said that it had found no evidence of jamming or hacking.

#### SATURDAY

At 7 a.m., the military released a statement admitting that Iran had shot down the plane because of "human error."

The bombshell revelation has not ended the division within the government. The Revolutionary Guards want to pin the blame on

investigative committee's conclusion about cause of the crash "a few hours ago."

It was a stunning admission, an acknowledgment that even the nation's highest elected official had been shut out from the truth, and that as Iranians, and the world, turned to the government for answers, it had peddled lies.

"What we thought was news was a lie. What we thought was a lie was news," said Hesamedin Ashna, Mr. Rouhani's top adviser, on Twitter. "Why? Why? Beware of cover-ups and military rule."

# Irak : répression meurtrière des protestations antipouvoir après le revirement de Moqtada Al-Sadr

Le leader chiite a retiré son soutien à la contestation, après le succès de la « marche du million ». Trois roquettes se sont abattues dimanche sur l'ambassade américaine à Bagdad, faisant au moins un blessé.

Des milliers de manifestants antipouvoir, dont de nombreux étudiants, ont défilé, dimanche 26 janvier, à Bagdad et dans le sud de l'Irak, en signe de défiance aux autorités après une tentative de démanteler leurs sit-in. L'assaut lancé par les forces de sécurité, dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi, contre plusieurs places de la contestation, a en effet donné lieu à un week-end particulièrement meurtrier. Au moins 12 personnes ont été tuées et 230 blessées en deux jours, selon la Haute Commission irakienne des droits de l'homme, portant à près de 500 le nombre de victimes de la répression depuis le début du mouvement, en octobre 2019.

Samedi, avant l'aube, les forces antiémeute avaient délogé les manifestants installés place Al-Bahariya à Bassora, dans le sud du pays, incendiant leurs tentes. A Bagdad, les forces de sécurité ont rouvert des routes et des ronds-points occupés par les protestataires autour de la place Tahrir, faisant craindre un assaut imminent sur ce centre névralgique de la contestation antipouvoir. L'assaut s'est poursuivi dimanche, notamment à Nassiriya, où les forces de sécurité ont attaqué le sit-in, brûlant les tentes et tirant à balles réelles sur les manifestants.

Peu de temps avant cet assaut coordonné, de nombreux partisans du chef populiste chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr avaient défilé leurs tentes et quitté le sit-in à Bagdad et dans le Sud, à l'appel de leur chef. Par un Tweet rageur, publié tard vendredi, Moqtada Al-Sadr avait annoncé retirer son soutien à la contestation, après le succès d'une « marche du million » qu'il a organisée à Bagdad contre la présence américaine en Irak. « Il a donné le feu vert au gouvernement pour réprimer les manifesta-



Des manifestants montrent des boucliers sur lesquels ont été inscrits les mots « brigade de protection de Tahrir », le 25 janvier à Bagdad. SABAH ARAR / AFP

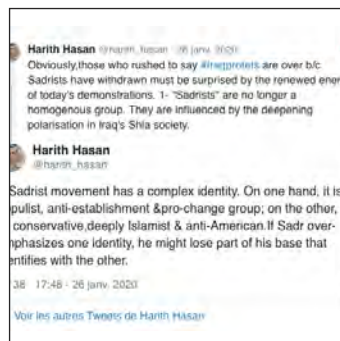
tions, a réagi Husanein Ali, un manifestant de 35 ans, auprès de l'agence Associated Press. Nous considérons cela comme une trahison du sang des martyrs et des sacrifices des partisans de Moqtada Al-Sadr. »

## Des sadristes choqués par le lâchage de leur chef

Ce dernier, qui s'est imposé à la tête de la première force politique au Parlement en 2018 sur une feuille de route nationaliste et pro-réformes, avait soutenu jusqu'ici les appels des manifestants à la démission du gouvernement et à l'organisation d'élections anticipées. Ses partisans, qui se comptent par millions dans les faubourgs populaires chiites de Bagdad et du sud du pays, et sont parmi les plus touchés par le chômage et la déliquescence des services publics, avaient déjà rallié en nombre les rangs de la contestation. Ils ont joué un rôle essentiel dans la logistique des sit-in et leur sécurité. Leur présence, et le risque d'une confrontation avec les autorités. Ceux qui, également nombreux, parmi les manifestants,

considèrent Moqtada Al-Sadr comme faisant partie du système dont ils veulent la chute, s'en sont accommodés, tout en craignant une récupération politique.

