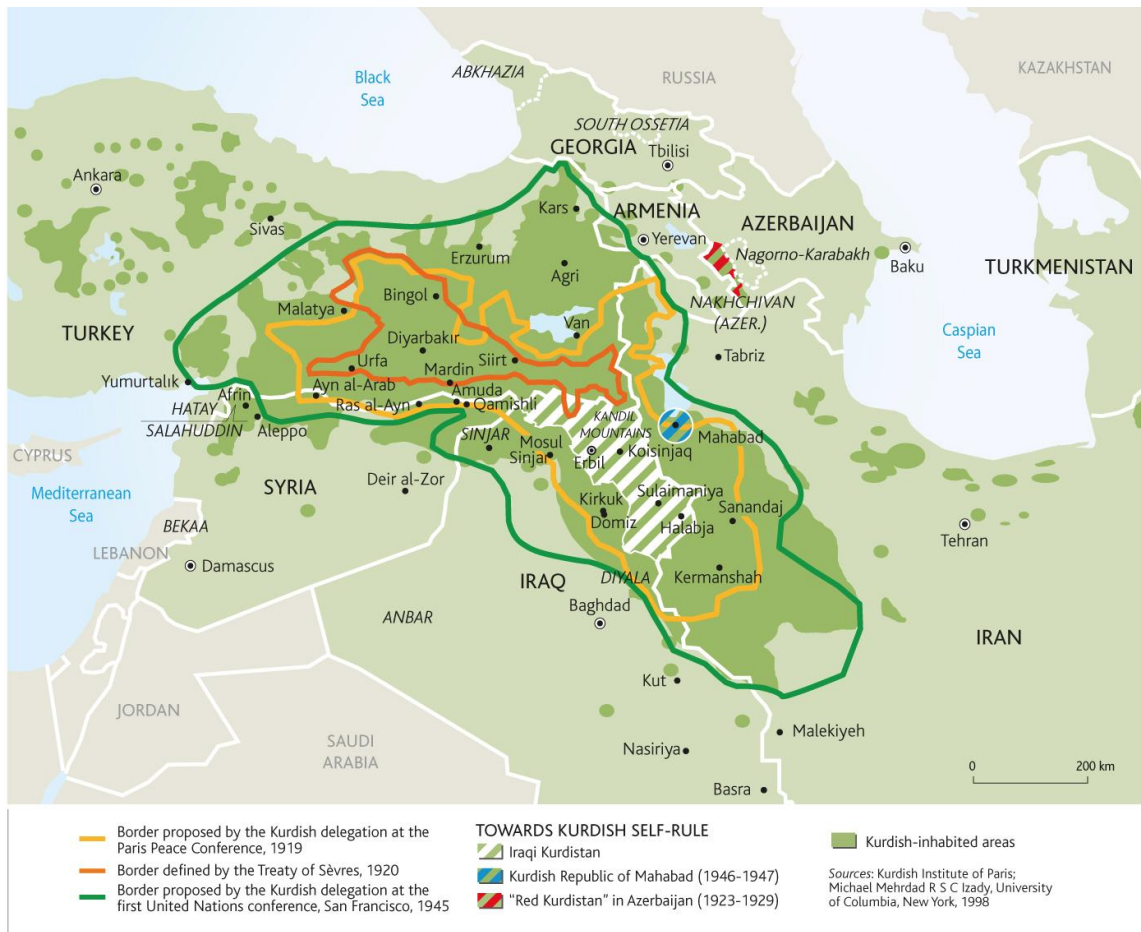


# Report IV: 22 September 2016:

## ISIS, Failing States and the Kurds

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## Summary

After the ISIS caliphate is defeated, Iraq, Syria and Turkey will continue to face crises because they are failing or failed states. These countries and Iran need long term support to become decentralised democracies that provide their ethno-religious minorities political, cultural and economic justice. For Iraq and Syria reconstruction will need to be on the scale of a Marshall Plan that spans decades and is designed to cope with worst-case scenarios.

**Iraq:** The Government of Iraq (GoI) is dysfunctional. Unless the constitution and major reforms are enacted, aid, loans and investment to the GoI will not be fairly applied.

- If the GoI cannot enact the constitution and carry out major reforms in a set time frame, it should be disbanded and replaced with a confederation or three independent states.
- Post-ISIS reconstruction needs to be co-ordinated with provincial, district and subdistrict levels of government to build local capacity and support con/federalism.
- Investment in reconstruction needs to be linked to building local capacity to ensure security, governance, justice, reconciliation and employment to address challenges specific to each of four jurisdictions: (1) ISIS-liberated Sunni Arab provinces (2) Militia dominated Shia provinces (3) Kurdistan Region and (4) disputed territories.
- Before a Mosul offensive, the status of the disputed territories needs to be resolved.

## Syria

- Supporting jihadi militia to expand territory and participate in political negotiations enhances the likelihood of Syria becoming a Sunni Islamic state.
- Supporting secular multi-ethnic administrations established by the Kurds and their allies in Afrin, Kobani, Tel Abyad (Gire Spi), Cizire, Shaddadi, Hol and Manbij, and allowing their representatives to participate in political negotiations enhances the likelihood of Syria becoming a pluralist decentralised democracy. A future Syria must avoid the ethnic quota system and other dysfunctions of Iraq.
- The development of a new constitution is a priority with or without a ceasefire.
- Humanitarian zones run by local administrations need to be established without delay to enhance security and begin reconstruction linked to building local capacity.
- As in Iraq, investment in reconstruction needs to be linked to building local capacity to ensure security, governance, a justice, reconciliation and employment to address challenges peculiar to each of four jurisdictions: (1) government controlled areas, (2) those liberated from ISIS, (3) those under opposition control and (4) those run by multi-ethnic administrations.

**Turkey:** President Erdogan and the AKP government have set Turkey on a dangerous path towards Islamic authoritarianism, curbing the media, democracy, justice and human rights.

- Pressure must be exerted on Turkey to stop purging innocent civilians, including judges, academics, journalists and teachers and stop the sieges, curfews, destruction and extrajudicial killings of civilians in Kurdish towns, suburbs and villages.
- If the AKP government does not embark on political negotiations with Kurdish leaders so minorities gain fundamental cultural, political and economic rights in Turkey, the international community needs to help develop a realistic roadmap with other leaders.
- Given its internal trajectory, Turkey must not be allowed to expand its control in Syria, participate in an offensive on Raqqa or Mosul, or block efforts to build a pluralist democratic government in Syria.

**Iran:** Iran must be encouraged to give its minorities more cultural and political rights and stop using the death penalty for political activists and crimes related to poverty.

## Introduction

The Chilcot report highlighted inadequate planning for a post-Baathist Iraq. Military expenditure was many times that spent on reconstruction. To avoid the same post-ISIS<sup>1</sup>, the international community needs to critically review current strategies, alliances and future scenarios regarding Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran and the Kurds.



Source: Institute for the Study of War (31 March 2016)



### The current status of ISIS

The collapse of the ISIS caliphate appears imminent. ISIS has lost 47 percent of its territory in Iraq, 20 percent of its territory in Syria and territory in Libya, Egypt and Yemen, involving the loss of supply routes and revenue sources<sup>2</sup> as well as significant leaders. Ramadi was liberated in January, Palmyra in March, Fallujah in June and Manbij in August. The US claims there are less than 20,000 committed ISIS fighters remaining in Iraq and Syria, although ISIS remains surprisingly well armed and is still capable of launching offensives (as it did in Raqqa province against the Syrian army) or resisting attack, as it did for 73 days in Manbij.

Many argue that an ISIS 'leaderless jihad' is more dangerous than an ISIS caliphate. ISIS increasingly resorts to fleeing before a fight (as in Jarablus) or relying on anarchic groups (as it does in Hawija), chemical attacks, human shields and suicide attacks, and, unlike Al-Qaida, does not consider its reputation harmed by claiming responsibility for attacks conducted by alienated, psychiatrically impaired freelancers, often called 'lone wolves' or those who have not received instruction and support to carry out a specific act<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> ISIS stands for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and is used in preference to Daesh, which is similar to the Arabic words 'Daes', meaning 'one who crushes something underfoot' and 'Dahes', which translates as 'one who sows discord'.

<sup>2</sup> ISIS revenue has dropped by about 30 per cent to USD\$54m between March 2015 and March 2016, according to the IHS consultancy group.

<sup>3</sup> The perpetrator of the Orlando attack that killed 49 people on 12 June had a history of hate threats against blacks, Jews and homosexuals. The driver of the truck in Nice on Bastille Day (14 July) that killed 84 people had a history of psychiatric illness, petty crime and domestic violence. Two attacks in Bavaria in

These trends indicate that ISIS ideology and tactics will continue to be a security threat and contribute to militant jihadism from Africa to Asia and divisive politics and sentiment in the West (e.g. French mayors banning the burkini; Brussels mayor banning a Kurdish cultural festival in September and the Australian-Kurdish journalist, Renas Lelikan being arrested and imprisoned on 20 July for being a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK). According to IHS Jane, between 1 January 2015 and 16 July 2016, 46 ISIS attacks killed 658 people in the US and Europe, including 32 people in Brussels on 22 March 2016. It is estimated some 5,000 European citizens in Europe are ISIS fighters. In the same period, ISIS conducted 2,063 suicide attacks killing 28,031 people in the rest of the world. Most of those killed were Muslim. ISIS claimed responsibility for most of these attacks, including an attack on the Prophet's Mosque in Medina on 4 July that killed four security guards, and attacks in Al-Qaida's heartland, one on 2 July at a Dhaka restaurant in Bangladesh killing 20 expatriates, one on 22 July in Kabul killing 80 Hazara people and one on 8 August in Quetta, Pakistan, killing at least 97 people, many of whom were lawyers. ISIS has also conducted low level attacks during Ramadan in Kuala Lumpur and Solo, Indonesia. However, ISIS has not claim responsibility for any attack inside Turkey.

#### Failing or failed states

The Baathist leaders of ISIS are opportunistic. Since 2013 they have taken advantage of political dysfunction and ethno-religious divisions. The international community ignored their threat until August 2014. The same international players are showing a similar passivity towards the increased Islamisation, authoritarianism and other dysfunctions of Turkey. Turkey does not return this passivity. After the demise of the ISIS caliphate, Turkey, Iraq and Syria will remain regional and international security threats because all three countries exhibit characteristics of failing or failed states: a lack of good governance, whether because the government and its institutions withhold resources and are incapable of making constructive decisions, as in Iraq, embark on civil war involving sieges and gross human rights abuses, as in Syria and Turkey, or are authoritarian, divisive and corrupt, as in all three countries. All three countries have an internal breakdown of law and order, leading to mass imprisonments, internal displacement and destruction of physical assets. All three countries have an inability or unwillingness to control their external borders.

The trajectories of these countries are part of the cataclysmic changes underway in the Middle East that do not lend themselves to half measures. While Russia and Iran are expanding their influence with specific goals, others in the international community are incoherent in their intentions, rhetoric and actions. This incoherence risks entrenchment and expansion of secular and theocratic dictatorships, and decades of fear, war and terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, energy and food insecurity, and the suffocation of democratic movements and already stagnant economies. To avoid these risks it is time to re-evaluate the status quo.

#### A mismatch of intention, rhetoric and action regarding the Kurds

One of the most glaring inconsistencies is the US-led coalition's military reliance on Kurds to fight ISIS, while not supporting their secular multi-ethnic administrations or doing

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July, one wounding five people on a Wuerzburg train and another wounding 15 people in Berlin were conducted by angry, alienated refugees.



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more to resolve tensions between Kurds and the nation states in which they live. Russia has been the only country speaking out against Turkey bombing Kurds in Syria and blocking Syrian Kurds from participating in political negotiations. This betrayal of an ally warrants the question: why are Kurds proving such good fighters against ISIS?

There are four main reasons. The first is that Kurds have a long history of fighting oppression, which has generated experienced commanders and fighters. The second is that the Kurdish population supports the fight against ISIS. A third reason is that Kurds have received air support. The fourth reason is that Kurds' are motivated by their dream for self-determination. For this dream to become a reality they must defeat ISIS and establish trust with other ethnicities and the international community. Hence, the Kurds are a formidable force. In contrast, the Arabs in Syria and Iraq and the citizens of Turkey are divided in their understanding of Islam, their political aspirations and their views on ISIS and the West.

### Australia's position

Despite militant jihadi ideology spreading in Asia, the Australian public are kept uninformed about the role of the Australian Defence Force (including SAS) in fighting ISIS, and what Australian citizens are doing in Syria and Iraq, about 30 having been killed fighting with ISIS and three having been killed fighting against ISIS: Ashley Johnston in February 2015, Reece Harding in July 2015 and Jamie Bright in May 2016. Nor is the public aware of Australia's diplomatic stance and goals, for instance, in meeting Iraqi Shia *Hashd al-Shaabi* leaders in August. In the absence of public debates about strategies that address root causes, this report outlines the political and military challenges and suggests ways forward, with a particular focus on the Kurdistan regions.

## **Iraq**

The Iraqi people have suffered decades of war, dictatorship and government corruption and dysfunction. Since 2005 the oil-rich Government of Iraq (GoI) has failed to enact the 2005 constitution, build trust and inclusive governance, or provide security, infrastructure, services and a diversified economy. The need to fight ISIS could have unified Iraq. Instead, the actions of the GoI have increased sectarianism and the potential for future conflict between Shia, between Shia and Sunni Arabs, and between Kurds and Shia militia and/or Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

### ***A dysfunctional government***

#### *Increased suicide bomber attacks in Baghdad*

The GoI has been unable to prevent near daily ISIS attacks in Baghdad that killed at least 817 people in the first seven months of 2016<sup>4</sup>. After the carnage in Karada on 3 July, when 'unusual' explosives killed 324 civilians, of whom 208 were burnt beyond

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<sup>4</sup> ISIS claimed responsibility for attacks on a Shia Mosque on 25 February killing 15 civilians; on 28 February killing 73 civilians and 17 security forces; on 11 May killing 94 civilians; three suicide attacks on 17 May killing 72 civilians; twin bomb blasts on 15 June killing seven soldiers and two civilians and four attacks on 3 July killing 324 civilians. On 8 July, another suicide attack killed 35 people and on 24 July a suicide attack killed 14. Attacks are on-going.



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recognition and others died of smoke asphyxiation, angry residents threw stones and yelled abuse at a visiting convoy that included Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. Reasons given for so many security breaches include poor intelligence, the non-implementation of security plans, a lack of co-ordination between security forces answering to the Defence Ministry, Interior Ministry and regional administrations, the use of fake UK-manufactured sonar bomb detectors, the bribing of security at checkpoints and the presence of ISIS cells inside Baghdad. Hence, people blame the government as much as ISIS for these attacks.

### Fiscal fiasco

To offset a widening budget deficit caused by falling global crude oil prices and the costs of war, Iraq is eating into its foreign reserves<sup>5</sup> and increasing its foreign debt. Despite the GoI having failed to meet the conditions of previous loans, for example one of \$50 billion made in 2004, in 2016, the international community continues to provide loans directly to the GoI<sup>6</sup>. Spokespeople in the Iraqi Parliament claim the parliament is often kept uninformed of interest payments and repayment schedules. Another \$2 billion in aid for reconstruction was pledged at a conference in Washington on 20-21 July. No Kurd was among the Iraqi delegation but because of the GoI's dismal record in distributing resources to the provinces, a Sunni Arab representative, Mashaan al-Juburi, asked that none of the pledged funds be given to the GoI. Rather, city councils should oversee reconstruction with an in-country international body paying funds directly to companies that do the work. In light of the GoI's poor record in distributing resources, the pending US Foreign Aid Spending Bill stipulates that 17 percent of the \$2.7 billion loan for military equipment and a \$260 million sovereign loan guarantee, that will allow Iraq to borrow up to one billion on the international credit market, must go to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

### Inertia and unrest

Even the Shia population has lost faith in the GoI, having held massive street protests since 31 July 2015 against GoI incompetence and corruption. Initially started by secularists, al-Sadr's Peace Brigades and other militias soon dominated the protests. In response, al-Abadi announced a series of reforms, including the elimination of senior official positions, the amalgamation of ministries to reduce them from 22 to 16, and the appointment of 14 out of 16 technocrat ministers not aligned to any political party<sup>7</sup>. For 12 months, the 328-member parliament blocked all reforms.

If a technocrat cabinet was not formed the Shia cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, threatened to bring down the government. On 31 March, all parties rejected al-Abadi's new list of

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<sup>5</sup> Iraq's budget shrank from USD\$118 billion in 2013 to \$105 billion in 2015. Iraq's foreign reserves were reduced to \$54 billion in 2015, and are likely to be reduced by another \$25 billion in 2016.

<sup>6</sup> In May, the International Monetary Fund agreed to loan GoI \$5.34 billion, which was to be tied to economic reforms that reduce public spending and curb corruption. The World Bank agreed to a \$1.55 billion loan; the EU and G7 pledged \$3.6 billion in loans and on 29 June, the US and GoI agreed to a \$2.7 billion loan for Iraq's military expenses. The person who negotiated all these loans, Iraq's finance minister, Hoshiyar Zabari, lost a no-confidence vote in parliament on 21 September. His is a Kurd who had held the position since 2005.

<sup>7</sup> The cabinet reshuffle was to exclude the Minister of Interior and Minister of Defence but on 5 July, the Interior Minister, Mohammed Salem al-Ghabban, resigned after the Karada massacre and on 25 August the Defence Minister, Khalid al-Obeidi, stepped down after losing a parliamentary vote of no confidence.



