

A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 154 | 11 AUGUST 2016

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In the wake of the attempted coup, President Erdogan travelled to Russia to repair strained relations with Turkey's near-neighbour.

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In response to a request from Libya's new 'unity government', the US has started bombing IS targets in the fragile country.

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For the first time since the ANC came to power, local government elections are evidence of a changing tide in the 'Rainbow Nation'.

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PROJECT CEDAR TREE supports work among the millions of refugees in Lebanon.



THE NUMBERS: TURKEY



1 million +

The number of Turks who attended a pro-democracy rally in Istanbul on 7 August, in response to the failed coup



11,000 +

The number of people arrested after the coup attempt (60,000+ have also been sacked or suspended, and 19,000 detained for potential links to Gulen)



\$210 billion

The amount Turkey needs to borrow annually, mostly from Western sources



87%

The drop in Russian visitors to Turkey after the aircraft downing in November 2015

CHANGING TURKISH FOREIGN RELATIONS



Against a backdrop of rising tensions between Turkey and the West, Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey pledged on Tuesday [9 August] to repair relations after nine months of antagonism. Although their meeting in St. Petersburg on Tuesday produced little beyond vows of friendship and cooperation, the symbolism of the two former antagonists coming together for a friendly talk was enough to raise alarms in Western capitals. (*New York Times*)

Rebuilding Russian relations

President Erdogan's meeting with the Russian leader comes at a critical time for Turkey, less than a month since the attempted coup by a faction of Turkey's military on 15 July. In some ways, the meeting may have been intended as 'competitive diplomacy' and a snub against the West due to tensions that arose in the wake of the attempted coup (Western powers criticised Mr Erdogan for his harsh crackdown and mass arrests, while Mr Erdogan was angered by the US' refusal to extradite the self-exiled cleric, Fethullah Gulen, who the Turkish president blames for masterminding the coup attempt).

However, over the past few months, Russia and Turkey have been moving closer to restoring the ties that were virtually destroyed when Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft over the Syrian border in November 2015, after it supposedly ventured into Turkish airspace. The sanctions that were slapped on Turkey by Russia (a top economic partner for Turkey) after the aircraft's downing severely impacted the Turkish economy, especially in the areas of tourism, exports and construction. In addition, two major energy projects were suspended: the TurkStream gas pipeline across the Black Sea and the building of the Akkuyu nuclear plant in Turkey by Russia. The sanctions were

lifted by Russia in June this year after Mr Erdogan expressed personal regret for the aircraft shooting, and the meeting this week was believed to include an agreement to restart the energy deals.

Dimitar Bechev, visiting scholar at Harvard University and senior fellow at Al Sharq Forum, wrote in an article for *Al Jazeera* that the historical record over the past few decades shows a Turkish tendency to "tilt" towards Moscow whenever relations with its Western allies become strained. However, Turkish-Russian relations are far from simple, and include a history of conflict that dates back centuries along the old 'fault lines' of the Ottoman and Russian empires. The two powers have long competed for geopolitical influence in the region, and according to Luke Coffey (specialist in transatlantic and Eurasian security for a Washington think-tank), they have gone to war at least 12 times since the 16th century. Their opposition is also not just ancient history: the Soviet Union's aggressive behaviour after WWII prompted Turkey to ally themselves with NATO and the West, and Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea (sometimes a focal point of Turkish-Russian conflict) greatly angered Turkey.

The Syrian complication

A central issue that is likely to hamper a full restoration of the tenuous Turkish-Russian friendship is their opposing involvement in the Syrian conflict. Russia's support for embattled Syrian president Bashar al-Assad has gone a long way towards keeping him in power, and Turkey wants him removed. Turkey supports 'moderate rebels' in Syria, who are fighting to oust Russia's ally. Russia is also arming the Syrian Kurds, who Turkey classifies as an enemy.