Moqtada Al-Sadr et les autorités irakiennes ont peut-être sous-estimé la détermination des contestataires et l'ancrage du mouvement. En réaction à l'assaut lancé samedi, des milliers de personnes se sont mobilisées, dont de nombreux sadristes, choqués par le lâchage de leur chef. « Les sadristes ne sont plus un groupe homogène. Ils sont affectés par la polarisation croissante de la société chiite irakienne », analyse Harith Hasan, expert au Centre Carnegie pour le Moyen-Orient, sur Twitter. Mouvement



composite, le courant sadriste réunit une tendance populiste, anti-establishment et pro-réformes, et une tendance conservatrice, islamiste et anti-américaine. « Si Moqtada Al-Sadr met trop l'accent sur l'une de ces identités, il pourrait perdre la partie de sa base qui s'identifie à l'autre », poursuit l'expert.

Depuis l'assassinat du général iranien Ghassem Soleimani et de son lieutenant en Irak, Abou Mahdi Al-Mohandes, dans une frappe de drone américaine à Bagdad, le 3 janvier, Moqtada Al-Sadr a renoué avec un anti-américanisme virulent. La « marche du million » qu'il a organisée vendredi pour réclamer le départ des Américains d'Irak a été vue comme un calcul politique pour regagner son ascendant sur la rue et s'imposer à ses rivaux du camp chiite dans les négociations pour désigner le successeur du premier ministre, Adel Abdel-Mahdi, qui a démissionné le 29 novembre 2019 sous la pression de la rue.

Si Moqtada Al-Sadr dit privilégier la voie pacifique et diplomatique, certaines factions armées chiites proches de l'Iran sont déterminées à obtenir coûte que coûte le départ des 5 200 soldats américains d'Irak. Dimanche, trois roquettes se sont abattues sur l'ambassade américaine à Bagdad, dont l'une d'elles sur la cafétéria, à l'heure du dîner, faisant au moins un blessé, selon un haut responsable irakien. Le porte-parole du département d'Etat américain a attribué cette attaque, la quatorzième depuis septembre contre des intérêts américains, à « l'Iran et [aux] milices soutenues par l'Iran ». Le premier ministre démissionnaire, Abdel-Mahdi, a dénoncé une « agression » qui pourrait « transformer l'Irak en zone de guerre ».





29-01-2020  
Karwan Faidhi Dri

## Belgian court rules in PKK's favor in terror cases

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – Belgium's Court of Cession ruled on Wednesday that the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is not a terrorist organization, ending proceedings launched in 2008 against a number of individuals and institutions linked to the group.

The Belgian government said it nevertheless continues to regard the PKK as a terrorist group.

Thirty-six people and entities linked to the PKK have been tried by Belgian federal prosecutors since 2008 for allegedly recruiting young Kurds in Belgium and other European countries and taking them to combat training camps, according to Euronews.

Wednesday's ruling confirmed the Brussels Court of Appeal's March 8, 2019 decision that the PKK is not a terrorist organization.

The PKK is an armed group which has fought a decades' long insurgency against the Turkish state for greater Kurdish political and cultural rights in Turkey, which is home to a substantial Kurdish minority.

In addition to Turkey, the United States, the European Union, and Canada consider the PKK a terrorist organization.

### 'Historic' decision

Jan Fermon, a Belgian lawyer who has defended 36 Kurdish activists accused of fostering ties with the PKK, told the pro-Kurdish Firat News Agency (ANF) the court's decision has "great importance" for similar cases in other European states.

"This is a final verdict which is of great importance for the discussion about the PKK ongoing for a long time. I find the verdict is consistent with international law. It is a fair ruling," he said.



Pro-Kurdish people wave flags with the face of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan during a protest demanding his freedom in Brussels, February 27, 2019. File photo: Francisco Seco / AP

"I hope it will contribute to a political solution to the Kurdish question at a European level. The court ruling has opened a new door on the side of Europe. It has paved the way for a profound concentration on a political solution," the lawyer added.

Zubeyir Aydar, a member of the PKK-dominated Kurdish National Congress (KNK) in Belgium, told ANF the decision is "historic".

"[We have] faced unfair accusations. We were then subjected to operations and arrests. The verdict announced today acknowledges the unfairness that the representatives of the Kurdish people have been through," Aydar said.

### Brussels to continue pursuing PKK

Philippe Goffin, the Belgian Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs, said the Court of Cession's decision is "the expression of judicial power, rigorously independent of

the executive, and must be understood as such by all the actors".

