

# A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 181 | 28 SEPTEMBER 2017

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Angela Merkel secured a fourth term, despite her conservative bloc's worst performance since 1949 and the rise of the far-right nationalist AfD.

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The referendum on independence for Iraqi Kurds proceeded peacefully across the region despite stiff internal and international opposition.

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## THE NUMBERS:

### GERMAN ELECTIONS



26.06.1945

The date of the founding of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)



6

The number of parties competing in the German elections



709

The number of seats in Germany's Bundestag (parliamentary body)



16 years

The record length of time served as German Chancellor, held by Helmut Kohl (1982-1998)

## MERKEL SECURES FOURTH TERM IN TOUGH ELECTIONS



By *Cherolyn Amery*

Germany's Angela Merkel began the tough task of trying to build a government on Monday [25 September] after securing a fourth term as chancellor. Damaged by her decision two years ago to allow more than one million migrants into Germany, Merkel's conservative bloc secured 33 percent of the vote, losing 8.5 points – its lowest level since 1949. Voters flocked to the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD), the first far-right party to enter the German parliament in more than half a century. However, the AfD hardly had time to savour its third-place showing before it fell into internal bickering. Many Germans see the rise of the AfD as a similar rejection of the status quo as votes for Brexit and Donald Trump last year. But Germany's political center held up better than in Britain and the United States as more voters have benefited from globalisation and most shun the country's extremist past. (*Reuters*)

### Changes and challenges

With the geopolitical landscape undergoing major shifts around the world, all eyes were on Germany to see what would happen in the 24 September election, and many breathed a sigh of relief when Angela Merkel secured her fourth term in office. There were, however, still some shocks: in particular, the losses of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party compared to the previous election, and the rise of the AfD, which went from zero seats to more than 90 in the chamber of 709 lawmakers.

In some ways, these developments were expected, especially due to Ms Merkel's 'open door' policy

regarding refugees. While Ms Merkel has been praised widely around the globe and in her own country for her leadership, she has also received widespread criticism and her approval ratings dropped with the influx of asylum seekers. And while her campaign in 2017 focused on the notable 'successes' of her 12-year term thus far – record-low unemployment figures, strong economic growth, a balanced budget and international importance – it was not enough to keep all of the party's supporters.

As well as the challenge of building a new coalition in the coming months – expected to be with two parties whose different agendas could make cooperation difficult – *The Economist* says that Germany is also dealing with other issues: a crisis in the car industry, the 'baby boomer' generation on the brink of retirement, deteriorating infrastructure, demands on Germany to play a bigger role in international security, and the ongoing work of integrating the 1m plus new arrivals to the country. *The Economist* does, however, also point to the positive side of the recent electoral results: a "reinvigoration" of German democracy, through disagreements that could "blow away the [political] cobwebs" and draw attention to growing issues and tensions that have not been addressed in the recent years of stability.

### Rise of the AfD

The AfD, now the third biggest political force in Germany and the first far-right nationalist party in the parliament since WWII, was founded by economics professors four years ago in response to the debt crisis and German bailouts of struggling European countries, but shifted its focus from anti-euro to anti-immigrant, calling for a ban of all mosques and to criminalise people wearing Islamic veils. Kate Connelly writes in *The Guardian* that the AfD "successfully cashed in on fears" related to the refugee crisis (especially issues of security and loss of German identity), while David Child (writing for *Aljazeera*) describes the AfD as effectively "occupying the space left behind by [Ms Merkel's] gradual shifting of her conservative CDU party closer to the political centre ground".

# NEWS HEADLINES



**Zimbabwe** put an activist pastor on trial, accused of attempting to subvert the government, a charge that carries up to 20 years in prison if convicted, following protests last year against President Robert Mugabe's handling of the economy. Evan Mawarire, through his #ThisFlag movement, led a stay-at-home demonstration in 2016, the biggest protest in a decade, via a social media campaign that urged citizens to speak out against economic problems and government's failure to pay workers.



**US** President Donald Trump criticised the United Nations for bloated bureaucracy and mismanagement on his first visit to UN headquarters, calling for "truly bold reforms" so it could be a greater force for world peace. The US is the biggest UN contributor, providing 22 percent of its \$5.4 billion biennial core budget and 28.5 percent of its \$7.3 billion peacekeeping budget.



Thousands of people protested in the **Philippines** on the 45th anniversary of the declaration of martial law in the country, while denouncing what they say are President Rodrigo Duterte's authoritarian tendencies and his bloody crackdown on illegal drugs. Hundreds of riot police were deployed in the capital, Manila, to secure the marches and rallies, among the largest against Duterte since he took office last year.

