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October 14th, 2019

This week's briefing



Welcome back from the weekend everyone.

In this edition we'll be looking at the all of the **Situation in Turkey, President Trump's response to Erdogan**, and **Election results in Tunisia**.

Plus: **Protests in Iraq, Spain, and Guinea**.



Iraqi troops responding to a protest site in Baghdad

Two years after the victory against Islamic state militants, Iraq is faced with large protests in its capital, Baghdad, and cities in its southern regions.

- The demonstrations started two weeks ago, at the beginning of October, erupting from social media- government security forces opened fire on the demonstrating crowd for several successive days; the surge of violence has resulted in the death of more than a hundred people, mostly demonstrators but including members of the Iraqi security forces, and thousands injured.
- Indeed, protestors are mostly young Iraqis fed up with the country's situation and hoping for a better future: youth unemployment is extremely high, the political class is deeply corrupted, and public services are lacking.
- As an illustration of the harsh conditions of living in Iraq stands the uncertainty of water and electricity supply throughout the country.
- Young demonstrators took the street spontaneously, without following any existing political movement, but the crackdown by security forces that followed has tainted the country with violence.
- The government of Iraq's prime minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, has requested the end of the protests, stating that it was ready to discuss with the demonstrators and hear their demands. Regarding the violent repression conducted by the military, the prime minister has made innocent statements, not denying the responsibility of its forces, but playing up

To go deeper

[Iraqi Army Ordered Out of Sadr City. Where Dozens Died at Protests](#), The NYT.

[Iraq protests blamed on 'malicious hands' as death toll passes 100](#), The Guardian.

[Violent crackdown against Iraq protests exposes fallacy of the country's democracy](#), The Conversation.

Kurds agree to hand over key cities in exchange for protection from Damas



Smoke rises amid bombing of the Kurdish-held city of Ras al-Ayn by Turkish-supporting rebels.

Photograph: Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Last week, Turkey launched its Operation Peace Spring, a ground military incursion in northeastern Syria, after hours of bombings. Ankara's action was taken shortly after Donald Trump announced that US forces would withdraw from the region, ceding influence there to Turkey.

- The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which controls large chunks of territories in the Turkey-Syria border region and had established relative autonomy for several years, is clearly [the main target of the Turkish government](#) in this operation.
- Ankara considers the SDF as a terrorist organization closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK), which has fought an insurgency against the Turkish state for decades.
- The SDF, funded and trained by the US since 2015, was Washington's best ally in the war against ISIS, defeating the organization in March after losing 11,000 soldiers in the fight.
- Abandoned by the US with their withdrawal from the region, and undergoing a deepening of the Turkish military offensive, Kurds had to reluctantly strike a deal with the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, exchanging key cities under their hold for protection from Damas. Syrian troops have started colliding with Turkish.
- The consequences of the conflict's resumption are disastrous. In addition to the massive displacement of populations arising from the war and the worsening of the living conditions for the region's inhabitants, the ensuing chaos could well favor the resurgence of ISIS. Hundreds of prisoners with links with the terrorist group who were detained in the area by Kurdish forces, escaped.

To go deeper

[Syria Live Updates: As Turkey Invades, al-Assad Sees Chance to Reclaim Lost Territory](#), the NYT

[Why Is Turkey Fighting the Kurds in Syria?](#), the NYT

[Syrian troops enter Kurdish fight against Turkish forces](#), The Guardian

[Kurdish forces backed by US strike deal with Syria's Assad, in major shift in 8-year war](#), CNN

President Trump sanctions Turkey in demands for a Syrian ceasefire



A Turkish army armoured vehicle advances in Syrian city of Tel Abyad, as seen from the Turkish border town of Akcakale [Burak Kara/Getty Images]

President Donald Trump has placed sanctions on Turkey, demanding that Erdogan stop Operation Peace Spring, an incursion into northeast Syria.

Some Context:

- In retaliation to Turkey's assault, the U.S. immediately halted negotiations of a \$100 billion trade deal, as well as increased sanctions on steel sales to Turkey.
- "We are calling on Turkey to stand down, end the violence and come to the negotiating table," said Vice President Pence in a public address.
- The long term Syrian strategy employed by Former President Obama has rapidly eroded since President Trump rapidly removed troops from the region. The entire force, roughly 1,000 troops, had provided air and ground support, as well as training for Syrian Kurds against the Islamic State since 2014. Additionally, they provided security details for the more than 11,000 ISIS POW's currently held in makeshift jails around the area.
- Even long-time Trump backer, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has denounced President Trump's decision, stating "Such a withdrawal would create a broader power vacuum in Syria that will be exploited by Iran and Russia, a catastrophic outcome for the United States' strategic interests."
- "We are determined to continue the operation until the end, without paying attention to threats," Erdogan said in a speech during a visit to Azerbaijan.