"It in no way implies that PKK members can no longer be prosecuted in Belgium. They can be arrested at any time for crimes and other offenses under the Criminal Code of which they are guilty," he added in a statement.

"The position of Belgium is unequivocal: the PKK is a terrorist organisation."

Michel Malherbe, Belgium's Ambassador to Ankara, also said in a tweet that the court ruling does not change the government's official policy on the PKK.

### 'Hypocritical decision'

More than 40,000 civilians and combatants on both sides of the conflict have been killed since the PKK insurgency began in 1984.

Ankara launches regular military operations against the PKK both inside and beyond Turkey's borders, coupled with diplomatic

pressure on its foreign allies to crackdown on the group's activities and affiliates.

Responding on Twitter, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the Belgian court's ruling has nothing to do with law, branding it "ideological and political" as well as "hypocritical."

The Turkish foreign ministry said the ruling gave "clear support to the PKK".

"It has also revealed that Belgian legislation poses an obstacle for Belgium to fulfill its international obligations in relation to counterterrorism, primarily stemming from the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council," the ministry said in a statement.

It called on the Belgian government to "take all necessary steps to correct this desperate and contradictory ruling and to continue countering the PKK terrorist organization in an increasing manner".



## Fillette kurde tuée par balle en 2018: un policier belge inculpé

Un policier belge, auteur du tir ayant mortellement blessé une fillette kurde de 2 ans, en 2018 lors d'une course-poursuite en Belgique, a été inculpé d'homicide involontaire, a indiqué jeudi son avocat à l'AFP, confirmant une information des médias belges.

«Il a été inculpé par un simple courrier recommandé qui lui a été adressé en décembre», a précisé Me Laurent Kennes, qui a fustigé une mesure «inutile» du juge d'instruction.

«C'était au parquet de faire cela dans son réquisitoire», le renvoyant

devant le tribunal, a dit l'avocat, en évoquant la perspective d'un procès vraisemblablement d'ici fin 2020.

Les faits remontent à la nuit du 16 au 17 mai 2018, sur une autoroute de Wallonie, au sud de Bruxelles.

Une camionnette transportant une trentaine de migrants pris en charge à Grande-Synthe (nord de la France) avait tenté d'échapper à vive allure à une voiture de police qui voulait l'intercepter.

Face au refus d'obtempérer, l'un des policiers avait sorti son arme par la fenêtre et visé, selon ses ex-

plications, «le pneu avant gauche» en doublant.

Mais un brusque coup de volant de son collègue avait dévié son tir vers l'habitacle de la camionnette, où Mawda, installée avec ses parents derrière le chauffeur, avait été touchée d'une balle dans la tête. Elle était décédée dans l'ambulance la transportant à l'hôpital.

Dans ce dossier, le policier auteur du tir, que son avocat dit «anéanti» par le drame, a été laissé libre.

Mais deux autres suspects sont en détention provisoire en Belgique: le

chauffeur de la camionnette et le passeur soupçonné d'avoir fait monter à bord les migrants, des Kurdes d'Irak.

Le premier avait été extradé du Royaume-Uni en avril 2019 et le second des Pays-Bas à l'automne, selon les médias.

De nationalité irakienne, tous deux ont été inculpés d'«entrave méchante à la circulation avec la circonstance aggravante du décès» et «rébellion armée», l'arme étant la camionnette ayant percuté la voiture de police à sa poursuite.

The New York Times

30/01/2020

By Eric Lipton and Alan Rappeport

## Bolton Book Puts New Focus on Trump's Actions in Turkey and China Cases

Interventions in Justice Department proceedings draw scrutiny after the former national security adviser raised concerns about the president's embrace of authoritarian leaders.

WASHINGTON — It was late 2018, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey was on the phone with an unusual request for President Trump: Could he intervene with top members of his cabinet to curb or even shut down a criminal investigation into Halkbank, one of Turkey's largest state-owned banks?

It was not Mr. Erdogan's only effort to persuade the Trump administration to back off the investigation into the bank, which had been accused of violating United States sanctions against Iran.

His government had hired a lobbying firm run by a friend of and fundraiser for Mr. Trump to press his case with the White House and State Department. And there would be more phone calls between the two leaders in which the topic came up, according to participants in the lobbying.

Mr. Erdogan's influence campaign is

now under scrutiny again in Washington, following the disclosure that Mr. Trump's former national security adviser, John R. Bolton, reported in his forthcoming book his concern that the president was effectively granting personal favors to Mr. Erdogan and President Xi Jinping of China.