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ministers, and vice president Nouri al-Maliki, Ayad Allawi and others called for the sacking of the president, prime minister and parliamentary speaker. On 30 April thousands of Sadr's followers stormed the Green Zone, with security guards allowing hundreds to enter the parliamentary building. Protesters temporarily detained 70 parliamentarians, among them some Kurdish parliamentarians. Missing from parliament were another 105 parliamentarians protesting the cabinet reshuffle. Protesters erected tents outside the parliament building, a state of emergency was declared and extra Special Forces were called in. After 24 hours, the protestors voluntarily left the Green Zone, but on 20 May, thousands again stormed the Green Zone and some breached the prime minister's office. This time security forces pushed the protesters out of the Green Zone by firing on them with tear gas and water cannons, and automatic weapons were fired into the air. Three protesters and one journalist were killed and another 570 people were wounded. On 9 June, Shia protesters torched the headquarters of the Daawa Islamic Party in Najaf.

The establishment of a technocrat cabinet is meant to overcome a quota system designed by the Coalition Provisional Authority to build inclusive governance, yet unaligned technocrats in a ministerial cabinet have no power to change a quota system based on political affiliations and patronage networks that permeates every level of government and bureaucracy.

The Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani blames Iran's interference in Iraqi affairs for causing divisions within and between the ruling Shia parties: the Daawa Islamic Party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Sadr's *al-Ahrar* party. The Daawa Islamic Party is divided between those affiliated with Iran, led by al-Maliki, who runs a shadow party from within called the Reform Front, and those advocating a more independent Iraq, led by al-Abadi. Al-Maliki's strength comes from his close links with the commanders of powerful Iranian-backed Shia Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs), called *Hashd al-Shaabi*. These include the Badr Corps and *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq* (League of the Righteous), whose salaries are paid by the Gol. By mid-2016, the Gol had stopped paying PMUs not loyal to Iran. Sixty percent of Iraq's territory, including highways, is controlled by *Hashd al-Shaabi*. Their leaders openly admit to wanting political power and are preparing to run in the 2017 elections<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, Al-Abadi's power is under constant threat, which explains his February order for the *Hashd al-Shaabi* to be incorporated into the ISF, although they would retain an independent military structure. By August, offices were registering militia in various provinces. Kurds and Sunni Arabs oppose this parallel structure. Sunni leaders suggest the militia should form a National Guard in their home provinces.

Since the 2014 elections, the Iraqi Parliament has passed 87 of a proposed 275 laws, excluding some of the most critical such as the formation of a Federal Council, which would turn Iraq into a bicameral system; the formation of a National Guard for each province to maintain security; and oil and gas laws. Meanwhile the Gol issues orders outside the parliamentary process. Legislation that does get considered is often cosmetic, likely to increase divisions, or contradicts the constitution. For instance, in mid

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<sup>8</sup> On 28 August, the High Electoral Commission announced that PMU factions would not be eligible to run in elections, but this likely will exclude those already affiliated with existing political parties and those that are independent of state control.





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July, the Iraqi parliament drafted laws limiting freedom of expression, the right to protest and internet access. Civil action caused a postponement of the bills. Other orders are made outside the parliament, for example, an order in June 2015 that stipulated all who reside in a governorate for a minimum of five years must be given residency status. An order in May 2016 shortened the qualifying period to three years. Given the influx of 2.5 million Sunni Arab IDPs into Kurdish majority areas, these orders are seen as a way of Arabizing the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and disputed territories. Hence, Kirkuk Provincial Council rejected the orders. The 400,000 IDPs, of which more than 80 percent live among the host community, are putting a strain on Kirkuk's neglected infrastructure while granting them residency would impact future elections and a referendum on who should govern Kirkuk.

In mid-July, 62 Kurdish parliamentarians were among 180 parliamentarians who returned to Baghdad for a parliamentary sitting. Each bloc had set preconditions for returning. Whilst Kurdish political parties are divided in Kurdistan they were united in the preconditions they set: the Gol must resume negotiations regarding oil and revenue sharing, provide salaries and military supplies to Peshmerga, implement Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution to resolve land disputes, boundaries and jurisdiction over disputed territories, and approve a referendum on Kurdish independence. None of these demands were met.

The Gol consistently makes promises and fails to deliver. For instance, since 2005, the Gol has failed to complete essential major infrastructure in the disputed province of Kirkuk. Since late 2013, the Kirkuk Provincial Council (KPC) and Gol directorates based in Kirkuk have not received revenue from Baghdad, or any compensation for oil extracted from Kirkuk's oil fields. The only compensation for Kirkuk's oil since 2014 has come from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and between March and August, the Gol stopped Kirkuk's oil from being exported through the Kirkuk Ceyhan pipeline<sup>9</sup>. Supply resumed after the appointment of a new oil minister, Jabar Ali al-Luaibi, and the Gol and KRG agreed to share Kirkuk oil 50:50. Iraqi State Banks block foreign companies investing in Kirkuk infrastructure by refusing to provide bank guarantees. In August the Gol Electoral Commission announced there would be no 2017 provincial elections in Kirkuk. The Commission has not allowed elections in Kirkuk since 2005.

As well as not coming to an agreement with the KRG about oil and revenue sharing, the Gol also discriminates against people living in the KRI. The Gol has not paid for wheat and maize supplied in 2014 and 2015 by farmers in the KRI and disputed territories. In 2016, the Gol announced it would not purchase 30 – 50 percent of all wheat grown by KRI farmers, or any wheat grown by farmers affected by land claims in the disputed territories. The Gol refuses to resolve the land disputes between Kurdish farmers who were forced off their land during the Baathist regime and the Arabs brought in to farm their land. In the absence of government action, people are sharing the land but the original owners lack land title. Also in 2016, the Gol banned KRI chickens, fruit and vegetables from being sold in central and southern Iraq. Nor does the Gol allow trucks that enter the KRI-Iranian Parviz-Khan border checkpoint to travel to Iraq, claiming the

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<sup>9</sup> The KRG has agreed to pay Kirkuk \$2 for every barrel of oil exported from Kirkuk, but due to the financial crisis, has only paid \$50 million since December 2015.



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KRG has failed to comply with 2015 legislation requiring all cross border trade to be under Gol control.

Such patterns of neglect and obfuscation are not peculiar to the KRI and disputed territories. Sunni and Shia Arab provinces face insurmountable difficulties dealing with Baghdad. Since 2011, nine out of 15 provinces outside the KRI have made applications for or have discussed creating autonomous regions, as is their constitutional right, but powerful Baghdad ministries oppose decentralisation, there are no procedures to process applications, no formula for how oil revenue is allocated and no clarification of powers, with many in Baghdad wanting to reduce the powers of autonomous regions. Without such clarifications, any new autonomous region will face a financial and political crisis like that faced by Kirkuk and the KRI. A crackdown on media also fuels sectarianism<sup>10</sup>.

### ***Existing divisions***

#### ***Shia Arab provinces***

The Shia provinces are awash with militias armed with the latest weaponry, each vying for power at the local and national level. *Hashd al-Shaabi* impose extremist Shia ideology on local administrations and communities and their charities benefit from international aid. For instance, in August, six bombs targeted Basra cafes that employed female staff. The potential for Shia militias to fight each other was indicated on 31 July, when al-Sadr's Peace Brigades clashed with a splinter group west of Baghdad.

#### ***Sunni Arab provinces***

Within days of Fallujah's liberation, Sunni tribes and organisations vied for power and a role in reconstruction, with some arguing that the Anbar Provincial Council be dissolved. The Anbar Provincial Council voted to dismiss Governor Suhaib al-Rawi on 28 June, but he refused to step down. On 4 July Al-Rawi requested the Gol divide Anbar into two provinces. Often to settle old scores, leaders and civilians accuse each other of being ISIS supporters or of having fled to safety. This is occurring in other Sunni Arab provinces, with Shia *Hashd al-Shaabi* being an unwelcome presence in all Sunni Arab provinces.

#### ***Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the disputed territories***

The KRI and disputed territories continue to suffer from a political and financial crisis as a result of an inability to resolve disputes with the Gol, a war with ISIS with the Gol refusing to pay or supply Peshmerga, and hosting a majority of Iraqi IDPs.

The parliament of Kurdistan has been inactive since October 2015, when the Gorran parliamentary speaker and four Gorran ministers were sacked and replaced with Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) representatives, after Gorran insisted that President Barzani's term had expired<sup>11</sup> and that the draft constitution be amended to reflect a parliamentary democracy. Gorran and other parties also demand the nationalisation of Peshmerga forces, greater fiscal transparency, the finalisation of the constitution, and

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<sup>10</sup> In March 2016, the Gol shut down the Baghdad office of *Al-Jazeera*, the local TV channel, *Al-Baghdadia*, and a satirical show, *Albasheer*, claiming they inflamed sectarian tensions. The number of legal actions taken against journalists in the first half of 2016 exceeds the number throughout 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Masoud Barzani has proposed stepping down when there was a suitable candidate, when Kurdistan becomes independent or by the July 2017 elections.



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administrative and budget decentralisation. After numerous reconciliation attempts failed to reactivate the parliament, in May 2016, PUK and Gorran formed an alliance that gave them a majority over KDP in both the Iraqi and Kurdistan parliaments. Without a reactivated parliament, the KDP-dominated KRG makes unilateral decisions. KDP insists that discussions with the GoI be framed by a resolution of the status of the disputed territories and a referendum on independence. Other parties demand the reactivation of parliament before a referendum.

Another major political issue is the minority rights. While Assyrians and Turkmens have five members each in the 111-member Kurdistan parliament, and in the KRI, people have freedom of religion and the right to be educated in their mother tongue, Assyrians consider the KRG and the judicial system have failed to address land disputes, and Yezidi and Assyrians in the disputed territories of Nineveh consider the Peshmerga failed to protect them against ISIS in June-August 2014.

The KRI's financial crisis has been on-going since January 2014, when the GoI stopped paying the KRI its allocated revenue. The crisis is exacerbated by the GoI stopping Kirkuk oil being exported between March and August; Turkey periodically shutting down the Kirkuk Ceyhan oil pipeline<sup>12</sup> and ISIS attacks on the Bai Hassan oil field in Kirkuk, as occurred on 31 July and 10 August. So as not to be so reliant on Turkey, the KRG commenced negotiations to build a new pipeline through Iran to the Persian Gulf, but the deal requires GoI approval. In late August the GoI rejected the proposal.

Since mid-2014, the KRG has not been able to regularly or sufficiently pay salaries to public sector workers, including Peshmerga and the KRG is behind in payments to oil companies. Eighty percent of all government projects have stopped and since 2014, the private sector has laid off 330,000 workers. The KRG estimates it would need \$5 billion to complete 4,000 unfinished projects. In May, the KRG promised a three-year reform package to boost the banking sector, taxation and the private sector, and diversify the economy. Yet, ten months after the liberation of Sinjar (Shingal) there is negligible reconstruction and unpaid teachers are threatening not to return to work in the new academic year.

Turkey continues to launch airstrikes on PKK in Iraq Kurdistan and since May Iran has been shelling and bombing Iranian Kurdish militia located in villages in Iraqi Kurdistan. These attacks are injuring and displacing civilians and destroying farmland, livestock and villages.

### **War with ISIS**

In the war with ISIS, the GoI has relied on the Iranian-backed *Hashd al-Shaabi* to compensate for the deficiencies in the ISF, which, with the exception of the Special Operations Forces, continues to have problems in recruitment, retention and combat readiness. However, the ISF has had some recent victories. After the liberation of Ramadi in January, on 14 March the ISF reclaimed the strategic town of Rutba in Anbar province,

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<sup>12</sup> Between 16 February and 11 March Turkey shut the pipeline for security and maintenance reasons, costing the KRG USD\$14 million a day for 23 days. On 17 March (the day a Federation of Northern Syria - Rojava was announced) Turkey shut the pipeline because of a technical issue.



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helped by ISIS fleeing without a fight, and on 14 April ISF took control of Hit after one month of fighting.

On 23 May, the ISF and *Hashd al-Shaabi*, the latter under Iranian command, began an offensive on Fallujah, 70 kilometres west of Baghdad, a former Baathist and subsequent Al-Qaida stronghold, and since January 2014, under ISIS control. An estimated 1,000 to 4,000 ISIS fighters held an estimated 90,000 civilians inside the city. ISIS killed civilians trying to escape and men who refused to fight for them. Despite Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani insisting that civilian lives be saved, *Hashd al-Shaabi* were accused of random mortar shelling, torturing and killing male escapees and detaining thousands.<sup>13</sup> By 26 June, 80 percent of the city was liberated, with coalition airstrikes destroying hundreds of ISIS vehicles escaping Fallujah. *Hashd al-Shaabi* announced they must stay to secure the peace.

Elsewhere, peshmerga have defended the multi-ethnic disputed town of Tuz Khurmatu in Salah al-din province since June 2014. On 24 April, 30 people were killed in clashes between Shia Turkmen *Hashd Al-Shaabi* and peshmerga. Some observers believe Iran is encouraging the Shia Turkmen to cause trouble to keep options open for limiting Kurdish power. Peshmerga negotiated a joint security force but this failed to prevent further clashes.

In the disputed province of Kirkuk, ISIS controls the district of Hawija and southwest Daquq. In late February-early March, ISIS in Bashir shelled peshmerga and Turkmen civilians in the town of Taza. Eight attacks on Taza involved mustard gas and chlorine that caused the deaths of three children. Another 300 people sought medical treatment. On 1 May, US-led coalition air support and peshmerga drove ISIS out of Bashir, killing 250 ISIS. Three peshmerga died. Security was left in the hands of Shia Turkmen, and on 2 May, ISIS attacked Bashir with mustard gas, wounding 13 *Hashd Al-Shaabi* fighters.

Liberating Hawija will be difficult because local ISIS groups control Hawija. Back in April, Sunni Arab tribes agreed to join with Peshmerga to liberate Hawija and southwest Daquq, and in early August, the ISF, *Hashd al-Shaabi* and Peshmerga agreed to join forces to liberate Hawija city. In the first week of August, ISIS captured and held hostage 3,000 people escaping Hawija. Others were shot. But the offensive remains on hold. Some blame delays on the Gol.

The liberation of Mosul will be the most complex and largest endeavour against ISIS attempted. Up to two million people remain in Mosul and up to 1.5 million people will be in need of humanitarian aid. A total of 20,000 to 30,000 Iraqi troops will take part.

Since early 2016, besieged Mosul residents have faced 24-hour curfews and severe food, water, electricity and medical shortages. ISIS deserters and escaping civilians are being executed or shot by ISIS snipers. To prevent further suffering, the Mosul offensive must come soon but before the offensive, KRG President Masoud Barzani has called for a political agreement on how Mosul and the province of Nineveh will be administered after

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<sup>13</sup> The Anbar governor claimed that between 3 - 5 June, 49 civilian men were killed and 643 went missing.



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liberation. This requires extensive negotiations between the GoI, KRG and leaders of Nineveh's multi-ethnic population. On 28 July, the Mosul governor, Atheel Nojaifi, proposed Nineveh become an autonomous region divided into six or eight self-administered provinces. In September President Masoud Barzani proposed Nineveh become three self-administered provinces. The KRG supports some form of autonomy for ethnic groups. For instance in a meeting with Assyrians and Armenians on 16 July President Barzani asked them to put forward a proposal for a Christian enclave on the Nineveh Plains that would be overseen by a multi-ethnic administration in Mosul. This may not suit some Assyrians who lobby for an independent Assyrian homeland covering parts of Nineveh and Dohuk, a territory that encompasses Kurdish religious groups (Yezidi, Shabak, Kakai), Arab and Turkmen communities. Some Yezidi also want an autonomous region in Sinjar (Shingal) where some 2,500 members of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Syrian Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (men's units called YPG and women's units called YPJ) are based. President Barzani has proposed that the different regions in Nineveh take part in a referendum on whether to join the KRI.

In preparation for the Mosul offensive, in February 2016, three ISF battalions and other contingents, including 600 from the 15<sup>th</sup> Division trained by the Australian Defence Force, arrived in Makhmour in the KRI, 70 kilometres south of Mosul, to prepare for the offensive. It was the first time the KRG had let ISF onto Kurdistan soil since 2005. Permission was granted provided the ISF leave the KRI after Mosul's liberation.

On 24 March, five days after an ISIS mortar attack on the Makhmour military base killed one US soldier, the Iraqi offensive on Mosul officially began. In reality, peshmerga have been fighting ISIS around Mosul since November 2015. The initial ISF advance was slow. There was no trust or agreement between the ISF, Peshmerga and Sunni Arab forces, and ISF's advances suffered from counterattacks by ISIS. In June the ISF succeeded in liberating a number of towns, and on 9 July the ISF captured Qayyara air base, 65 kilometres south of Mosul enabling the US to create a logistic hub at the airbase. In late August ISF liberated the town of Qayyara, 12 kilometres from the airbase.

As ISF advanced from the south, peshmerga advanced from the east, north and west, with major battles occurring in early March, May and August<sup>14</sup>. By mid-September peshmerga were within seven to ten kilometres of the city, and were blocking five of six routes into the city.

