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UK and EU Reached Trade Agreement

After difficult negotiations, the European Union and the UK signed a post-Brexit free trade agreement. Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of the UK, and Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, confirmed that the agreement had been signed only seven days before the UK's withdrawal from one of the biggest trade bloc in the world.

Johnson tweeted "the deal is done". At a Downing Street press conference, Boris Johnson said that UK have taken back control of its laws and destiny and that UK would have full political and economic independence.

The agreement allows both parties to impose tariffs in case one of them threatens the interests of the other. The Prime Minister of the UK stated that the signed agreement will offer new stability and certainty to the British companies. He confirmed that the UK will be EU's friend, ally, supporter and number one market. Von der Leyen said that It was a long and winding road to reach that agreement but It is fair and balanced.



Boris Johnson with the EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen earlier this year

Calls for Nationwide Lockdown in Britain

British scientists called for lockdown measures to be expanded. The government issued a new «stay home» order and closed all non-essential shops like restaurants, pubs and bars except for takeaways and deliveries. Now around 24 million people in England i.e. more than 40% of the population are under tough restrictions.

«The Guardian» stated that scientists confirmed that tougher measures must be taken at present. Scientists from the Independent SAGE have urged that all regions of England to be placed in tier 4, meaning that non-essential shops must close and restrictions should include travel restrictions.

It is worth noting that Britain announced in early December the discovery of a new Covid 19 variant. A growing number of countries reported cases of the new virus variant, three Arab countries are among them: Oman, Lebanon, Jordan.

Sanctions on Belarus «Putin's ally»

At the end of December, the United States announced the imposition of sanctions on officials and government and security institutions in Belarus.

The US Department of the Treasury revealed that it has placed the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and Chief of the criminal police,

Gennady Kazakevich, on the blacklist.

It held him responsible for the suppression of the demonstrations against President Alexander Lukashenko. The sanctions also included Belarus's election central committee, the Main Internal Affairs Directorate of the Minsk

City Executive Committee, the KGB Alpha group for countering terrorism, the Minsk Special Purpose Police Unit.

To date, the U.S. Department of State has imposed visa restrictions on a total of 63 individuals for their involvement in undermining democracy in Belarus.



Alexander Lukashenko

How is important to bring German Jihadist home?



Jassim Mohamad

German public broadcaster SWR said the group, reportedly comprising five women and eighteen children, including seven orphans, were handed over to a Foreign Office delegation by Kurdish envoys at Qamishli in northeastern Syria. A “humanitarian” recovery operation had brought home 18 children and five “Islamic State” (IS) brides from Kurdish-run internment camps in northeastern Syria. German Jihadist The German government knows of more than one thousand Islamists who have left Germany for Syria or Iraq to support terrorist organizations there. The figure comes from an answer given by the government to a question from the parliamentary representatives of the Left Party, according to newspapers of the Funke media group. The government also cited security authorities as saying that more than half of those who had left Germany

for such conflict zones had German passports. The German Interior Ministry estimates around one-third of these people(one thousand) have already returned to Germany, some of whom have been prosecuted or placed in rehabilitation programs.

There are around 270 of the German women and children are still in Iraq or Syria. Some 75 percent of the children are believed to be under the age of three and are assumed to have been born in a “jihad area,” the Interior Ministry said.

Germany’s secret service has reportedly joined a US-led unit targeting jihadis returning to Europe from Iraq and Syria. Officials have warned that many families of “Islamic State” fighters have already returned home

The Federal Prosecutor’s office, however, would like to take a tougher stance on these women, arguing they strengthen the terrorist militia from within as wives of IS militants and mothers who raise their kids in line with the groups ideology.

The BfV warned of children and adolescents who were socialized

and indoctrinated by radical terrorist groups and are returning to Germany from war zones. Some of them, were brainwashed in IS schools and are highly radicalized. IS propaganda promotes children as “a new generation of IS fighters, portrayed as ruthless and violent,” German Interior minister said, adding they might be dangerous upon their return and grow up as second-generation jihadists.

The interior ministry, BfV , report said that during coalition negotiations between Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), it was agreed that returning fighters with double citizenship should have their German nationality canceled if there is evidence of their having fought for a terrorist militia.

European governments are worried of repatriating their citizens who went to fight for an IS “caliphate” in Syria and Iraq, fearing the political repercussions of bringing back extremists following a series of jihadi-inspired attacks in France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

Syrian Kurdish authorities say they are unable to handle the burden of detained foreign IS fighters and the rehabilitation of non-combatant women and children.

US Joint Special Operations Command center in Jordan, Gallant Phoenix collects intelligence on fighters who fought for the likes of the so-called “Islamic State” (IS) and other Islamist militia groups. Relevant information includes documents, data, DNA traces and fingerprints that have been retrieved from former IS strongholds. Children were as much victims of the battle as the grown-ups, or perhaps even more so because they had no choice

The urgent return of foreign fighters and their families from the conflict zone and bringing them home is the best policy pursued by countries, to fight extremism and terrorism, and to rescue women, men and children who, because staying in Syria’s camps can be turned back into extremist organizations, and transferred again to new conflict and conflict areas.



Europe's Carrot does not Tempt Ankara ... and Brussels's Stick is Broken

At the beginning of last October, the Europeans postponed imposing sanctions on Ankara for its violations against Greek and Cypriot waters. On one hand they threaten Erdogan with the stick of sanctions and they tempt him with the carrot of benefits & privileges, on the other hand, hoping it would convince him to reverse his expansionist policies which aim at imposing a fait accompli on the European continent.

At the time, the Europeans decided to give Ankara a second chance, ignoring the Cypriot and Greek calls to implement the sanctions. The German position is effectively biased towards negotiations with Ankara, rather than clashing with it, in contrast with the French position which maintains that Turkey only understands the language of actions, as Macron previously said. The second summit, which the Europeans had promised to be decisive, is on the way. Yet, Ankara has only become more stubborn and difficult.

Efforts to Divide Cyprus

In Cyprus, the Turkish President announced, on November 17, that "a new era will start which will lead to the recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the region and the wider world". He was referring to his attempts to divide the island, despite the international powers' efforts to reunify it. This means giving the Republic of Northern Cyprus a share of the territorial waters, which is Turkey's end game, in conjunction with its struggle against both Cyprus and Greece.

Commenting on the development, Egyptian journalist and researcher "Rami Shafiq" said in a statement to "Levent News": "Recep Tayyip Erdogan -who is getting carried away with militarizing foreign policies towards the Middle East, especially in Libya, Syria and Azerbaijan- is putting pressure on Europe through illegal immigration and the clash with Greece and Cyprus over Northern

Cyprus. He spoke from Cyprus during his last visit saying: "today in Cyprus there are two separate peoples, two separate democratic orders and two separate states. A two-state solution must be discussed and negotiated on the basis of sovereign equality." He declared that Ankara's priority is to reach a sustainable solution in Cyprus and ensure the legitimate rights and security of the Turkish Cypriots, and that no equation in the Eastern Mediterranean where Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are not fairly involved will bring peace and stability".

