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IRAN: LE RÉGIME DISSIMULE L'AMPLEUR DE L'ÉPIDÉMIE ET RÉPRIME FÉROCEMENT LES ÉMEUTES DANS LES PRISONS

Depuis le début de l'épidémie, le régime iranien dissimule les chiffres à une population qui n'a de toute manière plus confiance en lui. Selon les calculs de *Radio Farda*, effectués le 31 mars à partir de données régionales, mais diffusés seulement le 1^{er} avril, le pays compterait plus de 70.000 personnes hospitalisées avec les symptômes de CoVid-19 et 4.762 morts, alors que les chiffres officiels donnaient alors 44.606 patients et 2.898 morts. Significativement, les autorités n'ont donné aucun chiffre pour la seconde moitié de mars sur les provinces de

Téhéran et Qom, justement les zones les plus frappées... *Radio Farda* a fait une estimation de 1.067 morts à Téhéran. Même certains députés du *Majlis* (parlement) ont déclaré que les chiffres officiels étaient bien inférieurs à la réalité, jusqu'à cinq fois selon un expert de l'OMS.

Lorsque l'autorité de santé a fait arrêter la publication papier des journaux pour raisons sanitaires (soi-disant pour éviter la contagion lors de l'impression et de la distribution), de nombreux Iraniens ont interprété la décision comme une tentative par le gouvernement de faire taire les

critiques de sa gestion de l'épidémie. Au Kurdistan iranien où le virus a tué au moins 400 personnes et en a probablement infecté des milliers d'autres, les autorités se sont concentrées sur la répression des critiques tout en poursuivant celle des activistes kurdes. À Kermanshah, le gouverneur a déposé plainte contre le journaliste kurde Ghulam Raza Alaa après un article ironique le visant, et celui-ci a été incarcéré. Parallèlement, plusieurs prisonniers ont été transférés de Mahabad vers la prison d'Ouroumieh (*WKI*).

De nombreuses prisons ira-

niennes ont connu des révoltes en raison de l'épidémie. Le pouvoir a annoncé la libération provisoire de 100.000 détenus pour éviter la propagation du virus dans les prisons, mais plusieurs journalistes bénévoles informant l'émission « Les Observateurs » de la chaîne de télévision *France-24* ont indiqué qu'en réalité, les cautions à payer étaient si élevées que peu de familles pouvaient les payer... Plusieurs observateurs locaux ont pointé les conditions sanitaires littéralement désastreuses ayant cours en détention, les prisonniers n'ayant parfois ni eau ni savon pour se laver les mains, la première mesure recommandée pour faire barrière au virus. Les émeutes carcérales auraient été particulièrement violentes à Ahwaz au Khouzistan, où elles auraient fait des dizaines de morts parmi les prisonniers, ainsi qu'à Khorramabad, la capitale de la province du Lorestan. Il n'y a pas de chiffres concernant les morts causées par l'épidémie en prison, mais selon *Amnesty International*, entre fin mars et début avril, des milliers de prisonniers d'au moins huit prisons iraniennes, terrorisés par l'épidémie, ont lancé des protestations qui ont provoqué une terrible répression du personnel pénitentiaire et des forces de sécurité. Un exemple en particulier a attiré l'attention: le 11 au matin, le prisonnier politique kurde Mustafa Salimi, ancien membre du PDKI, a été exécuté. Condamné à la peine capitale mais laissé dans le « couloir de la mort » durant 17 ans, il faisait partie des prisonniers ayant pu s'échapper de la prison de Saqqez lors des émeutes de fin mars. Après que plusieurs organisations de défense des droits de l'homme ont accusé les *Asayish* (sécurité) de la ville de Penjwîn, au Kurdistan irakien, d'avoir remis Salimi à l'Iran alors qu'il avait demandé l'asile, le

Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan a constitué une commission chargée d'enquêter sur l'incident.

Le 6, Hamid Sourî, un membre du « Centre national de lutte contre le coronavirus » a déclaré estimer qu'au moins 500.000 personnes étaient infectées dans le pays. Le 8, alors que l'opposition légale annonçait avoir décompté 20.400 décès, le président Rouhani a appelé à reprendre progressivement le travail. Une motion d'opposition à cette décision, signée par 80 députés, et demandant tout au contraire un confinement national d'un mois, a été rejetée par le parlement. Le même jour, le *CHRI* (*Center for Human Rights in Iran*) a publié une traduction non-officielle en persan du guide de l'OMS sur la manière d'éviter la propagation du virus dans les prisons (<https://persian.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/WHO-COVID-in-prisons-Farsi.pdf>), tout en appelant à la libération des prisonniers non dangereux, notamment ceux emprisonnés abusivement pour raisons politiques et ceux à la double nationalité. Le CHRI a aussi rappelé qu'éviter une explosion épidémique dans les prisons ne protégerait pas seulement les prisonniers concernés, mais aussi l'ensemble de la population iranienne... Dans le même temps, l'organisation kurde *Hengaw* de défense des droits de l'homme a rapporté que plus de cent détenus d'Ouroumîeh étaient positifs et que sept d'entre eux étaient morts...

Le 11, les commerces à « faible risque » étaient autorisés à rouvrir, sauf à Téhéran – une décision critiquée par plusieurs experts médicaux et jusqu'à certains membres du gouvernement. Le 17, des experts des droits de l'homme aux Nations

Unies, tout en appelant à un relâchement des sanctions imposées à l'Iran pour faciliter sa lutte contre l'épidémie, ont appelé depuis Genève le pays à étendre sa politique de libération aux prisonniers de conscience et aux binationaux les plus âgés. Le 18, alors que les commerces « à faible risque » de Téhéran étaient à leur tour autorisés à rouvrir, le président du conseil municipal de la capitale, Mohsen Hashemi, a déclaré que le nombre de personnes infectées était « bien plus élevé » que celui officiellement annoncé, et a averti que lever le confinement prématurément pourrait provoquer une nouvelle vague épidémique. La semaine précédente, le Centre de recherche du parlement avait indiqué dans un rapport que le nombre réel de décès dus au COVID-19 était deux fois plus élevé que les chiffres officiels et que le nombre de cas d'infection était jusqu'à huit fois plus élevé... (*Radio Farda*) Le 19, le ministère de la Santé comptait plus de 5.100 morts et 82.000 personnes contaminées.

Le 20, on a appris par *IHRM* (*Iran Human Rights Monitor*), que le prisonnier politique kurde Ismail Moradi, condamné à 10 ans en 2015 pour « collaboration avec des partis politiques kurdes », était entré en grève de la faim le 12 dans sa prison de Dizel Abad à Kermanshah en se cousant les lèvres, pour protester après s'être vu refuser la liberté provisoire. Les autorités pénitentiaires l'ont interdit d'appels téléphoniques et de visites à sa famille. Deux autres activistes kurdes ont été parallèlement incarcérés à Bojnurd (Qasim Azimi) et Saqqez (Kamaram Abdi) (*WKI*). Le même jour, le Français Roland Marchal, chercheur collègue et compagnon de Farida Adelkhah, était libéré après neuf mois de détention.

Le 23, le CHRI a appelé les autorités iraniennes à hospitaliser immédiatement le défenseur de l'environnement Sam Rajabi, emprisonné à Evin. Transféré à l'hôpital pour une opération urgente, celui-ci avait été informé qu'il était positif au coronavirus. Son opération a été annulée et il a été renvoyé en prison sans aucun traitement. Selon sa sœur, il partage une cellule avec 15 autres détenus, dont d'autres défenseurs de l'environnement... Les autorités ont également refusé de tester les collègues emprisonnés de Rajabi. Tous sont emprisonnés sur des accusations fabriquées d'espionnage.

Le 24, le gouverneur du Khouzistan tirait la sonnette d'alarme sur la capitale de la province, Ahwaz, où, déclarait-il, l'épidémie s'était emballée, mais sans vouloir donner de chiffres. Alors que l'inquiétude

quant à une seconde vague épidémique se faisait aiguë, les chiffres officiels atteignaient 91.472 cas et 5.806 morts. Le régime a également exécuté au moins dix Kurdes courant avril après l'évasion de masse de la prison de Saqqez fin mars, et plusieurs autres ont été condamnés à des peines de prison : le 21, l'activiste Akbar Goili a reçu à Sanandaj cinq ans pour « collaboration » avec le PJAK, et à Mariwan, Ismael Ardawani a été arrêté par l'*Etelaat* pour coopération avec un parti kurde. Le 29, le porte-parole de l'armée a déclaré que 3.600 personnes avaient été incarcérées par la cyber-police et les *Bassidj* pour « désinformation » sur l'épidémie (*Rûdaw*). Parallèlement, la décision du président iranien de lever le confinement pour relancer l'économie a été très critiquée y compris au sein du régime, notamment au ministère de la Santé. La Société iranienne d'immunologie

et d'allergie a même publié une lettre ouverte à Rouhani, où elle estimait le risque d'infections à 60 millions et celui des décès à plus de 2 millions. L'opposition a quant à elle mis en cause les richesses accumulées par le Guide suprême Ali Khamenei, qui contrôle plusieurs « fondations » et des milliards de dollars, qui auraient pu être employées dans la lutte contre le coronavirus plutôt que d'aller aux *pasdaran*... (*La Tribune*).

Après que l'Iran a réussi le 22 la mise sur orbite de son premier satellite militaire, le Département d'État américain a appelé le 25 les autres pays, et en particulier ceux de l'Union européenne, à « rejeter » l'action de l'Iran et à prolonger l'embargo sur les ventes d'armes au pays, qui devrait expirer en octobre prochain. Le Royaume-Uni, la France et l'Allemagne ont déjà condamné le lancement.

ROJAVA:

LES DJIHADISTES PRO-TURCS INTERROMPENT L'APPROVISIONNEMENT EN EAU D'UN DEMI-MILLION DE CIVILS

La Turquie et ses mercenaires djihadistes continuent à occuper une large bande de territoire au Nord-est de la Syrie ainsi que la région d'Afrîn à l'Ouest. Depuis plusieurs mois, ils empêchent aussi régulièrement l'approvisionnement en eau des zones administrées par l'AANES (Administration autonome du Nord-Est syrien), provoquant l'inquiétude des organisations humanitaires et de l'OMS quant à une propagation du coronavirus dans la région. Dans un rapport publié le 31 mars, l'organisation de défense des droits de l'homme *Human Rights Watch* a dénoncé l'usage de l'eau contre le Rojava alors que l'épidémie se propage. Ankara a rejeté ces accusations

comme une « campagne de diffamation », accusant le régime de Damas de ne pas fournir assez d'électricité pour permettre un fonctionnement normal de la station de pompage d'Allouk, située près de la ville de Serê Kaniyê / Ras al-Aïn, et gérée à l'origine par des techniciens syriens évincés depuis par les djihadistes pro-turcs. L'après-midi du 2 avril, ceux-ci ont endommagé à l'artillerie la canalisation provenant de la station et desservant une région habitée par un demi-million de civils, incluant la ville de Hassaké. Le 27 mars, 49 organisations de la société civile syrienne ou de défense des droits de l'homme ont accusé dans une lettre commune la Turquie de crime de guerre en raison de ces interrup-

tions volontaires de la fourniture d'eau.

Malgré le cessez-le-feu négocié en octobre et les récents appels des Nations-Unies à un cessez-le-feu pour faciliter la lutte contre la pandémie, les supplétifs djihadistes de la Turquie poursuivent leurs attaques contre les zones administrées par l'AANES, notamment près d'Aïn Issa et Girê Spî / Tell Abyad et l'autoroute M4. La présidente du Comité exécutif du Conseil démocratique syrien (CDS), Ilham Ahmed, a appelé les Nations Unies à faire pression sur la Turquie pour les arrêter. Les mercenaires pro-turcs ont aussi attaqué dans le gouvernorat d'Alep plusieurs villages tenus par les Forces démocra-

tiques syriennes (FDS), et la Turquie poursuit ses opérations de nettoyage ethnique anti-kurde dans sa soi-disant « zone de sécurité ». Selon des sources locales, le 1^{er} avril, 19 cars ont amené des centaines de familles de combattants djihadistes de *Ahrar al-Sharqiya* et du Front *Al-Shamiya* à Girê Spî / Tell Abyad et Serê Kaniyê / Ras al-Aïn. Elles doivent être réinstallées dans des maisons kurdes dont les propriétaires ont dû fuir l'attaque turque d'octobre (*Kurdistan-24*).

Le 26, l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) a indiqué que la Turquie reprenait les politiques déjà utilisées à Afrîn en amenant dans les zones qu'elle contrôle de Raqqa et d'Hassaké des familles originaires de la Ghouta, soulignant que les factions djihadistes des opérations « Source de paix » et « Rameau d'olivier » y poursuivent enlèvements et arrestations arbitraires des résidents, tant kurdes qu'arabes (*Asharq Al-Awsat*). Le 27, une attaque de drone turc a visé un bureau des *Asayish* (sécurité kurde) à Kobanê, faisant des dégâts matériels. L'AANES a appelé les États-Unis et la Russie à remplir leurs responsabilités en tant que garants de deux cessez-le-feu séparés conclus avec la Turquie, et à faire cesser les attaques turques. Ankara a accusé en réponse les FDS de chercher à infiltrer la « zone de sécurité », une accusation déniée par leur porte-parole Gabriel Keno (*WKI*). Au même moment, la Commission américaine sur la liberté religieuse internationale (*USCIR*) a publié son rapport annuel 2020, où elle recommande au gouvernement américain d'« exercer une pression significative sur la Turquie pour que celle-ci annonce un agenda de retrait de la Syrie et faire en sorte que ni son armée ni ses alliés de l'Armée syrienne libre ne tentent

d'étendre leur contrôle dans le Nord-est de la Syrie ou de s'engager dans un nettoyage religieux et/ou ethnique ».

Les occupants poursuivent également tant exactions que nettoyage ethnique à Afrîn. Le 1^{er} avril, la chaîne kurde irakienne *Rûdaw* a indiqué que durant les cinq semaines précédentes, trois femmes yézidiées avaient été kidnappées par les groupes djihadistes, parfois contre rançon, leurs familles ayant gardé le silence par peur de représailles. La ville a aussi été frappée par une série d'attentats à la bombe, le premier le 8 avril, utilisant des voitures piégées, pour lesquels la Turquie et ses supplétifs djihadistes ont accusé les FDS, mais dont plusieurs sources locales imputent la responsabilité à des affrontements internes entre djihadistes, déjà survenus dans le passé. Certains de ces miliciens, que la Turquie n'a pas payés depuis deux mois, se sentent trahis. Alors qu'Ankara veut les envoyer en Libye, ils souhaitent plutôt regagner Idlib (*Kurdistan-24*). L'OSDH a publié en milieu de mois un rapport détaillant leurs pillages systématiques dans la région, alors qu'une dizaine de Kurdes venaient de nouveau d'être kidnappés par des factions de l'« Armée nationale syrienne », une milice malgré son nom entièrement au service d'Ankara. Parmi les récentes exactions horribles, les meurtres d'une femme kurde de 80 ans, retrouvée pendue par ses enfants le 18, et d'un homme kurde de 74 ans, battu à mort par des djihadistes de la faction « Sultan Mourad », composée en grande partie de turkmènes syriens. La « Brigade Samarkand », responsable du meurtre de la femme, a ensuite enlevé ses enfants et plusieurs voisins. Le 28 au soir, un nouvel attentat à la bombe a tué au moins 40 personnes et a fait 47

blessés à Afrîn, menant à des suspicions de responsabilité des services secrets turcs, le MIT. FDS comme AANES ont tous deux condamné l'attaque le lendemain. Mazloum Abdi a incriminé la « politique destructrice de l'occupation turque », et le CDS a déclaré dans un communiqué que « l'invasion turque, s'appuyant sur des fractions [militaires] à l'idéologie terroriste, [avait] ouvert la porte aux forces terroristes pour qu'elles réorganisent leurs rangs et commettent des actes lâches sous la protection de la Turquie ». Quelques heures plus tard, Abdulkarim Omar, co-président du département des relations étrangères de l'AANES a appelé de nouveau la communauté internationale à « faire pression sur la Turquie pour qu'elle quitte Afrîn et toutes les zones qu'elle occupe ».

Mais les occupants turcs et leurs mercenaires djihadistes ne sont pas les seuls à mener le nettoyage ethnique dans les zones kurdes. La coalition TEV-DEM, groupe dominant l'administration de l'AANES, a condamné le 24 les tentatives du régime de Damas pour modifier la composition démographique dans plusieurs villages du Nord de la province d'Alep en y convertissant des bâtiments scolaires en centres de quarantaine destinés à des tziganes originaires du centre du pays. Le TEV-DEM accuse Damas de saisir l'opportunité de l'épidémie pour reprendre sa politique de « ceinture arabe » des années 60-70 et appelle les Nations Unies et les organisations de la société civile à faire pression pour faire cesser celle-ci.

Dans ce contexte difficile, l'unité des Kurdes de Syrie est plus que jamais nécessaire. Le 25, le commandant des FDS, Mazloum Abdi, a appelé à soutenir l'initia-

tive d'unité nationale, annonçant depuis Qamishli après une réunion avec une délégation représentant diverses tendances politiques du Rojava que « les pourparlers [avaient] abouti à des résultats positifs qui seront annoncés dans les prochains jours » (*RojInfo*).

Parallèlement, l'AANES a poursuivi, autant que le lui permettent ses moyens, la lutte contre l'épidémie du coronavirus. Le Rojava ne disposant que de 27 ventilateurs, des techniciens électriciens kurdes d'Amoude ont entrepris d'en fabriquer pour les hôpitaux du Rojava. La représentation du CDS à Washington a lancé un appel à l'aide sanitaire. Sur place, l'AANES a critiqué Damas pour n'avoir pris aucune mesure de dépistage ni de quarantaine des passagers débarquant à Qamishli, dont l'aéroport est tenu par le régime, critiquant l'absence de coopération du régime, qui « [met...] en danger la vie des habitants du Nord-est syrien ». L'AANES, ne disposant pas de kits de dépistage, a mis en place pour les arrivants un examen limité à la recherche des symptômes. Le 8, on ne comptait encore aucun cas au Rojava (*Kurdistan-24*). Le 9, après une demande téléphonique de Mazloum Abdi, la

Région voisine du Kurdistan d'Irak a envoyé du matériel médical devant permettre d'équiper deux laboratoires de dépistage et des formateurs (*Rûdaw*). L'AANES a aussi renouvelé sa demande d'assistance à l'OMS, alors que deux voyageurs arrivant de Damas étaient placés en quarantaine à Qamishli sur soupçon d'infection par le coronavirus. Le 15, l'administration du Rojava a exprimé son soutien à l'appel du président français pour un cessez-le-feu mondial durant l'épidémie.

Le 17, l'AANES a annoncé que l'OMS avait diagnostiqué dans sa région un premier cas de Covid-19 sur des échantillons envoyés à Damas. Il s'agissait d'un patient de 53 ans hospitalisé le 27 mars à l'hôpital national de Qamishli, géré par le régime, et décédé le 2, mais l'AANES n'avait pas été informée à ce moment (*Reuters*). Le chef du département santé de l'AANES a qualifié cette absence d'information de la part de l'OMS de « crime contre cinq millions de personnes ». Cependant, le cas n'a pas été confirmé par l'hôpital. L'AANES a prolongé le confinement en vigueur au Rojava jusqu'au 1^{er} mai. Le 29, les deux premiers cas ont été

confirmés au Rojava, une femme, de nouveau à l'hôpital de Qamishli, et un homme, mis en quarantaine à Hassaké.

Durant ce mois, Daech a poursuivi sa réorganisation dans le pays, profitant tant de l'invasion turque que de l'épidémie, qui mobilise les énergies. Ses cellules dormantes ont repris progressivement leurs activités, menaçant les habitants qui collaborent avec les autorités et relançant leurs rackets. Plusieurs prisonnières françaises ont réussi à s'enfuir de camps où elles étaient internées au Rojava. Une, échappée du camp de Roj, a été reprise, mais au moins trois autres, venues d'Al-Hol, moins bien gardé, ne l'ont pas été (*Libération*). Les djihadistes ont fait en début de mois deux victimes parmi les FDS dans une attaque sur la petite ville d'al-Suwar, dans la province de Deir Ezzor, et ont aussi lancé des attaques sur les forces du régime au sud de cette province où ils ont endommagé des installations pétrolières. Les FDS ont annoncé avoir capturé quatre djihadistes dans une contre-opération menée avec l'appui aérien américain. Parallèlement, l'AANES poursuit ses préparatifs pour mettre en place un tribunal qui jugera sur place les djihadistes qu'elle a capturés.

TURQUIE:

LE POUVOIR LIVRE À L'ÉPIDÉMIE SES OPPOSANTS EMPRISONNÉS MAIS LIBÈRE DES GANGSTERS D'EXTREME DROITE

Le 3 avril, Helin Bölek, la chanteuse kurde de «Grup Yorum» est morte chez elle à 28 ans après 288 jours d'une grève de la faim entamée en prison au printemps dernier pour dénoncer censure et répression. Libérée après deux ans de détention avec les sept membres du groupe pour « résistance à la police, insulte et appartenance à

une organisation terroriste », elle avait poursuivi son jeûne chez elle en soutien au bassiste du groupe, Ibrahim Gökçek, toujours incarcéré. Fondé en 1985 par quatre étudiants en réaction au coup d'Etat militaire de 1980, « Grup Yorum », qui se voulait au service des «peuples opprimés de Turquie et d'ailleurs», a été frappé d'une répression implacable. Le 11 avril, une autre

chanteuse kurde Nûdem Durak, née en janvier 1988, a été condamnée à 19 ans de prison pour avoir chanté, en kurde, le combat de son peuple, et a été incarcérée à Bayburt...

Le 1^{er} avril, le ministère de la Santé a indiqué que la Turquie avait enregistré 15.679 cas confirmés de coronavirus avec 277 décès. Mais l'épidémie apparaît

de plus en plus comme une opportunité saisie par le pouvoir AKP-MHP pour se débarrasser de ses opposants politiques. Après avoir criminalisé et emprisonné l'opposition, le pouvoir turc a soumis au parlement le 31 mars un projet de loi visant à libérer, provisoirement ou définitivement, jusqu'à 90.000 prisonniers en vue de diminuer la population carcérale. Les prisons turques, surpeuplées avec près de 300.000 détenus et souvent insalubres, mettent les prisonniers en danger grave de contagion. Si le ministère de la Justice niait encore courant mars tout cas en cellule, des sources locales ont fait état de plusieurs prisonniers testés positifs, comme Nalan Ozaydin, co-maire adjointe HDP de Mazıdağı démise et incarcérée, qui sur suspicion de CoVid-19 a été libérée et assignée à résidence... Mais le texte proposé a immédiatement provoqué l'inquiétude générale, car il exclut des libérations les personnes accusées de terrorisme (dont celles incarcérées en attente de jugement), ce qui concerne quasiment tous les opposants abusivement emprisonnés. *Human Rights Watch* et *Amnesty International* ont condamné ces exclusions, et les rapporteurs de l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe (APCE) pour le suivi de la Turquie ont appelé celle-ci à une libération non discriminatoire des prisonniers politiques.

Le 4 au soir, la prison de Batman a connu un incendie et un soulèvement quand des prisonniers politiques kurdes se sont mutinés en raison de l'inquiétude causée par l'épidémie. Le 7, le Mouvement des femmes libres kurdes (*Tevgera Jinên Azad – TJA*) a dénoncé un «massacre annoncé» dans les prisons, et la poursuite des destitutions de maires HDP, à un moment où les élus locaux, constituant un

maillon indispensable de la lutte contre l'épidémie, avaient entamé la mise en place de mesures de protection sanitaire des citoyens et de soutien économique aux plus démunis. Demandant des libérations sans discrimination, le TJA a accusé l'État de ne pas prendre les mesures de protection nécessaires: «Un seul centre de détection des cas a été créé pour l'ensemble du Kurdistan, la plupart des personnes qui se rendent à l'hôpital sont renvoyées chez elles. Les discours discriminatoires à l'égard des personnes âgées alimentent la mentalité sexiste, raciste et religieuse».

Parallèlement, le pouvoir a cherché à imposer le silence à tous les lanceurs d'alerte. La journaliste de Diyarbakir Nurcan Baysal, elle-même brièvement incarcérée pour intimidation en début de mois, a rapporté le 9 que les médecins qu'elle avait tenté d'interroger en ville lui avaient répondu: «Nous ne pouvons pas parler». À cette date on comptait (officiellement) 38.226 cas et plus de 800 décès, avec un épïcêtre dans la capitale économique, Istanbul, et plus de 400 personnes avaient été arrêtées pour leurs messages critiquant la gestion de l'épidémie sur les médias sociaux. Comme l'a noté Miray Erbey, chercheur en sciences cognitives à l'Institut Max Planck, en Turquie: «Les efforts pour contenir le flux d'informations ont été plus importants que ceux pour contenir l'épidémie elle-même». Le président turc a aussi veillé à apparaître comme le seul à agir: il a rapidement interdit les collectes de fonds lancées par les maires CHP des deux grandes métropoles d'Istanbul et d'Ankara pour assister les victimes économiques de l'épidémie (*Ahval*).

Le texte de loi contesté en début de mois sur la libération des pri-

sonniers a été approuvé au parlement le 13 au soir par 279 voix contre 51 avec le soutien de l'AKP et du MHP. L'un des avocats de Selahattin Demirtaş, l'ancien coprésident du HDP, maintenu en prison tout comme Osman Kavala, a qualifié la nouvelle loi d'«injuste et illégale» (*Le Figaro*). Le même jour, le gouvernement avait inscrit à l'agenda parlementaire la discussion d'une loi prévoyant l'amnistie des violeurs des mineurs s'ils se marient avec leurs victimes, qui a provoqué un véritable séisme sur les réseaux sociaux... (*Kurdistan au féminin*). Le lendemain, les chiffres officiels du coronavirus étaient d'au moins 61.049 cas et 1.296 morts, ils passeraient à 90.980 et 2.100 au 21 puis de 115.000 et 2.992 au 27... (*WKI*).

Le 16, le *New York Times* rendait compte dans ses colonnes de la libération de sa cellule d'Ankara du chef mafieux et leader d'extrême-droite de 67 ans Alaattin Cakici – ami fidèle du leader du MHP Devlet Bahçeli – emprisonné depuis 16 ans pour, entre autres, incitation au meurtre, attaque à main armée, blanchiment d'argent, direction d'une organisation illégale et insulte au président. Il lui restait des décennies à purger, la nouvelle loi a permis sa libération. Deux jours plus tard, la demande de libération pour risque sanitaire de Selahattin Demirtaş, qui a déjà fait un malaise dans sa cellule, était rejetée par un tribunal d'Ankara qui n'a pas motivé sa décision (*Ahval*). Le 20, le *New York Times* revenait à la charge sur l'épidémie en Turquie en dénonçant la «campagne de propagande soigneusement orchestrée» du président turc et en publiant ses propres calculs qui permettent de conclure à partir des chiffres d'Istanbul à une épidémie d'une ampleur bien supérieure à ce qu'admettent les

chiffres officiels: selon les comptes du quotidien américain, «la ville [d'Istanbul] a enregistré du 9 mars au 12 avril environ 2.100 décès de plus que prévu, sur la base des moyennes hebdomadaires des deux dernières années, bien plus que ce que les responsables ont rapporté pour l'ensemble de la Turquie pendant cette période». Et de continuer: «Le gouvernement a annoncé le premier décès dû au Covid-19 dans le pays le 17 mars. Mais les statistiques compilées par le *Times* suggèrent que même à cette époque, le nombre total de décès à Istanbul était déjà considérablement plus élevé que les moyennes historiques, ce qui indique que le virus était arrivé plusieurs semaines auparavant. Pourtant, M. Erdoğan a assuré à la nation le 18 mars, après l'annonce du second décès, que la Turquie avait «rapidement pris toutes les précautions»...

L'extension de l'épidémie n'a pas arrêté la répression du HDP, qui, début avril, ne disposait plus que de 19 des 59 mairies qu'il avait conquises aux municipales de mars 2019 un an auparavant. Le 9, le maire de Diyarbakir Selçuk Mizrakli, déjà démis en août dernier et présentement emprisonné, a fait l'objet d'une

nouvelle accusation de «propagande terroriste» par le procureur d'Ankara pour être entré en grève de la faim durant trois jours à l'appel du HDP en soutien à Leyla Güven, et pour avoir posté un *tweet* de soutien au militant kurde Ramin Hossein, exécuté en Iran (*Bianet*). Le 21, les procureurs turcs ont lancé une cinquième accusation contre l'ancien coprésident du HDP Selahattin Demirtaş, l'accusant de «terrorisme» en citant comme «preuves» entre autres certains de ses discours entre 2012 et 2016, une interview de 2016 au journal allemand *Süddeutsche Zeitung* et une plainte déposée contre lui par le Centre de communication de la présidence (CIMER) (*Duvar English*). Le 27, le *Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI)* a annoncé que le gouvernement avait demandé au parlement de suspendre l'immunité de 21 nouveaux députés du HDP.

L'armée turque a poursuivi ses opérations militaires, y compris dans l'Irak voisin. Le 15, nouvelles violations de l'espace aérien de ce pays, une frappe aérienne a détruit un bâtiment présenté comme appartenant au PKK à Rawandouz, où selon les responsables locaux, plusieurs installations de télécommunica-

tion ont été détruites, et des drones turcs ont tué trois femmes kurdes près du camp de réfugiés de Makhmur. Après qu'une délégation du gouvernement irakien est venue à Makhmour confirmer les faits, le ministère irakien des Affaires étrangères a convoqué l'ambassadeur turc à Bagdad pour demander officiellement l'arrêt de telles violations (*Newsweek*).

Les militaires turcs ont aussi fait une nouvelle fois montre de leur mépris de toute humanité en restituant à une mère de Dersim (Tunceli) les restes de son fils, un combattant du PKK tué par l'armée en 2017, dans une boîte, avant que les gendarmes ne l'empêchent d'assister à ses funérailles. Puis le 24 à Silvan (Diyarbakir), les gendarmes ont convoqué d'autres familles de combattants tués pour leur ordonner de retirer les lettres Q, W et X, qui ne sont pas utilisées en turc, des pierres tombales de leurs enfants. Devant l'impossibilité d'obéir sans détruire les pierres, les militaires ont fait retirer et briser celles-ci. Des cas similaires ont été rapportés à Van et à Erciş. Des centaines de corps ont ainsi été déterrés et enlevés sans que l'on sache où ils se trouvent (*RojInfo*).

LE KURDISTAN LIBÈRE DES MILLIERS DE PRISONNIERS ALORS QUE L'ÉPIDÉMIE MENACE

Toujours plongé dans une crise politique qui semble devoir perdurer, l'Irak est simultanément frappé sur le plan économique par la chute du prix du pétrole, sa principale ressource avec 93% du budget de l'État. Le budget prévisionnel 2020, 135 milliards de dollars, le montant le plus élevé de l'histoire du pays, par lequel les dirigeants politiques espéraient calmer les protestations et reconstruire les

infrastructures détruites dans le combat contre Daech, semble de moins en moins vraisemblable... Par ailleurs, la crise sanitaire, avec l'expansion rapide du coronavirus dans le pays, pourrait avoir de lourdes conséquences sociales et économiques.

Le 9 avril, le dernier candidat au poste de Premier ministre, Adnan Al-Zurfi, a annoncé renoncer à ses tentatives pour former un gouvernement. Ses

jours étaient comptés à partir du moment où les partis chiites dominant le parlement, suivant en cela les milices pro-iraniennes, avaient rejeté ses propositions. Les partis kurdes ont à cet égard pris une position attentiste, demandant aux partis chiites de s'entendre d'abord sur un candidat commun avant d'exprimer leur position. Le jour même, le Président a nommé à la place d'Al-Zurfi l'ancien chef des services de renseignement,

Moustafa al-Kadhemi, dont le nom circulait comme successeur possible depuis le début du mois... S'il n'est pas mieux vu par l'Iran, Kadhemi pourrait avoir plus de chances de succès que son prédécesseur, étant à la différence de celui-ci soutenu par l'ensemble des partis chiïtes – et par le plus important bloc parlementaire sunnite. Côté kurde, aussi bien l'UPK que le PDK (en la personne du Président de la Région du Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani) ont annoncé leur soutien à cette nomination. Al-Kadhemi a alors entamé le long chemin de la formation d'un cabinet qui soit acceptable par le parlement...

Dans ce contexte complexe, les discussions budgétaires entre le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK) et le gouvernement fédéral de Bagdad se sont poursuivies. En novembre dernier, un accord prévoyait l'attribution au Kurdistan de 12,6% du budget fédéral en échange de la fourniture quotidienne par celui-ci de 250.000 barils de brut à la SOMO, la société pétrolière d'État, mais le GRK avait décidé d'attendre pour entamer la fourniture la formation d'un gouvernement stable à Bagdad. Le 19, après une réunion entre une délégation du GRK et le ministre irakien du pétrole, le ministre des Finances du GRK, Awat Janab, a annoncé un accord identique au précédent. Cependant, le ministre de la planification du GRK, Dara Rashid, tout en renouvelant son accord pour la fourniture du pétrole à Bagdad, a également déclaré qu'en retour, Bagdad devait s'engager à régler la part de budget revenant à la Région ainsi que les paiements dus aux compagnies pétrolières qui y opèrent... On revenait donc au conflit placé dès l'origine au cœur des relations entre les deux gouvernements. En l'absence de livraisons

pétrolières, Bagdad a annoncé la semaine suivante qu'il cesserait en mai ses versements à Erbil. Le Vice-premier ministre du GRK, Qubad Talabani, devrait se rendre à Bagdad pour tenter de négocier un nouvel accord, et le 28, le Président de la Région du Kurdistan, Nechirvan Barzani, a lors d'une réunion avec la Représentante spéciale en Irak du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, demandé la médiation de cette institution pour résoudre la dispute.

Dans les territoires disputés, les djihadistes de Daech ont poursuivi leurs attaques, s'en prenant dans la nuit du 6 à un village du district de Daquq (Sud de Kirkouk) habité par des membres de la minorité kurde des Kakais. Après des affrontements qui se sont prolongés plusieurs heures, trois policiers irakiens ont été blessés par une bombe artisanale. Selon une source sécuritaire, la zone de Daquq avait déjà été frappée par trois autres attaques ayant causé plusieurs morts et trois kidnappings de policiers fédéraux. Le lendemain, ce sont deux pechmergas kurdes qui ont été tués dans une autre attaque djihadiste nocturne à Garmiyan, poussant le président du PDK, Massoud Barzani, à rappeler dans une déclaration que Daech constituait toujours une menace. Le 14, l'armée irakienne a annoncé qu'une autre bombe artisanale avait tué au Sinjar deux combattants des Unités de protection des Yézidis (YBŞ) et en avait blessé cinq autres durant une opération conjointe (*Kurdistan-24*). À Kirkouk, les forces de sécurité ont été placées en alerte la dernière semaine du mois après plusieurs attaques djihadistes, tandis que deux chefs militaires djihadistes étaient capturés et qu'une attaque-suicide

visait le bureau du renseignement irakien dans la ville de Kirkouk.

La lutte contre Daech se prolonge aussi à l'étranger, et notamment pour amener les bourreaux devant la justice. Le 24, un détenu irakien soupçonné d'appartenance à Daech a été inculpé de génocide à Francfort, en Allemagne, en même temps que du meurtre d'une fillette yézidie de cinq ans dont il avait fait son esclave... C'est le premier procès dans le monde dont l'acte d'accusation comporte la mention de «génocide» en relation aux Yézidis. Le couple de Fallouja est accusé d'avoir acheté, maltraité et torturé la fillette et sa mère, causant la mort de la première durant l'été 2015 (*New York Times*).

La Région du Kurdistan a aussi été confrontée à la propagation du coronavirus. Le 6, Ziya Petros, responsable du Bureau indépendant des droits de l'homme a averti que si le GRK ne prenait pas rapidement des mesures pour réduire la population carcérale, une catastrophe sanitaire pourrait se produire dans les prisons surpeuplées de la Région. Petros a notamment indiqué que des prisons prévues pour 900 détenus en hébergent maintenant plus de 2000, obligeant à placer jusqu'à 25 prisonniers dans des cellules de 9... (*Rûdaw*). Le même jour, l'Irak annonçait 1.031 cas de Covid-19 et 64 décès, tandis que les chiffres au Kurdistan étaient respectivement de 277 cas et 3 décès, avec 41 nouveaux cas en trois jours. Le ministre GRK de la Santé a tiré la sonnette d'alarme face à un «danger grave», indiquant que le système de santé du GRK ne lui permettait pas de contrôler la situation en cas d'épidémie à grande échelle. Onze quartiers d'Erbil ont été placés en confinement.

Le 7, le GRK a prononcé la libération de centaines de prisonniers placés en détention provisoire en attente de procès afin d'éviter la propagation du virus, expliquant que l'épidémie avait obligé à arrêter le fonctionnement de la justice. Le ministère de la Justice a chiffré ensuite le nombre de libérations à 1.474. Le 8, alors que l'Irak annonçait une extension de son confinement jusqu'au 18 avril, le ministère de la Santé du Kurdistan a annoncé 14 nouveaux cas. Beaucoup ont été contaminés lors de deux enterrements tenus à Erbil dans le même quartier (*Kurdistan-24*). Le 14 avril, 826 détenus supplé-

mentaires ont été libérés. La dernière semaine du mois, le nombre de cas confirmés atteignait 355, alors que les activités commençaient à reprendre et que la frontière avec l'Iran était rouverte. Mais le 28, le Kurdistan annonçait son cinquième mort de l'épidémie, aussi le premier dans la province d'Erbil, et onze nouveaux cas, dont dix résidents dans le district de Soran. Selon le ministère GRK de la Santé, au cours des 24 heures précédentes, 1.706 personnes avaient été testées positives au Covid-19, dont 1.121 dans la province d'Erbil, 158 à Suleimaniyeh, 300 à Dohouk, 25 à Halabja, tandis que

1.602 personnes étaient toujours maintenues en quarantaine dans 33 lieux différents de la Région.

Enfin, le 20, une centaine d'artistes kurdes, inquiets des tensions se développant entre partis politiques kurdes autour de la région de Zîné Wertê, ont lancé un appel à ceux-ci pour un «apaisement des tensions», appelant notamment à éviter toute instrumentalisation par la Turquie et l'Iran et rappelant que les Kurdes «ne peuvent gagner qu'à travers l'élaboration d'une unité nationale et d'une stratégie commune».



April 1, 2020
By Ezel Sahinkaya

Turkish Prisoner Release Bill Sparks Concern Among Rights Activists

As Turkish authorities proceed toward legislation permitting the release of thousands of prisoners to try to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, several rights groups are criticizing the government for excluding imprisoned dissidents, human rights defenders and journalists.

On Tuesday, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), with the support of the allied opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP), submitted a draft bill to the Turkish parliament to address prison overcrowding during the COVID-19 pandemic. If it's approved, Turkey will either temporarily or permanently release up to 90,000 inmates.

Human rights advocates say that while it is necessary to look for ways to reduce the prison population in the middle of the pandemic, this decision comes within the existing political and legal context in Turkey, which allows the government to use its anti-terrorism laws arbitrarily to target political dissidents.

"In Turkey's case, that means a set of anti-terrorism laws that are very broad, very arbitrarily applied and very much abused against the society as a whole, and particularly against certain groups that are targeted," Nate Schenkkan, director for special research at Freedom House, told VOA.

Schenkkan said that "there are tens of thousands of people in prison under these statutes who frankly have not had any demonstrated connection to actual terrorist activity. And to leave them in prison is to increase the risk for people who are held on essentially political charges."

300,000 prisoners

Turkey has recorded 15,679 confirmed coronavirus cases with



FILE - Turkish soldiers stand outside the court in a prison complex while people arrive, in Silivri, outside Istanbul, June 24, 2019.

277 deaths, the Ministry of Health said Wednesday. The country's prisons, holding nearly 300,000 people, are deemed by activists to be overcrowded and unsanitary, making them increasingly vulnerable to the contagious virus.

Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said on March 20 that there were no coronavirus cases in prisons, maintaining that "convicts and detainees are entrusted to the state."

However, local outlets reported Tuesday that a dismissed mayor from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' De-

mocratic Party (HDP), Nalan Ozaydin, had been released from prison after testing positive.

According to Evin Jiyan Kisanak, the daughter of Gultan Kisanak, an imprisoned Kurdish politician and former mayor of Diyarbakir, the Turkish Ministry of Justice as early as March 11 had banned all visits into prisons to prevent the spread of the virus.

"I cannot see my mother," Kisanak said, adding that her mother had told her that "the prison has not provided them with any hygiene

products or sanitizers. The ward has not been sanitized and there are mice everywhere."

The 70-article penal reform bill is expected to be discussed in the Turkish parliament next week. With the AKP and MHP holding a majority, the bill is assured to pass.

During a news conference on Tuesday, Cahit Ozkan, the deputy parliamentary group leader for the AKP, said the draft bill would exclude those charged with sexual offenses, violence against women, drug-related crimes, deliberate killing and terror crimes.

Rights groups say if the proposed bill is passed without amendment, it would exclude journalists, Kurdish politicians, human rights activists and people punished for association with the Gulen movement, a spiritual-political movement inspired by Turkish Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen, who has lived in the United States since 1999.

Among the most high-profile prisoners is Selahattin Demirtas, a Kurdish politician and former co-leader of the HDP. He is particularly at risk of the virus because of his deteriorating health, according to his lawyer, Ramazan Demir.

Demirtas' wife, Basak Demirtas, said in a video on Twitter that "we all need to speak out before it is too late to prevent deaths in prisons."

On Monday, over two dozen rights groups, including Amnesty International, Freedom House and the Committee to Protect Journalists, issued a joint statement calling on Turkish authorities to also include in the bill journalists, human rights activists and others "imprisoned for simply exercising their rights." The statement said authorities needed to particularly address



FILE - Several hundred Turkish Kurds, including lawmaker Gultan Kisanak, center, gather to protest the killings of three Kurdish women in Paris, in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir, Jan. 10, 2013.

risks to those held in long pretrial detentions in the country.

“There are many people in this circumstance whom the authorities should think about again, and people should be released if they haven't been convicted of any offense,” Andrew Gardner, a senior Turkey researcher at Amnesty International, told VOA.

Gardner said that pretrial detention in the country was used as a “de facto punishment” in which people are held for months or even years before their trials begin. Many of them were arrested following the 2016 failed coup attempt to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

‘Political crimes’

According to Sezgin Tanrikulu,



FILE - A supporter of Turkey's main pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) holds a portrait of its jailed former leader and presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtas during a campaign event in Istanbul, Turkey, June 17, 2018.

an Istanbul deputy of the main opposition Republican People's Party and a human rights lawyer, Turkey lacks a set of rules separating “political crimes” from

terrorism. The ambiguity, he argued, paves the way for the government to use terror laws to crack down on political dissidents.

“If you speak up about any subject that the government disapproves of or if you are involved in any political action that the government does not align with, it is possible that you would be linked with a terrorist organization and get punished,” Tanrikulu told VOA.

“There are thousands of people who are being tried under anti-terrorism laws. Excluding them from an early release creates damage that cannot be explained by the criminal justice system and public conscience,” he added.

VOA Kurdish Service's Ruken Işık contributed to this report from Washington.

Kurdistan au féminin 1 avril 2020

Turquie/Syrie : L'accès à l'eau, une arme de guerre lors de la pandémie ?

La protection contre le COVID-19 nécessite un approvisionnement régulier en eau salubre

ISTANBUL - La Turquie est dénoncée d'avoir “armé” l'eau contre les Kurdes syriens au milieu de l'épidémie de coronavirus. Ankara rejette cependant cette accusation comme une “campagne de diffamation”.

Human Rights Watch, basé aux USA, a averti mardi que “l'incapacité des autorités turques à assurer un approvisionnement suffisant en eau aux zones tenues par les Kurdes dans le nord-est de la Syrie compromet la capacité des agences humanitaires à préparer et à protéger les communautés vulnérables dans la pandémie de COVID-19”.

La principale station de pompage d'eau d'Allouk est au centre de la controverse. HRW affirme que jusqu'en mars, la station ne fonctionnait que de façon intermittente et est à présent fermée à nouveau.

Les forces syriennes soutenues par Ankara gèrent la station d'eau qui



Une jeune fille syrienne recueille de l'eau conservée dans une citerne, dans un camp pour personnes déplacées qui se situe dans le nord de la Syrie, près de la frontière avec la Turquie. © 2018 AP Images / Anas Alkharboutli

dessert le territoire détenu par la milice kurde syrienne, les YPG, qui est désignée comme terroriste par Ankara.

En octobre, les rebelles syriens sou-

tenus par les forces turques ont lancé une offensive contre les YPG, prenant le contrôle d'une grande partie du territoire. Ankara affirme que la milice kurde est affiliée au PKK, qui lutte contre une insurrec-

tion longue d'une décennie à l'intérieur de la Turquie pour de plus grands droits des minorités.

Une fillette syrienne remplit une cruche d'eau dans le camp de Washukanni, le 16 décembre 2019, qui a récemment été créé à la périphérie de la ville de Hasakeh pour les personnes déplacées de la ville de Ras Al-Ain, dans le nord-est de la Syrie.

“La Turquie et les factions soutenues par la Turquie contrôlent la zone où se trouve la station de pompage d'Allouk. Avant de prendre le contrôle, nous n'avions vu aucune interruption de l'approvisionnement en eau”, à affirmé Sara Kayyali, chercheuse à Human Rights Watch en Syrie..

“Ce que nous avons vu par la fermeture de la station de pompage, c'est une tentative d'armement, d'utiliser l'eau comme une arme pour tirer le meilleur parti de l'autorité kurde syrienne principale,

ainsi que des autorités syriennes”, à affirmé Kayyali.

HRW prévient que la station de pompage est d'une importance cruciale pour des centaines de milliers de personnes.

“La station de pompage d'eau fournit de l'eau potable aux camps de réfugiés les plus vulnérables de la région”, à affirmé Kayyali.

“Il y a de nombreux de milliers de Syriens et d'étrangers qui vivent déjà dans des conditions humanitaires désastreuses. Si vous cessez de pomper de l'eau dans ces régions et que le coronavirus entre, cela deviendra une catastrophe absolue”, a-t-elle déclaré.

“Heureusement, jusqu' désormais, nous n'avons aucun cas corona, car nous avons agi très rapidement, en fermant toutes les frontières”, à affirmé le Dr Raperin Hasan, coprésident de la régie régionale de la santé à Jazira, une région autonome du nord et Syrie orientale.

Mais Hasan prévient, la région abritant plusieurs grands camps de réfugiés, la perte de la station d'eau d'Allouk signifie qu'ils sont toujours confrontés à une crise humanitaire.

“Nous avons à présent des centaines de milliers de personnes vivant ensemble étroitement sans eau. Ils

n'ont qu'une petite quantité d'eau tous les trois jours”, à affirmé Hasan.

“Nous essayons d'apporter de l'eau d'autres endroits par camion, mais il n'y en a qu'une très petite quantité. Cela ne fonctionne pas, car il y a tellement de monde, et la qualité de l'eau n'est pas la même que si elle est acheminée par canalisation”, a-t-elle expliqué, in'a affirme.

“Nous avons déjà beaucoup de maladies - diarrhée, soucis d'estomac et maladies de la peau”, a-t-elle apporté. “Mais notre plus grande peur est le coronavirus. Parce qu'il n'y a pas d'eau pour se laver les mains, et ils ont le même problème à Hasakah [a local city].”

Une femme transporte des jerrycans pour les remplir d'eau au camp de déplacés kurdes al-Hol pour les déplacés où se trouvent des familles de combattants étrangers de l'Etat islamique (EI), dans le gouvernorat d'al-Hasakeh, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 9 décembre. 2019. L'hygiène personnelle, en particulier le lavage régulier des mains, selon les experts, est l'un des principaux façons de contrôler la propagation du virus.

Ankara dénonce Damas de ne pas avoir fourni suffisamment d'électricité à la station de pompage.

