

QUOTE OF THE DAY

SHARE YOUR SMILE WITH THE WORLD. IT'S A SYMBOL OF FRIENDSHIP AND PEACE. CHRISTIE BRINKLEY

# Turkey is testing Nato alliances in its pursuit of the Kurds

*Ankara seems ready to incur international penalties in a crisis that has amalgamated the 70-year-old institution's most crippling challenges*

DAMIEN MCELROY

As thousands of Britain's Kurdish community gather for a mass protest today in central London, an assembly of Nato officials will be convening within earshot of their march.

Pro-Kurdish protesters uniting under the umbrella #RiseUp4Rojava are determined to highlight the plight of Kurds in Syria as Turkey advances across the border to carve out a so-called safe zone, where it plans to send the majority of its 3.6 million Syrian refugees.

Some of Nato's most crippling challenges have amalgamated in one crisis. How to handle Turkey is now a make-or-break issue for the alliance.

London's weekend meeting is being held in advance of a 70th anniversary Nato summit in the British capital in December. A cloud hangs over the celebrations for the 29-country alliance. Attempts to mark a record of impressive cohesion throughout its history seem moot.

The challenges have shifted so much throughout that time – yet Nato has somehow endured. Indeed, Turkey's role in Nato has long been the subject of commentary and questioning. In recent months these debates have increased markedly. The Syrian operation has moved the conundrum to a whole new phase.

The think tank Carnegie Europe has described Turkey as a functional ally within Nato. The chief attributes are its crucial geostrategic location and its large armed forces,



US President Donald Trump with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Washington DC in 2017.

which made a powerful contribution to missions in the Balkans and Afghanistan.

Turkey's neighbourhood raises a thicket of issues for Nato that openly conflict with the core interests of the alliance.

European countries dominate Nato's membership. At least one – Sweden – has responded to the Syrian offensive by suspending arms

exports to Turkey.

Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Poland issued a statement on Thursday that made clear their fears that Turkey was about to violate international law on forcing refugee returns. It cautioned against engineering demographic change in that part of Syria and said they would boycott any situation that resulted from the Turkish

action if these were the out-

Among European diplomats there is serious discussion of potential sanctions on Turkey. Fearing the resurgence of ISIS as a result of the weakening and dispersal of the Syrian Democratic Forces has put Europe on high alert. The displacement of 100,000 people since the offensive began and Turkey's refusal to unleash a new migrant cri-

## The nightmares of the dead, the weeping and

KAREEM SHAHEEN

The nightmares don't come often – perhaps once every month or two. In them, I find myself in the midst of a terror-stricken wave of humanity, fleeing the scene of a suicide bombing or an impending assault by faceless men.

When I started working as a journalist, I was based in Abu Dhabi. Then, after a subsequent two-year stint in Europe, I returned to the Middle East to work as a reporter in Lebanon. I arrived in June 2013, just in time for a wave of suicide bombings in Beirut and clashes between the army and fundamentalist groups in Sidon, as well as inter-communal fighting between Sunnis and Alawites in Tripoli. The violence was linked to the war in Syria, which spilled over into multi-confessional Lebanon as the conflict took on sectarian overtones.

I covered so many of these violent incidents that, with the dark sense of humour journalists so often develop to cope with the trauma they regularly cover, a colleague once joked that I was the suicide bombing correspondent of the paper where I worked. I covered many stories of beauty, hope and resilience as well. But the images that lodged in my mind, the ones that stayed with me, were often the bloodier ones.

There was the twin suicide bombing in southern Beirut in February 2014, in which eight people were killed and more than 120 injured. One of the explosive-laden vehicles used in

the attack blew up next to an orphanage. I remember the children there, all of whom miraculously survived, marching out of the orphanage in tears, still wearing face paint.

I remember the human remains and streaks of blood on the pavement next to a cafe in an Alawite neighbourhood in Tripoli that had been hit the previous night in a double suicide attack. A grandfather, Abu Ali Issa, had tackled the second bomber, sacrificing his life to save dozens of civilians who had gathered to help those wounded in the first attack. As women on balconies simultaneously wept, ululated and tossed rice at the funeral processions, a man embraced me around my waist, then walked away – I think to make sure that I, a stranger, did not have explosives strapped to my body.

I remember rushing to the scene of the car bombing that killed the former economy minister Mohammed Chatah in 2013. The row of trees closest to the burnt-out husk of his car had been stripped of leaves. The row of trees leading away from the site of the assassination were still a verdant green.

My own human experience is a collection of memories, some faded like old photographs in an album buried in the back of an attic. Others resurface with greater clarity, in high definition. Often, those images are of death.

I have now left the Middle East and resettled in Canada. When I scroll back through old photos of our life in the region to find



A series of bombings rocked Beirut shortly after the author arrived in 2013.

snapshots that were taken with my wife, our friends and our cats, they are interspersed with pic-

tures of the dead, the weeping, the wounded and the bombed, from Aleppo to Eastern Ghouta.

A lot of colleagues in the friends, family and Syrian: come to know over the ye-

*As a journalist covering war zones in the Middle East, I know I am lucky to escape with only bad dreams*