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<sup>14</sup> With US-led coalition air support, in early March, peshmerga fought off 400 ISIS led by an Uzbek commander along a 20-kilometre front line west of Mosul. At least 70 ISIS militants were killed. Many peshmerga were wounded. On 3 May, more than 150 ISIS fighters, including 50 suicide bombers, launched multiple attacks against peshmerga near the town of Tel Skof, 28 kilometres north of Mosul. In the ensuing battle 49 ISIS fighters were killed, a British advisor was shot in the head and an American serviceman, Navy SEAL Charles Keating, was killed, along with 10 peshmerga. Keating was part of a quick reaction force that had been scrambled to rescue US advisors and five peshmerga. On 5 May ISIS launched another assault on peshmerga near the ISIS-held town of Tal Afar, 74 kilometres west of Mosul and at the end of May, some 5,500 peshmerga succeeded in a major offensive around Khazir, west of Mosul. An offensive in August had them advance to within 15 kilometres of Mosul after liberating hundreds of square kilometres including most of the disputed territories.



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Between June 2014 and 8 August, 1,505 peshmerga have been killed and 8,852 injured fighting ISIS. It costs the KRG \$81 million per month to pay Peshmerga salaries, weaponry, clothes, medicines and other supplies. With supplies coming through Baghdad either not arriving or being delayed, some European countries have directly supplied Peshmerga. In March, the US supplied weapons and equipment directly to two peshmerga battalions in readiness for the Mosul offensive. In April, the US agreed to provide \$415 million for Peshmerga salaries and on 12 July a memorandum of understanding was signed outlining US-KRG military co-ordination for the Mosul offensive<sup>15</sup>.

At the Washington conference on 20-21 July, the Iraqi Defence Minister, Khalil al-Obeidi, announced Peshmerga would not take part in the liberation of Mosul. Later it was announced that Peshmerga would only be allowed to fight under ISF command. In addition, they must stop advancing in Nineveh and must withdraw from the province after Mosul was liberated. The KRG announced that Peshmerga would not withdraw from the disputed territories that they have defended or liberated since 2014, and while they would co-ordinate with the ISF, they would not come under Iraqi command.

In defiance of Mosul leaders' wish for *Hashd al-Shaabi* to be excluded from the liberation of Mosul, on 22 July Muqtada al-Sadr commanded his Peace Brigades to head north, claiming that any US or British forces participating in the offensive would be targeted as invaders<sup>16</sup>. *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq* and the Badr Brigade also claimed it was their duty to be on the Mosul frontline. On 31 July the GoI made it official: *Hashd al-Shaabi* will participate in the offensive. Iranian Quds Force General, Qasem Soleimani, would be involved. On 18 September 500 US troops arrived at Qayyara airbase to assist in the Mosul offensive. About 9,000 Turkey-trained Sunni Arab fighters are also preparing to take part, with Turkey wanting to be involved too, despite Iraq repeatedly calling for a withdrawal of Turkish troops from northern Iraq.

Reports from within the city indicate resistance is growing against an estimated 4,500 to 7,000 ISIS fighters, which are outnumbered 50:1 by military aged men inside Mosul. Michael Knights, Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, warns of the possibility of 'catastrophic success'. He suggests planners 'craft political agreements and manage a gradual neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood liberation', warning 'The problem (will be) de-conflicting the actions of the ISF, Kurdish forces, Shia militias, anti-ISIL Sunni militants, police, armed civilians and possibly even Turkish and Iranian forces.'

### ***Ways forward***

Before the Mosul offensive, the status of disputed territories and the post-ISIS governance of Nineveh must be negotiated. With Turkey having a poor track record in negotiating its own internal security, law and order and human rights, Turkey must not be allowed militarily participate in the offensive or have undue influence in any political negotiations before or after.

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<sup>15</sup> The signatories were Elissa Slotkin, the US acting Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs, and Karim Sinjari, the acting Minister of Peshmerga Affairs. Some sources claim the agreement includes the US setting up five bases in the governorates of Erbil and Dohuk, although this is denied by the Ministry of Peshmerga and GoI.

<sup>16</sup> There are between 4,480 and 7,000 US forces in Iraq.

### At the national level

The longer the GoI remains dysfunctional, the more disunity will become entrenched within and between the different ethno-religious communities, political factions and provinces. In an effort to find a solution some advocate a presidential system, but opponents fear a return to dictatorship. Others argue for a majority government, but opponents argue this would perpetually relegate Sunni Arab and Kurdish parties to the opposition. Others look to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani as a moderator, but it was Al-Sistani that called Shias to take up arms against ISIS on 13 June 2014, three days after the fall of Mosul, rather than join the ISF. None of these options address the enormous challenges peculiar to each region.

If Iraq is to remain unified it has to become a functioning federation, which requires:

- The parliament to clarify and enact significant proportions of the constitution;
- Decentralise power to the provinces and devise procedures to allow one or more provinces to form autonomous regions.
- An independent judicial process where no individual or organisation is above the law; and
- A reconciliation process, possibly modelled on Rwanda's tiered system.

The scale of the challenges are immense, and momentum can only be achieved by a coordinated carrot and stick approach with a time line for milestones ideally devised and monitored by international institutions, US, Russia and Iran. Major infrastructure investment needs to be linked to the enactment of the constitution. To ensure fiscal and administrative decentralisation, other development aid, loans and investment for reconstruction need also to be administered at the provincial, district and sub-district levels. Local government and non-government actors that genuinely serve the community need to be identified and supported to determine priorities and mediate between competing interests, allocate resources and tender out projects, preferably to local companies that are not affiliated to political parties or militias, but which can employ a generation that have been trained for war or remain unemployed. Every aspect of reconstruction needs to be tied to developing local capacity, civil society and economic opportunities. For this to work, co-ordinated planning should be in progress.

Centralised authoritarian governance of Iraq has not worked since 1980. Given the level of distrust Iraqis have towards the GoI and the scale of GoI dysfunction, planning for a non-unified Iraq is essential. Alternatives include a loose confederation or independent states run by parliaments of equal status without the need for a central government. Whilst such alternatives do not solve the divisions within each region, they scale down the challenges, so roadmaps could address region specific challenges. Regional considerations are essential, whether or not Iraq remains unified.

### Shia Arab provinces

Investment and loans for reconstruction in Shia Arab provinces must be linked to:

- Building capacity at the local, provincial and potential regional level, including the establishment of diverse political representation before elections;
- Building the capacity of secular, non-aligned local NGOs;



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- *Hashd al-Shaabi* being integrated into the ISF, incorporated into a National Guard and/or local police force or disarmed, with those who disarm being given training, education and/or alternative employment;
- Fighters who committed human rights abuses being brought to justice;
- A transparent, fair and effective allocation of resources.

### Sunni Arab provinces

On 6 August, the Sunni Iraqi Forces Alliance called for the formation of a council to run all Sunni Arab provinces, claiming that Gulf States and Turkey would support a Sunni Arab autonomous region. If this move has the support of the majority of the population, the international community should consider this. Whether or not this option is enacted, Sunni Arab provinces require the support outlined for Shia Arab provinces, but they also require additional support that includes:

- The withdrawal of non-local *Hashd al-Shaabi* fighters and the establishment of local forces that answer to the ministries or directorates of elected governments;
- Support for returning IDPs, as many have lost their homes and possessions;
- Justice and reconciliation between pre-ISIS and ISIS-based political hierarchies, those who fought ISIS, escaped from ISIS and those who worked for ISIS and did not commit atrocities, and those who did.
- Justice for *Hashd al-Shaabi* fighters who committed atrocities;
- A resolution to the status of the disputed territories in Kirkuk, Nineveh, Salah al-din and Diyala; and
- Ensuring ethnic minority rights, as outlined in the next section.

### Kurdistan Region and the disputed territories

Even if Kurdistan becomes independent it will be a landlocked country requiring good relations with its neighbours. To avoid armed conflict between Peshmerga and the ISF/*Hashd al-Shaabi* and others, there is an urgent need for direct negotiations, and mediation if required, between the GoI, KRG and ethno-religious communities to:

- Resolve the status of the disputed territories;
- Ensure rights of ethno-religious minorities. However, city-states based on ethnicity may perpetuate divisions. Levels of government and local security forces representing the local ethnic mix, and ethno-religious councils with veto rights over legislation that infringes on their constitutional rights may be viable options.
- Support non-local IDPs and *Hashd Al-Shaabi* to return home;
- Decide on how natural resources are to be distributed in line with providing fiscal autonomy to the KRI;
- Allow free trade between regions and provinces and regions to export; and
- Hold a referendum on independence for Kurdistan, tied to a time line of reforms within the KRI, as outlined below.

Investment and loans to the KRI, fiscal autonomy and a referendum on independence should be linked to:

- Reactivating parliament;
- Finalising a constitution that reflects negotiations on provincial autonomy and ethno-religious minority rights;
- Forming a nationalised Peshmerga force;
- Fiscal transparency; and





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- Developing a strong independent judiciary.

In addition, the international community must apply pressure on Turkey and Iran to stop conducting airstrikes and other attacks inside the KRI.

## Syria

### ***Introduction***

Since 2011, 470,000 Syrians have died and another 1.9 million have been wounded, in total accounting for 11.5 percent of Syria's population. Another 45 percent of the population is displaced<sup>17</sup>.

Syria is currently divided into four zones of control. The Assad regime controls 25 percent of the country, where two thirds of Syria's population live. Government services and investment and foreign aid are concentrated in these areas. However, the International Monetary Fund estimates that national revenue has fallen from \$12 billion in 2010 to less than \$900 million in 2015. This has led the government to rely on local leaders and groups to oversee law and order, the most powerful being the National Defence Forces, consisting of militias that vie for power and rely on 'taxing' locals. Some have close links with Hezbollah and/or Iran.

The rest of the country is divided into areas controlled by (1) ISIS, (2) an increasingly Islamised opposition militia, and (3) Kurds and their allies. Despite the political and military divisions, there is trade between territories while IDP movement is changing the demographics of some areas.

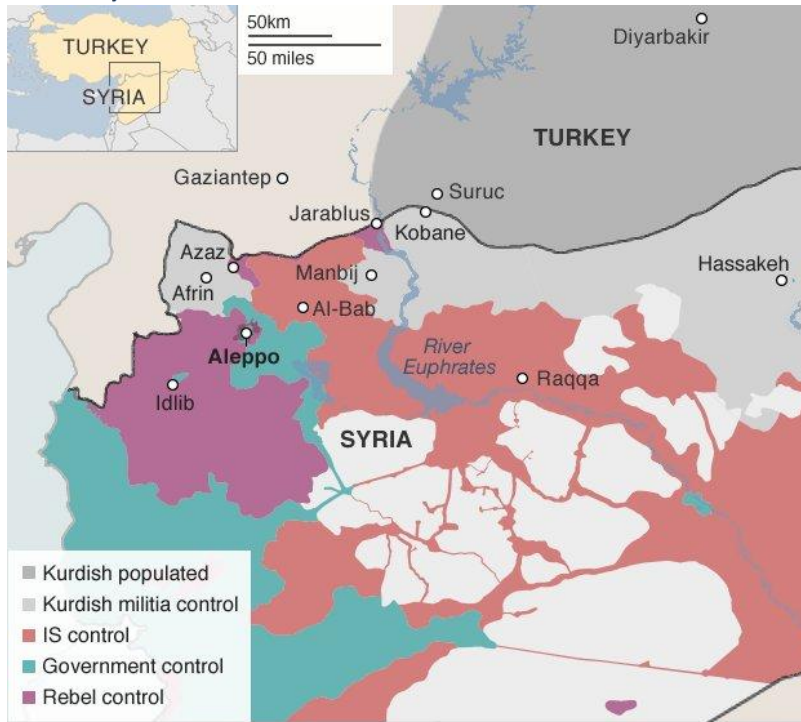
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<sup>17</sup> Syrian Centre of Policy Research



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Source: IHS Conflict Monitor (29 Aug 2016)

Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CrnSCceWYAASguP.jpg>

ISIS revenue comes from taxes and Deir Ezzor oil. A de facto agreement with the government allows ISIS to run refineries in return for supplying the national grid. In July, ISIS began minting and circulating its own currency.

Opposition held areas are distinguished by their political and military fragmentation and reliance on donations from Gulf States channelled through Turkey and Jordan. An estimated 395 local councils have been formed in areas of Aleppo, Idlib and elsewhere under the control of *al-Nusra*, *Jaish al-Islam* and *Ahrar al-Sham*. These local councils have instituted Sharia law, although secular civil society organisations are allowed to operate.

The situation in Kurdish dominated areas is described on p. 31.

### ***Why political negotiations have failed***

The devastation of civil war, war with ISIS and the influx of refugees into Europe led to UN-supported political negotiations that were held in February, March and April 2016. All failed because:

- Ending the war is not in the interests of the Assad regime, ISIS, *Jabhat al-Nusra* and its affiliates;
- External stakeholders have different strategic interests, with the US focused on defeating ISIS and maintaining relations with Turkey; Turkey focused on destroying gains made by the Kurdish led-alliance; Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia wanting a Sunni Islamist regime to replace Assad; Russia wanting to protect its interests in the north; and Iran wanting a corridor into Lebanon.
- There is no agreement on the role of President Assad and his colleagues in a transitional government;



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- There is no agreement on which of the opposition groups are terrorists. Russia has been unsuccessful in lobbying for *al-Nusra* linked *Jaish al-Islam* and *Ahrar al-Sham* to be added to the list terrorist organisations<sup>18</sup>.
- US influence on opposition groups is limited. Without a long-term ceasefire, it is unlikely remnant moderate opposition forces will separate from *jihadi* militants.
- Russia's influence on Assad is limited, as indicated by Assad holding parliamentary elections in April, wishing to reconquer all of Syria and rejecting the Russian draft of a new constitution;
- The UN and US have allowed Salafi militant groups with links to *al-Nusra* to take part in political negotiations, e.g. *Jaish al-Islam*;
- The UN and US have excluded representatives from secular groups such as the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) from participating in political negotiations because Turkey opposes their inclusion.
- Stakeholders do not appear to be planning for worst-case scenarios or devising incentives and consequences if Assad or opposition groups keep or break agreements.

## ***Negotiation process***

### **Lead up to March negotiations**

- Following the collapse of the Geneva negotiations on 3 February, on 10 - 11 February, the International Syria Support Group met in Munich and demanded that the Assad regime let humanitarian aid into besieged areas and a ceasefire to be implemented within a week. Some humanitarian aid deliveries occurred but the unrealistic ceasefire deadline was ignored.
- On 19 February, Russia's envoy to the UN warned President Assad that Russia did not support his stated intention to militarily reclaim all of Syria.
- On 21 February, the US and Russia announced a two week cessation of hostilities to begin at midnight 26 February that excluded ISIS and *al-Nusra*. The Assad regime agreed to cease all combat operations, except for those targeting ISIS, *al-Nusra* and its affiliates, and any group that did not sign up to the cessation of hostilities, provided that the border with Turkey was sealed and that the opposition did not use the cessation of hostilities to gain ground. The Riyadh High Negotiation Committee (HNC) announced it would abide by a cessation of hostilities for two weeks, with an ongoing cessation dependent on ending all sieges, allowing humanitarian aid into besieged areas, the release of political prisoners, the cessation of bombardments and that the Assad regime not use the cessation to gain ground. Russia claimed to have negotiated with opposition groups in Hama, Homs, Latakia, Damascus and Deraa. After 97 militant groups signed up, the US and Russia agreed to jointly monitor conditions on the ground.
- At midnight 26 February, silence fell in the ceasefire zones of northern Hama, Deraa, al-Ghaab plains, northern Homs and eastern Qalamoun, and even Aleppo. For a few days all Russian planes were grounded.
- The PYD and SDC were not invited to the Geneva talks starting on 14 March. US state department spokesman, John Kirby, said the US was searching for a way for their representatives to be included. UN envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, claimed these representatives had a right to participate, but did not invite them.

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<sup>18</sup> Turkey-backed *Ahrar al-Sham* accepts foreign fighters and supports suicide attacks in the West.



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Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, was unsuccessful in pushing for their inclusion, claiming the unity of Syria was at stake.

#### 14 – 24 March negotiations

During the failed 14 – 24 March negotiations in Geneva, the Assad regime insisted there would be no discussion about the presidency or future presidential elections and that the regime was only willing to discuss a national unity government that excluded Islamic groups. The Riyadh HNC, which includes *Jaish al-Islam*, was adamant they would not participate in a transitional government that included Assad.

Negotiations were overshadowed by two developments. The first was that President Putin claimed Russia would begin withdrawing its military forces from Syria. The move was thought to be an attempt to check President Assad's territorial ambitions and ensure an expansion of the cessation of hostilities.

The second development was the 17 March announcement of the intention to form of a Federation of northern Syria – Rojava after a two day conference in Rmeilan, the location of a US air base and the oil capital of Hasaka province, attended by 200 Kurdish, Arab, Syriac, Turkmen, Armenian and Chechen representatives from all political persuasions<sup>19</sup>. The proposed federation would include local multiethnic administrations established in each area liberated by the SDF<sup>20</sup> and would serve as a model for Syria. An elected 31-member committee was assigned to draft a social contract and work out how to demarcate borders and how to regulate relations between areas. In response, Russia and the UN envoy to Syria maintained a federal system for Syria could not be ruled out providing all parties agree and the unity of Syria was preserved. But the Assad regime, the Riyadh HNC and 70 opposition groups rejected federalism. The Assad regime rejects any form of decentralisation. The US did not support the unilateral move. Others observed that the basis of any political transition would be strong local administrations.

