

Ankara using media as government tool

Sat, 2020-01-11 01:38

ANKARA: As Turkey observed Working Journalists Day on January 10, the challenges faced by journalists in Turkey once again came under scrutiny.

According to the latest figures, the number of journalists who have been fired or put on trial over their reporting has increased markedly in recent years.

Over 11,000 journalists are currently out of work in Turkey, and about 12,000 more went on trial between 2003-2018, with 108 currently behind bars. In 2019, 34 journalists were beaten up on the street. And 45 journalists were recently fired from pro-government daily Hurriyet because of their union membership.

In its most recent annual report, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) listed Turkey as the country with the second-highest number of journalists in jail in the world.

In a country where 95 percent of the media is currently under government control, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) also uses financial rewards as a trump card by favoring pro-government newspapers with regular state-sponsored ads, and not outlets that do not toe the government line when reporting news.

The Turkish government also regularly cancels the press cards of "dissident" journalists. After the 2016 failed coup attempt, the press cards of 685 journalists were repealed over "domestic security" reasons. Over the last five years, 3,804 press cards were reportedly canceled.

Sibel Gunes, secretary-general of the Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC), said there has been a general deterioration in media freedom and freedom of speech in Turkey over the last decade.

"The courthouse has been the second address of journalists in Turkey, who are considered terrorists by those in government circles," she told Arab News.

HIGHLIGHT

A report released in July last year by pro-government think tank SETA published the biographies and social media contacts of 150 foreign journalists working in Turkey (including some contributors to Arab News), along with some of their social media posts, and went on to suggest that Turkish citizens should contact the authorities if they believed these foreign media outlets were criticizing the Turkish government.

"Although foreign media outlets and alternative media provide a breathing space for the right of information, the journalists who work for these

outlets have systematically become targets of the pro-government think tanks," Gunes said.

She added that although the government has almost total control over the media sector, many pro-government newspapers had shut down in recent months, "showing that biased and (untrue) reporting cannot be translated into reality."

Former journalist Utku Cakirozer, now a lawmaker in the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), thinks the threat of long prison sentences has been the main tool the government has used to put pressure on working journalists in Turkey.

"The unfair prison sentences have been a sign of the (government's) intolerance of criticism, paving the way for control over real reporting and efficient criticism," he told Arab News. "The only way to overcome these restrictions over the media and freedom of speech is to end the one-man-rule of the media, which will be the first step toward ensuring judicial independence and impartiality. Reporting and criticism should not constitute a crime. Turkish courts should follow international jurisprudence on media freedom."

Cakirozer also underlined that many media outlets are now owned by businesspeople who are closely affiliated with the government, and that many journalists had been dismissed or forced to resign because of their refusal to align their reporting with the government's wishes.

"Those who remain in these outlets have to apply (self)-censorship so that they do not lose their jobs or face punishment," he added.

The restrictions over the freedom of expression in Turkey are not exclusive to the media sector. Online encyclopedia Wikipedia has been blocked since 2017 because of entries that accused Turkey of having links to terror groups. It has still not been unblocked, despite a recent ruling in Turkey's Constitutional court stating that the government was violating citizens' rights.



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Egypt's foreign minister says Turkey supports extremists in Libya
Saudi Arabia condemns Turkey's military interference in Libya

[Turks oppose sending troops to war-torn Libya, survey shows](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-01-11 01:30

ANKARA: Deployment of Turkish troops to war-torn Libya has a strikingly low rate of support among the country's population, a recent survey suggests.

More than 1,500 people across 12 provinces took part in the poll, conducted by market research firm Istanbul Ekonomi Arastirma, with 58 percent of respondents saying they disapproved of any troop deployment to the war-torn country. Only 34 percent were in favor of the deployment.

Can Selcuki, general manager of Istanbul Ekonomi Arastirma, said that people fail to see any benefit in sending troops to Libya.

“In other military involvements, such as those in northern Syria, the threat was Syrian Kurdish YPG taking root along Turkey’s borders. Hence public support was above 75 percent for both the Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring operations.

“Military involvement in Libya may be well justified from a national benefit perspective, but the government has more convincing to do,” he told Arab News.