“L'instabilité de l'approvisionnement

en électricité dans la région affecte le maintien des services d'eau fournis par la station d'eau d'Al-louk”, selon un responsable turc s'exprimant sous couvert d'anonymat.

“Le régime d'Assad devrait accorder la priorité à la réparation et à l'entretien des infrastructures électriques de la région plutôt que de lancer une bataille de diffamation conjointe contre la Turquie avec l'organisation terroriste PKK-YPG, son associé de longue date.”

Kayyali de HRW réfute l'explication d'Ankara. «Ce n'est pas qu'il n'y a pas assez d'électricité; c'est juste eux [Ankara] souhaitent l'électricité pour le reste de la région qu'ils contrôlent”, a-t-elle apporté.

“La Turquie n'avait jamais utilisé l'eau comme arme dans la région, même lorsque le régime syrien accueillait le chef terroriste du PKK, Abdullah Ocalan”, à affirmé le professeur de relations internationales Huseyin Bagci, de l'Université technique d'Ankara au Moyen-Orient.

“Mais si Ankara devait utiliser de l'eau pour presser les Kurdes syriens, ce serait contraire au droit international et créerait des soucis majeurs pour la Turquie au niveau international”, a-t-il affirmé.

“Je pense que la situation est plus probablement un échec de toutes les parties à travailler ensemble, Damas, la Russie, les Kurdes syriens et la Turquie. Ils doivent tous s'asseoir pour discuter ensemble, car ce sont les plus vulnérables qui souffrent”, Bagci apportée.

Hasan est d'accord, avertissant que la crise de l'eau survient alors qu'ils sont engagés dans une lutte désespérée pour se préparer à combattre la pandémie de coronavirus.

“Notre système de santé est très, très faible. Nous n'avons pas de fournitures. Nous n'avons pas de grands hôpitaux. C'est un très gros problème. Nous n'avons pas de soutien international. Nous n'avons même pas de masques”, affirme Hasan.

“Le coronavirus représente une menace pour nous tous”, à affirmé Kayyali. “Il sera très facile de voir de quelle façon le fait de ne pas répondre dans une partie de la Syrie entraînera des conséquences dans les régions de la Syrie contrôlées par d'autres groupes, mais aussi en Turquie même étant donné qu'il s'agit d'un pays voisin.

C'est très clair, si nous ne combattons pas les coronavirus collectivement et faisons ce que nous pouvons, nous allons tous en subir les conséquences.”



April 1, 2020
By Zhelwan Z. Wali

Fate of three kidnapped Yezidi women in Afrin remains unclear

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Three Yezidi women have been kidnapped over the last five weeks from the Kurdish-majority city of Afrin, which has seen a fresh wave of violations committed against the Yezidi minority group, sources confirmed to Rudaw.

Afrin came under control of Turkish forces and their Syrian militia proxies in early 2018 following two months of intense fighting with the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Since then, human rights monitors have accused these groups of serious violations against locals. Fearing reprisal from the Turkish-backed armed

groups responsible for the kidnappings, the women's families have refrained from sharing information, said Ali Iso, the head of the Ezdina Foundation, a human rights watchdog, to Rudaw English on Wednesday.

"There is no justification for the arrest of my sister," said Hassan Dali Hassan, whose twenty-one year old sister Areen Dali Hassan was taken by the al-Hamzat Faction on February 27.

"The group that has taken her demands a ransom, a sum that we cannot afford to pay," he added.

Hassan, who now lives in Turkey, told Rudaw over Whatsapp on Wednesday that despite receiving ransom requests, the fate of his sister "remains unknown".

"The person responsible for her [kidnapping] is called Abu Shaher, one of the leaders of the faction," Iso added.

The families of the kidnapped women say that shortly after the abductions they were told that the armed groups were "investigating" the women. They were never told on what grounds their loved ones had been taken for, added Iso.

"Now that a month has passed since their kidnappings, the families are afraid that their loved ones might have been killed, as the armed groups do not update them at all on their situation. Because of this, they have decided to start sharing information with the media and rights groups on the kidnappings," said Iso.

The Ezdina Foundation monitors and documents human rights violations committed against the Afrin indigenous populations, focusing largely on Yezidis. Although headquartered in Germany, the organization has monitors on the ground in Afrin relaying information to them.

Another armed group, whose identity has not yet been confirmed, kidnapped Ghazala Battal, 20, on March 5. Sources from her village of Burj Abdi told Iso that she is being held in a prison in the nearby town of Jandaris.

A third woman named Kuli Hassan, Battal's mother, was abducted by another leader of the al-Hazmat Faction named Abu Subhi on March 9, keeping her in a prison in their own village since then.

"The number of women arrested and kidnapped by armed groups in Afrin is much greater than what is disclosed," he said. "But many families are afraid to talk about their arrest for fear of reprisals from these extremist groups."

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.

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.

The Yezidi ethno-religious minority, who faced genocide in Iraq at the hands of the Islamic State group (ISIS), still face a double stigma in Afrin.

As Kurdish speakers, they are a target of Turkish-backed groups, while their non-Islamic faith has also made them vulnerable to aggression. Islamists among the Turkish-backed groups have pressured local Yezidis to convert to Islam.

"Our Yezidi people on a daily basis suffer oppression by the radical extremist armed groups as they come under a lot of pressure to abandon their properties," Iso added.

Before Afrin fell to Turkey and their Syrian



Photo of Areen Dali Hassan. It has been submitted by his brother to Rudaw

proxies, the number of Yezidis in the area was as high as 35,000 people. However, the number has significantly dropped to about 5,000, as the majority have fled the area.

"Since the Afrin fall, 18 Yezidis have been killed by the radical groups including five women, five children and eight men," he added.

"The majority of the Yezidi refugees have been put in Shahba refugee camp. Others have either gone to Qamishli or the Kurdistan Region," he said.

Shahba Camp is located in Til Rafaat, north of Aleppo.



April 2, 2020
By Ruken Isik

Political prisoners set to be kept behind bars despite Turkish coronavirus amnesty

Turkey's parliament is set to debate a bill to free tens of thousands from the country's overcrowded prisons to try to stop the spread of the deadly coronavirus behind bars, but people jailed on terrorism charges will not be released and rights groups say they include thousands of political prisoners convicted for simply speaking out against the government.

Human Rights Watch called on Turkey to include people jailed for expressing their views in the new law that could see around 90,000 of Turkey's 300,000 prison population released early.

"Terrorism may sound like the gravest of offences, but in Turkey, the government misuses the charge for political ends. Many inmates are

placed in lengthy pretrial detention or sentenced without evidence that they committed violent acts, incited violence, or provided logistical help to outlawed armed groups," said Human Rights Watch's Turkey Director Emma Sinclair-Webb.



"It is important that prisoners who are not serving time for acts of violence, but instead are jai-

led for little more than their political views can benefit. There should be no discrimination on the basis of political opinion," she said.

Political prisoners include Gültan Kışanak, the female mayor of Diyarbakır, the biggest city in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast. Kışanak was arrested in 2016 and sentenced in 2019 to 14 years in jail on charges of being a member of a terrorist organisation, charges that she and her supporters hotly deny.

Her daughter, Evin Jiyan Kışanak, said prison visits had been cancelled after Turkey confirmed its first case of coronavirus on March 11. She said she had been able to talk to her mother on the phone for 10 minutes in the last week. Her mother said the prison was not prepared for the pandemic.

"The prison has not provided them with any hygiene products or sanitisers. Their ward has not been sanitised and there are mice everywhere," Evin Jiyan Kışanak said her mother had told her.

Evin Jiyan Kışanak said mother should be released due to her already poor health, but said an appeal for her to be freed had already been rejected.

The draft law before parliament has been long in the making, but has been speeded up due to the pandemic. The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Turkey has risen to 15,679 and 277 people have so far died with the disease. But there have so far been no reported cases of the virus within the prison population.

An earlier draft of the law included the possibility of early release of inmates convicted of sex crimes and other violent offences, but after a public backlash, sex offenders, murderers and a number of other criminals will not be freed. But the government has refused to budge on the issue of political prisoners.

One of the most prominent political prisoners in Turkey is Selahattin Demirtaş, the former co-leader of the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), who has been jailed since 2016 on a string of terrorism charges accusing him of links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey since 1984.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)

in 2018 ordered Turkey to release Demirtaş, saying his detention had the "ulterior purpose of stifling pluralism and limiting freedom of political debate". But Turkey said the ruling was not binding and kept the Kurdish politician in jail, from where he still managed to come third in the 2018 presidential elections.

His wife, Başak Demirtaş, has called for the suspension of prison sentences and release of people held in pretrial detention.

"Prison cells are overcrowded, ventilation is inadequate, there is nearly no direct sunlight. It is not possible to be healthily nourished. Hygiene conditions are extremely inadequate," she said in a video message on Twitter, warning of a potential catastrophe in the prisons.

Selahattin Demirtaş's lawyer, Ramazan Demir, said most political prisoners in Turkey were held because they were opponents of the government, and excluding them from eligibility for early release from overcrowded jails during the coronavirus pandemic "equals leaving them to die".

Kurdistan au féminin

3 avril 2020

Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

COVID-19. Le Rojava produit ses propres respirateurs

SYRIE / ROJAVA – Menacé par l'épidémie du coronavirus, le Rojava n'a que 27 ventilateurs sur l'ensemble de son territoire. Trois personnes ont donc décidé de fabriquer des respirateurs pour d'éventuels cas de Covid-19 en Syrie du Nord et de l'Est.

Les territoires du nord et de l'est de la Syrie sont sous l'embargo total et les fournitures médicales atteignent la région très difficilement. Les populations comptent sur leurs propres ressources et solidarité face à la pandémie du coronavirus et prennent des mesures créatives. En raison du petit nombre de ventilateurs médicaux, l'administration autonome fait tout son possible pour obtenir du matériel supplémentaire. Contre la catastrophe de la pandémie de Covid-19, trois personnes à Amûdê ont décidé de suivre la demande du Croissant Rouge kurde, Heyva Sor a Kurdistanê, et de développer un respirateurs.

L'ingénieur électricien Mehmûd Mihêmed Xêr et les techniciens électriciens Mesûm Silêman et Serdar Tahir Selîm sont à l'origine du développement d'un premier prototype, qu'ils ont présenté à l'agence de presse nord-syrienne ANHA.

Premier prototype

Les trois collègues ont réussi en trois jours de



travail à produire un prototype capable d'une ventilation contrôlée. Selon Serdar Tahir Selîm, le prototype peut être utilisé dans les hôpitaux après approbation par les spécialistes et le comité de santé de la région de Cizîrê.

Mehmûd Mihêmed Xêr déclare qu'ils ont développé l'appareil selon la norme mondiale et continue : « Nous avons décidé de faire quelque chose pour répondre aux besoins de notre

peuple. Avant de commencer, nous nous sommes dit : « Rêvez et faites quelque chose pour réaliser vos rêves ».

Tous les tests ont été réussis et le dispositif pourra être utilisé dans les unités de soins intensifs dès qu'il aura été approuvé par le personnel de santé, explique Mesûm Silêman.



April 3, 2020
By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

COVID-19 ‘risks turning a prison sentence in Turkey into a death sentence:’ HRW

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Turkish prisoners convicted under broadly-enforced antiterrorism laws who have relevant existing health issues should be included in government plans for early release or house arrest amid the deadly coronavirus pandemic, said Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Friday.

Turkish lawmakers will vote early next week on the passage of a law that could result in about 100,000 of the nation’s roughly 300,000 total prisoners. In its present form, the draft bill excludes thousands of prisoners who were convicted under the anti-terrorism statutes.

Tens of thousands of inmates are behind bars for links with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), revolutionary leftist groups, or alleged affiliation with the Fethullah Gülen movement, which Turkey deems terrorist organizations.

“Turkey has detained, prosecuted, and convicted thousands of civil servants, lawyers, politicians, activists, and journalists for alleged links to these groups,” read Friday’s report.

According to the New York-based human rights watchdog, however, for many of these detainees, there is “no evidence they committed violent crimes, incited violence, or provided logistical support” to the outlawed organizations.

Furthermore, since the collapse of a peace process between the government and the PKK in 2015, 16,300 members of the Pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) have been detained, with 3,500 of them receiving prison sentences, party officials recently told the Ahval news website.

This includes Selahattin Demirtas, the former co-chair of the HDP, who was detained and put in prison as part of thousands of arrests made in late 2016 shortly following a failed military coup attempt that Turkey blames on the Fethullah Gülen movement, to which Demirtas is not affiliated.

Demirtas’ doctor, Cegergun Polat, told Medyascope that the former HDP leader has two chronic health conditions which would put



Turkish soldiers stand guard in front of a courtroom at the Silivri prison and courthouse complex outside Istanbul. (Photo: Reuters/Ümit Bektaş)

him at great risk if were he to contract the coronavirus.

HDP spokesperson Hisyar Ozsoy previously told Kurdistan 24 that the “category of terrorism in Turkey is so vague, broad, and ambiguous that anybody critical of the government can easily be criminalized as a terrorist. That’s, unfortunately, the legal situation in the country.”

“They [prisoners] and their families are in contact with us,” he continued. “Frankly, the families, in particular, are very anxious and scared. Excluding political prisoners from this legislation is totally unconstitutional and everyone should be equal before the law.”

In an open letter released on Thursday, eight politicians from different opposition parties and intellectuals called on the Turkish government to take this in consideration, reported Bianet. In the joint letter, they wrote that prisons in Turkey “are full of journalists, writers, politicians, rights defenders, civil society leaders and dissidents due to questionable verdicts of arrest and conviction.”

HRW stressed that all prisoners who have underlying health conditions should be included in the release plan.

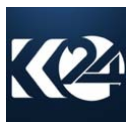
“When taking action to protect prisoners from the COVID-19 virus, those at gravest risk should not be left out of consideration,” said Hugh Williamson, HRW’s Europe and Central Asia director.

“The Turkish government’s positive proposal to reduce overcrowded prisons is undermined by the blanket exclusion of thousands of inmates convicted on terrorism charges, including those at risk of death from the virus and those who should not be in prison in the first place.”

“Prisoners who have been jailed for little more than their political views should be able to benefit from the early release law,” he concluded.

According to Thursday’s data from Turkey’s Health Ministry, there are 18,135 confirmed cases of the coronavirus across the country, 356 of which have been fatal.

Worldwide, the coronavirus has infected over one million people and killed more than 55,000, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting.



April 3, 2020
By Wladimir Van Wilgenburg

Turkish-backed militias shell north Syria, yet again cutting off water supply to nearly a half million civilians

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) - Shelling by Turkish-backed armed groups on Thursday caused severe damage to a water pipeline, one of their many recent intentional actions to block the crucial resource for some 460,000 civilians in Syria's northern Hasakah province, controlled by a local Kurdish-led self-administration.

"It's true. Today at 3 pm afternoon, mercenaries targeted Allouk pipeline, which supplies Hasakah with water, with mortar shelling," local official Suzdar Ahmed told Kurdistan 24.

"Currently, there is no water in Hasaka and we don't have information to what extent the pipeline is damaged. Tomorrow at 7 pm, our group will investigate the damage and estimate how many days they need to fix it."

Ilham Ahmad, the president of the executive committee of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), accused the Turkish-backed groups of hampering the fight against the coronavirus on social media.

She said that, rather than preventing the spread of the highly-contagious disease in Syria and Turkey, "Turkish backed mercenaries shelled the main pipeline that provides water to 500,000 people."

She added that four civilians were injured in the shelling. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that one civilian was "slightly" injured.

During the past week, Turkish-backed groups bombarded several areas in northern Syria amid a UN appeal for a ceasefire, supported by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Earlier on Thursday, two Syrian government soldiers and one civilian were killed when Turkish groups shelled positions of the Syrian government near the villages of Abosh and Qabr



Turkish troops and fighters from the Free Syrian Army wave flags on Mount Barsaya, located outside Syria's northern city of Afrin, Jan. 28, 2020. (Photo: Reuters/Khalil Ashawi)

in the eastern countryside of Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye).

Under Russian mediation, though, northeastern Syria has been providing electricity to the Turkish-occupied areas in exchange for water flow, as agreed upon.

The militias have regularly cut off water to Hasakah province, demanding that Kurdish-led authorities in northeast Syria provide more electricity to areas under their control.

The Allouk station is located near the border town of Serekaniye, which Turkey and its militant proxies took control of in October, during its so-called Peace Spring Operation.

The last time the water was cut was between Saturday and Monday, according to the Rojava Information Centre (RIC).

UNICEF and human rights organizations have criticized the interruption of water to civilians in Hasakah, many of which are displaced and desperately need the resource.

On March 23, UNICEF Representative in Syria Fran Equiza said the interruption "during the current efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease puts children and families at unacceptable risk."

"Handwashing with soap is critical in the fight against COVID-19," he stressed.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) in a report released on Tuesday said, "Turkish authorities' failure to ensure adequate water supplies to Kurdish-held areas in Northeast Syria is compromising humanitarian agencies' ability to prepare and protect vulnerable communities in the COVID-19 pandemic."

Also on March 27, 49 Syrian civil society and human rights organizations condemned the water interruption in a jointly signed statement, calling it a war crime.

The action, they argued, inexcusably "denies the population of northeast Syria safe and potable water."

Incendie et soulèvement dans la prison de Batman

Des prisonniers politiques kurdes se sont révoltés, samedi, dans la soirée, en raison de l'inquiétude liée à la propagation du Covid-19.

Des prisonniers politiques kurdes se sont révoltés, samedi, dans la soirée, en raison de l'inquiétude liée à la propagation du Covid-19.

Un incendie s'est déclaré samedi soir dans la prison de type M de la ville kurde de Batman. Avec le déclenchement de l'incendie, les prisonniers ont commencé à crier « révolte ».

Plusieurs dizaines d'ambulances se sont dirigées vers la prison, alors qu'aucune déclaration officielle n'a été faite par la direction de l'administration pénitentiaire.

Les familles et proches des prisonniers ont commencé à se rassembler devant la prison de Batman afin d'obtenir des informations et réclamer la libération des prisonniers politiques les plus vulnérables.

Avec la propagation de la pandémie Covid-19 en Turquie, les détenus politiques s'indi-

gnent et s'inquiètent face aux pratiques discriminatoires du gouvernement turc.

Vendredi, les rapporteurs de l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe (APCE) pour le suivi de la Turquie ont appelé celle-ci à une libération non discriminatoire des prisonniers politiques.



Les familles des prisonniers politiques rassemblés devant la prison de type M de Batman, après le soulèvement des prisonniers.

Entre la Turquie et la Syrie, l'accès à l'eau utilisé comme arme de guerre

À plusieurs reprises ces derniers mois, la Turquie et ses alliés ont entravé l'approvisionnement en eau dans des zones tenues par les forces kurdes, dans le nord-est de la Syrie.

L'OMS et les organisations humanitaires s'inquiètent d'une propagation du coronavirus dans la région.

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Transformer l'eau en arme de guerre. C'est la stratégie menée par la Turquie dans la « zone de sécurité » qu'elle a conquise en octobre dernier dans le nord de la Syrie. Cette étroite bande de territoire d'une trentaine de kilomètres de profondeur, lui a servi à couper en deux la zone d'in-

fluence kurde. Elle lui a également permis de mettre la main sur la station d'approvisionnement en eau d'Allouk, toute proche de la ville de Ras al-Aïn (en arabe), ou Serekanye (en kurde).

460 000 personnes en dépendent dans la zone contrôlée par les Kurdes pour leur accès à l'eau, que ce soit dans la ville-même d'Hassaké ou dans les camps de déplacés qui l'environnent. Or, le 29 mars, les autorités turques ont interrompu le pompage, alerte l'ONG Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Il a « depuis été rétabli », informe Ahmed Ben-

chemsi, porte-parole pour le Moyen-Orient chez HRW. Mais cette situation s'est déjà produite « plusieurs fois depuis le début de l'année, et le problème est récurrent ». Le 23 mars, le Fonds de l'ONU pour l'enfance (Unicef) avait d'ailleurs déjà alerté sur la situation.

Moyen de pression

Selon, l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), ces interruptions seraient provoquées volontairement par la Turquie. Les autorités turques utiliseraient l'eau comme moyen de pression pour forcer les forces kurdes, qui



Des enfants syriens pompent de l'eau dans la Ghouta orientale, aux alentours de la ville de Kafr Batna, le 21 mars 2018. Stringer/AFP

contrôlent de leur côté la station électrique d'al-Mabroukeh (au nord de Ras-al-Aïn) et le barrage de Tishreen (en amont du barrage de Tabqa sur l'Euphrate), à apporter de l'électricité dans la « zone de sécurité » turque.

Les autorités turques, elles, invoquent un défaut d'alimentation en électricité de la station d'Al-louk provenant des barrages en zones kurdes. Ce que démentent fortement les groupes humanitaires sur place. « C'est une tactique de guerre. Les autorités turques transforment l'eau en arme », affirme Ahmed Benchemsi, qui qualifie

le procédé de « violation des lois de la guerre » : « Toutes les parties d'un conflit armé ont pour obligation, selon le droit international humanitaire, de fournir aux populations de quoi survivre, y compris l'accès à l'eau. »

Alors que la Syrie recense officiellement deux morts causés par la pandémie de coronavirus, l'Organisation mondiale de la santé (OMS) a alerté sur la situation sanitaire dans le pays. Nima Saeed, représentante de l'OMS en Syrie a confié son inquiétude au média kurde Rojava Information Center : « Après neuf ans de conflit, le sys-

tème de santé syrien a beaucoup souffert. On estime aujourd'hui sa capacité de réponse à la pandémie à 40 % . »

Risque accru face à la pandémie de Covid-19

Dans ce contexte déjà critique, ces coupures d'eau récurrentes inquiètent. Plusieurs milliers de Syriens et Irakiens ayant fui des régions contrôlées par l'État Islamique vivent entassés dans des camps de déplacés, où les conditions sanitaires ne permettent pas de lutter efficacement contre la pandémie.

Les organisations humanitaires locales doivent aussi faire face à une pénurie de médicaments et d'autres denrées. À la demande de la Syrie, le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU a décidé en janvier la fermeture du passage d'al-Yarubiyah, à la frontière avec l'Irak, pourtant fréquemment utilisé par l'OMS pour ravitailler le nord de la Syrie.

Alors que le Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies, Antonio Guterres, a appelé la semaine dernière à un cessez-le-feu mondial, plusieurs organisations, dont HRW et l'Unicef, demandent une coopération plus forte entre les Nations unies, la Turquie, le gouvernement syrien et les autorités kurdes pour garantir l'approvisionnement en eau de la population civile.

« L'eau et les infrastructures liées à l'eau ne devraient pas être utilisées à des fins militaires ou politiques, rappelle Fran Equiza, représentant de l'Unicef en Syrie. L'interruption de la distribution d'eau, en plein effort face à la propagation du nouveau coronavirus, fait courir des risques inacceptables aux enfants et aux familles. »



6 avril 2020
Zhelwan Z. Wali

Cut Kurdistan prison population or face COVID-19 'catastrophe' - monitor

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Overcrowded jails could see an explosion of COVID-19 cases unless the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) drastically cuts the prison population, a human rights monitor warned Monday.

“The situation of the prisons of the Kurdistan Region is terrible. If a swift solution is not found, we will witness a catastrophe,” Ziya Petros, head of the Independent Board of Human Rights (IBHR), told Rudaw on Monday.

“It is true there are not yet any cases of coronavirus at the prisons. But employees who

commute and those who take food to them, those who guard the prisons, could possibly transmit the virus,” Petros warned.

“If a case is reported among the inmates, it spreads. Then why should we wait until something happens? Why not find a solution now?” he added.

Speaking to Rudaw by telephone from his jail cell in Erbil, one inmate, who must remain anonymous, said: “There is danger. We are put in overcrowded cells. Just imagine 35, 36, to 37 inmates are stuffed in a six square meter cell.” “As you are well aware, and according to the

health instructions, there should not be any crowds. Because it paves the way for a swift spread of the virus,” he added.

Petros criticized the widespread overcrowding in the Kurdistan Region's prisons.

“The Erbil and Duhok reform facilities are designed in a way that they accommodate only 900 inmates. But now, there are 2,115 inmates at the Erbil Adult Reform,” he said.

“In other words, the rooms are designed to hold only nine inmates, but 25 to 30 inmates have been put in them. This must be resolved. It is im-

possible to put 25 to 30 inmates in one single cell.”

According to Petros, there are 4,622 convicted felons locked up in the Kurdistan Region’s prisons. There are also 580 detainees awaiting prosecution in Erbil, 372 in Sulaimani, and 74 in Duhok.

Hemin Faruq, head of the Erbil Adult Reform, acknowledged the overcrowding poses a threat to public health.

“The number of the inmates at the Erbil Adult Reform is larger than what it should be according to the standards. This poses a health threat at a time when such a dangerous virus is widespread,” Faruq said.

Ahmed Najmaldin, the KRG’s director of prisons, said he has been holding talks with the government about ways to “reduce the number of the inmates.”

The KRG has not issued any general pardon for inmates.

“Issuing amnesties needs to be done through the law. And the parliament should issue such laws,” Petros said.



Overcrowded jails could become a breeding ground for COVID-19. File photo: AFP

On Sunday, Iraq’s caretaker Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi called on President Barham Salih to release some of the country’s prisoners early in a bid to limit the spread of coronavirus.

ding grounds for COVID-19, governments worldwide have started offering early or temporary release to some inmates who do not pose a serious threat to the public.

Fearing overcrowded jails could become breeding



06 avril 2020
par Zhelwan Z. Wali

Japan contributes \$3.6m to Shingal reconstruction fund

The money will “support reconstruction and peacebuilding in Iraq through the rehabilitation of war-damaged houses and construction of low-cost housing units”, read a UN-Habitat statement.

The project will focus on the “rehabilitation of public spaces and infrastructure ... [and] construction of low-cost housing units to accommodate returnees whose houses are totally destroyed and have not received any support for rehabilitation or reconstruction of their houses.”

It will also prioritize vocational training to stimulate the local job market. “Graduates of the vocational training will be employed for rehabilitation and construction activities implemented by UN-Habitat, which will contribute to rebuilding their livelihoods,” the statement added.

On August 3, 2014, Islamic State (ISIS) militias seized vast areas of Iraq and Syria, including Shingal - homeland of the Yezidis, an ethnoreligious minority viewed by ISIS as



devil worshippers.

Thousands of Shingal’s men and boys were executed and buried in mass graves while women and children were abducted and sold into sexual slavery, forced to convert to Islam, or recruited as child soldiers.

Shingal was liberated in November 2015. However, fifteen months of combat had leveled much of its urban center, which was laced with explosives.

“With this package, the total amount of Japan’s assistance to the people affected by the crisis

reaches \$540 million since 2014,” Hashimoto Naofumi, Japan’s ambassador to Iraq, said in a statement.

“I hope that the assistance from the Government and people of Japan will help rebuild

livelihoods of affected communities through rehabilitating community infrastructure and housing units," he added.

Of the 550,000 Yazidis in Iraq prior to the ISIS war, at least a third have emigrated abroad and 360,000 remain displaced to camps in the Kurdistan Region.

Teams in Iraq supported by the United Na-

tions Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIS (UNITAD) continue to search for mass graves, primarily around Mosul and Shingal.

In December last year, the Netherlands contributed \$3.5 million to clear mines laid by ISIS since 2014, particularly in the Shin-

gal district.

The area remains riddled with mines and other explosive debris five years since ISIS was forced out of the district.

In mid-2019, Lalish Temple, the spiritual home of the Yazidi minority in Duhok, received a \$500,000 grant from the US government to fund its restoration.



06 avril 2020

Coronavirus: Iraq's Kurdistan region warns of 'humanitarian catastrophe'

Baghdad's Foreign Ministry says it will help to transfer funds from Iraqis to families stranded abroad

Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region on Monday warned of a "humanitarian catastrophe" from the coronavirus as the government in Baghdad offered to transfer funds to citizens stranded abroad.

Despite taking measures to contain infections, Iraq reported 1,031 cases of Covid-19 and 64 deaths, while the Kurdistan region has recorded 277 and three deaths as of Monday.

With a healthcare system depleted by years of conflict and corruption, officials across the country have warned that they are not equipped to deal with a full-blown crisis.

"The Kurdistan region is in grave danger and is facing a humanitarian catastrophe," said Saman Al Barazanji, Health Minister in the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Kurdish authorities announced 41 new cases since Sunday.

The regional Interior Ministry said on Monday that measures to contain the virus, such as school closures and a curfew, would remain in effect until new instructions were issued.

The measures have not worked as well as the government had hoped, a Kurdish official in Erbil, the regional capital, told The National.

"Reasons for the spread are that our society is very social and residents are not used to



Members of the Hashed Al Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) forces militia disinfect a street in the western Washash district of the Iraqi capital Baghdad on April 6, 2020. AFP

this kind of curfew and are always on the move," he said. "Also, they have not taken this very seriously."

The curfew is expected continue until April 10 and might be extended, he said.

"If the pandemic spreads the government will not be able to deal with it, so the only way is to prevent it from spreading."

Meanwhile, many Iraqis remain stranded abroad as a result of travel restrictions imposed worldwide to contain the spread of the virus.

Baghdad's Foreign Ministry said it would

help Iraqis to transfer money to family members who were unable to return home.

The funds will be provided by the families in Iraq and the transfer procedures are subject to banking regulations, ministry spokesman Ahmed Al Sahaf said.

"We want to make it clear to the public that the funds are not a grant or donation, and they only include exceptional cases of individuals who do not have access to money," Mr Al Sahaf said.

The ministry is not authorised to distribute government funds to the citizens abroad, he said.

"We only have the capacity to co-ordinate with citizens on this matter," Mr Al Sahaf said.

Since last week, Baghdad has flown home hundreds of citizens.

The Iraqi embassy in the UAE co-ordinated with authorities to send 276 nationals home on Iraqi Airways last Wednesday.

The airline also flew back 212 Iraqis from

Egypt, 115 from Belarus and 261 from Lebanon.

More than 50 citizens infected with the virus remain stranded abroad, the ministry said last week.

The highest number is in Belgium, where 11 Iraqis are believed to have contracted the virus.

"Our embassies in these countries are making every effort to follow up on the condi-

tions of the infected people to provide them with medical care," Mr Al Sahaf said.

The Iraqi government has already closed its land border with Iran, which has had the Middle East's deadliest outbreak, and banned entry from there and other countries badly affected.

Schools, universities, cinemas and other public spaces have also been closed.



6 avril 2020

Rockets land near Halliburton oil site in Iraq's Basra

No damage or casualties were reported but it is the latest in a series of attacks on foreign troops

Rockets landed near a site managed by US oil company Halliburton and state-run businesses in Iraq's southern city of Basra early on Monday, without causing damage or casualties, industry and police sources said.

Police said that three Katyusha rockets landed near the sites at the Burjesia residential and operations headquarters west of Basra at about 3am local time.

Officials from the state-run Basra Oil Company, that operates oil production in the south, said the attack did not affect production and export operations.

A rocket launcher and some unused rockets were found in a nearby farmland area, local police said.

Almost all foreign staff have left the country due to the global coronavirus pandemic and so the accommodation was largely empty.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack and police said they sent additional forces to carry out a search operation in the area.

The attacks came as US forces withdrew from Al Taqaddum airbase and handed over operations to Iraqi forces at the weekend.

"The transfer of Taqaddum (Habbaniya) airbase is another step forward in the ongoing partnership between Iraqi Security Forces and the anti-ISIS international military Coalition," Brig Gen Vincent Barker, the coalition's director of sustainment, said. Over the last month, the coalition transferred



A flag flying in front of excess gas being burnt off at a pipeline south-west of Basra in southern Iraq. AFP

four bases to the Iraqi security forces as it consolidates its resources into a smaller number of key locations.

"This wouldn't be possible without the Iraqi security forces' proven capability to bring the fight to ISIS," Brig Gen Barker said.

Coalition spokesman, Col Myles Caggins, said the withdrawal came "after months of planning".

At least 500 coalition troops left the air base, transferring \$3.5 million (Dh12.8m) in property to the Iraqi government.

Col Caggins said that the Iraqi Ministry of Defence "remains strong against ISIS in Anbar Province".

Al Taqaddum airbase hosted US Marines plus Italian, Canadian and Spanish forces.

The withdrawal is a result of the victory over ISIS but also in response to repeated attacks

by Iran-backed Iraqi militias that has pushed the US into changing footing in the country. The current coronavirus outbreak is also thought to be speeding up the process as it halts most training programmes for Iraqi soldiers.

Some Western troops are being pulled out of Iraq altogether and those who remain are being taken to larger centres.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have increased during the last few months in Iraq after the killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah founder Abu Mahdi Al Muhandis.

They were killed in a US operation in Baghdad in early January which triggered a series of tit-for-tat attacks between the two in Iraq.

Several US soldiers and contractors, as well as a British soldier, have died in attacks since the start of the year.

La chanteuse turque Helin Bölek est « morte en martyre »

D'origine kurde, la chanteuse de « Grup Yorum » est décédée vendredi 3 avril à 28 ans, après 288 jours de grève de la faim. Mêlant musiques traditionnelles et chants révolutionnaires, le groupe était accusé de proximité avec « le terrorisme » par les autorités turques.

Sur les dernières photos qui circulaient d'elles, Helin Bölek avait les joues creusées et des cernes immenses sous les yeux. À 28 ans seulement, la chanteuse du célèbre Grup Yorum vient de succomber au 288e jour d'une grève de la faim entamée au printemps dernier pour dénoncer la censure et la répression.

Fondé en 1985 par quatre étudiants en réaction au coup d'État militaire de 1980, Grup Yorum voulait mettre sa musique au service des « peuples opprimés de Turquie et d'ailleurs », relate le site Politis. Il mêle musiques traditionnelles kurdes et turques et chants révolutionnaires, comme « Çav Bella », une reprise du fameux « Bella ciao » italien. Depuis sa création, 70 musiciens y ont défilé et 23 albums ont été enregistrés. Très populaire en Turquie, le groupe réunissait des milliers de fans lors de ses concerts.

Mais dans ses textes, Grup Yorum conteste ouvertement le pouvoir turc. Soulèvement du parc Gezi, manifestations populaires... le groupe est de toutes les mobilisations pour la défense des droits des minorités. Issue d'une famille kurde alévi de Diyarbakir, Helin Bölek assume pleinement cet héritage lorsqu'elle rejoint le groupe pour en devenir la chanteuse solo.

Une lutte contre l'oppression

En 2016, la tentative de putsch militaire contre le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan tend un peu plus les relations entre le pouvoir en place et les mouvements contestataires. Grup Yorum est dans l'œil du cyclone. Plusieurs procès sont intentés contre ses membres et les forces de police procèdent à de nombreuses arrestations.

En novembre 2016, Helin Bölek est arrêté



par la police au centre culturel d'İdil à Istanbul qu'elle anime dans le quartier populaire de Okmaydani, à Istanbul. Elle est détenue pendant deux ans avec les sept membres du groupe pour « résistance à la police, insulte et appartenance à une organisation terroriste ». Le ministère de l'intérieur turc les suspecte d'appartenir à un groupe terroriste d'extrême gauche, le Parti-Front révolutionnaire de libération du peuple (DHKP-C), ce qu'ils contestent.

Lorsqu'elle sort de prison deux années plus tard, Helin Bölek continue de chanter pour dénoncer les abus et les dérives d'Ankara. Mais la pression sur le groupe s'intensifie. Les descentes de police se multiplient au centre culturel d'İdil à Istanbul, où les membres du groupe ont l'habitude de répéter. Moins d'un an après sa libération, la chanteuse est de nouveau arrêtée avec quatre autres de ses membres.

Déterminée à aller jusqu'au bout

Le 16 mai 2019, tous les cinq décident d'entamer une grève de la faim en prison, pour protester contre les intimidations et le harcèlement dont ils font l'objet. À travers ce jeûne sans date limite, ils exigent l'arrêt des poursuites judiciaires et la libération de tous les membres détenus, la suppression des noms des membres du

groupe inscrits sur la liste des terroristes recherchés par le ministère de l'intérieur, ainsi que l'arrêt des perquisitions récurrentes au centre culturel d'İdil.

Helin Bölek est relâchée en novembre et retourne dans sa maison d'Istanbul. Mais les sept mois de jeûne volontaire l'ont considérablement affaiblie. Et surtout, elle décide de poursuivre au péril de sa vie sa grève de la faim pour soutenir le bassiste du groupe, Ibrahim Gökçek, qui, lui, n'a pas été libéré.

« Prendre cette décision n'a pas été si difficile au vu de ce que nous vivons chaque jour », justifie-t-il alors. « Nos instruments et notre musique sont systématiquement détruits. Nos concerts interdits. Nos noms inscrits sur des listes terroristes, et nous sommes emprisonnés (...) Parfois, en Turquie, il faut être prêt à mourir pour se tenir debout ».

Bien que libre, Helin Bölek est contrainte par les autorités turques à être hospitalisée d'urgence au mois de mars. Vendredi 3 avril, après 288 jours de grève de la faim, elle décède chez elle à Istanbul. « Elle est tombée en martyre », a annoncé Grup Yorum sur les réseaux sociaux, suscitant les réactions de soutien des fans. Ibrahim Gökçek, qui en était à son 291e jour, ne pesait plus que 40 kg.

COVID-19. Les femmes kurdes alertent contre un massacre annoncé au Kurdistan du Nord

Le Mouvement des femmes libres kurdes (TJA) appelle à la solidarité concernant la pandémie du COVID-19 qui se propage à toute vitesse à travers le Kurdistan du Nord [Bakur] et en Turquie où la population kurde et les détenus politiques entassés dans des prisons surpeuplées font face à un massacre annoncé.

Voici l'appel du TJA :

« Alors que l'auto-organisation des administrations locales a acquis une grande valeur pour que les sociétés s'organisent et se prennent en charge au 21^e siècle, en Turquie, les administrations locales sont privées de l'initiative nécessaire. Le gouvernement central du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) leur retire les tâches et les responsabilités, les représentants élus sont révoqués et remplacés par des administrateurs gouvernementaux. Ces pratiques ne sont censées être observées que sous les régimes dictatoriaux, mais elles se sont normalisées en Turquie.

Actuellement, alors que l'ensemble du programme mondial est axé sur la pandémie du Covid-19, le programme du gouvernement AKP en Turquie tente de dissimuler sa propre imprudence en coupant les services à la population kurde de Turquie et en se préparant à accuser la population pour les conséquences futures. L'État n'a pas réussi à dépeupler le Kurdistan par la migration forcée, la guerre ou l'exil. Aujourd'hui, en nommant des administrateurs dans des municipalités démocratiquement acquises, le Kurdistan est abandonné à la mort. L'État turc, qui manifeste une grande hostilité à l'égard des organisations locales de la société, met en œuvre des méthodes qui oppriment l'opposition sociale et les administrations locales après la pandémie du coronavirus.

Depuis le début de la République turque, l'État n'a jamais considéré les municipalités du Kurdistan dans le cadre de la prestation de services. Ils voulaient seulement intégrer les représentants et leurs relations avec l'État. Les municipalités ont fait preuve d'un enjeu idéologique pour l'État.

Par conséquent, la nomination des administrateurs est une démarche idéologique très planifiée de l'État dans le cadre de la fusion des administrations locales du Kurdistan avec l'État turc. Alors qu'à l'ouest de la Turquie, lorsqu'une personne est démise de ses fonctions, elle est remplacée par une personne choisie par les électeurs, au Kurdistan, les administrateurs de l'État sont nommés comme représentants. L'État ignore son propre principe d'égalité et applique toutes les lois antidémocratiques imaginables au Kurdistan.

Le premier administrateur a été nommé au Kurdistan en 2007, après la décision d'une « municipalité multilingue » offrant des services à la société qui, en plus du turc, comprenait également des langues kurde, assyrienne et arménienne dans la muni-

Pendant cette période, avec des dizaines de « décrets-lois », des dizaines de milliers d'employés ont été licenciés. Plus de 5 000 associations, écoles, syndicats, associations de femmes ont été fermés et leurs propriétés confisquées. Des milliers de personnes ont été arrêtées ou placées en détention. Avec le décret-loi n° 674, le président a été autorisé à nommer des administrateurs dans les municipalités ; les gouverneurs des villes ont été autorisés à confisquer les propriétés des municipalités et à licencier les salariés. Sur la base de ce décret-loi, toutes les municipalités appartenant aux représentants élus du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), du Parti des régions démocratiques (DBP – parti kurde), ont été saisies, et à partir du 11 septembre 2016, des administrateurs ont été nommés à leur place.



palité de Sur. En conséquence, le conseil et le chef de la municipalité ont été démis de leurs fonctions. Juste après les élections de 2009, où des représentants du mouvement kurde ont été élus dans 99 municipalités, des dizaines d'élus et de membres du conseil ont été arrêtés et détenus pendant de longues années.

Insistant sur les politiques de guerre pour résoudre la question kurde, le gouvernement de l'AKP a déclaré l'état d'urgence le 20 juillet 2016 et a ainsi suspendu la démocratie.

La nomination des administrateurs a eu lieu pour un total de 95 municipalités, dont 3 grandes villes, 10 villes, 63 localités et 22 petites villes où le DBP a été élu. L'État a nommé ses propres fonctionnaires dans ces municipalités. Des centaines d'élus, de membres du conseil municipal et de salariés municipaux ainsi que des membres de l'Assemblée du HDP ont été arrêtés. Des milliers de salariés ont été licenciés des municipalités. Au total, les municipalités représentant 6 366 566 personnes ont été

confisquées et donc gérées par des administrateurs.

Le 31 mars 2019, les élections ont été répétées et les candidats du HDP ont été élus dans 65 municipalités. 6 d'entre eux n'ont pas été autorisés par l'Etat à prendre leurs fonctions dès le début. Parmi les 59 municipalités restantes, des administrateurs ont été nommés dans 32 d'entre elles. 21 des représentants de ces municipalités sont toujours détenus. Pendant la période de la pandémie du Covid-19, le 23 mars 2020, les municipalités de Batman, Silvan, Lice, Eğil, Ergani, Güroymak, Iğdır-Halfeli, Siirt-Gökçebağ ont également été saisies et des administrateurs y ont été nommés. L'État veut ainsi retirer aux Kurdes, et en particulier aux femmes, le droit de s'organiser – les droits légaux sont ignorés, toutes les démarches des Kurdes sont criminalisées, dans les moments difficiles, la solidarité est bannie par l'État et la population est abandonnée à la mort.

En collaboration avec les administrateurs, une politique de guerre spéciale a été mise en œuvre et le système de coprésidence du HDP a été ciblé, les réalisations des femmes ainsi que la compréhension des administrations locales fondées sur la démocratie, l'écologie et la liberté des femmes ont été confisquées et des assimilations culturelles et politiques ont été mises en œuvre.

Les municipalités élues par le peuple ont été transformées en commissariats de police, les institutions des sociétés ont été transformées en institutions du patriarcat. Le système mis en place par le mouvement pour la liberté des femmes a été renié et les associations de femmes, les centres de conseil ont été fermés et remplacés par des cafés pour hommes. Des hommes ont été nommés à la tête des centres pour femmes, alors que les centres ont été transformés en centres de mariage des institutions d'éducation religieuse.

Une politique d'éradication des acquis des femmes a été mise en œuvre de manière agressive. Les relations entre la lutte des femmes et les administrations locales veulent être détruites, la sensibilisation aux services développés par la lutte des femmes a été déclarée illégale. Pendant le travail des municipalités du HDP dans le cadre de la lutte contre la violence, les statistiques de la violence contre les femmes ont diminué, les espaces d'expression des femmes ont été créés. Le fait que 76% des dirigeants du HDP arrêtés étaient des femmes après les élections du 31 mars 2019 montre claire-

ment que ces attaques de l'État sont dirigées contre le mouvement des femmes et l'égalité représentative. À cet égard, la solidarité des associations démocratiques et des mouvements de libération des femmes avec les femmes kurdes renforcera notre lutte commune contre les institutions patriarcales de l'État.

Le régime de tutelle de l'AKP, parallèlement aux politiques précédentes, montre que la volonté et la santé des personnes ne signifient rien pour eux, en désignant des tuteurs à un moment où la société a le plus besoin de services. L'État pousse les personnes à aller dans la rue, à les mettre sous tutelle dans des conditions insalubres, donc à s'attaquer à la population même dans des conditions de pandémie.

Au lieu de résoudre les problèmes de santé de la société, le gouvernement AKP essaie d'attaquer les droits démocratiques afin de maintenir son administration fasciste. Alors que tout le monde souligne l'importance de rester à l'intérieur, des dizaines de policiers entrent dans les maisons et sortent les occupants pour les traîner dans la rue.

Pour lutter contre la pandémie, les municipalités du HDP ont mis en place des équipes de coordination, échangé des informations avec les associations de santé et de la société civile, les transports publics sont régulièrement désinfectés, des lignes d'urgence ont été mises en place, des brochures multilingues ont été préparées, un travail social de distribution de colis sanitaires et alimentaires a été lancé et dix mille familles qui ont besoin d'aide ont été choisies pour recevoir des colis alimentaires et sanitaires, les besoins de base tels que l'eau ont été libérés.

L'État prévoit de laisser la société seule aller vers la mort en arrêtant les associations de la société civile et en rendant la population plus dépendante de l'État. Les précautions ne sont pas assez prises au Kurdistan, un seul centre de détection des cas a été créé pour l'ensemble du Kurdistan, la plupart des personnes qui se rendent à l'hôpital sont renvoyées chez elles. Les discours discriminatoires à l'égard des personnes âgées alimentent la mentalité sexiste, raciste et religieuse.

La pandémie de coronavirus augmente sérieusement de jour en jour, l'un des endroits les plus risqués étant les prisons. Le taux de capacité des prisons en Turquie est de 121%, avec le nouveau paquet d'amnistie préparé par le ministre de l'intérieur, les pri-

sonniers politiques, les étudiants, les féministes, les politiciens et les journalistes sont exclus de toute politique carcérale dans la lutte contre le Covid-19. Il est prévu de libérer les personnes qui ont commis des crimes sexuels, meurtres, trafic de drogue, vols. Tandis que 50 000 personnes sont prévues d'être libérées, les 200 000 restantes sont laissées pour mortes. Des milliers de personnes qui ne sont arrêtées qu'en raison du manque de liberté de pensée seront laissées dans les prisons où il n'y a pas d'espace personnel, pas de conditions d'hygiène, où le virus peut facilement se propager. Tout cela ressemble aux chambres à gaz d'Hitler.

Parmi les prisonniers, il y a 1333 détenues malades, dont 457 dans des conditions difficiles, il y a aussi des personnes ayant des besoins spéciaux, des personnes âgées et des enfants. Les personnes qui sont jugées pour leurs convictions politiques sont étiquetées comme membres d'organisations terroristes.

Sur la base des normes internationales et des décisions de la Convention européenne des droits de l'Homme (CEDH), la définition du terrorisme en Turquie devrait être modifiée, tous les prisonniers jouissant de la liberté d'expression devraient être libérés des accusations de terrorisme, l'inégalité des poursuites pour des milliers de personnes devrait cesser.

Abdullah Öcalan, qui a plus de 71 ans, a vécu dans des conditions difficiles dans la prison de l'île d'Imralı, où les conditions sont très rudes. Comme les fonctionnaires qui y travaillent font la navette vers l'île, ils courent un risque potentiel du Covid-19. Par conséquent, tous les prisonniers politiques doivent être libérés.

Nous savons que vous êtes tous confrontés à la pandémie du coronavirus dans vos pays. Nous ne pouvons résoudre les problèmes mondiaux qu'avec une solidarité mondiale.

Nous avons un besoin urgent de solidarité mondiale contre les violations du droit à la vie, le militarisme, le fascisme, l'oppression et le profit des dynamiques mondiales, comme les Nations unies (ONU), le Comité pour la prévention de la torture (CPT), le Parlement européen, le Conseil européen, l'UNICEF, les associations de défense des droits de l'homme, des femmes et de l'écologie. C'est aujourd'hui le jour de la solidarité, de la lutte commune et de la fin des guerres.

Nous voulons notre monde libre et souhaitons nous battre ensemble pour cela.



