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Related Categories: Science and Technology; Turkey

ERDOGAN VISITS IRAN

Since 2010, Turkey, a dominant Sunni power, has pursued a rapprochement with Shi'ite Iran shepherded by the Islamist-oriented ruling AK Party (Turkey is now the largest importer of Iranian natural gas, accounting for 90% of Iran's annual exports). However, relations faltered when Turkey backed Syrian rebels against the regime of Bashar Assad, a close Iranian ally. The two sides are also supporting opposing forces in Yemen's civil war. While they their best to paper over those differences during Erdogan's cordial visit, little progress was made on the most contentious issues and the positive optics may have been overshadowed by public sparring before and after the visit. Shortly before the trip Erdogan publicly "demanded that Tehran 'withdraw any forces, whatever it has in Yemen, as well as in Syria and Iraq and respect their territorial integrity'," prompting Iranian lawmakers to call for a cancellation of the visit. A prominent Iranian lawmaker, meanwhile, mocked Erdogan and accused him of participating in a "massacre" in Syria. (*Foreign Policy* April 10, 2015)

AMID YEMEN CRISIS, EGYPT VOWS TO PROTECT ARAB GULF

Egyptian President Sisi vowed to provide protection to the Gulf States when required. "Egypt will not give up its brothers in the Gulf region and we will protect them if necessary," the Egyptian president said. The crisis in Yemen has raised fears that the rebel Houthis, widely perceived to be backed by Iran, could seize the nearby naval choke-point at the Bab al-Mandab Strait and pose a threat to the security of the surrounding Gulf States. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have deployed warships to the strait that represents the only access to Egypt's Suez Canal from the Arabian Sea. "Bab al-Mandab Strait is a matter of Egyptian and Arab national security," President Sisi said in his statement. Egypt is currently providing naval support to a Saudi-led Arab coalition battling the Houthis inside Yemen, which has been airdropping weapons and supplies to pro-government tribal militia. (*Global Times* April 5, 2015)

IRAQI KURDS TO COOPERATE WITH BAGHDAD ON COMBATING ISIS

Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government President Masoud Barzani said he and Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Abadi have agreed to act jointly to counter the Islamic State. The Iraqi leader said the parties had agreed on joint efforts to liberate the northern Nineveh Governorate and the city of Mosul. According to US Central Command, Iraqi and Kurdish troops are expected to launch an operation to regain control of Mosul in April or May. (*Sputnik News* April 6, 2015)

NEW DOMESTIC SECURITY LAW FOR TURKEY

Turkish journalists have faced outright repression for years. Turkey was the world's leading jailer of journalists in 2012 and 2013. It has also been the leader in Twitter censorship, with the highest number of requests for content removal in Twitter's latest transparency report. A few days ago, Turkey's legislature approved a controversial domestic security bill that would make it even more perilous to speak out against the president, sharply limiting individual freedoms and enhancing the power of the security services to target the opposition. Human Rights Watch says that Turkey is characterized by an "erosion of media freedom, continuing readiness to limit freedom of expression, a restrictive approach to freedom of assembly." (*World Politics Review* April 2, 2015)