People familiar with the unpublished manuscript said Mr. Bolton wrote that he had shared his concern with Attorney General William P. Barr and that Mr. Barr responded by pointing to Mr. Trump's intervention in two cases linked to Turkey and China: the investigation of Halkbank and Mr. Trump's decision in 2018 to lift sanctions on ZTE, a major Chinese telecommunications company.

The Justice Department has disputed Mr. Bolton's account. But on Tuesday, top Democrats seized on the suggestions of meddling in the Halkbank and ZTE cases as fresh evidence that Mr. Trump, whose family enterprise has extensive

business ties to Turkey and also has considered building new towers in China and expanding in other areas, was using the presidency to enrich himself and his family.

“Several members of the administration had concerns about the president's dealings with autocrats,” Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic minority leader, said at a news conference. “Did the president have financial interests at stake when he was talking to Erdogan or Xi and others?”

He added: “Maybe his kids had some economic interest at stake. And did it impact our nation's foreign policy with those countries?”

Former foreign policy officials — including some who served in Republican administrations — said in interviews that Mr. Trump plays an unusual and at times disturbing role in high-profile criminal and sanction cases involving foreign governments.

“What I know about his intervention in the Halkbank case is highly abnormal and quite worrying, actually,” said Philip Zelickow, a history professor at the University of Virginia who served on the National Security Council staff for President George Bush.

Suggesting that Mr. Trump was putting private, commercial interests above those of the United States, Mr. Zelickow added: “There have been interventions on behalf of a foreign government that are hard to explain in traditional public interest terms.”

Mr. Trump's involvement in the Halkbank investigation started early in his administration. In 2017, he was asked by Rudolph W. Giuliani during an Oval Office meeting with Rex W. Tillerson, then the secretary of state, to help secure the release of a Turkish gold trader at the center of Halkbank's sanctions-evasion efforts.

The gold trader, Reza Zarrab, who

had hired Mr. Giuliani to help secure his release, had been accused by federal prosecutors of playing a central role in an effort by Halkbank to funnel more than \$10 billion in gold and cash to Iran, in defiance of United States sanctions designed to curb Iran's nuclear program.

Turkey also wanted the trader released, former Turkish government officials said, so that he would not testify against top bank officials or implicate members of Mr. Erdogan's family or Mr. Erdogan himself.

The push failed to secure Mr. Zarrab's release and was abandoned after he agreed to testify on behalf of the Justice Department to help obtain the conviction of a Halkbank executive in early 2018.

#### But that was just the start of the lobbying.

Mr. Erdogan, in a series of phone calls and in-person conversations in 2018 and 2019, repeatedly tried to persuade Mr. Trump to use his power to limit additional enforcement action against Halkbank itself, something the Justice Department had made clear it was considering.

After one phone conversation in late 2018, Mr. Erdogan told reporters in Turkey that Mr. Trump had told him that "he would instruct the relevant ministers immediately" to follow through on the matter.

"Talks are underway about this issue," Mr. Erdogan said at the time. "It is very important that this process has begun."

Mr. Erdogan's son-in-law, who serves as Turkey's finance minister, also took up the case, pressing Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on the matter. Other appeals were made by the former project manager of Trump Towers Istanbul, a twin-tower complex and mall that was the Trump family's first high-rise project in Europe.

Asked about Turkey's lobbying efforts in an interview in October, Mr. Mnuchin cited the ongoing legal process and would not comment.

The bank had separately hired a lobbying firm run by Brian D. Ballard, a top fund-raiser for Mr. Trump's campaign and the Republican National Committee. The lobby-



President Trump's involvement in the Halkbank investigation started early in his administration. Credit... Ozan Kose/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

ists from Mr. Ballard's team argued to the State Department and White House that any criminal charges against the state-owned bank could destabilize the Turkish economy.

For months, it looked like Turkey was going to succeed in this unusual lobbying campaign — asking a United States president to put pressure on his own Justice Department to protect a state-owned bank. Mr. Barr, who was confirmed in February 2019, played a key role in overseeing the negotiations over a possible settlement with the bank that would have seen it avoid criminal charges, representatives for Halkbank said in interviews last year.

Only after Turkey invaded Syria in early October did the Justice Department move to indict the bank.

"President Trump has been carrying water for President Erdogan and Turkey's state-owned Halkbank," said Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon, the top Democrat on the finance committee. "Every member of Congress should be profoundly alarmed that Donald Trump is trying to get the bank accused of the largest Iranian sanctions violation scheme in U.S. history off the hook because his authoritarian pal asked for a favor."