7 avril 2020
Hiwa Shilani

ISIS targets Kakai minority, police in Iraq's disputed Kirkuk

Islamic State fighters injured three Iraqi policemen in an attack late Monday night on a village inhabited by members of the Kakai religious minority outside the disputed city of Kirkuk.

A security source confirmed to local media outlets that the incident began when the village of Ali Saray, located in Daquq district, was first hit by mortars. Soon after, multiple Islamic State gunmen arrived and opened fire. For more than 30 minutes, they clashed with Iraqi federal police for more than a half hour.

The source added that, after the assault was over and the militant fighters had withdrawn, police conducted a search of the surrounding area. As they did so, an improvised explosive device (IED) that had presumably been hidden during the gunfire detonated, seriously wounding three of the policemen.

According to the source, three separate Islamic State attacks in the vicinity of Daquq during the previous 24 hours resulted in five additional casualties and three kidnappings of federal police officers.

In mid-February, a father and son were killed and ten more injured in another such attack in the town of Khanaqin, in Diyala province. All victims were from the Kakai minority which the Islamic State sees as heretics.

Read More: ISIS attack on religious minority in disputed Khanaqin leaves 2 dead, 10 injured

As in Monday's attack, a source told Kurdistan 24, "The terrorist group also detonated an IED while the security forces were attempting to evacuate the injured individuals."

Having suffered religious persecution from multiple directions, both historically

and in recent decades, members of the community have often sought to avoid attention by keeping their practices relatively secret. Though exact statistics on them are scant, it is believed that at least 100,000 Kakais live in various parts of the country, mostly in the disputed territories.

They are among the many minorities in Iraq that have been systematically targeted by the Islamic State but without garnering the same level of news coverage and general awareness as with

on KRG, Baghdad, UN to protect them from IS

In a statement received by Kurdistan 24, they said that their lives were in danger as the jihadist group was continuously targeting them in areas like Daquq.

Since the Islamic State's late 2017 military defeat in Iraq, its fighters have continued to stage guerilla-style attacks, often in or around rugged terrain in territories disputed between Iraq's fe-



A Kakai village in southern Daquq, located on the outskirts of the disputed city of Kirkuk, 2019. (Photo: Kirkuk Now)

other more well-known groups. A significant number of Kakai families evacuated their villages in Kirkuk's Daquq district following the militant group's rise to prominence in 2014.

In the summer of 2018, Kakais in Kirkuk called on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the federal government of Iraq, the United Nations (UN), and civil society organizations to protect them from being targeted again by the Islamic State.

Read More: Kakai minority in Kirkuk call

deral government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), primarily in the provinces of Kirkuk, Salahuddin, and Diyala.

The security void in disputed territories between areas protected by Iraqi troops and Kurdish Peshmerga forces sometimes reaches up to 20 kilometers deep. The rugged, barren terrain that is often seen in such areas has been a haven for Islamic State fighters who use it as a base from which to plan and launch attacks in surrounding settlements and towns.



April 7, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

Kurdistan orders release of hundreds of detainees amid coronavirus fears

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has ordered that hundreds of pre-trial detainees be released until their court dates to prevent the spread of coronavirus in facilities where they are held and because the current health crisis has brought most judiciary functions to a halt.

“Due to the decision to suspend governmental institutions, hundreds of individuals who have been arrested are stuck in detention centers. The Kurdistan Region’s judiciary has decided to release them until it is active again and until their trial dates come up,” said Ayad Kakayi, the head of the Kurdistan Bar Syndicate’s office in Erbil, on Monday.

He added, “The decision to release the detainees was also because of the current circumstances, to avoid crowded conditions in detention centers during the coronavirus outbreak.”

Kakayi also pointed out that the decision does not apply to all detainees. Those who have been charged with “murder, terrorism, and drug trafficking will not be included in this decision and will remain in detention centers.”

A statement released by the regional Justice Ministry afterward said that 1,474 detainees had already been released, 89 of whom had unspecified special conditions attached to their release. Of the detainees temporarily set free, 812 were being held in Erbil province, 440 in Sulaimani, 170 in Duhok, and 22 in the Gar-



miyan Administration area. “The process of freeing detainees and their conditional release will continue and we will announce new information in the coming days,” the statement concluded.

Multiple governments around the world scrambling to keep outbreaks of the virus from sweeping through their correctional facilities have ordered a variety of different such release or furlough programs for detainees.

According to the latest update by the KRG Ministry of Health, there are 280 confirmed cases of the deadly virus in areas under its jurisdic-

tion, including three deaths and 105 patients who have recovered.

Officially referred to as COVID-19, the highly-contagious disease caused by the novel coronavirus was first reported by Chinese authorities in late 2019.

As it continues to spread in over 180 countries worldwide, it has infected nearly 1.4 million people and killed almost 80,000, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting, particularly in countries that have weak health systems.



LES OBSERVATEURS

7 octobre 2020
Ershad ALIJANI

En Iran, révoltes et représailles mortelles dans les prisons touchées par le Covid-19

Malgré l'annonce de la libération temporaire d'un peu plus de 100 000 prisonniers pour contrôler l'épidémie de coronavirus Covid-19, des émeutes ont eu lieu dans une dizaine de prisons iraniennes ces trois dernières semaines. La rédaction des Observateurs de France 24 a pu s'entretenir avec des sources carcérales qui pointent du doigt le manque de produits d'hygiène de base, à l'origine de la colère de nombreux détenus.

Les médias officiels iraniens ont fait état d'émeutes dans plusieurs prisons, ayant causé selon eux un décès à Khorramābād dans la province du Lorestan le 19 mars, et un total de 97 évasions.

Mais selon des activistes de défense des droits de l'homme, une dizaine de prisonniers seraient décédés durant ces émeutes liées au coronavirus. Une publication relayée sur le site internet d'activistes iraniens le 3 avril liste notamment les noms de dix de

ces prisonniers avec leurs photos, et dans certains cas, des images de leurs funérailles. Neuf de ces prisonniers sont décédés, selon ces activistes, durant les émeutes qui ont eu lieu les 30 et 31 mars derniers dans deux prisons de la ville d'Ahvaz, dans la province du Khouzistan au sud-ouest de l'Iran.

Le responsable de la police locale a de son côté affirmé dans les médias iraniens le 31 mars qu'aucun prisonnier n'était décédé.

Mais une source carcérale contactée par notre rédaction a affirmé que des familles de victimes ont compté 38 corps en provenance des prisons à la morgue d'Ahvaz.

Le 27 mars dernier, l'Organisation des prisons iraniennes a expliqué par la voix de son représentant, Ashgar Jahangir, que 100 000 prisonniers avaient reçu des permissions de sortie, soit environ 40% des 240 000 prisonniers iraniens. Or, une source au sein des prisons a expliqué à la rédaction des Observateurs de France 24 que seulement une poignée de prisonniers des deux prisons d'Ahvaz avaient reçu des permissions, car la plupart d'entre eux ne pouvaient pas payer le prix élevé de la caution.

Le 6 avril, l'Iran a communiqué un bilan de 60 500 personnes atteintes du Covid-19, et 3 739 décès.

Pas d'eau, pas de savon, et des cellules pleines

Des activistes affirment que les scènes les plus violentes ont eu lieu les 30 et 31 mars dans deux prisons d'Ahvaz, à Sepidar et Sheiban.

Ahmad (pseudonyme) est un ancien détenu de la prison de Sepidar. Libéré l'année dernière, il a gardé contact avec plusieurs détenus et leurs familles, et a pu suivre les émeutes avec ses connaissances encore incarcérées.

J'ai gardé le contact avec des détenus jusqu'à ce que les communications soient coupées le 31 mars à minuit. Au moins trois personnes sont suspectées d'avoir le coronavirus dans la prison de Sepidar, et des prisonniers dans celle de Sheiban disent qu'il y a au moins un détenu qui serait mort du Covid-19.

Le premier conseil que chacun donne pour faire face au coronavirus est de se laver les mains. Mais c'est impossible dans les prisons d'Ahvaz. La situation sanitaire dans les deux prisons est horrible, en raison du manque d'infrastructures et d'accès à l'eau dans la province du Khouzistan. Parfois, les prisonniers n'ont pas d'eau pendant plusieurs jours.

Les autorités à Sepidar ont diminué les rations de savon l'an dernier, disant qu'elles n'avaient pas les moyens. Les prisonniers doivent donc acheter leur savon à la boutique de la prison. Mais beaucoup de détenus n'ont pas d'argent.

Et actuellement, c'est Norouz, le nouvel an persan, donc les boutiques des prisons sont fermées. Même ceux qui peuvent se le permettre ne peuvent pas acheter de savon. L'autre conseil souvent donné pour faire



Images circulant sur les réseaux sociaux en Iran montrant les émeutes ou évasions de prisonniers à Tabriz (à gauche), Ahvaz (centre) et Saqqez (à droite).

face au Covid-19, c'est celui de la distanciation sociale. En prison, c'est impossible, surtout dans des prisons comme celles d'Ahvaz qui sont pleines. Elles ont été construites pour accueillir 2 000 détenus environ, mais il y en a environ 4 000 à Sepidar et 5 000 à Sheiban. On trouve parfois 20 détenus dans une seule cellule. Beaucoup de prisonniers dorment à même le sol.

Dans la prison de Sepidar, il y a une salle de quarantaine, généralement utilisée pour les châtiments corporels, pas pour la quarantaine médicale. L'année passée, un détenu est revenu de cette salle avec la tuberculose.

"Certains prisonniers ont eu le corps brûlé, et sont méconnaissables"

L'ancien prisonnier Ahmad nous a affirmé que les émeutes avaient débuté à cause des frustrations liées aux permissions :

Beaucoup de prisonniers ont demandé des permissions, comme cela avait été promis par le gouvernement [dès le 3 mars, NDLR]. Mais seulement une dizaine d'entre eux y ont eu le droit. Les gestionnaires des prisons ont refusé beaucoup de demandes, soit parce que les prisonniers étaient considérés comme dangereux, soit parce qu'ils n'étaient pas en mesure de payer la caution. Quand on voit que certains prisonniers ne peuvent pas se payer du savon, comment peuvent-ils payer une caution entre 4 à 10 milliards de tomans [entre 250 000 et 625 000 euros] ?

Donc les prisonniers ont décidé de manifester. Ils ont brûlé tout ce qu'ils ont pu, comme leurs serviettes, et ont pris le contrôle de certains postes de garde. Mais ils n'ont pas pu aller bien loin. Ils se sont retrouvés blo-

qués entre les feux qu'ils avaient provoqués d'un côté, et les gardiens de prison qui leur tiraient dessus de l'autre.

J'ai parlé avec des familles de prisonniers qui ont identifié les corps de leurs proches à la morgue. Ils disent avoir compté au moins 38 corps, dont 18 venaient de la prison de Sepidar, et 20 de celle de Sheiban. Certains corps étaient totalement brûlés et méconnaissables.

Nous sommes inquiets quant à la sécurité de nos amis dans ces prisons. Leurs familles n'ont aucune nouvelle depuis le 31 mars. Aucun appel, aucune visite, aucune information n'est mise à disposition. Certains ne savent même pas si leurs proches se sont échappés, ou sont morts.

Des familles se sont rassemblées en dehors des prisons pour comprendre ce qu'il se passait, mais ils ont reçu comme réponses des gaz lacrymogènes et des coups de bâtons.

Des émeutes dans au moins dix prisons

Les premières émeutes avaient eu lieu le 19 mars à la prison de Parsilon à Khorramābād, la capitale de la province du Lorestan. Selon les médias officiels, au moins 23 prisonniers, dont la plupart sont des petits trafiquants de drogue, se sont échappés par peur d'être atteint par le coronavirus. Un détenu aurait également été tué par un garde selon des activistes.

Des vidéos publiées sur les réseaux sociaux montrent également des détenus courir dans plusieurs directions, certains essayant même d'arrêter des véhicules à Saqqez. Dans cette ville du Kurdistan, les médias ont fait état d'évasions le 27 mars. Au moins 74 détenus ont fui en raison des conditions sanitaires dans le centre médical de la prison.

A year after local polls, Turkey's Kurds left with only third of gains

Not even the coronavirus outbreak has slowed Ankara's crackdown on local administrations held by Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party, which, many now fear, will continue until the last one is seized.

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey — Has Turkey's Kurdish movement come to the end of the road after two decades as a major player in local administrations? It is a troubling question for many in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast, where, a year after local elections last spring, the Kurdish-dominated Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) is left with only 19 of the 59 mayoral offices it had won. The rest have been taken over by government-appointed trustees. Not even the coronavirus outbreak has slowed Ankara's crackdown, which, many now fear, will continue until the last HDP-run municipality is seized.

The Kurdish political movement made its first major foray into local administrations in 1999 by winning 37 municipalities in the conflict-torn southeast, where the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has led an armed insurgency for nearly four decades. For ordinary Kurds, winning and running local administrations has been a source of pride. Kurdish mayors — often elected by a landslide — were the main political voice of the aggrieved minority in the many years the Kurdish movement was absent from the parliament in Ankara. Over the years, Kurdish mayors were often accused of links with the PKK and mismanagement, facing trials, inspections and vitriol. Yet, despite its heavy-handed policies on the Kurdish issue, Ankara never attempted an all-out purge.

Things changed in 2015, when settlement talks between Ankara and the Kurds collapsed, marking the end of a relatively moderate climate for the Kurds. The ensuing crackdown on armed PKK militants in urban areas was soon followed by massive purges amid a nationwide emergency rule in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt. The purges targeted all sorts of Kurdish entities, from political groups and civic associations to media outlets and cultural centers. Among the first in line was the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), which at the time represented the Kurdish movement on a local level. The government seized 95 of 101 DBP-run local administrations, appointing trustees instead of elected mayors, many of whom landed in



People gather at the site of a roadside bombing in Gulec, Turkey, April 8, 2020. Photo by Twitter/@metesohtaoglu.

jail for alleged links with the PKK, which Ankara lists as a terrorist group. The crackdown extended to parliament, where more than a dozen HDP lawmakers were stripped of their seats, with some of them still in jail.

While the Kurdish movement gasped, largely sidelined from the political scene, the trustees enjoyed broad financial means — courtesy of the government — to improve services and win the good graces of locals. Still, the HDP managed to win 59 local administrations in the March 31, 2019, municipal polls. The enthusiasm of the new mayors, however, lasted only four months. Diyarbakir, the largest city of the southeast, and two other major cities, Van and Mardin, lost their mayors in August in what became the first episode of a fresh ouster campaign by the government. In the latest round on March 23, Ankara dismissed eight HDP mayors, bringing the total to 40, astounding anyone who may have thought that it had its hands full with the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

According to Ahmet Demir, who lost his office as mayor of Batman in the latest wave and spent four days in police custody, the

dismissals are devoid of legal ground and constitute an affront to the very concept of elections.

Arguing that no criminal evidence existed against him, Demir told Al-Monitor, "If you are to remove arbitrarily a mayor, elected with 66% of the vote, just because he is not to your liking, you'd better not hold elections at all."

He added, "If we have committed any crime, they have to put forth what it is. We were detained for four days. They left no stone unturned, but found nothing. The court just issued an overseas travel ban. This hardly makes any sense."

Referring to the coronavirus pandemic, he said, "Our response to the outbreak was deemed exemplary by everyone. They intervened as if to punish the whole city."

According to lawyer Sedat Yurtdas, who was among the first to represent the Kurdish movement in parliament in the early 1990s, Ankara has "failed to learn a lesson" from the futility of similar oppressive moves in the past and stands to gain little even in terms of winning favor with nationalist Turks.

He told Al-Monitor the campaign against Kurdish mayors has become even less credible now that even local administrations in big urban centers, run by the main opposition, have become the target of government interventions, going as far as the blocking of fundraisers for residents affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Yurtdas believes Ankara will leave the remaining HDP-run municipalities intact to keep up appearances and avoid further international criticism.

Others, however, disagree. According to Vahap Coskun, a scholar of law at Diyarbakir's Dicle University, Ankara's "trustee policy" will go on "as much as it can," even though it has lacked legal credibility.

"There is nothing legally convincing [in the claim] that mayors in the region break the law as soon as they take office and are being dismissed over the detection of such violations," Coskun told Al-Monitor. "And indeed, various cases concerning the mayors

have clearly shown they never committed the crimes they were accused of."

Coskun believes that not only the Kurdish mayors but all opposition-held local administrations are "in serious danger" because of a legal amendment, made after the 2016 coup attempt, that allows the government to appoint public servants instead of elected officials dismissed on terror-related charges. The provision, he explained, is a deviation from a long-established practice, under which mayors removed for wrongdoing have been succeeded by other elected officials from among municipal assembly members ever since 1930.

"The penal code's definition of 'terrorism' is extremely elastic and any expression of opinion could easily be placed into the scope of terrorism," Coskun said. "One could easily initiate a terror probe into a mayor, so any mayor could be dismissed on allegations of links to terrorism. This is very troublesome." By appointing trustees, the government might be hoping to sway voters, but the

HDP's showing in last year's local polls proved that such aspirations are futile, according to Coskun. "Many trustees had been appointed before the March 31 elections, but voters in formerly HDP-held municipalities voted for the HDP again. Nothing changed," he added.

The scholar criticized opposition parties for failing to raise a powerful voice against the dismissal of HDP mayors. "This is not a problem that concerns the HDP only — it concerns Turkey and local democracy as a whole," he said.

According to Coskun, fellow opposition parties might be wary of the "terror label" of dismissals, fearing that they, too, could face the same accusations should they speak out loudly against the purge. "But this is unlawfulness and there is no guarantee it will be limited to one party," Coskun said. "The rest of the opposition keeps quiet as the HDP is the target today, but tomorrow they, too, will be hit."

AL-MONITOR

April 8, 2020

Roadside bombing in southeast Turkey kills five civilians

While no group has yet to claim responsibility for the attack, Ankara is pointing the finger at the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party.

While no group has yet to claim responsibility for the attack, Ankara is pointing the finger at the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party.

Five civilians are dead following a car bombing in Turkey's restive southeast, local officials said Wednesday. According to a statement from the governor's office in the Kurdish-populated Diyarbakir province, roadside bombs hit a car carrying a group of forestry workers in the town of Gulec in the Kulp district.

Security forces are now looking for the perpetrators, which the governor's office said were "members of the PKK terror organization," referring to the armed insurgent group inside Turkey known as the Kurdistan Workers Party.

On Twitter, Turkey's parliament speaker Mustafa Sentop accused the PKK of orches-



Security forces were dispatched to the area after PKK terrorists detonated a roadside bomb in Diyarbakir, Turkey, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. (DHA Photo)

trating the “treacherous attack,” writing, “The separatist terror organization PKK has shown its nefarious face once again. The traitors will get the response they deserve.”

Fahrettin Altun, the communications director for Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, tweeted that the “fight against terrorism does not slow down, even today.”

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the bombing.

The PKK’s decades-long violent insurgency

against the Turkish state has left more than 40,000 people dead on both sides. After the collapse of a two-year-old cease-fire, fighting reignited between Turkey and the group in July 2015. Last year, several people died in a similar bombing in Kulp that authorities also blamed on PKK militants.

Ankara, the United States and the European Union all label the Kurdish militant group a terrorist organization.

In October 2019, Turkey launched a military operation in northern Syria to drive away

from its border the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, elements of which Ankara views as terrorists linked to the PKK.

Last year, more than two dozen democratically elected mayors from the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) were sacked and replaced with state appointees over alleged ties to the PKK. Accused of terror links, former HDP leader Selahattin Demirtas has been in jail for more than three years.



April 8, 2020
By Hisham Arafat

Syrian Kurds say Damascus' weak measures likely to spread coronavirus to the north

QAMISHLI, Syria (Kurdistan 24) - The Kurdish-led self-administration in northeastern Syria on Wednesday criticized the Syrian regime for allowing several people to pass into administration territory without first being tested for the coronavirus.

In doing so, said Kurdish officials, Damascus bears responsibility for exposing hundreds of thousands of vulnerable civilians to outbreaks of the deadly disease.

“Syrian [regime] authorities are not cooperating with us, but rather endanger the people’s lives in north and east Syria by letting civilians cross into our areas without being quarantined and tested for coronavirus,” the Kurdish administration said in a statement.

“We hold the Syrian [regime] authorities responsible for any case of coronavirus in our region because of their recklessness by violating the preventive measures and passing passengers to our areas without informing us,” the self-administration statement reads.

According to international organizations and experts, the self-administration is poorly prepared to deal with the coronavirus crisis due to a fragile health system, already degraded and strained by almost a decade of civil war and large numbers of displaced civilians.

The Kurdish administration’s police and media offices have called upon people of the region to report any travellers coming to



Medical teams near Qamishli airport check passengers coming from Damascus to areas in the northeast for signs of infection by the coronavirus, April 05, 2020. (Photo: Rojava Information Center)

the border of areas under their control from the direction of Damascus without being subjected to anti-coronavirus health procedures.

Earlier this week, dozens of passengers coming from Damascus to regime-held Qamishli airport have been taken to quarantine by the Kurdish self-administration before being allowed to enter.

So far, there have been no reported cases of the virus in northern and northeastern Syria, also known as Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) under the self-administration. The Syrian government’s Ministry of Health has reported a mere 19 cases, including two

people who have recovered and another two who have died.

In the face of multiple reports to the contrary, it is widely believed that Damascus is significantly underreporting the incidents of coronavirus in the areas of the country that it controls.

Not long after it first emerged in China in late 2019, Iran became the epicenter of the coronavirus in the Middle East, and exporting it to multiple neighboring nations. Iran has considerable regional influence, in part because of its proxy militias in Syria, Iran, and Lebanon. The resulting presence of Iranians, including frequent travel from Tehran, is seen as a likely vehicle for the virus to be

fanning out into all three nations' populations.

Syrian Kurdish authorities have already taken precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic to their region, where the health system has been severely damaged and overtaxed by almost a decade of civil war.

The first move taken in late February was to close the Semalka border crossing, the main passenger conduit between Rojava and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Until then, it had long been the primary way in or out of

Syrian Kurdish-controlled areas, used commonly by international journalists, humanitarian organizations, and diplomatic missions even if barred from operating in Syrian regime-held areas.

Local officials have also enacted and expanded curfews in areas under its jurisdiction. Since Feb. 26, the administration decided to restrict civilians recently in Europe from entering through the border crossing.

Despite such measures, the very real danger of a local coronavirus outbreak still exists and is exacerbated by the lax restric-

tions in regime-held territories that border the northeast, especially at checkpoints on the outskirts of Deir al-Zor, Raqqa, and Manbij provinces.

In the cities of Tabqa, located southwest of Raqqa, and in Manbij, those coming from regime and rebel areas are being checked by administration medical teams for symptoms consistent with the coronavirus before being permitted to enter the Kurdish-controlled areas. Additional mobile teams are also working to spread information about the virus and make recommendations aimed at curbing contagion.



April 8, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

COVID-19 cases rise in Kurdistan Region, while Iraq extends curfew

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Health on Wednesday announced 14 new coronavirus cases in Erbil.

A health ministry statement said the infected included nine women, four men, and a child from over six neighborhoods in Erbil city center.

All of them were infected due to interaction with sick patients at one of two funeral gatherings that recently took place in the Karizan neighborhood in Erbil city, it added.

On Tuesday, the Ministry of Health tested large numbers of people from 11 residential areas in Erbil in an attempt to stop a breakout of the coronavirus that appears to have been caused by mourners breaking curfew to gather at two funerals in roughly the same area.

According to the latest update by the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Health, there are 303 confirmed cases of the deadly virus in areas under its jurisdiction, including three deaths.

Furthermore, the Iraqi High Committee for Health and Safety, set up by the Iraqi government to combat the coronavirus, announced on late Tuesday the extension of



A COVID-19 treatment center in Erbil. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

a curfew until April 18. The original lockdown was until April 11.

The statement said the committee would provide financial support to families affected by the imposed curfew, as well as facilitate the return of Iraqis stranded abroad and provide quarantine for them. The statement added that the lockdown extension is to limit the outbreak of the coronavirus. According to the Iraqi ministry, 65 individuals died in Iraq from a total of 1,122 confirmed cases, while 373 made full recoveries.

Officially referred to as COVID-19, the highly contagious disease was first reported by Chinese authorities in late 2019.

As it continues to spread in over 180 countries worldwide, the disease has infected nearly 1.4 million people and killed almost 83,000, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting, particularly in countries that have weak health systems.



April 8, 2020

Kurdish leader stresses ISIS still a serious threat after attack kills 2 Peshmerga

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The so-called Islamic State remains a serious threat, said Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani on Wednesday, a day after members of the terrorist organization killed two Kurdish Peshmerga forces in an attack.

“Last night's terrorist attack in the Garmiyan area which resulted in the martyrdom of 2 Peshmerga forces is a reminder that the #ISIS terrorists continue to constitute a threat,” said Masoud Barzani in a tweet.

“It is imperative that the anti-terrorism efforts by Erbil, Baghdad and the coalition remain a priority.”

In his statement on the incident, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani said, “I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families and relatives of the two fallen Peshmerga heroes, Surkew Rashid and Ismaeil Fars, who lost their lives last night while repelling an attack by ISIS terrorists in Kulajo village, Garmian region.”

The incident occurred in the south of the autonomous region in the small town of Kulajo, located within the Garmiyan Administration, an unofficial province in the Kurdistan Region that includes the three districts Kalar, Kifri, and Chamchamal.

These areas neighbor others disputed by the federal Iraqi government and the Kurdis-



A Peshmerga fighter is killed in an Islamic State attack on Tuesday is loaded into an ambulance in the Kurdistan Region's Garmiyan, April 8, 2020. (Photo: Social Media)

tan Regional Government (KRG) and are protected by Kurdish security forces (Asayish) and Peshmerga troops.

The attackers are thought to have infiltrated Kulajo from land next to the town that is only once such stretch of territory where a lack of presence by federal and regional troops has created a security vacuum. These areas, usually tracts of inhospitable land, continue to be exploited by remnants of the terrorist organization to plan and launch terrorist attacks on nearby towns and cities. Rural parts of Garmiyan, as well as other

areas of contested claim, have been the site of repeated terrorist activity, including armed assaults, bombings, and kidnappings.

police in Iraq's disputed Kirkuk

The terror group has recently intensified its operations in apparent efforts to exploit diverted attention by the security forces due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. The disease has infected over 1,100 people across the country despite strict measures instituted by both Erbil and Baghdad to contain it.



April 8, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

Kurdistan assures public of coronavirus precautions on Turkish border

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – On Wednesday, the spokesman of the Kurdistan Region's key border crossing with Turkey assured citizens that strict health measures are being implemented as part of efforts to prevent additional cases of the coronavirus from entering through land trade with the neighboring country.

“Sanitary measures at border crossing have prevented any loophole for the transmission of the virus, and there is high-level coordination regarding taking the same health measures at the crossing on the Turkish side as well,” said Kami Kamal, spokesperson of the Ibrahim Khalil border crossing.

“Drivers from Kurdistan Region, before en-

tering the Turkish side, are subject to checks by medical teams to ensure that they are not infected with the virus. The vehicles and drivers' clothes are also sterilized before crossing, and without any contact with Turkish drivers,” he continued, adding, “The vehicles (and drivers) go through the same process again on the other side.”

cher. Mais de toute façon, il y a trop d'enfants pour que cela soit tenable. Leurs mères ne peuvent pas les enfermer dans les tentes. Si le virus arrive, il se propagera très rapidement.»

Pour l'heure, aucun cas n'a été recensé. Mais aucun test n'a non plus été effectué. L'administration kurde n'en a pas. Elle a quand même envoyé des prélèvements en utilisant des kits prévus pour d'autres maladies à Damas, mais le régime syrien a refusé de les examiner. Pour limiter les risques de propagation, les effectifs des employés des camps ont été réduits et le nombre de leurs rotations diminuées. Les services médicaux ont encore été restreints un peu plus.

«La majorité sont des enfants»

Si l'épidémie venait à gagner le nord-est syrien, les conséquences seraient d'autant plus dramatiques que la région est coupée du monde. Le poste-frontière d'Al-Yarubiyah, en Irak, par où transitait l'aide de l'ONU, a été fermé en début d'année suite à un veto de la Russie au Conseil de sécurité. Celui de Fishkabour a lui été fermé après le déclenchement de la pandémie.

«Il est probable que le Covid-19 affectera le nord-est syrien, et toute la Syrie [...]. On ne peut pas attendre des autorités du nord-est qu'elles supportent le fardeau de cette

énorme crise humanitaire, indique l'International Crisis Group dans un rapport publié le 7 avril. La majorité de la population d'Al-Hol et de Roj sont des enfants, et qu'ils soient irakiens, syriens ou de n'importe quelle autre nationalité, leur survie et celle de ceux qui s'en occupent doivent être assurées.»

Les autorités kurdes demandent depuis la chute de l'Etat islamique, il y a plus d'un an à Al Baghouz, l'aide de la communauté internationale pour gérer les camps et les prisons de jihadistes. Elles réclament aussi en vain que les pays étrangers, dont la France, récupèrent leurs ressortissants.



8 avril 2020
Hamid Enayat

Iran : Le nombre de décès dus aux coronavirus atteint les 20'400

Le parlement iranien bloque une motion d'urgence pour un confinement national d'un mois

La principale force de l'opposition iranienne (OMPI / MEK) a annoncé le 7 avril 2020 que le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus dans 245 villes en Iran est d'au moins 20 400.

Le nombre d'Iraniens qui ont perdu la vie dans les provinces de Qom est de 2.050, de Khorassan-Razavi 1.800, de Kermanschah 630, de Hamedan 560, de Lorestan 510, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'ouest 430, d'Ardebil 445, de Semnan 350, de Kerman 345, du Kurdistan 340, de Markazi 300, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'Est 335, de Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad 122, de Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari 82, de Bouchehr 40, auxquels il faut ajouter les chiffres des autres provinces.

Alireza Zali, chef du « centre national de lutte contre le coronavirus » à Téhéran, a déclaré à la télévision publique : « Nous avons eu une augmentation de 28% des admissions dans les sections ordinaires et de 15% dans les USI ces trois derniers jours, alors que nous avons laissé sortir moins de patients ces derniers jours. Nous sommes toujours dans une courbe vivement ascendante (...) La population de Téhéran est importante et diverse (...) nos installations ne peuvent absorber un tel volume », a-t-il ajouté. Après une réunion du conseil municipal de Téhéran, Zali a déclaré à l'agence officielle Fars aujourd'hui, que « Téhéran est

toujours l'un des points chauds de l'épidémie de coronavirus, et il n'y a presque pas de points clairs dans la ville, en raison du volume des déplacements intramuros dans la capitale ».

Hamid Sourì, un membre du « centre national de lutte contre le coronavirus » a fait une révélation choquante à l'agence de presse officielle du régime le 6 avril. Selon lui « environ 500.000 personnes sont infectées par le coronavirus dans le pays (...) La tendance épidémique est toujours à la hausse, et nous n'avons pas encore atteint le sommet ou le niveau horizontal de la courbe dans aucune province. Dans de nombreuses provinces, comme celles de Khorassan-Razavi, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'ouest, de Bouchehr, du Khouzistan, de Kermanschah, de Semnan, ou même de Téhéran, nous avons toujours une tendance à la hausse (...) Nous n'avons presque pas d'endroit dans le pays qui soit à l'abri du virus. Dans le cas le plus pessimiste, peut-être 400 000 personnes mourront du virus dans le pays (...) Si le deuxième pic d'épidémie commence, nous aurons des difficultés. »

Pendant ce temps, le parlement du régime a écarté de son ordre du jour comme « contraire à la Constitution », un plan de motion d'urgence avec trois priorités pour confiner le pays pendant un mois afin d'éviter de nouveaux décès. La motion signée par 80 députés visait à contrer l'ordre de Rohani de remettre les gens au travail (d'ici la semaine prochaine).

Mme Maryam Radjavi, le dirigeant de la résistance iranienne, a déclaré aujourd'hui que le refus du parlement d'examiner une « motion urgente d'arrêter le pays » est une nouvelle indication du travail commun entre Khamenei, Rohani et d'autres responsables, dans le plan criminel visant à renvoyer les gens au travail, un véritable piège mortel. Mme Radjavi a souligné qu'il s'agit d'un crime contre l'humanité, surtout lorsque l'écrasante majorité des experts au sein du régime soulignent que le coronavirus n'a pas encore été contenu et qu'il se propage dans de nombreux endroits. Par conséquent, le retour à la normal fera un nombre incalculable de morts.

Cependant, Saïd Namaki, ministre de la Santé du régime, qui s'exprimait lors de la même session, a souligné qu'« aucun phénomène n'est pire pour l'économie du pays que la poursuite de l'épidémie du coronavirus ». Tout en exprimant indirectement son opposition (à la reprise des activités), il a souligné que « nous sommes maintenant dans la phase de gestion de l'épidémie, nous n'avons pas encore contrôlé et contenu le virus et ne devrions pas nous faire d'illusions ou mal calculer les choses ».

Namaki a demandé une réunion à huis clos et a reconnu pour la première fois que le virus était entré séparément à Qom et au Guilan. Il a déclaré : « 23 équipes d'épidémiologistes travaillent pour trouver l'origine de la maladie. Ce qui s'est passé au Guilan

est une chose distincte de ce qui s'est passé à Qom (...) Nous avons enquêté sur tous ces points et nous allons en parler à huis clos... »

Dans un communiqué publié le 27 mars, la Résistance iranienne révélait que « depuis fin janvier, le coronavirus était présent à Astarā et Talesh (nord-ouest de l'Iran). Début janvier, un nombre important de touristes chinois s'étaient rendus de la République d'Azerbaïdjan à Astarā et dans la zone franche de Bandar Anzali ». Dans ses communiqués des 20 et 31 mars et dans celui du 3 avril 2020, la résistance iranienne a révélé les documents d'hospitalisation de 11 patients atteints de coronavirus à Téhéran entre le 25 janvier et le 7 février 2020. Par ailleurs, il existe une crainte généralisée au sein du régime d'un mécontentement et

d'un soulèvement populaires. Le site du Parlement du régime a cité aujourd'hui le député Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi disant : « l'après-coronavirus représente une menace sociale, sécuritaire, politique et économique pour le pays, qui est malheureusement ignorée. Ne pas tenir compte de la situation post-coronavirus aura de graves conséquences pour le pays. »

Dans son édition de ce jour le quotidien officiel Iran-Emrouz a écrit : « nous aurons un grand mouvement social après la fin du coronavirus. La situation ne va pas être seraine. Elle va être exactement comme la période post-électorale de 2017 (soulèvements), et nous allons assister à des incidents répétés et puissants. »

Le quotidien officiel Sharq a écrit aujourd'hui

: « (À la lumière) des événements de novembre 2019 et de janvier 2020 (le soulèvement), des slogans lancés à l'époque et du taux de participation aux élections de mars (...) si la situation continue ainsi (...) la tolérance de l'économie nationale – compte tenu du marché pétrolier actuel, des dommages irréparables causés aux moyens de subsistance des gens par le coronavirus et de la pression croissante sur les couches pauvres de la société – sera sérieusement compromise. » Le même quotidien rapportait la veille que 15 millions de personnes, qui touchent un salaire journalier, ainsi que leurs familles qui totalisent 40 à 50 millions de personnes, constituent la population vulnérable, et qu'« il existe donc une plus grande menace que le Coronavirus pour la société ».

Iraq's President Names Kazemi as PM after Sunni-Kurdish Support

Iraqi President Barham Salih named head of National Intelligence Service Mustafa Kazemi as the country's third prime minister-designate this year, moments after predecessor Adnan Zurfi withdrew his candidacy.

The nomination ceremony was attended by the country's top political figures, indicating widespread support for Kazemi that both previous PM-designates had not enjoyed.

Kazemi, 53, now has 30 days to form a new cabinet and present it to the parliament for approval.

His nomination came after the Iraqi Forces Coalition, the largest Sunni parliamentary bloc, threw its support behind Kazemi.

The Coalition issued a statement Wednesday indicating it supports a candidate backed by the political components responsible for his nomination.

"The person in charge of forming the Iraqi government must have the support of the political factions who are responsible for the nomination," the Coalition said.

It pointed out that its members are proud for always aiming to establish peace, dialogue, and understanding among Iraqis



Iraqi President Barham Salih. Reuters file photo

The statement reiterated its support for a stable Iraq and moving towards forming the government within constitutional contexts.

It stressed its commitment to the unity of the political parties to overcome the difficult stage and the great risks that the country faces in health, security, the economy, and politics.

President of Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani also welcomed Kazemi's nomination.

In a statement, Barzani said the country is

facing great challenges that require all political parties to overcome their differences and accelerate the formation of a federal government.

"The presidency affirms its belief in the political stability of Iraq, which

requires the formation of a new government and the support of all national parties."

CEO of AKKAD Center for Strategic Affairs and Future Studies Hussein Allawi believes Kazemi will be able to distance Iraq from the US-Iranian dispute.

Allawi told Asharq Al-Awsat that during his tenure as head of the intelligence service, Kazemi has worked for Iraq's best interest.

Kazemi will succeed as prime minister, he said.



April 9, 2020
By David Leseska

The growing sound of silence in southeast Turkey

After being briefly detained last week, Nurcan Baysal, an award-winning Diyarbakır-based activist and journalist, has continued to report on the situation in Kurdish-majority southeast Turkey, where locals have seen how growing fear about the pandemic has increased the government's sensitivity to criticism.

"Today I called some of my friends who are doctors," Baysal told Ahval in a podcast. "I tried to take some information, and they openly said, 'Nurcan, we can't talk'."

Four weeks after announcing its first confirmed case of COVID-19, Turkey has the world's ninth most cases, at 38,226, with more than 800 dead. The government has shuttered most shops, restaurants and cafes, cancelled all flights by Turkish carriers and quarantined more than 30 of its largest cities, along with 100 residential areas.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Monday vowed to expand the number of hospital beds in Istanbul, the country's coronavirus epicentre. Health experts and opposition politicians have called for a full lockdown like those applied in much of Europe, while the government has arrested more than 400 people for critical posts on social media.

Journalism watchdog Reporters without Borders said at least eight Turkish journalists, including Baysal, had been detained for pandemic-related reporting and are now waiting to hear if they will be officially charged. "Efforts to contain the flow of information have been greater than those to contain the epidemic itself," Miray Erbey, a researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, wrote this week about Turkey.

Whatever policies of oppression the government embraces, it tends to apply them twice as hard in Diyarbakır, the biggest city in the mainly Kurdish southeast, where the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has been waging an insurgency for some 35 years.

The biggest, most recent spasm of violence was in late 2015 to early 2016, when government forces used tanks and artillery to



drive the PKK youth wing from urban centres where they had erected barricades in response to a call from the group's military leaders to declare autonomy from the state. City centres were left in ruins. Since then, Baysal has been detained three times and sentenced to 10 months in prison, had her home raided twice and faced dozens of police investigations.

Last week, authorities told her that her columns and social media posts incited panic and fear. Baysal, the 2018 Global Laureate for Human Rights Defenders at Risk, according to the Irish organisation Front Line Defenders, explained her work as a journalist and activist and was released.

"The prosecutor mainly asked me about one paragraph in my article for Ahval News. He said, 'Why did you write about the coronavirus risk in prisons?'" she said. "He said, 'You are not an ordinary person. You have an effect on people and you should be more careful'."

The prison issue has emerged among Turkey's most urgent. Parliament is expected to vote this week on a bill to free nearly a third of the country's nearly 300,000 inmates, while excluding political prisoners, such as journalists, politicians and activists.

The amnesty is a response to overcrowding and concerns about the possible rapid spread of COVID-19, particularly considering the lack of cleanliness, hygiene products and distancing possibilities behind bars. The Council of Europe and Human

Rights Watch have both denounced the bill and called for the release of political prisoners.

After a parliamentary advisory body approved a draft of the bill on Saturday, inmates at a penitentiary in the Kurdish-majority city of Batman rioted. Some 8,500 people, including thousands of Kurdish lawmakers and journalists, remain behind bars on charges of links to the PKK.

Last week, former Diyarbakır mayor Selçuk Mızraklı wrote in an Ahval column that the government was abandoning countless journalists, students, lawyers and intellectuals to death in prison.

That Mızraklı is among those in prison underscores the absence of leadership in southeast Turkey, where the government has targeted any successful figure from the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

The main opposition mayors of Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, and Ankara, its capital, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş, respectively, have seen their profiles rise as they have aggressively responded to the pandemic, notably by launching municipal fundraising drives to support the poor and small businesses troubled by the corona crisis.

Erdoğan followed suit by launching a national donation campaign, and the next day barred the municipal fundraising drives. Both İmamoğlu and Yavaş quickly vowed to

continue their efforts to raise funds for the needy.

Meanwhile, last month the mayor of the largest city in Turkey's southeast was sentenced to more than nine years in prison.

The government has dismissed 40 HDP mayors since last year's local elections, and jailed dozens of other top Kurdish leaders, such as Selahattin Demirtaş, former HDP co-leader and presidential candidate.

"We don't have mayors," said Baysal. "We don't have people who can talk on our behalf."

To make matters worse, the government vowed to give Kurdish people in southeast Turkey peace, economic development and local rights, and fell way short, according to Baysal.

"There's no trust of this government," she said. "They failed to follow through on their promises, so we have this trust problem."

The government also shut down most NGOs in the southeast, including Sarmaşık, which would now be delivering food and other support to Diyarbakır's poor and at-risk if it had not been closed in 2016.

Baysal and some friends have in the past week joined forces to launch a new initiative that aims to make at least 50 food deliveries every day to people in the poorer areas of Diyarbakır, like Sur and nearby Bağlar.

After taking a long time to adjust to the new distancing rules, much of Diyarbakır is now shuttered and quiet. But Baysal still sees considerable pedestrian traffic in less wealthy, more densely populated areas like Sur and Bağlar.

"This social distancing is a luxury in some areas," she said. "If they don't work, there is no bread for that day. So, if the state doesn't support them with food and other things, these people will go out and continue to work."

Baysal has also continued to work. Because of her experience with major international organisations like the United Nations Development Programme, she is less concerned about a lengthy prison term than most journalists in the southeast, who lack such backing. But the threat of contracting COVID-19 during even a very short stint in jail has her worried.

"I feel a responsibility to report, to inform the people about what's happening here, (but

it is really not easy," she said, mentioning her two sons, who are 13 and 16-years-old. "They need me, and I don't want to be in prison when there's this coronavirus."

Baysal said that for the first time she had begun posting, then quickly deleting, tweets that she feared might draw government attention. She was thinking about not reporting in Turkish for a month, or until the corona crisis blows over.

"In the last eight years, I never stopped, I always continued to write through the clashes," she said. "But today I'm thinking maybe I need to stop ... There is no law here."

All major decisions in Turkey appear to be taken by one man, said Baysal, and concerns are growing that Erdoğan could take a step like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán took last week, essentially eliminating parliament in order to rule by decree.

"Turkey's really in darkness the last four to five years. I don't know how dark it can be," she said. "Every year we tell ourselves this will pass, but it's not passing. I'm really hopeless this time."



April 9, 2020
By Michael Knights

Iraq Goes from Zurfi to Kadhim: U.S. Policy Implications

If Kadhim's nomination goes through, it would be good news for Iraq, but Washington's troubled relationship with Baghdad still needs a radical strategic reset.

Iraqi prime minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi withdrew from his short campaign to form a cabinet after coming under pressure to step aside. Taking his place is intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kadhim, a candidate with the pledged support of all major political blocs. Despite radical differences in their personal styles, Zurfi and Kadhim are both political moderates and Iraqi nationalists with good connections to Baghdad's international partners. Both are also held in deep suspicion by the Iranian security establishment for being too close to the United States.

Yet a critical difference in process gives hope that Kadhim will succeed where Zurfi failed. While Zurfi's nomination stemmed from a failure to reach Shia consensus and required the intervention of Kurdish president Barham Salih, Kadhim has been introduced with consensus support and no veto from the Shia blocs. This can be presented as a face-saver for Iran-backed Shia parties who would reject him under normal circumstances.

Kadhim now has until May 9 to ratify a cabinet—a process that will intersect with at least two U.S. policy steps in Iraq. First, on April 25, Washington must decide whether to issue a new sanctions waiver that lets Baghdad continue importing Iranian natural gas and electricity, and under what conditions. The current waiver was

limited to an unprecedentedly short thirty days, an apparent signal that U.S. patience with Iranian meddling in Iraqi politics is wearing thin. Second, the Trump administration has proposed to launch a strategic dialogue with Baghdad in June, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo aiming to reset the relationship under the rubric of the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA).

APPROACHING A BILATERAL CROSSROADS

The U.S.-Iraq relationship is long overdue for a strategic reset. If the 2003-2011 occupation was the first phase of modern relations and the post-2014 effort to defeat the Islamic State (IS) was the second, then the third phase is now beginning. Although the jihadist group is not yet defeated, an

accumulation of complicating factors has been pushing the relationship toward this new phase, as shown most clearly when more than a hundred Iraqi parliamentarians called for the eviction of the U.S.-led military coalition in January. Drivers for this shift include:

•**U.S.-Iran competition.** The war against IS has always had a subtext of competition between the coalition and the Iran-backed militias that contribute most of the combat power to Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The militias have sought to use the war and its aftermath to cement their hold over the political, business, and security sectors. Some of them have also acted on their desire to drive U.S. forces out of Iraq by attacking and killing foreign personnel, resulting in retaliatory U.S. strikes such as the January assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and PMF leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. These developments have created a volatile dynamic in which the Iraqi government is failing to protect its diplomatic and military guests, and the United States is being drawn into an open-ended series of strikes that are unlikely to deter or destroy Iran-backed militias.

•**Evolution of the counter-IS mission.** After IS lost its last bit of territory in Syria in March 2019, the coalition began looking ahead to a late 2020 review that would have coincided with the mission's sixth anniversary. Today, the combination of escalating militia attacks in Iraq and the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated this planned restructuring. Almost all non-American trainers left Iraq last month, while the United States has moved most of its forces away from frontline bases and consolidated them into four hubs: Baghdad International Airport, al-Asad Air Base on the Syrian border, the Kurdistan Region, and the training center at Taji. Many of the programmed budgetary assumptions for security cooperation in fiscal year 2021 will no longer apply under these conditions. Yet the counter-IS fight must endure in some form lest the movement achieve another resurgence.

•**Potential aid complications.** Due to the coronavirus and other factors, Iraq will likely suffer a severe public health and economic crisis in the coming year, including tens of thousands of deaths and a collapse of household incomes. This would typically be a cue for the United States to ramp up aid delivery and coordinate global economic support packages. Today, ho-

wever, the whole world is going through the same pandemic, much of the Middle East is feeling the pinch of the Saudi-Russian oil price war, and the United States happens to be in the middle of an election year. Thus, while Baghdad has never needed American support more than it currently does, America has never faced a more challenging environment in which to rally additional U.S. and international aid for the country.

MAKING THE STRATEGIC DIALOGUE WORK

When U.S. and Iraqi leaders gather under the rubric of the SFA later this year, their first priority should be an honest airing of grievances. This should then give way to recognition of mutual interests, as well as areas where the two countries can agree to disagree. For almost the entirety of Prime Minister Adil Abdulmahdi's tenure—from his appointment in 2018 to his current caretaker status—the United States and other international supporters have lacked an active, clear-eyed partner in Iraq's top office. In contrast, if Kadhim were prime minister, U.S. officials could rest assured that any concerns he expressed to them would be coming from a respected Iraqi nationalist framing them with an eye squarely on his own country's sovereign interests, not Iran's.

The United States has signaled in the past that any SFA with Iraq is a package deal, meaning Baghdad cannot cherry pick aid benefits while taking (or tolerating) actions that undermine U.S. strategic interests. Although not explicitly transactional, the relationship has to be one of mutual give and take, not simply a one-way flow of aid to Iraq for no observable benefit. To reinforce this message with Iraqi officials, Washington should lay out its most fundamental, reasonable expectations:

•**Protecting American personnel.** Under Abdulmahdi, the Iraqi government has demonstrated an unpardonable failure to safeguard not only forward-deployed U.S. military advisors, but also the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. The latter failure is particularly galling when government forces have been perfectly willing to kill scores (if not hundreds) of young Iraqis just to keep the Iranian embassy safe from months of protests against Tehran's interference. This situation must change—Baghdad must order its forces to take action against any armed factions that attack its international guests.