Simon Shuster, in an article for *TIME Magazine*, highlights the fact that much of the AfD's support comes from the Russian immigrant community in Germany (an estimated third of the party's support is from Russian-speaking voters). Shuster notes that one of the key aspects of the AfD's foreign policy is a pledge to end German sanctions on Russia and to seek better relations with Moscow, and that Russian-sponsored media outlets accessible in Germany have been offering a notably positive depiction of the AfD. There has also been direct contact between some of the AfD leadership and key Russian role players, which raised concerns about possible collusion between the Kremlin and the AfD. Both parties denied this, but it is still important to note that a more-divided Germany could work in Russia's favour.

The AfD, however, has a long way to go before posing a significant threat to Germany's current status quo, especially with the shock withdrawal of the party's co-leader and most familiar face, Frauke Petry, at a press conference the morning after the election. Petry was known for pushing a more moderate agenda, and announced that she would rather serve as an independent MP than as a representative of AfD. On the same day, four other MPs at a regional government level also announced that they were leaving the AfD, showing further signs of discord within the party.

**PRAY > For Germany's new parliament as they face a variety of challenges both within and outside their borders > For German believers to recognise the opportunity and boldly reach out to the vast refugee/migrant population in their nation, with Christ's love**

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Much has been said about the key role that Ms Merkel – the daughter of a Christian pastor – has played in the refugee crisis, and how her position reflected a Christian attitude towards strangers and foreigners in desperate need. If this was an intentional decision on Ms Merkel's part to live out Christian beliefs, it is no shock that it would have come with a price, especially in the geopolitical world.

Holly Young interviewed a number of refugees in Germany for *Aljazeera* before the elections. Derar Rashed, a Syrian student at Humboldt University, said the following: "Merkel is not perfect, but she will enter the history books for her response to refugees arriving in Europe ... America is not the idol any more. When people ask where the liberty and freedom is you tell them, 'Go to Germany.'" Mariam from Iraq, a resident in a refugee shelter, said: "Merkel helped me and many other people in their darkest hours ... I feel safe while Merkel is the German chancellor."

Ms Merkel faces an uphill battle in the coming months as the German political landscape faces unavoidable changes. She has, however, already left a lasting legacy for the million plus people who have found refuge within German borders at a time when other countries were turning them away.

## RESPONSE TO KURDISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM



*By Donnelly McClelland*

**A**fter more than 25 years of autonomy from the government in Baghdad, Iraq's Kurdish region reached a watershed on Monday [25 September] when it voted on independence. The final results are still being tabulated, but according to the Kurdish authorities, more than 90 percent of people voted for secession in the nonbinding referendum. Kurds are celebrating the result, which they see as an overdue reckoning and potentially a step toward their longstanding dreams of statehood, but few other parties are pleased. (*New York Times*)

### Record voter turnout

Voters in the Kurdish autonomous region of northern Iraq, as well as in disputed, adjacent areas turned out in record numbers on Monday to cast their ballot, despite tremendous pressure from neighbours and the international community. The Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission (IHREC) said that the

voter turnout was 72% of the approximately 4.5 million eligible voters. The referendum proceeded peacefully across the three provinces that make up the region, and in areas controlled by Kurdish forces but claimed by Baghdad.

### Iraqi response

Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi said Kurdish leaders have committed "a strategic and historic mistake" by holding the referendum and gave them until Friday (29 September) to hand over control of airports and borders in northern Iraq to the federal government, or face an air blockade. The US State Department described the potential flight ban by Iraqi authorities as "not a positive development" and have recommended continued talks between the two sides (both of whom they view as "friends") in a constructive way. Mr Abadi has been trying to unite Iraq since he took office, but the Shia-led Baghdad government and the Kurdish region in the north have struggled for years to resolve differences over oil and other sensitive issues.

### Turkish and Iranian response

The referendum was condemned by neighbouring Turkey and Iran, trading partners of landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey has long been northern Iraq's main link to the outside world, and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) exports hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil per day to world markets via Turkey. Bilateral trade between Turkey and the KRG is worth

# NEWS HEADLINES



The Taliban has targeted US defence secretary James Mattis with a rocket attack on Kabul airport after he arrived in **Afghanistan** on an unannounced visit, officials said. Mattis landed in the Afghan capital alongside NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, and was met with several rockets landing in and around the airport, local police reported. There were no reports of casualties or damage after the attack, which was claimed by the Taliban. The trip marks Mattis' first visit to the country since the US President's pledge last month to win America's longest war.