Shafiq asserts that "this shows Erdogan's real intentions in using this historical conflict to create a functional presence for Turkey in eastern Mediterranean, which is rich in oil and gas, and compete with Greece which has recently drawn up its maritime borders with Egypt, as well as France."

Berlin Dampens its Enthusiasm for Ankara

Ankara has always depended on Berlin's support, in trying to prevent any direct confrontation or economic sanctions. However, German enthusiasm towards Ankara has faded down, with Ankara's insistence on moving forward with its plans that contradict the outcomes of the European summit that took place in early October. This can be clearly seen in a number of recent incidents, for example, on November 18, the German Parliament approved, by a majority, a joint request submitted by the governing grand coalition parties, the Free Democratic Party and the Green Party, calling on the government to consider banning Grey Wolves organization.

Heiko Maas, the German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, said on November 19 that the EU could consider, in the EU summit, imposing



President Macron

sanctions on Turkey over its actions in the eastern Mediterranean. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel confirmed that the EU leaders would discuss Turkey's actions in eastern Mediterranean, during the upcoming summit, where it is pursuing natural gas exploration in contested waters, telling reporters: "Things have not developed in the way we hoped."

In this regard, Shafiq said to Levent: "based on that, we find Erdogan not wasting a chance without confirming that Ankara will continue looking for a solutions to this crisis, which is demonstrated in the way Turkey puts pressure on Europe, which is pushing European, especially France and Germany, towards making the decision of imposing sanctions on Turkey this month, as part of their effort to achieve a strategic balance between their interests and their attempt to stop Erdogan's dangerous moves in their strategic areas."

NATO is put to test

Commenting on Turkey's actions in the Mediterranean and weakening NATO's unity, the Egyptian researcher said to Levent: "It must be emphasized that the whole world

is going through a transitional period; it concerns regional and international organizations, including NATO, especially when it drivers behind its of foundation are no longer present. Therefore, Turkey in particular is not the one threatening the unity of NATO but rather the conditions of the current strategic situation and the risks that come from Erdogan's regional and international policies. All of this will lead to weaken NATO's unity, but it will not happen in the short run; it will rather need some time."

He continued: "This is all are related to Turkey's strategic interests represented in its tough foreign policy. It adopted militarization of its foreign policies to achieve one main goal, which is obtain EU membership, which was reflected in Turkish officials' statements that described it as a strategic priority, and part of the Turkish doctrine. France, which plays major roles in Europe along with Germany, will not allow this to pass at this time, especially since Erdogan is providing full sponsorship to political Islam organizations that the French President, Emmanuel Macron, sees as a strategic enemy to his country."

Accordingly, the question now is how serious the Europeans are in imposing sanctions. The different European positions and lack of unity in the face of the Turkish policies lead to doubts about their ability stand up to them. Ankara realizes the weakness of the divided European position based on each country's interests, therefore it is not worried about the consequences of any real confrontation. This is likely to reinforce the division in Europe between the two poles of interests and lead to a confrontation, which will only involve countries that are practically and directly affected by the Turkish expansionist ventures, mainly Greece, Cyprus and France, some other Mediterranean countries may support them too.

Iran: Regime on an economic tightrope with a budget that doesn't balance

On 2 December 2020 the Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, presented the year 1400 (Persian calendar) budget to the parliament, to be reviewed and considered. Debate over the government's budget and revenue sources had already begun prior to the presentation of the budget itself. The government has aligned next year's budget based on anticipation of increased oil exports; this will only be achieved if an agreement is reached with the United States.

The government, in compiling this budget, has raised the overall budget ceiling by around 400 thousand billion tomans (Iranian currency) from last year. Last year the government had set the resources and expenditures at 2,026 thousand billion Tomans, which has increased to 2,435 thousand billion Tomans in next year's budget. Of this amount, 929.8 thousand billion Tomans go to the country's general budget, and 1,562 thousand billion Tomans is allocated to state-owned companies, non-profit institutions affiliated to the government and banks.

The bill is slightly expansionary in the general budget sector and contractionary in the sector related to state-owned companies and banks. In other words, comparing the total public budget of last year with the coming year, we see that the government has assumed at least 48% annual inflation and has included it in the growth of the country's public expenditures for the next year. But in the revenues and expenditures of state-owned companies and banks, only 8% growth is being considered. It seems that next year if the government achieves 100% of its income, it will pay more attention to the public



Iranian president Hassan Rouhani

expenses of the country than its privately owned entities affiliated with the government.

But to see how Rouhani has assessed next year's oil sales, one may need to have a more detailed look into the revenue from oil and oil derivatives sales. In the annual budget, the resources from the sale of oil are included under the heading "Government public resources from the place of transfer of capital assets". In this sector and based on what is stated in the first part of the budget, the government is assuming 252 thousand billion tomans from oil revenues. In other words, from a total of 841 trillion tomans expenditures of the public administration (expenditures without dedicated revenue), about 35% of it depends on the fate of oil barrels. But when we convert 252 thousand billion tomans into dollars and the number of barrels needing to be sold, we may understand the government's dilemma regarding optimism or pessimism about foreign developments.

Although the government budgeted for about 54 thousand billion tomans of oil revenue for the first six months

of this year, in reality it was only able to sell 27 thousand billion tomans of oil. Next year, the government has considered its dollar revenues at an optimistic conversion rate of 11,500 tomans per US dollar. Another variable in calculating total oil revenue is the base rate per barrel of oil based on the Ministry of Oil estimates. This oil revenue in the budget is based on an also optimistic \$40.00 US a barrel.

Now that we have all the numbers, we can come to a conclusion that shows the nature of this budget. The government forecasts sales of 2.3 million barrels of oil per day for next year, to fulfil its 252 thousand billion tomans oil revenue goal. Meanwhile, in this year's budget, the share of oil revenue is 107 thousand billion tomans. The figure of 107 thousand billion tomans was predicted based on the daily sales of 1.1 million barrels of oil, which, of course, in the first half of this year and taking the best possible estimate, was underachieved as Iran was only able to sell 500,000 barrels of oil per day.

The government must be able to sell 1.6 million barrels of oil per day in

the second half of the year to make up for the budget deficit caused by declining oil sales in the first half of the year. This scenario will definitely not happen because there are at least 30 days left until a possible government change in the United States.

But, suppose we assume that by January 20, when Biden takes office, Iran's current oil revenues continue, and Biden will suspend Iran's oil sanctions on the same day as his inauguration. In that case, Iran will hope to sell 3 million barrels per day in February and March to offset this year's budget deficit. In other words, contrary to what the government claims, Iran is eagerly waiting for Trump

to leave and for its oil to be sold and for sanctions to be lifted.

