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THE TURKISH ARMY EXTENDS THE TEMPORARY SECURITY ZONES IN THREE KURDISH PROVINCES

ON 7 September the Turkish Army, affirmed, in a communiqué, that it had extended for three months the duration of the “temporary security zones” in the provinces of Siirt, Sirnak and Hakkari. They had been set up for three months on 9 June. The Turkish General Staff states that these zones, to which all access is forbid-

den to civilians, will remain in force till 10 December. Moreover the Pan-Arab daily, Al-Quds al-Arabi reports, in its 13 September issue, that Turkey has begun excavation work along the Iraqi Kurdistan border so as to build a separating wall cutting Turkish Kurdistan off from the South. According to the paper, the cost of this work will be about

\$3.2 billion (3.0 billion euros). The wall will be 473 Km long and will consist of a first wall of reinforced concrete backed by an electronic fence equipped with alarms, the paper specified.

Moreover, on 28 September, after several days’ negotiations, Baghdad and Ankara signed an agreement to cooperate against the PKK. The agreement, broadcast live by the public TV channel, was signed by the Iraqi Minister of the Interior, Jawad


al-Bolani, and his Turkish opposite number Besir Atalay. Baghdad, however, rejected Turkey's wishes for carrying out military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Iraqi government made the point that it had no intention of sending troops to hunt down the PKK in a region over which, moreover, it has virtually no control. The Iraqi Kurds, for their part, have already made known their opposition to any invasion of their territory or the extradition to Turkey of PKK leaders on their land. The United States also opposed any such military operations, Washington fearing that they might destabilise the region of Kurdistan, which is relatively calm, compared with the violence raging in the rest of the country.

Clashes have increased since the beginning of the year, plunging Turkish and Kurdish public opinion in turmoil. On 29 September, in the bloodiest attack of recent years, thirteen people were killed and two others injured. The first report of 12 deaths was increased the next day by the discovery of the body of a 7 year-old child nearby. The attack occurred at about 2 pm GMT near the small town of Beytussebab, in Sirnak province. According to the local governor, Selahattin Apari, members of the PKK are said to have machine-gunned a minibus, mainly carrying civilians. Amongst the dead was a *mukhtar*, or village chief, and his four sons, all "*village guards*". This ambush recalls similar attacks against civilians in the first

years of the PKK insurrection. "*Village guards*" are a Kurdish militia, recruited and armed by Ankara "*to ensure the protection of villages*". According to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, this attack shows that the organisation is in "*dire straits*" because of Army operations. PKK activities seem to extend beyond Near Eastern borders. Thus, on 28 September, an official of the Kazakhstan Intelligence Services

announced to *Kazakhstan Today* that twelve people had been stripped of their Kazakh citizenship for having joined the ex-PKK. About forty Kurds are said to have left Kazakhstan between 1995 and 1999 to join that organisation. Descended from Kurds deported there in Stalin's time, the Kurds of Kazakhstan form a community of some 50,000 people, strongly attached to their language and culture.

THE US SENATE PASSES A RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING THE CREATION, IN IRAQ, OF "A FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT AND FEDERAL REGIONS"

 ON 26 September, the US Senate passed by 75 votes to 23, a non-mandatory resolution on the division of Iraq into three regions on a communal basis: Shiite in the South, Sunni in the Centre and Kurdish in the North. This resolution calls for the division of Iraq into federal regions, under the control of the three communities, in the context of a power-sharing agreement similar to that which had ended the war in Bosnia in the 90s. The US democrat-dominated Senate's resolution, recommends in Iraq the creation "*of a federal government system (...) and of federal regions*" asking President George W. Bush to seek the support of the international community to ensure the success of this idea. According to its defenders, this plan is the only solution for putting an end to the violence shaking Iraq. It is sponsored by Democ-

atic Senator and White House candidate, Joseph Biden, who presented it as the political key that would allow the withdrawal of American troops while preventing chaos. The Iraqi Kurdistan regional government warmly welcomed this American resolution as "*the only viable solution to Iraq's problems*". This resolution is a call "*to rebuild the Iraqi State on a Federal basis*", rejoiced the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government. "*A federal solution for the Iraqi State does not mean division, but rather a voluntary union*", the Kurdish authorities maintained. The resolution is, however, just a simple Parliamentary proposal and in no way commits the US Administration.

The division of the country into distinct federal States on the basis of the different communities is, however, rejected by President Bush's

Administration. Thus the Iraqi Prime Minister hopes that Parliament should meet as soon as possible so as formally to reject, by a vote of its members, the US Senate's proposals. The US Senate's vote also provoked widespread condemnation on the international scene from Iran, the Gulf State monarchies, the Arab League, the Islamic Conference Organisation and France. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that unites six Arab countries allied to the United States also criticised the resolution.

The Iraq Sunni Arabs and some of the Shiites see in the development of federalism a prelude to partitioning the country. The Shiites, who control the major part of the country's oil revenue, oppose such a measure that would weaken the territorial integrity of Iraq, which they effectively control at the moment. The Sunni Arabs live in an area with little or no proven oil reserves.