Mr. Trump's 2018 intervention in the case of ZTE was equally perplexing to some observers. Two years before, the United States found the Chinese company guilty of violating

American sanctions on Iran and North Korea. In April 2018, the Trump administration moved to punish ZTE by banning it from buying American technology.

But Mr. Trump suddenly had a change of heart, essentially pardoning the company in exchange for a \$1 billion fine and promises to replace its senior leadership and allow American compliance monitors.

The decision came after a direct plea to Mr. Trump from Mr. Xi in the midst of intense maneuvering over trade talks between the two countries and as the United States was preparing for a summit with North Korea.

It drew bipartisan backlash on Capitol Hill. Top lawmakers, including Senators Marco Rubio of Florida, Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, had urged the administration not to bend on ZTE, which they considered a law enforcement and national security issue.

Chinese officials had made it clear that they considered lifting ZTE's penalty a condition for reaching a trade deal. There was also the implicit threat that, if the penalty was not lifted, American companies operating in China would face further retaliation. The United States has also relied on China to exert pressure on North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program.

The Trump family had for years worked on plans to build a series of new hotel or apartment building projects in China, goals put on hold after Mr. Trump was elected president.

His administration scrambled to quiet the growing dissent, and Mr. Trump lashed out at Democrats for having allowed ZTE to flourish under President Barack Obama's watch.

In May 2018, Wilbur L. Ross Jr., the commerce secretary, and Mr. Mnuchin traveled to Capitol Hill to brief a group of Senate Republicans, including Mr. Rubio, John Cornyn of Texas and Bob Corker of Tennessee, on their plans for ZTE. Mr. Ross and Mr. Mnuchin sought to assure the lawmakers that they were planning on harsh penalties for ZTE and appealed to Republicans to dampen their public criticism so a deal could be reached, a person briefed on the discussions said.

Chinese officials widely speculated that the penalties on ZTE were an effort by the Trump administration to gain the upper hand in the trade talks. But people briefed on the discussions say Trump administration officials had not fully realized what a complication the measure would become in the trade talks.

Since then, ZTE has made a gradual recovery, and its profits have rebounded. And although its run-in with the Trump administration tarnished its smartphone brand with consumers, cellphone carriers around the world have still been willing to work with the company to build 5G mobile networks.

The handling of ZTE has raised questions about whether Mr. Trump will follow through with imposing restrictions on Huawei, another Chinese telecommunications company that the White House views as a national security threat.



## Teacher translates Quran to save endangered Kurdish dialect

**H**awrami, a dialect of the Kurdish language, is spoken by some 23,000 people in Iran's Western Kurdistan and Iraq's Hawraman area. UNESCO classed the dialect as "definitely endangered" in 2010.

The people of Hawraman, located in northeastern Iraq, mostly reside in the mountainous highlands where tough conditions have earned them the reputation of being self-reliant, resilient and resourceful. They are known for their traditional attire and long life expectancies.

They are also known as good fighters. After the First World War, when Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji rebelled against the British in 1919, it was with the help of several hundred Hawrami fighters that he delivered a humiliating defeat to the British at [Tasluja Pass](#) just outside Sulaimaniyah.

Today, the region is well represented in national bodies. For example, Ashti Hawrami served as the Kurdistan Regional Government's minister for natural resources.

However, the language is fast disappearing as families leave Hawraman for larger towns such as [Sulaimaniyah](#) and Erbil and new generations grow up unable to speak their heritage language.

Concerned with the trend, one 73-year-old teacher decided to [translate the Quran](#) into his mother tongue and publish it last October. Jamal Habibullah Faraj Bedar, a retired schoolteacher from the town of Tawela, translated the entire Muslim holy book from Arabic.

He told Al-Monitor that he wanted to translate Quran into Hawrami, whose speakers became Muslims very early on — in the ninth century. Today, the population is almost entirely Sunni Muslims, many of whom lean toward [mysticism](#).



Hawrami men are seen in traditional leather jackets, Oraman Takht, Iran, Feb. 5, 2009. © Matjaz Krivic/Getty Images

One of the best known centers of education in the area is a religious school in the border town of Byara, the site of tombs of Naqshbandi sheikhs who formed the major Sunni spiritual order of Sufism.