If the oil sanctions are not lifted in the Biden administration or the suspension of sanctions is subject to negotiations that will probably last more than a year, like the previous agreement with Iran, they will have a revenue deficit of around 198 thousand billion tomans next year, just from the non-realization of oil revenues. Naturally, this budget deficit will lead to higher prices for the people and more poverty. Presently, more than 60% of Iranians live below the absolute poverty line, and with next year's budget, this percentage would be expected to increase further. But the consequences of this budget deficit do not end here and, rather than accepting further grinding poverty, we will surely see the reaction and anger of more people and in the form of uprisings of the type of November 2019, which ignited with the increase in gasoline prices and spread in more than 100 cities in a short period of time, and, of course, this time may lead to the overthrow of Khamenei.

From Selling Afrin to Selling Armenia ... Russia Has no Friend

The fall of Afrin in northwestern Syria, which has the largest Kurdish population in the country along with Kobane and Jazirah, in the spring of 2018, caused widespread outrage among Syrian Kurds. It was seen as a political failure by their leaders in deal with the influential international players in the Syrian crisis, which raises the question of “Who sold Afrin?” Fingers are mainly pointing to Russia, given that Afrin is part of the areas under Russian influence.

The region was split into Eastern Euphrates (American influence) and western Euphrates (Russian influence), Russia had points of contact in Afrin which it had intentionally withdrew a day before the large-scale military attack on January 18, 2018. Since that day, the people of Afrin have accused Russia of selling their land to Turkey so that it can seize alternative areas of Ghouta, Homs's northern countryside, Abu al-Duhur Military Airbase, and areas of Idlib in the east of the Hejaz Railway among others.

Karabakh .. the Other Afrin

The crisis of Karabakh has been hard to fully comprehend even before September 27, when Azerbaijan began a large-scale military attack on Nagorno-Karabakh region. Prior to that date, the region had been under de facto Armenian control since 1994, when Armenia won a 6 year war against Baku, before Karabakh/Arstakh region declared its independence from Azerbaijan. However, the region did not receive any International recognition at the time, even from Armenia, due to political conditions that governed the balance of power in the region, until Azerbaijan began the attack again nearly 26 years later.

Towards the end of last September, following the start of Azerbaijan's attack, the tremendous Turkish support for Azerbaijan became evident. It was aimed at restoring control over the territories that were

still within Azerbaijan, according to the international law, but against the will of the Armenian people living in that region. Russia's position, despite being a friend to Armenia, historically, was vague. Even though international law is on Azerbaijan's side, Russia was able, as a permanent member of the United Nations, to call for a referendum on self-determination, as it did in Crimea, which it managed to annex under the pretext that the Crimean people voted for joining Russia. Similarly, in the Donbass region in Ukraine, Russia has supported Russian separatists since 2014.

Given that this issue might threaten Russo-Turkish interests, Russia made statements that effectively confirm it had sold Karabakh to Azerbaijan to make new deals with Turkey. This can be clearly seen in many occasions; on October 7, the Kremlin claimed that the Russia's commitments towards Armenia within the Collective Security Treaty Organization do not extend to the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, supported by Yerevan. That was practically seen as a clear confirmation of Russia's refusal to go to war in the region in defense of the Armenians.



Russian military in Syria

Armenia is Asking for Help ... and the Russian Line is Busy

On October 25, the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan confirmed that the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zone in Karabakh could be a way to get out of the war saying that the members of the OSCE Minsk Group have to support and encourage the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zone. He also added: “We have not seen any concrete step to prevent a humanitarian crisis” without the Armenian leadership daring to directly accuse Russia of leaving it to face the military technologies that Ankara provided to Baku, in order to win the war, in addition to sending thousands of Syrian mercenaries from the militias of the “Syrian National Army” whom Ankara sent to Karabakh to fight the Armenians.

Armenia Loses the War

Armenia realized that it has been abandoned by its Russian friend. In face of the Turko-Azerbaijani military superiority, there was no choice but to withdraw and lick its wounds. This is what happened on November 9, when the Russian President,

Vladimir Putin, his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, and the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, issued a joint statement stipulating the declaration of a ceasefire in the Karabakh region, starting from November 10, while keeping their forces where they had been deployed before reaching the agreement. Aliyev described the statement as “victory to Azerbaijan and surrender by Armenia”, while Pashinyan said that this decision was difficult and painful, but necessary because it prevented the loss of Stepanakert (the capital of Artsakh) and other cities, and besieging the unrecognized Artsakh Republic's army which consists of 20,000 Soldier Armenia sought Russia's help with the deterioration of the military situation in Baku's favour. On October 31, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan asked Russia to begin consultations to help Armenia preserve its security, during the ongoing fight in the Karabakh region. The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Russia will render Yerevan all necessary assistance if clashes take place on the territory of Armenia i.e. it refused to help Armenia in Karabakh. The statement added that according to 1997 treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, Russia will provide Yerevan with all necessary assistance if the clashes are rendered directly to the territory of Armenia.

From Afrin to Karabakh, it has become clear that Russia take little interest in the areas of its influence, as long as their worth can be obtained elsewhere. Moreover, Moscow has no problem in exchanging those areas with others or in displacing their local people and settling others in their place. Thus, Russia has no friend except for its interests, although this may be a common denominator among all major powers, Russia has surpassed them in that trait, or at least that is what the Kurds or Armenians might say if asked.

SADAT Erdogan's Revolutionary Guard Corps



Anas Mamash

After the Gezi protests that Turkey has witnessed in the past few years, Erdogan reached a quick solution through establishing a paramilitary force consisting of mercenaries called SADAT "the private company of consulting services for security and industrial and commercial construction". Upon request from Erdogan, the officers expelled from the Turkish armed forces "for being Islamists" formed SADAT and the intended goal was achieved.

Erdogan established his own secret army on May 27, 2013, when the Sixth Administrative Court and the Board of Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation passed Law No. 2 against Erdogan's government, which wanted to use Gezi Park in Taksim square in Istanbul's Beyoglu district for construction purposes. The move sparked public protests in many parts of Turkey. The security forces could not tackle the protests easily; Erdogan decided to prepare for any future problems by building up an army of mercenaries that would follow him under a private company "SADAT".