On 16 September, a two-party delegation of four US Senators, had visited Iraqi Kurdistan to meet the President, Massud Barzani, and see for themselves the political and economic development of the Kurdish region. Thus Mr. Barzani met Mr. Max Baucus, Democratic Senator for Montana, Mrs. Olympia Snowe, Republican Senator for Maine, Mr. Ben Nielson, Democratic Senator for Nebraska and Mr. Ken Salazar, Democratic Senator for Colorado. They discussed the efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government

(KRG) for development, the infrastructure projects, and the situation in Iraq. The Kurdish President stressed that a federal solution was essential to create a viable Iraq and that the rest of the country could well take the reconstruction drawn up by the KRG as an example. He pointed out that the Kurdish was working very closely with the central government in Baghdad to reach mutually satisfactory solu-

tions to problems they share. He added that he hoped that the Petraeus/Crocker report noted the good security and development situations in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Minister responsible for the KRG's Foreign Affairs Department, Falah Mustafa Bakir, for his part stressed that such a visit was also important for understanding the many opportunities that Kurdistan offered for direct foreign investments.

IRBIL DEMANDS THE RESIGNATION OF THE IRAQI OIL MINISTER

IN 13 September, the government of Iraqi Kurdistan called for the resignation of the Iraqi Oil Minister, accusing him of meddling in the internal affairs of the region because of remarks he made about an oil contract signed by the Kurds. The Kurdish executive "rejects the declarations made by Minister Hussein Shahrستاني and calls for his immediate resignation", declared the government's spokesman, Khalid Saleh, during a press conference in Irbil. In the course of an OPEC meeting in Vienna on 10 September, Mr. Shahrستاني described as "illegal" an oil exploration contract signed early in September by the Kurdistan government with an American company. "What happens in Kurdistan is none of Mr. Shahrستاني's business", "he would do better to devote himself to more positive matters on the country's behalf rather than undermining the efforts of the Kurdistan government in

favour of the Iraqi people", declared Mr. Saleh. The Oil Minister "has no authority for calling into question the legality of contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (...)", he considered. "He would be better employed dealing with the oil smuggling that is going on under his very eyes as well as the difficulties he has made for himself over the new oil legislation", continued the spokesman. Otherwise "he had better resign and leave his job to someone else, because the Iraqi oil industry deserves something better", he added. Moreover, the spokesman accused Mr. Shahrستاني of having put pressure on Turkey and Iran so as to stop both countries supplying Iraqi Kurdistan with petrol and refined oil products, which shows up "the depth of his grudge against the Kurdish people".

Early in September the Kurdistan Regional Government announced the signature, of a contract with a

local subsidiary of US companies, Hurd Oil Company of Dallas and Impulse Energy Corporation (IEC), for exploring oilfields in the Kurdish province of Duhok. This was the first contract signed by the Kurdish Regional Government since the Kurdish Parliament passed new oil and gas legislation at the beginning of August.

Furthermore, the Iraqi National Parliament is examining, for its part, a controversial Oil Bill, already approved by the government in July. The Iraqi Kurdistan government has opposed to this Bill ever since an amendment was added, *“stipulating that oil exploration contracts will fall within the competence of the central government”*. Considered by Washington as a point essential to national reconciliation in Iraq, this Bill, aiming at an equitable sharing of oil revenues between the 18 provinces constitutes one of the most sensitive issues in this country that is sitting on the third largest reserves of black gold

On 8 September, the Iraqi Oil Ministry declared that Iraq aimed at increasing its oil production to 3 million barrels a day (mbd) in 2008 and to 6 mbd with the next ten years. The aim is to increase present day production, which is just under 2.5 mbd, to 3 mbd in 2008. Meeting this objective requires an improvement in the oil industry's infrastructures, building a new pipeline in the East and other pipelines for exporting oil to neighbouring countries as

well as new oil terminals South of the existing one in Basra. The Iraqi oil industry is suffering from several decades of under-investment, largely due to 13 years of UN sanctions, imposed after the Gulf war (1990-

91) while Saddam Hussein was in power. The Iraqi oil industry must, moreover, must deal with the insecurity that still reigns while *“about fifty oilfields are waiting to be worked”* declared Mr. Shahrastani.

TEHERAN CLOSES ITS BORDERS WITH IRAQI KURDISTAN

IRAN has decided to close its borders with Kurdistan in protest at the capture, by the US Army in this region, of an Iranian the Americans accuse of being an agent involved in the supply of arms to Iraqis. On 24 September, Teheran announced the closing of five border crossing points between Kermanshah (Iranian Kurdistan) and Iraqi Kurdistan. This measure, if prolonged, could have serious consequences for Iraqi Kurdistan — but also for those Iranian firms that trade with Kurdistan, according to Kurdish officials and experts. *“The price of closing the borders will be paid by both sides — by the Iraqis and by the Iranians, because Kurdistan is Kurdistan is a growing market for Iranian products”*, explained Mohamed Salman, head of the Economics Department of Irbil University. The bulk of the foodstuffs, domestic and electronic appliances come from Iran the Kurdish merchants point out.

The Kurdish Trade Minister, Mohammed Rauf, pointed out that the volume of Iran's trade with Iraqi

Kurdistan was a billion dollars. *“Kurdistan is a major trading of Iran, an important outlet for Iranian goods”*, recalled for his part the Director General of the Kurdish Trade Ministry, Aziz Ibrahim. He stressed, before the Suleimaniyah press, that this measure would affect the activity of firms on both sides of the border. *“Nearly 120 Iranian companies, mostly active on reconstruction sites, are working in Iraqi Kurdistan”* he pointed out.

