

## CHINA EASES ONE-CHILD POLICY...



## CHINA EASES BIRTH LIMITS BUT KEEPS CONTROL

By Joe McDonald

The Communist Party's decision to ease limits on family size makes China a bit less restrictive but is a reminder of the party's pervasive role in society. The 35-year-old policy that limited most urban couples to one child is a holdover from an era of intrusive controls that dictated where Chinese worked and lived - even whom they could marry. The latest change, driven by a need for more young workers, allows married couples two children but affirms party power over what most societies consider a basic right. Thursday's announcement was a reminder that many official policies treat the Chinese public as economic raw material. It cited a need to "improve the balanced development of population," rather than to give people more control over their lives.

"This is a technical change, a policy change, rather than a political change," said Joseph Cheng, a retired political scientist formerly at the City University of Hong Kong. "If you try to have more than two children, you still get sanctions. So the state retains that kind of power."

The change is part of the Communist Party's relentless, gradual policy changes that are aimed at making China rich while retaining the party's monopoly on power. Communist leaders relaxed other social controls over the past 30 years as they rolled out market-style economic reforms. If entrepreneurs were to create wealth and

jobs, they needed to be allowed to pick where to work and travel. On the political front, though, the party says it never will share power and jails pro-democracy activists on subversion charges.

**Draconian laws**

Birth limits were imposed in 1979 to conserve resources and proved more durable because of the intensity of the ruling party's worries about shortages of farmland and water.

The party says the controls led to 400 million fewer births, making possible the economic boom of the past three decades. But enforcing them led to draconian measures, including forced abortions.

As recently as 2010, authorities in the southern city of Puning pressured couples to consent to sterilization by detaining 1,377 of their relatives, according to the human rights group Amnesty International.

Policy experts have warned for more than a decade that birth limits were pushing up China's average age, raising the danger that it would have too few workers to support a growing population of retirees.

That crunch is starting to hit. China had one of Asia's highest median ages at 37.3 years in 2014, and that could rise to 40 by 2025, according to Euromonitor International, a research firm. It said the size of the working-age population aged 15 to 64 is set to decline starting next year.

That prompted some provinces in 2006 to allow an additional child for couples who were both only children. In 2013, that was expanded to allow two children for families in which only one parent was an only child.

The party might have gained confidence from the fact that only a limited number of parents took advantage of the 2013 change. About 1.45 million couples, or 13 percent of the 11 million eligible, applied for permission to have a second child as of May, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission. That was in line with a seeming decline in interest in childbearing overall: The government forecast 20 million births in 2014 but the commission said only 16.9 million were recorded.

**Small families**

Many things have been put off by the soaring cost of raising a child in a cramped apartment in increasingly urbanized China. That is estimated at anywhere from 40,000 to 100,000 yuan (\$6,500 to \$16,000) a year.

"It already is a struggle for people to buy one house, not to say to buy another one for the second child," Joy Huang, a researcher for Euromonitor, said in an email.

Others who grew up in the era of single children see small families as normal, said Lu Jiehua, a Peking University sociologist who studies population.

"Couples born in the '80s and '90s are

quite reluctant to have a second child," Lu said. The latest policy change should result in 3 million to 6 million more babies over the five years starting in 2017, according to a Credit Suisse forecast. It said that would return the birth rate to its 1990s level.

If the birth rate fails to budge, then Beijing might have to ease controls further and allow three children or offer incentives such as longer maternity leave or free education, Lu said.

Despite market-style economic reforms, the Communist Party still plays a bigger role in many spheres of Chinese life than most other governments. The party still controls all Chinese media and appoints every legislator, Cabinet minister, mayor and police chief and every president of a bank, university, phone company or oil producer.

And since 2008, political controls have become tighter, not looser. The government of President Xi Jinping has revived the tactic of collective punishment, pressuring human rights and political activists by harassing their children and relatives. In October, the 16-year-old son of a human rights lawyer was detained in Myanmar and returned to China against his will after he left the country to attend school in the United States. Chinese authorities placed him under house arrest.

"The bottom line is, you must not challenge the authority of the regime. You must accept the leadership of the party," said Cheng, the political scientist. —AP

## Kuwait Times

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher  
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief  
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24835619  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

## Focus

CRITICS OF OBAMA'S  
SYRIA MOVE SAY  
'TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE'

By Nicolas Reize

Barack Obama's decision to send special forces to Syria is too little and too late, say critics, who accuse the US president of lacking a strategy for the war-torn country. After four and a half years of conflict that have left 250,000 dead and millions displaced, Washington says it will deploy elite US commandos to Syria.

But "fewer than 50" will be sent, and they will not be taking part in ground combat but instead will advise rebels fighting the Damascus regime, according to its announcement Friday. Until now, Obama—a big skeptic of military intervention—had officially balked at putting US boots on the ground in his effort to battle the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group.

He opted instead to carry out air strikes as part of an international coalition set up in mid-2014. Strictly speaking, this will not be the first time that US fighters have been on Syrian soil.

Commandos have in the past carried out covert operations in bids to save hostages, and CIA agents have supplied weapons to rebels. Even though the decision amounts to something of a U-turn for Obama, Republicans—both in Congress and on the campaign trail—remain unsatisfied, and other commentators too are critical.

"I think we have a president who just doesn't know what he's doing," Donald Trump, the party's frontrunner in the 2016 race for the White House, told CNN. Senator John McCain, also a former presidential candidate, said that, "unfortunately, this limited action is yet another insufficient step" taken by a president who "continues to have no realistic" and "coherent" strategy on Syria.

McCain, who is for US military intervention abroad, also accused Obama of accelerating the "erosion of America's credibility." Senator Lindsey Graham, meanwhile, said 50 special operations personnel were insufficient in number to intimidate IS.