•**Protecting U.S. currency.** Despite a

widening slate of sanctions, U.S. dollars are still being diverted to Iran or to U.S.-designated terrorist groups, including Iraqi actors. Baghdad must continue doing its utmost to prevent such diversions.

•**Keeping U.S. security assistance away from bad actors.** U.S. weapons, training, and logistical sustainment are provided to Iraq under strict conditions regulated by U.S. law, including provisions that exclude those guilty of human rights abuses or association with the Iranian government. If Washington is to move forward with the programmed FY 2021 Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), then Iraq's new government must take many corrective actions to put security cooperation on firm footing. These include intensified "Leahy vetting" of commanders, exclusion of U.S.-sanctioned figures from security roles, the renewal of U.S. advisory efforts with the Tribal Mobilization Forces, and explicit Iraqi protection of coalition-trained commanders.

Baghdad will no doubt have ground rules and reasonable expectations of its own, which the United States should observe. For one, unless U.S. forces are attacked inside Iraq, they should not target Iranian operatives and Iran-backed militias there. And absent evidence of Iraqi sanctions violations, Washington should commit to re-extending its waivers in continual 120-day tranches. Likewise, it should keep shielding Iraqi sovereign reserves from international lawsuits and avoid further threats to freeze these funds. Finally, U.S. officials should do everything they can to ensure Iraq gets its fair share of international relief—or even more considering the remarkable vulnerability of its public health and economic systems, whose stability holds major implications for wider regional security.

A commonsense strategic dialogue under a respectable "Iraq first" prime minister can restore a degree of normality and decorum to the bilateral relationship. Baghdad will sorely need this kind of reset in the coming months, when the full local impact of coronavirus becomes clearer, the oil crash forces it to enact its deepest economic austerity measures since 2003, and IS steps up its efforts to exploit the chaos.

Michael Knights is a senior fellow with The Washington Institute. Since 2003, he has conducted extensive on-the-ground research in Iraq alongside security forces and government ministries.



April 9, 2020

Turkish authorities file lawsuit against Kurdish mayor Selçuk Mizrakli

Turkish prosecutors charged imprisoned former mayor of the southeastern province of Diyarbakır, Selçuk Mizraklı, with making terrorism propaganda, the Bianet news website said on Thursday.

Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office charged Mizraklı with terrorist propaganda for participating in an event organised by the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), staging a three-day hunger strike in support of Leyla Güven, a deputy for the HDP, and a tweet he posted in support of Kurdish activist, Ramin Hossein, who was executed in Iran, Bianet said.

Mizraklı was removed from office on Aug. 19 alongside two other HDP mayors accused of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group that has been at war for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey for



more than three decades. The HDP mayor was arrested on Oct. 22 and has been in prison since then.

Authorities have replaced dozens of HDP

mayors over links to the PKK since the March 31 local elections last year. The government has long accused the pro-Kurdish HDP of harbouring sympathies and acting in the interest of the PKK.

Kurdistan au féminin

9 avril 2020

Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

Le kurde classé la 31e langue la plus riche du monde

Saviez-vous que le kurde est classé 31e dans la liste des « langues les plus efficaces et les plus riches du monde », par la revue « Le Français Dans Le Monde* » ?

Si seulement la langue kurde n'avait pas été interdite par les Etats colonialistes turc, syrien, irakien et iranien qui occupent le Kurdistan, le kurde aurait été encore plus riche qu'il n'est à l'heure actuelle où les nouvelles générations de Kurdes ne peuvent même pas le parler !

*Publié dans le 335e numéro de la revue

Info donnée par le compte Twitter de Serhad Eyalet Lordu





April 9, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

Kurdistan's Bardarash security thwarts attempt to smuggle 20 people to Duhok province

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The district commissioner of Bardarash announced on Wednesday the arrest of 20 people who tried to illegally enter the Kurdistan Region's Duhok province.

Khalil Mahmood, the district commissioner of Bardarash, said in a press conference that security forces had "arrested 20 persons from Iran and the cities of central Iraq who were seeking to sneak into the district" despite a lockdown amid the coronavirus crisis.

In efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus, formally known as COVID-19, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has blocked travel and entry between cities in the autonomous region and the rest of the cities in Iraq except for freight deliveries of food and other necessities.

Mahmood noted that of 43 people quarantined in the district, 37 of them left after the end of their quarantine and only six remain. He added that 134 members of the Peshmerga and Iraqi Security Forces have also been placed under quarantine in the district



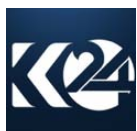
The Kurdistan Region's Duhok province. (Photo: Social Media)

as part of the Ministry of Health's regulations.

In the past week, Erbil security forces announced that they had foiled several attempts to smuggle people into the city and arrested close to 100 individuals during a strict coronavirus lockdown that restricts such movement of the general population to block the spread of the contagious disease.

As it continues to spread in over 180 countries worldwide, the disease has infected nearly 1.5 million people and killed almost 88,000, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting, particularly in countries that have weak health systems.



April 9, 2020
By Hisham Arafat

Turkey continues demographic change in northern Syria by resettling hundreds of refugees in Tal Abyad, Ras al-Ain

TAL ABYAD – Turkish authorities reportedly sent 19 buses loaded with roughly 900 Syrian refugees over the border into Syria to be resettled in the country's northern towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye), activists and local news agencies said on Wednesday.

"The new arrivals, who are the families of the Turkish-backed armed groups, will be settled in Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain in the houses left by their owners who fled the town after the Turkish attacks in October,"

Ahmad, a Syrian Arab activist who asked to conceal his name for security reasons, told Kurdistan 24.

Ahmad added that people who stayed in the town were angry with the Turkish authorities for bringing people from other Syrian provinces and relocating them in the border areas.

"More busses carrying the families of the militants of the Turkish-backed groups of Ahrar Al-Sharqiya and Al-Shamiya Front will arrive

in a few days to be transferred and resettled in the town of Ras al-Ain," he said.

Local media in northern Syria report that the busses contained Syrian families from Ghouta around Damascus, Idlib, Homs and the northern Aleppo countryside.

Activists in the town published videos on social media showing the militants waiting for their families on the border crossing gate of Tal Abyad.

Activists also said the new arrivals were

transported at the expense of Turkish authorities who granted them houses whose owners already left after the Turkish invasion in October 2019.

Since the Turkish cross-border invasion on Serekaniye began in October, scores of violations against local civilians have been consistently and credibly reported by residents and observers. Moreover, many who have attempted to return to their towns under Turkish control faced brutality, arrest, and torture, especially members of the Kurdish population.

Turkey launched its so-called “Peace Spring” operation on Oct. 9, causing the displacement of hundreds of thousands and the death of at least dozens of civilians.

The campaign was put on hold after the United States and Russia struck separate deals with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to allow the withdrawal of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from a planned buffer zone Ankara refers to as a “safe zone.”

Erdogan said in December that Ankara aims



Vehicles carrying Syrian refugees arrive at the Syria-Turkey border crossing gate of Tal Abyad, Syria, April 8, 2020. (Photo: Activists)

to resettle up to one million Syrian refugees as a first batch in the buffer zone under its control, many of them from other parts of the country.

Local Kurdish populations and multiple international observers see this as an inten-

tional effort by Turkey to ethnically cleanse Kurds from areas along its borders. The United Nations has said there are strong indications that Turkish and Turkish-backed forces have already enacted such a campaign of forced demographic change in the Kurdish-majority city of Afrin.

**The
New York
Times**

April 9, 2020
By Carlotta Gall

From Prominent Turkish Philanthropist to Political Prisoner

ISTANBUL — During a tumultuous day in court in February, the Turkish businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala was unexpectedly acquitted of trying to overthrow the government and then rearrested before he could walk free.

He described it as the best day of his life.

“We were acquitted,” he told his lawyers, referring to the eight others tried with him.

Never mind that the two years he had already spent in solitary confinement had been extended indefinitely — this time on specious charges of supporting a 2016 coup. He was happy that at least in one case, he and 15 others had been given the chance to show that the original charges against them were baseless.

“Nothing can affect that composure and attitude,” Murat Celikkan, a campaigning journalist and longtime friend and colleague,



Osman Kavala, a businessman and philanthropist, in Istanbul in 2015. Credit... Associated Press

said of Mr. Kavala. “I would be furious, but in all the procedures he never raised his voice once.”

Mr. Kavala has become the most prominent political prisoner in Turkey, and as he himself ruefully acknowledged after his rearrest, his case is a prime example of the state of injustice in Turkey today under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

His case is just one of half a million prosecutions underway amid a government crackdown since an attempted coup in 2016, but it is one of the most confounding.

Best known for his good deeds, he has been variously accused of espionage, links to terrorist groups and trying to overthrow the government. Even seasoned lawyers, well used to decades of political trials in Turkey, have described the various charges against him as “ridiculous.”



Outside the court where Mr. Kavala was acquitted of charges of trying to overthrow the government, only to be rearrested. Credit...Ibrahim Mase/DHA, via Associated Press

Mr. Kavala, 63, grew up and lives in Istanbul. He comes from a family of tobacco traders who moved from the town of Kavala in northern Greece to Istanbul in the 1920s as part of the population exchange between the two countries after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

He studied management at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara and economics at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. He went on to study for his doctorate at The New School for Social Research in New York, but broke off his studies when his father died in 1982.

At 26, he returned to Istanbul and took over the Kavala Group of companies. In 1988 he married Ayse Bugra, a social scientist.

He soon began diversifying the family business, following his own interests. He co-founded the Iletisim Publishing Company, which became an important vehicle for democratic ideas at a time, after the military coup of 1980, when there was a dearth of democratic institutions in the country.

He became increasingly interested in environmental issues and civic rights. He abandoned a hotel development in southern Turkey after watching the movie "Turtle Diary" and learning that the beach was an important nesting site for turtles.

"He did it very easily," Ms. Bugra recounted in a recent interview. "There was no hesitation." He co-founded an environmental organization, TEMA, among others.

The most troubling issue in Turkey from the late 1980s was the conflict in the southeastern part of the country between the Turkish army and Kurdish separatists, which degenerated into a brutal ethnic conflict against

the Kurdish population. When the armed conflict ended a decade later, Mr. Kavala began the work that has become his lasting legacy.

"We started talking about the healing powers of art and culture," Ms. Bugra said, "and he started thinking about taking culture to different parts of Turkey."

That idea grew into the founding of Anadolu Kultur, an organization that supports arts and cultural collaboration, and takes exhibitions and performances all around the country.

He supported an arts space in Diyarbakir, the biggest Kurdish city in the southeast; cultural memory projects for Yazidis, Kurds, Armenians and other minorities; and a program to encourage a normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia.

In between came a 1999 earthquake that killed 17,000 people and had a galvanizing effect on Turkish society. Humanitarian and civic organizations took off.

"That was an important moment for the country as a whole," Ms. Bugra said. "That was the first time we saw a civil society mobilization. It was something spontaneous."

Mr. Kavala began building temporary housing. And he became one of the leading philanthropists in the country, well known among embassies and international donors, and an energetic supporter of civic and human rights groups.

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Among the many organizations he helped found was the Open Society Foundation in Turkey, the organization created by the Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros to support democracy and transparency around the world.

The nonprofit sector flourished during Mr. Erdogan's first decade in power from 2002, as Turkey was pursuing peace with the

Kurds and instituting reforms to further its accession to the European Union.

The arrival of more than three million refugees fleeing the war in Syria from 2011 was another milestone in her husband's life, Ms. Bugra said. He was visiting the southern city of Gaziantep, working on a project for Syrian refugees in October 2017, when he was detained. Police boarded his plane in Istanbul and led him off before passengers were allowed to disembark.

What has taxed Mr. Kavala and his friends the most in the 29 months since his incarceration is the question of why he has been singled out so harshly.

The answer may be simply: everything he stands for.

He represents the leftist-leaning, secular elite, which in Turkey's polarized society is the opposite of the president and his supporters. They are from religiously conservative, Islamist circles that were long sidelined from power.

"Osman represents another culture," said Asena Gunal, who runs his flagship organization, Anadolu Kultur. "Someone who is open, cultured, who speaks English, can talk to foreigners, active in society. Something they see as dangerous."

Image

Ayşe Bugra, left, waiting for the release of Mr. Kavala, her husband, from a jail near Istanbul last month. The Istanbul prosecutor's office issued a new arrest warrant for Mr Kavala after his acquittal.

As he spent 16 months in detention without knowing the charges against him, the pro-government news media and even Mr. Erdogan himself accused him of nefarious connections, including being part of a so-called Jewish conspiracy led by Mr. Soros.

Some analysts say his work with Armenians and Kurds is hated by elements in Turkey's security establishment. Others have described him as victim of an internal power struggle in Mr. Erdogan's cabinet.

"It's really hard to see people talking about him who don't know him," Ms. Gunal said. "He is a nice person trying to be nice to people."

The indictment, when it was finally revealed, charged him with trying to overthrow the government by financing and organizing protests in 2013 that began as an occupy movement of Gezi Park in Istanbul's Taksim Square to prevent the construction of a shopping mall.



Ayşe Bugra, left, waiting for the release of Mr. Kavala, her husband, from a jail near Istanbul last month. The Istanbul prosecutor's office issued a new arrest warrant for Mr Kavala after his acquittal. Credit...Murad Sezer/Reuters

Mr. Erdogan, who has grown increasingly authoritarian, insists the protests were not a spontaneous social movement, as they were widely seen at the time, but an effort to oust him from power.

"This is not an innocent uprising," he told his parliamentary group the day after Mr. Kavala's rearrest. "Behind the curtain there are those Soros-like types who meddle in some countries."

He added that he had thwarted a "maneuver" to have Mr. Kavala released.

Interpreting the president's comment, Mr. Celikkan, Mr. Kavala's friend and colleague, said it did not bode well

for Mr. Kavala. "Unless the president leaves office, dies or changes his mind, he is going to stay in prison forever," he said.

Mr. Kavala sees his case as driven by politics — in other words, Mr. Erdogan's desire to stay in power.

In answers to questions sent to him in jail through his lawyers, he said judges and prosecutors were acting in line with the political discourse. "As a result of this, legal norms are being eroded and many people are in prison unfairly," he wrote.

"As I am the lead actor in the fiction of the indictment and also the only arrested defendant of the case, I believe my situation is seen as a striking example of punishment for political reasons," he wrote.

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg found in December that the Turkish courts had held him without reasonable cause.

"His detention was intended to punish him as a critic of the Government," the court concluded in a statement, "to reduce him to silence as an NGO activist and human-rights defender, to dissuade others from engaging in such activities and to paralyze civil society in the country."



April 10, 2020

Turkey sends body of PKK member to family by post

Turkish authorities have sent the body of a member of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to his family in a box, delivered by Turkey's postal service, pro-Kurdish Mezopotamya Agency reported on Friday.

The body of Agit İpek, who died in a clash in Turkey's eastern Tunceli province on May 23, 2017, was found and identified through a DNA test two years later, the agency said.

The office of Tunceli's chief prosecutor then mailed İpek's remains in a box via PTT Cargo to a courthouse in Diyarbakır, Turkey's biggest Kurdish-majority province where İpek's family resides.

Meral Daniş Beştaş, an MP from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), reacted to the report from her social media account.

"Another step towards dehumanisation. Nowhere in the world has such inhuman treatment been seen, even during wars. To send a mother the remains of her child by cargo fits in which religion, which conscience, which law?" Beştaş tweeted.



İpek was buried in Elmabağçe, a neighborhood in Mardin province's Artuklu district.

The gendarmerie restricted access in Elmabağçe and did not allow İpek's mother, Halise, to attend his funeral, Mezopotamya said. Only three other people were permitted to participate in the burial.

The Democratic Regions Party (DBP), a sister

party to the HDP which focuses its organisation in Turkey's Kurdish-majority provinces, condemned the treatment of the PKK member's body, calling the practice "an unadulterated example of enmity against Kurds," at a time when the populace is confined to their homes due to the coronavirus pandemic.

April 10, 2020

Iran executes Kurdish political prisoner following prison riot

Iran executed Kurdish political prisoner Mostafa Salimi in Saqqez Prison on Saturday morning, April 11, 2020.

Mr. Salimi, 53, was on death row for 17 years. Recently, he managed to break out of prison during the riots in the Prison of Saqqez on March 27. He was extradited to Iran several days ago by the Kurdistan Authority of Iraq.

Mostafa Salimi was taken to solitary confinement. He was given a last visitation with his family on Friday, April 10.

Mostafa Salimi was born on June 25, 1967 and was a contractor for the National Gas Company. He was arrested on April 6, 2003 in the city of Nahavand, in the western Hamadan Province, on the charge of Moharebeh (waging war on God) and collaboration with the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran.

His charges included two separate cases of armed clashes which left two State Security Force agents dead. He was also accused of 18 years of unarmed activities in support of the KDPI in Iran and five years of armed activities for the party in Iraq and Iran-Iraq border regions. He was a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party of

Iran but returned to Saqqez, Iran, after splitting from the group.

Sources close to Mr. Salimi say he was subjected to vicious physical and psychological torture during his detention.

A group of prisoners in the Prison of Saqqez clashed with prison guards at noon on Friday, March 27, and broke out of prison, after smashing the gates. Some 80 prisoners managed to successfully escape prison.

At least 10 prison riots have erupted since late last month in Iran as the prisoners have begun to speak out to demand temporary leave, hygienic supplies and separation of sick and healthy detainees.

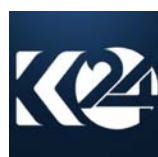
Numerous prisoners have begun to test positive for coronavirus in recent weeks, with several died of Covid-19 in Iranian prisons.



Local media reported a major prison break on March 27 in Saqqez, in western Kurdistan province, with 74 inmates said to have fled because of conditions at the prison's medical center. Videos published on social media show inmates running in all directions, some trying to stop passing cars.

The authorities responded to prisoners' demands by heavy crackdown.

The worst violence happened on March 30 and 31 in the two prisons in Ahvaz, Sepidar and Sheiban, which led to deaths of dozens of prisoners.



April 11, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

Kurdish leader calls for investigation into sexual assault of disabled woman in Kirkuk

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – On Friday, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani called on the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to conduct a joint investigation into alleged evidence of the recent sexual assault of a disabled Kurdish woman in the disputed province of Kirkuk by members of the police and Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) militias.

On Thursday, video footage surged on social media that appeared to show a police-

man and a PMF fighter committing the crime.

The Iraqi High Commission on Human Rights said in a statement on Saturday that it "strongly condemns the hideous and inhuman crime," and called for "the formation of a fact-finding team to visit the district and meet the security leaders in it."

Barzani's statement, released on the same day, read, "A few days ago, a report was pu-

blished about the assault by the Popular Mobilization Forces and the Iraqi police at a checkpoint in Pirde sub-district against a Kurdish woman with special needs from a Kurdish family with limited income."

He demanded an immediate investigation "of this despicable assault" to "punish the perpetrators."

"This crime is a great injustice practised against the Kurdish citizens under the

control of authority and a military reality that is imposed on Kirkuk," Barzani added. "From the start, the current authority in Kirkuk city has become accustomed to expressing animosity toward the Kurdish citizens and their rights in various ways."

Barzani concluded his statement by saying, "Everyone must know that such acts will not go unpunished, and a blind eye will not be turned on the event," and that "the most severe punishment must be imposed on the culprits."

According to local Pirde police, the two suspects have been arrested and the incident is now being investigated.

Kirkuk, home to Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and Christians, is the center of contention between the federal and regional governments and the most prominent of the territories disputed by the two.



In Baghdad's harsh response to the Kurdistan Region's 2017 independence referendum, Iraqi forces and PMF militias attacked Kirkuk and other disputed areas, pushing Kurdish Peshmerga forces from them.

Since then, the Kurdish population has complained that ethnically-motivated attacks and other persecution against their community by the security forces that now control their neighborhoods have become commonplace.



April 11, 2020
By Vladimir Van Wilgenburg

KRG investigating alleged handover of Iranian Kurd executed by Tehran

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on Saturday that it had formed a special committee to investigate allegations that 53-year-old Iranian national Mustafa Salimi, who was executed that morning in Iran, had been handed over by local Asayish (security) forces in the Kurdistan Region's eastern district of Penjwin, despite Salimi having claimed asylum to escape death.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government is not aware of such an incident, and if something like this happened, it happened without the KRG's awareness," KRG spokesperson Jutyar Adil Mahmood stated on Saturday. "To investigate this, the KRG Prime Minister has ordered the establishment of a committee to investigate the matter."

Fetema Karimi, the Director of the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), told Kurdistan 24 that Salimi was a former member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran (PDK-I).

"He later left the party and was involved with armed robbery; and because of that he was arrested in 2003 in Iran. He was given a



Mustafa Salimi, an Iranian Kurd who was executed on Saturday morning by the Iranian government. (Photo: Archive)

death sentence and was serving 17 years of prison in the city of Saqqez," she said. On March 27, 70 prisoners escaped from a prison in Saqqez, fearing the spread of the

deadly coronavirus. "(They) started a riot, and many of them managed to escape the prison. One of the escapees was Mustafa Salimi," Karimi added.

According to a recent Amnesty International report, in the past few weeks, thousands of prisoners at eight prisons across Iran have staged protests, fearing the spread of the coronavirus.

In Iran, there have been a total of 4,232 deaths due to the coronavirus, according to the latest official data from the Iranian health ministry which multiple reports claim is far lower than the actual number.

"Mustafa Salimi had managed to smuggle himself out of Iran and reach to Penjwin city in the Kurdistan Region," said Karimi. "It is Kurdish activists and journalists who

are reporting Mustafa Salimi's arrest in Penjwin, Kurdistan Region – we have not seen any official statements," she added.

Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, an Iranian human rights activist in Norway, told Kurdistan 24 that "according to our sources, he had told the Kurdish authorities that he would be hanged if sent back to Iran."

"It is important to get an answer from the Kurdish authorities at what level the authorities were involved. So they should answer whether it was deportation or extradition."

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the leading political force in Sulaimani that holds significant authority over local Asayish and Peshmerga forces along the 220-kilometer long border area with Iran, denied the allegations.

Imad Farhadi, a member of the PUK's foreign relations office told Kurdistan 24 that the PUK believes the case of Salimi has been distorted and that misinformation based on verbal allegations have been circulated.

"The Sulaimani Asayish has no record of Salimi's arrest and extradition to Iran. Asayish is part of KRG's security apparatus. KRG PM Barzani has formed a special committee to investigate the serious allegations and Asayish will cooperate fully."

The Asayish Directorate in Sulaimani in a statement on Saturday completely denied the claims adding that Salimi arrived in the Kurdistan Region at all.

Diya Butros, who heads the Kurdistan Re-

gion's Independent Board of Human Rights, told Kurdistan 24, "After hearing about the incident, I have requested our offices in Sulaimani and Halabja provinces initiate an investigation into this matter. This morning, we received information from the general prosecutor in Penjwin district who confirmed that Salimi did cross the Kurdistan Region's border and was then handed over to Iranian forces."

"Following his handover to the Iranian forces, he was executed this morning," he added. "This is a clear human rights violation. Since he crossed the border illegally, he should have been legally investigated and the decision regarding his handover must be made by the court of law."

He continued, "Article 21 of Iraqi Constitution clearly dictates that the man should have been given political asylum... so the decision to hand him over was a violation of the constitution, international law, and human rights law that caused the man to lose his life."

Butros explained further, "Sulaimani province Asayish is responsible to investigate with the Penjwin district security police whether they acted on their own or if they received orders from their superiors," specifying personnel from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) who are in charge in Penjwin.

"Sulaimani Asayish must give clarification to the general public on how this incident was allowed within their jurisdiction, to legally hold those responsible for it, and prevent such a thing from happening in the future. This resulted in the loss of life and Salimi

was imprisoned for supporting the Kurdish cause in Iran."

Salimi's family was earlier contacted by prison authorities for a chance to visit him before his execution on Saturday morning. "Mustafa Salimi was in a terrible mental situation – but there was no word of his looming death penalty," KHRN's Karimi said.

After his execution, his body was given to his family.

Amiry-Moghaddam told Kurdistan 24 that such a handover would be "against all international norms. He was sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Courts lacking a fair trial and due process."

Furthermore, there are fears that another inmate who escaped from Saqqez Prison could have also been executed after he was arrested in the city of Baneh in northwestern Iran.

"It is said that Shores Morrovati has also been hanged, yet we have not been able to speak to his family and confirm that," KHRN's Karimi added.

Following his execution, the Komala political party condemned the Islamic Republic of Iran for the execution Salimi, calling on the KRG to investigate the circumstances of his transfer to Iranian authorities.

"Mustafa Salimi was imprisoned for 17 years by the Iranian regime... no matter what crime he had committed, he must have been treated in accordance to human rights and been given the rights of a Kurdish asylum seeker," a statement read.



April 12, 2020
By Zhelwan Z. Wali

Kurdish president dispatches coronavirus medical aid to northeast Syria

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - The Kurdistan Region has dispatched medical equipment for two coronavirus testing labs, as well as training staff, to northeast Syria on Thursday, Rudaw has learned.

Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), sent thanks to the President of the Kurdistan Region in a tweet for his "swift and generous response"

in the provision of medical equipment for two coronavirus testing labs.

According to an official from the Kurdistan Region Presidential office, the commander requested assistance for the people of northeast Syria, known to Kurds as Rojava, in a phone call made last week to President Nechirvan Barzani.

President Barzani decided to send medical aid to Rojava following the phone call, dispatching equipment for two COVID-19 testing laboratories to Rojava on April 9, said the official. Two medical teams were also sent on the same day to train 26 medical lab employees there to train them on how to fully operate the labs.

The Kurdish-controlled northeast is less da-

maged by war than other parts of Syria. But unlike Syria's rebel-held northwest, where UN aid enters via Turkey, the northeast is deprived of cross-border channels for UN medical assistance.

Rojava has in recent months become increasingly reliant on Damascus for aid after Russia blocked proposals to renew the mandate for humanitarian to be routed through the border with Iraq, insisting that aid be come through Damascus, where it can be controlled and conditioned by the Syrian government.

Aid groups say the move has effectively left the region under a blockade that "could lead to one of the most severe outbreaks in the world."

Abdi also hailed Barzani's promise to provide them with "more medical assistance in support of our efforts to combat this pandemic."

Although no cases of coronavirus have been confirmed in the area, measures needed to respond in case of an outbreak are scarce.

Syria has so far recorded 25 cases of COVID-19, including two deaths as of Sunday morning, according to World Meters.

Dr. Juwan Mustafah, co-chair of the Health Authority of Northern and Northeastern



Nechirvan Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region (left); Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (right) Photo: Rudaw

Syria, told Rudaw they have already "requested the provision of medical assistance from the WHO many times," but have yet to receive a response.

Last week, Abdul Hamid al-Mahbash, a co-chair of the Executive Body of The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) warned of a "humanitarian catastrophe" if the international community did not respond to their medical needs.

Mahabash urged the the United Nations, the World Health Organization and other international organizations to provide them with the necessary medical and health equipment needed to combat the spread of the virus.

The NES has already extended the Kurdish enclave's curfew until April 21, which began on March 23.

LE FIGARO

April 13, 2020

Coronavirus: la Turquie va libérer des dizaines de milliers de détenus

Le parlement a adopté lundi soir une loi controversée pour tenter de désengorger un univers carcéral menacé par la pandémie de Covid-19.

Le parlement turc a adopté lundi soir une loi approuvant la libération de dizaines de milliers de détenus pour tenter de désengorger un univers carcéral menacé par la pandémie de nouveau coronavirus. Des ONG de défense des droits de l'Homme, Human Rights Watch et Amnesty International, ont critiqué le texte, qui exclut de ces libérations les détenus condamnés en vertu de lois antiterroristes controversées. Elles ont aussi condamné l'exclusion de cette mesure de nombreux journalistes, opposants politiques

et avocats qui se trouvent en détention provisoire et n'ont pas encore été jugés.

Cela inclut des personnes incarcérées alors qu'elles attendaient une date pour le début de leur procès, d'autres qui attendaient une inculpation formelle ou des suspects en cours de jugement.

«De nombreuses personnes qui sont en prison parce qu'elles ont fait usage de leurs droits - et qui n'ont commis aucun crime - sont exclues (de la mesure de libération) parce que le gouvernement choisit d'utiliser ses lois antiterroristes très flexibles, excessivement larges et vagues», a déclaré à

l'AFP Andrew Gardner, un responsable d'Amnesty International.

Parmi ces personnes figurent l'homme d'affaires et philanthrope Osman Kavala et le politicien kurde Selahattin Demirtas. Un avocat de M. Demirtas, Mahsuni Karaman, a déclaré qu'il avait récemment demandé la remise en liberté de son client pour raison de santé mais qu'aucune décision à ce sujet n'avait encore été prise. M. Demirtas, ancien chef du parti pro-kurde HDP, s'est plaint en décembre de douleurs thoraciques et de difficultés respiratoires et il a reçu un traitement d'urgence en prison. Quant à la loi qui vient d'être adoptée, elle est «injuste et illégale», a déclaré l'avocat à l'AFP.

Le gouvernement turc a lancé une vaste campagne de répression après le coup d'Etat manqué survenu en 2016. M. Demirtas figure parmi les dizaines de milliers de personnes détenues en raison de liens présumés avec des organisations militantes kurdes illégales ou avec le mouvement dirigé par le prédicateur musulman Fethullah Gülen, qui réside aux Etats-Unis. Ankara accuse Gülen d'avoir été l'instigateur de la tentative de coup d'Etat. Le religieux rejette catégoriquement cette accusation.

L'opposition ignorée

La nouvelle loi concerne plusieurs catégories de prisonniers, dont les personnes âgées en mauvaise santé et les femmes enceintes. Elle exclut les meurtriers, les auteurs de crimes sexuels et les trafiquants de drogue. Elle a été adoptée par 279 voix contre 51, a indiqué sur Twitter Milena Buyum, une militante d'Amnesty International en Turquie. Elle a ajouté qu'au cours de plusieurs jours de débats au parlement qui ont précédé le vote du projet de loi, «pas un seul des amendements de l'opposition n'a été accepté».

Lorsque le Parti de la justice et du dévelop-



Un soldat turc devant le ministère de la Défense, le 9 avril. Arif AKDOGAN / TURKISH MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE / AFP

pement (AKP) au pouvoir a présenté le projet de loi, il a indiqué que quelque 45.000 personnes seraient remises en liberté en application du texte dans le cadre d'une libération anticipée sur parole, et que le nombre s'élèverait à 90.000 en comptant les détenus qui seraient assignés à domicile. Le ministre turc de la Justice, Abdulhamit Gul, a déclaré lundi que trois détenus étaient morts du Covid-19 sur un total de 17

contaminés par la maladie. Treize de ces détenus se trouvent à l'hôpital dans un état satisfaisant, mais un autre qui souffre de pathologies antérieures à sa contamination est dans un service de soins intensifs, a indiqué le ministre. Selon les chiffres du ministère de la Santé publiés lundi, la Turquie a enregistré plus de 61.000 contaminations et près de 1300 personnes ont péri.

AL-MONITOR

April 14, 2020

Turkey to release thousands of prisoners as coronavirus sweeps through jails

As COVID-19 ravages Turkish prisons, Ankara is pushing forward a law that will reduce the prison population by a third.

With a COVID-19 outbreak now confirmed in Turkey's prisons, the country's parliament has approved a new law that would relax sentencing requirements and reduce the prison population by nearly a third, despite criticism that inmates held on terrorism charges will not eligible for early release.

Backed by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party and the allied Nationalist Movement Party, which together hold a majority in the 600-seat parliament, the bill passed with 279 votes in favor and 51 against.

The legislation, which temporarily or permanently releases about 90,000 inmates, will now go to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for approval. Under the bill, those eligible for house arrest will remain at home until May 31. The justice minister can extend that period three times by a maximum of two

months each if the coronavirus crisis continues.

The legislation excluded tens of thousands of political prisoners jailed on terrorism charges for alleged ties to the banned Kurdistan Workers Party or the Fethullah Gülen movement, which the government blames for an attempted coup in 2016.

Rights organizations and opposition groups have called on the Turkish government to unconditionally release journalists, academics and others jailed for their political views or swept up in Turkey's sweeping post-coup crackdown.

"Those convicted in unfair trials under Turkey's overly broad anti-terrorism laws are also now condemned to face the prospect of infection from this deadly disease," Amnesty International's Turkey campaigner Milena Buyum said in a statement Monday.

"Turkey's government must do the right thing and immediately release those who

are imprisoned solely for expressing their peaceful views," said Buyum.

Notable political prisoners include Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas, the former co-chairs of Turkey's pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, prominent philanthropist Osman Kavala and writer Ahmet Altan.

The novel coronavirus has already spread to nearly half a dozen prisons in Turkey, Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said Monday. Of the 17 inmates with confirmed cases, three have died from the virus.

Turkey has among the fastest rising number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the world. On Monday, the country's infections rose by 4,093 to 61,049 and the death toll hit 1,296, said Health Minister Fahrettin Koca.

On Tuesday, Turkish politician and leader of Independent Turkey Party Haydar Bas died from COVID-19.



April 14, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

Kurdistan releases 826 more detainees as part of anti-coronavirus efforts

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Region's Supreme Judicial Council on Wednesday announced the release of more than 800 more detainees as part of continuing efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among inmate populations in the autonomous region.

"The conditional release of those detainees was decided by a court of law and was due to circumstances caused by the coronavirus in the Kurdistan Region, enacted to prevent the spread of the virus inside correctional facilities," said Romeo Hakari, Head of the Human Rights Committee in the Kurdistan Region's parliament.

Hakari added that, as part of the second wave of discharges, 159 detainees have been released in Erbil province, 348 in Su-

laimani, and 319 in Duhok province.

"We, as the committee, welcome the decision as it serves in the best interest of the public," he remarked.

Last week, A statement released by the regional Justice Ministry specified that 1,474 pretrial detainees had already been released.

At the time, a Kurdistan Bar Syndicate official Kakayi specified that the decision did not apply to all detainees. Those who have been charged with "murder, terrorism, and drug trafficking will not be included in this decision and will remain in detention centers," he said.

Multiple governments around the world now scrambling to keep outbreaks of the virus

from sweeping through their jails and prisons have ordered a variety of such release or furlough programs.

According to the latest update by the KRG Ministry of Health, there are 331 confirmed cases of the deadly virus in areas under its jurisdiction, including four deaths and 194 patients who have recovered.

As it continues to spread in over 180 countries worldwide, it has infected more than 1.97 million people and killed over 125,000, according to government-reported data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The actual figures could be dramatically higher due to insufficient testing capabilities or underreporting, particularly in countries that have weak health systems.



April 14, 2020
By Hiwa Shilani

2 Yezidi fighters killed in blast during ISIS operation near Sinjar Mountain

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Iraqi army announced on Tuesday that two fighters from the Yezidi (Ezidi) Protection Units (YBS) militia group were killed and another five injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated during a joint security operation outside Sinjar (Shingal) earlier that day.

According to a statement released by the Security Media Cell, the Iraqi military's communications center, YBS soldiers and army forces were conducting a sweep for remnants of the Islamic State within the village of Aziz, located in Qahtania district in a rural area surrounding Shingal Mountain. Shingal, near the Syrian border in Iraq's Nineveh

province, is disputed by the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

It also mentioned that local residents' property had been damaged and livestock had been killed or wounded.

The YBS is comprised of members of Shingal's Ezidi religious minority, against which the Islamic State carried out a campaign of mass-murder and brutal persecution beginning in 2014 that has since been widely recognized as an act of genocide.

The Iraqi army launched simultaneous operations backed by aerial strikes in different parts of Iraq to hunt down Islamic State fighters, after escalating at-

tacks by members of the organization in Kirkuk, Diyala, and Anbar provinces.

The military also announced that its forces discovered and destroyed a concealed hideout containing barrels of fuel used by Islamic State militants for insurgent attacks along with several explosives vests.

A security source reported that the operations have killed 10 Islamic State fighters and destroyed a total of 15 hideouts, according to Iraqi news outlet Shafaq.

On Monday, multiple casualties were reported on both sides during clashes between security forces and fighters

from the extremist group in rural areas to the south of the Kirkuk, also part of the disputed territories.

The recent incidents appear to show that the Islamic State has increased its activity over the past two weeks.

Islamic State sleeper cells continue to carry out attacks, over two years after Baghdad declared a military victory over the group in late 2017.

Over the past few months, the coronavirus outbreak has presented a new challenge to the Iraqi government, adding to the lack of security coordination with the Kurdistan Region's Peshmerga in areas disputed between Erbil and Baghdad.

Islamic State militants appear to be exploiting the fact that resources and attention have been diverted to enforce curfews and otherwise deal with the di-

sease's effects. On Sunday alone, Iraqi forces had three engagements with sleeper cells in disputed territories.

Early reports indicated that one police officer was killed, while the security forces captured one militant.



REUTERS

April 14, 2020

By Ali Kucukgocmen

Turkish parliament passes bill to free thousands from prison amid coronavirus

STANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey's parliament on Tuesday passed a law that will allow the release of tens of thousands of prisoners to ease overcrowding in jails and protect detainees from the coronavirus, but which critics slam for excluding those jailed on terrorism charges.

President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party and nationalist MHP allies supported the bill, which was accepted with 279 votes for and 51 votes against, deputy parliament speaker Sureyya Sadi Bilgic said.

The law will open the way for the temporary release of around 45,000 prisoners to stem the spread of the coronavirus. Those eligible will be released under judicial control until the end of May and the Justice Ministry will be able to extend the period three times by a maximum of two months each time, according to the law.

A similar number would be released permanently under a separate part of the legislation aimed at reducing prison overcrowding.

Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said on Monday there were 17 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among prisoners, including three deaths, and 79 prison personnel had also tested positive.

The law has been criticised by opposition parties and activists for excluding those jailed on terrorism charges, which include jour-

nalists and politicians swept up in a crackdown following a coup attempt in 2016.

Opposition members say the release of criminals including thieves, racketeers and those involved in bribery could lead to a rise in crime.

Violations of Turkey's intelligence law are not eligible for earlier release, which opposition members said aimed to exclude journalists imprisoned earlier this year for reporting the death of Turkish intelligence members in Libya's conflict.

Turkey has arrested thousands of academics, lawyers, journalists, civil servants and members of the military it says were supporters of U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, who it blames for the coup attempt. Gulen denies any involvement.

Many Kurdish activists and politicians the state says have links to the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are also in jail.

"UNFAIR TRIALS"

Amnesty International welcomed the steps to reduce overcrowding in prisons but said the law failed to cover others who should be considered for release.

"Those convicted in unfair trials under Turkey's overly broad anti-terrorism laws are also now condemned to face the prospect of infection from this deadly disease,"

Amnesty campaigner Milena Buyum said.

"Turkey's government must do the right thing and immediately release those who are imprisoned solely for expressing their peaceful views," she said.

Critics of Turkey's judiciary say court rulings are influenced by politicians. Erdogan and his AK Party say the judges make decisions independently.

Under the crackdown since 2016, the number of prisoners has risen to nearly 300,000 - the second-largest prison population in Europe and the most overcrowded prison system as of January 2019, according to data from the Council of Europe.

Around 50,000 people convicted or jailed pending trial on terrorism charges, including members of the PKK and Gulen's network, are excluded from the new law, according to an opposition parliamentarian.

Turan Aydogan, parliamentarian from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), said the law should have been designed to protect freedom of thought.

"You lock up whoever criticises," he said, addressing AKP and MHP members in parliament. Another CHP member said all 210 amendments to the law proposed by opposition parties were rejected.



April 14, 2020
By Halgurd Sherwani

Senior Kurdistan Region officials highlight Baghdad's responsibility to compensate Anfal victims

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – In commemoration of the former Baathist regime's genocidal Anfal program against ethnic Kurds, top Kurdistan Region officials on Tuesday stressed that the current Iraqi government is still responsible for the reparations to survivors and victims' families.

"Though much has been done in previous years toward international recognition of the Anfal Campaign as well as to compensate and repatriate its victims and survivors, unfortunately, it has not been successful yet," Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani said in a statement on the 32nd anniversary of the genocide.

"The Iraqi government is obliged to compensate the Anfal victims' families," Barzani said on Tuesday.

In a statement on the official website of the Kurdistan Region Presidency, President Nechirvan Barzani said, "On this day, we honor the victims of the Anfal, all the fallen heroes of Kurdistan, and we pay tribute to their families and loved ones."

President Barzani also urged all members of the international community to formally recognize the Anfal campaign as genocide,



Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). (Photo: Archive)

especially following the Iraqi Supreme Court's declaration of it as such. He also pledged to continue efforts to locate and return the remains of Anfal victims, thousands of which have been found in various mass graves across Iraq, to the Kurdistan Region.

In another statement, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani said the commemoration of the horrors perpetrated against the people of Kurdistan in front of the world's very eyes does not have to be reduced only to a "regular commemoration of our sufferings."

"However, the KRG is always committed to serve the Anfal survivors and the victims' families, the Iraqi state should carry its moral and constitutional responsibilities in compensating those grave crimes and give guarantees such crimes will not happen in the future," the prime minister added.

"That chauvinist and racist ideology that motivated the Anfal Campaign has to be eradicated in every form," Prime Minister Barzani stressed.

The Anfal was comprised of a series of ethnic cleansing campaigns perpetrated against the Kurds in rural areas of Kurdistan by the government of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s in which as many as 180,000 Kurds were systematically killed.

Kurdistan au féminin

14 AVRIL 2020

La Résistance à travers le regard féminin

TURQUIE. Vers la légalisation du mariage des mineurs avec leurs violeurs ?

TURQUIE / BAKUR – La nuit dernière, en pleine pandémie du COVID-19, le parlement turc discutait du projet de loi prévoyant l'amnistie des violeurs des mineurs s'ils se marient avec leurs victimes...

La proposition de loi, contient des articles concernant la légalisation du mariage des enfants, a provoqué un séisme sur les réseaux sociaux depuis la nuit dernière. Alors que les organisations de femmes condamnent avec virulence la proposition, qui envi-



sage le mariage des filles avec les agresseurs de 15 ans de plus qu'elles, la proposition pourrait être soumise à la Commission de la justice dans les prochains jours. (Via Cumhuriyet)

(Et pendant ce temps-là, les 50 000 prisonniers politiques, dont des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes, – qualifiés de terroristes – sont interdits de quitter la prison malgré la pandémie du coronavirus...)

Extended lockdown brings more burdens for Syrian Kurds

Residents in the Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria are criticizing the autonomous administration's lockdown measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus, in the absence of alternative sources of income.

Shahla Mohieddine stands in front of her courtyard in the Assyria district of Qamishli, wearing gloves and a mask she hopes will keep her safe from the coronavirus. She shows signs of bewilderment and concern as she utters a few words on her mobile phone with her husband.

As soon as she hangs up, she tells Al-Monitor's correspondent, who is standing at a safe distance, "My children are in their room waiting for their father to bring home some vegetables and fruits. But the prices are so high that we can barely buy what we need. My husband's income is not enough. He works at a mobile phone shop, which was shut down in compliance with the lockdown. We have no other source of income."

The Kurdish autonomous administration in Syria has extended the coronavirus lockdown period until at least April 21. It had announced the first 15-day lockdown period March 23 in the broad swath of territory under its control. It also strictly ordered owners of shops, cafeterias, internet cafes and gyms to shut down and adhere to the directives issued by the crisis team formed to address the spread of the coronavirus in the Jazira region.

In a related move, the autonomous administration also exempted residents from paying water, electricity and sanitation bills for May and June. But some of the residents with limited income viewed this step as insignificant, given these bills' trivial amount. Also, the General Administration for Supply and Consumer Protection — which is a department of the autonomous administration — approved a list of fixed prices for goods, in light of a recent price surge after the curfew was implemented.

Yet the price list stirred confusion and anger among some retail merchants and traders. Wholesale trader Ali Awad, a pseudonym, told Al-Monitor, "Most imported goods from any region are sold at high prices from the source suppliers, not to mention the customs duties we pay for the autonomous ad-



Women hold stacks of bread as they walk along an empty street after restrictions are imposed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in Qamishli, Syria, March 23, 2020. Photo by REUTERS/Rodi Said

ministration and the Syrian government checkpoints, in addition to the loading, unloading and shipping commissions that we also bear."

He explained that the prices set by the General Administration for Supply and Consumer Protection are lower than the prices charged at the country of origin. "Do they want us to bear the difference ourselves?" he asked.

A source from the General Administration for Supply and Consumer Protection told Al-Monitor, "We set prices after studying the price of the food items at the source markets."

On March 29, the Executive Council of the autonomous administration announced food baskets would be distributed to needy families in the area during the lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus. However, the council didn't say how much aid would be available or when it would be distributed. Some baskets were handed out April 9 to low-income people by the administration's Office of Humanitarian Organizations Affairs in Al-Malikiyah (Derek).

Al-Monitor contacted some activists, journalists and low-income residents by phone. Gandhi Saadu, a resident of Qamishli — which is about 60 miles from Al-Malikiyah — said he was unaware of any measure to

help the poor. "Are there really practical steps being taken by the autonomous administration? I only heard some rumors about food items being distributed to all those in need," he told Al-Monitor.

"The exemption from paying water, electricity and service taxes is a bit confusing. Such a measure doesn't rise to the level of procedures that protect or help the poor. This is all the more true since a family needs \$400 a month to live decently amid exorbitant prices and soaring unemployment and poverty rates in our areas. These decisions cannot protect the poor," said Saadu.

He lamented the autonomous administration's decision-making process regarding the coronavirus pandemic. "It seems that decisions and measures are taken arbitrarily and without any prior study or any strategic planning. There is no awareness of the difficult economic situation and living conditions of the population amid a lack of medical, health and economic planning," he said.

Saadu added, "The decisions taken so far have caused complete paralysis of various aspects of life without any coordination or networking between the different autonomous administration bodies, security institutions, medical and services agencies, and civil organizations. All measures taken to this date are mere security actions by the

Kurdish security police (Asayish). Most of the procedures are implemented by the Asayish and then the municipalities, and this is a fatal mistake."

Journalist Sulafa Younes from Amuda also criticized what she sees as the administration's lack of seriousness in controlling purchase and sales operations, which causes societal problems.

She told Al-Monitor, "The autonomous administration's services and preventive measures are good, but shop owners do not adhere to the fixed prices set by the General Administration for Supply and Consumer Protection. Prices vary from one place to another."

She pointed to a surge in meat prices. For example, the cost of veal and lamb recently rose by about 20%.

"The majority of the population, earning a low income or daily salary, can't buy meat at such a high price," she said, adding, "Merchants always claim [they must buy] at a high price from their suppliers, who in turn blame the source supplier for setting high prices. Meanwhile, the General Administration for Supply and Consumer Protection insists on its fixed prices lists. The consumer ends up being the victim."

Younes called on the administration to reconsider any decision that does not serve the poor. "Most breadwinners have lost their source of livelihood. We urge you to provide them with maximum aid so they can withstand the current difficult circumstances," she said.

Amer Ali from the city of al-Qahtaniyah (Tirbespi) is a construction worker living on a daily salary. He told Al-Monitor, "I haven't worked for almost 20 days now. I need at

least \$300 a month for household expenses." In addition, he has monthly bills for various utilities, a landline, and cell phone and internet service.

"The autonomous administration says it exempted citizens from paying for some services, which do not exceed \$3 for two months. I say this exemption is meaningless. Also, the distribution of food baskets is not enough. The administration ought to give out checks to cover our fixed expenses," Ali said. He further pointed to the additional financial burden borne by families with sick members.

Between adhering to safety measures and meeting the needs of families with limited incomes, the Kurdish region — which has had no development plans in recent years — seems to be heading toward even more hardship.