SADAT: Establishment of the Company and a biography of its founder:

On February 28, 2012, SADAT was established by 23 retired and non-commissioned officers, under the leadership of the Islamist former Brigadier General Adnan Tanriverdi. On August 17, 2016, Erdogan appointed Tanriverdi as a Presidential Adviser. Tanriverdi was born in Akshehir, Konya in 1944, he joined the Military Academy in 1964, and in 1967 was promoted to be Lieutenant. He was appointed a staff officer in 1978. In Kenan Evren's administration, who took

power through a military coup d'état, NATO's influence began to rise within the army, at the same time as Tanriverdi's popularity was growing. His rise accelerated under Evren's administration. Tanriverdi, the Islamist, graduated from the Armed Forces Academy in 1980 as a staff officer, he was then appointed as head of the Directorate of Intelligence Branch, then a deputy chief of staff in the second infantry division (Adapazarı), and a member of the teaching staff of the military academy. He was appointed head of Special Warfare Department, Logistical Departments and Operations Branch. Afterwards, he was promoted to be an army major in August 1980, then a lieutenant colonel in 1984, and a colonel in 1987. In 1990, he was appointed as head of the 8th Corps Artillery Regiment (Malazgirt). While he was in that position, he was promoted to be a brigadier general on August 30, 1992, after that he became the commander of the Second Armoured Brigade in the Kartal region for three years between 1992 and 1995, and head of the Health Department of the Land Forces between 1995 and 1996, he retired on August 30, 1996, during the tenure of General Staff Ismail Hakki Karadayi.

The Company's Activity and Main Goals

Tanriverdi later explained that SADAT was established at the request of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which began to group the special fighters and members of the Turkish Armed Forces who were expelled due to illegal activities. SADAT later flourished rapidly after the Gezi protests.

Officially, the company presents itself as a private establishment (a private Turkish security contractor), but in reality it is no more than the military wing of AKP recruiting and training young people throughout Turkey to use weapons in special camps in



Demonstrators shout slogans as they clash with riot police in Istanbul (Archive)

different parts of the country. SADAT activities began to float on the surface of every regional conflict; it trained jihadis and sent them to fight against al-Assad's regime in Syria, Haftar's forces in Libya, and the Armenians in Karabakh. Moreover, it has also recruited mercenaries from Europe to fight besides their counterparts wherever they are deployed.

It is said that in early 2012, SADAT established a series of special camps in Marmara region to train Arabic-speaking fighters to fight against the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. It was also reported that parts of the Turkish army used SADAT to suppress the alleged coup d'état in July 2016 against AKP.

Erdogan's New Military Arm

SADAT, which does not fall under government restrictions, follows direct orders from the Turkish Prime Minister and does precisely what he says. Erdogan sees it like the Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, a multi-purpose armed force to ensure political loyalty domestically and a military force to carry out terrorist attack outside Turkey.

As Erdogan's "secret army" inside and outside Turkey, SADAT is currently participating in military activities in Libya, Syria and the Caucasus.

Wherever there is war, Turkey is there providing soldiers and mercenaries. This army (SADAT), which has recently appeared in the Caucasus, influenced the outcome of the war in favor of Azerbaijan, by supporting its army against Armenia. It deployed huge numbers of mercenaries brought from Libya and Syria who fought against the Armenian army, and committed war crimes against the Armenian forces.

The opposition is daydreaming

The opposition parties are planning to take control through democratic elections but they have not taken into account SADAT which follows direct orders from Erdogan, who spent money on his own secret army. It has evolved and grown in size after the Gezi protests, in preparation for any clashes that break out if he loses the next elections, as he will not step aside easily. Erdogan could not even accept the loss of Istanbul in the municipal council elections. Therefore, in case of his defeat in the general elections, SADAT will be put into action, as it is constantly on standby, ready to tackle any threat inside or outside Turkey, and fight any potential civil war in cold blood and with an iron fist. This is how Erdogan wants to secure his political future while the opposition is daydreaming.

The Libyan Deputy Prime Minister to Levant: Turkey is the Biggest Threat to the Arab World not only to Libya



Hager El-Desouky

The Deputy Prime Minister of the interim Libyan government, Dr. Abd al-Salam al-Badri, expected that the future US and EU sanctions against Turkey, would deter the Turkish President, confirming that the political solution in Libya must root out all foreign intervention whether mercenaries or Turks.

“Levant News” did an in-depth interview with the Deputy Prime Minister “Abd al-Salam al-Badri” described the nine-year-old Libyan crisis years, confirming that Doha and Ankara are key players in the Libyan crisis, despite the different roles.

■ First, the important question about the escalating complicated situation in Libya ... How would you describe the nine-year-old Libyan crisis?

Libya has no problems at all. 95% of Libyans are Arabs and 100% of the Arabs are Muslims, therefore, there are no reasons for division and discord. Nevertheless, we are facing conspiracies and foreign interests that have complicated the crisis and I do not expect that there will be a solution soon.

■ In your opinion, who is behind disrupting the political solution in Libya?

The countries which employ agents are behind this because even if there are military operations in the end, we will seek a political solution. The conflicting parties must negotiate to find a solution to the crisis, and clearly Qatar and Turkey are two main parties in the Libyan crisis, in addition to the Islamist extremists, such as Yusef Al-Qaradawi and others.

■ How do you see Turkey’s

ambitions and Qatar’s efforts to abort any settlement in Libya?

Turkey and Qatar have different roles in the Libyan crisis. Turkey does not only threaten Libya but also the Arab world. Turkey works on keeping the region unstable in order to exploit it, especially countries rich in oil and gas like Libya. Qatar supports the terrorists in Libya to target Egypt not Libya, because the fall of Libya to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) means the fall of Egypt.

■ Maybe that is why Egypt announced the red line between the cities of Sirte and Jufrah .. Do you think that this policy has deterred Erdogan?

Egypt is aware of Turkey’s conspiracy, that is why the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, warned that Jufrah and Sirte are a red line. Before this warning, Tripoli was about to be liberated, even some militia leaders began negotiating for a safe solution. However, liberation of Tripoli is not for Erdogan’s benefit, so he used tenuous arguments to make military intervention, such as the presence of about a million Libyans of Turkish origin, but in the end, the red line deterred that scheme.

■ How do you reply to the allegations which state that the residents of Misrata are of Turkish origin?

Fayez al-Sarraj is of Turkish origin, therefore. Erdogan has the right to talk about him. Yet, he has no right to say that Misrata city is Turkish. This is nonsense and false.

■ What do you think of the training provided by the Turkish Ministry of National Defence for the members of the Government of National Accord (GNA) under what it calls a “memorandum of security and

military cooperation”?

This training for the GNA mercenaries is a blatant violation which its goal, as it is known, is to form the Turkish Mobilisation.

■ In your opinion, What are the goals of the Turkish Mobilisation?

Turkey fears that the freeze of its military activity in Libya will marginalize its role, that’s why Erdogan provokes crises and starts wars in the region to cover up the domestic problems he faces in an attempt to win a fake championship.

■ If these are the goals .. Don’t you see that the Turkish Mobilization will not stop?