"In fact, (IS) will see this as yet another sign of President Obama's weakness," he said.

**'Band-Aid'**

"Deploying a handful of US special operations forces to Syria will not change this situation significantly," said Frederic Hof, former special advisor for the transition in Syria at the US State Department. "It is a Band-Aid of sorts, although a potentially useful one," added Hof, who is now a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank.

Both the White House and the State Department insisted Friday that the Syria strategy had not changed. Yet last month, in an interview with "60 Minutes" on CBS, Obama had said "in a situation that is as volatile and with as many players as there are inside of Syria, there aren't any silver bullets."

"What we are not going to do is to try to reinsert ourselves in a military campaign inside of Syria," the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize laureate had added. In August 2014, during an often cited news conference, Obama admitted he did not yet have a strategy to combat the Islamic State in Syria. He then repeated tirelessly that he would not send US troops into the country.

And in September 2013, he had dismayed allies—France and the Gulf monarchies in particular—when he abandoned plans to strike Syria after accusing President Bashar al-Assad of violating a US "red line" by using chemical weapons, once it became clear lawmakers did not support the action.

Today, as the Islamic State group controls a part of Syria and is proving resistant to the thousands of coalition air strikes, US Secretary of State John Kerry said Saturday that the move to deploy US commandos was "not a decision to enter into Syria's civil war."

"It is not a decision or a choice focused on Assad," he said. "It is focused exclusively on Daesh and on augmenting our ability to be able to more rapidly attack Daesh and do a better job of eliminating Daesh," he added during a visit to Kyrgyzstan, using an Arabic term for the IS group, also known as ISIL.

However, Kerry refused to rule out more US commandos being sent to Syria. But Joseph Bahout, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, denounced what he called Obama's "strategy of no strategy," saying the president wanted to ease his conscience and give the illusion he was doing something. —AFP

All articles appearing on these pages are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein. Kuwait Times invites readers to voice their opinions. Please send submissions via email to: [opinion@kuwaittimes.net](mailto:opinion@kuwaittimes.net) or via snail mail to PO Box 1301 Safat, Kuwait. The editor reserves the right to edit any submission as necessary.

## TURKEY'S KURDS 'ARE VOTING FOR PEACE'

By Gokan Gunes

Leaning against an armored truck, masked Turkish policemen with rifles slung over their shoulders scan the crowds queuing to vote in a neighborhood of the main Kurdish city of Diyarbakir.

Security is high in the Kurdish majority southeast for Sunday's vote following a new flare-up in the conflict between Kurdish rebels and the Turkish state and a wave of jihadist attacks which have left several hundred people dead since July. The wall surrounding Suleyman Nazif school in Diyarbakir's Sur district, which has been turned into a polling station for the vote, is pockmarked with bullet holes. But that did not stop people from lining up as soon as polls opened at 0400 GMT for Turkey's second parliamentary election in five months.

"All I want is peace and brotherhood, we have suffered too much lately," 43-year-old voter Mahmut Kiziltoprak said. The Sur neighborhood, a stronghold of young Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) supporters, bears numerous scars of warfare: A charred building here, shattered windows and hastily-dug trenches there.

Since the breakdown of a 2013 ceasefire between the Turkish army and the outlawed PKK in August, the Kurdish southeast has been caught in the grip of a spiral of violence.

**'AKP has no hope'**

"The police entered every house in the neighborhood, treated everyone as a criminal," said Huseyin Oturmak, 65, an observer for the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP).

"The AKP has no hope here," he said. Many residents of Diyarbakir accuse Turkey's strongman President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of reigniting the flames of war after a wave of deadly tit-for-tat violence. Ironically it was under Erdogan's watch as prime minister that Ankara introduced a raft of reforms for the Kurdish minority, estimated to number between 15 and 20 million, and launched secret negotiations with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Kurds at one stage were a bedrock of support for the AKP, but voters turned to the HDP in large numbers in June, delivering it a stunning election success to become the first pro-Kurdish party to sit in parliament. The delicate peace process has now been shattered

and with it hopes of ending a war in the south-east that has claimed 45,000 lives over three decades.

The PKK conflict resumed after a bombing on pro-Kurdish activists in the border town of Suruc in July that killed 34 people and was blamed on the Islamic State group.

PKK fighters killed two Turkish policemen in

only (HDP leader) Selahattin Demirtas who can bring peace. He's the one who wants peace, therefore it's him I'm voting for," said Esat Akir, 55.

Around 11,000 police and soldiers were mobilised to ensure security in Diyarbakir and the surrounding region, according to the private NTV television channel.

And no incidents of violence were reported by



DIYARBAKIR: Using a wheelchair, Lisa Calan (28) who lost both her legs at an explosion on June 5, 2015, in Diyarbakir, during a pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party's, (HDP) rally, casts her vote yesterday. —AP

revenge, with many Kurds accusing Ankara of complicity with IS, and two days later Turkish jets bombed both jihadist targets in Syria and PKK rebels in Iraq. Both sides declared the peace process over, with Erdogan vowing to fight the PKK to the "last terrorist".

Tensions surged further in October when suicide bombers blew themselves up at a pro-Kurdish peace rally in Ankara, killing 102 people, many of them HDP members, in the worst such attack on Turkish soil. "It's

mid-afternoon. Election officials at polling stations visited by AFP predicted a high turnout: "80 to 90 percent," said Arin Zunrun Karakoyun at the Suleyman Nazif school. "In the current climate people have realised the importance of this election," she said. "Look at the ballot box, it is not yet 11 am and it's almost overflowing," added Hamit Bodakci at another polling station in Sur. "About 60 percent of the 389 registered here have already voted." —AFP