Kurdistan au féminin 15 avril 2020

Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

GRÈCE: Les réfugiés kurdes de Lavrio menacés par le COVID-19 et le maire d'extrême-droite

Il y a quelques jours, le maire (extrême-droite) de Lavrio a demandé que la police prenne le contrôle des deux camps au prétexte que les Kurdes vont propager le COVID 19 parmi la population de Lavrio. (...) Pire, le centre de santé de Lavrio que les Kurdes ont fourni, en décembre 2019, en matériel médical et consommables médicaux, refuse aujourd'hui de consulter les malades kurdes. »

ATHÈNES – Les deux camps de réfugiés kurdes de Lavrio, en Grèce, où entassent plus de 600 femmes, enfants et hommes privés de tout, sont sous le menace du coronavirus. Mais, ils sont interdits d'aller au centre de soin de la ville tandis que le maire d'extrême-droite de la ville veut envoyer la police dans les camps plutôt que de les protéger du virus en leur apportant de l'aide...

Témoignage glaçant de Jacques Leleu depuis à Lavrio :

« A partir d'aujourd'hui nous lançons une campagne intitulée « 100 photos de réfugiés kurdes pour ne pas les oublier »

Pourquoi cette campagne ?

L'occident, l'Europe, La France ont utilisé les kurdes pour éradiquer les criminels de DAESH

Comme l'occident n'est pas à une contradiction près elle maintient le PKK dans la liste des organisations terroristes. Pourtant la France, les USA ont combattu aux côtés des militants kurdes. Aujourd'hui, l'Occident trahit et abandonne les Kurdes.

Plus près de nous, en 2017 le gouvernement grec, a cédé à la pression de la Turquie et de son dictateur Erdogan (Erdogan, le meilleur allié des terroristes de DAESH). Le gouvernement grec de l'époque a accepté de modifier le statut des camps de Lavrio. Du jour au lendemain la croix rouge grecque a abandonné les kurdes des camps.

Depuis ce jour seule la solidarité internationale soutient concrètement les camps en apportant de la nourriture, du matériel, des médicaments.

Il y a quelques jours, le maire (ultra droite) de Lavrio a demandé que la police prenne le contrôle des deux camps au prétexte que les Kurdes vont propager le COVID 19

parmi la population de Lavrio.

Cette nouvelle attaque contre les camps s'inscrit dans la droite ligne des multiples tentatives qui veulent faire disparaître le camp principal du centre ville au profit d'une juteuse opération immobilière.

Nous connaissons tous le dicton « si tu veux te débarrasser de ton chien dis qu'il a la rage. »

Ces propos sont odieux car le maire oublie que les Kurdes, dès le 16 ou 17 mars, ont mis en oeuvre un plan de prévention de 8 points (voir mes chroniques précédentes) sur les conseils de nos amis pneumologues grecs.

Aujourd'hui, les camps de Lavrio n'ont aucun cas de COVID 19 contrairement à ce qui se passe dans la ville. Dès le 18 mars nous savions que plusieurs habitants de Lavrio étaient contaminés. Ce sont donc les Kurdes qui sont en danger s'ils sortent des camps et non le contraire.

Pire, le centre de santé de Lavrio que les Kurdes ont fourni, en décembre 2019, en matériel médical et consommables médi-

caux (voir ma page Facebook), refuse aujourd'hui de consulter les malades kurdes.

Oui, vous avez bien compris... ce sont les réfugiés kurdes qui ont remis au service public de santé grec le matériel que le gouvernement grec n'a pas donné à ses services de santé.

Au moment où nous remettons ce matériel, c'est à dire le 15 décembre, l'Etat grec

n'avait pas versé la dotation financière du centre de santé de Lavrio pour l'année 2019.

Pour toutes ces raisons nous avons décidé de lancer l'opération « 100 photos de réfugiés pour ne pas l'oublier »

L'occident, l'Europe, la Grèce, le maire de Lavrio veulent rendre les Kurdes invisibles. Nous allons rendre ces invisibles... visibles.

A partir d'aujourd'hui nous allons publier, chaque jour, « 10 photos d'invisibles ».

Les 10 premières photos donnent à voir essentiellement des enfants. Au fil des années nous avons vu grandir ces enfants avec lesquels nous avons partagé des jeux. Nous vous demandons de partager le plus largement possible cette galerie.

La solidarité est l'arme des peuples. »

Kurdistan au féminin 15 avril 2020

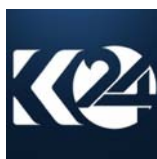
Le Kurdistan à travers le regard féminin

Kurdistan du Sud. Des drones turcs tuent 3 femmes kurdes à Makhmur

MAXMUR – Des drones turcs ont attaqué ce mercredi le camp de réfugiés de Makhmur, au Kurdistan du Sud, dans le nord de l'Irak.

Trois femmes ont été tuées et d'autres personnes ont été blessées, dont certains dans des conditions critiques, suite à l'attaque. Le bombardement, qui visait les zones où les résidents du camp paissent leurs animaux, est survenu après deux jours d'intenses activités de reconnaissance des drones turcs dans la région de Makhmur.

Une délégation du gouvernement irakien s'est rendue sur place. Elle a enregistré les noms des victimes et rendu visite aux blessés. La délégation a quitté le camp sans faire de déclaration.



April 15, 2020
By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Syrian Kurds back Macron's initiative for UN ceasefire plea during pandemic

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The leader of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) expressed support on Wednesday for an initiative by French President Emmanuel Macron to rally United Nations' Security Council members behind a worldwide military truce amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"The international initiative led by President @EmmanuelMacron to support the UN call for a global ceasefire so the world can focus on the coronavirus epidemic is a good step and humanitarian initiative that requires all forces to support it, to save the world and

build a better future," SDF Commander-in-Chief Mazlum Abdi said in a tweet.

Macron has said he's already secured the agreement of three of the five permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council, each with veto power over council resolutions, to join his initiative, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

The initial appeal issued in late March by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged warring parties across the world to "lay

down their weapons to support the bigger battle against COVID-19."

The SDF's General Command declared its support for the UN plea and commitment to global efforts to fight the coronavirus on March 24, the following day. It warned that, as a result of Syria's health system being ravaged by almost a decade of war, any renewal of hostilities would cause more displacement that would severely affect the remaining health infrastructure and lead to an increased spread of the virus.

Guterres then welcomed the statement by the SDF and called “on other parties to the Syrian conflict to support his appeal.”

After Turkey intervened in northeastern Syria in October, Russia and the United States reached separate ceasefire deals with Turkey which that allowed it to control the area between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain (Serikaniye). Despite the agreements, Turkish-backed groups continue to periodically shell areas held by the SDF.

“Technically, there has been a ceasefire in place since October last year, but in reality, Turkey and Turkish-backed forces commit daily violations, including shelling civilian areas and water infrastructure, resulting in civilian casualties and deaths,” Thomas McClure, a Syria-based researcher at the Rojava Information Center, told Kurdistan 24.

“SDF’s call for a ceasefire in line with the UN statement is an acknowledgement that coronavirus does not recognize military frontlines, and that its spread through regime-held areas of Syria can be best hal-



Mazlum Abdi, Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), delivers a speech after the group's final military defeat over the Islamic State in Syria, April 8, 2019. (Photo: Hawar News Agency)

ted if all parties to the conflict are able to focus fully on caring for civilians in their zone of control.”

With the weak health system in Syria, the virus’ spread through the region is likely to prove catastrophic, he added.

“Doctors need all the help they can get to prepare, rather than being forced to stitch up

war-wounded and civilians caught in the crossfire.”

The local administration has taken several precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic such as shutting down public places, quarantining travellers coming from rebel-held or Syrian government-held areas, and imposing a curfew.

So far, there have been no confirmed cases of the coronavirus in northeast Syria.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 25 infections in Syria, including two deaths, but multiple reports show that Damascus is significantly under-reporting infections in the war-torn nation.

Investigations underway after execution of Kurdish political dissident in Iran

THE government of Iraq’s autonomous Kurdistan region has opened an investigation into allegations that its security forces sent Kurdish political dissident Mostafa Salimi to Iran, where he was hanged on Saturday.

It announced the establishment of a special committee to look into claims that Mr Salimi was handed over by local Asayish (security) forces in the eastern district of Penjwin.

“The Kurdistan regional government (KRG) is not aware of such an incident, and if something like this happened, it happened without the KRG’s awareness,” spokesperson Jutyar Adil Mahmood claimed.

Mr Salimi sought asylum in Iraq after fleeing his native Iran in fear for his life. He was a former member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran (PDK-I) and faced persecution as a political dissident.

In 2003, he was jailed for alleged involvement in an armed robbery, although he consistently denied the charges. He was part of a group that escaped from Saqqez prison last month amid rioting by in-



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

mates who feared the spread of coronavirus.

Mr Salimi managed to make his way to the city of Penjwin city in Iraqi Kurdistan, where he was reportedly arrested and deported, despite warning that he would be executed if returned to Iran.

He was sentenced to death in Iran for “moharebeh” (waging war against God) 17 years ago.

The theocratic regime claimed that Mr Salimi was involved with Kurdish opposition parties and had engaged in armed struggle against the government.

Iran Human Rights director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam said: “The death penalty is an inhumane punishment. In addition, Mostafa Salimi’s execution was against all international

norms.

“He was sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Courts lacking a fair trial and due process.”

“Executions in Iran have continued to be carried out even after the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown in the country.

“It shows the death penalty is crucial for the Islamic republic’s survival.”



April 15, 2020
By Sirwan Kajjo

Coronavirus Raises Tensions Between Syrian Government, Kurds

WASHINGTON - The coronavirus pandemic has increased tensions between the Syrian government and Kurdish groups in the war-torn country.

The Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northeast Syria has accused the central government in Damascus of obstructing its efforts to fight the virus.

Local officials said that the Syrian government has not committed to implementing certain measures to prevent the coronavirus from spreading around the country.

“We had an initial agreement with the regime to suspend all flights between Damascus and Qamishli [in the northeast] until further notice,” said Raperin Hasan, co-chair of the health commission at the autonomous administration in northeast Syria.

“But they keep sending flights without testing suspected passengers for the virus,” she told VOA in a phone interview from Qamishli.

So far, no coronavirus cases have been reported in northeast Syria, but, Hasan said, “the Syrian regime would be responsible for any cases in our region.”

Manal Mohammed, another health official in northeast Syria, told Rudaw TV on Monday that local authorities “have already quarantined about 70 people who have recently arrived from Damascus and have shown symptoms of COVID-19.”

As of Wednesday, Syrian authorities have reported 29 confirmed cases of the coronavirus across the country, including two deaths.

Health experts believe the number of suspected COVID-19 patients in Syria could be much higher because the country has limited resources to test people for the virus.

Ongoing tensions

Since the eruption of the country’s civil war in 2011, Kurdish forces have been in control of most areas in northeast Syria. They have



FILE - Workers spray disinfectant to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, on a street lined with billboards showing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, in Qamishli, Syria, March 24, 2020.

also been an effective U.S. partner in the war against the Islamic State (IS) terror group.

The U.S. support for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has put the latter at odds with Damascus, which accuses the Kurdish-led forces of using American backing to seek secession from Syria. Kurdish officials deny such allegations.

“The Syrian regime doesn’t recognize our administration,” Hasan said, charging that “the regime is striving to spread panic among our people at these difficult times



Fighters of Syrian Democratic Forces take part in the funeral procession of Kurdish fighters who were killed during clashes in the northeastern Syrian town of Ras al-Ain, in Qamishli, Syria, Oct. 22, 2019.

and undermine our efforts to prevent the coronavirus from spreading here.” But a source close to the Syrian government in Damascus, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told VOA that “the government of President Bashar al-Assad has no intention to turn this health crisis into a political

dispute with anyone.”

“With limited resources, the government is trying its best to provide essential services to all Syrians as we are struggling to contain the spread of coronavirus,” the source added.

Exacerbating the crisis

Experts say the Syrian government has exacerbated the coronavirus crisis in Syria by not taking proper measures to fulfill its health obligations to its citizens across the country.

“The bitter reality is that the regime does not take basic responsibility for aiding the people anywhere in Syria,” said Seth Frantzman, a Middle East expert who closely follows developments in Syria.

“In eastern Syria it has an obligation to provide health care and access to the U.N. and WHO and tests for

the virus. It continues to pay lip service to Syria's 'sovereignty' while not providing the basic needs to those under its control," he told VOA.

International aid

As most of the international aid, especially from the United Nations and the World Health Organization, currently goes through Damascus, local officials in northeast Syria accuse the Syrian government of blocking needed aid from reaching their region.

Analyst Frantzman says that areas of eastern Syria need immediate support from the international community, since communities are still recovering from the war on IS and a recent Turkish-led offensive against Kurdish forces.

Nearly a decade of war has largely damaged Syria's health care system, raising fears among U.N. officials that millions of displaced people will be more susceptible to contracting the coronavirus.

The U.N. has called for a nationwide cease-fire in Syria to focus on combating the virus.



A displaced girl wears a face mask provided by the Violet Organization, in an effort to spread awareness and encourage safety amid coronavirus disease fears, at a camp near Maarat Masrin in northern Idlib, Syria April 14, 2020.

It has also called on all warring sides in Syria to release political prisoners as the potential spread of the coronavirus in Syrian prisons remains high.

The SDF is holding about 10,000 IS fighters,

most of whom were captured following the military defeat of the terror group in March 2019.

The U.S.-led coalition said it recently had delivered \$1.2 million in medical supplies and other assistance to the SDF with the aim of helping local authorities to reduce the spread of the virus in IS prisons and among the local populations as well.

Last weekend, the local administration in northeast Syria announced that it had also received two advanced PCR testing machines as assistance from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. They said this would help them test more people for the coronavirus.

AMN

April 16, 2020

Iraq accuses Turkey of violating airspace and bombing refugee camp

BEIRUT, LEBANON (11:45 A.M.) – The Air Defense Command in Iraq announced on Wednesday, a Turkish breach of Iraqi airspace, carried out by a drone that bombed a camp near the city of Makhmur in northern Iraq.

According to the command, the Turkish drone penetrated Iraqi airspace, bombing a refugee camp.

The leadership said in a press statement, "The Iraqi air defense monitored a violation of Iraqi airspace carried out by an armed Turkish drone with a flight detail: height of 6 km and a speed of 200 km/hour."

He added: "A camp for Kurdish families near the city of Makhmour was bombed by a missile, as two women from the camp were killed in this bombing, while a force from



Division 14 arrived to find out the details."

For its part, the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament, condemned this latest attack.

Iraq has repeatedly condemned these airspace violations, while also calling on Turkey to withdraw their troops from its country.

Turkey has often violated Iraqi airspace in the past to bomb alleged sites belonging to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the northern part of the country.

Coronavirus : en Turquie, une amnistie massive exclut les prisonniers politiques

Une loi votée mardi permet la libération de 90 000 détenus, à l'exception des critiques du régime, qui risquent d'être exposés au Covid-19.

Dominé par le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur au pouvoir depuis 2002) et ses alliés nationalistes, le Parlement turc a approuvé, mardi 14 avril, une loi d'amnistie qui permet la libération de quelque 90 000 prisonniers. La loi ambitionne de réduire une population carcérale estimée à 300 000 personnes au moment où l'épidémie de Covid-19 prend de l'ampleur en Turquie.

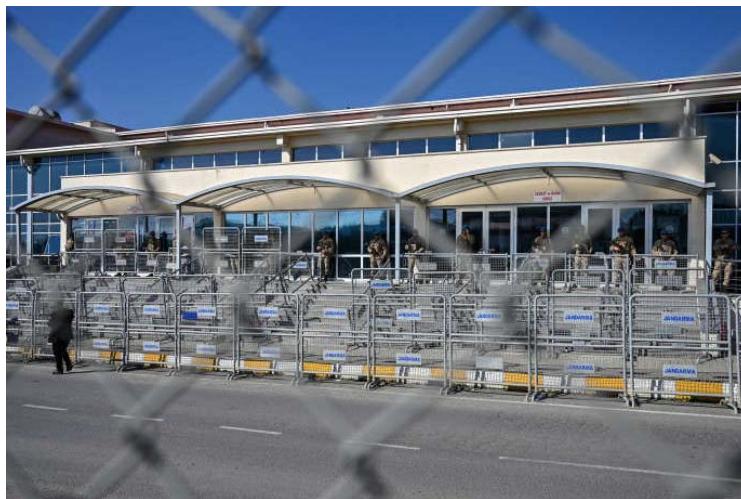
Les détenus condamnés pour trafic de drogue, abus sexuels, meurtre, violences domestiques graves et terrorisme ont été exclus de l'amnistie. Mais aussi les prisonniers politiques qui, blogueurs, militants des droits de l'homme, maires de localités kurdes, sont détenus pour « terrorisme ».

Parmi ces prisonniers de conscience figurent notamment le mécène et homme d'affaires Osman Kavala, le leader kurde Selahattin Demirtas et l'écrivain Ahmet Altan. Condamné à la perpétuité pour « terrorisme », brièvement libéré en 2019 puis réincarcéré quelques jours après, ce dernier, âgé de 70 ans, purge sa peine dans la prison de haute sécurité surpeuplée de Silivri, située à la périphérie d'Istanbul. « Les droits communs sont libres mais la vie d'un romancier qui a écrit trois articles déplaisants pour le gouvernement reste en prison, à la merci de l'épidémie », a dénoncé son frère, l'économiste Mehmet Altan, joint par téléphone.

Manque d'hygiène et de suivi médical

« Il est inacceptable que le régime choisisse ceux qu'il juge bon de libérer, tout en abandonnant à la perspective d'une mort en prison des journalistes, des étudiants, des avocats et des intellectuels accusés de crimes d'opinion », a lancé Adnan Selçuk Mizrakli, le maire démocratiquement élu de Diyarbakir, la plus grande ville du Sud-Est à majorité kurde. Le politicien s'est exprimé dans une lettre ouverte rédigée depuis sa cellule de la prison de Kayseri où il purge une peine de neuf ans et quatre mois de prison pour « propagande terroriste ».

Depuis les purges lancées après la tentative



Des soldats turcs montent la garde devant le palais de justice de la prison de Silivri, près d'Istanbul, en Turquie, le 18 février. OZAN KOSE / AFP

de coup d'Etat de juillet 2016, les emprisonnements de journalistes, d'avocats, de personnalités politiques d'opposition et de défenseurs des droits humains se sont multipliés. Selon des statistiques diffusées en juin 2019 par le ministère de la justice, près d'un cinquième de la population carcérale totale de Turquie, soit 48 924 personnes, a été inculpé ou condamné pour des infractions liées au « terrorisme », une accusation dont les autorités usent et abusent pour faire taire les voix dissidentes.

Surpeuplées, les prisons turques sont caractérisées par le manque d'hygiène et de suivi médical. Dans ces conditions, les mesures de distanciation nécessaires pour lutter contre la propagation du Covid-19 sont impossibles à mettre en place. « Cette approche est inique », a déclaré à la presse le député Mustafa Yeneroglu, un transfuge de l'AKP qui a récemment rejoint les rangs de Deva, le nouveau parti créé au début du mois de mars par Ali Babacan, un ancien compagnon de route du président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

« Virus médiatique et politique »

Les opposants craignent que les libertés civiles soient les prochaines victimes de l'épidémie en Turquie. Un amendement de loi est d'ailleurs en préparation qui prévoit de soumettre Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp et Telegram à un contrôle plus strict. Prétendant lutter contre les « provoca-

tions » postées par des internautes et des journalistes sur les réseaux sociaux, le ministère de l'intérieur a procédé à des centaines d'arrestations. Quelque 616 personnes ont été contrôlées pour des partages sur les réseaux et 212 personnes ont été interpellées. Huit d'entre elles ont été incarcérées. Des médecins, qui avaient émis des critiques sur la ré-

ponse du gouvernement à la crise sanitaire, ont été contraints de s'excuser.

« Maintenir la pression »

« La crise sanitaire est un outil puissant entre les mains de ce régime, prêt à tout pour rester au pouvoir. Empêcher la critique, blâmer un hypothétique ennemi intérieur est la seule arme à la disposition des autorités qui veulent maintenir la pression pour éviter la destruction de l'empire de la peur qu'elles ont créé », estime Bayram Erzurumluoglu, un ancien professeur de sociologie de l'université d'Adiyaman, dans le Sud-Est, limogé par décret après le putsch manqué de 2016. Ces craintes semblent justifiées. Dans son discours à la nation après la réunion du cabinet ministériel, lundi 13 avril, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a critiqué la presse. « Certains médias ont utilisé la pandémie comme prétexte, déclarant pratiquement la guerre à leur propre pays avec leurs articles et leurs chroniqueurs, comme ils l'ont toujours fait », a-t-il martelé. Et de conclure : « Si Dieu le veut, notre pays va se débarrasser non seulement du coronavirus, mais aussi des virus médiatique et politique. » Selon Mehmet Altan, la loi d'amnistie marque « une nouvelle phase » de consolidation du régime. « La loi vise à faire passer aux gens l'envie de critiquer. Il s'agit de préparer le terrain car, après l'épidémie, les conditions économiques et sociales seront encore plus difficiles »,

Iraq condemns Turkish strikes against PKK in Kurdistan region

Ankara claims it killed four PKK members in a Qandil mountains airstrike in Iraq northeast of Erbil, but Kurds report only physical damage there; Baghdad says Turkey did kill three civilians in Makhmour, to the southwest of Erbil.

In what it called a flagrant violation of its sovereignty, Iraq says Turkish airstrikes inside its airspace targeted a refugee camp and killed three civilians Wednesday.

"We deplore the penetration of Iraqi airspace by Turkish aircraft," the Iraqi government-affiliated Security Media Cell wrote on Twitter. "This provocative behavior is inconsistent with the obligations of good neighbors."

On Wednesday, news outlets in Iraq's Kurdistan region reported that a strike killed three civilians near a refugee camp in the mountainous Makhmour region and that another airstrike destroyed a shelter in the city of Rawanduz belonging to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an armed Turkish in-

surgent group. Turkey has attacked the refugee camp before, saying it is a haven for the PKK; The Associated Press quoted Iraqi officials today as saying the strike was made with a drone.

The shelter bombing, which took place just 200 meters away from a peshmerga headquarters northeast of Erbil, took out two telecommunications towers, a local official told Rudaw. Turkey's Defense Ministry said, "Turkish fighter jets neutralized four PKK terrorists," according to a statement carried by the state-run Anadolu Agency. The ministry said the jets struck Wednesday in the Qandil region near the Iraq-Iran border.

Under its military campaign dubbed "Operation Claw," Turkey has been targeting PKK strongholds in neighboring Iraq, which it says are used by the militants to launch cross-border attacks inside Turkey. In January, Turkish airstrikes killed at least four Yazidi fighters affiliated with the PKK in northern Iraq's Sinjar Mountain region. Never miss another story

As Iraq reported civilian casualties from Wednesday's strikes, Turkey's Defense Ministry said one of its soldiers was killed in a separate attack south of its border in Iraq's Hakurk region.

"A hero fellow soldier was martyred by the explosion of a mine/handmade explosive previously placed by terrorists from the separatist terrorist organization PKK," the ministry said in a statement today.

The PKK's decades-long violent insurgency against the Turkish state has left more than 40,000 dead on both sides. Ankara, the United States and the European Union all label the Kurdish militant group a terrorist organization.

In October 2019, Turkey launched a military operation in northern Syria to drive away from its border the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), elements of which Ankara views as terrorists linked to the PKK.

Turkey Mob Boss Released While Govt Critics Kept in Prison

STANBUL — An organized crime boss serving a prison sentence in Turkey was set free Thursday as Turkish authorities continued releasing thousands of inmates to ease overcrowding during the coronavirus pandemic while moving to keep government critics behind bars.

Far-right mob boss Alaattin Cakici was released from an Ankara prison and planned to "sequester" at a friend's hotel in western Turkey, defense lawyer Zeynep Ciftci tweeted. The private DHA and IHA news agencies filmed Cakici's convoy leaving the prison.

The 67-year-old was imprisoned for convictions on charges that included instigating

murder, armed attack, money laundering, leading an illegal organization and insulting the president. Cakici had served 16 years of his decades-long sentences before his release.

At the same time, scores of journalists, activists, and politicians and members from opposition parties are ineligible for early release under penal legislation that took effect this week. The updated law changes the conditions for prisoners to be released on probation and reduces the minimum time that must be served for some convictions.

The law, which was fast-tracked as Turkey responds to the pandemic, does not apply to people charged with or convicted of sex

and drug crimes, murder in the first degree, or violating Turkey's intelligence law. It also excludes inmates held on terror charges, a crime of which numerous government critics stand accused.

Following a coup attempt in 2016, tens of thousands of people were arrested for alleged terror links to the network of Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen and the outlawed Kurdish insurgency.

Opposition parties and rights groups have slammed the legislation, charging Turkey's broad terror laws are used to crack down on freedom of expression.



REUTERS

17 avril 2020

Syria's Kurdish-led northeast confirms first case of coronavirus

QAMISHLI, Syria (Reuters) - The Kurdish-led administration in Syria's northeast said on Friday that the World Health Organisation had found the area's first case of coronavirus earlier this month after samples were tested in Damascus.

In a statement, the regional administration said a 53-year-old man had died at Qamishli National Hospital on April 2 and that a sample sent to Damascus had tested positive for COVID-19, the lung disease caused by the coronavirus.

But it said health authorities in the northeast, a region ruled autonomously from Damascus, had not been made aware of the results, which emerged on the same day as

the patient's death.

A WHO regional spokesperson said the positive test result was reported by the Syrian government health ministry on April 2, and that active surveillance was being carried out in northeast Syria to probe for other potential cases.

"Contact tracing of the patient's close contacts was conducted, and all were reported negative. However, another family member is currently reportedly also in hospital with symptoms of COVID-19 with test results pending," said WHO spokesperson Inas Hamam.

The Kurdish-led administration said it was "dangerous" that their health authorities had

not been informed directly when the case was first confirmed.

"The international organisation knows well that the Syrian authorities do not cooperate with the autonomous administration," it said in the statement.

Relief organisations have expressed concern about the coronavirus pandemic reaching northeast Syria, where health infrastructure has been shattered by war and medical supplies are limited.

An official at the Qamishli National Hospital, which falls under the control of Syria's central government in Damascus, denied earlier on Friday the existence of any coronavirus cases so far at the hospital.

AL-MONITOR 

April 17, 2020

Iraq summons Turkish ambassador over deadly PKK airstrikes

In a public show of disapproval, Iraq's Foreign Ministry summoned the Turkish ambassador over deadly airstrikes carried out by Ankara this week against suspected militants in northern Iraq.

In a statement on Twitter, Iraq's Foreign Ministry said it summoned Ambassador Fatih Yildiz on Thursday because of a "Turkish army fighter plane violating Iraqi airspace, and bombing a refugee camp near [Makhmour] that claimed the lives of two women."

On Wednesday, news outlets in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq reported that one air attack killed three civilians near a refugee camp in the mountainous Makhmour region and another destroyed a shelter belonging to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an armed insurgent group, in the city of Rawanduz.

Speaking to Kurdish news outlet Rudaw, the head of the Makhmour camp confirmed three women died in Wednesday's strikes.

"Two women were killed immediately by the airstrikes, and another woman succumbed



A Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter jet lands at Incirlik air base in Adana, Turkey, Aug. 11, 2015. Photo by REUTERS/Murad Sezer.

to her grave injuries and passed away later on," Bewar Amin said.

Turkey made no mention of civilian casualties in its version of events, which said the Turkish fighter jets had "neutralized four PKK terrorists as part of a counterterrorism operation." The National Defense Ministry also said the airstrikes Wednesday occurred in the Qandil region near the Iraq-Iran border, not Makhmour.

During their meeting in Baghdad Thursday,

Ambassador Yildiz told Iraqi officials his country would continue to exercise its "right to legitimate self-defense," according to state-run Anadolu Agency. Yildiz also said Turkey's military campaign in Iraq is in compliance with international law.

Under its "Operation Claw" military campaign, Turkey has targeted PKK strongholds in neighboring Iraq that it says are used by the militants to launch cross-border attacks inside Turkey. In January, Turkish airstrikes killed at least four Yazidi fighters affiliated with the PKK in northern Iraq's Sinjar Mountains region.

The PKK's decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state has left more than 40,000 dead on both sides. Turkey, the United States and the European Union all label the Kurdish group a terrorist organization.



REUTERS April 17, 2020

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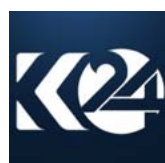
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April 17, 2020
By Joanne Stocker-Kelly

Rojava officials confirm first COVID-19 death

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Kurdish authorities in Syria's northern city of Qamishli on Friday confirmed Rojava's first COVID-19 death.

A 53-year-old man from Hasaka became the first person in northeast Syria's to die from COVID-19, health authorities of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) said in a statement.

The man, who has not been named, was admitted to a private hospital before being transferred to the national hospital in Qamishli on March 27. He was placed on a respirator and a sample was sent for testing to Damascus on March 29, but the man died on April 2.

However, the hospital's manager denies there have been any COVID-19 fatalities at the facility.



A member of the sanitary section of al-Assad University Hospital runs blood tests at the special department designated for the novel coronavirus, Damascus, April 15, 2020. Photo: Louai Beshara / AFP

suspected of being infected with the virus to the central laboratory in Damascus, and we have not been informed of the existence of any positive sample until now," Dr. Omar al-Akoub told Rudaw English.

Syria has 33 confirmed COVID-19 cases and two deaths, according to data collected by John Hopkins University from World Health Organization (WHO) partners.

"We are sending samples of many cases

iversity from World Health Organization (WHO) partners.

The statement also accused the WHO of failing to inform the NES when it learned of the man's test result, which was among six cases announced by the Syrian health ministry on April 2.

The Syrian health ministry reported the first official case of COVID-19 infection in the country on March 22 and the first death on March 30, but the man's case is the first known infection in the Kurdish-controlled northeast.

Speaking to Rudaw English, NES officials have said that the region had little capacity to handle a possible outbreak of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

The self-administration has imposed quarantine measures in the region in the hopes of preventing the virus taking hold in the po-

pulation, including in displacement camps and prisons that are holding thousands of suspected Islamic State (ISIS) members and their children in extremely close quarters.

Earlier this week, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq facilitated the delivery of two polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines needed to test samples for the virus, but supplies of critical personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators are still lacking, Raparin Hassan, co-chair of the NES health board, told Rudaw English.

The WHO also recently said it airlifted a 20-ton medical shipment to Qamishli, which a spokesperson said would be distributed to a number of hospitals in the area controlled by the self-administration, as well as regime areas.

Without supplies of lifesaving equipment di-

rectly from the WHO or the US-led Coalition against ISIS, the NES is dependent on the Syrian regime for supplies and has scarce capacity for testing samples.

Most of the COVID-19 tests for northeast Syria are necessarily carried out at the single central public health laboratory in Damascus. Hassan said four additional machines had been promised, which would allow the NES to operate without the help of Damascus.

A spokesperson for the WHO previously told Rudaw English that all parties to the Syrian conflict, including the Kurdish authority, had agreed to the testing protocol, but the NES has repeatedly said it needs the assistance of the international community to contain the threat of coronavirus.



April 18, 2020

Turkish court rejects Kurdish politician Demirtaş's appeal for release

A court in Turkish capital Ankara has rejected an appeal by jailed Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş for his release due to the high risk to his life over the deadly coronavirus, his lawyer Muhsin Kahraman said on Saturday.

Demirtaş, who has been in prison since November 2016 over terrorism charges, had suffered a cardiac episode in December last year, and has other respiratory issues, both known to exacerbate the effects of the virus.

The Ankara court did not provide any reasons in its decision against the appeal, Kahraman said, rejecting any appeal of the decision on the grounds of the ruling "being in compliance with law and legal procedure."

A 2018 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights ordered the immediate release of the popular former leader of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), but Demirtaş has remained in prison over alleged ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), an armed group that has been at war in Turkey for over three de-



acades.

An amnesty bill recently passed in parliament allowing for the release of some 90,000 inmates from Turkey's overcrowded prisons, as part of the country's measures to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Among inmates to be released are mafia leaders, violent criminals and sex offenders, but the bill excludes terrorism charges,

which will result in thousands of activists, students, academics, politicians, journalists, lawyers and others to remain in prison.

Human rights groups have called for the release of arbitrarily detained inmates, who often face charges over the criminalisation of what the Council of Europe Commissioner of Human Rights called "legitimate exercise of freedom of expression" in a 2018 article.

Un palais assyrien découvert sous les ruines d'une mosquée détruite par Daech à Mossoul

Dans les décombres laissés par l'Etat islamique, des chercheurs allemands ont exhumé les vestiges d'un gigantesque édifice du VIIe siècle avant notre ère. La salle du trône mesure à elle seule 55 mètres.

C'est dans ce palais que le roi d'Assyrie Assarhaddon réunissait sa cour, il y a près de trois millénaires. Longtemps restée cachée et inaccessible, la construction a émergé, triste ironie de l'histoire, des ruines d'une mosquée de Mossoul, détruite en 2014 par l'Etat Islamique.

Érigé sur le tell (colline artificielle) de Nebi Yunus, le bâtiment religieux a été démoli à l'explosif par les combattants de Daech, comme beaucoup d'autres sites archéologiques de la ville irakienne. Mais la destruction de la mosquée n'aura pas été vaine : des scientifiques de l'Université de Heidelberg en Allemagne ont en effet pu découvrir les restes d'un palais souterrain datant de l'époque de l'Empire assyrien.



La mosquée détruite en 2014 par les combattants de l'Etat Islamique, à Mossoul. ZAID AL-OBEIDI / AFP

revendre, les archéologues se sont frayé un chemin à travers des galeries souterraines parfois de 70 cm de haut. Un effort large-

plus grande salle du trône de l'empire assyrien à ce jour », explique au journal Die Welt Peter Miglus, professeur d'archéologie à Heidelberg.

L'un des taureaux ailés gardant la porte d'entrée. Avec l'aimable autorisation du projet de fouilles de Ninive, Université de Heidelberg

Un palais de 450 mètres de long

D'après les archéologues, le palais est en partie conservé, ce qui est d'autant plus surprenant que l'ancienne ville assyrienne Ninive, aujourd'hui recouverte par les banlieues de Mossoul, a été fondée en 612 avant notre ère, puis largement détruite par les armées alliées des Babyloniens et des Mèdes. L'existence de la résidence royale était déjà connue depuis des décennies, mais personne n'avait pu y accéder jusqu'ici.

Au départ simple arsenal construit par le roi Sennachérib pour conserver les trésors rapportés des guerres et permettre aux chevaux de s'entraîner, le lieu devint un véritable palais sous le règne de son fils Assarhaddon, de -680 à -669. Ses campagnes couronnées de succès ont par la suite fourni au roi les moyens de l'agrandir,



Le piédestal du trône dans la salle où le roi recevait ses visiteurs. Avec l'aimable autorisation du projet de fouilles de Ninive, Université de Heidelberg

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Sur les pas des islamistes, qui ont tenté de récupérer de nombreux artefacts pour les

ment récompensé lorsqu'ils ont finalement débouché sur la porte du palais, gardée par quatre grands reliefs de taureaux ailés. Les tunnels les ont ensuite amenés dans un hall de 55 mètres de long dans lequel Assarhaddon recevait ses visiteurs, juché sur une plateforme haute de cinq mètres. « C'est la

et d'en faire un édifice aux dimensions impressionnantes. Le bâtiment mesurait ainsi environ 450 de longueur et entre 200 et 300 mètres de largeur. Des textes assyriens rapportent qu'Assarhaddon avait fait décorer le palais de pierres exotiques, de bois, d'ivoire et de métaux précieux.

Inscription du roi Assarhaddon (680-669 avant J.-C.) sur un panneau mural du palais. Avec l'aimable autorisation du projet de fouilles de Ninive, Université de Heidelberg

Les scientifiques allemands disposent désormais de cinq ans pour effectuer l'ensemble de leurs recherches sur le site archéologique. Mais le coronavirus, qui a contaminé un peu plus d'un millier de personnes dans le pays, a stoppé pour une durée indéterminée tout projet de fouille. Peter Miglus espère pouvoir toutefois reprendre les recherches à l'automne 2020 : «Nous avons beaucoup à faire, mais nous n'avons pas beaucoup de temps», a-t-il déclaré à Die Welt.

La mosquée rasée par les combattants de l'État Islamique doit en effet bientôt être reconstruite. «Notre idée est de réunir en un ensemble la mosquée et le palais royal assyrien, créant ainsi un lien visible entre l'Orient ancien et l'Islam», explique au journal Der Tagesspiegel Stefan Maul, professeur d'assyriologie à l'Université de Heidelberg. Ainsi, la résidence du roi Assarhaddon sera préservée, tout en permettant à la population de retrouver ce lieu de culte très prisé.



April 19, 2020
By Hisham Arafat

Car bombing injures civilians in north Syria's Kurdish-majority city of Afrin

AFRIN, Syria (Kurdistan 24) – At least six civilians were wounded in a car bombing in Syria's northwest city of Afrin that has been under the control of Turkish-backed militias for just over two years, local sources said on Saturday.

The explosion occurred near a recently established bridge in the center of Afrin city, by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBEID) attached to a Suzuki car, the Syria-based war monitor Afrin Post reported.

Two of those injured were reported in critical condition, one of them a Kurdish worker in a juice shop nearby, the monitor said.

“The Turkish-backed armed groups which occupied the city in March 2018 have told people at the explosion site that Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have carried out the explosion, but people nearby said the explosion was due to infighting among the Turkish-backed groups,” an activist living in Afrin told Kurdistan 24 on condition of anonymity.

The activist added that dozens of Turkish-backed militia members left Afrin and headed to Idlib because their salaries have been cut by Turkish authorities in the past two months.

“The security situation of the city was disturbed as one group called the Turkish-backed police asked other militant groups to stay in Afrin, but the latter refused and headed to Idlib and this resulted in some infighting among the groups, including sporadic



A car bombing injured at least six civilians in the northern Syrian city of Afrin. (Photo: SOHR)

clashes and the car bomb explosion today,” the activist added.

On April 8, another explosion occurred in which three civilians were injured when an oil tank was blown apart by an IED attached to the tank in the Ashrafiyah neighborhood.

Activists in the city claimed that the explosions were planned by the Turkish-backed groups with the aim of spreading confusion and panic among the indigenous Kurdish residents of Afrin in order to cause them to leave the area as part of their greater anti-Kurdish program of ethnic cleansing.

Multiple human rights organizations and media outlets have documented multiple credible claims that, since the occupation of Afrin began in March 2018, Turkish-backed armed groups have regularly committed various violations and war crimes, primary

among them ethnic cleansing, kidnapping, extortion, murder, rape, and the looting and destruction of property.

In February 2019, the United Nations' Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria released a report charging that armed groups in Afrin were guilty

of war crimes including “hostage-taking, cruel treatment, torture, and pillage.” It stated that “the most common violations perpetrated in Afrin involved frequent abductions by armed groups and criminal gangs.”

As recently as early March of this year, the commission again released evidence that it had found reasonable grounds to believe that the militias “perpetrated the war crime of murder and repeatedly committed the war crime of pillaging, further seriously contravening the right to enjoyment of possessions and property.”

Currently, over 100,000 residents are still estimated to be in the area, living under the harsh security and economic conditions that they have faced since Turkey took control of the Kurdish-majority region.



April 20, 2020

Pro-Kurdish HDP files criminal complaint against state agency report on underage marriage

Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has filed a criminal complaint over a state-run Anadolu news agency report for what it called normalising child sexual abuse.

The woman featured in Anadolu's April 16 report, titled "Woman married at young age awaits the day her husband will be released from prison," had married when she was 14, leading to her husband's incarceration on charges of child sexual abuse.

The woman said she was eagerly awaiting her husband's release under a prison release bill approved by Turkish parliament earlier this month, paving the way for the release of up to 90,000 of the country's some 300,000 prisoners.

"There is news about the release of prisoners everywhere. I had really gotten my hopes up," Anadolu quoted the woman as saying. "My daughter keeps asking me



17 with parental consent.

Turkey has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Europe with an estimated 15 percent of girls married before the age of 18, according to non-profit group GirlsNotBrides.

where her dad is, when he is coming. We can't answer her."

"In this land where efforts should be exerted to eliminate underage marriages, calling a 14-year-old a woman and attempting to legitimatise her 'marriage' is undoubtedly a crime and should not go without punishment," HDP's complaint said.

In Turkey, the legal age of marriage is 18, or

Women in similar situations to the Anadolu report have been calling for amnesty for their husbands, saying jail sentences that came years after their marriages only served to break up families, but human rights groups maintain that amnesty would weaken the protection of girls in precarious situations.

BELLA CALEDONIA

April 20, 2020

Turkey's political prisoners face a potential Covid-19 death sentence

Overcrowded, poorly cleaned, and with a history of inadequate medical care that has left a legacy of damaged health, Turkish prisons can become a coronavirus hothouse, turning prison sentences to death sentences and providing a source of infection to wider society. The Turkish Government has answered the international call to let out prisoners in response to the pandemic, with a law that has released up to 90,000 people to parole or house arrest. But this move has drawn widespread condemnation from supporters of human rights by its purposeful exclusion of all political prisoners. It even excludes the estimated 43,000 detained on remand awaiting trial.



After these releases, Turkey's prisons will still incarcerate around 200,000 people. Successive Turkish governments have imprisoned their opponents, but recent years have seen a huge growth of political arrests,

especially since the failed coup attempt in 2016. This has provided an excuse for a clamp down on everyone that Erdogan wishes to silence, especially democrats, leftists and (as always) Kurdish activists. When

the accused appear in court they can have little expectation of a fair trial. Critical judges have themselves been arrested, along with journalists, human rights activists, civil servants, and academics. Sentences are extraordinarily long, and even before they reach the sentencing stage, prisoners can expect to have spent years in pre-trial detention.

Among the political prisoners are thousands of members and activists of the leftist, pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), including MPs and many of the elected mayors who were removed from their posts by the authoritarian central government, as well as the party's former co-chairs Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş. Demirtaş has a heart condition and lung problems, leaving him at high risk if he is exposed to the coronavirus, but calls for his release have been refused. The HDP follows a scrupulously constitutional path, but that doesn't prevent them from being accused of assisting the outlawed PKK – the standard 'terrorist' charge levelled at all politically active Kurds. Demirtaş, a hugely popular progressive leader, has been in prison since his arrest in November 2016. He faces a long list of charges and a demand from the state prosecutor that he be given a sentence of over 140 years. Two years after his arrest, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that such a prolonged detention awaiting trial was a deliberate political act calculated to restrict his ability to carry out his political role, and consequently in contravention of Human Rights law, but Turkey dismissed their argument. When Demirtaş collapsed in his cell with a heart problem last December it took a week before the authorities agreed to take him to hospital.

While Demirtaş has been left to risk his life in prison, those who have been released include not only common criminals, but the notorious mafia boss and long-time member of the fascist Grey Wolves, Alaattin Çakıcı. Çakıcı's murder victims include his former wife, as well as leftists and Kurds. But his friends include Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the far right MHP, which provides vital support to Erdoğan's AKP government. Bahçeli has been lobbying for Çakıcı's release since 2018, and COVID-19 provided the opportunity.

As in other places, the coronavirus has opened the door to increased authoritarianism – on top of an already dire record. Critics of government responses to the virus can expect no mercy, and there is a fear that the spaces vacated by prisoner releases, will

soon be filled. Even without the additional restrictions of social distancing, protest in Turkey has been made very difficult. When, back in March, HDP MP, Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, referred on social media to cases of COVID-19 in a prison, he was investigated by Ankara's Chief Prosecutor for spreading panic. At the same time, 410 people were arrested for their critical posts on social media, and accused of 'attempting to stir unrest'. Journalists have been detained for their COVID-19 stories, and people are increasingly self-censoring. Prisoners may seem to have nothing to lose but their chains, however, speaking about their conditions to relations has resulted in sanctions. Despite this, the news that the parliament's Justice Committee had approved the discriminatory release law provoked a riot in Batman Prison. Kurdish political prisoners have a proud history of protest, so when the virus begins to kill, we may see more actions. The one concession made to those who have dared to criticise the bill (including the main opposition party, the CHP) is a restriction put on the release of sex offenders and run-of-the-mill murderers, which had not been considered necessary in initial plans – though this doesn't prevent the release of many violent men who are already threatening their former wives.

Even practical actions by opposition politicians are being thwarted and punished. The CHP mayors of Istanbul and Ankara organised fund raising to help the poor of their cities who are suffering as a result of the pandemic, but the central government announced their own fund-raising campaign and closed down the municipal funds, taking over the money. The mayors are now the subject of criminal investigations. In Eskişehir municipal soup kitchens have been closed down. The AKP, and their MHP friends, are attempting to ensure that they have an exclusive monopoly over the giving of aid.

In the Kurdish areas, 46 out of the 65 municipalities won by the HDP in the election a year ago have since seen their elected mayors replaced by a 'trustee' appointed by central government. While the remaining elected mayors are doing what they can, within the imposed limits, to work with local people in organising to prevent the spread of the virus, the trustees have no local connections. Decades of neglect from central government have kept these areas poor, with most people dependent on their daily wage. Despite government promises of help for all who need it, most central aid, which comes with government propaganda lea-

flets, is directed towards AKP supporters, and not to those known to support the HDP.

And all the time, while the world is distracted, Turkey is continuing its aggression against the Kurds in Syria and Iraq. They keep violating the ceasefire they signed up to in Northern Syria, and they have repeatedly cut off the water supply to the Hesekê region, which constitutes a war crime even without the additional needs for cleaning brought about by the coronavirus. On Wednesday, Turkish planes targeted the Maxmur refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan, whose inhabitants follow the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan, and killed three women.

Little of all this seems to have dented Turkey's international image. True, there was disapproval when the government brought in a 48-hour curfew at two hours' notice, which prompted predictable last-minute crowding in the shops, but the Interior Minister has taken the flack for that. (That his proffered resignation was not accepted is an indication of the influence of the MHP over internal AKP power struggles, as the minister is sympathetic to the right-wing nationalist MHP agenda.) The official, highly questionable, COVID-19 death statistics seem to be taken at face value, along with government claims of support for those in need – and Turkey even managed some cynical soft diplomacy. Well publicised deliveries of medical aid, including masks and medical gowns, have been sent to the UK and other European nations. The UK Foreign Minister, Dominic Raab, thanked the Turkish Foreign minister, describing the action as 'an indication of strong friendship' between the UK and Turkey.

With history moving so fast, and so much going on just in our own corner of the world, it can be difficult to keep pace with what is happening elsewhere, but if more people are able to express public criticism of the Turkish regime it becomes that little bit harder for Turkey to get away with murder. Protests about the discrimination against political prisoners, prison conditions, and grave abuse of the justice system more generally, have been made by Human Rights organisations, the EU, and international lawyers, but the more organisations and political representatives that can be persuaded to make a public stand, the better. And when we can again begin to plan a holiday, we can help shape the post-COVID world by boycotting travel to Turkey.



20 avril 2020

Des masques faciaux aident une famille de réfugiés kurdes syriens à s'intégrer en France

LAVARDAC, FRANCE: Les ruelles de Lavardac, un petit village du sud-ouest de la France, sont en grande partie silencieuses pendant le verrouillage national, mais un bruit rythmique peut être entendu depuis la fenêtre à l'étage d'une maison sans prétention.

C'est le bruit des machines à coudre utilisées pour fabriquer des masques en tissu contre les coronavirus pour la population locale par cinq réfugiés kurdes syriens.

La famille Shikho – les frères Mustapha, Mohamad, Fawzi, Hekmat et leur beau-frère Riad – a décidé de produire les masques en signe de «solidarité» avec leurs concitoyens et en signe de gratitude pour leur avoir permis de s'installer à Lavardac en 2016.

Dans une pièce étroite aux murs blancs qui sert d'atelier, la famille découpe, coud et plie les tissus colorés.

Et des dizaines de masques faits à la main finis sont prêts sur une planche à repasser pour être livrés à la pharmacie voisine.

«Nous voulions être au service des habitants qui ne peuvent pas sortir. Nous savons ce que c'est que de rester enfermé », explique Mustapha, le plus âgé. «Dans notre cas, c'était la guerre.»

Le jeune homme de 31 ans, qui comme son frère Mohamad est tailleur de formation, avait initialement prévu d'ouvrir un atelier à Lavardac, une communauté verdoyante de seulement 2 300 âmes.