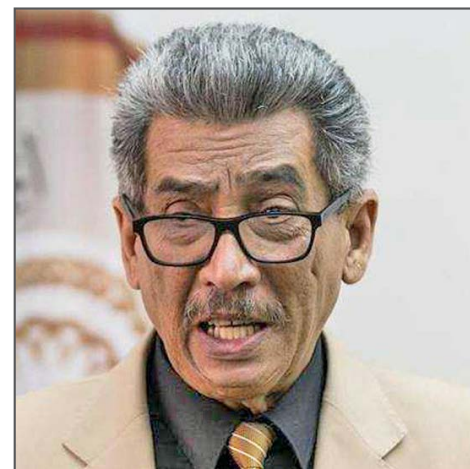
This mobilization will end and Erdogan will not be able to return to Libya and threaten as he used to do. The whole thing is over by the agreements of the UN Security Council. If he returned, that would not be a problem as long as we have the Egyptian support on our side. If he crossed the red line, he would learn a lesson that he will not forget.

■ In your opinion, what are the prospects for ending the war in Libya?

First, the political solution in Libya must be Libyan only. The foreign intervention will not help in resolving the crisis because it was what ruined the Libyan scene, so all foreign forces must leave Libya, whether Turks or mercenaries. Secondly, anyone whether a Libyan or not who has contributed and failed to find a political solution must leave the political scene .. We all failed, let us leave! and leave Libya to others to try to reform!

■ Do you feel concerned if the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) recycled itself in power in Libya with the suggestion of system of groups?

The MB is a very insidious virus, and it undoubtedly tries to enter from



Abd al-Salam al-Badri

both the door and the window.

We are always concerned about the MB’s intervention. Despite our rejection of their hateful ideology, unfortunately the foreign powers support them to be a thorn in Egypt’s back.

■ The Libyan crisis witnessed a Turko-Algerian coordination, which was evident in Erdogan’s visit early this year .. How do you see the Algerian position?

In the past, Libya and Algeria had divergent visions. However, I think that the current president is less intense and supports national reconciliation. Honestly, I told the Algerians on a visit that the fall of Libya leads inevitably to the fall of Algeria and the extremism centres in southern Libya.

■ What do you think of the efforts of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)?

We asked for the (UNSMIL) to be reviewed, starting with Tarek Mitri, then Ghassan Salamé, and finally the current Deputy Special Representative for political affairs in Libya, Stephanie William. All of them have characteristics but don’t qualify them to be mediators.

Honestly, there is still a difference between us and Stephanie, and this was evident in the Forum for Political Dialogue in Tunisia.

Stress-testing Tehran



Ian Black

On November 27, when news broke about the assassination of the Iranian nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a chill descended on the Middle East. It felt like a dangerous spark that could ignite a destabilizing conflagration in the region in the final weeks of Donald Trump's term in the White House.

Iran quickly blamed Israel for targeting Fakhrizadeh – and not without reason. Binyamin Netanyahu, its prime minister, had named him in April 2018 when he unveiled the Mossad intelligence service's sensational seizure of a trove of documents pertaining to Tehran's clandestine nuclear program. Netanyahu reacted to the news of the killing by coyly saying that “he can't tell all” about it. Other Israeli officials have not admitted their involvement, but neither – crucially – have they denied it.

Experts have linked the assassination to last month's reports of Trump's consideration of military action against Iran. The New York Times quoted current and former US officials as saying the president had asked senior advisers whether he had options to target Iranian sites after UN inspectors reported a significant increase in the country's stockpile of nuclear material.

Advisers responded by warning that a strike against the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities could easily escalate into a broader conflict. Whatever the truth of this report, by targeting a prominent figure in Iran's nuclear programme, presumably with a green light for Netanyahu, the Twitterer-in-chief in the Oval Office will make it far harder for his successor, Joe Biden, to persuade Iran to return to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The Democratic president-elect has repeatedly pledged to lift US



From a demonstration after Fakhrizadeh assassination

sanctions if Tehran goes back to comply with the terms of the JCPOA, which was seen by Barack Obama – Biden's old boss – as a high point of his multilateral foreign and security policy. Trump's 2018 abandonment of the agreement – viewed by him as “the worst deal ever” – triggered tensions with NATO allies UK, France and Germany, as well as with Russia and China.

Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA was interpreted – at least by Tehran – as proving Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's argument that the US cannot be trusted and that the nuclear issue is an American pretext to pressure Iran and prepare the groundwork for regime change. Four years of the Trump administration's Iran policy culminated – publicly at least – in the January 3 assassination of Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force that runs regional Iranian Revolutionary Guard Force operations. That was the visible and acknowledged peak of the “maximum pressure” campaign, but it was also followed by a wave of mysterious sabotage, fires and accidents at nuclear installations across the country, including at Natanz, the underground uranium enrichment plant.

Still, this is not all about US or Israeli

military or intelligence activities, whether clandestine or not. Other forms of pressure are economic sanctions, whose effect has been magnified by the spectacularly damaging corona pandemic. And European countries have failed to find satisfactory compensation for Trump's unilateral re-imposition of sanctions.

It has also become painfully clear that Iran's economic woes—especially the shrinking of its oil exports and its currency devaluation—are closely connected to key geopolitical events. Volatility in the exchange rate and currency depreciation are alarming signs of an unhealthy economy. “The enormous depreciation of the riyal against other currencies over the past decade illuminates the deterioration of Iran's terms of trade versus the rest of the world,” argued two economists in a recent paper. No surprise that Trump's defeat by Biden had a positive impact on Iran when the riyal briefly appreciated by another 10 percent.

America's regional diplomacy still seems focused on increasing Iran's economic pain. If the Saudi blockade of Qatar is about to end – as a result of US and Kuwaiti intervention – then Tehran would face also significant losses since it has received nearly \$100m from Qatar Airways in

overflight fees.

Biden is a very different story from Trump. His approach is to deal first and foremost with Iran's nuclear program and afterwards try to curb its regional ambitions and missile program – which are of growing concern to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel. The incoming president has said the US could restore sanctions under the terms of the deal should Iran resist further negotiations.

Tehran has countered by insisting that it should be compensated for the damage done to its economy by the US sanctions so far – which is highly unlikely. Another important domestic factor is that time is limited to while Hassan Rouhani remains in office, as the next presidential elections are in June 2021. Hardliners, including Hossein Dehghan, backed by the IRGC and Khamenei, look set to win.

US officials are already said to be especially nervous about January 3 2021 – the first anniversary of the Qassem Soleimani drone strike in Baghdad. Biden is now on course for the White House and Trump is on his way out. The transition will be over on January 20. But there is still no guarantee that this hyper-sensitive issue will not ignite a damaging regional blaze – sooner or later.

