The truck bombing on 14 October in Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, is the worst in the recent history of the highly unstable nation.

US president Donald Trump’s decision to not certify Iran’s compliance with the nuclear deal has shaken US allies and angered Iran.

In the wake of the Islamic State’s ‘defeat’ in Iraq, Kurdistan’s renewed quest for independence continues to raise many geopolitical eyebrows.

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SOMALIA REELS AFTER WORST TERROR ATTACK

By Gustav Krös

World leaders from the United States, UK, Turkey, Canada and France strongly condemned the truck bombing (on 14 October) in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, which left at least 276 people dead. The explosion – the worst single explosion in the East African country’s history – occurred at Zoobe junction, a bustling area of the city with many shops, hotels and offices. The deadly blast also left more than 300 people wounded. (Aljazeera)

Al-Shabaab connection?

Since the attack, the death toll has reached more than 350, and many families have still not been able to find their loved ones. The president of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, blamed the Islamist extremist group al-Shabaab for the attack and asked for international assistance to combat the group. Although al-Shabaab did not claim responsibility, the attack does resemble their previous onslaughts, though none have been on this scale. The Somali government has been fighting the group for almost a decade, and managed to remove them from the capital with help from African Union forces in August 2011.

International response

International leaders were quick to condemn the attack and offer assistance. The US and Qatar sent medical aid, while Turkey and Djibouti sent humanitarian assistance. Hundreds of neighbouring Kenyans donated blood in their capital, Nairobi. France showed solidarity by turning on the lights of the Eiffel Tower, and President Emmanuel Macron tweeted: “Solidarity with Somalia. Support to the African Union against Islamist terrorist groups. France stands by your side.” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted: “The attacks in Somalia are horrifying & Canada condemns them strongly. We mourn with the Canadian Somali community today.”

Turkish involvement

Turkey, however, is the nation that stands out above the rest. Within the first 48 hours, they not only evacuated critically injured victims to Turkey (a Turkish air ambulance took 40 injured victims to Turkey for medical treatment), but they also sent their Health Minister, Ahmet Demircan, to oversee the operation, together with surgeons to assist Somali doctors in the overcrowded hospitals. Their swift response drew praise from Somalis, with Information Minister Abdrahman Omar Osman saying: “Turkey is always first to help us. They are our only genuine brother.”

Turkey has been investing heavily in Somalia for the past few years, through the building of roads, hospitals and schools. This was done not only with the hope of return on investment in the future, but also as part of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s global promotion of ‘compassionate Islam’. His ‘success’ can be seen in Osman’s further comment: “Others might give more money but Turkey is perceived by the people to be the ones really helping Somalia.”

Comparison to Western attacks

Many Somalis questioned the perceived lack of support from Western nations, and the lack of support from the international community in general. Questions were also asked about the lack of media coverage of the incident, and the lack of support on social media platforms. Comparisons were made between tragic incidents in the West (like the Las Vegas shooting on 1 October) and those in developing nations. These debates mostly took place on social media platforms, where people asked whether life in the West is somehow seen as being ‘worth more’.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Scripture tells us that we should mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). What makes this
Trump backing out of Iran nuclear deal?

By Andrew Richards

US President Donald Trump struck a blow against the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement in defiance of other world powers, choosing not to certify that Tehran is complying with the deal. “Based on the factual record I have put forward, I am announcing today that we cannot and will not make this certification,” Mr Trump said at a White House event as he unveiled a tougher strategy against Tehran. Mr Trump’s move does not pull the United States out of the agreement. (Reuters)

Firstly, it is important to note that a sitting US president must review Iran’s compliance with the deal every three months. So it should come as no surprise that Mr Trump reviewed the agreement – by law, he must do so. Secondly, although the Trump administration did not certify the Iran deal (based on evidence that Iran was not keeping to its side of the agreement), it does not mean that the US is distancing themselves or withdrawing from it. Yes, Mr Trump has threatened to do so, but has passed it on to Congress, which will have 60 days to decide whether to reimplement sanctions or change legislation that covers US participation in the accord.

The Trump administration’s decision not to certify the deal ties in with the president’s insistence that the deal was no longer in America’s interest. Mr Trump intends to renegotiate the deal to include Iran’s ballistic missile programme and the role of the Revolutionary Guards Corps (a military unit loyal to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei) in conflicts throughout the Middle East.

Consequences

The leaders of the UK, France and Germany all say that despite Mr Trump’s threatening attitude towards what they call “the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy”, they would stay in the deal with Iran. The agreement with Iran was signed in 2015 by the US, Russia, France, Germany and the UK, and Germany, France and the UK warned that unilateral US action would harm US and European interests.

Stephen Walt, professor of international affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, said: “Trump’s erratic behaviour at home and abroad has gravely damaged confidence in US steadiness and leadership, and his policies are leaving other states with little choice but to explore other arrangements.” The German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, hinted at what form those “other arrangements” might take: “Trump’s drive to decertify the deal was putting a wedge between the US and Europe and pushing countries in the EU closer to China and Russia.”

In a world where Europe is becoming more and more suspicious of Russia, what implications does Gabriel’s statement have? In brief, it implies that if the US

A rerun of Kenya’s August presidential election is set to go ahead, after a last-minute attempt to block the vote failed at the Supreme Court. Opposition Raila Odinga leader plans to boycott the poll, which was decided on after the Supreme Court last month annulled the August 8 presidential election result.