Mais le bouclage national en France, en vigueur depuis le 17 mars, a tout changé et

ils ont décidé de travailler à domicile.

«Nous avons un tas de tissu. Nous avons commencé par fabriquer des masques pour la famille », explique Mohamad, 24 ans.

La mairie nous a aidés. Nous avons donc voulu leur faire un geste en retour.

Mohamad Shikho, un réfugié syrien

«Nous nous sommes dit: « Pourquoi ne pas le faire pour nos amis, les habitants? » La mairie nous a aidés. Nous avons donc voulu leur faire un geste en retour. »

À ce jour, les frères Shikho – avec l'aide occasionnelle de leurs sœurs et de leur mère Radija – ont produit environ 2 000 masques à trois épaisseurs et lavables. Et leur travail n'est pas passé inaperçu.

«Grâce à leurs masques, les gens peuvent désormais s'aventurer à nouveau», explique le pharmacien local Frédéric Barthe.

«La population a une sorte de protection. C'est un moindre mal, en attendant l'arrivée des vrais FFP2 (masques) ou chirurgicaux.»

Sa pharmacie et celle de la ville voisine, ainsi qu'une poignée d'associations locales, essaient de rembourser aux Shikhos 1 € (1,09 \$) pour chaque masque vendu pour couvrir les frais et l'équipement. « Les gens nous disent que nous devrions les vendre entre 4 et 5 €, mais nous ne voulons pas le

faire, par solidarité », explique Fawzi.

Élève de 19 ans au secondaire, Fawzi a écrit un livret, «Je cherche la paix», illustrant l'odyssée de la famille.

Cela commence à Homs où ils vivaient lorsque le conflit syrien a commencé il y a près d'une décennie.

De là, ils ont déménagé au Liban pendant quelques mois, avant d'atteindre Afrine, un coin de la Syrie d'où ils venaient à l'origine, mais qui est maintenant occupé par la Turquie anti-kurde.

Leur voyage les a ensuite conduits à Istanbul, Athènes et enfin la France.

«Nous avons appris notre premier mot de français à l'aéroport, c'était 'Bonjour', » rigole Hekmat, 17 ans, qui parle désormais français presque comme un natif, mais sans l'accent régional.

Pour le maire de Lavardac, Philippe Barre, la décision d'installer une famille de réfugiés syriens dans le village n'a pas été totalement sans problème.

«Il y avait une certaine résistance au sein de la population», dit-il.

Mais «à travers l'école, les associations locales et le travail», les Shikhos «ont démontré leur forte volonté d'intégration et cette initiative avec les masques est un très bon exemple de leur bonne volonté et de leur cœur au bon endroit».

April 20, 2020

Kurdish Activist on Hunger Strike Amid Coronavirus Threat

Kurdish political prisoner Esmail Moridi has sewn his lips closed in protest being denied temporary prison leave amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Esmail Moridi has on hunger strike and stitched his mouth closed since April 12, after his request for temporary release was rejected by the authorities despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

He has been imprisoned since five years ago serving a ten-year prison sentence at Dizel Abad Prison in Kermanshah, west of Iran.

Prison authorities have cancelled his phone calls and visits with his family just after announcing the hunger strike. His family is now seriously concerned about his health condition which has been reported as critical.

Esmail Moradi was arrested in June 2015 by the IRGC forces in Kermanshah and sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of collaborating with Kurdish parties.

Iran's prisons have hygiene, overcrowding and healthcare problems which are highly susceptible to the spread of infectious disease.



As the Covid-19 infection and death toll of the novel coronavirus continues to mount across Iran, prisons are hit especially badly, as the regime refrains from providing them with the means to protect themselves against the virus.

In most prisons, including Evin, Qezel esar, Gohardasht, Ardabil, Urmia, Quchan, Zahedan, Kermanshah, and Sanandaj the numbers of Corona cases are on the rise while there is no adequate medical treatment. All prisoners are at risk.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, United Nations human rights experts have recently called for the immediate release of thou-

sands of political activists, dual nationals and foreigners imprisoned in Iran.

In a report released on April 20, the experts including the U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, and the UN Special Rapporteur on arbitrary and unjust executions, Agnes Callamard asserted

that while the regime's Ministry of Health has officially stated that one person falls victim to Cocin-19 every ten minutes in Iran, the Iranian regime still holds many people in prisons.

"Iran's prisons have long-standing hygiene, overcrowding, and healthcare problems. We urge the Iranian authorities to implement measures consistent with their obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including the right of persons deprived of their liberty to be treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent dignity, and the right to life", the experts have asserted.

April 20, 2020
By Newsweek

Turkey presses on with military campaigns in Iraq and Syria despite coronavirus woes

Turkey has pressed on with military campaigns against Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria despite the novel coronavirus compounding the troubles of local populations in both conflict-torn countries.

Turkey has fought for decades with the insurgent Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group that has established positions in neighboring Iraq and Syria. On Wednesday,

the Turkish Defense Ministry announced that its forces had "neutralized" 18 PKK fighters operating in Iraq's northern Qandil Mountains.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry challenged this account, however, summoning the Turkish ambassador after what it said Thursday was "a Turkish army fighter plane violating Iraqi airspace, and bombing a refugee camp near Makhmur that claimed the lives of two

women." Baghdad's top diplomat Mohamad al-Hakim urged his Turkish counterpart "to stop such serious violations and respect the principles of good-neighborliness."

The following day, however, Turkish forces again reportedly attacked across the border, this time in northern Syria.

Both the state-run Syrian Arab News News

Agency and pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Friday that Turkish troops and allied Syrian rebels launched rocket attacks near villages in the Hakkari province, a region under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led, U.S.-backed militia that Turkey considers to be an arm of the PKK.

Both Washington and Ankara—members of the NATO Western military alliance—consider the PKK to be a terrorist organization due to its guerrilla campaign against Turkey, but the group has complex relations with Iraq and Syria, both of which seek to balance Turkish and Kurdish ties. The U.S. has also allied with Kurdish forces that consider themselves separate from the PKK to fight the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) in both countries.

The jihadi group's lighting gains across the region prompted interventions from various international forces, including Iran, Russia and a U.S.-led coalition. With ISIS largely defeated, war-torn Iraq and Syria face a new, rapidly-spreading foe: COVID-19.

The novel coronavirus that has infected more than 2.2 million across the globe poses major challenges for even the world's most developed health care systems and has put those in Iraq and Syria at especially dire risk. While Iraq has confirmed only 1,482 cases and Syria a mere 38, the real figures are believed to be higher due to lack of testing.

Turkey, a population more than twice that of Iraq and nearly five times that of Syria, has recorded over 78,000 cases of the disease. Only Iran, with a comparable population and just over 79,000 cases, registered higher in the Middle East where Turkey was not the only actor to continue clashes.

ISIS has ramped up attacks in Iraq and Syria in an effort to reassert itself on the battlefield. The militants targeted both the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian military in positions across Syria's southeastern desert, and have stepped up ambushes against both Iraqi troops and militiamen as well, drawing U.S. strikes against the jihadis south of Kirkuk on Monday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has also reported on repeated rival Syrian and Turkish strikes in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, where insurgents and militants have both attempted to advance against government positions supported by Russia and Iran.

The coronavirus pandemic has prompted international appeals for peace. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called last month for an "immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world."

"It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives," he added in a video appeal. "To warring parties, I say: Pull back from hostilities. Put aside mistrust and animosity. Silence the guns; stop the artillery; end the air-

trikes. This is crucial to help create corridors for life-saving aid. To open precious windows for diplomacy. To bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19."

Also taking up the cause was French President Emmanuel Macron. The leader told Radio France Internationale on Tuesday he had secured the support of U.S. President Donald Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson—who was treated for COVID-19—in calling for a global truce. He said he expected the backing of fifth U.N. Security Council leader, Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well.

In a statement published Wednesday, the Syrian Democratic Forces voiced their support for these efforts.

"We, in the General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces, at a time when we affirm that this initiative serves humanity and is in the framework of supporting efforts to combat the coronavirus, we also affirm our commitment to any resolution that supports the United Nations call launched by Mr. Antonio Guterres on March 23, 2020, in which he called for an international truce," the group wrote.

"These worthy efforts led by President Macron will have an effective role in combating the pandemic, and we hope that it will be an essential step for establishing a sustainable global peace based on dialogue, not wars," it added.



April 20, 2020,
By Laurie Mylroie

Iran relaxes COVID-19 restrictions, amid charges it is underreporting cases

WASHINGTON DC (Kurdistan 24) – On Saturday, "low-risk businesses" in Tehran were allowed to reopen, following a similar measure adopted last week for the rest of the country.

Yet on Sunday, the following day, the Chairman of the Tehran City Council, Mohsen Hashemi, warned that the real number of coronavirus cases in the country was significantly higher than the official government figures and if restrictions were relaxed too early, that could lead to a resurgence of the disease.

Tehran, along with the religious center of Qom, 100 miles to the south, are the two epicenters of the coronavirus in Iran.

Until recently, Iran had the largest number of reported cases in the Middle East. That stemmed from its close ties with China, where the disease originated. On Saturday, however, Turkey overtook Iran as the Middle Eastern country with the largest number of such cases.

Yet there are serious questions about the reliability of Iran's statistics. Last week, a report released by the Iranian parliament

concluded that the country's death toll was some 80 percent higher than the official figure.

If so, that would still leave Iran with the most cases of any Middle Eastern country.

The parliamentary report attributed the underreporting of the disease, in part, to the fact that only those people who died in hospitals after testing positive for the virus were included in the official figures. Additionally, the country suffered from a serious lack of testing, it said.

Iranians remain wary

Despite the reopening of small shops in Tehran, as well as some factories and warehouses, much of the public remained at home, the German press agency, DPA, reported on Saturday.

“Most shops in northern Tehran and in the city centre remained empty as citizens opted to protect their health by remaining at home,” it said.

A key factor in confronting the virus is significant and speedy measures to contain it. Both South Korea and Germany took such measures and have been among the most successful countries.

However, as Hashemi complained on Sunday, Tehran responded only slowly to the emerging threat. In Iran, the virus first appeared in Qom, and as Radio Farda reported, both the representative of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the head of intelligence of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) “strongly opposed” closing Qom’s religious sites to the public.

Now, to address public concerns, the Iranian regime has taken some extraordinary steps. In 1979, in the early days of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, declared April 18 as Army Day.

On Saturday, instead of the usual parade of military equipment, including the country’s latest missiles, disinfecting vehicles and



A biker wearing a face mask to curb the spread of the coronavirus rides past a group of people selling hand sanitizer in Tajrish square in northern Tehran, April 16, 2020. (Photo: Associated Press/Vahid Salemi)

other medical equipment filed past the reviewing stand of senior officers who were wearing face masks.

Of course, the intended message was that the government – and the army, in particular – were protecting the people.

However, the effect on the virus of spraying disinfectant in the air is unclear. “There is no scientific basis at all for all the spraying and big public works programs,” Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, told The New York Times. “It’s at best wasteful, and at worst we’re just putting disinfectants into the environment that we don’t need.”

Others, however, suggested that because

so little is known about the virus, the spraying might, possibly, have a positive effect.

Earlier in the week, the Commander of the IRGC, Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, “unveiled an advanced device that can remotely detect people infected with the novel coronavirus,” the Iranian news outlet, Tasnim, which is close to the IRGC, reported.

“By creating a magnetic field, the device is able to detect every coronavirus infection case within a 100-meter radius,” Tasnim quoted Salami as saying.

That is nonsense, of course. And, it is, perhaps, a sign the regime thinks its mishandling of the coronavirus crisis may have led to a serious problem. On Sunday, in a report entitled, “Stirrings of unrest around the world could portend turmoil as economies collapse,” The Washington Post suggested that the economic problems associated with the virus and the world-wide lockdowns could lead to political unrest.

The story did not mention Iran, but it did report problems in next-door Iraq: “there have been spontaneous but brief outbursts of rage in the city of Nasiriyah and the impoverished Baghdad neighborhood of Sadr City.”



20 avril 2020

112 artistes du Sud-Kurdistan ont publié une déclaration commune concernant Zîne Wertê et appelé les partis politiques kurdes à ne pas se laisser instrumentaliser par la Turquie.

Le communiqué publié par 112 artistes du Sud-Kurdistan est rédigé comme suit:

« On a pu assister ces derniers temps à des tensions accrues entre les partis politiques kurdes. Si cette crise est due aux intérêts divergeants des partis politiques, on peut également y voir la main des ennemis des Kurdes. Nous, les artistes, qui sommes en quelque sorte la voix et la conscience du peuple, voyons émerger un plan effrayant. Ce plan est un permis de tuer les Kurdes. L’État fasciste turc et l’Iran ont proposé ce



plan pour étendre leur contrôle sur la région. Leur objectif est de massacrer et d’assimiler le peuple kurde. Si ce sale plan n’est pas empêché, de nombreux génocides et massacres se produiront au Kurdistan.

C’est pourquoi, nous, artistes patriotiques du Kurdistan, appelons tous les partis politiques kurdes à apaiser les tensions. Ne

participez pas aux plans de l’ennemi envahisseur qui menace les Kurdes de génocide et d’assimilation culturelle. Les partis politiques kurdes ont tout à gagner du respect mutuel et de l’unité nationale. Les conflits internes ne pourront que profiter à l’ennemi. »

Insistant sur la nécessité de faire passer les intérêts du peuple kurde en premier, la déclaration appelle les partis politiques kurdes à agir avec

compréhension et esprit national, et faire ainsi un pas vers l’unité nationale. Et de conclure: « Nous voulons que notre peuple soit attentif à cette situation et joue son rôle pour défaire les plans des ennemis. Nous ne pouvons gagner qu’à travers l’élaboration d’une unité nationale et d’une stratégie commune. ».



20 avril 2020

Afrin: Kurdish population more than halved since 2018 offensive, says rights group

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Since the Turkish invasion of January 2018, the Kurdish population of Afrin, northwest Syria, has fallen by more than 60 percent, according to a local rights group.

Thousands of indigenous Kurds were forced to flee the area when Turkish forces and their Syrian militia proxies launched Operation Olive Branch on January 20, 2018.

By the time Ankara had seized control of Afrin city from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) on March 24, tens of thousands of Kurds had fled, many of them to Kurdish-controlled areas in northeast Syria.

Families displaced by regime offensives to the south were resettled in their place.

“According to the latest statistics that we received, the size of the indigenous population of Kurds in the Afrin region reached 34.8 percent in January, while they previously made up 97 percent of the population,” the Afrin-based Human Rights Organization said in a report Sunday.

“The number of arrivals from various other regions makes up 65.2 percent of the population.”

The organization, which is run by local activists, failed to elaborate on the ethnicity of the settlers, but said they are from Idlib, Ghouta, Homs, and Deir ez-Zor – Arab majority areas.

It estimates Afrin is now home to 298,700 Kurds and 458,000 people displaced from elsewhere in Syria, while Afrin city is home to 53,300 Kurds and 110,000 people displaced from elsewhere in Syria.

International aid organizations were barred from entering Afrin following the offensive, making data difficult to verify. The Human Rights Organization did not explain its methodology.

According to UN estimates, upwards of 150,000 Kurds have been displaced, most of them displaced to Shahba camp in Tel Rifaat, north of Aleppo.



Turkish-backed Syrian proxy fighters loot businesses in Afrin, File photo: AFP

Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch with the stated aim of pushing the YPG back from its southern border.

Ankara believes the YPG is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group which has fought a decades-long war with the Turkish state for greater political and cultural rights for Kurds.

The YPG, which makes up the backbone of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), denies any organic ties with the PKK.

Monitors accused Turkey's Syrian militia proxies of committing abuses against Afrin civilians, especially Kurds, during and after the offensive.

Photographs quickly emerged of militiamen looting Kurdish homes and businesses and pulling down a statue of Kawa the Blacksmith – a core figure in Kurdish national culture.

Observers accused the militias of ethnic cleansing after homes were commandeered by fighters, residents intimidated or kidnapped for ransom, and displaced families blocked from returning.

Judicial structures in occupied Afrin are managed by Turkish-backed armed groups.

“Security chaos still prevails in the Afrin region, as a result of the spread of armed elements under the Syrian National Army in a chaotic manner, carrying weapons without distinguishing them from thieves and bandits,” the Afrin-based Human Rights Organization said.

Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched another offensive against Kurdish forces in October 2019, this time in the northeast, after US troops withdrew from the Syria-Turkey border region.

UN observers accused these Turkish proxies of potential war crimes and allowing an Islamic State (ISIS) revival in areas liberated by the Kurdish-led SDF.

The Russian-backed Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad has demanded Turkey withdraw from its territory.

Earlier this year, Syrian troops and other regime loyalists clashed with Turkish soldiers in Idlib, where Ankara has established military observation posts and supports the armed opposition.

A ceasefire deal brokered by Moscow and Ankara appeared to halt the regime offensive to retake the province. Efforts to contain the COVID-19 outbreak also seem to have reigned in the fighting.

Sweden repatriates Kurdish asylum seeker to Turkey

Resul Özdemir, a Kurdish asylum seeker in Sweden who Turkey says is a top-ranking member of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was returned to Turkey on Wednesday.

Özdemir was repatriated "as a result of coordinated efforts" by Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (MİT) and Swedish authorities, state-run Anadolu news agency said, citing anonymous security sources.

The Kurdish asylum seeker had been convicted to 15 years in prison for membership of the PKK. Turkey maintained that he had been in charge of PKK forces in Cizre, a town of 140,000 along Turkey's border with Syria, during violent clashes of late 2015 between Kurdish militants and Turkish security forces following the collapse of a ceasefire with the PKK.

Swedish authorities had told Özdemir's family last week that the man would be sent to Turkey, as the country released asylum seekers and refugees held in



repatriation centres as the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic continued to spread. The family was later told there had been an error and that there would be no repatriation, according to Özdemir's lawyer, as quoted by Evrensel newspaper.

Özdemir had been in a prison in Swedish capital Stockholm since December 2019, following the rejection of his appeal for asylum by the migration court. In February, some 40 Kurdish and Swedish organisations issued a statement

condemning Sweden's attempt to deport the man, who they said would possibly face torture in Turkey.

Turkey and the PKK have been engaged in a decades-long conflict in the country's southeast, which has seen more than 40,000 killed. The PKK, which maintains its headquarters in the Qandil mountains in northern Iraq, has been labelled a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Iran: Les décès dus au coronavirus dépasse 34.700 dans 297 villes

• Nombre croissant de morts au Sistan-Balouchistan et exécution de prisonniers à la veille du Ramadan

• Maryam Rajavi : Les exécutions révèlent le désespoir et la peur d'un régime qui compte sur les exécutions comme seul moyen de contrôler la société explosive

L'Organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple d'Iran (OMPI / MEK) a annoncé le 24 avril 2020 que le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus a dépassé les 34.700 dans 297 villes du pays.

Les nouvelles en provenance du Sistan-Ba-

louchistan indiquent une augmentation significative du nombre de décès. Le nombre exact est inconnu, mais au cours des dernières 24 heures, au moins 90 personnes ont perdu la vie. Le nombre de victimes dans les provinces de Téhéran est de 5.870, de Khorassan-Razavi 2775, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'Est 1348, d'Azerbaïdjan de l'ouest 1130, de Hamedan 886, du Kurdistan 590, de Semnan 575, de Zanjan 475, de Khorassan du Nord 375 et de Lorestan 795.

Alors que le régime continue à dissimuler le nombre de décès dus au coronavirus et persiste à donner de faux chiffres, Alireza Zali,

chef du centre national de lutte contre le coronavirus (CLNC) à Téhéran, a déclaré au quotidien officiel Asr-e Iran : « depuis l'apparition de la maladie, nous avons admis environ 58.000 malades du coronavirus à Téhéran. »

À l'issue de la réunion des ministres de la santé des États membres de l'OMS, Saïd Namaki, ministre du régime, a déclaré : « nous sommes encore à mi-chemin. Nous pouvons encore perdre le match (le ballon peut échapper à notre gardien) à la dernière minute, et nous serons vaincus et humiliés aux quatre coins du monde. »

Coronavirus : en Turquie, un couvre-feu le week-end mais pas de confinement total

Le pays fait face à la pandémie grâce à un nombre élevé de lits en soins intensifs mais craint de voir son économie s'effondrer.

Des avenues vides, un ciel dépollué, des dauphins évoluant dans les eaux du Bosphore : Istanbul a vécu son deuxième week-end de couvre-feu, samedi 18 et dimanche 19 avril. Un épais silence, troublé par les seuls cris des mouettes et les klaxons des camionnettes des boulangers autorisés à circuler pour vendre le pain, a régné sur la ville de 16 millions d'habitants qui est aussi le principal cluster de l'épidémie de Covid-19 en Turquie, avec 60 % des cas enregistrés.

Comme dans toutes les autres villes du pays, les Stambouliotes se sont pliés avec discipline à l'injonction des autorités, répétée cinq fois par jour en même temps que l'appel à la prière depuis les minarets : « Restez chez vous !

Entré en vigueur vendredi 17 avril à minuit, ce deuxième couvre-feu n'a pas suscité l'affolement de la semaine précédente, quand la population, prévenue de la mesure deux heures avant son entrée en vigueur, s'était précipitée dans les commerces de bouche, faisant fi des mesures de distanciation sociale.

Hormis cette bévue, les autorités, confrontées à une propagation rapide du coronavirus, ont pris des mesures drastiques contre la pandémie, confinant les moins de 20 ans et les plus de 65 ans, soit 33 millions de personnes, invitant les autres à limiter leurs déplacements. Le port du masque est désormais obligatoire dans les commerces. Les déplacements ont été interdits entre 31 grandes villes du pays.

Un nouvel hôpital est actuellement en construction sur le site de l'ancien aéroport Atatürk, à Istanbul

Si le confinement total n'a pas été imposé, c'est par peur de voir l'économie s'effondrer. « Les rouages doivent tourner », avait déclaré le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan au début de la crise sanitaire. Une partie de l'activité économique se poursuit pendant la semaine, notamment sur les chantiers, où des ouvriers protestent régulièrement de leur manque de masques et d'accès à l'eau pour se laver les mains. Les seuls commerces autorisés à ouvrir sont les alimentations et les pharmacies. Depuis le 24 mars, le grand bazar d'Istanbul est fermé.

Melek, qui vend des loukoums, se ronge les sangs depuis qu'elle a dû fermer sa confiserie du



quartier populaire de Sisli. « Qui va payer le loyer de ma boutique ? Le propriétaire m'a dit que je pourrai payer après la crise, sauf que personne ne peut dire quand celle-ci prendra fin », soupire-t-elle.

La ville doit se débattre avec le fardeau financier de la pandémie et anticiper l'accueil des patients à venir. Les autorités sanitaires estiment que le rythme des infections pourrait atteindre son pic dans une dizaine de jours. Les hôpitaux sont sur le pied de guerre. Un nouvel hôpital est actuellement en construction sur le site de l'ancien aéroport Atatürk, à Istanbul, où une piste d'atterrissage a été démolie. Samedi, le président a supervisé l'opération depuis son hélicoptère.

Selon le ministre de la santé, Fahrettin Koca, 3 977 nouveaux cas ont été confirmés pour la seule journée de dimanche 19 avril, ce qui porte l'ensemble des personnes contaminées à 86 306. Au total, 2 017 personnes sont mortes du coronavirus en Turquie depuis le 11 mars, dont 127 au cours des dernières vingt-quatre heures.

Grâce à la politique de santé menée par l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir, la construction d'établissements de santé modernes, dotés d'un matériel dernier cri, a été encouragée. Ces hôpitaux relèvent le plus souvent du secteur privé, mais ils ont été enjoins, épidémie oblige, de soigner gratuitement les plus démunis.

Dépistages intensifs

Le pays dispose d'un grand nombre de lits en soins intensifs, en moyenne 40 pour 100 000 habitants. Pour l'heure, les hôpitaux sont loin d'être débordés et les soignants sont bien équipés. « On ne peut en dire autant des médecins de ville, qui manquent de moyens de protection », pointe Onur Hamzaoglu, professeur de médecine et

membre de l'Association des médecins de Turquie (TTB).

Bien que 70 % des praticiens turcs soient membres de la TTB, l'association n'a pas été admise au sein du conseil scientifique, le groupe d'experts qui conseille les autorités. Kayahan Pala, médecin et membre de la TTB, regrette cette mise à l'écart, « non seulement du conseil scientifique, mais aussi des comités de surveillance du Covid-19 éta-

blis dans les villes ».

« Pour lutter contre la pandémie, il faut faire preuve de transparence, ce qui n'est pas le cas du gouvernement », déplore le professeur Hamzaoglu. Tout comme la TTB, il estime que le ministère de la santé ne déclare pas les décès dus au virus « conformément aux normes de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé », ce qui explique la stabilité relative du nombre de décès quotidiens par rapport à l'augmentation exponentielle des nouveaux cas.

Onur Hamzaoglu, professeur de médecine : « Pour lutter contre la pandémie, il faut faire preuve de transparence, ce qui n'est pas le cas du gouvernement »

Selon Fahrettin Koca, le ministre de la santé, l'apparition fulgurante de nouveaux cas s'explique avant tout par le fait que la Turquie pratique intensément les dépistages. 598 933 patients au total ont été testés depuis le début de la crise.

L'épidémie n'a pas tari la soif de vindicte du président Erdogan envers ses adversaires politiques, notamment les maires élus sous l'étiquette du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP) dans les grandes villes – Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya, Adana, Mersin, Antakya.

A peine les édiles avaient-ils lancé des campagnes de charité dans le cadre de la lutte contre le coronavirus que le numéro un dénonçait la « formation d'un Etat parallèle ». En conséquence, les fonds recueillis ont été bloqués par le ministère de l'intérieur. La tension est montée d'un cran, samedi 18 avril, avec l'ouverture de deux enquêtes judiciaires contre le maire d'Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, et celui d'Ankara, Mansur Yavaş



24 avril 2020

Le TEV-DEM condamne le changement démographique mis en oeuvre par régime syrien

Le Mouvement de la société démocratique (TEV-DEM) a condamné les tentatives du gouvernement syrien de changer la démographie à Tall Eran et Tall Hasil, dans le nord d'Alep, dans une déclaration publiée vendredi.

Lors d'une déclaration publiée vendredi, le TEV-DEM a condamné les tentatives de changement de démographie dans le Nord d'Alep :

« Après 9 ans de lutte en Syrie, nous continuons à lutter contre la politique et la mentalité chauvine du parti dominant.

Le gouvernement syrien continue de considérer les Kurdes comme s'ils n'étaient pas un peuple vivant en Syrie et veut qu'ils quittent la Syrie. Il approche les Kurdes comme s'ils étaient plus dangereux que l'armée d'invasion turque et veut jouer avec leur avenir. Le gouvernement syrien, qui prend de nouvelles décisions visant l'existence du peuple kurde dans différentes régions, a récemment mis en pratique cette politique à Tall Eran et Tall Hasil, où vivent plus de 125 000 personnes.

Ces régions ont été laissées vulnérables aux attaques d'Al-Nusra et d'autres groupes durant l'été 2013. Des massacres ont suivi. Des dizaines de civils ont été tués, enlevés et le sort de nombreuses personnes est toujours inconnu. Le responsable de ce massacre est le régime syrien, qui ne défend pas les civils », a-t-il été déclaré.



Le TEV-DEM a poursuivi en condamnant le gouvernement syrien pour avoir ouvert des centres de quarantaine à Tall Eran et Tall Hasil et a ajouté :

« Le gouvernement syrien a suivi une politique brutale envers les Kurdes au milieu du siècle dernier, connue sous le nom de « ceinture arabe ». Aujourd'hui, il y a des tentatives à ce que le même scénario se reproduise à Tall Eran et Tall Hasil. Pour y parvenir, la pandémie de Covid-19 est considérée comme une opportunité. La preuve en est la conversion des bâtiments scolaires des deux villes en centre de quarantaine. En outre, des Roms (tsiganes) des régions contrôlées par le gouvernement ont été placés dans ces écoles. L'objectif

est de vider les deux villes et de remplacer la population par des familles roms chauvines. Pendant cette période, l'État turc occupe, Afrin, Serêkaniyê et Girê Spî.

Les zones où vivent les Roms sont situées dans les régions centrales du pays. Le gouvernement syrien aurait pu déplacer les centres de quarantaine dans lesquels se trouvent les Roms vers ces régions, cependant ils ont été transférés à Tall Hasil et Tall Eran.

Nous appelons toutes les organisations de la société civile et les Nations Unies à faire pression sur le gouvernement syrien pour qu'il mette fin à cette politique de changement démographique ».



23 avril 2020

German court tries ISIS jihadist over Yezidi genocide

FRANKFURT, Germany – A man believed to have belonged to the Islamic State (ISIS) group goes on trial in Germany on Friday accused of genocide and murdering a child belonging to the Yezidi minority who he held as a slave.

Identified only as Taha al-J., the 37-year-old Iraqi man is also accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and human trafficking in the case, heard before Frankfurt judges.

His wife, a German woman named

Jennifer Wenisch, has been on trial for a year at a Munich court.

She too is charged with murdering the young Yezidi girl who the pair are believed to have allowed to die of thirst in the Iraqi city of Fallujah in 2015.

The start of Wenisch's trial in April last year appeared to be the first formal proceeding anywhere in the world related to the Islamic State group's persecution of the Yazidi community.

A Kurdish-speaking group hailing from northern Iraq, the Yazidis were specifically targeted and oppressed by the jihadists beginning in 2014.

The mother of the young girl, identified only by her first name Nora, has repeatedly testified in Munich about the torment visited on her child, named as Rania.

Court documents allege that Taha al-J. joined ISIS in March 2013, holding different positions within its hierarchy in the jihadists' "capital" in the Syrian city of Raqqa, as well as in Iraq and Turkey.

Death by heat

German prosecutors say the accused bought a woman belonging to the Yazidi minority and her five-year-old daughter as slaves at the end of May or beginning of June 2015.

He then took them to Fallujah, where they were seriously maltreated and at times deprived of food, the prosecutors allege.

In the summer of 2015, after a string of such abuses, the young girl was chained by al-J to the window of a house where she lived with her mother, as "punishment" for having wet the bed.

She died of thirst in temperatures as high as 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit).

The couple also forced her mother to walk barefoot on the scorching ground outside, inflicting severe burns.



Mother and daughter had been kidnapped in summer 2014 after ISIS invaded the Sinjar region of Iraq, known to Kurds as Shingal.

They were repeatedly sold on "slave markets", prosecutors say.

The Frankfurt case is expected to last until at least August, and is being heard under tight police guard.

Al-J. was arrested in Greece in May 2019, before being extradited to Germany in October, where he has since been held in pre-trial custody.

'No order to exterminate'

Both Lebanese-British lawyer Amal Clooney and Yazidi activist Nadia Murad – herself a survivor of ISIS sexual slavery and a 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner – have represented the mother of the young girl at Wenisch's Munich trial.

The two women lead an international campaign to classify ISIS crimes against the Yazidis as genocide.

But proving before a court that genocide has taken place is difficult.

The explicit will to destroy a group

such as the Yazidi must be demonstrated to judges' satisfaction.

"There is often no order to wipe out" a group, University of Leipzig legal expert Alexander Schwarz told AFP.

"There are no written instructions where 'exterminate the Yazidi' appears."

The small ethnic and religious minority of the Yazidi is believed to have been most ferociously persecuted by the jihadists, who forced their women into sexual slavery, recruited the underage as child soldiers, and murdered hundreds of men.

In August 2014, the killings of 1,280 Yazidis and kidnappings of 6,400 more may have constituted a genocide according to the UN.

Non-Arab, non-Muslim Iraqis, many of them Yazidis, have fled to Germany.

Murad, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, is among those to have passed through a program there for woman and children – many victims of repeated rapes – since its inception in 2014.

Neuf mois dans les prisons iraniennes

Les geôliers voulaient faire passer le chercheur Roland Marchal pour un espion, avant de le libérer, le 20 mars

Nous sommes en juin 2019, et la pièce n'a pas de fenêtres. Le prisonnier porte encore les vêtements enfilés la veille au petit matin, dans un hôtel de Dubaï, où il était de passage avant de se rendre en Iran. Mais déjà on lui a pris sa montre, ses appareils électroniques. Sa vie ordinaire le quitte, morceau par morceau, entre les mains de gardiens pressés et anonymes. Ceux-là ne montrent pas de haine, n'usent pas de violence excessive. Leur besogne vient juste de commencer.

Il leur faut transformer le chercheur français Roland Marchal, 64 ans, en captif. Puis, pour des raisons qui échappent encore tout à fait au prisonnier, lui fabriquer une identité nouvelle. Dans les profondeurs opaques de la République islamique d'Iran, certains ont reçu la mission de faire passer Roland Marchal pour un espion. Ils s'y attelleront sans relâche. « Il va falloir nous dire la vérité », prévient un agent dans un français approximatif et abrupt. Le prisonnier apprendra bien vite que, en matière de vérité, la mécanique diplomatique, politique, judiciaire dans laquelle il vient d'être emporté connaît ses propres lois.

Quelques heures auparavant, il pensait entamer un séjour de quelques jours de vacances en Iran, avec sa compagne, l'anthropologue franco-iranienne Fariba Adelhah. A l'aéroport international Imam-Khomeyni, arrivé au niveau des contrôles, c'est une habitude, M. Marchal avait appelé son amie : « Le téléphone sonnait dans le vide. » Il l'ignore encore, mais Mme Adelhah vient d'être arrêtée. Le service de renseignement qui a décidé de s'attaquer aux deux Français sait que le chercheur est sur le point de la rejoindre. Six hommes en tenue de civil le cueillent peu après l'atterrissage de son avion. On l'emmène dans la pièce sans fenêtres. Ses affaires sont fouillées, ses mots de passe réclamés et notés. « Ils paraissaient certains que je n'étais pas du tout ce que je prétendais être... Les questions qu'ils

me posaient me donnaient l'impression qu'ils me voyaient comme un personnage du Bureau des légendes. J'ai appris plus tard que certains de mes geôliers avaient vu cette série. »

armés dans la Corne de l'Afrique. Chercheur au Centre de recherches internationales de Sciences Po, son expérience de l'Iran, raconte-t-il, tient à de courtes visites à Mme Adelhah, qui y réside une partie



Le premier interrogatoire va commencer. On tente de lui faire croire que sa libération ne tient qu'à une chose : sa « coopération » avec les hommes qui viennent de l'enlever. Mais que veut-on vraiment de lui ? M. Marchal l'ignore encore.

Après des mois de négociations et de tentatives infructueuses, M. Marchal a été libéré le 20 mars et rapatrié en France. Loin de Téhéran, depuis un appartement parisien qu'il décrit comme paisible et ensoleillé, au bord d'un boulevard déserté par le confinement, il a confié le récit de sa détention au Monde. Ses souvenirs lèvent un coin du voile sur le fonctionnement d'un régime au sein duquel certains considèrent la prise d'otage comme la poursuite de la diplomatie par d'autres moyens...

Roland Marchal travaille sur les conflits

de l'année. Les recherches de sa compagne portent sur les évolutions de la société iranienne, derrière le masque de la République islamique. Sa nationalité française n'est pas reconnue par le régime, ce qui l'expose vis-à-vis des autorités locales, toujours promptes à s'en prendre aux doubles nationaux à des fins de pressions internationales. Mme Adelhah n'entend pas pour autant renoncer à son objet d'étude.

Apprendre à survivre

Le lendemain de son arrestation, Roland Marchal est conduit devant un magistrat : « Il m'a demandé ce que je venais faire dans le pays, raconte M. Marchal. Je lui ai fait part de nos projets touristiques. » L'homme lui tend un document officiel. Il est accusé de collusion avec un Etat étranger, d'atteinte à la sécurité nationale et d'activité anti-iranienne. « Avant de me

donner son papier, le magistrat m'a souhaité un très bon séjour en Iran. » Quelques instants plus tard, il est enfermé, en tenue de prisonnier et à l'isolement, dans la prison d'Evin, le lieu de détention des prisonniers politiques.

Roland Marchal s'en rendra compte au bout d'un certain temps : son sort ne dépend plus ni du système judiciaire iranien ordinaire ni tout à fait des relations diplomatiques de l'Iran avec la France. Il est retenu par les gardiens de la révolution, l'armée idéologique de la République islamique, qui contrôlent directement une partie de la prison. Ses geôliers dépendent du guide Ali Khamenei et de lui seul. Il vit désormais hors du droit. L'Iran officiel ne peut rien pour lui.

Dans les premières semaines, les jeux de pouvoirs dont il fait l'objet lui importent peu. Il doit apprendre à survivre dans une pièce d'un peu plus de 1,50 mètre sur 2,50 mètres, baignant dans la lumière froide d'une lampe fluorescente sans savoir exactement ce qu'on lui reproche. Ceux auxquels il a affaire ont en tête un roman d'espionnage à trous qu'ils vont tenter de compléter avec des bribes biographiques disponibles en ligne et ce qu'ils pourront piocher dans ses courriels.

Cette entreprise durera tout le temps de sa détention. « J'étais d'emblée accusé d'être à la tête d'un réseau d'espions français en Iran, puis de travailler pour le Comité des sanctions des Nations unies, et enfin pour la CIA, se souvient M. Marchal. Ils faisaient feu de tout bois. » « C'est difficile de vivre dans un monde où la logique n'a pas vraiment de prise, sans savoir si vos interrogateurs croient à ce qu'ils disent, explique Roland Marchal. Un jour ils m'ont demandé de les mettre en contact avec Bernard Emié, le directeur de la DGSE. Je leur ai expliqué tant bien que mal que je n'avais aucun moyen de le faire. Est-ce qu'ils le voulaient vraiment ? Est-ce qu'ils m'ont cru ? »

Les théories complotistes des gardiens de la révolution trouvent leurs racines dans le récit originel d'une République islamique résistant à l'Occident qui lui a déclaré la guerre. Elles l'alimentent. Le maintiennent en vie, et donnent une raison d'être au système dont ils procèdent. Elles font partie du décor. Car l'essentiel se joue ailleurs.

Les premières semaines, M. Marchal lutte

contre la claustrophobie. Son état se détériore. Il tente de faire 6 000 pas par jour entre deux murs, jusqu'à l'étourdissement. On finit par le placer en cellule collective puis, fin septembre, dans une « suite » réservée, selon ses geôliers, aux « VIP ». Il a accès à une petite cour qui sent les gaz d'échappement, à une télévision dont il peut choisir la chaîne, à un interrupteur pour éteindre les néons la nuit. L'ordinaire de la détention s'installe. Parfois à la discrétion de ses gardiens, on lui permet d'appeler sa famille. Pour son anniversaire, on lui apporte des pommes. A trois reprises, il peut voir Fariba Adelkhah, détenue dans la même prison, dans un bâtiment différent. Très brièvement.

Les interrogatoires se poursuivent, prenant parfois une dimension plus incongrue encore. « A certains moments c'était un peu comme donner un cours à des étudiants de Sciences Po. » Les gardes qui ont toujours à cœur de lui tailler un costume de maître espion lui posent aussi des questions très générales. « Ils me demandaient d'analyser les différences entre islam et islam politique, de commenter les raisons de l'hostilité américaine contre l'Iran ou de m'exprimer sur la crise des "gilets jaunes" en France. » Ses geôliers lui exposent à leur tour leurs théories sur la montée en puissance chinoise et russe et leur mépris d'une Europe discréditée.

A partir du 24 décembre, Mme Adelkhah entame une grève de la faim qui met en péril sa santé et qu'elle n'interrompra qu'au bout de quarante-cinq jours. Dans le quartier de la prison où il se trouve, M. Marchal rencontre un groupe d'écologistes iraniens, investis dans la protection du guépard asiatique, arrêtés depuis janvier 2018 sans inculpation, eux aussi accusés d'atteinte à la sécurité nationale. Ils lui font comprendre qu'il y a peu à attendre du processus judiciaire en cours.

Négociations en cours

On finit par donner à M. Marchal les moyens de mieux saisir sa situation. Un interrogateur évoque des négociations entre Paris et Téhéran au sujet des conditions de détention d'un Iranien détenu en France. On ne parle pas encore d'échange. Plus tard, le chercheur comprend que son existence est liée à la mise en liberté d'un inconnu, l'ingénieur Jalal Rohollahnejad, emprisonné en France depuis février 2019. Il fait l'objet d'une demande d'arrestation des Etats-

Unis, l'accusant d'avoir enfreint les sanctions sur l'importation de systèmes électroniques sensibles vers la République islamique. Il attend une extradition outre-Atlantique, que les autorités iraniennes veulent lui éviter.

M. Marchal raconte qu'au cours de sa détention, la tentative infructueuse de médiation sur le dossier nucléaire entre Téhéran et Washington menée par Emmanuel Macron en passant par le président Hassan Rohani sera critiquée par ses interrogateurs, hostiles à l'accord nucléaire.

Les deux chercheurs français ont-ils été capturés par les gardiens de la révolution, liés aux plus durs du régime, pour créer un point de friction entre Paris et le gouvernement de M. Rohani ? M. Marchal a eu le loisir de se poser cette question, tout comme une infinité d'autres dans le silence de sa cellule. L'épidémie de Covid-19 qui frappe durement l'Iran engage ensuite Téhéran dans une nouvelle offensive diplomatique, où la République islamique espère obtenir des appuis internationaux face aux sanctions américaines.

Roland Marchal pensait alors rester en prison au moins jusqu'à la présidentielle américaine. Quelque chose à l'approche du printemps s'est pourtant débloqué. Début mars, alors que les visites consulaires lui étaient accordées de manière erratique, on lui permet par WhatsApp de s'entretenir avec l'ambassadeur de France à Téhéran, Philippe Thiébaud. Sous surveillance. Le diplomate fait savoir que l'acte d'extradition de M. Rohollahnejad, ne sera pas signé par le premier ministre. Le Français sera donc libéré.

Quelques jours passent. Le 20 mars, jour du Nouvel An iranien, on le mettra dans un avion pour Téhéran et M. Marchal dormira à l'ambassade de France. Dans une France étrange, transformée par l'épidémie, il réapprend à vivre, veut redevenir le « petit chercheur » qu'il était. Libre. Mais seul.

La deuxième audience du procès de Fariba Adelkhah a eu lieu le 19 avril. Le verdict est attendu dans la semaine.

Tehran Launches Military Satellite as Trump Tells Navy to ‘Shoot Down’ Iranian Boats

The president’s statement came a week after the Pentagon accused Iran of sending 11 fast boats to conduct “dangerous and harassing approaches” to six American warships in the Persian Gulf.

WASHINGTON — Iran successfully put into orbit what it called its first “military satellite” on Wednesday, after a string of previous failures, just hours before President Trump declared he had instructed the Navy to sink any Iranian fast boats that “harass our ships at sea.” The order, if followed, could sharply escalate the confrontations between the two nations.

While Iran was vague about the military capabilities of the satellite, the launch was notable in part because it originated from a mobile launch vehicle, similar to the kind the North Koreans are using to demonstrate they have the ability to roll out a missile and send it into space before the United States or its allies have time to respond. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo immediately condemned the launch as a violation of a United Nations Security Council resolution and declared that Iran would be “held accountable,” but did not specify what that meant.

As the C.I.A. director, Mr. Pompeo ordered an acceleration of a secret American program to sabotage Iranian launches. But after a string of major failures, the launch on Wednesday marked an unusual success, one Iranian television hailed with pictures of officers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, many wearing masks, in a celebration in a control room.

The president’s abrupt tweet authorizing a far looser standard for the Navy to fire on Iranian fast boats seemed to take the Pentagon by surprise. Under the Navy’s rules of engagement, lethal force can be used only if American ships or personnel are put at risk — for example, by trying to ram a U.S. warship or place explosives near its hull. But blaring loudspeakers and weaving in the ship’s path, all part of the standard harassment techniques used by swarms of Iranian small boats, are not considered legally sufficient to open a salvo that could escalate into war.

Last week the Pentagon accused Iran of sending 11 fast boats to conduct “dangerous and harassing approaches” to six American warships in the Persian Gulf, and that appeared to be what led to the president’s warning “to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea.”

The statement came after Mr. Trump’s former national security adviser, John R. Bolton, tweeted last week that the United States had “been too

lenient in responding” to Iranian provocations. As a presidential candidate, Mr. Trump declared that when the Iranians “circle our beautiful destroyers with their little boats” they would be “shot out of the water.”

Taken together, the satellite launch and the warning to Iran suggest the two countries are escalating their episodic confrontations, even as both nations are fighting the coronavirus. And they may both have reasons: At home, the Iranian government and Mr. Trump’s administration have been criticized for mismanaging the response to the virus, and leaders in both nations may calculate that there is an advantage to reigniting confrontations with old adversaries.

While the swarming of small boats is a striking visual sign of those confrontations, the missile launch may well prove the more significant action. Iran’s civilian and military space programs — which American officials contend are closely related — have been plagued by mysterious explosions, failed launches and satellites that never deployed correctly. Roughly two-thirds of their orbital launches have failed, though it has never been clear how much of that has been a result of bad luck or technical incompetence, and how much has been caused by active American and Israeli sabotage programs.

Mr. Trump even tweeted out last summer a classified American satellite image of the burned remnants of a failed space launch, taunting the Iranians by declaring that “I wish Iran best wishes and good luck in determining what happened.”

But on Wednesday, what happened appeared to be a rare Iranian success — one Tehran said was the inauguration of its equivalent of the Pentagon’s new Space Force. That seemed a vast overstatement: It is unclear that the new satellite is transmitting images, or even how good they are compared with what is available on Google Earth and commercial satellite services.

Still, Mr. Pompeo confirmed the launch and noted that the government in Tehran had always claimed its satellite launches were only for commercial purposes and had no military use. That all reversed on Wednesday.

“I think today’s launch proves what we’ve been saying all along here in the United States,” Mr. Pompeo told reporters at the State Department. “I think Iran needs to be held accountable for what it’s done.”

Because the lofting of a satellite into orbit mimics some of the flight path of a nuclear warhead, such launches have long been considered akin

to practice runs. The United Nations resolution Mr. Pompeo referred to does not explicitly prohibit such launches; instead, watered-down language agreed to as part of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal says that Iran is “called upon” to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons, for up to eight years. Iran insists it is not working on a nuclear weapon, and thus none of its missiles are designed to be “nuclear capable.”

The appearance of the mobile launcher struck both American and Israeli officials as a major advance. Previously Iran has launched its satellites from fixed sites, which are easy to strike before a launch. But the photos and video of this launch showed a mobile launcher similar to what the North Koreans have increasingly used. The system reduces warning time, and thus makes it harder to pre-empt a launch.

For the Revolutionary Guards, the launch has other symbolic value. The force had overall responsibility for the Iranian nuclear program, and some elements of the group have pressed for Iran to completely withdraw from the agreement — as Mr. Trump has — and to speed the restoration of its program. But so far the Iranian government has been proceeding methodically, hoping to split the European nations, China and Russia from the United States.

Since then, however, tensions have de-escalated, and there was a theory that the coronavirus would distract Iran’s attentions, and its budgets. But there is little evidence that is the case.

Mr. Pompeo, speaking at the State Department, dismissed the importance of Mr. Trump’s tweet about sinking Iranian fast boats for harassing U.S. naval ships, noting that the president had previously given senior American officials authority to “take whatever action is necessary to make sure you can defend and keep our people safe.”

But a tweet does not constitute a military order, and a Defense Department official said the Navy had not received any formal policy directive from Mr. Trump ordering it to change its criteria for opening fire on Iranian gunboats. A U.S. military official said there had been no further incidents with the Iranians, fast boats or otherwise, since the one last week, when the Pentagon said Iranian boats “repeatedly crossed the bows and sterns” of Navy ships at high speeds, at one point coming within about 10 yards.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, David L. Norquist, the deputy defense secretary, said Mr. Trump’s statement on Twitter was more of a

warning to the Iranians than a change to the current rules of engagement.

“The president issued an important warning to the Iranians. What he was emphasizing is that all of our ships retain the right of self-defense,” Mr. Norquist said. “The president is describing and responding to poor behavior of the Iranians.”