**India** responded with irritation to Pakistani allegations of brutality in Kashmir, saying that while India had made substantial progress since independence, all Pakistan had achieved was a reputation as the "pre-eminent export factory for terror."



**Iran** said it had successfully tested a new ballistic missile with a range of 2,000 km (1,200 miles) and would keep developing its arsenal despite US pressure to stop. The US has imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran, saying its missile tests violate a UN resolution, which calls on Tehran not to undertake activities related to missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Iran says it has no such plans.

more than \$10bn a year. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country was considering all options, including a military intervention against the region, after they pursued the referendum despite Turkey's opposition thereto. But since Turkey also benefits greatly from their trade with the Kurdish region, an extended embargo does not seem likely. Added to this is a recent deal between the KRG and Russian energy firm Rosneft for a \$1 billion natural gas pipeline through Turkey, as well as another to develop five oil and gas fields in the region, which may discourage Turkey from shutting down energy exports.

Iran refused to allow flights into and out of the Kurdish region to use its airspace and also threatened a military response, if necessary. Both Turkey and Iran have made their military threats clear by holding military exercises near their borders with Iraqi Kurdistan. A fifth of Turkey's population and a tenth of Iran's population is Kurdish. Neither country is interested in igniting Kurdish aspirations at home.

In Iran, thousands of Kurds poured into the streets in the cities of Baneh, Saghez and Sanandaj waving lit mobile phones in the air and chanting their support for their Kurdish neighbours. Iranian state television acknowledged the rallies, a rarity in the Islamic Republic.

## **Kurds in Syria**

The Syrian government stressed its opposition to the KRG referendum, labelling it "a separatist referendum" and "fully unacceptable in our eyes", while simultaneously announcing that the Syrian government is considering extending Kurdish autonomy within Syria. Kurdish-led authorities held an election on Friday (22 September) in northern Syria, marking the beginning of a three-stage process to set up new systems of governance in order to strengthen the Kurds' regional autonomy in the country. Kurds

accounted for 15% of the country's population prior to the civil war.

## **FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Many view Kurdistan as a land of tolerance and an "island of stability and security" – a place to where people fled to escape tyranny and oppression elsewhere in Iraq. The relationship between Kurds and Christians in Iraq is generally cordial – minorities make good allies – but whether an independent Kurdistan is an area of common interest is a point of dispute among Christians in Iraq. Many Iraqi Christians have expressed that they do not see themselves as loyalists to the Kurdish cause, but see Kurdish governance as a preferred alternative to Baghdad, which they see as corrupt and dysfunctional. But some Christians have a vision for a single united Iraq – one in which Christians are free to travel wherever they please. A third group, predominantly of Orthodox and Catholic backgrounds, has a bolder dream: their own autonomous region.

There is no doubt that the Kurdish referendum is a complicated affair, with a host of factors – economics, history, ethnicity, geography and religion – all playing a role. The current vote, although not an official declaration of independence, could start a multi-year process towards an independent country. If that happens, the road to sovereignty will face many roadblocks, as the huge international resistance to the referendum has shown. Christians within the region, despite their desperate desire for peace and some form of normality, may be confronted with further conflict.

**PRAY > For Kurdish and Iraqi leaders to address Kurdish independence in a responsible and non-violent manner > For believers in Iraq who face the prospect of further conflict in the wake of the contentious referendum, that they will be ambassadors of His peace**

# IRAQ'S REQUEST FOR NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY



**By Andrew Richards**

Iraq's foreign minister is asking nuclear countries for help building an atomic reactor for peaceful purposes, saying the country has a right to use atomic power peacefully. Ibrahim al-Jaafari made the request in his speech to the UN General Assembly's annual meeting of presidents, prime ministers and monarchs. He called for assistance "to build a nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes in Iraq, to acquire this nuclear technology." (*Washington Times*)

## **A nuclear Middle East**

Whenever you hear the word "nuclear" together with "Middle East", it is easy to assume that it means trouble – especially when you add words like "ballistic missiles" and "nuclear-capable warheads". Apart from Pakistan, Israel is the only nuclear-armed state in the Middle East – or that's what most people think. Strictly speaking, they are, but when it comes to nuclear power, there are four other countries that are not far off.