To go deeper

[U.S. demands Syria ceasefire, slaps sanctions on Turkey](#)

[Tops U.S. Republican says Trump's sanctions on Turkey 'do not go far enough'](#)

Spain sentences leaders of the Catalonia Separatist Movement



People hold placards depicting pictures of jailed Catalan separatist leaders in Barcelona

Credit: PAU BARRENA/AFP via Getty Images

Spain's Supreme Court has jailed nine of the leaders of the Catalan Separatist movement for their role in a failed bid for independence that resulted in mass protests and unrest.

What it means:

- Following the ruling, highly disruptive protests broke out across the region, particularly in Girona and resulted in closures of the High Speed rail, as well as the cancellation of over 100 flights.
- The leaders were sentenced to nine and 13 years in jail, marking a tough stance from Spain.
- Acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced that the sentencing signified the defeat of the independence movement, stating that his government would “guarantee the

- Nearly half of Catalonia's population still supports the separatist movement, and many people across the nation are denouncing the lengthy sentences as a blow to democratic freedoms.
- More on this story as it unfolds.

To go deeper

[Spain jails Catalan Separatist leaders, sparking protests](#)

[Spanish Supreme Court sentences Catalan Separatists to prison](#)

[Catalan Separatist leaders get lengthy Prison terms](#)

4 dead in Guinea after protests to prevent the president from expanding his power



A small number of people took part in scattered demonstrations across the capital, Conakry
[Cellou Binani/AFP]

On Monday, thousands of protesters—including ordinary citizens and those representing trade unions and advocacy organizations—took to the streets against Guinea's president.

What it means:

democratic transition of power. Now, he is pushing for a referendum to keep his power despite his second term coming to a close.

- As of now it is reported that 4 people, [including a 16-year old boy](#), have died as a result of the police's attempt to disperse the crowd, which included firing tear gas and bullets.
- [Guinea's police and security forces have had a history of brutally silencing dissent](#). The country has already banned several planned protests this year.
- Amnesty International's West Africa Researcher, François Patuel, has said that "The use of lethal force against protesters and bystanders and the arrest of the protest organizers are a shameful attempt by Guinean authorities to stifle dissent by any means necessary. These acts should be investigated independently, and suspected perpetrators brought to justice in fair trials."
- Though Alpha Condé's election excited many who have been looking forward to a democratic Guinea, his presidency has not been without controversy. In 2016, he was accused of [accepting bribes](#).

To go deeper

[Guinea's democratic transition and its pitfalls](#)

[Moving past colonialism in Guinea](#)

[Guinea's crackdown on protests](#)

Kais Saied wins Tunisian Elections



Kais Saied has promised to fight corruption and support decentralization.

Tunisia has a new president. The conservative law professor Kais Saied won the election, defeating businessman Nabil Karoui in the second round with 72% of the vote.

Some Context:

- Nabil Karoui was released from jail last week ahead of the second round. Karoui publicly recognized his defeat, and issued a congratulatory statement to Saied.
- The Tunisian electoral commission said that voter turnout for this second round was 55%. Keep in mind this is Tunisia's second democratic election since the 2011 Arab Spring.
- Kais Saied is a conservative, who advocates for a strict enforcement of the law. He was endorsed by the moderate Islamic party Enhadda, but maintained the fact that he was independent and would stay that way. His campaign was interesting as Saied ran independently, and strove to work on his image as a "man of the people".
- The 61 year old president-elect is nicknamed "Robocop" for his austere and cold manners.
- Critics say that his program is relatively empty, and even his campaign was mostly made up of a few strong declarations here and there that relied on a solid media presence.
- Saied faces a slowing economy, failing infrastructure, and high levels of unemployment. His message was less about hope than about work, in the sense that he is calling out Tunisians, especially the youth, to get to work and contribute to the growth of the country.

To go deeper

[Tunisia's Nabil Karoui Concedes Election Defeat to Kais Saied](#)

[Présidentielle en Tunisie : Kaïs Saïed s'est fait élire "sans programme et sans campagne électorale"](#)

That's all for this week's Good News edition, if you have any comments or suggestions, please email us at afterthoughtgroup@gmail.com! This weekly edition was produced by Timothy Motte, Mina Basmaci, Vincent Leroy, and Zachary Ernest.



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