

A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 187 | 1 FEBRUARY 2018

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Tensions are mounting between NATO allies, Turkey and the US, over Turkey's offensive in the Kurdish-majority region of Afrin, Syria.

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North and South Korea have decided to put past tensions aside and promote a "Peace Olympics", but many question the North's intentions.

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An approximate 40,000 African migrants in Israel, whose asylum applications have been rejected, now face expulsion or jail in this complex nation.

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Project Hero is helping to ensure the future of the Church in Syria through aid distribution.



THE NUMBERS: TURKISH INCURSION



19.01.2018

The date Turkish troops began the Afrin offensive—
'Operation Olive Branch'



800,000

The estimated civilian population in the Afrin district



8,000 to 10,000

The estimated number of fighters affiliated with the People's Protection Units (YPG)



30km

The "secure zone" Turkey is attempting to establish along its border with Syria

TURKEY'S SYRIAN INCURSION HEIGHTENS TENSIONS



By Andrew Richards

Simmering tensions between Turkey and the United States spilled into the open as President Trump warned President Recep Tayyip Erdogan against the growing risk of conflict between the two nations. The Turkish president, for his part, demanded that the United States end its support for Kurdish militias. The two men, both populists and unapologetic nationalists, spoke by telephone as Turkish forces attacked Kurdish militias in Syria. American officials said they were increasingly uneasy that the campaign against the Islamic State would be seriously undermined by the newest battlefield in a country that has been ravaged by war for nearly seven years. (*NY Times*)

Recent Afrin offensive

On 21 January, Turkey entered Syria after several rockets were fired into the Turkish border town of Kilis (40km from Afrin) – Turkey blamed Kurdish forces near Afrin for the attack. By 24 January, more than 260 people had been killed in Afrin, including Turkish soldiers. The question is, with Turkey now fighting a force directly backed by the US, does this mean that Turkey is fighting the US in Syria? And what does it mean for NATO?

NATO vs NATO

Both the US and Turkey are NATO members (and in the greater picture, allies), and both recognise the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) as a terrorist organisation. But when it comes to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, Turkey sees them as an extension of the PKK, and as such as a terrorist entity, while the US does not. In theory, if the PKK

attacks Turkey in any way that undermines its sovereignty, the US has an obligation to respond because of NATO commitments (an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all).

In the case of the Kurdish Peshmerga fighting against the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria, the backing by the US is tolerated because, in the bigger picture, the NATO allies were fighting a common enemy (IS). The Peshmerga, who are among the most disciplined and fierce fighters in the Middle East, was probably the single most successful force against IS. But now that IS is no longer a problem, the continued backing of the Peshmerga by the US angers Turkey (the US is backing a predominantly Peshmerga force near the border of Turkey in what it calls a 'border security force' of an estimated 30,000 trained troops). Turkey claims that these forces are blatantly too close to the border and undermines its border security with Syria.

The greater Kurdish region stretches over parts of Iraq, Syria and Turkey, with those parts in Iraq and Syria currently under the control of Peshmerga after they were liberated from IS over the past year. Turkey, justifiably or not, fears that the Peshmerga will move into southern Turkey.

From the US viewpoint, the security force is intended to form a buffer between Syrian government forces and those fighting the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The security force will be based in and around Afrin, where Turkey is focusing its bombardment, and also along the Syrian border with Iraq and the Euphrates River Valley.

Reason for US backing

Covertly, the US has been training and equipping opposition forces in Syria, with more direct involvement with US special forces to defeat IS. However, now that coalition aligned at defeating IS has been victorious, the US has chosen to openly support Mr Assad's opposition. A recent opinion article in *Haaretz* stated the following: "Washington made the right decision. The US has

NEWS HEADLINES



Seventy percent of **South Sudan's** children are out of school and the young country risks losing a generation that would make it harder to rebuild after conflict ends, a UN official said. South Sudan, which split off from its northern neighbour Sudan in 2011, has been gripped by a four-year civil war sparked by political rivalry.



India recently tested its longest-range intercontinental missile, part of efforts to build a nuclear deterrent against neighbouring Pakistan and China. The 5,000-km range Agni missile was tested from an island in India's eastern coast, Bay of Bengal. The defence ministry said the launch was "a major boost to the defence capabilities" of India. It is an advanced version of the indigenously built Agni, or 'Fire', series, part of a programme that started in the 1980s. It has been previously tested.



Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga took an oath of office as "president of the people" in front of thousands of supporters gathered in Nairobi's Uhuru Park, for the staged "inauguration". Following the ceremony, the government issued a notice, declaring the opposition's National Resistance Movement illegal. The event comes two months after President Uhuru Kenyatta was sworn in for a second term following an election re-run in October.

seen first-hand in Iraq what can happen when a military force is disbanded. Armed, battle-hardened, and without money, there is a very real risk that fighters might splinter off and join new groups or militias. Better channel their energy to good use. Meanwhile, Washington is also right that the demise of IS should not be taken for granted; a force is needed to prevent their re-emergence, one that is local and indigenous while making sure there is no room for Iran to capitalise on a US withdrawal. Washington made it abundantly clear to Ankara that Afrin would be excluded from its new border force. In other words, the Turkish pretext for launching the incursion, the prevention of a PYG force in the Afrin corridor, is bogus. Behind Turkey's anti-US stance lies an imperial ambition. Turkey wishes to assert itself as a regional hegemon by muscling out the US."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

INcontext has travelled to Lebanon (currently hosting over a million refugees) on a number of occasions in the past two years. During every visit, INcontext has visited churches that exist predominantly as a result of former Muslims coming to Christ. A very large majority of these Christians are Kurdish. There is no doubt that

God is at work among the Kurdish community, and the future relationship between the US and Kurds across the Middle East will impact spiritual undercurrents as well as political dynamics. Kurdish converts look up to the US because of their close involvement in the fight against IS, but also because the US is considered a Christian nation. This current situation, therefore, is tremendously sensitive for Kurdish believers in Lebanon. How the US responds to the threat of expanding violence in these predominantly Kurdish regions of northern Syria will impact these young believers, and the work among Kurdish refugees in Lebanon. The US idea of maintaining a "peace-keeping" force of predominantly Kurdish Peshmerga in the region to ensure that IS does not re-establish itself is being seriously challenged by Turkey's actions in northern Syria. It remains to be seen whether the US can stand its ground between two rival allies, and how this will impact the work among Kurdish refugees in neighbouring nations.

PRAY > For wisdom for Turkish and US leaders > For those impacted by this new 'front' in the Syrian conflict > For believers caught up in the expanding conflict, to be protected and to be beacons of hope in a dark situation

NORTH KOREA: OLYMPIC 'THAW' OR 'TROJAN HORSE'?



By **Donnelly McClelland**

Allowing North Korea to keep nuclear weapons would send a terrible message to other countries seeking to gain leverage in global politics, former US national security adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned [on 25 January]. "If North Korea still possesses a military nuclear capability in some finite time, the impact on the proliferation of nuclear weapons might be fundamental," Kissinger told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill. Kissinger – who served in the administrations of former presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford – called North Korea's nuclear ambitions "the most immediate challenge to international peace and security." (FOX News)

Olympic 'thaw' or 'Trojan horse'?

In the midst of global discussions about North Korea's nuclear situation, a surprise series of meetings between North and South Korea (the first high-levels talks in more than two years) took place early in 2018, with the two nations deciding to put past tensions aside and promote a "Peace Olympics". North Korea agreed to send

a delegation (including a 140-member art troupe, a 230-member cheerleading squad, 22 athletes, reporters and officials) to the Winter Olympics, hosted by South Korea from 9-25 February. They will be marching with the South Korean team under the unification flag at the opening ceremony.

This extension of an olive branch has had a mixed response from South Koreans. President Moon Jae-in, who campaigned on reducing tensions with North Korea, took a knock with this latest move, his ratings dropping to the lowest level since he took office. South Korean officials hope for an advance in denuclearisation talks, but many remain sceptical of the North's intentions. Junhee Lee, an analyst with the Korea Institute for Military Affairs cautioned (as reported by *CBC*): "We cannot trust them fully because of their past actions. We cannot lower our guard." In contrast, John Delury, a professor at the Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies, believes that the actions of the North clearly indicate a change in atmosphere and it is now up to the diplomats to "enlarge this small window of opportunity".

Among young South Koreans (traditionally part of President Moon's political base), there is a growing trend of hardened attitudes towards their northern neighbour; some believe that Kim Jong Un may be exploiting the opportunity presented by the Olympics to weaken US-led international pressure and sanctions and President Moon is falling into Mr Kim's trap. Mr Moon, however, hopes that the sporting event can create a platform for international diplomacy, including summit talks on key issues that include North Korea.