It goes without saying that Shia-majority Iran wants a nuclear weapon to defend themselves against the Sunni majority in the region – or, at least, that's what the media gets fed. Former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowed during the UN General Assembly in 2012 to "eliminate" Israel and to attack Saudi Arabia and the United States, leaving no doubt as to the real aim behind its stated "peaceful purposes" of nuclear power. In response, Saudi Arabia threatened a nuclear arms race in the region if Iran ever acquired nuclear weapons.

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The United Arab Emirates (UAE) recently completed the world's largest single nuclear project, known as the Barakah plant, that will go into operation in 2018. The 5600MW nuclear reactor was built to help relieve the country's energy demands. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are set to begin construction on their own nuclear plants in 2018, with Egypt having obtained a \$25 billion loan from Russia for this purpose.

Now Iraq, a war-torn country incapable of rebuilding its economy and infrastructure, wants the world to help it build a nuclear reactor for generating energy. In 1976, Iraq (under leadership of Saddam Hussein) purchased a nuclear reactor from France, intended to be used for peaceful scientific research; Israel, however, viewed it as a means by which Iraq would eventually acquire nuclear weapons and destroyed the reactor in an airstrike on 7 June 1981. In 2003, the US cited their concern over Saddam Hussein's 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMDs) as pretext for invading the country (no WMDs were ever found).

Currently, Israel is the chief military nuclear power in the region, even though it has never acknowledged that it has any nuclear weapons. A 2013 report on the suspected Israeli nuclear arsenal suggested that Israel has up to 80 nuclear warheads, with enough fissile material to double their arsenal. Israel has always held fast to its belief that their nuclear weapons are a key deterrent against their hostile Arab neighbours.

### Hope for the future

Iraq is known for its tribal infighting and terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), so asking for nuclear assistance in front of world leaders gathered at the UN General Assembly could be seen as a play to make the West offer money for the rebuilding of infrastructure rather than for nuclear technology (in order to prevent potential weapons falling into the hands of terrorists if Iraq started its own nuclear programme).

With the Islamic State more or less defeated in Iraq, a few refugees starting to return and the US military staying on to help strengthen the Iraqi defence, there is hope of a new beginning for the country. There are still many challenges, however, and national stability would be necessary to ensure that any benefits of possible nuclear power reach the people.

### FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

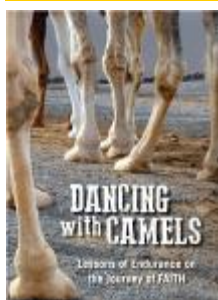
Unlike Egypt (that secured a loan from Russia), both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have enough money to pursue their nuclear ambitions. Iraq has nothing, and its record of political corruption is not an inviting prospect for any country to invest billions of dollars in a nuclear programme that might never get off the ground.

With Christian families starting to return to the Nineveh plains (especially Qaraqosh), wanting to rebuild their lives and reclaim their historic significance in the region, the future of Iraq will not be found in nuclear power but in the power of reconciliation.

A recent report found that Christians who lived in Mosul before the IS takeover do not want to return now that the city has been liberated. One reason is that Mosul is still home to many IS-sympathiser families, and Christians would find it very hard to live alongside those who endorsed the brutal murdering of fellow believers. But wherever Christians might resettle in Iraq, it would be almost impossible to escape the memories of what happened. The only path to peace is reconciliation between Christian and Muslim, if they can together rebuild shared hopes and dreams that were taken away from both. Reconciliation will only come with love, mercy and forgiveness... all Christian character traits that will be essential in the rebuilding of Iraq.

**PRAY > For Iraqi leadership to make constructive efforts towards resolving the ethnic divisions in their country > For Iraqi believers to demonstrate love and reconciliation**

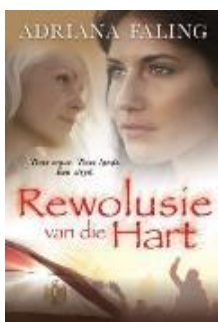
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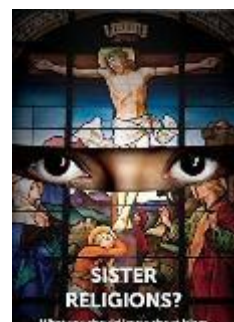
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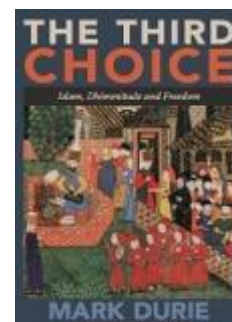
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