According to the US authorities, the Iranian arrested was a member of the elite Quds Force, a branch of the Guardians of the Revolution, who brings arms into Iraq. Teheran denied these accusations, stating that the man arrested on 20 September, Mahmudi Farhadi, was an official working for the Iranian province of Kermanshah. The Iranian authorities demanded his release, as did Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who was concerned *“for the prosperity of the Kurdistan region”*. In a communiqué published on 21 September, the Kurdistan Regional Government stated that it consid-

ered "this action by American soldiers to be illegal". According to the Kurdish government, the Iranian delegation had come to Iraq with an official invitation. It arrived in Suleimaniyah on 18 September to develop cross-border trade. Washington regularly accuses Teheran of supporting militia who are fighting US troops by supplying them with armour-piercing booby traps. Iran has always refuted such charges. On 28 August, the US Army detained a group of Iranians, employed by the Iranian Fuel and Power, for questioning in a major Baghdad hotel for several hours. The US Army still holds five Iranians, arrested on 11 January 2007 in Iraqi Kurdistan, accused of helping terrorists. Teheran insists that they are diplomats.

Moreover, the local Kurdish authorities declared that, on 26 September, after the closing of the frontier, Iranian troops fired shells that exploded several kilometres inside the borders, in the Haj Umran sector, North-East of Irbil. In an interview on Iranian television on 23 September, General Yahia Rahim Safavi, military advisor of the Supreme Guide, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, confirmed that Iranian artillery had shelled Kurdish fighters of the Free Life in Kurdistan Party (PEJAK). The general's remarks, spoken in Persian, were directly translated into English by the channel. General Safavi explained that Teheran did not consider their activities "a great threat" but "their schemes, carried out

by small groups or 4 or 5 men, created insecurity". Iran had, however, denied, in response to accusations by local Kurdish authorities, being the perpetrator of strikes in Iraqi Kurdistan. On 3 September, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mehdi Mostafavi, declared, "Iran categorically denies any shelling in Northern Iraq. Teheran has already, in the past, officially replied to such allegations". In August, Iraqi Kurdistan officials had stated that several hundreds of Kurdish villagers had taken the road to escape this shelling by the Iranian Army. Hussein Ahmed, head of the Qalaa Diza district had declared, "some 150 families have fled from their villages".

The Iranian province of Western Azerbaijan, which has a large Kurdish population, is the scene of regular clashes between the Iranian Army and PEJAK activists. On 3

September, the state television announced that Seven Iranian police had been killed in a shoot out between security forces and "rebels" in the Kurdish province of Kermanshah. Mid-August, six members of the elite Guardians of the Revolution were killed and five others wounded when their helicopter crashed during operations in Northwest Iran near the Iraqi borders. According to the semi-official news agency Mehr, the incident occurred during an operation against PEJAK. In February, 14 Iranian troops, including two leading members of the Guardians of the Revolution, were killed when another helicopter crashed during operations close to the Turkish border. Iran has signed an agreement with Turkey to fight the PKK. In return, Ankara is committed to fight the principal Iranian armed opposition group, the People's Mujahiddin.

BAGHDAD: THE AL-MALIKI GOVERNMENT LOSES ITS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT

ON 18 September, the Pentagon reported to Congress on its concerns regarding the poor political progress achieved in Iraq, considering that the improvement in security was insufficient to pacify the country. "There has been little political progress at national level in terms of laws passed and of carrying out of reforms", the report indicates. "The efforts (...) to find a consensus are still complicated by sectarian divisions and the violence

resulting from these divisions", the report continues. Furthermore, a report published on 5 September by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) an official independent (i.e. non-party) organisation sent by Congress on a fact finding mission, considered that 11 of the 18 political and security objectives set by Congress have not been achieved, that 4 had been partly achieved and only three fully reached. These figures, contained in

the final report, are slightly less pessimistic than those contained in an interim report by the GAO. Initially this body had assessed that 13 of the 18 objectives had not been achieved and only two partly and three fully achieved. Between the two versions of the report, the GAO had upgraded two of the objectives from the “unachieved” to the “partly achieved” level — after insistent approaches by the White House. In the view of this body, only three of the 18 objectives had been fully achieved: the setting up of joint security posts in Baghdad, ensuring Human Rights for minorities in the Iraqi Parliament and creating support committees for the Baghdad security plan. Amongst those not achieved are such important points as: ensuring that the Iraqi security forces ensure security in an equitable manner, reducing sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminate the control of local security by the militia or again to increase the number of Iraqi security forces capable of independent action.

Since its formation in May 2006, Nuri al-Maliki’s cabinet has been undermined by divisions between Sunni Arabs and Shiites — but also by the struggle being waged by the principal Iraqi Shiite organisations (all of which have powerful armed militia) for influence and control over their community — which makes up the majority of the country’s population. This situation has prevented Parliament from passing a number of reforms desired by the

United States, in a strategic law on the privatisation of oil extraction and on the sharing of oil revenues between the 18 Iraqi provinces. In this context, the organisation led by the young Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, withdrew its support for the Prime Minister’s government, already undermined by dissension. The movement confirmed, at Najaf, that it was leaving the coalition that gives Mr. Maliki a majority in Parliament, the Iraqi Unified Alliance (IUA). In any case, these Sadrist ministers had been boycotting the government since April. They were demanding, in particular, a timetable for the withdrawal of the Americans and an improvement in public services. The IUA, which so far had ensured a majority in Parliament for Mr. Maliki’s government (with the support of independent Shiites and Kurds) was made up of three organisations: Moqtada Sadr’s movement, the Prime Minister’s own Dawa Party and the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). A fourth Shiite organisation, Fadhila, had already withdrawn from the coalition some months ago. Moqtada Sadr’s decision complicates the task of the Prime Minister, whose “National Unity” government is already being boycotted by nearly half of its 40 ministers. With the withdrawal of the Sadrists, Mr. Maliki sees the number of members of parliament supporting him reduced to 136, thus losing the majority (138) of the 275 members. His allies, however, are still more

numerous than the opposition (127) — themselves extremely divided. Parliament includes 12 independents.