Anas al-Abda, head of the Syrian National Coalition (opposing President Assad) said that he welcomed the meeting between Mr Erdogan and Mr Putin, because he hoped that the Turkish president (a key ally of the opposition) would be able to negotiate some shifts in the Syrian situation with Russia.

Necessary Western relations

Meanwhile, Turkey cannot afford to alienate itself completely from its Western allies. Atilla Yesilada,



The last doctors in the rebel-held east of the **Syrian** city of Aleppo have urged US President Barack Obama to come to the aid of the 250,000 civilians there. A letter signed by 29 physicians warns that if attacks on medical facilities continue at their present rate, there could be none left within a month. It calls on Mr Obama to impose a no-fly zone over Aleppo to stop air strikes. Russia has meanwhile said its forces will hold fire for three hours each day to let aid into Aleppo.



Popular support for Chancellor Angela Merkel has plunged according to a poll conducted after attacks in **Germany**, with almost two-thirds of Germans unhappy with her refugee policy. The survey showed public support for Merkel down 12 points from her July rating to 47 percent. This marked her second-lowest score since she was re-elected in 2013. In April last year, before the migrant crisis erupted she enjoyed backing of 75 percent.



Islamic State fighters may have captured up to 3,000 fleeing **Iraqi** villagers and executed 12 of them, the UN refugee agency said. The report followed a statement from the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, which said about 1,900 civilians had been captured by IS fighters, who were using people as shields against attacks by Iraqi Security Forces.

Istanbul-based partner of global think-tank GlobalSource Partners, wrote in an article for *Al Jazeera* that in order to stay solvent, Turkey needs foreign capital equal to roughly 28% of its GDP (one of the highest ratios of developing nations), and almost all of this comes from Western banks or funds. Yesilada describes Turkey's economic relationship with the West as "an umbilical cord to Western capital and good markets". Additionally, Turkey's NATO membership allows the country to engage with Russia on regional issues from a position of strength.

From a Western perspective, Turkey is critical to NATO's operations. Turkey has the second largest military in NATO after the US, and they have been involved in multiple military operations under the NATO flag. According to Coffey, there are also rumours that Turkey houses US tactical nuclear weapons that are critical to NATO's deterrence capabilities. Omar Lamrani, writing for *Stratfor* (global intelligence analysts), says that "NATO's recent frictions with Russia have reinforced Turkey's importance to the bloc [and] with Russia building up its presence in the Black Sea after reclaiming Crimea, Turkey's role in NATO has not been so crucial since the end of the Cold War".

Meanwhile, the EU is relying heavily on Turkey's cooperation in the refugee crisis, especially in terms of 'staunching' the flow of people from the Middle East, so the EU cannot afford to alienate Turkey at the present time, regardless of how they feel about Mr Erdogan's heavy-handed response to the attempted coup.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Lamrani summed up his opinion of Turkey's significance: "Time and again, history has shown that Turkey's geographically advantageous position and its martial tradition ensure its continued consequence in European and Middle Eastern geopolitical developments, regardless of the challenges it faces." At this time when Turkey struggles with internal shifts and external relationships, and when its position is impacting the lives of millions affected by the Syrian war and the refugee crisis, pray that God works powerfully in this nation so that the role it plays in the region is for good.

PRAY > For God's will to overcome the complex political 'chess game' in Turkey > For the protection of the 'mission doorway' through Turkey to the Muslim world

THE US IN THE FRAGILE STATE OF LIBYA



The United States carried out air strikes on positions of so-called Islamic State (IS) in Libya, following a request by the UN-backed government there. The strikes targeted positions in the port city of Sirte, an IS stronghold. The air strikes are the first such US military intervention co-ordinated with the Libyan unity government. There have been two previous US attacks on IS targets in Libya – last February and in November. The Pentagon said the strikes, authorised by President Barack Obama, were in support of government forces currently fighting IS militants. "These actions and those we have taken previously will help deny ISIL a safe haven in Libya from which it could attack the United States and our allies," the Pentagon statement continued, using another term for IS. *(BBC News)*

The situation in Sirte

Since early 2015, Sirte – the birthplace and stronghold of former dictator Col Muammar Gaddafi – has been under the control of IS forces, who made the strategic city their base of operations. Since an offensive was launched to take back the city, IS forces there have been losing ground, but they are still a great threat due to their use of landmines, booby traps, roadside bombs and snipers, so the government forces are hoping that US air support will bring about a breakthrough.