"However, they could not read the Quran in their own language. So, I wanted to be the first one to translate the Quran into Hawrami," said Bedar. "In the past years, UNESCO has indicated that Hawrami is in danger as the dialect is no longer used [much] in writing. I was very concerned to hear this. Hawrami is an ancient language we inherited from our forefathers."

He went on, "I decided that the best way to keep my native language alive is to translate the Quran into Hawrami."

Bedar finished the translation in two and a half months and a local businessman from Hawraman offered to print 1,000 copies of the book in Tehran.

Interpretations of the Quran have been translated into most of the world's major languages even though Islamic Sharia forbids the holy book's literal translation. It

was therefore unsurprising when Kurdistan's Regional Supreme Fatwa Council stated its opposition to Bedar's move, based on a [fatwa issued in 2013](#) against the translation of the Muslim holy book.

"The text of the Quran is very deep and full of meanings. Thus, literal translation of the holy Quran into other languages is prohibited. But interpretations of the Quran into all languages is allowed, provided the person who does the interpretation meets basic conditions and has full knowledge of the meanings of the Quran," Hassan Khalid Mufti, Head of Kurdistan Region's Supreme Fatwa Council, told Al-Monitor.

Bader disagrees. He said the council's view is illogical and the Quran should be first translated and then interpreted line by line.

"Their view is not correct. Reason and logic are with me, not with them," Bedar told Al-Monitor. "The Almighty God has sent the Quran so that people can read it, understand it, learn it and then practice it in life. If the view by the Supreme Fatwa Council is correct, then it means that the Quran has merely

been sent to the Arabs and they alone can read and understand it."

Mam Burhan Qanie, an independent lawmaker in the Kurdistan Regional Government, told Al-Monitor that he supports any effort that will help revive the Hawrami dialect, the mother tongue of many poets and intellectuals.

"I believe that the books of the major religions — Quran, Bible or Torah — should be translated into all key languages and dialects so that people can read them," he said. "There is no verse in the Quran that says the text should not be translated into other languages. Islam itself says it is a religion for all mankind. How can Islam influence an Italian or a Greek if they cannot read it in a language they understand?"

Qanie, who sits on the parliamentary committee of culture, youth and civil society, said, "I cannot make any promises that the dialect [will be granted a formal status], but we support any efforts deemed as serving the Kurdish language and culture."

Alarmed by the danger to their dialect, many intellectuals from Hawraman called last year for its inclusion in the Kurdistan region's [public education curricula](#). But nothing to that effect has yet happened amid complaints that the Hawrami dialect and the Hawraman area have been neglected both economically and culturally by the authorities.



# Le Parlement européen accueillera bientôt une conférence annuelle sur les Kurdes

Le Parlement européen accueillera, à Bruxelles, les 5 et 6 février, la 16ème Conférence internationale sur “L’Union européenne, la Turquie et les Kurdes”.

**S**outenue par la Gauche unitaire européenne – Gauche verte nordique (GUE/NGL), les Verts/ALE et les Socialistes et Démocrates (S&D), la conférence est organisée par La Commission civique Union européenne-Turquie (EUTCC)\*, en partenariat avec l’Institut kurde de Bruxelles. Elle est en outre parrainée par des personnalités telles que l’avocate iranienne Shirin Ebadi, la Nicaraguayenne Bianca Jagger, ambassadrice de bonne volonté du Conseil de l’Europe, le linguiste américain Noam Chomsky, l’archevêque Desmond Tutu et l’ancienne Députée HDP Leyla Zana.

Au programme des deux jours, figurent plusieurs tables rondes dont voici les thèmes :

**“Répression et résistance en Turquie”**, discussion animée par Joost Jongredon, professeur à l’Université de Wageningen, avec la participation du Député européen Benoît Biteau (français) et de Députés de Turquie issus de différents partis politiques (HDP, CHP et Saadet).

**“La crise des réfugiés et les Kurdes”**, avec l’intervention des Eurodéputés Tineke Strik (hollandaise) et Udo Bullmann (allemand), de l’avocat belge Jan Fermon et du cabinet juridique Asrin (Turquie), engagé dans la défense du leader kurde Abdullah Öcalan.