Increasingly weakened, subjected to great pressure from the United States, for whom he is carrying out a national reconciliation, the Prime Minister has several times announced his intention of reshuffling his team, without it being followed through, at least to date. Mid-August he had announced the formation of a new coalition composed of the two Shiite parties, Dawa and SCIRI, and the two main Kurdish parties — the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, to try and draw Iraq out of its political crisis. Mr. Maliki had also made repeated gestures to the Sunni Arab parties to secure their participation.

On 5 September, accused of being unable to fulfil the objectives of national reconciliation which he was given, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, went to Najaf to meet the Great ayatollah, Ali al-Sistani, the highest spiritual authority of the Shiite community and principal supporter Mr. Maliki’s Shiite organisation. The two men discussed the government crisis, almost half of whose ministers have resigned because of disagreements within the community. “I asked him for help in forming a government and in appointing ministers. I also asked him if it would be possible to form a new government solely made up of technocrats”. In

the context of efforts of reconciliation to put an end to sectarian violence, Ayatollah Sistani and Vice-President al-Hashemi met on 26 September, for the first time. "He told me that his heart was full of sorrow over what had happened in Iraq", indicated the Sunni Arab Vice-President, who is also the head of an Islamic party, following the meeting. The Vice-President has recently launched an initiative, "the Iraqi National Understanding", which lays down 25 principals that should serve as a basis for reconciling the different protagonists in the crisis. "I showed him the document and Sistani took out the version he had in his pocket. He told me that he had read it and supported it in general, but had some remarks to make", added Mr. Hashemi, without divulging their nature.

Moreover, on 11 September the US State Department announced that Turkey would host a conference on the security and future of Iraq late in October, which will be attended by the Moslem countries of the region. This conference of neighbouring countries, the third of its kind, will be aimed at securing commitment from the countries on means of stabilising the country. During a similar meeting in May at Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt, the countries bordering on Iraq had committed themselves to preventing radical activists from entering Iraq. On 9 September, speaking at the opening of a conference organised in Baghdad covering representative of neighbouring countries and those of

the Near East as well as the United Nations and the G-8, the Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari urged those countries bordering on Iraq to prevent "the terrorists and killers" from entering his country, warning that the violence in Iraq could conta-

minate the whole region. "Despite the emphasis on national reconciliation, we must also be reconciled with our neighbours, with the international community as a whole", declared Hoshyar Zebari.

THE TURKISH GENERALS CONTINUE TO POUR SCORN ON THE TURKISH PRIME MINISTER AND PRESIDENT, FROM THE ISLAMIC AKP PARTY

IN 5 September, the Turkish Parliament passed a vote of confidence in the new Ankara government that emerged from the 22 July General Elections, thus opening the way for the liberal reforms desired by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Speaker of the Parliament, Koksal Toptan, made the point that 337 members had voted in favour of the confidence motion with 197 against. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has 341 of the 550 seats in Parliament since its election victory. "Reinforcing democracy and social protection will be the principal objectives of our government", declared Mr. Erdogan to the House after the vote. "Our guideline will be to establish no discrimination between our citizens and to spread justice to all the regions", he added — probably alluding to the Kurdish provinces.

The new government had made the revision of the constitution one of its priorities. The government's plan is

to replace the country's existing Constitution, drafted by the military junta after the 1980 *coup d'état* by one that would allow the Islamic headscarf to be worn in universities. This, however, has provoked a violent debate round this ultra-sensitive subject. The Turkish President, Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, both from the Justice and Development Party (AKP), an offshoot of the Islamic movement, have declared themselves in favour of abolishing the ban on wearing this headscarf in university campuses, which has been strictly applied till now. Since it's coming to office in 2002, the AKP has wished to lift this ban but, at each attempt, as come up against the Turkish Army's sharp opposition. Today, strengthened by its incontestable election victory, with 46% of the total vote, the AKP now wishes to carry out its election promises with a new legal framework that would replace the present Constitution, imposed in 1982, two

years after the Army's putch, but several times amended since. In 2005, the European Court for Human Rights had upheld the ban on wearing the headscarf in Universities, which also applies to the Civil Service.

While the AKP's jurists and leading activists argue the justification of this repeal in their proposed new constitution, the two leaders have affirmed that the ban is a violation of individual freedom. *"The right to higher education cannot be restricted because of the clothing that a young woman wears"*, declared Mr. Erdogan in an interview published on 19 September in the *Financial Times*. *"Such a problem does not exist in Western societies, but it does exist in Turkey and I believe that it is the first duty of those who are involved in politics to resolve the problem"*, he added. The Army, the senior judiciary and the rectors of the universities consider that wearing the headscarf is an act of defiance to the regime of so-called *"Turkish secularism"*. *"It is better for them (veiled or covered up women) to go to university than to stay at home and be isolated from social life"*, declared Mr. Gul to the liberal daily *Milliyet*. *"We must look at the issue from the standpoint of individual freedom"*, he indicated. Mr. Gul insisted that abolishing the ban would not lead to an outbreak of pressure on women who do not wear this head cover. Mr. Erdogan indicated that the draft Constitution would be discussed by society before being presented to Parliament, probably at

the end of the year. The wives of both these leaders wear the headscarf, as do their daughters. Mr. Gul's daughter was obliged to wear a wig so as to complete her studies in Turkey, while Mr. Erdogan's daughters went to the United States for their higher education.

