

# Fighting ISIS with 60's AK47





the frontline in Taza, the place is south of Kirkuk





the frontline in Taza



Peshmerga complain about not having new weapons promised by foreign countries; they use old AK47 from the 1960 while ISIS has the latest weapons.



The old vets are all volunteers, and are not from the regular army.



Like so many, General Jamal has lost an eye in the previous wars, but he is still on the battlefield.



His son Armand wants to become peshmerga, and often comes with his daddy like this day on the frontline. 'i want to be a leader like my father » In many families, even the mother is a pershmerga.





Radio telecommunications tools are also missing. Many military orders are done thru iphone...



The frontline in Taza: The sunset is not the best time for kurdish peshmerga as they have the sun in the eyes, and cannot see what happens few meters away in ISIS side.



In daytime, the place seems quiet, but at nighttime, the fights are heavy, most of the time ISIS acts at 4 am. the ambulances are always ready to leave the place. Many have been wounded.





Peshmergas do not really have an official uniform, but use US uniforms from different wars... No time to solve this problem they told me!



So many vets from the 80's wars have joined the kurdish forces.



For some old perhsmergas, who are grand fathers, it is a duty for their nation to be there. some even come from Switzerland, France, Uk...



The veterans unit is called Peshmerga Derenakan.



The only PRG i saw during my visit on the frontline. This one is russian. The veterans peshmergas come back in the army but sometimes do not keep the former grades they had...



Time to pray for this pershmerga. They all told me that ISIS guys are not muslims men. Just animals.



While ISIS has taken all the Hummers from the iraqi army, Peshmergas have to drive their forces to the front in classic 4 wheels without any protection...



In Taza frontline, this is the only kurdish tank for kilometers. ISIS is in the town in front.





The veterans love to tell stories of the former wars: « you see this scar? a french doctor saw me, i had an infection on my neck, he took a razor blade, and without anesthésiea cut my skin and remove the pus ».



The Coat of arms of the Kurdistan Regional Government, which governs Iraqi Kurdistan, is an eagle holding a sun on his wings.



Veterans aslo call for amunitions.



Around Kirkuk, ISIS is everywhere. In this place, the little village hosts the families of the ISIS guys who are on the other side, so Kurdish fighters are in between...20 men left the village including an ISIS leader



Kurdish soldiers take a lot of pictures, not only for souvenirs , but also to beat ISIS on the social medias. Many manage some FB groups of their units, like the vets do.



Iraqi president Jalal Talabani from Patriotic Union of Kurdistan is on all the flag from the kurdish soldiers. Every kurdsih political party rules an army...



The frontline in Taza: the highway goes to Bagdad, a vital link for the economy. the place has changed hands many times those last months, now peshmergas keep it. They killed an assault of ISIS 2 weeks ago,, the guys were chechen.

مرحباً بكم في ناحية  
تازة خورماتو  
HOŞ GELDİNİZ  
TAZE HORMATU'YA

Even if there is war, trucks keep on crossing the area, a difficulty for there forces as anything can be inside...



Isis is just over the river says this officer.



When they cook, we see the smoke...They also have raised black flags all around.



The frontline in Taza: the sun is going down, i must go back to Erbil in a safe area, but tension is high as pershmerga have the info that the safe road is closed. The only way is thru Kirkuk.

Some peshmergas take me to the front lines of the war against ISIS. I find myself in the Taza area, just south of Kirkuk, on the road to Baghdad.

According to them, very few journalists come here. Some even said that I was the only one they saw. Nonetheless, it is a key strategic location. It is very dangerous there since Kirkuk is divided: Kurds in the north, ISIS in the south. All along the front lines you can see different units roaming about little traditional houses. Some are kept by old Kurdish vets from the 1980s wars.

Many vets have returned to war, despite being well past middle-aged and having children and grandchildren. Some even behind comfortable lives in Europe to come back, like a Swiss colonel I met. For them, it is their duty to fight for their region. Despite being autonomous and having a large secessionist movement, Kurdistan is not recognized as a state distinct from Iraq. "Some terrorists come along and now the whole world calls them the 'Islamic State'," complains one peshmerga, "For decades we have been trying to make the state of Kurdistan and we've gotten nothing!"

They have very few weapons, most of them are pre-Cold War AK47s. Some even date back to 1960. They still work, but the Kurdish forces ask for more efficient guns since ISIS has the latest weapons taken (or given) from the Iraqi army who in turn was supplied by coalition forces.

Many vets have only one working eye. The other was lost in previous wars. Once night falls, it becomes very difficult to monitor the 1000km long border. They don't even have night vision equipment.

Last week it rained for 5 days, and it was impossible to see or hear anything. Some ISIS guys tried to gain territory, but the Kurds successfully fought them off. Their 4 wheel drives were stuck in the mud while ISIS's brand new hummers were able to move about without issue. From the front line you can see ISIS flags. Since they told me to pack light, I didn't bring a zoom lens. Sorry! You can see the smoke from their kitchen and even see men running from house to house.

ISIS is only 500 meters from the Kurdish position but nobody seems afraid. Peshmergas know that death is part of their fate, and even if they look like an army from another century, they will defend themselves and their country to the very end. For them, it is the highest honor to die for Kurdistan.

They protect the Baghdad road, but a few weeks ago lost it. After heavy fighting, they regained it, killing 3 Chechen ISIS fighters in the process.

Since peshmergas don't have armored cars, it is very dangerous for them to go around safely.

The car I took to go on the front lines was very slow and made in the 80s. If we were chased by ISIS cars, we wouldn't have stood a chance. In one day, all the materiel I saw included AK47s, a tank, an RPG, and a few gun old machines. Even if the peshmergas say that this equipment works well, they are disappointed not to receive new ones, as Europe and USA promised.

The day after my visit, France made lot of bombings in the area, as ISIS was too close. Peshmergas take a lot of pictures, not only for souvenirs, but also to fight ISIS on the new front: social media.

They fear the roads they do not know well as ISIS pays the local farmers to put mines. Even in times of war, peshmergas are among the most welcoming people in the world. They regularly offer food and drinks.

When it was time for me to go back to the safety of Erbil, circumstances changed. The north road was closed because of an ISIS attack. The only way out was to send me through the south road that crossed Kirkuk. Let's just say that safety there was not ideal. I had to hide my camera, and we crossed Kirkuk with an escort of armed peshmergas and a civilian car.

The soldiers were all nervous since Kirkuk is very dangerous, especially at the check points. As soon as a car was driving next to ours for too long, they were shouting at the driver to go away.

If a man was crossing the road too slowly, they threatened to hit him. These methods, employed by ISIS suicide bombers, have claimed the lives of hundreds in Kirkuk.

Once on the Kurdish side, they found a Kurdish taxi driver to bring me safely back to Erbil.

eric lafforgue

[lafforgue@mac.com](mailto:lafforgue@mac.com)

[www.ericlafforgue.com](http://www.ericlafforgue.com)