Iraq's "Platoon"



James Denselow

For far too long in the mainstreaming Western entertainment industry, films have been about the Middle East from the perspective of foreigners not nationals of the countries themselves. A potential major step to counter that trend came with the release of "Mosul" last week, the first all-Arabic film to release on Netflix in the streaming service's history. This should be celebrated in and of itself but far more interesting is the story of the actual film. It tracks a group of elite Iraqi 'SWAT' policemen on an undisclosed mission towards the end of the battle to win Iraq's second city from the clutches of ISIS. This moment in history warrants far more attention than it had at the time. It was reportedly the largest urban military operation since World War Two. An entrenched opposition force that knew no limits to what tactics it would resort to, faced an unusual

coalition of attackers; including the US, Kurdish Peshmerga, Iranian-backed militias and of course the Iraqi military themselves.

Whilst the film was made in Morocco it opens to drone footage of the aftermath of the nine-month long battle. Rubble, rubble and then more rubble is all that you can see across the horizon. In the film when pinned down by enemy fire the SWAT team reject calling in an American airstrike because "they flatten everything because they don't have to rebuild anything".

The landscape feels less urban and more like an alien moonscape, but critically by putting Iraqis as the central heroes, gradually the city begins to take shape and you realise the terrible consequences of war amongst people's homes and families. Shellshocked children wonder towards the safer parts of the cities wheeling the corpses of their parents. Unlike films portraying the US experience in the country, 'Mosul' immediately shows an interaction between the SWAT and civilians that never could be replicated by a foreign army.

Indeed, in the midst of a ruined city the SWAT commander who is himself from Mosul, endeavours to put rubbish he finds in the bin. When they come across an Iranian commander a debate as to what he is doing in an Iraqi city drags the discussion all the way back to the times of Babylon. The key and central components of the story are that of men fighting for each other and for their own city. One speaks to the future and how they need to have "more children as that brings our city back quicker".

Whilst the Directors were American, it was produced by Iraqi filmmaker Mohamed Al-Daradji. The film was based on a true story and dedicated to members of the Nineveh SWAT team themselves which is a nice touch. Combat scenes are intense although as they are happening at the tail end of the battle you feel that the story of the main liberation of the city, when mass carnage ensued, has still yet to be told.

The film is based on a New Yorker piece that explored how the key criteria of recruitment to the SWAT team was having been wounded

or lost a family member to ISIS. It reminds the viewers of the fact that ISIS fighters were a largely domestic force and that in such an uncivil civil conflict, trust was determined by base motivations such as revenge. Yet the 6,000 or so ISIS fighters that held the city hostage would shoot fleeing civilians, booby trap buildings and sexually abuse the wives of those Mosul residents who couldn't protect them. Unlike other members of the Iraqi military who if captured by ISIS would be offered the chance to convert and switch sides, members of the SWAT team were supposedly executed on site, such was their feared reputation amongst ISIS militants.

If 'Mosul' proves popular with Western audiences, and the reach of Netflix during a global pandemic lockdown is an excellent platform, then who knows what it could do for the war film genre in a region beset with it. Could Syria, almost ten years into its own 'Apocalypse Now' pursuit of darkness, get a fictional film that could do justice to the pain that the country has gone through for instance?



From the Netflix movie (Mosul)

When al-Assad “the caliph” talks



Rima Flihan

I was not very shocked by al-Assad’s speech in the Al-Osmaane Mosque to the Ministry of endowments, but it may have made me laugh a little bit because it was full of intellectual, historical, social and scientific paradoxes and fallacies. I was not surprised because I’ve already known that Bashar al-Assad and his regime are basically against liberalism, secularism and human rights, otherwise it would not have held up so far, Syria would not have been in this catastrophe, and he would not have committed all these massacres and violations against human rights since the beginning of the uprising in Syria until now if he had not had that mentality as he showed it in that sanctimonious sermon. the caliph

However, I think that this sermon has to be analysed for the deluded people so far and for those who think recycling him globally might provide protection for minorities and that he is close to secularism which is the propaganda on which his mass media machine works.

Bashar al-Assad in his speech accused liberalism of moral decay and aiming to destroy societies, religions and being the cause of the war on Syria. In his comments, he stated his real positions against a number of human rights, for example, he is against promoting individualism which liberalism aims at. He only supports collectivism such as tribalism. It is known that society develops only when its people develop and values of citizenship and civil liberties are strengthened. Tribalism contradicts our humanitarian identity and our own individual identity which enables us to mature intellectually, humanly and cognitively, and it even contradicts citizenship. Al-Assad considered liberalism an enemy of the society providing examples about this saying that liberalism believes that a child has the right to choose the caliph

the religion he wants when grows up but what should be according to al-Assad that he definitely has to follow the religion of his family or tribe. This completely contradicts the principle of freedom of belief in the international human rights law. Al-Assad believes that secularism only means freedom of religions, therefore, it does not mean separating religion from the state but on the contrary, he said that the religious institution in Syria is a support to the army and part of the state. He also accused liberalism of being the cause of moral decay in the world saying that it was the reason for promoting and legalizing recreational drugs and same-sex marriage, hence he is against gay rights and considers their identity a part of the moral decay that he spoke about and linked it to the approval of same-sex marriage the caliph

and this is also a violation against human rights. He also confuses the person’s sex with their gender. Al-Assad also talked about the Arabism of Syria considering it a non-negotiable issue and connected “Arabism with Islam” with language in part of his speech, then he contradicted what he has said in another part saying that language and identity are two different things, especially when he attacked the pre-Islamic ancient Syriac identity of Syria saying that the Syrians used to speak Syriac but they were Arabs and he criticized that idea harshly. He rejected the existence of any civilization in Syria except the

Arab civilization, not caring about the

fact of the existence of other non-Arab ethnicities which have their own languages, civilizations and political systems, and which have existed in the region much before Islam and mixed later with other ethnicities or they were related to a common “Semitic” origin of the many peoples who inhabited the Arab region and the Levant including the Arameans, Arabs and others. Al-Assad did not care much about the fact of the existence of other ethnicities in Syria, and this means according to what he said that the Syrians are Arabs and Assyrians are Arabs and all people in Syria are Arabs, even if they speak and write other languages, and even if history says something else.