Abdullah Gul was elected Head of State by Parliament, to the great displeasure of the Army, which has been trying for months to prevent the former Foreign Minister from becoming President — and thereby becoming Commander in Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces... Furthermore, General Yasar Buyukanit, Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces General Staff, was absent from Mr. Gul's official investiture in Parliament on 28 August, and the next day did not salute the Head of State, as required by protocol, at a military celebration. The Turkish Army also refused to invite the country's First lady, who wears the Islamic headscarf, to the Army's Victory Day ceremonies or the march past to celebrate the Turkish victory, on 30 August 1922, over the Greeks forces. On the eve of his election, General Buyukanit had denounced, in a Victory Day communiqué, *"centres of evil that are systematically trying to erode the country's secular structure"* and insisted that *"the Armed forces (...) would make no concessions"*.

On 11 September, for his first journey to the provinces, the new Turkish President visited Turkish Kurdistan — a visit intended to strengthen the links between the

central authorities and this economically underprivileged region, according to his entourage. During his tour, Mr. Gul visited Van, and four other Kurdish provinces: Hakkari, Sirnak, Siirt and Diyarbakir. In these provinces, torn by decades of violence, the level of unemployment is the highest of all Turkey. Following the 22 July elections, about twenty Kurdish members were elected to the Turkish Parliament, from which they had been driven in the 90s. They support the Party for a Democratic Society (DTP), the principal pro-Kurdish organisation, which affirms its desire for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem and calls for a strengthening of the political and cultural rights of the Kurdish people. The DTP secured entry into Parliament despite all the pressures and obstacles set up against the party. Its members continue to be active under conditions severely limited by the legislation and police and judicial harassment. Thus nine of its members were arrested on 9 September for remarks ruled to be *"illicit"*. These nine activists face several years' imprisonment under the Turkish penal code that punishes any support of *"terrorism"*. *"No one can expect us to describe our children as terrorists"*, declared Sabahat Tuncel, DTP member of Parliament during a rally at Batman.

Furthermore, on 18 September, Abdullah Gul made his first visit *"abroad"* as Head of State, going to Cyprus, where the Turkish Army

still deploys 40,000 soldiers. He was greeted by the president of the "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus", an entity that is not recognised by the international community. The island has been divided into two parts, the Greek Cypriot South and the Turkish Cypriot North for the last 33 years. In 1974, the Turkish Army invaded the North following

an attempted coup d'état by ultra-nationalist Greeks. Mr. Gul called on the international community to lift the economic restrictions imposed on the North — the Greek Cypriot State (internationally recognised) described this visit as a provocation and snub to the European Union.

days hearing of witnesses. When the hearing were resumed, an anonymous witness, speaking from behind a black screen, told how his son was executed on 25 March 1991, in the Basra football stadium. His other son, who was also a prisoner at the time, told him the circumstances of his son's death. "The people were executed in the stadium in groups of 25. Almost 200 were killed in all. Ali al-Majid was there when they killed the first group of 25. He left leaving orders to kill all the others", declared the witness. "I was not present in Basra", denied Chemical Ali vehemently. He was thin and tired and entered the court supporting himself on a cane. "You weren't there yourself, you didn't see anything", he shouted at the witness. Up to 100,000 Shiites were massacred in March 1991 by the Republican Guard, following the uprising against Saddam Hussein in the South of the country, encouraged by the US President, George Bush Senior. In the course of earlier hearings, a witness, Laila Kathum, had accused Chemical Ali of having killed both her sons by personally throwing them from a helicopter while in flight. Nearly 90 victims of this repression are due to give evidence before this court.

THE TRIAL OF "CHEMICAL ALI" IS RESUMED, THIS TIME FOR HIS ROLE IN THE MASSACRE OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SHIITES IN 1991

ON 24 September, the trial of one of Saddam Hussein's most bloodthirsty associates, Ali Hassan al-Majid, already sentenced to death, began in Baghdad with fresh witnesses. He is charged for his role in the massacre of tens of thousands of Shiites in Southern Iraq in 1991. The hearing opened in the premises of the Special Iraqi High Court, in Baghdad's Green Zone, in the presence of Ali Hassan al-Majid alias "Chemical Ali" and his 14 fellow accused. "Chemical Ali" is charged with crimes against humanity during the bloody repression of a Shiite uprising in 1991, He was then in command of the Republican Guard divisions in the South of the country and was also Minister of the Interior and Minister of Defence. A cousin of Saddam Hussein, he earned his nickname from his extensive use of chemical weapons against the Kurds in the 80s — crimes for which he has already been sentenced to death.

His appeal against this was rejected on 4 September and, under Iraqi law, he is due to be hanged within 30 days. He had been found guilty of "genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity", alongside Sultan Hashim Ahmad al-Tai, former Minister of Defence, and Hussein Rashid Mohammad for their role in the massacre of 180,000 Kurdish civilians during the "Anfal" operation. He has shown no sign or remorse, justifying the massacres in Kurdistan and openly claiming full responsibility. "I am the one who ordered the Army to destroy villages (...) I have no need to defend myself or apologise. I have committed no offence", he had retorted to his judges. "Thank God" he had simply exclaimed on 24 June when his death sentence was announced.