**“Le Moyen-Orient dans le contexte de l’invasion turque en Syrie du Nord-Est / Rojava”**, avec la Députée euro-



Enceinte du Parlement européen à Bruxelles

péenne Leïla Chaïbi (GUE/NGL, française), le Dr. Gamal Soltan du Centre égyptien Al-Ahram pour les études politiques et stratégiques, l’ancien Député danois Soren Sondergaard, Kirmanc Gundi, chargé de cours à l’Université du Tennessee (États-Unis), et le journaliste kurde Ferda Çetin

**“L’invasion turque au Rojava et son impact sur les femmes et l’égalité des sexes”**, table ronde modérée par l’Eurodéputée Maria Eugénia Rodríguez Palop (GUE/NGL, espagnole) et à laquelle participeront trois représentantes de l’Administration autonome du Nord et de l’Est de la Syrie (AANES), Seham Kerio, Parwin Yousef et Jihan Khudro.

**“L’Europe et le Moyen-Orient : l’intérêt personnel contre la**

**démocratie”**, table ronde modérée par l’ancien Eurodéputé allemand Jürgen Klute, avec la participation du Député européen Brando Benifei (S&D, italien), du politologue autrichien Thomas Schmidinger et de l’académicienne kurde Dersim Dagdeviren.

**“Il y a des alternatives”**, discussion animée par le journaliste hollandais Wladimir van Wilgenburg, avec la sociologue turque Nazan Üstündag, Aviva Stein, membre du Nouveau Sommet mondial (Pays-Bas), le journaliste kurde Amed Dicle et l’historien équatorien Juan Carlos

Il est possible d’obtenir des informations sur la conférence en écrivant à cette adresse:

[brusselsconferenceep@gmail.com](mailto:brusselsconferenceep@gmail.com)

\* L’EUTCC a été fondée en novembre 2004, à l’issue de la première conférence internationale sur “L’UE, la Turquie et les Kurdes”, à l’initiative de plusieurs ONG : Rafto Foundation (Norvège), Kurdish Human Rights Project (Royaume-Uni), Medico International (Allemagne), Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (Royaume-Uni). Elle se donne pour objectif de contribuer à la progression de l’adhésion de la Turquie à l’UE. Par les conférences qu’elle organise chaque année, l’EUTCC souhaite également contribuer à une solution démocratique, pacifique et durable du problème kurde.

## ORDER FROM CHAOS

# The irresistible resiliency of Iraq's protesters

Iraq's protest movement has been remarkably resilient. For months now, tens of thousands of Iraqis across Baghdad and the south have mobilized against the government, demanding better services, accountability, and wholesale reform of the Iraqi state. Since the protests erupted, more than 600 have been killed and thousands more have been injured, according to human rights organizations. The fallout over Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani's assassination was expected to signal the death-knell of the movement, but even that has failed to decisively end what is arguably Iraq's biggest grassroots socio-political mobilization in history.

Iraqis cannot be blamed for wanting more from their government. Their country is on the brink of a socio-economic implosion as a result of a youth bulge, economic degradation, and dilapidated infrastructure. The country's population of more than 30 million is expected to reach 50 million in a decade. More than 60% of Iraqis are under 24, and 700,000 require jobs every year. Iraq's ruling class has failed to respond to the demands of the population and simply no longer has the credibility, much less the capacity, to assuage its population despite the hundreds of billions of dollars that has been expended over the past decade.

Iraq's ruling class crudely assumed the threat of terrorism, the war on ISIS, and sectarian strife could deflect focus from their governance failures and the endemic (politically sanctioned) corruption in perpetuity. The political class has also capitalized on and exploited a powerful narrative that has been forged among its supporters — and indeed some policy circles in Washington and other Western capitals — that has measured the grievances and calamities of the country against the extremes of civil war or Baath-era rule. This sensationalist narrative propagated the notion of a revived Iraqi state and government and it took hold particularly under the previous Iraqi

government of Haidar al-Abadi, yet it ignored underlying, deep-rooted issues that have galvanized an entire generation of Iraqis longing for a better future.

But the odds are against Iraq's protesters. The environment is not conducive to a wholesale deconstruction (followed by a reconstruction) of the state or its political system, and there are very few, if any, major actors internally in Iraq and externally that want a revolutionary change that effectively upends the post-2003 political order in its entirety. Iraq's protesters may have to also come to terms with the reality that the international community is actually much more aligned with the Iraqi ruling class





(even the militias brutally suppressing them) than they think: There is far too much at stake and far too many dangerous uncertainties in a post-war climate in Iraq and the region for any major external actors to seriously contemplate backing or actively supporting an attempt to overhaul Iraq's political system.