FASTFACTS

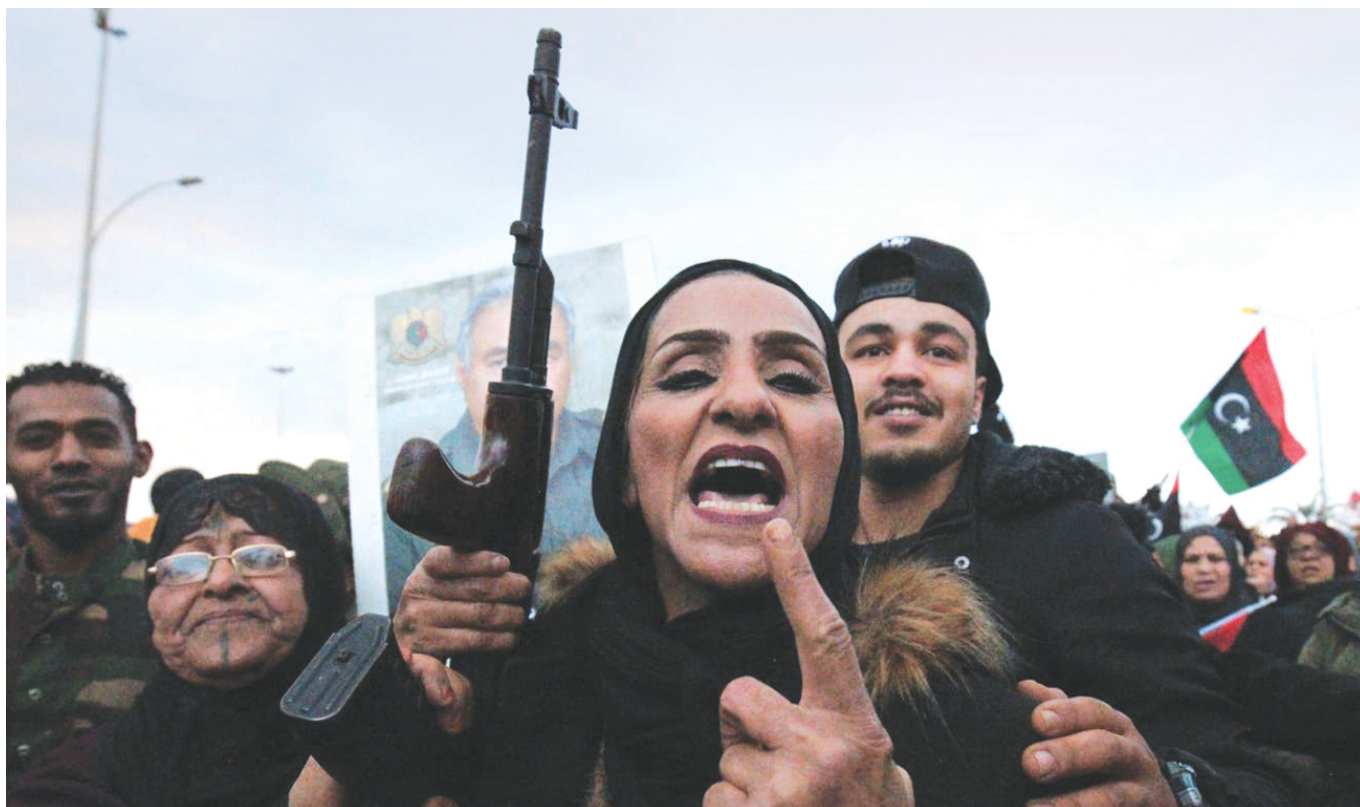
- 58 percent of respondents say they disapproved of any troop deployment to the war-torn country.
- Respondents who oppose the troop deployment are mainly in the range of 35-54 age, while those who approve are mostly aged from 18-25.

Libyan intervention also divides the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its ally Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Only 61.8 percent of the AKP voters consider the deployment of forces to Libya as a necessity, while 45 percent of the MHP voters are against the military presence in Libya.

Opposition party supporters are principally against military deployment to the North African country, with 92.9 percent of pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party voters opposed to the move. In the newly formed İyi Party, the rate is 88 percent, while in the main opposition Republican People’s Party the figure is 78 percent.

Turkish people are also reluctant for the government to become involved in every conflict in its neighborhood, with 75 percent of respondents suggesting Ankara should adopt an intermediary role for regional conflicts rather than becoming involved.

Along with drones, armored vehicles and Syrian mercenaries, Turkey recently sent military advisers to Libya following a request by Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj’s Government of National Accord (GNA), which Ankara backs against Libyan military commander Khalifa Haftar.



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Egypt's foreign minister says Turkey supports extremists in Libya
Experts uncertain of strength of Libyan cease-fire

[France calls for 'gesture' from Iran over detained academics](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-01-11 01:26

PARIS: France said on Friday that the imprisonment of two prominent French academics by Iran was unacceptable and that their release would represent a "significant gesture," as tensions mount between Tehran and the West.

The plea for the release of Fariba Adelkhah and Roland Marchal – imprisoned since June last year – comes as Iran is embroiled in an international crisis over its missile attacks on US troops in Iraq and a passenger plane crash near Tehran.