Regarding the repression of the Shiite insurrection in 1991, his trial and that of his 14 co-defenders was adjourned on 23 August after three

Nevertheless, on 7 September, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani indicated that he would not sign the order to execute Saddam Hussein's former Defence Minister, already sentenced to death by the Iraqi court and due for execution in thirty days time.

Sultan Hashim al-Tai and two other dignitaries of the Saddam Hussein regime, sentenced to death for their role in the campaign of mass execution and chemical bombing carried out in Kurdistan during the 80s had their appeals rejected on 4 September. All three are due to be hanged within 30 days, under Iraqi law,

which also requires the order of execution to be signed by three members of the Presidency. In December 2006 President Talabani had refused to sign the order to execute Saddam Hussein, declaring he was opposed to capital punishment. The ex-dictator was hanged on 26 December.

offence thieves had a hand amputated in Mashad (North-East). These amputations, provided for by law, are rather rare in Iran, but several cases have been reported in the press in recent months.

IRAN: THE INCREASINGLY REPRESSIVE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC ACCELERATES THE RATE OF EXECUTION BY PUBLIC HANGINGS

THE authorities have ensured the greater visibility of these executions by hanging, for example, two men found guilty of murdering a judge in the centre of Teheran last month. This was the first execution to be carried out in public in the Iranian capital in five years. In just the month of August, 17 detainees were hanged in public and 11 others in prison. The hangings, which are often carried out using a crane, bring to total number of hangings this year to 201, according to a record kept by AFP on the basis of news published in the press and witnesses. The Islamic Republic has accelerated the rate of execution in the last few months. By way of comparison, at least 177 people were executed in 2006, according to Amnesty International and at least 81 in 2005 according to AFP. Treason, spying, murder, armed assault, drug trafficking, rape, sodomy, adultery, prostitution and

apostasy are all punishable by death in Iran.

On 5 September, the Iranian authorities hanged 21 condemned people, of whom 17 were executed at dawn in the province of Khorassan-Razavi (North-Eastern Iran) according to official media. The 17 executed in Khorassan-Razavi were described as "*corruptions of the earth*" and found guilty of drug peddling, declared a police spokesman on the State television channel. Four other people were executed in Shiraz (Central Iran) they were found guilty of possessing arms, drug trafficking and armed assault against members of the police and were hanged in public in the city, according to the *Fars* news agency. Moreover 7 drug traffickers were hanged at Mahan on 12 September in Kerman province, in Southern Iran as well as a man found guilty of murder in the province of Hormozgan (South). Moreover, four second-

Furthermore, on 10 September, the Teheran province police chief, Reza Zarei, announced that the Iranian police have warned over 110,000 women who were incorrectly covered up since the beginning of a campaign, launched in April, to enforce observance of Islamic morals. "*Since the beginning of the campaign* (21 April) *the police has issued 113,454 warnings for incorrect wearing of the veil*" in Teheran province, declared General Zarei, as quoted by the Iranian press. He adds that 5,700 people, including 1,400 men were obliged to attend classes in good morals and that 1,600 women have been brought before the courts. Iranian women, like foreign women, have to observe the rules regarding wearing of headgear, ever since the Islamic revolution of 1979. The declared objective of the campaign, which is also aimed at perpetrators of violent actions, is to "improve the physical and moral security of society". The Iranian police chief, General Esmail Ahmadi Mogadam, declared that a "new phase of the campaign would be beginning after the month of Ramadan", which ends on 12 October next.

Moreover, on 25 September, a spokesman of the Iranian Ministry

of Justice, Mohammad Shadabi, announced that Iran has released the Iranian-American pacifist activist, Ali Shakeri, after four months detention. This is the fourth US citizen to be released by Teheran

since August. He was accused of wanting to foment a revolution. *"He was released last night against a bail of one million rials (about 77,900 euros) and a judge has authorised him to leave the country"*, stated the spokesman.

IRAQ: SEPTEMBER WAS THE LEAST BLOODY MONTH OF THE YEAR FOR CIVILIANS

ACCORDING to the Iraqi government's official figures, civilian losses caused by violence in Iraq fell by nearly 50% in September compared with the month before, which makes it the least murderous month for civilians this year. According to these statistics, provided by the Ministries of Health, the Interior and Defence, 884 civilians were killed in Iraq in September as against 1,773 in August. In all, 850 civilians were injured, which is also an improvement on the 1,559 injured recorded in August. This assessment is the lowest since Washington deployed 30,000 additional troops in Iraq. The US Army let it be known on 30 September that violence committed in Ramadan had dropped 38% compared with the same period last year.

Losses in the ranks of the US Army in September also reached the lowest monthly figures for 2007, with 71 deaths. This is the lowest figure since July 2006, when 53 deaths were recorded in the US Army's ranks. This also marks a drop since

the beginning of summer: 120 soldiers were killed in May, 93 in June, 82 in July and 79 in August. US Army officers attribute this drop in army losses to the security campaign launched in Baghdad in mid-February, which was then extended to several unstable sectors surrounding the capital. With the deaths of three soldiers in separate incidents on 29 September, the total of American deaths since the beginning of US operations in Iraq in March 2003 is now 3,802 soldiers, according to official American figures. The heaviest monthly casualty figure for US troops was November 2004, with 137 deaths while the battle to capture Fallujah, West of Baghdad, was raging. Prior to this the month of April 2004 was particularly violent with 135 US troops killed in an earlier attempt to take Fallujah and uprisings in Shiite towns South of Baghdad.