#### 13 – 27 April negotiations

On 13 April another round of political negotiations commenced, and again the PYD and SDC were not invited, despite Russia requesting the UN Security Council to ensure talks were inclusive. Opposition groups that attended the February, March and April negotiations included the Riyadh HNC, the Turkey-backed Syrian National Coalition, the 'Moscow-Astana platform', 'Cairo platform' and the Kurdistan National Council (KNC) supported by President Masoud Barzani.

On 13 April, despite Russia's insistence that Syria abide by UN Resolution 2254, President Assad held parliamentary elections in government-held areas. On 18 April, the Riyadh HNC walked out of the Geneva talks, and opposition groups declared an end to the ceasefire because of a lack of progress in distributing humanitarian aid and the continuation of government airstrikes and use of barrel bombs over Aleppo, and ground attacks on *al-Nusra* and affiliated groups in Latakia and Hamas.

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<sup>19</sup> They included Syrians loyal to the regime, the Opposition and SDF and Muhammed Sultan, who arrived from Turkey to represent Azaz Turkmen.

<sup>20</sup> In Arab dominated Tel Abyad, since its liberation from ISIS in mid 2015, an executive council of seven Arabs, four Kurds, two Turkmen and one Armenian oversees a 113-member assembly.

On 26 April, Russia requested that the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) add *Ahrar al-Sham* and *Jaish al-Islam* to its list of sanctioned organizations because of their close financial, material, technical and military links with ISIS and *al-Nusra*. The request was blocked. On 27 April, the Geneva negotiations ended having failed to make any progress.

#### Summary of political developments April – September

- At 1 am on 30 April, a limited truce, dubbed a 'regime of calm', orchestrated by the US and Russia, began in areas of Latakia and the Ghouta suburb of Damascus. Aleppo was excluded.
- Between 22 April – 3 May, at least 246 civilians died in shelling, rocket fire and air strikes on opposition held areas in eastern Aleppo city, with targets including water facilities, three health clinics and an Al-Quds hospital.
- At midnight 4 May, localised cessations of hostilities were extended to parts of Aleppo. Russia stressed that opposition groups must distance themselves from *al-Nusra* and its affiliates and identify those who refused to do so.
- Russian negotiations led to another 19 opposition groups signing up to the truce, but the Free Syrian Army (FSA), now dominated by militant jihadis, did not recognise the partial regimes of calm.
- Russia warned that the US was delaying the identification of militant groups under their control. Russia also warned that Turkey must stop shelling Syrian territory and must stop creating a de-facto zone of control inside Syria.
- On 9 May, the US and Russia claimed the cessation of hostilities would be expanded over the entire country until 25 May. Against the wishes of the Assad regime, Russia ceased air strikes to allow opposition groups to separate from *al-Nusra*, but this did not occur. On 12 May, the negotiated 'regime of calm' expired in Aleppo. Fighting resumed. Elsewhere, Russia extended the deadline by a few days, but in June decided to escalate offensives against ISIS, *al-Nusra* and affiliated groups in Aleppo and Raqqa, after *al-Nusra*, *Ahrar al-Sham* and other militias seized Dirkhadiyah near Damascus.
- In May, a Russia-drafted constitution was presented to US Secretary of State, John Kerry. It outlined a secular bicameral system with a People's Assembly and Assembly of Regions, and the devolution of powers to regional councils, with regional governors being elected rather than appointed and ethnicities being given language rights. The president would be limited to two seven-year terms but would retain power of the armed forces and ministerial cabinet appointments. People's Assembly deputies would be of a different ethnic background to the prime minister. All militias outside the defence forces would be banned. Assad rejected the draft document.
- On 30 May, the Riyadh HNC chief negotiator and leader of *Jaish al-Islam*, Mohammad Alloush, resigned because he doubted peace talks would succeed. His replacement, Assad al-Zubi, labelled all Kurds 'terrorists'.
- Since May, Israel has established a small safe zone along its border with Syria extending 20 kilometres south from the pro-government Druze village of Hadar, and 10 kilometres deep, with the intention of bringing in humanitarian supplies, building schools and establishing a local police force. About 16 brigades operate in the area, including *al-Nusra* and ISIS affiliates.



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- The US-Russia 1 June deadline for Assad to allow humanitarian aid into besieged areas passed. The regime refused the UN call for airdrops.
- On 8 June, Russia asked anyone with influence over Turkey to prevent Turkey blocking the PYD and SDC from participating in political negotiations.
- Turkey continued to build a wall along its border with north-east Syria, blocking refugees from entering Turkey and aid from entering Syria.
- On 16 June, a two-day regime of calm was implemented in Aleppo city but Russian and Iranian-backed regime airstrikes continued in rural areas.
- On 17 June 51 US State Department officials signed a petition for US airstrikes against the regime. The petition was rejected.
- In late June, Russia and US announced they were discussing co-ordinating intelligence and attacks on *al-Nusra* and ISIS.
- On 6 July, the Assad regime and opposition groups agreed to a three-day country-wide ceasefire. This was extended twice, but on the ground, fighting intensified in an around Aleppo city, with the Assad regime cutting the last supply route into opposition held eastern Aleppo city, where 300,000 civilians remain. Another 1.2 million people live under government control in western suburbs of the city.
- On 28 July, *al-Nusra* announced it had broken with Al-Qaida, and had changed its name to the Front for the Conquest of Syria or *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham*. It also announced it had formed a coalition of militias to fight Assad and establish an Islamic government in Syria. A coordinated offensive undid some of Assad's gains.
- In August, the US and Russia attempted to negotiate a weekly 48 ceasefire in Aleppo to allow humanitarian aid into government and opposition held territory.
- On 26 August, in Daraya on the outskirts of Damascus, one of the original centres of peaceful opposition followed by government forces committing a bloody massacre in 2011, and four years of bombardment and siege thereafter, opposition militia surrendered their weapons, and 1,850 militants and civilians were evacuated. The opposition saw this as enforced demographic change.
- On 7 September, the HNC outlined a 'new' plan that called Syria an Arab nation based on Sharia law. The plan excluded Assad and his clique from participating in a transitional government and any possibility of a federation. In a joint statement the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and Assyrian Democratic Organisation (ASO) objected to the plan because ethnic and religious minorities were given no input and were not sufficiently acknowledged. For the same reasons, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) also rejected the plan.
- On 9 September, US and Russia announced a ceasefire to begin 12 September. If it held for one week, they would co-ordinate in attacking ISIS and *al-Nusra* in specified zones. Assad warplanes would be grounded. Regime airstrikes over Aleppo and Idlib intensified, killing at least 85 civilians before the deadline.
- On 12 September the Syrian Army put a seven-day freeze on operations, although attacks on opposition held areas in eastern Aleppo, Deraa, Homs, Hama and Deir Ezzor continued, including airstrikes on eastern Aleppo on 18 September. Twenty opposition groups did not sign up to the agreement. On 17 September, Australian and British jet fighters 'mistakenly' bombed the Syrian army near Deir Ezzor, killing 90 soldiers and Russia accused the US of not getting moderate opposition militia to separate from *al-Nusra*. By 19 September, government forces had broken the ceasefire 254 times, and opposition forces had shown a similar disrespect for the agreement. Throughout the week, regime troops and



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opposition militia failed to withdraw from the Castello Road supply route into eastern Aleppo and the Assad regime had blocked UN aid trucks from entering Syria from Turkey. On 19 September, UN trucks on the border were allowed through to 18 civilian enclaves, but one hour before the deadline, the Assad regime declared the ceasefire was over. Two hours later UN and Syrian Red Crescent trucks unloading supplies in an opposition held area south-west of Aleppo city were hit by an airstrike or explosion that killed 20 civilians, including 12 aid workers and destroyed 18 trucks. Since the end of the ceasefire, eastern Aleppo city has been subject to barrel bombs and shelling.

- After 19 September, US Secretary of State and the Russian Foreign Minister continued to hold talks. However, there appears to have been no predetermined consequences if Assad or opposition groups broke the agreement, which the US refused to release, even to the UN Security Council. Russia claims the agreement includes the proposal that Syria become a federation.

### ***War front***

There are three major challenges on the war front. The first is that if ISIS is defeated, Assad and/or the radicalised opposition could expand territory. This would potentially leave (most?) Syrians with two alternatives: a secular dictatorship or a theocratic dictatorship.

A second challenge is that the US-led coalition is increasingly reliant on the SDF, comprising about 30,000+ Kurds and 5,000+ Arabs, Turkmen and Assyrians, etc., as well as the Kurdish YPG/J but Turkey fiercely opposes these forces being used in any capacity, claiming they are PKK terrorists. The US is trying to balance its alliances, with questionable results<sup>21</sup>.

A third challenge is that ISIS has escalated suicide attacks in government controlled territory (killing 140 people in February, 150 people on 23 May and 48 people on 5 September) and Rojava (northern Syria), for instance, killing 220 civilians and 35 YPG fighters in Kobani on 25 June and 57 people in Qamishli in July.

### **Hasaka – Raqqa**

Despite the SDF and YPG/J being under constant attack by Turkey, Turkey-backed militia and ISIS, these forces have gained territory in the provinces of Hasaka and Raqqa. Throughout 2016, Turkey has fired artillery and used militia against military and non-military targets in Rojava (northern Syria). Russia has raised objections to these attacks but has received no public response. Meanwhile, US-led coalition air support helps Kurds fight ISIS around Kobani, Tel Abyad and Qamishli.

Although YPG/J and SDF signed up to the cessation of hostilities that commenced at midnight 26 February, on 24 February Turkey's President Erdogan unilaterally claimed these forces were excluded. In the hours before the deadline, under cover of artillery fire from Turkey, 100 Turkey-backed militants attacked YPG in Tel Abyad (Gire Spi). On 28 February, President Erdogan announced ISIS had recaptured 70 percent of Tel Abyad and 20 villages, but the YPG regained control of all territory, killing 140 ISIS fighters, with

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<sup>21</sup> The US-led coalition has also established a small 300 strong New Syrian Army (NSA), which in 2016 began operating in the southwest. Russia attacked the NSA on 16 June, but has supported the SDF.



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support from US-led coalition airstrikes. On 8 and 24 June Turkish soldiers again used heavy weaponry on villages around Kobani. On 25 June, ISIS dressed in Kurdish uniforms and a car laden with explosives entered Kobani and killed more than 220 civilians and 35 YPG fighters. An ISIS attack on Tel Abyad on 29 June killed ten people and wounded nine.

In April, May, July and August, Assad's forces clashed with Kurdish forces in Hasaka province<sup>22</sup>, the most serious occurring between 17 – 21 August in Hasaka city. Assad's forces had been losing authority in the city. On 17 August, after the notorious pro-government National Defence Force militia and Iranian Hezbollah attacked an *Asayish* checkpoint, clashes broke out with the YPG fighting back and expanding the area under its control. On 18 August, two Syrian SU-24 warplanes bombed the city and an area six kilometres north of the city, where US Special Forces were training YPG. The US scrambled jets, but Assad's warplanes had already left. Assad's warplanes returned on 19 August but turned back because coalition aircraft were patrolling the skies. The planes returned again on 20 and 21 August, when a Russian military delegation was attempting to mediate. However, clashes intensified, with 43 people being killed between 18 – 21 August. Thousands fled the city. With Kurdish *Asayish* in control of 90 percent of the city another Russian mediation attempt on 22 August succeeded. All military forces agreed to leave the city. Government police would stay in some buildings and *Asayish* would maintain the peace in the rest of the city. The Assad government's use of fighter jets on Kurds in the proximity of US forces was unprecedented. Turkish Prime Minister Yildirim concluded that Syria was at last seeing the Kurds as a threat.

Territorial gains against ISIS included the US-led coalition supporting the SDF to capture two ISIS-controlled oil fields, then liberating the strategic town of Al-Shaddadi on 19 February, thus cutting another supply route to Mosul and clearing ISIS out of Hasaka province.

On 27 April, 250 US Special Forces arrived at the Rmeilan military base in Hasaka province, and on 21 May, the head of US Central Command, Army General Joseph Votel, visited Rojava before flying to Ankara. On 24 May, the SDF began a three-pronged advance towards Raqqa city, accompanied by US Special Forces and some antiquated tanks. They quickly advanced, retaking villages and farmland. On 4 June, Assad forces entered Raqqa province for the first time since August 2014, heading to Tabqa airbase and the nearby city of Tabqa, 40 kilometres west of Raqqa. The Russian foreign ministry announced 'Moscow is willing to coordinate ... with the US-led coalition and Kurdish militia in Syria for the purpose of freeing Raqqa.' On 20 June, hundreds of ISIS fighters from Raqqa counterattacked, killing about 40 Syrian soldiers, and forcing the Syrian army to retreat from the province on 22 June. On 25 June, Russian and Syrian airstrikes in Raqqa city and Deir Ezzor province killed 49 civilians.

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<sup>22</sup> On 20 April, Assad soldiers arrested several Kurdish youths for avoiding mandatory military service in Qamishli. Kurdish security forces known as *Asayish* and YPG defended the youth, and in three days of fighting, 30 Syrian soldiers and 23 YPG fighters and civilians were killed. Taking advantage of the instability, ISIS launched a suicide attack on YPG positions in Qamishli but by 24 April, the Kurds had prevailed against ISIS and declared a truce with Assad's forces. On 18 May, Assad's forces attacked *Asayish* in Hasaka city, resulting in the deaths of five regime soldiers. More clashes on the 3 and 4 July in Hasaka city resulted in several deaths on either side.





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The US continues to underplay whether the SDF will enter Raqqa city. If they do they will confront up to 7,000 ISIS fighters, who have rigged trenches and buildings with IEDs and will use up to 300,000 civilians as human shields. Some Raqqa Arabs are concerned about the role of the SDF. The Kurds reassured them that the security and administration of Raqqa post-ISIS will be in the hands of locals, as has occurred in the liberated towns of Tel Abyad, Shaddadi and Hol. It would be up to local representatives to decide whether to join the Federation of Northern Syria – Rojava.

After the G20 meeting in Hangzhou on 4-5 September, Erdogan announced Turkey would co-ordinate with the US to retake Raqqa. This would probably entail Turkish ground forces coming through Kurdish-held territory. On 6 September, US Defence Secretary, Ash Carter, claimed the US would like to coordinate Turkish and SDF forces to liberate Raqqa! The Saudi foreign minister said Saudi Arabia was opposed to SDF forces taking part in the Raqqa offensive and that Saudi Arabia could deploy Special Forces.

### Aleppo city and surrounds

The most intense fighting in Syria's civil war is in Aleppo province, with many observers claiming whoever wins Aleppo, wins Syria. In the lead up to the cessation of hostilities at midnight, 26 February, Russian-backed government offensives intensified in and around Aleppo city. Civilians in the opposition held east continue to suffer from food, water, fuel, electricity and medicine shortages. Reasons behind the intensification were the need to negotiate from a position of strength and that the opposition maintained military, economic, political and ideological links with *al-Nusra*. By 5 March, *Jaish al-Islam* and *Ahrar al-Sham* claimed the Assad regime had broken the cessation of hostilities 50 times and were amassing forces. *Al-Nusra* called on opposition fighters to keep fighting and *Ahrar al-Sham*, *Jaish al-Islam* and the FSA co-ordinated with *al-Nusra* against Syrian government positions in Aleppo, Latakia and northwest Hama.

On 8 March, *Jaish al-Islam* attacked the besieged Kurdish neighbourhood of Sheikh Maqoud in Aleppo city with yellow phosphorous. This was one of several occasions chemicals were used on the neighbourhood. Between February and May, *Jaish al-Islam*, *Ahrar al-Sham* and an allied Turkmen militia in the Syrian National Coalition launched rockets into the neighbourhood and used snipers to target civilians. These actions killed 117 civilians and wounded another 744, and 2,400 houses were destroyed. Another attack in June killed at least seven civilians, after which, a nine-month siege of the neighbourhood was broken with one aid delivery.

On 7 May, Iran suffered its worst loss of life in one attack when *Jaish al-Islam* killed 13 Iranian officers and captured others in Aleppo province. It was an added incentive to find a political solution. Between 15 and 22 June unknown assailants made assassination attempts on journalists and leaders of opposition militias, who were now fighting on three fronts: against ISIS, the regime and the SDF. Two *al-Nusra* commanders (Abu Ali Muharjireen and Abu Abdullah Jabal) were assassinated.

According to the Syrian Institute of Justice, in and around the city of Aleppo in June, the Assad regime launched 2,306 airstrikes, 1,254 barrel-bomb attacks from helicopters, 354 cluster bombs and 194 prohibited phosphorus bombs impacting 1,634 residential areas, 11 medical centres, 10 mosques, seven schools and three civil defence centres. The



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Syrian Observatory of Human Rights claimed that 797 people were killed by these actions. Between 25 May and 7 July, 41,000 IDPs from Aleppo arrived in Kurdish-controlled Afrin.

Regime attacks on opposition in Aleppo intensified in July. In late July, after no food or medicine deliveries for two weeks, Assad offered to open humanitarian corridors for citizens to leave but provided no assurances as to what would happen during and after their departure. In the meantime *Al-Nusra* changed its name and united with other opposition groups for an offensive beginning on 31 July, breaking the siege and making gains against Assad's forces, in which an estimated 500 people were killed from both sides. The Assad regime allegedly conducted three chemical attacks between 1 and 11 August, killing four people, and brought in 3,000 reinforcements. Hundreds of opposition fighters arrived from Idlib, but by the end of August, the Assad regime had closed the supply route into the eastern areas of Aleppo city.

