

REPORT OF KLA MEETINGS AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, 27 MAY 2015

KLA Members in attendance: Brusk Aeiveri, Zirian Fatah, Tara Fatehi, Nader Gariban and Dr. Gina Lennox.

10 AM: Meeting with

Steven Yates, Departmental Liaison Officer, Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Will Robinson, Departmental Liaison Officer, Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Note: Murray Hansen, Chief of Staff to Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs, could not attend meeting.

Zirian Fatah outlined what the Australian Government needs to consider and work towards for Iraq:

1. Directly supply military and humanitarian aid to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).
2. Push for regular monthly payments to the KRG of the constitutionally allocated budget of 17% of Iraq's annual revenue.
3. Push to resolve the status of the disputed territories, which Article 140 of the constitution states should have been completed by 2007.
4. Pressure the Baghdad Government on constitutional matters, including (2) and (3), before Kurdish Peshmerga participate in an offensive on Mosul.
5. Support a democratic federal system of government in Iraq, including the KRG. e.g. assist in negotiating power and resource sharing arrangements and the development of appropriate institutions, etc. at the local, regional and federal level.

Gina Lennox expanded some points.

Steven's response was that the Australian Government's policy is to encourage an inclusive government. It was explained that the current Baghdad Government is no more inclusive than Maliki's Government. He then asked if we could provide him with the steps to achieve a federation of Iraq!

Brusk Aeiveri outlined what the Australian Government needs to consider and work towards for Syria:

1. Discuss ways of stopping ISIS recruits, weapons and supplies, and ISIS oil, stolen antiquities etc. crossing the Turkish-Syrian border.
2. Support the opening of humanitarian corridors across the Turkish-Syrian border for aid and resources to rebuild destroyed towns, villages and industry, and help refugees return home.
3. Support Syrian Kurdish participation in coalition military training program.
4. Support democratic councils in the autonomous regions of Rojava (Syria).
5. Support a democratic federal system of government in Syria.

Gina Lennox expanded some points.

Steven's response was that Australia cannot operate militarily in Syria as it does not have the consent of the Assad Government and has no diplomatic links with the Assad Government. He noted that when Australia was on the UN Security Council,

Julie Bishop advocated humanitarian access into Syria without the consent of the Assad Government and succeeded in having this passed.

Brusk Aeiveri outlined what the Australian Government needs to consider and work towards for Turkey, in supporting the Turkish-Kurdish peace process by encouraging:

- The development of actionable steps;
- Transparency including the use of independent monitors to oversee the peace process;
- Have negotiations covered by independent media; and
- Have international monitoring of elections on 7 June 2015.

Gina Lennox expanded some points.

Steven's response was that Turkey is outside his portfolio: It is considered part of Europe.

Nader Gariban outlined what the Australian Government needs to consider and work towards for Iran:

- Support the abolition of the death penalty, i.e. Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre: Between January and April 2015, 323 people executed – only 94 announced by government; in 2014, 721 people executed – only 268 announced by government. Main alleged crime: drug trafficking. Other alleged crimes listed: murder, rape, 'unknown'. Kurds make up 80% of all executions.
- Minority rights in a democratic federal system of government in Iran.

Nader pointed out that such moves would decrease the number of Iranians seeking asylum in Australia.

Steven's response was that the Australian Government opposes the death penalty and is discussing how to take international action against the death penalty in all countries. For individual countries the Australian government is quietly (i.e. not publically) advocating against the death penalty. In Julie Bishop's recent visit to Iran she raised the issues of the death penalty and minority rights with President Hassan Rouhani, and the Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif.

12 AM: Meeting with Luke Simpkins and David Feeney

Luke Simpkins expressed the view that an independent Kurdistan would contribute to stability in the Middle East. KLA emphasised that an Australian -Kurdish Parliamentary Friendship Group would ideally be non -partisan in regards to the different parts of Kurdistan and the different political parties. Luke and David readily agreed that this was necessary and considered that they would be able to gain the interest of at least 10 parliamentarians, five from each side of politics, to make up the group.

12.30 PM: Presentation

21 Parliamentarians in attendance:

3 Liberal MPs: Craig Laundry, Mal Brough, Luke Simpkins.

11 Labour MPs: Laurie Ferguson, Chris Hayes, Julie Owens, Melissa Parke, Graham Perrett, Michele Rowland, Matt Thistlethwaite, Maria Vamvakinou, Tony Zappia, Nick Champion, Jill Hall.

3 Labour Senators: Lisa Singh, Chris Ketter, Claire Moore.

1 Greens Senator: Richard Di Natale (Leader of the Greens)

1 Independent Senator: Jacquie Lambie

2 Chiefs of Staff: Rob Messenger accompanying Jacquie Lambie; Another staff person unable to be identified.

19 stayed throughout the presentation and questions and answers.

QUESTION: How can ISIS be defeated without Shia militia in Iraq?

ANSWER: Shia militia cannot defeat ISIS within Sunni territory. Sunnis have to be given something worth fighting for e.g. an autonomous region/government/parliament.

QUESTION: What about the Assyrians wanting their own autonomous region?

ANSWER: The problem with this is that they have a small population and a small area of Ninevah province and this area lacks a strong economic base. One possibility is that their rights could be enshrined in the autonomous region's constitution and parliament and expressed at the local government level.

QUESTION: Should the PKK be delisted as a terrorist organisation?

ANSWER: Yes, otherwise how can the Turkish-Kurdish peace process be successful, given the PKK is a major stakeholder in the peace? (See text of presentation for other reasons given)

Note: Jacqui Lambie and others strongly favoured delisting the PKK as a terrorist organisation. Jacquie's reason is that they have proven such good fighters against ISIS.

QUESTION: What is happening militarily in Rojava?

ANSWER: The Syrian Kurds are fighting daily battles with ISIS from Hasaka to the border.

QUESTION: Which US party would support the Kurdish cause most?

ANSWER: Republicans.

QUESTION: Has the US changed its attitude towards Turkey in the last 10 years?

ANSWER: Yes, but it is a matter of degrees. It still defers to Turkey on too many matters.

3 PM: Meeting with Bronwyn Taylor, Chief of Staff to Tanya Plibersek, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development) **and Richard Brooks**, Media and Policy Advisor to Nick Champion, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health. Note: Mike Kelly, Senior Policy Advisor to Bill Shorten, sent his apologies that he could not attend.

The same points were presented at this meeting as were presented in the 10 AM meeting. Bronwyn Taylor pointed out that the Australian Government has cut all relations with the Assad Regime. Gina Lennox asked 'How will there ever be a political solution if no-one starts negotiating with the regime?' and suggested that

Assad may be interested in having a coalition force stop ISIS recruits, weapons and supplies coming across the Turkish-Syrian border and in exchange, the regime may be willing to negotiate with non-extremists.

Labor is seeking briefings about Iraq, as these are forthcoming. For example, what happens to arms that are seized? What is the exit strategy? What assistance is being offered to protect Iraqi citizens?

Conclusion:

We had been warned not to expect more than 5 – 8 parliamentarians to attend the KLA presentation and even those who attended may only stay for a short while, so the attendance exceeded expectations. It showed there is considerable interest in Kurdish issues, if framed by a concern for ISIS.

In general, Australia is following a passive, US-led line, although there was surprising support for delisting the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

Future action should include engaging with more Liberal parliamentarians and those who work with the UN.



Close & Return to Home page

Close & Return to KLA Activities page