Furthermore, on 29 September, officials of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Iraq would ask the UN Security Council to extend the mandate of the US-led multi-

national force (which at present stands at 160,000 men) for only one more year, until the end of 2008. According to these officials, Iraq would then seek to reach a long-term bi-lateral agreement with the United States like those Washington has with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Egypt. In his speech to the UN General Assembly, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, declared on 26 September, that, for his part, the stabilisation of Iraq was still a long way off. Moreover, he reminded the countries neighbouring on Iraq, the disastrous consequences for all that would come of the propagation of violence in the region. *"We have warned all the countries of the region that the continuous flow of arms, capital, suicide bombers as well as the increasing numbers of fatwas preaching hatred and murder can only have disastrous consequences for the peoples of the region and the world"*, he declared. The US President reminded Mr. Maliki that the Iraqi government should make more efforts towards national reconciliation. Talking to the Iraqi Prime Minister on the fringe of the General Assembly, Bush encouraged him to get parliament to pass laws aiming at bringing the Iraqi communities close together. Success in this area would allow Washington to delegate part of its security mission to the Iraqi forces and this enable it to bring back part of its forces. On 3 September, the British army started to leave the city of Basra in the context of a process that should result,

eventually, in handing control of the province over to Iraq and the withdrawal of British forces from the country. This withdrawal marks the end of British presence in the city, but the British forces should nevertheless retain a "supervisory" role and continue to train Iraqi security forces and guard the main supply

lines from nearby Kuwait. Great Britain has already handed over control of three other provinces in Southern Iraq. The total number of British troops in Iraq is due to go down from 5,500 to 5,000 by the end of the year. Since the start of the intervention in Iraq, 159 British troops have died in the country.

before several hundreds of marines. "These decisions are based on a calm evaluation of the on the spot conditions by the army command and not on the feverish reactions to Washington politicians to the opinion poll results in the media", he explained. "When we begin reducing our strengths in Iraq, we will do it from a position of strength, not one of fear and failure. Acting otherwise would encourage our enemies and increase the probability that they would attack us on our land", he added. Mr. Bush left Iraq on the Presidential plane Air Force One to attend the APEC summit in Australia.

AS WELL AS ...

• **GEORGE BUSH MAKES A SURPRISE VISIT TO AL-ANBAR PROVINCE OF IRAQ.** On 3 September, the US President George W. Bush made a surprise visit to Iraq, and to a province that is symbolic for the White House. Accompanied by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Mr. Bush arrived early in the afternoon at an air base 180 Km West of Baghdad, where Defence Secretary Robert Gates and several senior Army officers were waiting for him. This immense US base lies in the heart of al-Anbar province, the theatre of the most dangerous operation for the GIs.

The decision to meet Iraqi representatives in Anbar province is highly symbolic. The US Army has been working, for several months, on a strategy of alliance with local tribal chiefs to fight the Iraqi branch of al-Qaida, a strategy that has enabled it to record "some remarkable success", according to the national

Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley. This surprise visit of a few hours to Iraq took place on the very day that Great Britain undertook a highly symbolic withdrawal from Basra, Iraq's second largest city.

The US President, speaking a few days before General David Petraeus, Commander of US forces in Iraq and Ryan Crocker, US Ambassador to Iraq, presented their evaluation of the situation, renewed his support for Iraqi Prime Minister despite rising criticism in Washington. He met Mr. Maliki on the al-Assad base with some members of his government and tribal leaders of this Sunni Arab region. The US President was making his third visit to Iraq since the intervention in March 2003. This was "the last major meeting of the president's military advisers and Iraqi leaders before the president decided on the course to follow", according to a Pentagon spokesman. The US President also raised the question of strengths

• **FEAR OF A CHOLERA OUTBREAK IN KURDISTAN.** On 21 September, the World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed that over 1,500 People had caught cholera in Iraq, where an epidemic has spread. In all, 29,000 cases of diarrhoea have been recorded by the Iraqi authorities, of which 1,500 are confirmed cases of cholera, declared a WHO official. A Week earlier the WHO had spoken of 16,000 cases of acute diarrhoea in the Kurdish provinces of Suleimaniyah, Kirkuk and Irbil.

At the end of August Zeruyan Othman, Minister of Health of the Kurdistan Regional Government, had confirmed, at a press conference, 35 cases of cholera infection have been identified in Suleimaniyah province and 47 in Kirkuk. Mr. Othman had pointed out that 4,000 cases remained suspect, as they were suf-

fering from acute diarrhoea. Cholera, one of the deadliest illnesses in nature, originates in very polluted water, which causes diarrhoea.

• **FRANCE IS TO OPEN DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN IRAQI KURDISTAN. ON 14 SEPTEMBER**, Bernard Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister, announced to his Iraqi opposite number, Hoshyar Zebari, who he was welcoming to Paris, France's decision to open a diplomatic representation in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to a communiqué by the French Ministry's spokeswoman, Pascale Andréani, *"the Minister confirmed to his opposite number that France had taken a decision to set up diplomatic representation at Irbil"*, in Iraqi Kurdistan. She added that this opening *"would be effected as soon as possible and would enable the strengthening of French presence in this region"*.