As IS built up its presence in Libya over the past year, the North African country has become an increasing concern for Western powers. Since the

fall of Col Gaddafi in 2011, the internal chaos and 'power vacuum' left Libya vulnerable to outside influence, and IS seized the opportunity to expand there (especially as they lost ground in Iraq and Syria). An additional attraction was the free availability of vast stockpiles of weapons looted from Col Gaddafi's arsenal – according to *BBC News*, post-Gaddafi Libya became "an arms bazaar" and "an ideal playground for jihadists". Libya's ports, established trans-Saharan smuggling routes, petrochemical resources and regional recruiting opportunities also made it a strategic nation for the extremists.

A number of senior IS commanders from Iraq and Syria have travelled to Libya in recent months, in order to escape targeting by the US-led coalition and to build up the North African base. Ismail Shukri, head of intelligence in the city of Misrata, told *Newsnight* that most IS forces in Libya are foreign – in addition to those from Iraq and Syria, there are large numbers of Tunisians, along with Egyptians, Sudanese and some Algerians.

In areas where IS has been in control, especially Sirte, strict Sharia (Islamic) law has been implemented and widespread cruelty carried out, including crucifixions and beheadings. In February 2015, the Libyan branch of IS broadcasted a video made of their beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians, and in April of the same year, they killed another 30 migrant workers, most of whom were Ethiopian Christians.

Numerous challenges for Western intervention

With the threat that IS continues to pose to the West, the US and other Western powers argue that they have no option but to intervene in Libya. However, the situation is far from straightforward. According to *BBC News*, "in the aftermath of campaigns of this kind [the airstrikes], the US, and other countries involved in Libya, will probably be left with more questions than answers over the stability of the country and the local forces they backed".

NEWS HEADLINES



The Islamic State has named a new leader of Boko Haram, the **Nigerian** militant group which last year swore allegiance to it. Abu Musab al-Barnawi was named IS' governor for West Africa in its weekly magazine. Al-Barnawi said Boko Haram was "still a force to be reckoned with" and that it had been receiving new recruits. The publication did not mention Abubakar Shekau, who was the group's leader and represented the Nigerian jihadists in videos during an insurgency that has killed about 15,000 people and displaced more than two million.



Thousands of civilians in **Afghanistan's** Helmand province fled their homes in the past weeks, as fierce fighting raged between Afghan forces and Taliban fighters, sparking a humanitarian crisis. Afghan forces backed by US air strikes continued their operation to end the Taliban siege of the area, forcing people to flock to the provincial capital for safety.



A Pakistani Taliban faction and the Islamic State have both claimed responsibility for a suicide attack at a hospital in **Pakistan's** Quetta that killed at least 70 people. The attack targeted a group of mourning lawyers, who had gathered to accompany the body of a murdered colleague.

At the top of the list of current challenges is the fact that Libya has three competing governments. The first one is based in the capital, Tripoli, made up of leaders who refused to give up power after the 2014 elections; the second is the 'elected' (and internationally-recognised) leadership who relocated to the city of Tobruk. Then there is the new 'unity government', established by the UN in 2015 and led by Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj (who requested the recent US air strikes). Neither the Tripoli nor the Tobruk governments are fully acknowledging the unity government's authority, and it has not yet gained any real power in the country.