Standing alongside Mr. Norquist, Gen. John E. Hyten, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he liked “that the president warned an adversary.”

Mr. Trump has a history of Twitter announcements that seem at odds with traditional policy, including that involving the military and its rules and operations. Liberal critics of the president have suggested that, facing low approval ratings for his handling of the coronavirus response, Mr. Trump is searching for other ways to change the subject, demonstrate leadership and energize his conservative base.

American military units on the ground and at sea abide by strict rules on “escalation of force,” a ladder that includes audible warnings, flares and maneuvers before a shot is fired, often as a last measure.

Mr. Trump’s directive, in many ways, discounts this entire process and could lead to injury and death on an already crowded, and often confusing, waterway such as the Persian Gulf. “Commanders are well aware and already have sufficient guidance to deal with these types of events,” said Vice Adm. John W. Miller, a retired



The carrier Abraham Lincoln in the North Arabian Sea last year. Credit...Bryan Denton for The New York Times. Credit...Bryan Denton for The New York Times

commander of the Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain.

The Trump administration has continued to impose its “maximum pressure” campaign of economic sanctions against Iran after the United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement. Tehran, for its part, has launched proxy attacks against American troops, interests and allies in the region.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps, which com-

mands the fast boats, is a paramilitary organization, separate from Iran’s conventional military. The organization carries out operations across the Middle East, trains Arab Shiite militias and oversees businesses in Iran.

Reporting was contributed by Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Lara Jakes and Michael Crowley from Washington; Ronen Bergman from Tel Aviv; and Farnaz Fassihi from New York.

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by Christopher F. Schuetze

German Trial Accuses Iraqi of Genocide in Killing of Yazidi Girl

The Frankfurt trial of the 27-year-old man accused of being an ISIS member is believed to be the first that carries the charge of genocide in relation to the Yazidis.

BERLIN — An Iraqi man accused of being an Islamic State terrorist has gone on trial in a high court in Frankfurt accused of genocide, human trafficking, and the torture and murder of a 5-year-old Yazidi girl he had held as a slave in Falluja, Iraq.

Opening statements in the trial of the defendant identified by his first name and last initial in accordance with German privacy rules, Taha Al-J., came a year after his German-born wife went

on trial over the death of the same girl.

His trial is believed to be the first in the world that carries the charge of genocide in relation to the Yazidis.

“This trial is remarkable in many ways,” Alexandra Lily Kather, an international law expert, said in a telephone interview. “This is the first case going on trial in the world including genocide among the charges with respect to crimes committed against the Yazidi.” Ms. Kather co-authored a report on the trial’s significance for Just Security, a legal blog.

Taha Al-J., who is 27, is also charged with murder, crimes against humanity,

war crimes and trafficking for the exploitation of their manpower and murder, according to the counts read aloud by the president of the five-judge panel in Frankfurt on Friday. The defendant, dressed in a patterned button-down shirt, declined to make an opening statement or to enter a plea.

His trial centers on a mother and her child, members of the Yazidi religious minority who have been persecuted by the Islamic State, known as ISIS. The defendant and his wife bought, enslaved and tortured the 5-year-old and her mother, prosecutors said. The girl died in 2015 after being left chained to the bars of window in heat reaching 122 de-

grees Fahrenheit.

“Taha Al-J. intended, according to the charges, to exterminate the religious minority of the Yazidi by his acquisition of the two Yazidi females and to have personal benefits from their services in his household,” Charlotte Rau, a court spokeswoman, said in a statement on Friday.

The defendant was captured in Greece and extradited to Germany a month after his wife’s trial started.

The trials are part of a series in Western courtrooms dealing with the crimes committed by extremists from the Islamic State during their active years in Iraq and Syria as they tried to create a caliphate. Taha Al-J.’s trial is the second in Germany in as many days to rely on the legal concept of “universal jurisdiction,” which tries foreign-born defendants for crimes committed abroad.

On Thursday, the trial of two Syrian men accused of torturing and killing people for their country’s secret police got underway in Koblenz, roughly 75 miles northwest of Frankfurt. Like the trial of the German-born wife of Taha Al-J., other hearings in Germany have also focused on German citizens who had joined ISIS.

The head of a United Nations commission in 2016 said of targeted attacks on the Yazidi minority in 2014: “Genocide has occurred. ISIS has subjected every Yazidi woman, child or man that it has captured to the most horrific of atrocities.”



The mother of the child, who was unidentified, will be a witness and co-plaintiff in the trial. Her legal team includes the human rights lawyer Amal Clooney.

Ms. Kather and other legal advocates — citing the fact that ISIS fighters had separated captured Yazidi men and boys from women and girls, killing or recruiting the former and enslaving or raping the latter — have criticized this case for not emphasizing the gender-specific nature of the genocide.

“We hope for gender-specific harm to be reflected or included in the charges of cases going to trial in the future,” she said.

According to the indictment in Frankfurt, the defendant bought the mother and daughter and held them in his household in Falluja in the summer of 2015, where they were forced to keep house under strict Islamic rules. The prosecutors say the two were not given enough food or water and were regularly beaten.

The weakened child died after she was chained in direct sunlight in late summer of that year. During that time, Taha Al-J. ran the bureau of “Shariah exorcism” in Raqqa, Syria, once a stronghold of the Islamic State.

The trial will continue on Monday and go through the summer.



25 avril 2020

L'État turc ordonne la destruction de tombes de combattants kurdes | RojInfo

L'État turc exerce une torture psychologique accrue à l'encontre des Kurdes et particulièrement des familles engagées politiquement.

A Silvan, dans la province kurde de Diyarbakir, des parents ayant perdu leurs enfants dans les combats contre l'armée turque ont été convoqués par le commandement de la gendarmerie qui

leur a enjoint de retirer les lettres « Q », « W » et « X » (lettres de l'alphabet kurde n'existant pas en turc, ndlr) figurant sur les pierres tombales de leurs enfants.

Malgré les menaces, les familles ont refusé de satisfaire à cette injonction, déclarant que ces lettres faisaient partie

du nom de leurs enfants et qu'au surplus, on ne pouvait les retirer sans briser les pierres tombales.

Mêmes pratiques à Van

Depuis quelque temps, des pratiques similaires ont eu lieu dans la province de Van. Des soldats de l'armée turque,

accompagnés de mukhtars (chefs de quartier ou village), inspectent les cimetières à la recherche de tombes de guérilleros. Les pierres tombales sur lesquelles figurent le mot « Şehîd » (« martyr » en kurde), le nom de code des combattants ou des symboles kurdes, telles que les couleurs vert-rouge-jaune, sont enlevées et brisées sous les yeux des proches. Dans certains cas, les parents sont contraints de le faire eux-mêmes. Le dernier incident de ce type s'est produit il y a une semaine dans le district d'Erciş où deux pierres tombales ont été délibérément détruites par des soldats de l'armée turque, sous les yeux des familles des défunts.



Des tombes de combattants kurdes détruits par l'armée turque.

Les tombes sont systématiquement vandalisées

Les brutalités visant la mémoire des combattants relèvent de la guerre psychologique menée par le régime Turc

contre la résistance kurde. Ces agressions ont atteint une ampleur sans précédent, en particulier sous la gouvernance de l'AKP. Les tombes des guérilleros sont systématiquement

l'objet d'actes de vandalisme. Des centaines de corps ont ainsi été déterrés et enlevés sans que l'on sache où ils se trouvent.

ASHARQ  AL-AWSAT 26 avril 2020

Turkey Continues Efforts to Carry Out 'Demographic Change' in Northeastern Syria

The Turkish army and its loyal factions continue displacing the remaining residents in areas that fall under their control in northeastern Syria as part of the "demographic change" policy, a human rights observatory announced.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said Turkish forces and their proxies are moving forward with their systematic approach implemented in Afrin and other areas under their Operation Peace Spring.

It said this comes in light of the demographic change they seek to bring about in areas that were controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Families from eastern Ghouta and other Syrian areas are being housed in several areas in Raqqa and Hasakah, which have been captured recently by Turkish forces and proxies, replacing the civilians who were forced to displace.

Abductions and arbitrary arrests still continue targeting residents, both Kurds and Arabs, in areas under control of Operations "Peace Spring" and "Olive Branch" factions, it stressed.



Turkish-Russian military patrol in al-Darbasiyah town, northeastern Syria (AFP)

In Tal Abyad, just one of the many examples, Turkish-backed factions continue their arbitrary practices, although the city is inhabited mostly by Arabs, it added.

The SOHR stated that military groups affiliated to the pro-Turkish factions raided Saturday homes of displaced civilians in Meydanki area in Afrin countryside.

It noted that the area experiencing abuses by

the new residents against the property of Kurdish indigenous people, including allowing cattle to graze agricultural land, causing significant damage to crops.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Defense Ministry announced killing at least 20 members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria, near Turkey's southern border.

"The terror group's attempt to infiltrate the

Operation Peace Spring de-escalation zone to disrupt peace and security was prevented by our heroic commandos. Twenty YPG/PKK terrorists were neutralized in a successful operation before they could achieve their aims," the ministry said on Twitter.

On October 9, Ankara launched the Operation Peace Spring against YPG members from the area east of the Euphrates River in northern Syria to ensure the safe return of Syrian refugees. Turkey and its loyal forces seized a 30 km region deep in the Syrian territories during an

operation that was halted eight days later. This happened as Ankara agreed with the US and Russia on Oct. 17 and 22 on the withdrawal of its forces from the Syrian border and the withdrawal of Kurdish units as well from the Operation Peace spring zone.



26 avril 2020

Le commandant en chef des FDS appelle à soutenir l'initiative d'unité nationale | RojInfo

«Les pourparlers ont abouti à des résultats positifs qui seront annoncés dans les prochains jours », a déclaré Mazloum Abdi, se référant à une réunion avec une délégation représentant diverses tendances politiques du Rojava.

Mazloum Abdi, commandant en chef des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), s'est adressé à la presse après une réunion avec une délégation composée de représentants de différents partis et organisations kurdes du nord et de l'est de la Syrie, sur la question de l'unité nationale.

M. Abdi a déclaré qu'il y avait de nouvelles évolutions concernant les efforts pour la réalisation de l'unité nationale kurde, et que les diverses tendances politiques avaient une approche positive de l'initiative.

Il a ajouté que les pourparlers avaient abouti à des résultats positifs qui seraient annoncés dans les prochains jours, appelant tous les partis politiques à soutenir l'initiative établie et agir en faveur de l'unité nationale des Kurdes.

HUSÊN : L'UNITÉ NATIONALE KURDE EST UN BESOIN URGENT

Le Dr Bextiyar Husên, un des membres de la délégation, a fait remarquer que tous les tenants de la mise en place



Le commandant en chef des FDS appelle à soutenir l'initiative d'unité nationale

d'une unité nationale kurde s'étaient unis autour de l'initiative fondée à cette fin.

Qualifiant l'unité nationale kurde de besoin urgent, M.Husên a ajouté que la délégation rencontrerait et discuterait avec le PYD (Parti de l'Union Démocratique) et l'ENKS (Conseil National Kurde Syrien) à ce sujet.

Rappelant les précédentes tentatives d'unité nationale, M.Husên a déclaré :

« L'Administration autonome et l'ENKS ont signé les accords Hewlêr 1, Hewlêr 2 et Duhok. Cependant, ces accords n'ont malheureusement pas donné de résultats. L'atmosphère et les circonstances sont différentes aujourd'hui. Il est maintenant essentiel de prendre une décision dans l'intérêt du peuple kurde ».

La délégation devrait rencontrer dimanche l'ENKS et le PYD.



April 26, 2020

Locked in by virus, Iraq hit with new pandemic: domestic abuse

Baghdad (AFP) - "More morphine!" Malak's mother cried, her 20-year-old daughter hospitalised after a marital dispute left her severely burned -- the latest victim of domestic violence exacerbated by confinement in Iraq.

The nationwide lockdown since mid-March is meant to keep coronavirus cases down in the country, but it has led to a spike in another sad statistic: domestic violence.

The head of Iraq's community police, Brigadier General Ghalib Atiyah, told AFP that its log of domestic violence cases has increased by an average of 30 percent since the curfew came into force -- with some areas seeing as high as a 50-percent spike.

In a single week, the United Nations in Iraq (UNAMI) reported: "The rape of a woman with special needs, spousal abuse, immolation and self-immolation as well as self-inflicted injuries due to spousal abuse, sexual harassment of minors, and suicide due to domestic abuse among other crimes."

In the southern province of Wasit, a 58-year-old doctor killed his wife after she refused to let him sell land that she owned, according to human rights lawyer Sajjad Hussein.

To the north in Samarra, footage surfaced of a 10-year-old girl in tears, her arms apparently broken.

"I don't want to see my dad any more, he hits me every day," says the child, identified as Saba.

"He tells us it's to 'educate us,'" her mother, who is divorced, is heard saying.

But Malak al-Zubeidi's case made waves.

Eight months ago, the young woman in the shrine city of Najaf married a policeman who physically abused her and barred her from seeing her family, Malak's mother told Human Rights Watch (HRW).

On April 8, he beat Malak so badly she doused herself in gasoline and set herself on fire, her mother said, burning for several minutes before her father-in-law put out the flames.

- Afraid to seek help -

Footage of her swollen, burned face and pained wails in the hospital went viral, but public support could not save her: the young woman died 10 days later.

"All Malak wanted was to be able to see her family," said Hana Edwar, a longtime women's rights advocate in Baghdad.

Her NGO, Amal (hope in Arabic), has doc-



With Iraq under lockdown due to the coronavirus, the country has seen a spike in domestic violence (AFP Photo/AHMAD AL-RUBAYE)

umented a "dramatic" rise in domestic violence cases during the curfew, she told AFP.

"Everyone is spending long periods of time together inside the house. The most insignificant thing can turn into a controversy that eventually leads to violence," she said.

Extended families often live together in one household in Iraq, swathes of which still hold on to conservative religious and tribal customs.

In those areas, many girls are married at a young age and subject to domestic violence.

According to the UN, 46 percent of married women in Iraq have survived some form of abuse at home, of which a third report physical and sexual assault.

They have few pathways to seek help.

A recent survey by the International Organisation for Migration found that 85 percent of men in Iraq would bar female relatives from filing a police report.

And 75 percent of female respondents admitted they would not feel comfortable reporting to the police, likely fearing possible additional abuse and the cultural stigma in Iraq surrounding women entering stations alone.

The community police has work to do to erase that taboo but cannot reach out to communities through its usual town halls because of the curfew, Atiyah told AFP.

- 'Total impasse' -

There are also few shelters available for victims and legal accountability seems far-fetched.

Article 41 of Iraq's penal code gives men the right to "punish" their wives and children "within the

limits of law and customs", a clause frequently used to dismiss cases brought against relatives.

Many abuse cases are "resolved" in tribal courts, which have their own legal framework that includes settlements to aggrieved families outside of official tribunals.

And "honour killings", or violence meted out extrajudicially against someone who broke a social norm, are usually met with light sentences by Iraqi courts.

After the public outcry over Malak, three of her male relatives were slapped with six-month jail sentences for "failing to assist someone in danger".

Activists have long pushed Iraq's parliament to adopt a more robust domestic violence law that would better protect victims and deter possible abusers.

"Every time, MPs bring up religion's role or pretend they're worried such cases would clog the courts," said advocate Afrah al-Qaisi. "It's a total impasse," she told AFP.

Now, the UN and HRW have seized on the wave of abuse under lockdown to point a spotlight at the issue.

Iraq's parliament should quickly revise, pass and enforce a domestic violence law in line with international standards, the New York-based HRW said.

"It should not take a global pandemic for Iraqi legislators to address the other deadly pandemic of domestic violence, but failure to do so will cost more lives," HRW's Belkis Wille said.

En Turquie, le président Erdogan utilise l'épidémie pour ses ambitions régionales

Le pouvoir islamo-conservateur, en déclin, ravive le mythe d'une Turquie conquérante.

Le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, en est convaincu, la bataille du Covid-19 se joue aussi sur le terrain géopolitique. Dans le nouvel ordre mondial censé émerger après la pandémie, la Turquie est appelée à jouer un rôle prépondérant. « Pour la première fois depuis la seconde guerre mondiale, nous assistons à une nouvelle restructuration du monde. La Turquie a l'opportunité d'être au centre de ce processus », a-t-il déclaré dans une récente adresse à la nation.

L'idée séduit les zélotes du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur), au pouvoir depuis dix-huit ans. Les ministres ne parlent que de ça. Ibrahim Karagül, le chantre du gouvernement, rédacteur en chef du quotidien Yeni Safak, est, pour sa part, persuadé que le « miracle turc » est à portée de main.

Le pays, écrit-il dans un éditorial publié le 21 avril, « s'y préparait depuis des années ». Sous la houlette d'Erdogan, rien n'est impossible : « L'Empire ottoman était une grande famille répartie sur trois continents. Pendant la première guerre mondiale, cette famille a été brisée, partagée, capturée, asservie. (...) Erdogan l'a rassemblée, il a changé le cours de l'histoire. »

Touchée par l'épidémie de Covid-19, qui a fait 2 491 morts et 101 790 cas déclarés, la Turquie affiche plus que jamais son « pouvoir de séduction ». Il est urgent de redorer son blason, terni par ses violations des droits de l'homme, sa perte de dynamisme économique, l'autoritarisme débridé de son président.

Ces dernières semaines, du matériel médical (masques, blouses jetables, kits de dépistage, médicaments, respirateurs artificiels) a été livré à une trentaine de pays à travers le monde, dont l'Italie, l'Espagne et la Grande-Bretagne, et aussi Israël et l'Arménie, des Etats avec lesquels les relations sont d'ordinaire plutôt tendues. Tous les colis portent la mention « présidence », afin de souligner le rôle central joué par le numéro un dans la mise en œuvre de cette « diplomatie humanitaire ».

Vendre du rêve à la population

Le pouvoir de coercition continue de s'exercer. Les envois de soldats et de matériel ont repris vers Idlib, dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, où l'armée turque a créé des dizaines de postes d'observation supplémentaires pour défendre

les territoires qu'elle contrôle face à une éventuelle offensive du régime de Damas. En Libye, les drones turcs au service du gouvernement d'accord national (GAN) poursuivent leurs frappes sur les forces du maréchal dissident Khalifa Haftar.

Nul ne sait mieux que le « Grand Turc » vendre du rêve à sa population. « Si notre président nous disait qu'il s'apprête à construire une autoroute à quatre voies vers la Lune, nous le croirions », résumait, le 31 mai 2018, Berat Albayrak, le gendre du président, nommé depuis ministre du Trésor et de l'économie. Raviver le mythe d'une Turquie conquérante est la bouée de sauvetage du pouvoir islamo-conservateur, en déclin, comme l'a prouvé son échec aux municipales du printemps 2019. Cet exercice de rhétorique est d'autant plus nécessaire qu'un choc économique s'annonce.

« Si la gestion de la crise sanitaire est bonne, la politique monétaire est catastrophique », estime l'économiste Ahmet Insel. Depuis le début de la pandémie, la Banque centrale turque (BCT), qui a abaissé mercredi 22 avril son taux directeur pour la huitième fois en moins d'un an, épuise ses réserves de change pour soutenir la livre, la monnaie locale, qui a perdu 15 % de sa valeur par rapport au dollar depuis le début de l'année. Orienté à la baisse, le marché financier risque de contraindre l'institution monétaire à capituler. Le combat, perdu d'avance, laisse le pays à la merci d'une nouvelle crise monétaire.

Relocalisation vers l'Europe

Pour parer à l'effondrement de l'économie, un projet à dimension géopolitique a été mis de côté. On a appris cette semaine que les systèmes de missiles S-400, livrés par la Russie en 2019, ne seront pas activés avant plusieurs mois, officiellement en raison de l'épidémie. En réalité, Ankara ne veut pas risquer de subir les sanctions économiques promises par l'administration américaine. Il semble que l'option



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, lors de la journée de la souveraineté nationale et des enfants, à Istanbul, le 23 avril. AP

proposée par Washington, à savoir que les S-400 restent dans leurs boîtes pour éviter les sanctions, ait prévalu.

Contrarier l'allié américain n'est pas une option au moment où les autorités turques, en quête de nouvelles sources de financement, courtisent la Fed, la banque centrale américaine, dans l'espoir que cette dernière leur donne accès à ses liquidités en dollars via l'ouverture de lignes de swap (échange de devises), ce qu'elle a fait pour 14 pays récemment.

La Turquie n'est pas sur la liste car elle ne coche aucun des critères de sélection (faible inflation, déficit courant maîtrisé, budget à l'équilibre). Et ses orientations de politique étrangère ne sont pas nettes. « Depuis la crise diplomatique entre Washington et Ankara, née de l'emprisonnement du pasteur américain Andrew Brunson à Izmir en 2018 et, plus tard, l'achat de S-400 russes susceptible d'entraîner des sanctions économiques, la Turquie est un pays dont la Fed se méfie », souligne sur son blog Ugur Gurses, un ancien fonctionnaire de la BCT.

Le président turc n'a pourtant pas tout à fait tort. A l'heure où la politique de sécurité industrielle de l'Union européenne est remise en question, son pays pourrait tirer avantage de la relocalisation de certaines productions de la Chine, où elles sont concentrées, vers l'Europe et son pourtour. « Les pays d'Europe centrale et orientale, le Maroc, la Tunisie mais aussi la Turquie, pourraient devenir les réceptacles de cette relocalisation », explique Ahmet Insel. A condition que l'économie tienne le choc.

Iran: la solution au Covid-19 pourrait se trouver dans la fortune de Khamenei

Le refus du pouvoir en Iran de financer la lutte contre le Coronavirus, alors que le pays traverse une grave crise économique, ne peut mener qu'à une contestation encore plus forte du pouvoir clérical, notamment de son Guide Suprême. Par Hamid Enayat, analyste et écrivain iranien basé à Paris.

Le 11 avril, le président iranien Hassan Rohani a publié un décret gouvernemental avec le soutien total du Guide Suprême Ali Khamenei, dans lequel toutes les restrictions ont été levées pour que les employés puissent reprendre leurs activités au péril de leurs propres vies chaque jour. Même avant ce décret, les travailleurs journaliers et les enfants travailleurs étaient déjà obligés de sortir pour gagner un peu d'argent.

Le décret a dû faire face à de nombreuses objections au sein même du régime. Beaucoup se sont opposés à l'idée d'augmenter la quarantaine dans les zones où le taux de croissance des infections est élevé. Mais le gouvernement a déclaré que ce n'était pas économiquement faisable en raison des sanctions, de l'absence de revenus pétroliers et du blocage de l'accès à leurs ressources financières à l'étranger.

Une lettre ouverte à Rohani

La décision de Rohani a suscité une vague de contestation, en particulier parmi les personnes impliquées dans la lutte contre le Coronavirus au sein du ministère de la Santé. Les experts ont admis que le retour des personnes au travail pourrait provoquer une nouvelle vague d'infection. Suite à cette décision, une organisation gouvernementale dénommée Société iranienne d'immunologie et d'allergie a publié une lettre ouverte à Rohani, où elle estime le nombre d'infection à environ 60 millions et plus de 2 millions de morts.

Lors de la première session après les vacances du nouvel an au Parlement iranien, 80 députés ont présenté un projet de loi de trois urgences pour la quarantaine et la fermeture totale du pays pendant un mois, qui a été rapidement retiré de l'ordre du jour sous prétexte d'être contraire à la constitution.

Pas de quarantaine par manque de ressources financières

Pendant ce temps, l'opposition iranienne a déclaré que le problème n'est pas l'insuffisance des ressources financières. Les richesses accumulées par Khamenei et contrôlées par des



Le Guide Suprême Ali Khamenei. (Crédits : Reuters)

organisations telles que Astan Quds Razavi à Khorasan, ainsi que l'argent dépensé en Irak, en Syrie, au Yémen, à Gaza et au Liban, doivent être allouées à la santé de la population et servir à payer les salaires des ouvriers, des enseignants et des employés incapables de travailler pendant la pandémie.

Suite à l'appel de l'opposition, les responsables du régime ont souligné ce qu'ils n'avaient jamais osé mentionner auparavant : Des milliards de dollars de la richesse du peuple iranien sont maintenant disponibles dans les banques et les institutions sous le contrôle de Khamenei, mais lui et le gouvernement refusent de les dépenser.

Après avoir soulevé ce débat, quatre membres du Majlis (Parlement des mollahs) ont immédiatement abordé la question. « Le président et trois membres de la faction parlementaire des droits civils ont appelé à une quarantaine totale dans les zones à haut risque », a publié le journal Ebtekar le 9 mars.

Deux mesures sont nécessaires

Ils ont également écrit sur leurs comptes Twitter personnel : « La prévention de l'épidémie de COVID-19 n'a pas réussi. Cependant, deux mesures sont nécessaires : Premièrement, la mise en quarantaine totale des zones critiques de l'épidémie. Deuxièmement, l'utilisation des fonds abondants de SHASTA (grandes sociétés affiliées au ministère des Coopératives), du Bureau d'exécution de l'ordre de l'Imam Khomeiny, de la Fondation Mostazafan et du holding pétrochimique (tous sous le contrôle direct de Khamenei) pour la fourniture et la distribution de masques, vêtements, lunettes et

autres produits de première nécessité pour le personnel médical. »

Suite à cela, Masih Mohajeri, rédacteur en chef du journal Jomhuri Eslami, qui a été fondé par Khamenei, a déclaré le 11 avril : « Le ralentissement économique causé par le Coronavirus est évident et ne peut être résolu par les dons des gens et d'autres ressources financières limitées. Pour résoudre les problèmes, il faut que de grandes puissances financières entrent en scène en raison de leurs capacités et du fait que leurs biens appartiennent au peuple. Ces pouvoirs financiers sont l'Ordre de l'exécution de l'Imam Khomeiny, la Fondation Mostazafan et Astan Quds Razavi. Si les vastes installations et ressources dont disposent ces institutions sont mises au service des sections touchées, les problèmes de ces secteurs seront résolus dans les plus brefs délais et de manière complète. »

Les autres ressources financières qui ont été signalées en Iran sont le Fonds national de développement et le Fonds de réserve de devises étrangères. A cet égard, plus de 100 militants de la politique civile et des universitaires ont demandé : « Pourquoi le Fonds national de développement, qui appartient à tous les citoyens iraniens mais qui est sous le contrôle direct de Khamenei, dépense-t-il de l'argent pour la force des pasdarans plutôt que pour la santé publique ? Pourquoi les ressources financières de ces méga-institutions ne sont dépensées que pour le pèlerinage d'Arba'een ou le bureau du Guide Suprême au lieu d'être investies dans la résolution de cette dangereuse affaire nationale. » (Site internet Zeytoon, 28 mars).

Des fonds aux montants astronomiques

Yahya Al-Ishaq, ancien chef de la Chambre de commerce de Téhéran, a évoqué la situation financière du régime et la possibilité de résoudre les problèmes financiers de la population : « Selon les responsables gouvernementaux, il y a environ 4.000 milliards de dollars gelés à la disposition du gouvernement (avec le taux de change gouvernemental). En outre, environ 50 % des actifs des banques sont gelés et inutilisés. L'ensemble des actifs gelés doit être converti en actifs courants afin de résoudre les problèmes » (Khabar Online, 10 avril).

Le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) a estimé dans son rapport de novembre que les réserves de change et les réserves d'or de l'Iran s'élevaient à 85,5 milliards de dollars à la fin de 2019. Il est donc très clair que ce n'est pas le manque de ressources financières qui a contraint le régime iranien à lever sa semi-quarantaine.

Dans cette situation, le régime voulait faire

d'une pierre deux coups. Comme l'a dit Khameini, ils voulaient faire de cette crise une opportunité. Ainsi, en prenant en otage la santé du peuple iranien et l'environnement favorable causé par le Coronavirus, ils voulaient lever les sanctions sur le pays.

Et d'autre part, avec un massacre à grande échelle d'Iraniens atteints de cette maladie - peut-être un million - affaiblir le soulèvement des masses défavorisées et sans emploi, en particulier la jeunesse insurgée, qui réclame un changement démocratique en Iran depuis 2017 avec différents soulèvements, en particulier le dernier à la mi-novembre 2019.

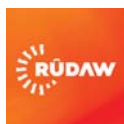
Les soulèvements et les protestations à venir

Le FMI estime que les États qui n'ont pas pu soutenir leur pays dans la lutte contre le Coronavirus seront confrontés à des mouvements de protestation. Les médias du régime reflètent déjà cette situation. Un journal officiel a mentionné l'état critique de l'économie du pays que l'épidémie de Corona a détérioré,

soulignant que cette situation peut conduire à des soulèvements et des cris de protestation et de violence.

Cette prédiction n'est pas très éloignée de la vérité. La société iranienne brûle dans les flammes de la pauvreté, de la discrimination, de l'oppression et de l'inégalité et il suffit d'une étincelle pour qu'elle explose. Dans ce contexte, la crise du Coronavirus balaie la société avec un énorme bilan de morts.

Les mollahs pensent que les Iraniens vont perdre le pouvoir d'agir sous l'effet des griefs et de la déception causés par cette crise. Mais il s'agit d'une erreur stratégique mortelle, un type d'erreur que les dictateurs commettent dans les derniers jours de leur règne. Tout cela ne se produit pas dans une société sans leadership. Il y a de jeunes forces rebelles qui sont à l'origine du changement et ce mouvement sera encore plus grand que les soulèvements d'Aban qui ont eu lieu en novembre 2020.



26 avril 2020
Zhelwan Z. Wali

Civil society group brings rival Kurdish parties together in Syria

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - A delegation of Kurdish intellectuals and lawyers from Kobane have launched an effort to bring together rivaling Kurdish parties in Syria, an initiative requested by the international community and authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The delegation met with Mazloun Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Qamishli on Saturday. They are scheduled to meet with the ruling Democratic Union Party (PYD) and opposition Kurdish National Council (KNC or ENKS) on Sunday.

"It is better for the unity of the Kurdish nation if we are united. The entire Kurdish parties and nation support such initiatives," said Abdi in a press conference after the meeting with the delegation.

"We are optimistic that efforts put to build unity will bear fruit," Abdi added.

"All the political parties have a positive stance," Abdi claimed, also saying the people of Rojava are supporting the reconciliation initiative. The PYD and ENKS, which consists of several opposition parties, have been in a bitter dispute

for years over the sharing of power in northeast Syria, known to Kurds as Rojava.

The latter has accused the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), the umbrella group for the ruling PYD and its allies, of refusing to share power. Moreover, the ENKS-linked Roj Peshmergas - funded by the KRG - have been prohibited from becoming part of the security apparatus alongside SDF forces.

The opposition group's refusal to recognize the TEV-DEM administration has strained ties between the two groups.

The rivals have made several failed attempts in the past to unite the various groups in the area. Power-sharing agreements between the groups were signed in 2014 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's Duhok province, mediated by the Region's ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) which has close ties with the ENKS. However, none of the deals have been implemented.

Turkey's launch of Operation Peace Spring against Kurdish-led forces in northern Syria in October last year has since encouraged rival Kurdish parties in Rojava to re-engage in serious efforts to build unity.

"We have no other option but to cast aside our differences. For us the matter of Kurdish identity is very important," Hussein Mohammed Ali, a member of the Kobane delegation, told Rudaw.

"Mr. Abdi was very positive and very happy for our attempt at bringing different Kurdish sides together," Ali said, adding that Abdi agreed that despite political differences, Kurdish parties should remain united in their rhetoric.

The ENKS is a member of the pro-Turkish Syrian opposition, a point of contention with the PYD.

Officials and members of the ENKS usually often live in the Kurdistan Region, Turkey and Western countries. Some have been banned from entering Rojava and have been jailed for their criticism and alleged links to Turkey.

For the first time in years, the EKNS reopened its offices in Rojava in early February in a "gesture of good faith," as part of ongoing attempts to strengthen ties with ruling Kurdish authorities in northern Syria.



23 avril 2020
By Dorian Jones Mon

Cities Angered by Removal of Pro-Kurdish Mayors in Turkey

MARDIN, TURKEY - The mix of fury and disappointment among residents was palpable inside a cafe in the southeastern Turkish city of Mardin after the government replaced the popular mayor with a trustee.

One year on from local elections, 40 out of 65 municipalities won by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) are now under the control of government-appointed trustees.

In Mardin, the HDP's Ahmet Turk won 56.2 percent of the vote in March 2019. But in August he was one of the first, along with those in nearby Diyarbakir and Van, to be removed and replaced by the government.

Six months after the move, residents in Mardin, where the governor now runs the city of over 800,000 people, were especially critical of a lack of service and development.

"No one bothers, no one wants to do anything, and no one raises their voice. We're speaking to you now — who knows what will happen to us tomorrow?" cafe manager Firat Kayatar told AFP during a visit late February.

"They may as well not hold elections in the southeast because they had two elections, and after both they appointed trustees," said Kayatar, who lives in the old city.

Complaints unheard

"No one listens anyway," one of the cafe's customers, Abdulaziz, 57, chipped in. "We can't complain to anyone. [The governor] brings bananas but we need bread."

Another man nearby who did



not give his name said young people went to university but were unable to find a job.

"This is the problem Mardin faces, too," he said.

The party described the mayors' removals as an "attack" on Kurds but the government has accused the HDP of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Kurds make up around 20 percent of Turkey's overall population.

The HDP accused Ankara last month of making it "even harder for the Kurds to fight the coronavirus" through the "repression of Kurdish democratic institutions, their municipalities in particular."

Such actions are not new. Ankara removed 95 HDP mayors after the party won 102 municipalities in 2014.

"When it comes to the HDP, just slapping trumped-up terror charges is the easiest way to go and it's just a political attempt to destroy their legitimacy," said Emma Sinclair-Webb, Turkey director of Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Accusation against PKK

The chairman in Mardin for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) defended the government's actions, accusing the PKK of using the HDP mayors to obtain control.

"In fact these mayors were Qandil representatives," Faruk Kilic said, referring to where the PKK leadership and rear bases are located in a mountainous region in Iraq.

"None of the mayors made statements of their own independent will," Kilic added, a claim the HDP strongly denies.

The Turkish government has repeatedly accused the HDP mayors of using the municipalities' money to support the PKK, or hiring relatives of PKK militants.

The interior ministry claimed some mayors attended political rallies, demonstrations and even funerals of PKK militants.

The HDP says 21 of its mayors are behind bars.

The PKK has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish

state since 1984, and the group is blacklisted as a terror organization by Ankara and its Western allies.

The government's aim was to "collapse any distinction between the HDP, a legal party playing by the rules of the game in parliament and democratically elected representatives from this party, and an armed organization," HRW's Sinclair-Webb said.

'Economic' reason for dismissals?

Veteran Kurdish politician Turk was acquitted in February in one case cited against him when he was removed as mayor of Mardin the first time in 2016.

The AKP's Kilic said if mayors were later acquitted on the charges against them, they would return to their posts, but added "there's evidence against many" charged.

Eren Keskin, of the Ankara-based Human Rights Association (IHD), believed there was an "economic" motive to the dismissals.

"The first municipalities they appointed a trustee for — Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van — are provinces that are really open to economic development," Keskin said.

Her claim was supported by HDP deputy chairman Saruhan Oluc, who said the government "keeps itself strong through the income and profit from local administrations."

Oluc accused the government of handing out money and favors to its allies as well as companies and foundations close to it through the municipalities' coffers.

Turkey grants Kurdish militants no peace, even in death

For three hard years, Halise Aksoy searched for the remains of her son after learning that the young Kurdish rebel had fallen in battle against Turkish security forces on May 23, 2017. Her quest for Agit, which means “brave” in Kurdish, ended on April 10 at the central courthouse in Diyarbakir, the informal capital of the mainly Kurdish southeast. “Aunty, look! Your son’s bones are there,” said a court official, breezily motioning toward a plastic bag with a yellow tag attached. The bag was on a table and contained a rectangular box.

“They offered me a glass of water,” recalled Aksoy in a telephone interview from her native village of Elmabahce in neighboring Mardin province. “I said, ‘I don’t want your water, keep it to yourselves,’ and took my son and left.”

Images of a dazed Aksoy sitting in her living room with the bag on her lap surfaced on social media soon after, triggering uproar. “My mother was in a state of shock,” said Mizgin, the sixth of Aksoy’s four daughters and three surviving sons. “Now she is angry. Very angry.”

“Aunty, look! Your son’s bones are there,” said a court official, breezily motioning toward a plastic bag with a yellow tag attached.

Initial media reports suggested that Agit’s remains had been couriered to his mother’s home by the state postal service — cash on delivery.

The claims were swiftly rebuffed by the chief prosecutor’s office in Tunceli, the southeastern province where Agit had died in a clash with Turkish security forces. The office said in a statement that it had confirmed his identity on Aug. 28, 2019, based on a blood sample provided by Aksoy. It went on to assert that authorities in Tunceli had contacted Aksoy but that she had declined to fetch “the body tissue” because she lived in Diyarbakir. Critically, however, the statement did not say when it had contacted Aksoy.

“The Tunceli prosecutor’s office is openly suggesting that Halise Aksoy doesn’t care about her son, that she didn’t bother,” Abdullah Zeytun, the head of the Turkish Human Rights Association in Diyarbakir, told Al-Monitor in an interview.



Agit Aksoy’s face is pictured in the Aksoy home, Elmabahce, Mardin, Turkey, April 11, 2020. Photo via Mesopotamia News Agency.

Aksoy disputes the official version of events. She insists that the Tunceli prosecutor’s office contacted her by telephone in February while she was visiting her children in Istanbul. She said the official told her they had a “document” for her and asked if she would collect it. When Aksoy asked whether they were referring to the remains of her son, the official on the line refused to disclose any information. He insisted it was “secret.”

“I implored him for an answer but he wouldn’t give me one,” she said.

Aksoy had had her hopes dashed once already last year, when a captured Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant said he knew where Agit was buried and led officials to what he claimed were his remains. But a letter dated Aug. 1, 2019, addressed to Aksoy and seen by Al-Monitor, stated her DNA sample did not match that of the bones that were retrieved.

Aksoy ekes out a living selling embroidery and crochet she does at home. Her husband deserted her and the children 20 years ago. “Agit was her favorite child. He promised to look after her,” Mizgin said.

The 53-year-old had made multiple trips to the city of Malatya, where the bodies of militants who die in the region are gathered for identification at a government-run forensic medicine institute. She would scour the morgue for Agit but return empty handed

each time. Her hopes of ever finding him began to fade.

Her spirits battered, Aksoy told the prosecutor’s office that she would fetch the “document” from Diyarbakir as soon as she returned from Istanbul. “Had I known it was my Agit I would have been on the first plane to Tunceli,” Aksoy said.

By the time Aksoy made it to Diyarbakir, the remains had traveled back and forth multiple times between Istanbul, Tunceli and Diyarbakir “like a ping pong ball,” Mizgin said.

Kurdish lawmakers in the Turkish Parliament bombarded Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul with demands for an explanation — and redress.

“Anyone with a shred of decency or the slightest hint of humanity would feel shame before this photograph” of Aksoy with the box on her lap, thundered Hisyar Ozsoy, of the Kurd-friendly opposition People’s Democracy Party (HDP), in a letter addressed to Gul.

“What is the reason Agit’s body was not handed over in 2017, despite his family’s concerted efforts to recover it, and held for three years?” Ozsoy asked.

For Ozsoy, the issue is deeply personal. He is a direct descendant of Sheikh Said, who

led what is often described as the first Kurdish rebellion in the early days of the republic. The uprising was quelled and Said was hanged in Diyarbakir's Dagkapi Square in June 1925. The whereabouts of his body remain a mystery.

The lawmaker filed a motion in 2017 demanding his great great grandfather's remains be found and accorded a proper burial. No action has been taken so far.

Ozsoy is also still awaiting a formal response from Gul to his questions about why Agit's remains were treated "with such utter disrespect." But "the answer is clear," Ozsoy told Al-Monitor in a telephone interview from Ankara. "Such actions are in keeping with modern Turkey's nation-building project" which was "erected on the violent and systematic suppression of Kurdish identity," he contended.

"The Turkish state dictates who among the dead deserve humane treatment, who can be properly grieved and who cannot. Agit was deemed to be among those who do not. Yet under international humanitarian law it's the state's duty to treat all its citizens equally in life as in death," Ozsoy said. "The state has committed a crime."

The Human Rights Association's Zeytun, who is representing Aksoy, agrees that the state's handling of Agit's bones constitutes a crime. Zeytun told Al-Monitor that he had filed criminal charges with the Diyarbakir prosecutor against those responsible. They include subjecting Aksoy to "mental torture" and the "gross violation" of Agit's right to "proper and dignified interment." Zeytun concedes, however, that the charges will probably be dismissed.

"The Turkish state dictates who among the dead deserve humane treatment, who can be properly grieved and who cannot." – HDP politician Hisyar Ozsoy

The official view is that the outlawed PKK is a terrorist group. The militants are similarly designated by the European Union and the United States. Their corpses have become a lever through which the Turkish state asserts its power and stigmatizes the rebels and their families. Allowing a normal funeral for Agit, who joined the PKK in 2010, was out of the question, Zeytun said.

"When I arrived in the village with, you know, the package, it was besieged by police," recounted Aksoy, her voice faltering. "We were told that no more than three of us could be present at the burial. They wouldn't even allow us to call an imam to perform the funereal prayers."

"I couldn't bring myself to open the box and look at what was left of my son. It was a small box. We wrapped it in a shroud and buried it in a hurry."

Aksoy might count herself fortunate to have recovered her son at all.

Butchers' Creek

The rebels launched their fight in 1984 for an independent Kurdish state carved out of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. They now say they will settle for autonomy inside Turkey.

At its peak in the mid-90s, the insurgency raged across the mountainous Kurdish heartlands in Turkey's southeast. Thousands of villages were razed and emptied by Turkish security forces. Between 900,000 to 1.2 million people were forced to flee, marking the biggest human displacement in Anatolia since the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the Greek and Turkish population transfer of 1923.

Abuses were committed on both sides, but disproportionately by Turkish security forces. Reports of desecrations of PKK corpses and mass graves began to seep out despite the military's aggressive censorship of the Turkish press.

"We were later told that the ears were booty for soldiers who took part in the operations. They would dry them, lacquer them and use them as keychains, necklaces and the like." – Veteran Kurdish journalist Nezih

Every so often, the military would organize press junkets to boast of its victories. Veteran Kurdish journalist Nezih, a pseudonym, has vivid memories of one such macabre tour. He told Al-Monitor in a telephone interview, "It was late October or early November in 1996. A big operation in which a top PKK commander was killed had been carried out in Kulp," a PKK stronghold in Diyarbakir province.

"Some 30 PKK fighters were declared 'neutralized.' We saw a dozen or so lined up on the ground. They were all male. They had without exception either one or both of their earlobes neatly sliced off. Some had bloody boot prints on their faces. We were allowed to take photographs. When we asked one of the officers why part of their ears had been removed, he said they had 'probably been chewed off by wild animals.' We were later told that the ears were booty for soldiers who took part in the operations. They would dry them, lacquer them and use them as keychains, necklaces and the like."

Nezih still has the photographs.

"Reports of Turkish soldiers mutilating PKK corpses, whether true or not, has fed into

the anger and frustration that is one part of what leads Kurdish youth to join the PKK," said Aliza Marcus, author of "Blood and Belief," one of the most authoritative accounts on the PKK to date, in emailed comments to Al-Monitor.

In 1988, journalist Evin Cicek uncovered the story of Kasaplar Deresi or Butcher's Creek, a dried riverbed on the edge of Siirt in the southeast where dozens of PKK fighters' bodies were dumped along with the town's garbage. "Corpses flung into the garbage heap were dismembered by stray dogs and dragged by them into the city center. People would weep in silence. Women would beat their chests to grieve," she said.

Journalist Gunay Aslan, who published the story in January 1989 after secretly inspecting the site, was bundled into a van, beaten and detained by Turkish special forces in Siirt. "They said they would behead me if I ever came back," Aslan told Al-Monitor from Germany, where he eventually fled.

In a 2011 interview with the now shuttered Turkish daily Taraf, Cicek revealed for the first time that a local bureaucrat had shared with her in 1989 the names of 80 people killed between 1984 and 1988 whose bodies had been cast into the refuse pile. Only six had been handed over to their families after Gunay exposed the scandal.

It's no surprise that it took her so long. Journalists were routinely jailed or murdered for reporting on the government's abuses against the Kurds. Seven reporters from the pro-Kurdish Ozgur Gundem alone were killed by unknown assailants between July 1992 and July 1993.

A Turkish Spring

By 2011, however, the climate in Turkey had shifted dramatically. A right-wing conservative party led by Turkey's current President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had already been in power for nine years. The Justice and Development Party vowed to shut the generals out of politics and carry Turkey into the European Union. For a while, it seemed like Erdogan was sincere. A blizzard of ground-breaking reforms shamed the EU into opening full membership talks with Ankara in 2005. Previously taboo subjects like the mass slaughter of Armenians, bans on the Islamic-style headscarf and LGBT rights began to be openly debated. Aslan collaborated with a group of filmmakers to produce a documentary on Butchers' Creek.

"I was able to return to Turkey after 11 years and we were allowed to screen the film in Diyarbakir. It was quite extraordinary," Aslan said.

In 2008, Erdogan authorized the national intelligence agency MIT to initiate direct talks with the PKK. The goal, or so it appeared, was to end the decades-long conflict that had cost more than 35,000 lives, bleeding the country of billions of dollars and wrecking its global image. The first round, held secretly in Oslo, collapsed after being leaked, allegedly by saboteurs in the security establishment who opposed the talks.

A second round, conducted with the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan launched in 2012, seemed distinctly more promising. In a letter read out before hundreds of thousands of Kurds gathered in Diyarbakir on March 21, 2013, to mark the Kurdish new year, Ocalan called on his fighters to withdraw from Turkey and to end the war.

"A door is opening to a process of democratic politics from a period of armed resistance," he declared. "It is not the end of our struggle; it is the start of a new sort of struggle."

Emboldened by the mutually observed cease-fire, Kurds across the southeast began hunting for the remains of loved ones who had died fighting in the ranks of the PKK. Some dug up the bones of Kurds killed by the thousands during a 1938 revolt in Tunceli, then known as Dersim. New cemeteries to house the remains began dotting far flung corners of the southeast.

The authorities mostly looked the other way, intervening only occasionally when statues of prominent guerrillas or other symbols glorifying the PKK were erected.

Kurdish anthropologist Derya Aydin has written extensively about the social impact of the cemeteries. "Kurds from across the country began flocking to these memorials. It became a sort of pilgrimage. For the first time, Kurds were allowed to bury their dead with dignity and mourn them in peace," Aydin told Al-Monitor in a telephone interview.

In many cases, the burials took place without DNA testing to establish who the bones belonged to. "For many it was a largely symbolic affair, a form of collective closure," Aydin noted. She reckons at least 13 cemeteries were built — one on the edge of a dense forest in her native Bitlis, where she conducted much of her research.

Starting in 2014, fresh bodies began to arrive from neighboring Syria, where the Islamic State had declared war on the Kurds. In September that year, the jihadis laid siege to the town of Kobani, a bastion of Kurdish nationalism on the Turkish border.

Hundreds of Turkish Kurds, some volunteers, others from the PKK, joined the fight against the jihadis. Many had been galvanized by Erdogan's perceived *schadenfreude* when he declared, "Kobani has fallen, it will fall." Deadly riots erupted in Diyarbakir as thousands took to the streets in protest.

Aksoy's youngest child, Shinda, decided she wasn't going to take it.

"She was only 16. She couldn't bear the injustice. I couldn't stop her. She took up and left." Aksoy last saw her daughter on Sterk TV, a pro-PKK channel that is formally banned in Turkey but captured by satellite dishes jutting from rooftops and balconies across the southeast. Shinda was being sworn in along with other fresh recruits and had been assigned the code name "Nuda." Aksoy believes her daughter is still alive.

The battle for Kobani was bloody and protracted and won by the Kurds. Veteran Kurdish politician Lezgin Bingol lost his daughter there in October 2014. Dilan had dropped out of high school in Istanbul and joined the PKK in 2009, a year before Agit. Both were 15 when they took up the fight.