Bashar al-Assad said that those who came out of the mosques at the beginning of the revolution were not necessarily Islamist. He literally said that many of them were atheists, and I (the writer) add that they were from all religions and beliefs, because the uprising in the beginning was popular and included all communities of the Syrian people, and there was no place to gather except in mosques and all attempts to get together outside them failed because of the repression of the government security to any gathering once it begins and arresting everyone in it and these are experiences I witnessed myself in Damascus at least. For those who forgot, Bashar al-Assad was promoting at that time that the uprising since the beginning

was radical Islamist. Thus, do those brainwashed by the regime during that time remember what he said back then and what he is saying now? In this speech, al-Assad clarified the identity of his regime in a way that leaves no room for doubt that this regime is dictatorial, not secular and based on centralism and chauvinism, does not respect human rights but he rather incites against anyone outside of the collectivist culture and does not respect the diverse cultures in the Syrian society. In his speech, he incited against liberals, atheists, secularists, homosexuals, and freedom of belief. All these indicate that he has no intention so far to change any constant on which this repressive regime has been based since it has been founded. It is a regime that does not respect the identity of the non-Arab the caliph Syrian ethnicities, does not respect secularism or liberalism, but rather it incites Muslims against them by placing liberalism and secularism and their intellectuals and supporters in the place of the enemy who aims to destroy religion and spread moral decay, this what he said literally. The funny thing that the regime which brags about morals is the same regime which facilitates human trafficking by exploiting minors in nightclubs owned by those who are very loyal supporters in the suburbs of Damascus and elsewhere, it is the same regime which tortured and raped many arrested women, it is the same regime which impoverished people and the caliph

killed them, it is the same regime which abused people and their property, and now its president comes to talk about morals, beliefs and values, and here he accuses, in his sanctimonious sermon, liberalism of promoting recreational drug and everyone knows that what the regime does inside and outside Syria perfectly matches with the ideology of the extremist religious ideologies which say about liberalism the same thing and stand against civil liberties, human rights, democracy and secularism and reject separating religion from the state



Bashar Al Assad

Middle East Governance in the Post Pandemic Era



Dalia Ziada

It is written in history that the year 2020, the year of the coronavirus pandemic, was one of the most difficult years in human's history, after the black plague in the Middle Ages and world wars in the 20th century. Over the past millennium, the human genius challenged several global crises and turned them into opportunities. Middle East

This pandemic is not different. Several positive changes on various aspects of life are already being generated out of humans' attempts to survive the fatal microscopic virus. This article lists only a few ways, in which the COVID-19 crisis positively changed the long-standing dynamics of political power, governance and socio-political interactions in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

To limit the spread of the Coronavirus, each country had to close its borders and isolate itself from the rest of the world, while domestically forcing a curfew or a complete lockdown. Accordingly, every government, in every country, found itself forced to face the crisis alone in a tough battle to rescue peoples' lives, while also preserving a stable economy and an unwavering system of governance. Ironically, the illiberal and non-democratic governments were the ones that performed better in this battle. Perhaps, because these governments have stronger control on private sector businesses and individual citizens and most of the wealth of the country is under government's control.

However, in the process of governments combating the virus, the relationship between the citizen and the state, in MENA countries, has been redefined, in a way that may positively affect the political future of the MENA region, if not the whole world. Here is how:

First: Citizens are becoming more



Egyptian men wearing face masks

active in fulfilling the vacuum in government provided services, rather than complaining or government failure of just waiting for the government to reform its bureaus. Middle East

Second: Civil society organizations are becoming more engaged with grass-roots citizens on issues that are immediately relevant to improving the quality of their lives, like economic reform and health care. Before, civil society organizations, especially in Arab Spring countries, were mostly focused on political rights and civil freedoms. As a result, they were seen by governments as an upsetting groups of covert politicians, and by grass-roots citizens as the detached elite. The newly expanding role of the civil society, after the pandemic, helped change this image. At least, it put civil society organizations under a new light in the eyes of the government, which started to see them as essential partners, rather than trouble-making group of activists.

Third: The pandemic is redefining the way MENA citizens and governments are approaching the conversation on human rights. Since the Arab Spring revolutions, erupted in 2010, the focus has always been on political and civil rights as trans-national human rights issues. In contrast, economic and social rights (such as

healthcare, education, and housing) have always been viewed as internal issues that each country should work to reform on its own. But, thanks to the pandemic, economic and social rights are now becoming a trans-national trans-border issue that countries can cooperate and work on together. As we have seen for example in the exchange of medical supplies and medical technology between countries, in the past few months.

Fourth: The pandemic redefined the role of the military within the civil government. It renewed the old debate on the "non-traditional role" (the political and economic role) of the armed forces, within the civil state. For long, the economic autonomy of the armed forces, in Egypt for example, has been criticized for its potential negative influence on market competition and the opportunities provided to the private sector to grow through open market economy. But, the pandemic put this argument to test. Since the beginning of the Coronavirus crisis, in Egypt, for example, the private sector hesitated to aid the government in managing the crisis. Rather, private sector leaders deliberately abused the state of panic among the people and attempted to increase their profits by practicing monopoly over basic food and medical commodities.

At that moment, the armed forces and its affiliated food and medical factories intervened to provide a 'parallel arrangement' ready to satisfy people's needs, and, thus, forced the private sector to cooperate. Middle East

Fifth: The Coronavirus pandemic helped with upgrading government's capacity in terms with using information technology. The pandemic accelerated the pace of technological transformation of public services and educational institutions. In Egypt, for example, we witnessed a technological revolution in both education and judicial sectors. Also, the information technology tools were heavily used by candidates for parliamentary elections to manage their electoral campaigns and reach out to their potential voters. This indirectly participated in limiting the corrupt practices that usually take place during pre-election public gatherings to influence the voters.

The aforementioned few observations are a proof that the Coronavirus pandemic has positively changed the MENA region, and the whole world, for good, at least in governance sector and on the level of state-citizen relationship. Keeping and building on these positive transformations is our next challenge. Middle East.

Sulaymaniyah Demonstrations The Violence Background



Shiyar khaleal

Perhaps some Iraqi parties and militias affiliated with Iran do not want Erbil to recover from its economic crisis, sign new “peace” agreements with Baghdad, and create a national partnership to manage the crisis that Iraq is going through in general. Therefore, they only thing they could do is to announce their support for the subversive demonstrations that took place in Sulaymaniyah city in the Kurdistan region adjacent to the Iranian border under the pretext of non-payment of salaries.

Those peaceful demonstrations under the pretext of non-payment of salaries soon turned into acts of sabotage by burning governmental headquarters and stealing their contents, in conjunction with clashes with the security forces and creating chaos in some villages in Sulaymaniyah.

The demonstrations were accompanied by burning headquarters for the traffic, police and the governorate. PMF satellite channels and websites did massive media promotion about the demonstrations and the teenage demonstrators were pushed to inflame the situation and transform peaceful demonstrations into acts of sabotage. These events coincided with Kurdistan government’s endeavour to distribute part of the salaries from its share to the employees, and with the ongoing negotiations with Baghdad to pay the salaries to its employees, the thing that indicates that creating these acts of sabotage is a clear message to fail all understanding attempts to reach an agreement with Baghdad.

There is no doubt that it is not strange for the Kurdistan region the sabotage attempts that the neighbouring countries and some militias and Iraqi parties have been trying to make since 2014, despite Kurdistan’s constant endeavour to enhance understanding with Baghdad. The failed political class in Baghdad realized that Erbil’s economic, political and military prosperity will negatively affect it and expose most of its corruption and attempts to create chaos in the country for known regional actors.