#### Azaz – Manbij – Jarablus

Another area of intense fighting is the Azaz – Jarablus – Manbij triangle north of Aleppo city. This area has recently been subject to the biggest US policy shift since embarking on the war with ISIS.

On 18 February SDF and YPG/J forces captured Menagh military airbase and the Sunni Arab town of Tal Rifaat. On 18 April, President Obama and President Putin acknowledged that before an offensive on Raqqa, the Azaz – Jarablus border needed to be closed and the region freed from ISIS and *al-Nusra*. It was the only border area that pro-Kurdish forces did not control. Efforts continued to be delayed for three reasons: Turkey was supplying weapons and ammunitions to *Al-Nusra*, *Jaish al-Islam* and other militia in the radicalised FSA; militia were fragmented, with many co-ordinating with *al-Nusra*; and Turkey opposed the use of Kurdish forces to close the border.

After bloody clashes between SDF/YPG forces and *Ahrar al-Sham*, in April, Russian airstrikes on *Ahrar al-Sham*, *al-Nusra* and ISIS helped the YPG/J and SDF defend Afrin and partially lift a three-year siege on Afrin's 400,000 residents and 330,000 IDPs. In response, Saudi and Qatar fighter planes arrived in Turkey, Turkey placed more artillery along the border and increased pressure on the US not to use YPG and SDF in the Azaz – Jarablus region. Turkey claimed that its artillery, Turkey-backed militias and US-led coalition airstrikes could liberate the area. On 7 April Turkey-backed militias, including *Ahrar al-Sham* and Turkmen, took Al-Rai. Four days later ISIS retook Al-Rai and surrounding villages, then expanded their territory along the Marea – Azaz front.

In mid-April, Erdogan agreed to an offensive on Manbij, located west of the Euphrates River and 38 kilometres south of Jarablus. Manbij had been under ISIS control since 23 January 2014. Turkey insisted that Syrian Arabs must lead the offensive. The SDF helped formed the Manbij Military Council comprising local fighters of mixed ethnicities, with the US-led coalition supplying weapons and ammunition and conducting airstrikes, downplaying the role of Kurds, but in early May operations were halted near Manbij, Jarablus, Azaz and Tel Rifaat because the US was unable to accommodate Turkey's demands.



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On 5 May, an attack on a refugee camp near the Turkish border killed at least 28 IDPs, highlighting the impracticality of Turkey's demand to create a UN and NATO enforced 'safe haven' between Azaz and Jarablus. On 7 May, about 20 Turkish soldiers entered Syria and attacked ISIS positions, killing 55 ISIS fighters, in retaliation for ISIS having launched artillery attacks on the Turkish border town of Kilis, which had killed 23 civilians by May.

With ISIS advances on Marea and Azaz, Turkish military officials met with SDF representatives at Incirlik airbase in May and after the US reassured Turkey that an offensive on Manbij would be conducted by local forces in the Manbij Military Council (MMC) and once liberated, Manbij would be stabilised by local forces and run by a local administration, on 31 May, a SDF-led offensive on Manbij began. By 10 June, with help from US-led coalition airstrikes and US and French Special Forces, 90 villages had been liberated and the city was surrounded, thus cutting off one of the last remaining ISIS supply routes from Turkey. A total of 159 ISIS fighters, 37 civilians and 22 SDF/MMC fighters had been killed in clashes, suicide bombings and air strikes. On 20 June, ISIS attempted to break the siege using vehicles rigged with explosives that killed 28 SDF fighters. On 23 June, SDF/MMC forces entered the city from the south, thereafter engaging in street-to-street fighting, deactivating IEDs placed in 80 percent of the buildings and avoiding ISIS snipers. By 28 June the SDF/MMC controlled one third of the city, but fighting was slow because of the need to protect 250,000 civilians, a majority Arab and at least 30 percent Kurdish. Because of the offensive, opposition groups again declared war on the SDF and labelled the 25 Arab factions in the SDF as traitors. PYD co-chair Salih Muslim claimed Turkey was supplying ISIS through *Al-Nusra* and *Ahrar al-Sham* to attack the SDF/MMC in Manbij, and in late June, 1,000 Kurdish civilians were kidnapped by ISIS in Al-Bab and Al-Rai. Captives who refused to work for ISIS were killed. By 8 July, ISIS fighters were fleeing among evacuating civilians.

On 19 July, US-led coalition airstrikes killed between 74 and 205 civilians fleeing Manbij. This was the worst civilian toll of any single coalition airstrike in the war against ISIS. The SDF/MMC announced a 48-hour deadline for ISIS to evacuate the city but fighting intensified, and another coalition airstrike on 28 July killed at least 28 civilians. By 5 August 90 percent of Manbij was liberated with 140,000 civilians having escaped. The city was completely liberated on 13 August. To protect the remaining citizens, the last 100 to 200 ISIS fighters were allowed to surrender, disarm and travel to Jarablus in 500 cars, taking with them 2,000 civilians with unknown affiliations. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed 437 civilians, 299 SDF/MMC fighters and 1,019 ISIS fighters were killed during the 73-day offensive. In the following days, thousands of Manbij residents returned to the city, which was largely spared from destruction. On 15 August the Manbij Military Council took over the administration and the Al-Bab Military Council was formed in preparation for an offensive on the ISIS stronghold of Al-Bab, 50 kilometres southwest of Manbij.

On 22 August, the SDF announced the formation of the Jarablus Military Council (JMC) comprising Jarablus-based Arab, Kurd and Turkmen fighters to liberate Jarablus. On 23 August, the council's leader, SDF commander Abdulsttar Al Jadr, was assassinated. The JMC arrested two suspects allegedly employed by MIT (Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation).

The SDF-led liberation of Manbij galvanised Turkey. With Turkey's realignment with Russia and the post-coup installation of military commanders loyal to President Erdogan, Turkey was free to move. Along the border north of Jarablus Turkey amassed tanks and 1,500 FSA fighters, but all were Islamist, including those from the Turkmen Sultan Murad Brigade, *Ahrar al-Sham*, *Faylaq al-Sham*, *Jabhat al-Shamia*, *Nour al-din al-Zinki* (which recently filmed its members decapitating a prisoner) and others. Jarablus had been under ISIS control since December 2014, when *al-Nusra* handed over the city after forcing 10,000 Kurds to evacuate.

On 23 August Turkish and US-led coalition warplanes hit a dozen ISIS targets around Jarablus and Turkey shelled SDF forces north of Manbij. Early 24 August 150 Turkish Special Forces, 300 troops, tanks, armoured vehicles and 1,500 Turkey-backed militia crossed the border. Another 3,500 Turkey-backed militia joined them inside Syria. Within 12 hours they claimed victory over empty villages and a deserted Jarablus. ISIS had pulled out and forced civilians to evacuate. Some ISIS fighters had donned uniforms of the Turkey-backed militia. Others fled south to Al-Bab. Kurds concluded that Turkey had done a deal with ISIS.

The Assad regime accused Turkey of invasion and replacing ISIS with other terrorists. On a visit to Ankara, US Vice President Joe Biden announced that Kurdish forces would lose US support if they did not withdraw east of the Euphrates. Erdogan claimed that Operation Euphrates Shield would remove all ISIS and Kurdish terrorists from the area.

On 25 August, Turkey's artillery hit SDF near Manbij and Turkey-backed militia clashed with the JMC south of Jarablus. The US announced that YPG fighters were withdrawing east of the Euphrates, although some remained to clear IEDs. JMC claimed they would maintain a defence line against an advance by Turkey. The same day, Turkey artillery shelled Dendeniye, a village near Manbij, killing three children and two adult civilians. People reported odorous gases that caused blistering.

In response to PKK killing 11 police and wounding at least 75 police and three civilians at a police checkpoint in Cizire inside Turkey, on 26 August Prime Minister Yildirim again declared all-out war on 'PKK' in Turkey and Syria. The same day, Turkey's warplanes and artillery heavily bombed JMC forces and civilians in the village of Amarneh, eight kilometres south of Jarablus, then Turkey-backed militia and tanks entered Amarneh and clashed with JMC forces: i.e. non-local Arabs and Turkmen fighting Jarablus Arabs, Turkmen and Kurds. One tank was destroyed, one soldier and several Turkey-backed militia were killed. Four YPG fighters were taken prisoner and transported to Turkey. Turkey claimed victory in Amarneh yet fighting continued there and in Jeb al-Kussa, where on 28 August Turkey's airstrikes and shelling of JMC forces and clashes backed by tanks killed at least 40 civilians and four Kurdish-led fighters according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. According to Kurdish sources at least 75 civilians were killed. After Turkey-backed militia shelled eight villages JMC forces finally withdrew south of the Sajur River, where they established a new defence line. On 27 - 28 August fighters in Manbij Military Council, local Arab tribes and SDF units advanced in support the JMC fighters.



Meanwhile, Turkey had amassed reinforcements north of the border and moved additional tanks as well as engineering equipment across the border. Turkey-backed militia advanced east towards Marea and south towards Manbij, claiming they intended to take Al-Bab and Manbij. Between 28 August and 6 September, Turkey shelled and fired into Kobani, Hasaka and Afrin, and conducted airstrikes on Afrin on 28 August and 1 September. On 2 September, some members of at least one SDF Arab unit, *Liwa al-Tahrir*, defected to the Turkey-backed militia in Jarablus. Turkey claimed the SDF was about to disintegrate<sup>23</sup>. Other observers claimed this was a beat up<sup>24</sup>.

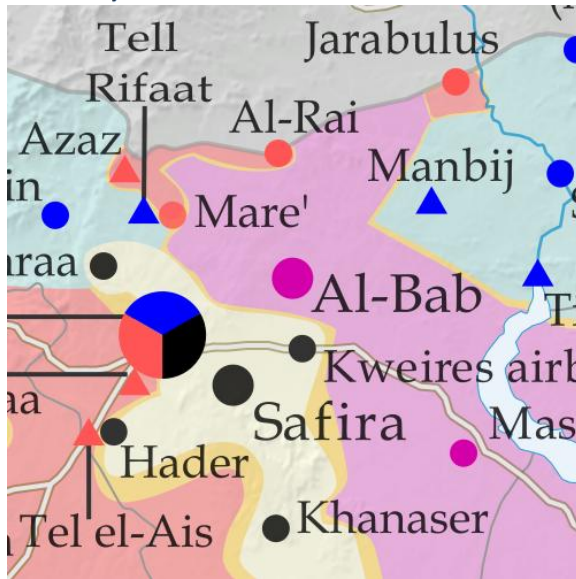
Kurds felt betrayed that US supported Turkey's entry into Syria, although some observers claim that the US only provided initial air cover when the action was unstoppable. If the US did support Turkey's entry into Syria, the decision was likely motivated by the US wanting to mend relations with Turkey, close the border to ISIS and keep Turkey forces and militia in check once they crossed. Yet given Turkey's behaviour since 22 July 2015, the entry of Turkey into Syria was likely to further complicate an already complicated war.

On 29 August, US Secretary of Defence, Ash Carter, special envoy, Brett McGurk, and President Obama's deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, claimed the US did not support Turkish forces advancing more than 12 kilometres south of the border. They called on Turkey to focus on ISIS and not to target Kurdish-backed forces. On 30 August, JMC and US announced an informal truce between Turkey's forces and SDF-backed forces. Turkey denied any agreement but the truce has been upheld with the presence of US Special Forces. Russia also advised Turkey it had already overstepped in Syria.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://southfront.org/arab-fighters-massively-defect-from-us-backed-sdf-attack-kurdish-ypg-units-in-northern-syria/> and <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/arab-group-leaves-kurdish-ypg-led-syrian-democratic-forces/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/turkey-syria-intervention-wreck-arab-kurdish-alliance.html>



Source: [https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-lspEC9ZP0nc/V8TaXyoMNeI/AAAAAAAAABPc/HI1HhYxI3Dca-d2-8vN7SgoZr\\_KjGUVpwCLcB/s1600/2016-08-27\\_map-of-syrian-war-isil-rebels-kurds-turkey.png](https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-lspEC9ZP0nc/V8TaXyoMNeI/AAAAAAAAABPc/HI1HhYxI3Dca-d2-8vN7SgoZr_KjGUVpwCLcB/s1600/2016-08-27_map-of-syrian-war-isil-rebels-kurds-turkey.png)

On 3 September Turkey Security Force (TSF) armoured units crossed the border and entered Al-Rai, 55 kilometres west of Jarabulus and militia took surrounding villages without a fight. The next day Turkey announced it had cleared ISIS from the Azaz - Jarabulus border, creating a zone of control 98 kilometres long and 12 kilometres deep. This was executed without a single clash with ISIS. However, ISIS regrouped and on 31 August, ISIS suicide attacks destroyed two tanks and allegedly killed 'dozens' of people near Jarabulus; on 2 September ISIS re-captured four villages near Al-Rai; and on 6 September, an ISIS rocket killed two soldiers and two militias operating south of Al-Rai.

On the 17 September, Turkey-backed militia ordered 25 to 30 US Special Forces out of Al-Rai calling them infidels and dogs and shouting '*Allah Akbar*'. Turkey mediated their return but this led to three units leaving Operation Euphrates Shield, some reports claiming they defected to *al-Nusra*. In stark contrast, the SDF accommodated 50 US Special Forces that set up a co-ordination centre on the outskirts of Tel Abyad's (Gire Spi), 90 kilometres from Raqqa, and raised the US flag. It is not the first time that the US flag has been used to protect Kurdish forces.

Back at the G20 meeting in Hangzhou, Turkey pushed for the establishment of a safe haven between Azaz and Jarabulus, where it proposed to build refugee towns for Sunni Arab Syrians. That Turkey is not committed to establishing local administrations is indicated by Jarabulus residents on 15 September claiming all ISIS signs remained in the town, there was still no electricity, running water, healthcare or schools, food remained in short supply, and no local council had been established.

By 20 September, ten of Turkey's soldiers had been killed during Operation Euphrates Shield. Next in Turkey's sights is the liberation of Al-Bab, 30 kilometres south of Al-Rai. In September, the Al-Bab Military Council (made up of Al-Bab Arabs and Kurds with some Turkmen), Manbij Military Council and some SDF units liberated ISIS held villages 20 kilometres from Al-Bab. Turkey-backed militia and the Syrian army are also advancing towards Al-Bab. From 8 September ISIS began withdrawing from the city, heading for Raqqa.

### ***Relationship between PYD, YPG/J and PKK***

Against Turkey shelling and supporting militias to attack YPG/J and SDF in Afrin, Kobani and Tel Abyad<sup>25</sup> the YPG/J and SDF have not retaliated. On 16 February, the UN Security Council urged Turkey to respect international law but on 19 February, the UN Security Council rejected Russia's request for the UN to ask Turkey to halt military actions inside Syria.

President Erdogan repeatedly claims that the secular PYD, and YPG/J are PKK terrorists, no different to ISIS. On 28 April, US Secretary of Defence, Ash Carter, acknowledged links between PKK and YPG but on the same day US State Department spokesperson, John Kirby, insisted the PKK's political and military wings are terrorists and PYD and YPG/J are not. So what is the relationship?

Most Kurds have relatives on both sides of the Turkish-Syrian border. Cross border towns such as Qamishli and Nusbayin are in clear view of each other. From 1979 until 1998, when Syria and Turkey had tense relations over the disputed province of Hatay and Turkey damming rivers, Syrian President Hafez Assad allowed PKK training bases inside Syrian controlled territory. During this time Syrian Kurds joined the political and military wings of the PKK, with up to 10,000 Syrian Kurds being killed during the armed struggle inside Turkey. When Turkey threatened war with Syria if Syria did not stop supporting PKK, Syria forced PKK's leader, Abdullah Ocalan, to leave Syria. On 15 February 1999 Ocalan was abducted in Nairobi and taken to Turkey, after which, Ocalan called for PKK to declare a truce with the Turkish government and leave Turkey. Assad closed down all PKK bases. When PYD was established in 2003, the Assad regime arrested 1,500 of its members. Political parties outside the regime are illegal in Syria.

Fast track to 2011. President Bashir al-Assad promised to reinstate citizenship to 220,000 of the 300,000 Syrian Kurds who had lost their Syrian citizenship under Hafez Assad, although no mention was made of redressing the Arabisation of Kurdish areas. In mid-2012, the Assad government partially withdrew from northern Syria to concentrate on offensives against Arab opposition groups in the west. This partial withdrawal enabled the PYD, KNC and other parties to establish the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) in 2012. The TEV-DEM oversaw the establishment of local multi-ethnic administrations in Afrin, Kobani and Cizire and the Peoples Protection Units (YPG/J) and *Asayish*. In January 2014, after the election of officials, these administrations declared self-rule. Municipal elections in Cizire were held in March 2015. Otherwise there have been no general elections. In 2015 primary schools introduced teaching in Kurdish or Arabic, with Arabic, Kurdish and English being mandatory in secondary schools.