"In 2012 we heard that Dilan had crossed over to Syria. She rang us 10 days before her death. She said she was in Kobani," Bingol told Al-Monitor. It was the first time the Bingols had heard from her since she had "vanished without a word." "Dilan had told her comrades that she wanted to be buried in the cemetery in Bitlis if she died. We fulfilled her last wishes."

Bingol secured her death certificate and held her funeral unhindered. A small mosque had been erected next to the cemetery that was locally known as Garzan. Dilan's body was cleansed according to Islamic rites. An imam led the prayers. She was laid to rest under a gray marble headstone.

Bingol and his family were frequent visitors at the cemetery near the village of Yukari Olek, lying 15 kilometers (nine miles) south of Bitlis. "We found these moments deeply comforting. Our pain was eased," he reminisced.

Their solace was short-lived. The peace process began to unravel.

The PKK had spurned Turkey's demands that it join Syrian Sunni opposition rebels fighting to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Erdogan was losing support from Turkish nationalists. Their backing was critical for his plans to boost his presidential powers in a 2017 referendum. He feigned

ignorance of a deal struck after months of shuttle diplomacy between MIT, Ocalan, HDP lawmakers and PKK commanders in Iraqi Kurdistan that was unveiled amid much exuberance at the Dolmabahce Palace in February 2015.

By the summer of 2015, the cease-fire was in tatters and the PKK recklessly carried its battle to towns and cities in the southeast, plunging the region into a fresh cycle of violence and triggering a brutal state response.

No rest for the dead

Security forces began vandalizing the cemeteries, destroying headstones and mosques. At least one of the cemeteries, which the government said was being used as a PKK camp, was destroyed in an airstrike.

Erdogan said the graveyards doubled as training grounds and arms caches for the PKK. "We are destroying them," he bragged. Garzan was among those targeted.

In June 2015, a criminal court in Bitlis slapped Bingol and his wife Netice with charges of "irregular burial" of their daughter, a case that is still pending. But the worst was yet to come.

In July 2016, a group of officers accused of links to the Pennsylvania-based Sunni preacher Fethullah Gulen mounted a coup attempt against Erdogan. The government declared a state of emergency and used its powers to summarily purge and arrest tens of thousands of civil servants, police officers and politicians, many on a panoply of often flimsily evidenced terror charges. Bingol, who was working for the Bitlis municipality, was among them.

He was freed in March 2017, pending trial on charges of membership of a terrorist organization. The first thing Bingol wanted to do was to visit his daughter's grave. But it was unclear whether access to the area, like so many others, had been frozen under emergency rule. Nobody dared to ask.

In December 2017, Bingol wrote to the local governor requesting clarification.

The response he got was heart stopping. The remains in all 268 graves in Garzan had been unearthed that same month in keeping with a court order and transferred to the government's central forensic medicine institute in Istanbul, where Agit's bones had been tested.

A dumbstruck Bingol decided to see for him-

self. "I could not believe what I saw," he said. "The entire cemetery had been leveled. The mosque, the graves, everything. They had come in with earth movers and bulldozers. What kind of human does this without even informing us? I felt shame on their behalf," Bingol recalled. Satellite images of the cemetery corroborate his description.

In a January 2018 press release, the Bitlis governor's office justified the move on the grounds that the "so-called cemetery ... adorned with illicit symbols" had been built on usurped pasture land. The bones, removed in the presence of an imam, would be returned to families whose DNA matched them once testing was complete.

Armed with documents proving that Dilan's burial had been formally sanctioned, Bingol headed for the local prosecutor's office. In mid-January, the state admitted it had made a mistake and returned her remains to him in a bag. "He's a well-known and respected personality in the area so they probably did so hoping that the affair would die down," speculated Serzan Cakmak, a lawyer who has filed a criminal case against the state on behalf of the Garzan families.

A further shock ensued with news that a large number of the remains had been transferred from Istanbul in plastic boxes and buried in a pauper's grave in the Black Sea town of Kilyos, north of Istanbul.

Cakmak says such actions violate Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights pertaining to the right to respect for private and family life. The chief prosecutor in Bitlis, however, dismissed the charges. Cakmak has since lodged an appeal with the Bitlis magistrate's court and says he will take the case all the way to the European Court of Human Rights if need be.

In a telephone interview with AI-Monitor, Cakmak said that 29 families had provided DNA samples to the authorities to help identify their loved ones. Of them, 25 families have retrieved their remains so far. Around 12 sets of body parts were brought back from the graveyard in Kilyos, Cakmak said. Among them was Bingol's nephew, Faysal, who had also died fighting for the PKK. Families "had to wait for months before they got their kids back," Cakmak said. Most were too afraid to make a claim, he added.

Such delays are often deliberate, according to the Istanbul-based Anatolian Association of Solidarity and Assistance for the Families of Missing Persons. The group's co-chair, Seyhmus Isik, told AI-Monitor, "it's a form of psychological pressure that's applied to slain PKK fighters' families." Since the failed



Halise Aksoy sits with a box containing the remains of her son, Agit, Elmabahce, Mardin, Turkey, April 10, 2020. Photo by Mesopotamia News Agency.

coup, he says, the authorities typically try to prevent imams from performing their last rites. Ordinary citizens and even relatives are not allowed to attend their burials. Armoured vehicles stand in the way, Ozsoy the lawmaker said.

Coming full circle

The targeting of the cemeteries continues. Last week, security forces in the southeastern township of Ercis smashed the headstones of two PKK fighters in full view of their families, telling them to "never again" inscribe code names on headstones or decorate them with PKK symbols, the online KrdNews news site reported.

"There isn't the slightest pity felt for a mother who has lost her child. There is no respect for the dead," observed Osman Baydemir, a former mayor of Diyarbakir who is living in exile in Europe. "I know of many instances when authorities told the families of PKK fighters to repay the government for the bullets used to kill them," he told AI-Monitor in a Skype interview.

Baydemir is among scores of HDP officials who are being prosecuted for taking part in PKK funerals and assisting in their burials even though there are no laws proscribing such acts. "There are so many such charges filed against me I have lost count," said Baydemir.

"I know of many instances when authorities told the families of PKK fighters to repay the government for the bullets used to kill them."

"One of the charges jailed mayors have faced is that they have either attended funerals of PKK members or they have failed

to prevent the appearance of PKK-related symbols, flags and slogans at the funerals of PKK members," said Human Rights Watch Turkey director Emma Sinclair-Webb in emailed comments to AI-Monitor.

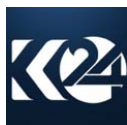
"Such charges are usually a means of padding weak indictments and accusing the mayors of 'spreading terrorist propaganda,' an offense that is often applied in an overly broad manner to link the mayors to terrorism without evidence they have actually incited violence. The European Court has ruled that such charges can be a violation of freedom of expression," Sinclair-Webb added.

The demonization of the HDP has been carried to such extremes that when a jailed former HDP lawmaker, Aysel Tugluk, was allowed to take part in her mother's funeral in Ankara, she was mobbed by a crowd chanting racist slogans. Some bore clubs and pelted mourners with stones.

"Terrorists and Armenians cannot be buried here," they shouted. Tugluk's mother was exhumed and reburied in her native Tunceli.

Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin condemned the incident and the Interior Ministry launched a criminal probe. Three of the perpetrators were arrested.

Bingol reburied his daughter in a cemetery in the city of Tatvan in Bitlis province on the western shores of Lake Van. "Why did the state treat my child like a criminal? She died fighting the Islamic State," he lamented. "I haven't placed a headstone on her new grave yet. I fear they will destroy it again."



28 avril 2020

Kurdistan President calls for UN mediation to resolve Baghdad-Erbil budget dispute

Kurdistan Regional President Nechirvan Barzani during a meeting with UN Special Envoy Jeanine Hennis- Plasschaert, April 28, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan Region Presidency)

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani called on the United Nation's envoy to Iraq to mediate between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal Iraqi government to resolve renewed budget disputes.

President Barzani's call came during a meeting he had with United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq Jeanine Hennis- Plasschaert. He described Baghdad's recent decision to suspend sending KRG its share of the national budget as "unconstitutional" and "unlawful."

"The KRG budget and salaries must not be politicized," read a statement from the Kurdistan Region's Presidency office. It added that Barzani had asked the UN Special Representative "to mediate in resolving the ongoing dispute."

On Monday, Plasschaert held a meeting with Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, during which the premier stated the federal government's move was "political pressure against the people of the Kurdistan Region," an



Kurdistan Regional President Nechirvan Barzani during a meeting with UN Special Envoy Jeanine Hennis- Plasschaert, April 28, 2020. (Photo: Kurdistan Region Presidency)

English statement on the KRG website read.

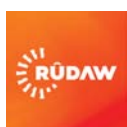
Baghdad "should not use Erbil's budget share as a bargaining ploy," the prime minister affirmed.

These developments come amid ongoing efforts by Iraqi Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi to form a cabinet that would be accepted by the country's political elite, most notable among them leading Shia parties.

Both the Kurdistan Region president and prime

minister reiterated their support for Kadhimi during their meetings with the UN envoy. President Barzani also "appreciated" the UN's role in "alleviating tensions" in Iraq as government formation negotiations continue.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Iraq, Dr. Adham Ismail, also attended the meeting alongside the UN envoy, commending KRG's successful response to COVID-19 and praising the ongoing preventive measures imposed in the region.



28 avril 2020

Sarkawt Mohammed

Syrian refugee mother struggles to provide for family in Erbil

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Kurdish refugees from Syria continue to struggle to live a dignified life in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Zeinab, a mother of three, fled war-torn Syria with her husband in 2013.

Widowed and unemployed, her family lives in extreme poverty in Erbil's Zhiyan neighbourhood.

"Now that my kids have grown up, they are asking me for clothes," said the mother.

"They look at our neighbours' children and

they ask for bicycles and cakes, so I don't buy household items. I want my children to live well. They are always inside and don't go out," she added.

Without an income, Zeinab decided to sell tissues on the street to support her family, but was arrested by local Asayish (security) forces, and imprisoned for 15 days.

"I told the judge that I don't have any other solution. What should I do? He told me it's not allowed. I told him I know it's banned. I am forced to sell tissues," said Zeinab, whose situation has worsened since the coronavirus pandemic put her son out of work.

The mother now says she has fallen ill from the stress of her situation, and has no money to see a doctor.

The family is not benefitting from any governmental aid, which Mam Wali, the Mukhtar of Zhiyan, says is because they are Kurds from Afrin.

"This family is Kurdish and from Rojava [Syria]. That's why none of the governmental aid is given to them. They came here yesterday but said they won't receive any aid, it's only for other poor people," said the Mukhtar.



Apr 29 2020

Turkey must end harassment of Kurdish journalist, PEN says Turkey

Turkey must end its ongoing harassment of the Kurdish journalist Nurcan Baysal, the writers' association English PEN said.

Baysal, a columnist for Ahval and a former writer-in-residence with English PEN, has been accused of "inciting hatred and enmity among the public" by the Turkish authorities after two separate investigations were launched against her within three weeks.

"We urge the Turkish authorities to put an end to the ongoing harassment of Nurcan Baysal and to ensure that she and other writers and human rights defenders are able to express themselves freely without the constant threat of investigations and imprisonment," the statement by English PEN said.

On March 30, Baysal was summoned to the police station in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır regarding comments she had made criticising the Turkish government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Kurdish-majority cities.

On April 20, Baysal was again summoned to the police station in Diyarbakır, which she attended with a lawyer. She was told that a new investigation had been opened regarding two messages she had posted on Twitter.

The first message, tweeted in February 2018 and pinned to her Twitter profile, reads: "We started rebuilding our demolished house in Sur. Come on, shake off pessimism and despair! Send a card to the ones in prison, show solidarity with their families left behind, Sur, Cizre, Şirnak ... be with the ones whose houses are



destroyed. Look at the sky, the stars are still there."

The second tweet, from October 2019 was in response to a post regarding the Turkish military offensive in Syria.

PEN said that, in addition to this judicial harassment, Baysal and her family had also been subject to other forms of intimidation. In October 2019, while Baysal was in Britain for her residency with English PEN, armed police raided her home in the early hours of the morning, leaving her two sons terrified. Baysal was also detained in 2018 and 2019.

"I am from (Diyarbakır), I'm writing about the human rights violations from here. I think this is the problem," Baysal said in a podcast with Ahval. "And because I speak loudly. They want me to shut up."

Baysal's article on the coronavirus pandemic in her hometown Diyarbakır, the biggest predominantly Kurdish province in Turkey, included testimony from a prisoner's wife, in which she said the overcrowded prisons lacked basic sanitation measures such as soap or hot water.

Baysal, the author of four books, worked for many years on poverty, development and migration in Kurdish areas for the United Nations Development Programme, and she is active in a number of peace initiatives. She is a member of English PEN and PEN Turkey, and is an advisor to a number of non-profit organisations.

In 2017, Baysal was awarded the "Brave Women Journalists Award" presented by the Italian Women Journalists Association and in 2018, she was named Global Laureate for Human Rights Defenders at Risk by the organisation Front Line Defenders.



April 29 2020

U.S. condemns deadly Syria truck bomb as Turkey blames Kurds

The United States condemned a truck bomb that killed at least 40 people in northern Syria's Kurdish-majority province of Afrin on Tuesday.

"The United States condemns the act of terror carried out today in Afrin, Syria, claiming the lives of dozens of people shopping in the central market as they prepared to break the

Ramadan fast," the State Department said in a statement.

"Initial reports indicate many victims were civilians, including children," the statement said.

At least 47 others were wounded in the attack in the centre of Afrin, which was carried

out using a bomb-rigged fuel tanker, the Turkish Defence Ministry said.

The Turkish government blamed the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Syrian Kurdish militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey says is a terrorist group linked to the PKK.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on

Twitter called for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire in Syria after "today's cowardly act of terror carried out on innocent victims in #Afrin".

"Such acts of evil are unacceptable from any side in this conflict," he added.

Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu also condemned the attack on Tuesday and blamed the two Kurdish militias.

"The treacherous (PKK/YPG) terrorist organisation will not get away with the attack carried out in Afrin on Mubarak Ramadan," Soylu said on Twitter.

Turkish troops and their Syrian Islamist



allies took control of Afrin on March 17, 2018, after a two-month offensive against the YPG.

Turkish-controlled areas in northern Syria have been a frequent target of bomb attacks that have claimed the lives of several Turkish-backed militia and civilians.

Kurdistan au féminin

29 avril 2020

ROJAVA. Attentats en série à Afrin, les renseignements turcs pointés du doigt



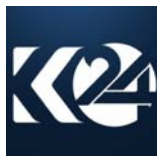
SYRIE / ROJAVA – Le mardi 28 avril, une série d'attentats a fait plus de 40 morts dans la ville kurde d'Afrin, occupée par la Turquie et ses mercenaires islamistes depuis 2018.

La série d'attentats, qui visaient les colons installés dans le canton kurde d'Afrin, serait l'oeuvre des services secrets turcs (MIT), selon des responsables russes et les Kurdes. En effet, ces derniers temps, il y a eu trop de frictions entre la Turquie et ses gangs islamistes dans les zones du Rojava et de la Syrie occupées par la Turquie. Notamment au sujet de Libye et d'Idlib. La Turquie demande aux mercenaires de partir en masse en Libye pour combattre le général Haftar et de ris-

quer la mort. La plupart des gangs le refusent évidemment. Ils préfèrent vivre « tranquillement » en pillant les biens des populations qu'ils ont chassées et/ou massacrées avec la bénédiction des institutions internationales depuis le début de l'invasion turque en Syrie et au Rojava.

Quand au front Idlib, le fait que la Turquie les ait abandonnés suite aux accords avec le dirigeant russe Poutine n'arrange pas les choses entre gangs islamistes et leurs maîtres turcs.

Sinon, voir certains Kurdes se réjouir de la mort des colons sanguinaires installés dans leurs maisons peut vous choquer à juste titre et qu'on aimerait demander aux Kurdes de prendre du recul et de ne pas réagir de la sorte. Mais ne perdons pas de vue tout ce qu'ils endurent des mains de bouchers turco-jihadistes : crimes de guerre, crimes contre l'humanité, pillages, meurtres, torture, viols, féminicides, kidnappings ...



Hisham Arafat
April 29-2020

First two COVID-19 cases confirmed in northeast Syria: Kurdish Administration

QAMISHLO (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdish-led self-administration in northeast Syria has confirmed the first two coronavirus cases in the region after nearly one month and half of the lockdown, officials said on Wednesday.

“A man and his wife tested positive for COVID-19, which are the first two cases registered in northeast Syria,” Dr. Jiwan Mustafa, head of the Health Authority in northeast Syria, told Kurdistan 24.

Mustafa said the woman is being kept at the national hospital in Qamishlo city while the man is in a quarantine center in Hasakah.

There is no further information available about the cases, including how the patients were infected as they are currently in quarantine and no one has talked to them yet.

Two weeks ago, the Kurdish administration accused and criticized the World Health Organization (WHO) of concealing news of a coronavirus case, although the case was unconfirmed.

The Kurdish administration also criticized the Syrian regime authorities which control Qamishlo International Airport for allowing several people to pass into administration territory without being tested for COVID-19.

Kurdish officials also said Damascus bears responsibility for exposing hundreds of thousands of vulnerable civilians to outbreaks of the deadly disease.

The Crisis Coordination Cell, formed by the local administration to fight the coronavirus, also criticized Damascus for not coordinating flights with them



Medical and security teams from the Kurdish self-administration check passengers near the Qamishli airport checkpoint coming from Damascus to the self-administration areas and take them to quarantine centers to be tested for coronavirus, Qamishli, Syria, April 5, 2020. (Photo: Rojava Information Center)

coming from Damascus to the city of Qamishlo.

The Kurdish-led authorities in Syria have taken several measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in their region where the health system has been debilitated by almost a decade of civil war.

On March 23, a full curfew was imposed in the region to prevent the spread of the virus. The lockdown was then extended until the end of April.

There had been a testing laboratory in northeast Syria. However, it was lost in October 2019 when Turkey invaded the Kurdish-majority city of Serekaniye. Turkish shelling of the hospital in the city left the laboratory inoperable, as a report by the Rojava Information Center explained on April 5.

Thus, the Kurdish administration was

obliged to send coronavirus tests to Damascus, but authorities there refused to receive them.

The Syrian government is widely seen as doing a poor job in dealing with the virus. The Ministry of Health in Damascus has reported only 43 infections so far, with three deaths. Given the far greater numbers that other countries are reporting, including in the Middle East, the Syrian figures appear incredible.

Syfrom the Kurdistan Region two weeks ago to help Syria's Kurdish-led authorities test for coronavirus infections.

Additionally, the US-led Coalition against the so-called Islamic State has provided \$1.2 million in medical supplies and equipment to help protect staff at hospitals in Hasakah and Shaddadi, as well as to combat the virus more broadly.



29 avril 2020

Humanitarian group supports more than 37,000 families in Kurdistan affected by COVID-19

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) announced on Wednesday that it has so far assisted nearly 40,000 low-income families throughout the Kurdistan Region that have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis and the regionwide curfew.

"The Humanitarian aid has been delivered to more than 37,000 families, since the establishment of the hotline," said BCF leader Musa Ahmed head in a press conference, referring to a special number that the group set up for families in need to call.

"We have so far received more than 45,000 calls and the aid will continue." Ahmed added, pointing out that "humanitarian assistance reached every corner of the Kurdistan Region including districts, sub-districts, and in some areas the villages as well."

The organization announced in mid-March that it would provide food baskets to low-income families amid the curfews imposed across cities in the Kurdistan Region.

The campaign started as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) decided to im

pose a regionwide curfew as a precautionary measure against the coronavirus. The federal government in Baghdad and other provincial



Workers for the Barzani Charity Foundation deliver food parcels to residents of the town of Khalifa who are facing economic hardship as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. (Photo: BCF)

governments around Iraq have also imposed their own curfews.

"We do not differentiate between anyone, whether they are residents of the region, internally displaced persons, or a refugee in the region," Ahmed added.

He explained, "This assistance is provided with the support of international charity institutions... as well as donations from people in the Kurdistan Region."

The BCF is one of the most active humanit

arian NGOs in Kurdistan that often provides a substantial amount of aid to internally displaced persons and refugees in the Kurdistan Region, other parts of Iraq, and northern Syria, as well as multiple programs to enrich the lives of displaced children.

The organization was founded in 2005 and, in its own words, "strives to honor the great legacy of Malla Mustafa Barzani, the leader

of the Kurdish Liberation Movement and influencer of the contemporary Kurdish nation."



April 29, 2020

US condemns terrorist attack in Syria's Afrin amid Turkish-Kurdish accusations

QAMISHLI, Syria (Kurdistan 24) – Late on Tuesday, the United States condemned a truck bombing earlier that day that killed at least 40 and wounded dozens more at a crowded market in the northern Syrian city of Afrin as Turkey and a local Syrian Kurdish administration exchanged accusations over responsibility for the deadly incident.

State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortogus said in a statement that US strongly denounced the act of terror against civilians who were shopping as they prepared to break the Ramadan fast.

Such cowardly acts of evil are unacceptable from any side in this conflict," she said, adding, "The U.S. renews its call for support and implementation of a

nationwide ceasefire in Syria, as called for by UN Special Representative Geir Pedersen."

The initial appeal issued in late March by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, later championed by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and various international leaders, urged warring parties across the world to "lay down their weapons to support the bigger battle against COVID-19."

So far, there has been no claim of responsibility from any side of the conflict, but the first immediate response was by Turkish state-run TRT and Anadolu news agencies which accused the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) of carrying out the explosion.

Afrin has been controlled by a Turkish-backed Syrian militia, often known as the Syrian National Army (SNA), since March 2018 when the Turkish army launched its cross-border offensive on the Afrin region to target the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) which had been prominent in the area since 2012.

Ankara considers the YPG a terrorist organization and an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group that has waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey for expanded Kurdish rights.

The Kurdish self-administration in northeast Syria, spearhead by the YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), also condemned the attack and rejected the Turkish accusations "We in the Syrian Democratic Council condemn and denounce this cowardly terrorist act that targeted innocent civilians and threatens the remaining ones to move and leave their villages and cities," the SDC, the political wing of the SDF, said in a public statement.

Elsewhere, the SDF's Commander-in-Chief, General Mazloum Abdi, condemned the "terrorist act" that led to the loss of innocent lives in a post on Twitter.

The SDF chief suggested the criminal act was a product of the policy of "destruction pursued by the Turkish occupation and its mercenaries."

Abdulkarim Omar, the foreign relations chief of the Kurdish-led administration that runs the northeastern quarter of Syria, suggested the bombing aimed to "displace the rest of its indigenous population."

"The international community must condemn this act of terrorism, and pressure [the] Turkish state to withdraw from Afrin



A blaze caused by an oil tanker bombing rages at the entrance of a crowded market in the northern Syrian city of Afrin, April 28, 2020. (Photo: Social Media)

and all the occupied areas [in Syria]," Omar wrote on Twitter.

Additionally, activists in Afrin blamed Turkey and its allied Syrian opposition militias to be responsible for the attack.

There were no explosions in Afrin before the Turkish invasion in 2018 but after Afrin region was occupied by Turkey, there are explosions almost every two weeks," an activist living in Afrin told Kurdistan 24 on condition of anonymity.

Another activist in Afrin added that explosions are planned by the Turkish-backed groups with the aim of spreading confusion and panic among the indigenous Kurdish residents of Afrin as part of a greater anti-Kurdish program of ethnic cleansing.

Hours before the explosion on Tuesday, the official US commission charged with monitoring international religious freedoms has called on the US government to pressure Turkey to leave Syria due to its human rights violations against religious minorities in multiple areas, with Afrin mentioned prominently.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), in its annual report, called on Washington to "exert significant pressure on Turkey to provide a timeline for its withdrawal from Syria." The report also said that the US should ensure "that neither its military nor FSA allies expand their area of control in northeast Syria, carry out

religious and ethnic cleansing of that area, or otherwise abuse the rights of vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities there."

In February 2019, the United Nations' Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria released a report charging that armed groups in Afrin were guilty of war crimes including "hostage-taking, cruel treatment, torture, and pillage." It stated that "the most common violations perpetrated in Afrin involved frequent abductions by armed groups and criminal gangs."

As recently as early March of this year, the commission again released evidence that it had found reasonable grounds to believe that the militias "perpetrated the war crime of murder and repeatedly committed the war crime of pillaging, further seriously contravening the right to enjoyment of possessions and property."

So far in April, there have been three car bomb attacks in Afrin, including the one that occurred on Tuesday.

On April 19, six civilians were injured in an explosion that occurred near a recently-established bridge in the center of Afrin city that was caused by another vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBEID) that was attached to a Suzuki car.

Another oil tanker explosion on April 8 injured three civilians in Afrin's Ashrafiyah neighborhood.

Öcalan appelle le PKK, l'UPK et le PDK à l'unité nationale kurde

Lors d'une conversation téléphonique, lundi, avec son frère Mehmet Öcalan, Abdullah Öcalan a livré son appréciation concernant la situation actuelle au Moyen-Orient et la crise au Sud-Kurdistan (Irak), soulignant la nécessité de l'unité kurde.

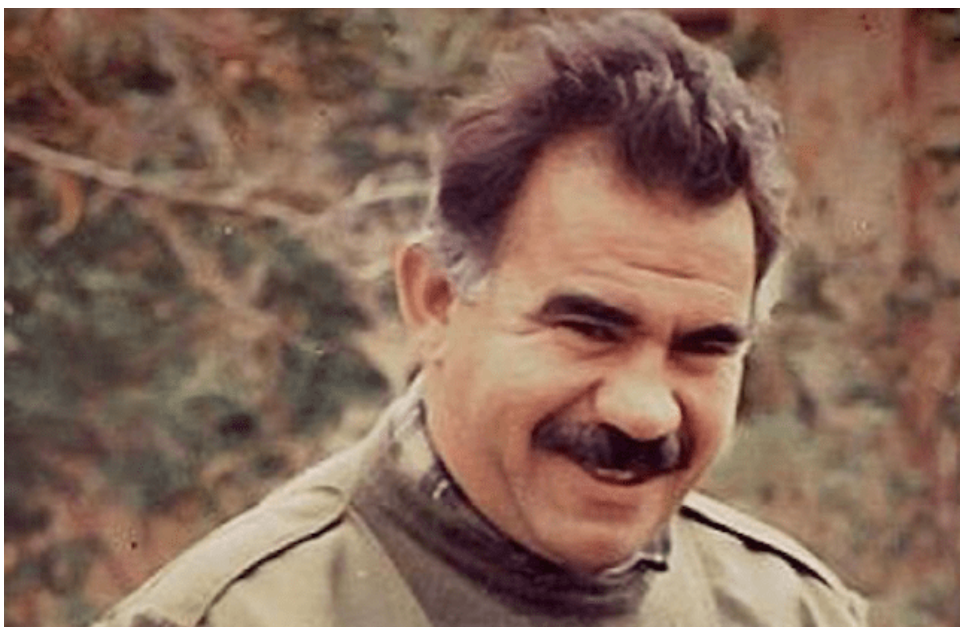
Depuis qu'il est détenu sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, à savoir 21 ans, le leader kurde Abdullah Öcalan a pu parler pour la première fois au téléphone avec un membre de sa famille. Ses codétenus Ömer Hayri Konar, Hamili Yıldırım et Veysi Aktaş, qui, à l'instar d'Öcalan, sont soumis à l'isolement carcéral, ont également pu contacter leurs familles par téléphone le même jour. La conversation d'Abdullah Öcalan avec son frère a duré environ 25 minutes.

Mehmet Öcalan a confié à l'agence de presse Mezopotamya (MA) le contenu de la conversation avec le leader du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) : "Nous avons été convoqués au bureau du procureur général d'Urfa pour passer l'appel téléphonique. J'ai été le seul à pouvoir entrer dans la pièce où devait avoir lieu la conversation téléphonique. J'ai parlé 20 à 25 minutes à partir du téléphone fixe du bureau du procureur général."

"En bonne santé pour le moment"

Indiquant que son frère avait préalablement précisé qu'il s'en tiendrait aux sujets « les plus nécessaires, Mehmet Öcalan a résumé l'entretien téléphonique comme suit :

"Je lui ai dit que les gens étaient inquiets de la pandémie et de la situation à Imrali. Le président a dit qu'il était en bonne santé pour le moment. Il a déclaré, à propos des développements dans le Sud [Sud-Kurdistan, Irak], qu'il y avait des tentatives pour monter les Kurdes les uns contre les autres, mais que les Kurdes ne peuvent rien tirer d'un tel conflit. Il a ajouté que cette politique ne serait pas non plus à l'avantage de la Turquie et que, d'autre part, ni le PDK (Parti démocratique du Kurdistan), ni l'UPK (Union patriotique du Kurdistan), ni aucun autre parti kurde ne devaient s'attendre à ce qu'on leur accorde leur propre État en échange d'un soutien dans ce conflit. Il a dit que ce n'était ni acceptable, ni réaliste, et demandé que tous agissent sur la base de l'unité kurde. »



"Les Kurdes n'ont pas besoin de guerre, ils ont besoin d'unité"

Abdullah Öcalan a souligné que les Kurdes avaient besoin d'unité depuis 40 ans, a rapporté Mehmet Öcalan qui a poursuivi ainsi : "Il a dit que les personnes vivant dans cette région [Sud-Kurdistan] étaient des Kurdes et qu'une effusion de sang serait une défaite pour tous, autant pour Qandil [région du Sud-Kurdistan contrôlée par le PKK] que pour le Gouvernement régional kurde. Il a souligné que son message s'adressait aux familles Barzani et Talabani ainsi qu'au peuple du Sud-Kurdistan. Il a déclaré : « Les Kurdes n'ont pas besoin de guerre et d'effusion de sang, mais de paix et d'unité ». Il a précisé que c'était là son message le plus important".

L'accord de 1982 pourrait être mis à jour

"Il a parlé de l'accord en dix points de 1982, conclu avec Idris Barzani, le père de Nechirvan Barzani, dont l'UPK était au courant, en soulignant que cet accord pourrait être mis à jour. Il a salué Nechirvan Barzani, Masrour Barzani et les enfants de Jalal Talabani et déclaré qu'ils devaient savoir que si les Kurdes ne sont pas unis, personne ne ferait rien pour eux, qu'ils ne devaient faire confiance à personne. Il a mis en garde

contre les effusions de sang entre les Kurdes qu'il a qualifiées d'inacceptables, autant pour le mouvement kurde que pour

le peuple. Il a souligné que s'il y avait un problème, il devait être résolu par le dialogue, sans compromettre la paix, et que cela dépendait des familles Barzani et Talabani, ainsi que des amis de Qandil. Il a insisté sur l'urgence de l'unité kurde, en précisant que le chemin vers l'unité passait par les quatre parties du Kurdistan."

"La structuration dans les quatre parties [du Kurdistan] doit être renforcée"

Mehmet Öcalan a par ailleurs rapporté des commentaires du leader kurde sur la situation au Rojava : "Il a dit avoir entendu que l

la situation au Rojava n'était ni bonne, ni mauvaise. Le président a expliqué que les institutions et les partis démocratiques du Rojava avaient stagné dans le développement des structures démocratiques. Il a souligné qu'aucune solution ne pourrait être trouvée de cette manière, en l'absence d'une force d'union. Il a dit qu'il fallait pour cela d'avantage de structuration, ce qui permettrait d'aller vers la création d'une force commune, que cela était d'ailleurs valable pour les quatre parties du Kurdistan. Le Président a ajouté qu'il était inacceptable de se satisfaire de petites structures et de vouloir les garder pour soi : Une petite structure n'est utile ni pour les Kurdes, ni pour les autres entités ; il faut que la structure soit grande et que tout le monde y soit représenté. Il a souligné que la structure ne devait appartenir ni à une ethnie, ni à une confession, chose que le mouvement

n'accepterait jamais. Il a conclu qu'il serait bon de garantir et renforcer l'unité démocratique".

"Personne ne doit m'utiliser pour ses propres intérêts"

Mehmet Öcalan a cité le leader kurde en disant : "Il y a beaucoup d'appréciations erronées à mon égard. Je sais quel genre de combat je mène ici. Si j'en ai la possibilité à l'avenir, je répondrai à ces commentaires. Que personne ne m'utilise pour ses propres intérêts. Le monde entier sait ce que je fais depuis 50 ans. Les amis qui sont à mes côtés et moi-même faisons tout ce qui est

possible de faire dans nos cellules. Je n'accepte pas les visions injustes à mon égard. Tout est clair. Il n'y a rien à cacher. Nous avons un gros problème à traiter et tout le monde doit travailler de manière adéquate. Nous sommes confrontés à une effusion de sang. Si nous devenons une force, nous pourrions empêcher le sang de couler. Tout le monde doit se battre pour cela et se concentrer sur cela. »

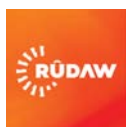
"Le HDP doit étendre son organisation"

Concernant le Parti démocratique des Peuples [HDP], Mehmet Öcalan a rapporté ces propos : « Le HDP doit se renforcer. Il

doit réaliser un travail important et s'inscrire dans une perspective large. Il doit étendre son organisation et devenir une force. S'il ne le fait pas, il sera détruit par la partie adverse".

"Salutations aux prisonniers"

Pour conclure, Mehmet Öcalan a déclaré ce qui suit : "Le Président a répété le message qu'il m'avait transmis lors de notre dernière rencontre à Imrali le 3 mars. Il a demandé que le contenu du message soit mis en œuvre. Enfin, le président a salué les amis emprisonnés, les familles des martyrs et le peuple."



29 avril 2020

Iran cyber police detain 3,600 people over COVID-19 'misinformation'

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Iranian security forces have detained 3,600 people over spreading misinformation about the novel coronavirus, the spokesperson for the Iranian armed forces said on Wednesday as the country battles the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a wide-ranging interview with state-owned Tasnim News Agency, Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi highlighted the efforts of the armed forces, including the police, in dealing with COVID-19 pandemic. "In relation to corona, FATA police is active one hundred per cent in the cyber space and in this regard as of now 3,600 individuals have been detained by NAJA and Basij," Shekarchi said referring to the Police for the Sphere of the Production and Exchange of Information (FATA) and the Disciplinary Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NAJA).

"1,136 judicial dossiers have been lodged," he added.

Government health officials have had an acrimonious relation with the armed forces, in particular with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC,) over the way they have taken matters into their own hands during the pandemic.

Defying guidance from the health ministry, the IRGC held a funeral for senior commander Hossein Assadollahi on March 24, attended by thousands of officers and their supporters.

"Given the expertise of the doctors, nurses



FARS Hossein Velayati

People pays respect to medical personnel of the Iranian navy at Tehran's Golestan hospital on April 19, 2020. Photo: Fars News

and the paramedics of the armed forces, the average recovery of the patients in the armed forces hospitals is more than [in] the other hospitals," Shekarchi said adding that out of 58 hospitals belonging run by the armed forces, 54 were admitting patients.

Iran has become the regional epicenter of the pandemic with 5,957 people dead and close to 100,000 people infected with the virus. Of this number, 54 soldiers have contracted the virus, but all have recovered. Four members of the armed forces' medical teams have died.

Tehran has been hesitant to impose the wide-ranging lockdowns seen in many

neighbouring countries, although measures have been introduced to curb the spread of the virus.

Businesses were allowed to reopen in April after non-essential enterprises were ordered closed following the end of the Nowruz holiday on April 4.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced plans earlier this week to gradually reopen the country through a colour-coding system.

Any region coded "white"- with no new infections or deaths will be allowed to reopen mosques and resume Friday prayers, according to the president.



29 avril 2020

Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria condemn 'cowardly' Afrin bombing



A handout picture released by the Syrian Civil Defense rescue workers, also known as White Helmets, shows the scene of the blast on April 28, 2020. Photo: AFP/Ho/Syrian Civil Defense

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria have condemned the “cowardly” Tuesday car bombing which killed at least 40 people in the northern city of Afrin.

A fuel tanker laced with explosives detonated in the city center on Tuesday evening, killing at least 40 people and injuring 47 others, according to Turkey’s state-owned Anadolu Agency (AA).

General Commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Mazloum Abdi took to Twitter on Wednesday to condemn the attack.

“What happened in Afrin yesterday was a condemned terrorist act which claimed the lives of innocent people. This criminal act is the outcome of destructive policy pursued by the Turkish occupation and its mercenaries in the city of peace and olives,” Abdi wrote.

A statement released by the Syrian Democratic Council, the SDF’s political wing, blamed Turkish-backed forces for the explosion.

“We condemn this cowardly terrorist act which targeted innocent civilians and threatens the remaining sons of Afrin to be displaced and leave their villages and cities,” read the statement.

“[The] Turkish invasion, relying on [military] fractions with terrorist ideology, has opened the door wide to terrorist forces to reorganize their ranks and carry out cowardly acts under Turkish protection,” it added.

Hours later, Abdulkarim Omar, co-chair of the Department of Foreign Relations for the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES) called on the international community to “pressure Turkey to leave Afrin and all other occupied areas.”

Afrin was invaded by the Turkish army and its Syrian proxies during Operation Olive Branch in March 2018 on the grounds that the YPG threatened Turkish national security.

Turkey regards the YPG as the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - a Kurdish armed group fighting for

Kurdish cultural and political rights in Turkey. PKK is seen as a terrorist organization by Ankara and its Western allies.

Turkish authorities, including the country’s defense ministry and vice president, accused the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), the backbone of the multi-ethnic Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of being behind the attack.

Several bombings have rocked Afrin since the Turkish invasion, which Ankara insists are the work of the YPG. However, SDF officials have said that they do not intend to target civilians.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also condemned the attack.

“The United States renews its call for support and implementation of a nationwide ceasefire in Syria following today’s cowardly act of terror carried out on innocent victims in Afrin. Such acts of evil are unacceptable from any side in this conflict,” he wrote on Twitter.

Kurdish Elders Killed by Turkish-Backed Militia Members – Syrian Democratic Times

Two Kurdish elders in Afrin have been horrifically murdered by Turkish militia members within two days of each other, in two separate incidents, casting new light on the brutality of the Turkish occupation of Afrin.

An elderly Kurdish woman was hanged to death in Afrin, likely by members of “the Samarkand Brigade,” a Turkish-backed militia controlling her village. After her hanging, a number of her family members and her neighbors were then kidnapped by “the Samarkand Brigade” and brought to Turkey.



Ali Ahmed, 74, died after being severely beaten by members of a Turkish-backed militia who were tending sheep on his land.

Upon returning home from the field on April 18, 2020, the children of the Kurdish elder Fatima Kanna, 80, found their dead mother hanging from an olive tree at their home in the village of Hekeche, in the Shieh/Sheikh Al-Hadid district of Afrin.

Kanna’s children found signs of suffocation, beating, and other wounds on Kanna’s body while washing her. This confirmed beyond a doubt that she was murdered. Kanna had visited her daughter’s house in the village earlier in the day.



Fatima Kanna, 80, was hanged by members of a Turkish-backed militia occupying her town. The militia has now kidnapped a number of her family members and neighbors.

After the news of the hanging broke out, “the Samarkand Brigade” then kidnapped Fatima’s sons Hanan and Muhammad, and Muhammad’s wife and his son Fawzi, as well as a number of neighbors and relatives. These detainees have been brought to Turkey, according to the Afrin Media Center. The Kurdish elder Ali Ahmed, 74, lost his life on April 22, 2020, after being severely beaten by members of a Turkish-backed militia who were tending sheep on his land in the town of Midanky, district of Sharan, in rural Afrin, according to the Afrin Media Center.

According to sources from the town, Ali had a verbal dispute with members of a Turkish-backed militia named “the Sultan Murad,” who were attempting to graze their sheep on

Ali’s land. Ali asked the militia members not to graze their sheep there, the sources say. The occupiers then replied (paraphrased), “We liberated this land with our blood and it will remain ours, and the Kurds should leave Afrin!” The militia members then undertook a severe beating of Ali with sticks.

Following the severe beating, an attempt was made to rush Ali to the Afrin Hospital, but sadly he lost his life during the journey.

The so-called “civilian police” did not interfere with the beating and did not pursue the aggressors, for fear of retaliation from “the Sultan Murad” militia and other Turkish-backed militias, who are directly involved with Turkish intelligence.

Kurdistan au féminin 30 avril 2020

TURQUIE. « La marginalisation des Kurdes est devenue une loi »

TURQUIE / BAKUR – « Aucune pandémie n'est aussi dangereuse que la résurgence des mafias nationalistes en Turquie », déclare le député HDP Musa Farisioğulları à propos de l'impact de la réforme des prisons adoptée par le parlement turc.

Alors que la pandémie du coronavirus fait des ravages en Turquie et au Kurdistan du Nord, plus de 300 000 prisonniers, dont 50 000 sont des prisonniers politiques englobant des journalistes, politiciens, artistes ou enfants kurdes, sont interdits de quitter la prison tandis qu'une loi votée récemment permet à 90 000 prisonniers du droit commun, mais aussi aux mafieux ou aux terroristes de DAECH, de quitter la prison.

Les prisonniers des prisons surpeuplées de Turquie sont sans défense contre le coronavirus. Selon le ministre de la justice Abdulhamit Gül, 120 cas d'infection ont été détectés dans quatre prisons. Selon le bureau du procureur, 55 infections ont été confirmées dans la seule prison de Konya. Les parents des prisonniers signalent des symptômes de COVID-19 dans des dizaines de prisons. Les prisonniers se plaignent que les soins de santé, déjà rudimentaires, se sont considérablement détériorés depuis le début de la pandémie. Dans ce contexte, le député HDP Musa Farisioğulları demande que des tests complets soient effectués dans les prisons. Lors d'une conférence de presse dans le bâtiment du DTK (Congrès de la société démocratique) à Amed (Diyarbakir), le politicien du HDP s'est exprimé sur la réforme de la loi sur le système pénal adoptée par le Parlement turc. En fait, la réforme devrait s'appeler « amnistie Çakıcı », a déclaré Farisioğulları : « Le projet de loi sur l'exécution des peines, qui a été soumis conjointement par le bloc AKP/MHP et que l'opposition appelle une « amnistie secrète », a été adopté injustement et accompagné d'une musique de marche plus pompeuse. Grâce à cette loi, le parrain de la mafia Alaattin Çakıcı – un ami fidèle du leader du MHP Bahçeli – et des milliers d'autres criminels ont été libérés.

En revanche, les prisonniers malades, les femmes, les journalistes et les prisonniers politiques continuent d'être détenus derrière



les barreaux. Selon les informations qui nous sont parvenues ces derniers jours, les mesures de protection nécessaires ne sont pas appliquées dans les prisons. Les prisonniers ne reçoivent pas de masques ni de désinfectants pour les mains. Certains ne sont pas emmenés à l'hôpital malgré les symptômes de coronavirus, mais on les laisse mourir. Des tests coronaires doivent être effectués dans toutes les prisons, en

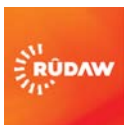
pouvoir, la politique gouvernementale vise à inciter les groupes sociaux à s'opposer les uns aux autres. Une solution à la question kurde a longtemps été mise de côté. Avec la loi d'application, l'État a une fois de plus mis à jour sa politique traditionnellement dirigée contre le peuple kurde. La colère, la vengeance et la rage se sont mêlées à la crainte du bloc AKP/MHP de perdre le pouvoir et ont conduit à une nouvelle poussée



particulier dans la prison de l'île d'Imrali. Les prisonniers âgés et malades doivent être libérés immédiatement, tout comme les femmes avec enfants.

La coalition gouvernementale AKP/MHP est responsable de tous les décès attendus dans les prisons. Par crainte de perdre le

de l'idéologie nationaliste. La marginalisation des Kurdes est redevenue une loi. Aucune pandémie n'est aussi dangereuse que la résurgence des mafias nationalistes en Turquie. Le rejet des méthodes de résolution démocratiques et l'adoption de lois sur la mafia entraîneront la société dans un chaos encore plus grand ».



30 avril 2020

Elderly Afrin Kurd ‘expelled’ from his home by Turkey-backed rebels: monitor

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Turkish-backed Syrian rebels have turfed an elderly Kurdish man out of his Afrin home and forced him to hand over his property to a Syrian family displaced by regime forces, a local rights group has claimed.

Hanan Ali Battal, a Kurdish resident of Chakali Wasani, was forced to leave his home on April 12 by a Turkish-backed militia group and relocated to his son’s house in Afrin city, the Afrin-based Human Rights Organization said in a report on Wednesday.

“Armed groups affiliated with the faction of Sultan Suleiman Shah al-Amshahat in the village of Chakali Wasani on 12/04/2020 expelled the elderly Hanan Ali Battal from his house,” the report states.

“Battal was forcibly relocated to Afrin city where his son Mahmoud is residing in order to seize his house and rent it to a settlement family and collect the rent for them [the militia],” it added.

The monitor also reported on Thursday that a 23-year-old Kurdish resident named Battal Mustafa Hassan from the Shih area of Afrin was executed earlier this month by former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), accused of working with the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) – the political wing of the People’s Protection Units (YPG).

“Almost seven months ago... Battal Mustafa Hassan, from the town of Shih, was detained on charges of communicating and reporting news of Turkey to the PYD organization,” the report states.

Turkish authorities allegedly detained Hassan in the southern Turkish province of Hatai and handed him over to HTS via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing.



Turkish-backed Syrian Arab fighters seize control of the northwestern Syrian city of Afrin, March 20, 2018. File photo: AFP

Hassan and his family had been displaced six years ago to Turkey’s Hatai province, where they owned a supermarket.

“About a month ago they [HTS] asked for a ransom of \$10,000 to be provided during a very short period of time. However, due to their [the family] inability to secure the amount, they [HTS] executed him by shooting him almost ten days ago,” the report added.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi has called for an international investigation into the alleged crimes perpetrated by Turkish-backed forces in Afrin since Ankara invaded two years ago.

“The Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazloum Abdi, called on Thursday for an international investigation regarding what he described as crimes committed in Afrin since the Turkish army and its factions took over two years ago,” North Press Agency (NPA), a local news outlet with

close ties to the SDF, reported on Thursday.

Abdi also claimed the devastating truck-bombing in Afrin city centre on Tuesday, which left 40 people dead and 47 wounded, was the result of Turkey’s occupation and the behavior of its Syrian proxies.

Thousands of indigenous Kurds were forced to flee Afrin when Turkish forces and their Syrian militia proxies launched Operation Olive Branch on January 20, 2018.

By the time Ankara had seized control of Afrin city from the People’s Protection Units (YPG) on March 24, tens of thousands of Kurds had fled, many of them to Kurdish-controlled areas in northeast Syria.

Families displaced by regime offensives to the south were resettled in their place.

Afrin is now home to 298,700 Kurds and

458,000 people displaced from elsewhere in Syria, while Afrin city is home to 53,300 Kurds and 110,000 people displaced from elsewhere in Syria, according to Afrin-based organizations.

According to UN estimates, upwards of 150,000 Kurds have been displaced from Afrin, most of them to Shahba camp in Tel Rifaat, north of Aleppo.

Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch with the stated aim of pushing the YPG back from its southern border.

Ankara believes the YPG is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group which has fought a decades-long war with the Turkish state for greater political and

cultural rights for Kurds. The YPG, which makes up the backbone of the US-backed SDF, denies any organic ties with the PKK.

Monitors regularly accuse Turkey's Syrian militia proxies of committing abuses against Afrin civilians, especially Kurds – both during and after the offensive.

Photographs quickly emerged in March 2018 of militiamen looting Kurdish homes and businesses and pulling down a statue of Kawa the Blacksmith – a core figure in Kurdish national culture.

Observers accused the militias of ethnic cleansing after homes were commandeered by fighters, residents intimi-

dated or kidnapped for ransom, and displaced families blocked from returning.

Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched another offensive against Kurdish forces in October 2019, this time in the northeast, after US troops withdrew from the Syria-Turkey border region.

UN observers accused these Turkish proxies of potential war crimes and allowing an Islamic State (ISIS) revival in areas liberated by the Kurdish-led SDF.

The Russian-backed Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad has demanded Turkey withdraw from Syrian territory and recently clashed with Turkish troops in the opposition holdout of Idlib.