NEWS HEADLINES



Leading businessmen, philanthropists and politicians have announced a new **global** fund for ending modern slavery. The public-private partnership plans to develop a new \$1.5bn fund "to coordinate a coherent, global strategy to address modern slavery". The Thomson Reuters Foundation's CEO Monique Villa, US Senator Bob Corker and Gary Haugen from the International Justice Mission said the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery would be the largest initiative of its kind.



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, a long-time critic of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested during nationwide rallies protesting what he calls rigged presidential elections set to take place on 18 March. He was later released pending a court hearing.



A **Swiss** far-right campaign to curb immigration from the European Union, potentially unravelling bilateral ties with the bloc, moved ahead when the government gave proponents a green light to start canvassing public support. Should the initiative win the required 100,000 signatures by July 2019, it would go to a vote under the Swiss system of direct democracy. That could pave the way to scrapping the free movement of EU citizens now guaranteed under bilateral accords.

Impact of sanctions

Kim Jong Un's move towards opening up discussions between the two nations is thought to have been influenced by increased international pressure in the form of political and economic sanctions. But a recent report by *Reuters* suggests that despite biting sanctions, North Korea has continued to export coal via Russia, possibly to neighbouring South Korea and Japan. And despite years of sanctions, North Korea has not changed their ways and or been deterred from their path of nuclearisation. Those who probably suffer the most under sanctions are the ordinary citizens of North Korea, more than the government or high-level officials who continually seek out other avenues.

In response to the *Reuters* report, a US State Department spokesman said: "It's clear that Russia needs to do more. All UN member states, including Russia, are required to implement sanctions resolutions in good faith and we expect them all to do so." US officials estimate that North Korea makes at least \$100m through the supply of arms, military training, construction contracts and smuggling. The US is currently pressuring African countries with long-standing relationships with North Korea to cut military and diplomatic ties with the reclusive nation; some have responded positively, while others are resisting or quietly ignoring US pressure. Even some supposed US allies, including South Africa (where North Korea has an embassy and which the US considers a hub of North Korean arms trade), have been slow to respond to Washington's demands.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Numerous aid agencies are working in North Korea, and many of them are Christian. In most instances, the North Korean government is

aware when an organisation is Christian, and they warn the receiving communities to be cautious in their dealings with these Christians. In the past, this has sometimes had the opposite effect to what the officials hoped: rather than causing North Koreans to be anti-Christian, they were often confronted with Christians being the only people staying to help when sanctions really began to 'bite'.

However, US aid workers have been impacted by the ban on US citizens traveling to North Korea, which came into effect in September 2017 (and will be reassessed annually). An American Christian working into the country for the past 11 years expressed his dismay at the potentially negative impact that the travel ban might have on their work there: "We've invested so much time, resources and energy into the North Korean people and to have the door shut has been pretty tough to deal with. By the middle of last summer, we knew the travel ban was coming and prepared as well as we could by working with our non-American partners who can still travel inside. They are continuing the work, but there has been a lot of damage in the perception of local people regarding America. North Koreans don't blame their leaders, or the NGO community, but do blame our government."

PRAY > For Godly insight for all the leaders involved in the quest for peace on the Korean Peninsula > For the Winter Olympics to proceed peacefully > For believers to have many opportunities to display Christ's love to the North Koreans who will be in the South for the duration of the Winter Olympics > For the Winter Olympics to be an opportunity for the Korean Church to reach and touch many lives in meaningful ways

AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN ISRAEL FACE TOUGH CHOICE



By Andrew Richards

A large protest near Tel Aviv took place against a choice to take a \$3500 (£2600) payment and a plane ticket, and leave the country by March – or face jail. It comes amid reports that the Israeli Immigration Authority has begun handing out notices to migrants whose asylum requests have been rejected. Israel's government says there are about 40,000 people – mainly from Eritrea and Sudan – who've entered the country illegally. (*BBC News*)

Not welcome

Israel is notorious for not granting refugee status to applicants, with reports between 2009 and 2013 showing that out of 17,194 applications for asylum, only 26 were granted, ranging from North Korea (three) to Zimbabwe (one). Apart from the Philippines, four of the top five countries of origin for those fleeing to Israel are African. These include Eritrea, Ethiopia, Niger and Sudan. Since becoming a signatory to the UNHCR Refugee Convention (1951) in 1954, Israel has only granted asylum to 200 people.