Those attempts were obvious years ago through imposing an embargo on the Kurdistan Region and pushing the political classes into chaos and political conflict after Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, the Iraqi Prime Minister, and Nechirvan Barzani, the Kurdistan Region’s president, agreed to implement the Sinjar deal which stipulated the normalization of the



security, military and administrative conditions in Sinjar to restore security and stability to the disputed district between Baghdad and Erbil.

The deal included many administrative, security and service items. The administration is agreed on with the Kurdistan region and Nineveh Governorate taking into account the district people’s demands. Security is within the authority of the federal government in coordination with the Kurdistan region government. The most important item of the agreement is concerned with the security arrangements which assign security to the local police under the supervision of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service in coordination with the Kurdistan region government. As well, It includes removing the official & non-official armed groups from the district, the thing that might infuriate the militias.

All of this poses a threat to the Popular Mobilization Militias and the cadres of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in Sinjar, which preferred to join the PMF brigades over joining the federal government or the Peshmerga forces. The only thing they could do is to look for ways to obstruct the historic agreement. Iran has been seeking since 1996 to divide the Kurdistan Region, especially since there is an air embargo on Iran’s flights according to a UN Resolution 688 in 1992, so it intends to take revenge through causing chaos and disturbing security.

Here, we must remind the reader that these

ongoing acts of sabotage in Sulaymaniyah and promoting them by PMF media, coincided with recent terrorist attacks by Iranian militias against the US-coalition base in Erbil airport, attacking the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Baghdad, and the demonstrations came to blind the Kurdish citizen in the region.

Returning to the issue of paying salaries, we must mention that there is an actual salary crisis in Kurdistan Region, but neither the Kurdish government nor the Kurdistan Democratic Party is considered responsible for this alone, as the Region has repeatedly declared its cooperation and willingness to negotiate with the central government to resolve this dilemma. However, the votes of pro-Iranian militias and political movements in Parliament were enough to fail all the previous endeavours.

Kurdistan Government considered peaceful demonstration a legitimate right for the citizens, and this was evident in the statement of Masrour Barzani, the prime minister of Kurdistan Region, when he confirmed on Monday that the difficult conditions in the Region are out of his government’s control warning the citizens against attempts by few to use people’s livelihood for their personal interests, and that his government is sparing no effort to overcome the difficult financial conditions that the Region, Iraq and the world are going through. Stating that it -the government- continues negotiations with the Federal Government to obtain the rights and financial entitlements for the Region which have not been sent yet unfortunately. Despite the fact that Kurdistan Government has shown full flexibility to reach an agreement under the constitution, calling on the political actors in the Region to be cooperating to overcome this difficult situation, and to protect peace and the entity of Kurdistan Region; which is everyone’s duty. He pointed out that Kurdistan Government undoubtedly feels the heavy burden and the citizens’ difficult life, thanks their steadfastness, and sees peaceful and civilized demonstration a legitimate right for the citizens within the law.

From all this, we see that Iran and its Iraqi militias seek to prevent Kurdistan’s globally-known progress, prosperity and stability, and transform it into divided states, thus failing Erbil’s successful experience and the ongoing negotiations between Kurdistan and Baghdad, Sinjar deal and the new governmental parliamentary negotiations. When we take a closer look at the geography of the regions that carried out the sabotage in Sulaymaniyah, Iran’s role will be crystal clear.

Does Erdogan plan to launch another offensive on Kurds?



Zara Saleh

While the Syrian Democratic Forces were thrashing ISIS and destroying its Caliphate, Erdogan started to set up a new “caliphate” in north Syria after Turkish army’s occupation with support of the Syrian jihadist rebels that so-called the “Syrian National Army”. Simultaneously, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been threatening, as usual, to attack the Kurds and he will “not allow establishing a terrorist state along Turkey’s borders”. In recent few weeks, once again, President Erdogan has threatened to launch a new offensive in Kurdish-controlled areas. Following the increased populist rhetoric, for example, and the rhetoric of hatred against the Kurds by the Turkish president, the Turkish army with

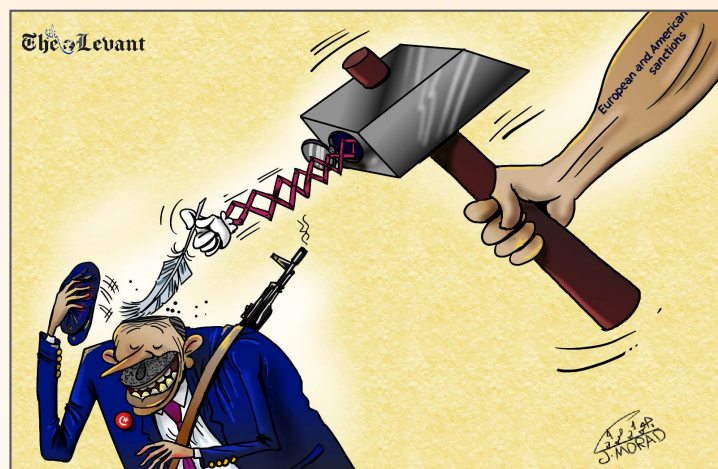
the Syrian mercenaries started shelling villages across Ain Issa north Raqqa. Added to that, Turkey has been created a new military base in that area close to the M4 highway. Besides, the Turkish President has approved a bill from the Turkish parliament to extend the army’s mission to cross the borders with Syria and Iraq. A glance at Turkey’s expected to plan and the military steps that have been done such as digging trenches, tunnels, and watchtowers. It emerges that the Turkish army is trying to take control under the strategic M4 highway, north Ain Issa, and then to occupy the town. In fact, this plan will allow Turkey to take more control in northeast Syria and to cut the connection between the SDF-controlled area and other parts of Syria such as the strategic city of Aleppo. On the other hand, Russia is considered as guarantors of the Turkey-Russia Accord that to

implement it and to protect the Kurdish-controlled areas from Turkish attacks, and there is a Russian military presence in Ain Issa as well. The Russian attitude seems to be in favor of Erdogan’s plan if it is not playing a “game”. Following the Nagorno-Karabakh deal between Putin and Erdogan, there is also an opportunity for another deal on the ground in Syrian territories as it has happened before between both countries when Russia sold the Kurdish region of Afrin in exchange for Eastern Ghouta. Now, there is a concern that Russia might play such a game plan in Idlib as well and to close eyes on Turkey’s military plan in north Ain Issa. Arguably, Turkey and Russia’s “last minutes” game is attempting to benefit from Trump’s last two months in the office. In addition, Erdogan is trying to have a plan to take advantage of the presidential transition period in America. However, relying on his short



memory, Erdogan’s plan cannot be approved even by Trump’s administration due to the American decision to reject any more Turkish attacks in the SDF-controlled areas. Whereas, the new-elected president Joe Biden attitude is clear towards Erdogan “America is back”, and his team has strongly declared the importance of the US presence in Syria and to support their trustworthy ally the Syrian Democratic Forces.

The Levant
CARICATURE



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