Then there are the multiple militias operating in the country – according to *BBC News*, up to 1,700 armed groups emerged during the uprising against Col Gaddafi. The only factor in common among the militias was their hatred for the dictator, but there was no single group leading the rebellion, and the militias were (and still are) divided along local, regional, ethnic and ideological lines. Among the militias are moderate Islamists, extremists, secessionists, monarchists and liberals, and after four decades under dictatorship rule, democracy is a foreign concept among the opposing groups. Analysts believe that these myriad militias are the ones with the real power in the country, more so than the politicians that they claim to back.

In April this year, US president Barack Obama stated that his "worst mistake" as president was not preparing Libya for the aftermath of Col Gaddafi's overthrow. Meanwhile, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said that the US does not have an "end point" for the bombing campaign, but that they hope it "does not require a lengthy amount of time".

It is widely known that the US, UK and France have been carrying out secretive 'special force' operations in Libya in the past months, but little is known about what exactly these have entailed, and *Voice of America* reports an added complication: that the US is backing different forces than its French and Italian allies. In June this year, Marine Lieutenant General

Thomas Waldhauser (incoming commander of the US forces in Africa) told the Senate Armed Forces Committee – in response to a query about whether the US was acting in an "ad hoc fashion" in Libya – that he was not aware of any "grand strategy".

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Did Western support for Col Gaddafi's overthrow directly cause the "security nightmare" that Libya is now posing? Are the nations that supported the 2011 rebellion obliged to get involved in a 'clean up', or are the airstrikes and other external military involvement making the situation worse? Is Libya going to become another Iraq or Afghanistan? Beyond the reported politics, how much of a priority to the US are Libya's oil supplies?

These are all questions that cannot be answered by Christians attempting to formulate a Biblical response to what is happening there. What is clear – and what needs to be the Church's focus – is that the country is in immense turmoil, and beyond political manoeuvrings, ordinary people are suffering greatly. An estimated 400,000 Libyans are internally displaced, banks are out of cash, and hospitals are running out of medication. Before all the unrest, the minority Libyan Church enjoyed a relative amount of stability, but now believers face direct targeting by IS and other extremists.

Christians are not called to figure out whether the US is 'right' or 'wrong' for their involvement in what is clearly a very complicated situation, but are called to pray fervently for "all in authority" who face critical decisions, so that that Libyans may eventually be able to "live peaceful and quiet lives" (1 Timothy 2:2) in a country that only God can put back together.

PRAY > For God to direct foreign intervention in Libya > For the Islamic State to lose its grip on the country > For minority Libyan Christians to share their faith and hope wherever they are able

WINDS OF CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA



Young democracy

South Africa is a parliamentary representative democratic republic, with the president serving both as head of state and head of government. South Africans also elect provincial legislatures that govern each of the country's nine provinces, as well as local leaders who serve at a municipal level – it was elections for these two 'local government' structures that took place on 3 August.

When apartheid (white-minority rule) ended early in the 1990s, South Africa's new young democracy was celebrated and lauded around the world as an example of a successful transition from oppression to freedom. Since the first 'free' elections in 1994, the ANC has dominated South African politics, as the ruling party in the national legislature as well as in eight of the nine provinces. In the 2011 local government elections, the ANC received 62.9% of the vote, while in the 2014 general elections, 62.15% of the national vote went to the ANC.

Jacob Zuma, the controversial president whose term

South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) party has suffered its worst election result since it came to power in 1994, threatening its rule in several of the country's biggest cities. Its share of the vote in the recent local elections sank to 54 per cent in a humiliation for President Jacob Zuma, who has survived a number of scandals and has been blamed by many for overseeing a corrupt administration who they believe has betrayed the party's core principles. Jackson Mthembu, the ANC's chief whip, said the results were a "cause for concern", adding that the party had to be "very critical of ourselves". (*Financial Times*)

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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has been characterised by scandals and growing opposition, took over from Thabo Mbeki in May 2009, and recently survived a 'no confidence' vote by the National Assembly in March 2016.