Aruna region to “moderate Islam” and asked for global support to transform the hardline kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and lures investors. In an interview with the Guardian, the powerful heir to the Saudi throne said the ultra-conservative state had been “not normal” for the past 30 years, blaming rigid doctrines that have governed society in a reaction to the Iranian revolution, which successive leaders “didn’t know how to deal with”.

Turkey, on the other hand – a predominantly Muslim nation – sent their health minister and surgeons to show care and support for the Somali people. This prompted the comments about Turkey being Somalia’s “genuine brother” and “the ones really helping Somalia”. The difference was the personal touch that shows genuine care.

Opposition Raila Odinga, vowed to return the country to “moderate Islam” and asked for global support to transform the hardline kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and lures investors. In an interview with the Guardian, the powerful heir to the Saudi throne said the ultra-conservative state had been “not normal” for the past 30 years, blaming rigid doctrines that have governed society in a reaction to the Iranian revolution, which successive leaders “didn’t know how to deal with”.

Thanks to social media and the flow of news, there is much confusion as to what exactly Mr Trump is threatening to do, but has passed it on to Congress, which will have 60 days to decide whether to reimplement sanctions or change legislation that covers US participation in the accord.

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In a world where Europe is becoming more and more suspicious of Russia, what implications does Gabriel’s statement have? In brief, it implies that if the US
Within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), with its five permanent members (the US, the UK, France, China and Russia), a closer move towards Russia and China could potentially see a 4-to-1 vote on UNSC issues. That said, the US has the right to veto any resolution set before the UNSC, and even if there is a majority vote against the US, its veto power could still ultimately decide the outcome of the resolution. But continued opposition of the US by the other four permanent UNSC members would have a negative effect on the US’ geopolitical influence.

It is highly unlikely that the EU would align itself politically with Russia and China – there are just too many disparities between them: Russia and China support the Assad regime in Syria, they unashamedly arm Iran despite weapons embargos, and both are against the US’ global influence (to name a few issues). But what Gabriel is saying is that by going against its allies, the US is slowly isolating itself from the rest of the world – the world it needs to engage with to remain a political and economic superpower.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In response to recent developments, Iran’s Supreme Leader said: “I don’t want to waste our time [responding] to the rants and whoppers of the foul-throated president of the United States. The US is the agent of the international Zionism; it was the US that created Daesh [Arabic acronym for Islamic State] and Takfiri movements [Iran’s terminology for Sunni extremist groups].”

The Gospel Coalition suggests there are two factors that have contributed this openness to the Gospel. Firstly, violence in the name of Islam has caused widespread disillusionment with the regime, prompting many Iranians to question their beliefs. Secondly, many Iranian Christians are boldly and faithfully telling others about Christ, despite the risk. Contrary to popular thinking, renewed persecution due to tensions with the US could provide a spiritual platform for more growth.

PRAY > For US leaders to seek Godly wisdom and direction as they move forward > For the underground Church in Iran to continue growing in strength and numbers > For Iranian Christians to be a voice and influence in their nation.

CONTINUED
the Kurds were making significant gains against IS in the north of Iraq, and because the Kurdish region gave refuge to thousands of Iraqis fleeing IS, the US decided to help arm the Kurdish Peshmerga as well. In the eyes of foreign-policy makers in Washington, the arming of both was key to defeating IS in Iraq.

Now that IS has been ‘defeated’ in Iraq, will the US continue to back both sides with the growing conflict between them? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, because without US support it would be increasingly difficult to maintain the upper hand against IS, and no, because if actual war were to break out between the two, it would drag Turkey, Iran and possibly Russia into another Middle Eastern conflict.

Oil and financial interests

Although Kurdish independence is opposed throughout the region, the stability of the Kurdish region remains key. Both Turkey and Russia gain huge financial benefits from the Kurds and would rather encourage peace than confrontation. Turkey’s statement, however – that it would help Iraq get rid of Kurdish fighters in the city of Kirkuk – goes against the stability it seeks. Turkey is locked in a decades-old conflict with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), seen by Turkey as a terrorist organisation threatening national sovereignty, but Turkey needs peace in Kurdistan because of the $1bn trade between the two countries.

Another reason why a stable Kurdistan is preferable is because it sits on some of the largest untapped gas deposits in the world. For this reason, Russia has been investing in Kurdistan for years, lending billions of dollars to the government in return for oil. Russia and the Kurdish government signed a $1bn gas pipeline deal that will eventually see natural gas exported from Kurdistan via Turkey to Europe. Therefore, stability in Kurdistan is key to both Turkey and Russia. Turkey could even possibly bargain with gas in exchange for membership in the European Union.

But the question is not about who makes the most money, but who would fight for whom if war were to break out between the Kurds and the Iraqis. Because of its financial investments in Kurdistan, Russia would likely support the Kurds in some way. And with the US already so deeply invested in Iraq, their choice would be obvious.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The fact that the history of the Christian community in the Middle East goes back more than two thousand years (even before Islam) has done little to persuade Muslims that the Christian Church is not a ‘product’ of the West. Kurdistan, however, is quite unique in the Middle East. As one of the least corrupt states in the region, Kurdistan is able to combine Western democratic principles with Islamic values, and stands as a beacon of hope among the many war-torn countries around it.

Kurdistan is perhaps the most pro-American state in the Middle East, aside from Israel. Because the US plays such an important role in the geopolitics of the region, backing of Iraq against the Kurds could spell disaster for the local Church: Kurdistan could retaliate against its Christian population and refugees. Now is the time to pray for immense wisdom and Godly direction for leaders and role-players in the region.

PRAY > For God’s will to be done for the people of Kurdistan > For the Iraqi government to seek co-operation and not oppression

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