A large part of the challenge for the protesters is that the Iraqi political system is designed in a way that makes it impervious to a major restructuring. There is a whole host of formal and informal, state and para-state actors that dominate, shape, and manage the structures of governance and power. The country suffers from the inexorable accumulation of weapons and armed groups, the absence of viable institutions, and multiple alternative authorities that supplant the Iraqi state. Many areas are beyond the influence and control of the government, areas where power is distributed diffusely among parties, militias, tribes, and clerics.

**Iraq's ruling elites are likely to stay in power even if the protests reach critical mass.**

As a consequence of these dynamics, and unlike protests in Algeria or Sudan, Iraq's ruling elites are likely to stay in power even if the protests reach critical mass. In other words, save for its destruction by way of an external invasion, a country-wide civil war (which itself requires a decisive victor), or another dictatorship that is brought about through a coup, for example (and even then, Iraqis may be worse off than they currently are), the current system will prevail.

What makes the situation particularly perilous for the protesters

is the impunity with which militia groups and state-sanctioned security forces are able to crack down on civilians. Iraq is dominated by unaccountable militia groups that wield substantial power and influence, in large part because these groups have exploited the fragility of the Iraqi state, have amassed considerable weapons and other resources, benefited from external patronage from Iran, and capitalized on all this to acquire political superiority.

The 100,000-strong Popular Mobilization Force (PMF), for example, was formed in response to the collapse of the Iraqi army, when ISIS seized Mosul in 2014. It is led and dominated by Iran-aligned groups that have been at the forefront of the violent crackdown against protesters. The power of the PMF is such that it has subsumed Iraq's conventional army; where it may have once been conceivable that the army would protect protesters from the atrocities of Shiite militias, that is evidently no longer the case.

The popular wisdom before the current crisis was that the PMF was not a homogenous force and included nationalist or state-aligned groups that will prevent Iran's proxies from monopolizing power within the organization, groups who will operate as a buffer that insulates the Iraqi population from their violence and atrocities. There were misplaced hopes in the multi-layered characteristics of the PMF. The reality is that Iran's proxies have been unmatched in their sheer resolve and ruthlessness to instrumentalize and appropriate powerful institutions like the PMF, and this has been grossly underestimated in the analysis of these groups.

The odds moved further against the protesters because they have arguably lost their single most important buffer against the militia groups that have been responsible for killing and injuring civilians. Muqtada al-Sadr and his Sadrist movement have been critical to protecting them from these groups, but a deal struck last week between al-Sadr, the Iraqi government and Iran's proxies has resulted in the cleric withdrawing his support. The amorphous nature of the protest movement means its ranks will continue to swell, even without the support of a major socio-political force like the Sadrists; but the notion that the movement can still survive and sustain itself without the protective cloak of at least one of the major political actors in the country is both extremely dangerous and implausible.

That said, the protesters may have some of their fortunes revived. Iraq is infamous for its fragile political deals and coalitions, and so if there is one thing the protesters can bank on, it is the opportunities that might be thrown their way as a result of the fractious nature of the political landscape. The protesters need to urgently mobilize support from at least one major Iraqi political actor in the wake of Sadr's withdrawal of support. That might also include key institutions like the U.S.-trained Iraqi army, which has fought Iran's proxies in the past. Although it is still unlikely that the army will intervene, it is not improbable — particularly if there is some active support from external actors like the U.S.

**The zero-sum approach from the movement... makes them their own worst enemy.**

But the zero-sum approach from

the movement — calling for the entire overhaul of the political system — makes them their own worst enemy. The absence of a concerted effort to mobilize significant support within the Iraqi political arena makes them extremely vulnerable and exposed to malign forces. Moreover, the protests are not disconnected from other domestic and regional dynamics, including tensions between the U.S. and Iran. The rocket attack on the U.S. embassy by militia groups last week was immediately followed by a vicious crackdown against protesters. A broader conflict between the U.S. and Iran, or some other conflagration, could gift Iran's proxies with the perfect smokescreen for launching an expanded violent campaign that looks to decisively end the protests. The fate of the protesters may also be decided away from the glare of the media: the backroom deals, the assassinations, kidnappings, and the occasional attacks launched in total darkness.

The coming weeks will be critical for determining whether Iraq's protest movement can sustain itself and, more importantly, yield at least some objectives focused on improving governance and reforming the state. The government may increasingly turn to violence, but case studies from around the world and the scholarly literature on protest movements show that while coercion might decrease protest temporarily, it far from neutralizes them; in the longer run, coercion increases the dissidence that enables protest movements to revive themselves. On every occasion the Iraqi government relies on coercion, the protesters are likely to adapt their strategies accordingly and reinforce their resiliency as a result.