Between January 2013 and March 2016, Kurds from Turkey comprised 49 percent of all YPG/J's casualties<sup>26</sup>. The military capabilities of the YPG/J, which came to world attention during the ISIS siege of Kobani, are due to their past experience in the PKK and since 2012, PKK militants training YPG/J, and since 2014, PKK militants joining YPG/J, or fighting

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<sup>25</sup> On 19 and 20 February, Turkey used Stinger and I-Hawk missile systems on YPG and SDF forces for the first time.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-ypg-pkk-connection>



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alongside YPG/J and Peshmerga units against ISIS. On many front lines, Kurdish fighters from all four Kurdish regions have been co-ordinating their fight against ISIS, in contrast to the divisions between Kurdish political leaders. Even in Sinjar (Shingal), where tensions between peshmerga and PKK/YPG fighters existed before and after its liberation in November 2015, all forces have moved quickly to prevent clashes.

From the establishment of the PYD in 2003 it adopted Abdullah Ocalan's concept of democratic federalism or self-rule without reference to the nation state. It is highly likely PYD is also influenced by the way Iraqi Kurds formed a parliament without international approval in 1992 under the protection of the no-fly zone. Like the KRG and PKK, in an effort to gain international support, PYD has opened foreign offices: in Moscow on 10 February, in Prague on 4 April, in Stockholm on 18 April, in Berlin on 6 May and in Paris on 23 May.

Some commenters claim that PYD are PKK's Syrian managers and PYD is intolerant of other political parties. Both observations hold some truth, yet the Rojava experiment distinguishes itself in that the PYD has taken a non-confrontational stance in relation to existing regimes and has avoided a nationalist path. This third way enabled PYD to hold talks with the Turkish government before the siege of Kobani. At the time, the Turkish government claimed they were willing to negotiate with PYD as long as PYD opposed Assad, did not seek autonomy through violence and did not threaten Turkey. This 'tolerance' ceased after President Erdogan's claim of an ISIS victory in Kobani proved premature. Ever since, Erdogan has painted PYD and the YPG/J as terrorists, and since July 2015, has routinely accused the YPG of supplying arms to PKK and conducting terrorist attacks inside Turkey. US officials say there is no evidence for either claim.

The PYD emphasises it is a political party representing Syrian Kurds. Controversially, it is not asking for independence or even an autonomous Kurdistan Region in Syria, in contrast to Kurdish National Council (KNC), a coalition of Syrian Kurdish parties linked to KDP-Iraq. The KNC supports a Kurdish autonomous region in Syria. PYD is intent on establishing multi-ethnic administrations and a multi-ethnic Democratic Federal Region of Northern Syria – Rojava in view of a federated Syria.

Their goal is grass roots democracy, gender equality and sustainability based on three economies: cooperative (i.e. communal ownership), open (i.e. foreign investment) and private (companies that abide by the social principles of the local administration). They propose each neighbourhood elects a man and a woman as co-presidents. Eighteen neighbourhoods make up a district. The co-presidents of the neighbourhoods form 40 percent of the district council, with the remaining members being directly elected. These district councils are responsible for administration, services, land ownership, cooperative enterprises, etc., within the district, and co-ordinate in the regional council. All councils comprise at least 40 percent women. In addition, parallel autonomous women's councils can overrule a mixed council ruling if it infringes on women's rights. Other priorities are youth representation at every level and preserving the ecology.

With Rojava besieged by Turkey, ISIS, *al-Nusra* and its affiliates, and with the KRG officially closing the KRI – Rojava border between 16 March and 8 June, communities experience food, fuel, medicine and building material shortages as well as high prices.





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However, the administrations generate revenue from custom duties and producing an estimated 40,000 barrels of oil per day for domestic consumption and export through Iraqi Kurdistan. The Assad regime continues to pay civil servants, including teachers. Otherwise the administrations strive for self-sufficiency. Hasaka farmers supply wheat for all bread outlets in Rojava. Organic fertiliser is being made from human and animal biological waste mixed with straw and Afrin soap and jean manufacturers export products to Syrian cities and Turkey.

On 1 July, a draft of the social contract for the Federation of Northern Syria – Rojava was published to encourage discussion and feedback. The draft enshrines human rights, the rights of women, youth and ethnicities, and the right to free education, healthcare, work, housing and property ownership, as well as the right to live in an ecologically healthy environment. Above and below ground natural resources are to be fairly distributed between regions, but each region will be autonomous. A region will be able to develop and dispense its own justice system, maintain local security forces and decide diplomatic and trade relations, providing no policy goes against the social contract.

The problem for PYD, YPG/J and SDC, is that while they have benefitted from US-led coalition and even Russian air support, and while Russia consistently argues for their inclusion in political negotiations, Syrian Kurds are well aware that these superpowers can withdraw their support at any time, as did the Russians from the Mahabad Republic in Iran in 1946 and the CIA from supporting peshmerga fighting Saddam Hussein in 1975. The US, EU and Russia wish to maintain relations with Turkey and Iran and both Turkey and Iran fear successes in Rojava, for if PYD and its allies can consolidate support for a federated region, this would incentivise Kurds in Turkey and Iran to do the same.

### ***Ways forward n Syria***

1. The international community cannot wait until Syria is 'fixed'. Humanitarian zones must be established in areas where there are representative local administrations attempting to provide security and services, so reconstruction can commence. This proposal is in contrast to that pushed by Turkey, which would change demographics and not build local capacity.
2. Two of four power structures in Syria want a Sunni Islamic state. International stakeholders must review their political, military and financial support for any extremist group (e.g. *Jaish al-Islam*) that wants a Sunni Arab Islamic State at the national level in Syria.
3. The Russian-drafted constitution that proposes a bicameral system at the national level, administrative decentralisation and ethnic language rights, must be developed with input from stakeholders that support decentralisation and do not support a Sunni Islamic nation state. Given the scale of reconstruction needed in Syria, groups that do not concur with internationally agreed on parameters need incentives to negotiate. Other constitutional issues in need of resolving include presidential powers, how to avoid a dysfunctional ethnic and political quota system, the form of decentralisation (e.g. would it be based on the existing 14 provinces, districts and subdistricts, and what powers would be devolved), how resources are to be distributed and how militias are to be disarmed or incorporated into national and local security forces. As Iranian representatives

note, major constitutional reform will supersede the impasse on Assad's future role.

4. Other reconstruction needs to build local capacity tailored to the needs of (1) government controlled areas, (2) those liberated from ISIS, (3) those under opposition militia control and (4) those run by local multi-ethnic administrations. All investment and loans must be linked to milestones regarding local security forces, diverse political representation, effective governance, establishing robust judicial processes, the means for reconciliation and economic opportunities. The trajectory of Iraq must be avoided and the Rojava experiment supported, as it provides a valid alternative to nationalism, authoritarianism, neo-liberal capitalism and traditional socialism. Checks and balances and avenues to develop alternatives are required for those who want local administrations to be based on Sharia law and those who wish to remain under the Alawite regime.
5. Assad and other members of the regime and members of militia must be held accountable for crimes against humanity, etc.

## Turkey

The US, EU, NATO and the UN are acquiescing to an increasingly erratic Turkey that defies international law in its post-coup purges, in waging war on its Kurdish population and Kurds in Syria, and by having troops and tanks in Syria and Iraq without permission from the respective governments. President Erdogan repeatedly claims that he and his government are the only guarantee that Turkey will maintain internal and regional security. Neither claim has been realised. Turkey's domestic and foreign policies are shaped by the ambitions of Erdogan and his fear of Kurds.

### Turkish politics before the attempted coup

Since 2012, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has curbed the parliamentary process and free speech and purged the media, judiciary, military and educational institutions.

On 16 February 2016, the main opposition party, the Republican Peoples Party (CHP), pulled out of the Constitutional Reconciliation Commission in protest against the push to give Turkey's president unprecedented powers. The commission was dissolved.

On 20 May 2016, AKP and Nationalist Action Party (MHP) members of parliament voted to temporarily suspend the constitution and lift parliamentary immunity from prosecution to allow the prosecution of up to 138 parliamentarians including 50 of 59 pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) parliamentarians, among them the co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yüksekdağ, as well as 51 CHP parliamentarians. The 138 parliamentarians face 667 charges, of which 405 target HDP parliamentarians. The charges include criticising the president, attending demonstrations and supporting a terrorist organisation. After the Constitutional Court rejected an appeal by the affected parliamentarians, President Erdoğan signed the bill to allow prosecutions to commence. On 5 September, eight HDP parliamentarians were ordered to attend court, but they refused to appear. If convicted, parliamentarians will have to resign, and first-past-the-



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post bi-elections will take place. The process of criminalising parliamentarians is reminiscent of 1994, when six Kurdish parliamentarians, including Leyla Zana, lost their parliamentary immunity and were sentenced to 15 years in prison. Zana spent a decade in prison, during which time there was increased military clashes between PKK and the state. If the same path is followed, the HDP will be banned, leaving the Kurdish movement outside the parliamentary process.

In a further consolidation of President Erdogan's powers, on 22 May, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was replaced by Binali Yildirim, following an April ruling of AKP's highest decision-making body to remove Davutoglu's authority to appoint provincial and district officials. Unlike Erdogan, Davutoglu wanted to form a coalition government after the 7 June elections and opposed the imprisonment of journalists and academics speaking in support of human rights. He had been the chief negotiator in a refugee deal with Europe.

Even before the attempted coup, an estimated 70 percent of all newspapers and 85 percent of all television channels were government mouthpieces<sup>27</sup>. Journalists, human rights activists and academics were being arrested and imprisoned for criticizing Erdogan or AKP policies. For instance, in June, three prominent Turks were imprisoned: the academic, Ahmet Nesin; a forensic pathologist and chair of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, Sebnem Koru Financi, and a member of Reporters Without Borders, Erol Onderoglu.

Erdogan infamously described the judiciary as shackles on his feet. On 5 June, Turkey issued a decree, signed into law by Erdogan two days later, to reassign 3,750 judges and prosecutors according to their sympathies with Erdogan. This followed a purge of the judiciary and police in 2014, which squashed corruption investigations into senior AKP officials that implicated Erdogan's family. On 13 June 2016, the AKP government submitted a bill to parliament for the removal of all 700 members of the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State (the top administrative court) except for the presidents, chief prosecutors and department chiefs, who were already Erdogan loyalists. The bill also required the removal and reappointment of 11 members of the Higher Electoral Board.

The AKP parliament amended Law 5442 to increase the powers of the military in war torn provinces in eastern Turkey. On 23 June, the parliament granted immunity from prosecution to TSF personnel conducting counterterrorism operations in eastern Turkey and to civil servants engaged in counterterrorism activities, other than prosecutions authorised by the military or political leadership. The law greatly expands the powers of the military and makes it difficult to investigate allegations of human rights abuses.

The AKP government has expanded the number of religious schools and appointed AKP administrators and principals in other schools. Sunni Islam has become a compulsory subject in all state schools.

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<sup>27</sup> Al Monitor: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/turkey-erdogan-dictator-onslaught-press-freedom.html>



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Large companies are also being taken over by Erdogan supporters, an example being the Armed Forces Assistance Corporation, a credit union that receives 10 percent of all TSF salaries. All this and more occurred before the attempted coup.

### Attempted coup

On Friday 15 July, commanders in the TSF and the Gendarmerie (rural police)<sup>28</sup> backed by up to 10,000 soldiers attempted to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP government. By 10 pm many top TSF commanders had been taken hostage by their guards, aides or secretaries. Tanks rolled down the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, blocking the two bridges over the Bosphorus Straits and surrounding the parliamentary buildings and presidential palace in Ankara. Pro-coup helicopters and F-16 fighter jets flew over both cities, with helicopters over Ankara strafing parliamentary buildings, MIT headquarters and other security buildings. Raids were conducted on Police Special Force facilities. Soldiers closed down Ankara and Istanbul international airports and took control of TRT, a minor State television station. At the station, soldiers forced a front woman to announce a country-wide curfew and martial law and that a 'Peace at Home Council' had been formed to restore constitutional democracy, human rights and the secular rule of law.

MIT had been forewarned of the coup at 4 pm, 11 hours before the coup was planned to start. Already having been moved forward after it was announced a purge of the military was to commence on 16 July, the coup was moved forward again, and quickly unravelled. Coup supporters failed to get the newly appointed Chief of General Staff, General Hulusi Akar, to sign a declaration and publicly announce that the entire chain of command was behind the coup. The planned air transportation of 5,000 soldiers from the Kurdish region of Şırnak into Ankara did not occur and President Erdogan evaded capture. Erdogan left the Marmaris hotel where he was staying about half an hour before his would-be captors arrived, boarding a flight to Istanbul. Two fighter jets tailing the presidential plane did not open fire after they were told it was a passenger flight.

Another failure was that coup supporters did not use social media, in contrast to Prime Minister Yildirim and President Erdoğan. From 10.30 pm, Yildirim and, later, Erdogan used television outlets and social media to call people onto the streets to protest against the treason of a 'small group' in the military. After 110,000 imams were texted, 85,000 mosques used loud speakers from midnight to dawn to call the salat prayer, used in times of war, and encourage people onto the street to protest the coup. Some coup supporters opened fire on civilians but on Bosphorus Bridge, thousands of AKP supporters, including radical Islamists, confronted tanks and soldiers, chanting '*Allah Akbar*' and causing 200 terrified, confused, unarmed pro-coup soldiers to surrender. These conscripts had been told they were on a training exercise. Crowds attacked the soldiers, and some were bashed, stripped or killed.

At dawn, Erdogan announced the coup had failed and that the Gulen movement was behind it. Fethullah Gulen is a Sufi cleric who has lived in the USA since 1999. The former colleague of Erdogan's had become Erdogan's arch enemy in 2013, after Gulenists

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<sup>28</sup> The coup was allegedly organised from the Gendarmerie General Command Headquarters in Ankara.



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launched corruption charges against senior AKP ministers that implicated members of Erdogan's family. Subsequently Gulen supporters were classified as terrorists, the AKP government claiming they ran a parallel structure within the state with the intension of taking power. Fethullah Gulen was quick to condemn the coup and deny any involvement. He suggested Erdogan could have staged the coup for his own purposes.

On Saturday morning, MIT claimed 104 coup supporters had been killed and bullets and clashes had killed another 246 police and civilians and wounded between 1,400 and 2,185 people. Already, 1,563 in the military had been arrested, including five generals and 29 colonels. Alleged coup supporters were denied Muslim burials.

On Saturday, Erdogan, Yildirim and others in the AKP government claimed the US had played a role in the coup, given that coup plotters used Incirlik airbase to refuel fighter jets, and the US refused to extradite Fethullah Gulen. US Secretary of State, John Kerry, immediately denied US involvement and Kerry and others insisted the US would take action if Turkey could produce evidence that Fethullah Gulen was responsible.

Most observers conjecture that those behind the attempted coup comprised an unusual alliance of mid-ranking Gulenists (half of those arrested had been promoted in 2007, 2009 and 2013, the last after ten percent of all Kemalist generals and admirals were imprisoned); secular Kemalists, among them those who opposed Erdogan's increased Islamisation of institutions and/or push for an executive presidency; and those who were involved in the civil war on Kurds. Other coup supporters were following orders, being opportunistic or were subject to blackmail.

On Saturday, all parties, including the pro-Kurdish HDP, condemned the coup as an attack on democracy. Prime Minister Yildirim thanked the opposition parties for their support, which could have heralded a healing of divisions in Turkey. Instead, within hours of the announcements three HDP offices were attacked and in subsequent meetings between the AKP and opposition parties, HDP was not invited.

Also on Saturday, Turkey closed its airspace to military aircraft. Air and ground traffic in and out of Incirlik airbase was stopped and power was cut to the base although there were backup generators. The base is used by aircraft from six countries, 2,000 US air force personnel and 250 Germans, refuel tanker aircraft servicing one third of all air operations against ISIS and is the location of a tactical nuclear arsenal under US military control. On Sunday, the airbase was reopened but ISIS operations were halted for up to a week.

Erdogan proclaimed the coup was 'a gift from God' as it would lead to a purge of terrorists from all state institutions. By 27 July, authorities had arrested 8,838 military personnel (1.5 percent of the second largest force in NATO). Among them were 163 of Turkey's 325 generals and admirals, of whom 149 were permanently relieved of their duties and 123 were imprisoned. Those imprisoned included a commander in the NATO contingency force, the commander of Incirlik airbase, the commander in charge of security along the Syrian and Iraqi borders and the commander involved in operations against the Kurds in Diyarbakir, Hakkari and Şırnak. Others were leaders of commando brigades and many hundreds of conscripts operating in Kurdish areas. About 1,000



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officers were imprisoned, as were the two Turkish pilots responsible for shooting down the Russian fighter jet in November 2015. All were labelled Gulenists.

Within five days of the coup, 2,745 judges and prosecutors (20 percent of the total) had been removed from duty, including two judges in the Constitutional Court and ten in the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors. Between 450 and 1,000 of these were detained on the basis they were Gulen supporters, their detention having implications for processing other detainees. The Ministry of Education forced the resignation of 1,577 deans at state and private universities, and 35,000 teachers and administrators were suspended from duty. All state employees, officials and academics had their passports revoked. The Interior Ministry suspended another 8,777 officials including 30 provincial governors, 47 district governors, 614 gendarmerie and 7,899 police. Another 492 staff in the Religious Affairs Directorate, 257 staff in the Prime Minister's Office, and 300 employed by the Energy Ministry were arrested. In total, an estimated 60,000 people had lost their jobs and 10,137 people had been imprisoned. To act so quickly on such a scale, the AKP government must have prepared an extensive list of names. Parliamentarians were the only group noticeably absent from the purge.