Winds of change

Last week's local elections showed a definite shift in South African society and politics, with ANC support dropping below 60% for the first time since coming to power. Analysts suggest that this may mark the start of a new era, distinct from the 'post-apartheid' period that followed the end of white-minority rule. The election became a struggle for control of the eight largest city councils, known locally as "metros" – it is here that 40% of the population lives, and where business, trade and government is centred.

This time around, the ANC only managed to secure a majority (more than 50%) in three of the metros. Meanwhile, the Democratic Alliance (DA), the main opposition, strengthened its hold in the Western Cape's city of Cape Town, securing two-thirds of the vote – the largest majority achieved by any party in any of the eight metros. The party also won the vote in the Nelson Mandela Bay, a long-time stronghold of the ANC, which exacted a symbolic blow to the ruling party. With no single party winning a 50% majority in four metros, municipal coalitions will be making leadership decisions for the next five years, a profound development that could fundamentally reshape local politics.

Disillusionment and hope

Anger over corruption, unemployment and inadequate basic services has caused many ANC supporters to turn to the opposition or to abstain from voting. In 2013, a leading ANC political figure caused a storm with her statement that "people can threaten us and say they won't vote but the ANC doesn't need their dirty votes" – this conviction has been proved wrong by the most recent polls. An estimated 3 million 'traditional ANC voters' held back their votes in protest of the ANC's performance, which made a substantial difference in the results. One disillusioned voter said that lives have not improved since 1994 "when there was so much love

for the ANC". Another voter, who chose to support the DA for the first time, said that the DA had been given "a chance to show what they can do", and hopes that the opposition party will not let people down.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Many South Africans are thanking God for the atmosphere that prevailed over these elections, and that violence and intimidation did not spoil proceedings.

However, 'spiritual blackmail' was evident in some of the pre-election campaigning. While South Africa is a majority-Christian nation, syncretism still draws some parts of traditional religion into the mix, including ancestral worship and consultation, and at a political rally in Soweto (one of South Africa's largest 'townships') in July, President Zuma told ANC supporters that those who turn their backs on the party will be punished by their ancestors and will have bad luck for the rest of their lives.

Meanwhile, the South African Church still has a voice in the country, which needs to be made even more audible. Landa Cope of YWAM believes that Christians in the political realm are "called into politics and civil governance for the glory of God and the good of the people [and] are there not to perfect the world or nation but to offer God's perspective ... a better way ... and allow society a choice". Another South African Christian leader reminded believers that bad-mouthing political leaders does not reflect a Godly attitude: "We do not have the biblical right to slander [the] president – even if much wrong has been done. Rather we have the biblical responsibility to pray for him, and the Church collectively has the responsibility to be a prophetic voice in the sense of proclaiming God's truth to government. Let's love our country through prayer."

PRAY > For righteous leaders > For leadership coalitions to serve the people and not their personal agendas > For South African Christians to be intentional agents of reconciliation

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



PROJECT CEDAR TREE *Supporting work among refugees in Lebanon*

In Lebanon there are more than 1.5 million refugees from Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan living in tent camps, slums and informal dwellings. More than 90% are Muslims and are seeking hope and peace. More than 50% are children with little or no hope of being educated, often working in fields to help support their families. One out of every four people in Lebanon is a refugee, most of whom lack the basic necessities of life.

Project Cedar Tree supports these refugees in various ways:

- Providing essentials like rent and food, and skills training to improve economic opportunities
- Supporting a centre that provides a safe space for children to gather, to receive an education, and to receive emotional support and counselling
- Providing a vehicle to transport aid and helpers to the refugees
- Sponsoring much-needed aid to be taken into Syria

To make a financial contribution, please use of the **INcontext** bank account details and use CEDAR and your email address (or part of it) as your reference.

For more information regarding this project, please contact Gustav: gustav@incontextministries.org or 021 976 1465