Economic migrants

Before labelling Israel as "unloving", one needs to consider the reasons for the deportation of African asylum seekers. Firstly, for most of the cases, Israel views asylum seekers as economic migrants and not as refugees fleeing for their lives. Elsewhere in Europe, this has also been the case prior to the Syrian civil war and the bloodshed of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. Secondly, of the estimated 40,000 Africans now being forced to

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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www.incontextinternational.org

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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leave the country or face imprisonment, the incentive of \$3500 and a free plane ticket to leave the country has already been taken by 20,000 of the original 60,000 African migrants who entered Israel before the construction of Israel's wall on its southern border with the Sinai in 2012. Since then, 40,000 illegal African migrants have been allowed to stay in the country, in the hope that they would return to their countries of origin sooner rather than later.

Five years on, that "later" has come, with Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu saying that action now needs to be taken. Those who don't want to go back to their countries due to safety concerns would be sent to a third country, possibly Rwanda or Uganda. Both countries, however, have denied any agreement with Israel.

Israeli concerns

Mr Netanyahu, according to a transcript of his speech to the Israeli parliament, called African refugees in Israel "infiltrators" and a threat to Israel's security. From the perspective of Israel, surrounded by anti-Israeli Muslim nations, the presence of otherwise illegal Muslims in the country could be considered a security risk. Most of the 40,000 African refugees facing imprisonment are from Sudan (a majority Muslim country) and Eritrea (51.6% Muslim).

However, not all Israelis are in agreement with their president and government in this regard. Yoel Piterbarg, a pilot, is one of thousands of Jewish activists standing up for the African refugees, stating that a large majority of Jews were refugees at one stage, and that Israelis should remember the kindness many of them were shown. He is quoted (in *HelloChristian*) as saying: "The State of Israel is populated mainly by Jews who were in their distant and recent past refugees in countries [around] the world. Most of them went through the Holocaust, many were forcibly expelled from their countries, and many emigrated voluntarily to better their situation to

better countries that agreed to accept and care for them. It is precisely us, the Jews, who must be attentive, empathic, moral and public opinion leaders in the world to deal with the immigration of refugees who suffered and suffer in their countries of origin. The refugees should remain and be treated as human beings – just as the Jews used to be refugees and wanted to be treated like human beings and not thrown out."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Israel as a nation finds itself in a fairly unique position: 'birthed' under tremendous opposition in 1948, its very survival as a state has come under threat from hostile neighbours on many occasions. Leaders are therefore caught between the proverbial "rock and a hard place". On the one hand, Jews understand the command in Leviticus 19:33-34 – to not mistreat a foreigner residing among them and to treat them as native-born, to love them as if they were one of their own. But on the other hand, the frequent threats that Israel will be "wiped off the map" cannot be taken lightly. It should not be surprising then that their immigration policies are quite stringent, given the very delicate balance of demographics within the country. Israel faces challenges on every side and, as a nation built on democratic principles, will endeavour to make decisions that are deemed best for them as a nation. These challenges are brought before parliament where they are discussed and debated, sometimes at great lengths, before decisions are made. From a Christian perspective, one could view Israel's stance towards these "illegal immigrants" as unkind, but one also needs to realise that it is a complex situation, with very few easy answers.

PRAY > For Israeli leaders and decision makers to display wisdom and compassion in this delicate and emotionally-charged situation > For immigrants facing expulsion or jail to have the opportunity for a safe alternative > For believers to be bearers of hope and compassion

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION

PROJECT HERO

Helping to ensure the future of the Church in Syria

In partnership with Lebanese Christian leaders, INcontext aims to distribute food, clothing, medicine and basic necessities to the Church in Syria.

Project Hero focuses on those who choose to remain in Syria, who deal with the daily bombings from which others have fled, and who encounter death as part of daily life. Those who have stayed have done so for two reasons: either they have been unable to get out (for reasons such as old age or a lack of finances), or they have refused to leave Syria because it is home and they still believe they have a role to play in the reconstruction of the nation.

"You stand beside us with your big support, we thank you for all your giving for the church and its people." - Pastor in Damascus

To support this project, please make use of the INcontext bank details and use HERO together with your email address (as much as possible of it) as reference.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact our project department (gustav@incontextministries.org) or [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the website