After AKP protesters demanded the reintroduction of the death penalty, Yildirim and Erdogan announced this would be considered, 'as in a democracy the will of the people must be served'. In Turkey's embrace of democracy the Prime Minister's Office blocked 20 news portals, cancelled the licences of 24 news outlets and leaked the names of 73 journalists to be arrested because they were endangering national security. People were asked to report any anti-government propaganda on the internet and the European Convention on Human Rights was suspended.

On Wednesday 20 July, a meeting of the National Security Council voted to declare a state of emergency for three months, which could be extended. Parliament gave its approval the following day, thereby allowing Erdogan and his cabinet to rule by decree. The first decree extended pre-charge detention from four to 30 days and ordered the closure of 2,341 private schools, universities, unions, health centres and charities. Ankara prosecutors requested the seizure of the assets of 3,049 detained judges, and 131 media outlets were closed down, among them the two largest news agencies, Cihan and Zaman, that had already been put under state control in March, as well as 16 TV channels, 23 radio stations, 45 newspapers, 15 magazines and 29 publishers. Some companies sacked hundreds of workers suspected of Gulen sympathies, though no international NGO was caught in the purge.

In a decree on 31 July, Erdogan put all armed services under his control and closed all military training centres, decreeing the establishment of a new national defence university for officers. Erdogan also wants direct control of MIT. Those who replaced the sacked generals and admirals are considered anti-US and anti-NATO. They include Islamists and Kemalists. This selection heralds potential for ongoing divisions within the TSF, which Erdogan can manipulate.

Soon after the failed coup, opposition parties called for a return to democracy, freedom of media and the separation of powers. On 25 July, all opposition parties, except the HDP, were invited to a meeting with Erdogan to discuss constitutional reforms. Further



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meetings also excluded the HDP. These meetings and Erdogan's announcement that constitutional reform regarding the role of president could wait were reported as signs of reconciliation and unity. Another view is that Erdogan was trying to preserve his international reputation.

For weeks, Erdogan mobilised crowds on a daily basis by sending text messages to all citizens urging them to gather in public places after work to celebrate the failure of the coup until further notice. To facilitate the protests, free public transport was provided and mobile phone companies were ordered to allow free mobile calls. Alevi Turks and Kurds felt threatened by the large all-male crowds chanting '*Allah Akbar*'. On 7 August, buses transported one million people to a rally in Istanbul. Representatives of the CHP and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) sat beside Erdogan. The HDP was not invited. HDP held their own rallies, calling for a return to democracy, a resumption of political negotiations and an end to Ocalan's isolation.

By mid-August the number of civil servants suspended or sacked had reached 84,914 and the number of those detained in official and unofficial detention centres had reached 60,384, with 20,355 awaiting trial. Many of those arrested admitted to being Gulenists. Human Rights Reports claimed that detainees were being bashed, tortured and deprived of food, water and sleep. To make room for those implicated in the coup the state announced that 38,000 prisoners not involved in the coup would be released. Otherwise, a total of 3,670 judges and prosecutors had been suspended from duty and 4,262 institutions had been closed, including 1,000 schools, 15 universities, 35 hospitals and 1,200 foundations and media outlets. Another 146 arrest warrants were issued for academics of whom 74 had been arrested, Gulenist schools were converted to Islamic schools, 44 companies were raided, and 187 arrest warrants were issued for company owners and managers. Major companies were taken over by the state and the state seized \$4 billion of real estate owned by the Gulen movement.

At the end of August, CHP claimed thousands of innocent people were being caught up in the purge. In September, all public servants who had been sacked without a trial were stigmatized by being named in a public gazette, lessening their chances of future employment. One academic estimated the purge has seriously damaged the livelihoods of 500,000 people and had created new internal enemies, who would have legitimate claims before the European Court of Human Rights.

These events did not prevent fighter jets bombing PKK bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, or the ongoing sieges and curfews in eastern Turkey or media crackdowns that further isolated the HDP from public debate. Having succeeded in purging Gulenists, the AKP government decided to focus on organisations and individuals allegedly linked to the PKK. On 11 August three HDP offices in Istanbul were raided and 17 HDP members were arrested. On 8 September, 11,285 teachers accused of having links with the PKK (without any investigation or court appearance) were suspended from duty. Dozens more were arrested when they protested the arrests. On 19 September, the AKP deputy prime minister announced a total of 27,715 teachers had been fired and another 9,000 teachers had been suspended from duty for suspected links with Gulenists or PKK. On 11 September, 24 elected Kurdish mayors (half of whom are already in prison awaiting trial) were replaced with AKP government administrators and on 16 September, the HDP



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deputy co-chair, Alp Altınörs, was imprisoned for attending the funeral of a HDP executive who was killed in the bomb blasts at the 10 October 2015 peace rally. His funeral attendance was used as evidence of his links with terrorism.

With an increase in PKK attacks on TSF outside urban areas after the attempted coup, the TSK organised mobile units supported by the latest technology, including drones, to attack PKK in eastern Turkey. The TSF and gendarmerie are increasing their presence at checkpoints around Kurdish towns and suburbs, and have established pro-state Kurdish neighbourhood guards in each suburb, similar to the 90,000 strong village guard system. The AKP government claims these and other actions will be expanded, further alienating the Kurdish population, preventing children attending school and any democratic means to address Kurdish issues. In early September dozens of Turkish nationalists attacked residents and shops in a Kurdish neighbourhood of the Black Sea town of Sinop. Nationalist attacks on Kurds are becoming more frequent.

The attempted coup reflects intelligence failures, unless one or more stakeholders allowed the coup to happen. The post-coup purges are severely weakening the judiciary, education system, other public services, media and the TSF, the last having implications for NATO, the war on ISIS and other aspects of Turkey's security. These factors put further strain on Turkey-US relations, added to which is Turkey's continued pressure for the speedy extradition of Gulen. Even if Turkey does provide valid evidence, some experts conjecture it would take up to ten years for US courts to process the extradition<sup>29</sup>.

Since the coup, members of the AKP government and TSF have questioned whether Turkey should remain in NATO, and in mid August it was suggested Russia could use Incirlik airbase. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, continued to claim that the US supports the Turkish government, initially qualifying this with 'provided the Turkish government adheres to democracy and the rule of law'. Kerry also maintained that NATO remains strong, but 'democratic responsibilities come with membership'. NATO turned a blind eye to previous coups and the NATO treaty has no suspension provisions.

### ISIS and TAK attacks

Despite Turkey's largest defence force, police force and military intelligence with access to Salafi groups, these forces have failed to stop attacks allegedly conducted by ISIS or those claimed by the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), a radical offshoot of PKK, over which the PKK has no control.

About 2,750 Turkish citizens have joined ISIS and *al-Nusra* in Syria and Iraq. There is mounting evidence that MIT has supplied weapons and ammunition to ISIS, and that security forces have turned a blind eye to fighters and supplies crossing back and forth across the border and living among the population. Wounded ISIS receive medical attention in Turkish hospitals; ISIS have Turkey resident permits, driver's licences, travel documents and credit cards. Turkish individuals have benefitted from trading in oil from ISIS-controlled fields. With US pressure from July 2015, Turkey began playing a double hand – arresting some ISIS individuals, but often releasing them within days, and

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<sup>29</sup> Turkey submitted 84 dossiers on Gulen before the coup and four afterwards.





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occasionally attacking ISIS in Syria. By 2016 Turkey began suffering the consequences of its ISIS policies, with ISIS firing on Turkish batteries from Jarablus and using Katyusha rockets on the border town of Kilis, killing 23 civilians. In 2016, ISIS was held responsible for the following attacks inside Turkey, conducted on:

- 12 January in Istanbul, killing 13 German tourists and injuring 39;
- 19 March in Istanbul, killing four tourists (three Israelis and an Iranian), as well as the Turkish suicide bomber and injuring 39;
- 1 May in Gaziantep, an ISIS recruiting ground, killing three policemen and injuring 23 people;
- 28 June at Ataturk International Airport in Istanbul killing 45 people and the three terrorists and injuring 240; and
- 20 August in Gaziantep, killing 54 civilians attending a Kurdish wedding of mainly HDP supporters, including 22 under the age of 14, after which at least nine mortars from Jarablus landed in the outskirts of the city. A military curfew was imposed on Gaziantep for 15 days but there was no official mourning. At funerals, ultra-nationalists attacked mourners shouting '*Allah Akbar*'.

ISIS has not claimed responsibility for any of these attacks, nor the attack in Suruc in July 2015 that killed 32 Kurdish and pro-Kurdish activists, or the attack in Ankara on 10 October 2015 that killed more than 128 people at a pro-Kurdish peace rally. The CHP and HDP have asked for a parliamentary investigation into ISIS activities in Turkey five times. Each time AKP parliamentarians voted against an investigation.

In contrast, TAK claimed responsibility for four attacks in 2016 that killed 75 people. In each attack, security forces or police were targeted, and civilians were collateral damage, unlike the alleged ISIS attacks that targeted civilians and foreigners, often in high profile locations for maximum media coverage.

The first of the TAK attacks occurred on 17 February and targeted a military bus outside a garrison located a few hundred metres from parliament and the General Staff headquarters in Ankara, killing 28 army personnel and one civilian and injuring sixty. Within hours, the Turkish president and prime minister blamed YPG, PKK and the Syrian Regime, identifying the suicide bomber as Salih Najjar, a Syrian Kurd who arrived in Turkey as a refugee in July 2015. The PYD, YPG/YPJ and PKK denied any involvement.

In the following days 16 people were arrested, Turkey conducted airstrikes on PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan, shelled YPG/YPJ and SDF in Afrin and south of Azaz, including the Menagh airbase and sent between 350 and 800 militia and truckloads of ammunition to defend Azaz and *al-Nusra* from Kurdish forces. On 20 February, TAK identified the dead suicide bomber as Zinar Raperin, (aka Abdulbaki Sonmez), born in eastern Turkey in 1989. DNA tests proved that the suicide bomber was Abdulbaki Somer, who had been a member of PKK for ten years before joining TAK in 2014. Somer had then moved to Syria and joined the YPG for 1.5 years, before assuming the identity of Salih Neccar and returning to Turkey as a refugee in July 2015. Questions remain as to how Somer was able to pass through immigration and how the state was able to so quickly identify Somer after the bombing.



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On 13 March, a car bomb exploded in a transport hub only 200 meters from the Prime Minister's office in Ankara killing 35 people and the two attackers, and injuring 125 people. The next day, AKP blamed PKK for the attack but on 17 March, TAK claimed responsibility and confirmed the identity of the female suicide bomber as Seher Çağla Demir from eastern Turkey. Two days later five people were arrested for the bombing.

On the 27 April a TAK suicide bomber blew herself up outside a Bursa mosque, injuring 13, and on 7 June, TAK targeted an Istanbul police station killing seven police officers and four civilians, and injuring thirty-six. These attacks were blamed on PKK until TAK claimed responsibility.

### Civil War in eastern Turkey

The civil war in eastern Turkey involves the collective punishment of Kurdish communities and clashes between PKK and the TSF. The collective punishment of Kurdish civilians began in August 2015 after Kurdish representatives in Silopi (Şırnak), Cizre, Şırnak, Hakkari, Mus, Batman, Van and Diyarbakir declared self-rule. Turkey immediately embarked on 'clean up operations' implementing sieges and 24-hour curfews and using tanks, artillery and assault helicopters to demolish suburbs and towns. By May 2016, 57 elected Kurdish mayors and city council members were under arrest, and another 28 mayors and 24 city council members had been suspended from duty.

The Documentation Centre of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey claims that between 16 August 2015 and 18 March 2016 there were 63 round-the-clock curfews in at least 22 districts of seven cities in eastern Turkey<sup>30</sup>, affecting an estimated 1.7 million residents, with at least 500,000 residents having been forced from their homes.

The 24-hour curfew and siege of Sur (in Diyarbakir) that began on 2 December 2015 and those in Cizre and Silopi that began on 14 December 2015 were partially lifted in February. In Sur, iconic places such as the 500 old Kurşunlu Mosque, the historic Hasırlı Mosque, the 1,700 year-old Saint Mary Church and Surp Giragos Church were damaged by tank and artillery fire. People leaving Sur were arrested and charged with 'membership in a terrorist organization' or 'attempting to change the constitution by use of arms.' After 103 days, bulldozers and trucks moved in to clear the destruction of Sur, which is a UNESCO listed heritage site. The government declared that it would embark on an urban transformation project, which required the emergency expropriation of half the district. Residents were not allowed to return home and feared the government would force them to relocate. The siege was finally lifted on 27 August, but security forces stopped journalists from entering Sur and a curfew remains in place.

In Cizre, people were given a choice: immediate evacuation or detention, both of which involved undressing before coming out of their houses, or remaining in their homes, risking mortar and artillery fire. Those who chose evacuation through a 'security corridor' were subject to Turkish troops opening fire on them. At least 178 bodies (some sources say more than 200) were collected from several basements, including 26 of the 31 people trapped in one basement for 19 days. The bodies were burnt beyond recognition. ISIS papers were found in a house used by Turkish security and some claim that ISIS

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<sup>30</sup> The provinces affected were Diyarbakır (34 times), Şırnak, Cizre and Silopi (9 times), Mardin (11 times), Hakkâri (5 times), Muş (1 time), Elazığ (1 time) and Batman (2 times).



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militants were used in security operations. An estimated 300 civilians died during the 90-day siege of Cizre, with hundreds more reported missing and hundreds being arrested. Evidence of the deaths and other human rights violations, including 76 civilians dying from being denied medical treatment, was presented to the International Criminal Court by a Cizre-based Law Commission in May.

In the Idil district of Şırnak, where a curfew and siege was reinstated in mid-February, a mobile phone recorded Turkish security forces killing 13 unarmed civilians who were trying to leave the district and holding up a white flag. After continuous shelling, 60 percent of Şırnak was destroyed by May. An estimated 60,000 people were forced to live in tents or move to other towns. Only 5,000 people remained in the town.

On 14 March, new curfews were imposed on parts of Diyarbakir, Yuksekova and Nusaybin. In Nusaybin, on 26 May, after 72 days of aerial bombardment, ground attacks, militant youth clashing with security forces and people having no electricity, water or access to basic services, the militant youths announced they were withdrawing from the town in order to avoid a massacre like the one in Cizre. Turkey continued bombing Nusaybin. An unknown number of people remained trapped in basements, while snipers targeted people trying to leave. On 3 June Turkey announced clean-up operations were completed in Nusaybin, with security forces having killed 495 militants since March. The siege and curfew on Nusaybin was lifted on 19 July.

New sieges and curfews have been implemented in Silopi on 5 April, in rural areas around Diyarbakir on 4 June, and on 23 June in 15 villages in the Lice district, where 8,000 TSF torched woodland and farms. The curfews on Diyarbakir and Lice were lifted in the first week of July but new round-the-clock curfews and sieges were implemented in villages and subdistricts of Mardin on 14 July, in villages in the districts of Lice and Hani on 3 August and in 12 neighbourhoods in Diyarbakir province on 9 September.

Observers fear the government intends to resettle Kurds from destroyed suburbs, towns and villages. Of the 2.7 Syrian refugees in Turkey, of whom only 256,000 live in camps, the rest living in rental accommodation, about one million live in nine Kurdish provinces. On 3 July, President Erdogan proposed that Syrian refugees be granted citizenship, which would change the demographic balance of these Kurdish provinces. For example, Urfa has a mainly Kurdish population of 800,000 but accommodates 410,000 Syrian refugees.

Since August 2015, an estimated 1,000 civilians have been killed according to pro-Kurdish organisations, including at least 72 children. At least 180 civilians lost their lives within the boundaries of their home, 162 of these being killed by sniper fire or missiles. Some deaths were the result of TSF not allowing ambulances or medical personnel to help the injured or sick, or from the TSF damaging or occupying medical centres. According to the International Crisis Group, confirmed deaths are 307 civilians, 209 'youths with unknown affiliation', 582 TSF and 653 'PKK militants'.

The toll of casualties caused by PKK and TSK clashes are in addition to these statistics. Turkey's state media claims that between July 2015 and April 2016, 11,000 PKK and YDG-H (youth militias) were arrested and by July 2016, 7,000 PKK fighters had been killed in airstrikes, shelling and clashes. State media claims 600 soldiers, police and village guards



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were killed by PKK-made roadside bombs, booby-trapped buildings, vehicle-borne bombs, sniper fire and direct clashes during the same period. The PKK People's Defence Forces (HPG) claimed that between 24 July 2015 and 23 July 2016, they killed between 2,218 and 2,982 members of the TSF, with between 363 and 442 PKK fighters killed by TSF (depending on the report) in 356 land operations, 658 aerial bombardments, 1,649 incidences of heavy artillery shelling and 110 direct clashes. The PKK statistics do not account for the deaths of militant youths, and their statistic for civilian deaths (298) is lower than the 1,000 civilians claimed by pro-Kurdish political parties.

The civilian toll has caused PKK some soul searching especially after a PKK operation on 10 May went terribly wrong when an explosion killed 16 civilians who had stopped a truck carrying explosive materials attempting to enter Diyarbakir. The incident highlighted the dangers of taking the armed struggle to the cities. Three days later, on 13 May, in the rural countryside of Cukurca near the border with Iraq, PKK shot down a Turkish Super Cobra helicopter with a Russian made portable shoulder held SA-18 surface-to-air missile likely stolen from the Syrian Army. In May, June and August, PKK offered to resume political negotiations but Prime Minister Yildirim refused.