"These arrests and the fact that they are in prison today is totally unacceptable," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told RTL radio. "It

would be a significant gesture if Iran freed them as soon as possible," he said.

France has repeatedly called for de-escalation in the latest intensification of the Iran-US standoff, sparked by the killing of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani in an American drone strike which prompted Iran to attack bases in Iraq housing US troops.

France, Britain and Germany are scrambling to keep alive a 2015 deal that reined in Tehran's nuclear program, which US President Donald Trump walked out of in 2018.

Iran has dropped espionage charges against Adelkhah but she still faces charges of spreading "propaganda against the political system" and "conspiracy against national security," her lawyer said this week.

Iran does not recognize Adelkhah's dual French-Iranian nationality and has lashed out at Paris for what it has described as "interference" in the cases of the academics, both from Sciences Po University in Paris.

Marchal is also accused of "collusion against national security," according to his lawyer.

The two researchers are not the only foreign academics behind bars in Iran – Australian Kylie Moore-Gilbert of the University of Melbourne is serving a 10-year sentence on espionage charges.

Sciences Po said late last year that Adelkhah and Moore-Gilbert had begun a hunger strike. Moore-Gilbert has issued a plea to Prime Minister Scott Morrison to work for her release.

Tehran is still holding several other foreigners in high-profile cases, including British-Iranian mother Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Iranian-American businessman Siamak Namazi and his father, Mohammad Bagher Namazi.



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[Israeli brutality fails to break spirit of Jerusalem neighborhood](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-01-11 01:16

AMMAN: Despite the fact that locals are arrested daily and that a number of houses have been demolished, residents of Issawiya, a small neighborhood in East Jerusalem, continue to defy Israeli attempts to break their spirit.

Over the past two months, Israeli police have detained an estimated 200 residents of Issawiya – many of them children – in defiance of international law. Orders to demolish three more homes in the neighborhood were also issued this week.

According to data from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI),

more than 600 residents have been arrested since the launch of regular police raids in Issawiya. About a third of those, according to residents and lawyers are minors.

The ACRI has written to the Israeli attorney general saying that the systematic over-policing directed at thousands of people – most of whom have never even thrown a stone in their life – along with intimidation, arrests, and the use of gas, stun grenades, and sponge-tipped bullets “are not legitimate means” for imposing law and order.

“This policy serves only to exacerbate and foment the confrontations, and in itself causes disturbances, while using means intended to punish, humiliate, and oppress an entire population that is mostly innocent of any crime,” the Israeli human rights organization wrote.

Since June the situation in Issawiya, as described by the ACRI, has been intolerable. “Day after day, night after night, Special Patrol Unit and Border Police forces enter the neighborhood, patrolling the streets, haranguing youths, invading homes, ordering shops to close, blocking roads, handing out incessant tickets, and conducting arrests, many of which prove to be spurious.”

Yaser Darwish, an activist in Issawiya, told Arab News that the daily attacks would not deter people from standing up for their rights. “They have been attacking Issawiya almost every night, and this week alone they have issued demolition orders for three homes in the center of town, claiming that they (were) built without a license,” he said.

Another Israeli human rights organization, Btselem, said that in 2019 alone Israel has demolished 169 homes in East Jerusalem – 18 of them in Issawiya – more than had previously been destroyed in the years since 2004, and that those demolitions “resulted in making 328 Palestinians, including 182 children, homeless.”

Former Palestinian Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Ziad AbuZayyad told Arab News, “(The Israelis) want to break their spirit and force them to kneel, but the people of Issawiya are stubborn and the entire town has stood up to the Israeli police and other Israeli officials’ efforts.”

Hanna Issa, head of the Islamic Christian Committee for Jerusalem, told Arab News that the constant attacks are a prelude to an attempt to displace this small neighborhood, which is close to Israeli institutions including the Hebrew University’s Mount Scopus Campus and the Hadassah Hospital.

“They want to knock off the head of anyone that dares raise his head so that Issawiya will be an example to other neighborhoods, and so that eventually they can move these areas while widening the borders of what they call their unified capital,” Issa said.

Micky Rosenfeld, spokesman for the Israel National Police, told Arab News that police carry out regular patrols in the neighborhood of Issawiya, and “have done so for years,” in order to prevent and respond to security-related

incidents whether caused by criminals or terrorists.

“Police officers have been attacked when on patrol by masked residents with petrol bombs, and have had fireworks fired at them from close range, causing the officers to be in a life-threatening situation,” he claimed.

Rosenfeld added that Israeli police officials “are in contact with the leaders of the community to discuss the general situation and coordinate.”



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Author:

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