On 10 August, police vehicles in Sur and in the Kurdish town of Kiziltepe in Mardin province were attacked, killing nine and wounding another 59. The PKK or its armed wing, HPG, did not claim responsibility, in contrast to operations conducted on 5 and 8 August that left 14 soldiers dead. On 17 – 18 August attacks in Elazig, Van and Bitlis killed 13 people, 11 of whom were police, soldiers or village guards, and injured around 300, including many Kurdish civilians according to state sources. These sources blamed PKK and Gulenists. PKK's armed wing, HPG, claimed responsibility for the Elazig attack, saying that it was conducted in retaliation for the previous week's TSF operation in Lice, and that the attack killed 150 police and wounded another 155 police. They did not claim responsibility for the other attacks.

Cemil Bayik, a PKK leader and head of the Kurdistan Communities' Union (KCK), claims that Kurds in Turkey are living through the worst time in their 32-year armed struggle. On 11 May, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (HR), Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, wrote to the Turkish government asking for a UN team to be allowed to investigate what happened during the 78-day curfew on Cizre between December 2015 and March 2016, after receiving reports that unarmed civilians were deliberately shot by snipers or fired at from tanks and military vehicles, or were burnt beyond recognition when hiding in three basements. Turkey did not respond to the request. Nor has Turkey responded to requests by Human Rights Watch and others to investigate what is happening in eastern Turkey.

Since April 2015, there had been no visits or communication with Abdullah Ocalan, who remains in solitary confinement on the island of Imrali. After hearing that pro-coup plotters landed on Imrali with the intention of killing Ocalan, and that fighting had broken out, 50 Kurdish political representatives, mayors and other officials began a hunger strike on 5 September, demanding the end of Ocalan's isolation. On 12 September, his brother was granted a visit. Ocalan's brother later reported that Ocalan told him that no side could win the war and if talks were revived there could be a resolution to all issues within six months. With Turkey cutting off all peaceful means to



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negotiate, some Kurds want HDP to withdraw from parliament. Others blame PKK for entrenching the AKP government's position against the Kurds.

### US-Turkey relations

US-Turkey relations have been strained from Turkey not closing its border to ISIS, claiming the US was behind the attempted coup, the excessive nature of the post-coup purges, Turkey demanding the extradition of Gulen and attacking YPG and SDF in Syria. Over in New York, US attorney Preet Bharara is indicting a Turkish businessman, Reza Zarrab, for violating US sanctions against Iran. Four AKP ministers are implicated.

In March, President Obama refused to meet Erdogan when Erdogan was attending a nuclear summit in Washington. On 19 July, Wikileaks published AKP emails dating between 2010 and 6 July 2016. Next to nothing has been published in English about their contents, except to say Turkish citizens routinely inform on each other. At the G20 summit in Hangzhou in early September Obama and Putin met and discussed Syria. The US response to Turkey wanting to take Al-Bab, establish a Turkey-controlled 'safe haven', and play a part in the Raqqa and Mosul offensives remains to be seen, but indications are that the US will continue to support the SDF to fight ISIS, and block Turkey's aggression towards Kurdish forces, as indicated by a US presence on the ground in Tel Abyad, Hasaka and in the Azaz-Jarablus region. If the US can get Turkey and Kurds to join forces in liberating Raqqa, they will have performed a miracle.

### Europe-Turkey Relations

The EU and Turkey signed a joint action plan on 18 March to curb the arrival of refugees using irregular routes into the EU from Turkey. In accordance with the 29 November 2015 action plan the contract states that as of 20 March, all individuals arriving in Greece from Turkey *who do not qualify as asylum seekers or who have been accepted as refugees in the first country of asylum (e.g. Turkey) or who would be guaranteed protection in another country (e.g. Turkey)* will be sent back to Turkey and for every one sent back, once irregular arrivals have been substantially reduced, Europe will take one refugee from Turkey, capped at 20,000 until May. However, *each person to be sent back will have the right of appeal*, and during this time they will be able to stay in a Greek reception centre, with Greece receiving emergency assistance of 464 million Euros in 2016. In return, *once irregular arrivals have been sufficiently reduced* three billion Euros will be released to help refugees inside Turkey. So far, there is no news that a single euro has been paid to Turkey. *Providing Turkey complies with another five preconditions*, the EU would consider short visa free travel for Turkish citizens to the Schengen area by June 2016, and accelerate specified aspects of Turkey's accession to the EU. The deadline as come and gone because Turkey has failed to reach five benchmarks, the most important being to amend anti-terror legislation to be more aligned with EU norms, implement corruption measures and judicial co-operation in criminal matters, and conclude an agreement with the European police agency, Europol. Erdogan refuses to make these amendments. Instead, he has repeatedly threatened that unless Turkish citizens are granted visa free access Turkey will flood Europe with refugees.

There were 154,661 arrivals from Turkey between March and June 2016, a marked reduction from 2015. Of these, 52 percent were Syrian nationals, 25 percent were Afghanis and 16 percent were Iraqis. A factor contributing to the reduction of arrivals is that Turkey has closed the Turkish-Syrian border to refugees (while insisting the border



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remains open), and Turkish guards have shot and killed at least 60 refugees attempting to cross the border in May-June, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

On 23-24 May, a UN-Supported World Humanitarian Summit was held in Istanbul. Only one of the seven G7 world leaders, Angela Merkel, attended. The only positive outcome was talk of making humanitarian agencies more efficient and reserving 25 percent of all humanitarian funds for local NGOs by 2020. One could argue that the UN considering Turkey a suitable place to hold a humanitarian summit ignores the suffering of people in Turkey and makes the UN complicit in the suffering.

However, EU countries have become less compliant to Turkey's demands and more critical of its policies. EU representatives condemned the ruling to lift parliamentary immunity from prosecution for HDP and other parliamentarians. On 2 June the German parliament ruled that the mass killings of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 was genocide, causing Erdogan to angrily accuse 11 German MPs of Turkish origin, who voted in favour of the resolution, of being 'mouthpieces of terrorist organisations'. Turkish nationalists issued death threats to these MPs. On 14 June, the EU's envoy to Turkey, Hansjoerg Haber, resigned over disagreements about the EU-Turkey migrant deal and on 27 June, German lawmakers, activists and artists filed a civil suit in the German court system accusing President Erdogan, former Prime Minister Davutoglu, other government officials and members of the military and police of systematic war crimes in the disproportionate use of lethal force, extrajudicial killings and violations of the right to life in eastern Turkey, including Cizre, in accordance with Germany's Code on International Criminal Law.

After the Brexit referendum, President François Hollande announced a wish to end negotiations for Turkey's accession to the EU. Post coup, EU-Turkey relations further nose-dived, with many in Turkey claiming Turkey no longer needs the EU. The Austrian chancellor called for a cessation of talks about Turkey's accession and visa free access, claiming talks were 'diplomatic fiction'. Germany's foreign minister claimed relations had deteriorated to a point where it was like Germany and Turkey were on different planets. Meanwhile Erdogan threatened to cut relations with Italy if Italian prosecutors continued investigating Erdogan's son for being involved in money laundering. In mid-August the German Minister of the Interior told parliament there was evidence that Turkey supported terrorists. But these are words in a vacuum of inaction and post-coup, some European leaders were convinced by Turkey that Gulen was responsible for the coup. One wonders what evidence was put to them. If the EU does not take a firm stand on human rights, then the EU is complicit in the authoritarian actions of the Turkish state.

#### *Mending relations with Israel, Russia and Iran*

In June, the increasingly isolated AKP government restored some level of relations with Israel and Russia, both unpopular moves among AKP supporters. Nevertheless, on 9 August Erdogan met with President Putin in Moscow to discuss restoring economic relations, and future coordination on Syria. However, at the UN Security Council in August, Russia continued to criticise Turkey for failing to stop fighters, supplies and weapons flowing across the border to supply jihadi groups in Syria and for blocking the PYD from attending political negotiations and restricting the use of the SDF in the Azaz-Jarablus-Manbij triangle. On 21 August, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim claimed that Turkey



would agree to Assad temporarily remaining in power during a transitional period and that the main priority is that Syria remain unified. To this end Turkey would become more actively involved to ensure Syria is not divided along ethnic lines.

### ***Ways forward***

Turkey is a failing state and no longer a reliable ally. Its geopolitical importance makes its current trajectory an international security threat. Western acquiescence to this trajectory has not curbed Erdogan's excesses or enhanced the West's international credibility. While diplomatic channels must remain open and humanitarian help for refugees continue, levers need to be applied so Turkey is encouraged to change its current trajectory. These levers include:

- Clear statements to ambassadors, political representatives and at international forums about what Turkey risks if it continues to:
  - Imprison parliamentarians, mayors, judges, prosecutors, academics, journalists, and anyone who speaks against Erdogan or the AKP;
  - Purge government institutions without due process;
  - Continue sieges, curfews and destruction of Kurdish towns, and kill and make homeless their residents;
  - Not hold security forces accountable for human rights abuses;
  - Block all democratic means for Kurds to address their concerns;
  - Not resume negotiations with Kurdish representatives to resolve Kurdish issues;
  - Keep Abdullah Ocalan in isolation;
  - Not investigate and hold accountable those behind terrorist attacks inside Turkey allegedly conducted by ISIS;
  - Take the following actions in Syria:
    - Support Salafi militias;
    - Advance more than 12 kilometres inside Syria or establish a permanent presence;
    - Militarily attack or subvert the SDF; and
    - Besiege and attack Afrin, Kobani, Tel Abyad and Cizire.
- Not co-operating with Turkey's demands to:
  - Exclude PYD, SDC, SDF and other representatives from political negotiations on Syria;
  - Block SDF from fighting ISIS in Syria;
  - Continue to besiege local multi-ethnic administrations in northern Syria.

The international community must support political negotiations and a roadmap for peace between the Turkish state and Kurdish political, tribal and religious leaders, as well as academics, lawyers and activists. If Turkey refuses to negotiate, the international community can work with Kurdish and Turkish representatives to devise measureable steps and a reasonable timetable for all parties. PKK want independent observers to monitor the roadmap, and in September Demirtas visited Masoud Barzani to ask for his help in facilitating negotiations. If the government refuses to negotiate peace with 25 percent of its population, the international community must support self-determination for Kurds in Turkey in other ways, as outlined below.

In the case of non-compliance:

- The US-led coalition needs to review its dependency on Incirlik and other airbases inside Turkey;
- NATO needs to prepare mechanisms for temporary suspension or the expulsion of a member if clearly defined parameters are breached;
- The EU needs to consider a (temporary) suspension of negotiations regarding Turkish citizens having visa free access and Turkey joining the EU;
- Countries must review the status of PKK as a terrorist organisation in light of them being legitimate freedom fighters aspiring to democratic outcomes in the absence of democratic ways for Kurds to attain their cultural, political and economic rights, and live in peace, and in light of PKK fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq since 2014, and making repeated attempts to negotiate a ceasefire with the AKP government since July 2015.
- If all the above fail, the international community needs to consider the freezing of foreign assets and international investment in Turkey.

## Iran

On 26 February Iran held elections for the 290-member *Majlis* or Consultative Assembly for which there were 6,000 vetted candidates, and for the 88-member Assembly of Experts, the top clerical body that appoints the country's most powerful official, the Supreme Leader, for which there are 161 candidates. President Rouhani was more than half-way through his first term and needed MP support to push through long-awaited economic reforms. Although the Guardian Council rejected many moderates standing for election, 62 percent of the 55 million eligible voters took part in the election.

In the *Majlis*, five seats are reserved for a Zoroastrian, Jew, Assyrian, Chaldean and Armenian. The results for the remainder were 135 reformists and moderates, 83 conservatives and 65 independents (in these figures two seats are unaccounted for). In the Assembly of Experts clerics backed by reformists and moderates won 52 of the 88 seats but in May the conservative Ayatollah Ahmed Jannati was voted chairman.

Although moderate President Hassan Rouhani promises Kurds language and cultural rights, and that these rights should be incorporated into the constitution, conservatives, moderates and reformists alike make little difference to Kurds living in the heavily militarised impoverished Kurdistan region of Iran. All Kurdish political parties are illegal. Two leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran (KDP-Iran) have been assassinated: Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou in Vienna in 1989 and Sadegh Sharafkandi in Berlin in 1992. In May 2016, after being convicted of being members of the KDP-Iran, five Kurdish human rights activists were hung in Urmia.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, 14,000 prisoners have been executed, the majority from ethnic minorities. In 2015, Iran executed between 966 and 1054 people: more per capita than any other country. Kurds made up 50 percent of these executions. In 2016 Kurdish activists, journalists and academics continue to face arbitrary





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arrest and imprisonment, with Kurds comprising 411 of the 915 political prisoners in Iran. On 2 August, 20 Kurdish prisoners charged with terrorism were executed. On 7 August a Kurdish scientist, Shahram Amiri, was hung for spying for the US, and on 9 August another 6 Kurdish prisoners were executed. One was a political prisoner and five had been charged with drug trafficking. Another 34 Kurdish prisoners were executed in August. All had been held without due process, incommunicado and tortured.

Kurds suffer on-going discrimination in education and employment. Unemployment in the Kurdistan region is 35 percent, and the per capita income is half the average of Iran.

After Ayatollah Khomeini's holy war on Kurds between 1979 and 1989, Kurds ceased their armed struggle in 1996 in order to pursue democratic means to achieve their rights, including the right to be educated in Kurdish. In 2016, they decided these means had failed to make a difference and on 8 May clashes between the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) and Revolutionary Guards near the border with Turkey resulted in the deaths of five PJAK and eight Revolutionary Guards. On 16 June, KDP-Iran representatives conducting political activities were ambushed near Urmia, which resulted in the deaths of six Iranian Revolutionary Guards. On the same day 12 PJAK rebels and three Revolutionary Guards were killed in clashes near the border with the KRI.

After more clashes with the KDPI around Mahabad, on 26 June Iran began shelling Iranian Kurdish peshmerga in three locations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, wounding three children and two adult civilians and causing the evacuation of ten villages. On 28 June, two civilians were killed in an Iranian Kurdish village that had been surrounded by Iranian soldiers, who were confiscating goods and preventing villagers from leaving. Intermittent clashes and the bombing and shelling of Iranian Kurdish bases in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are ongoing.

### ***Ways forward***

The international community must speak up for:

- The abolition of the death penalty in Iran, particularly for political prisoners and those charged with crimes related to poverty; and
- Cultural, political and economic rights for ethnic minorities in Iran.

### **Conclusion**

Geopolitical considerations and vested interests lead to few voices speaking openly about root causes and possible solutions to what is happening in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. While quiet diplomacy can be effective, clear public statements that reflect reality and offer hope are equally important.

The KLA argues that the damage done by ISIS provides opportunities for the international community to manage a post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq and Syria on the scale of a Marshall Plan, basing reconstruction on reality rather than assumptions and linking reconstruction to a timeline of political, economic, judicial and social milestones, providing advisers and mediators, coordinating with respected local leaders, and jointly defining processes, outputs and both desired and worst case outcomes. With the scale of destruction and dysfunction in Syria and Iraq, capacities and physical assets must be built from the bottom up as well as the top down. Top down, constitutional issues must be



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resolved and enacted. Establishing an international criminal tribunal, a national judicial system and local people's courts, as well as reconciliation education, leadership training, trauma counselling and conferences will be important steps. All efforts require transparency, vertical and horizontal coordination and information exchange, and regular evaluations.

Given the magnitude of crises around the world, the international community has a responsibility to review how humanitarian and development aid is organised. Currently, emergency humanitarian aid in Syria is politicized and fragmented. In Iraq, short-term aid projects focus on IDPs who live in camps when most IDPs live in host communities. Projects rarely contribute to local capacity or improve inadequate infrastructure. On-the-ground, international NGOs do not co-ordinate, are inefficiently managed and have a high turnover of young staff with little knowledge of local complexities. Rarely do these international NGOs conduct honest evaluations of their efforts and if they do, these are not published, as organisations are concerned about donor funding. Heavy security around UN staff keeps them out-of-touch with ordinary people. The Coalition Provisional Authority had similar challenges post-2003.

Ultimately, the contradictions in international law must be addressed, for instance, in supporting the right to self-determination but claiming sovereignty is sacrosanct, even when a government commits war crimes or is utterly dysfunctional. The provision of a legal context for shaping futures in non-military ways, and the development of mechanisms, incentives and consequences to enforce treaties like the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), would decrease the likelihood of worst-case scenarios.

By action or inaction, the international community must avoid legitimising authoritarian rule, human rights abuses and other dysfunctions. The people of the Kurdistan regions have long suffered from the contradictions of international law and the inaction of the international community. Kurds have every right to self-determination, whether as part of functioning democracies or in an independent state because they are a large minority who aspire to democracy in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, and because they have proved reliable allies whenever called upon. They can make a valuable contribution to the oil-rich and geopolitically important region they inhabit. Even Turkey may come to realise it can benefit from stable Kurdish regions in and outside Turkey.

In the current Middle Eastern quagmire, Australia has been a follower, not a leader. It was not always the case. South Australia was the first state in the world to allow female parliamentarians. Australian Prime Minister Dr. Herb Evatt was pivotal in the formation of the United Nations. Australia has played an active role in nuclear safety and non-proliferation. In the Middle East, Australia has been involved militarily and diplomatically since World War I. It has close ties with the US, UK, Turkey and Iraq. Australia is not seen as an imperialist power with vested interests and has the expertise to take part in the political, social and material reconciliation and reconstruction process.



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