Iraqi Kurdistan now has an autonomous government. Messrs Kouchner and Zebari, who, moreover *"raised the situation in Iraq and in the region as well as the state of bi-lateral relations"* between France and Iraq, confirmed that they would meet again on 22 September in New York for a meeting on Iraq under the aegis of the UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon and the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Last month, Mr. Kouchner was the first French Foreign Minister to visit Baghdad.

• **TURKEY-E.U.: A SLOWING DOWN OF TURKISH REFORMS.**

On 25 September, the French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, announced that France and Turkey would be working together at Foreign Minister level to envisage *"all the possibilities"* for bringing Turkey closer to the European Union (E.U.). M. Kouchner, who was speaking before the American Institute for Research into Foreign Relations, explained that he was one of those who had *"convinced"* President Nicolas Sarkozy this summer *"not to break up the whole process"* of negotiations under way for Turkey's membership of the E.U. *"We spent an hour and a half (on 24 September) with Prime Minister Erdogan and we decided that the Turkish Foreign Minister (Ali Babacan) and myself would be responsible for setting up a sort of working party to look at all possibilities"*, stated Mr. Kouchner.

"Turkey and the European Union must open 35 chapters in their negotiations", he recalled, stressing that *"only 5 assume integration into the E.U., 30 could be accepted in the context of a partnership"*. *"We are going to open the first 30, which will take years"*, pursued Mr. Kouchner. Paris and Ankara will *"also work on this new Mediterranean Union chapter"*, pointed out the Minister, referring to Mr. Sarkozy's initiative aimed at bringing together the countries round the Mediterranean that have no call to be integrated into the E.U. Mr. Kouchner stressed, however, that,

unlike Mr. Sarkozy, he thought that *"Turkey should be accepted, because to drive its moderate Islam towards extremism would be a great error"*. However, he pointed out: *"I am not the one who runs the show!"*. At the end of August, Mr. Sarkozy raised the possibility of restarting the negotiations for that country's membership on condition that any new chapters should be *"compatible"* with the two possible options: either membership or an association as close as possible.

On 17 September, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan, declared that his country was going to draw up a *"new programme"* to speed up the reforms intended to integrate Turkey into the European Union. *"The new reform programme that is being prepared aims, above all, at harmonising (Turkish laws) with the community's gains"*, pointed out Mr. Babacan before a meeting of various official bodies involved in the pro-European process. Jean-Christophe Filori, a leading European Commission official working on the Turkish case had indicated, the week before, that Turkey must give *"a fresh impetus"* and *"concrete signals"* of reforms before November if it wants to avoid a new negative report from Brussels, which each year evaluates its progress towards the E.U. In particular, the Commission has been demanding for months that Ankara abrogate Article 301 of its Penal Code, which has allowed proceedings to be started

against dozens of intellectuals for “insults to Turkish identity”. In the autumn of 2005, just after negotiations for Turkey’s membership of the E.U. had stated, Brussels had already criticised the slowing down of reforms. Last year, its evaluation had been very severe, even leading to the freezing of certain chapters of the negotiations because of Ankara’s refusal to open its ports and airfields to Greek Cypriot craft.

• **THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE: THE TONE IS HARDENING AGAINST IRAN.** On 25 September, the Iranian President, Mahmud Ahmadinjad, declared from the United Nations rostrum, that the case of his country’s nuclear ambitions was “closed” and that the issue should henceforth be treated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). “*All our nuclear activities have been totally peaceful and transparent*”, he declared, accusing the Western powers of wanting to deprive Iran of its right to atomic energy. On 21 August, Iran had reached an understanding with the IAEA to make known the extent of its atomic programme, which aims at mastering the technology for producing electricity, whereas the Western countries, led by the United States, think that Iran is seeking to make nuclear weapons. The agreement with the IAEA allows Iran to settle the questions one by one over a period that, according to the UN agency, runs on to December, even though the Iranians are

adding centrifuges to their Natanz enrichment plant, approaching the 3,000 needed to produce usable quantities of nuclear fuel.

On 16 September, the French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, estimated that the world should “*prepare for the worst*”, that is the possibility of a “war” with Iran, and had called for European sanctions while also calling for “*negotiating to the end*”, to avoid Teheran equipping itself with atomic weapons. Mr. Kouchner had stressed that negotiation remained the preferred option for getting Teheran to suspend its production of enriched uranium. However, he had also declared that Paris was arguing in favour of European Union sanctions against Teheran outside the United Nations context, which had been followed till then. On 24 September, the Iranian President, Mahmud Ahmadinjad, declared that he thought that the United States were preparing for military intervention against Iran and affirmed, for his part, that Teheran would not attack any other country.

The UN Security Council has demanded that Iran stop its uranium enrichment activities and twice imposed sanctions on the country. The United States and France are exerting pressure for a third series but Russia and China are hesitant. The UN Security Council has passed three resolutions against Iran, the two latest of which includ-

ed sanctions, because it effused to suspend its enrichment of uranium. Mr Ahmadinjad considered that Washington’s efforts to tighten the sanctions were “*unimportant*”.

On 13 September, the Iranian central bank indicated, in a communiqué, that Iran’s currency reserves, deposited in foreign banks, had reached the figure of \$65 billion at the end of June 2007. These hard currency credits have increased by 37% since the same period the year before, added the communiqué, published in the daily paper *Hamshahri*, that explained that this increase was due to the increase in price of oil, of which Iran is a major exporter, on the international markets. Iran is the world’s fourth greatest producer of oil, and the second largest in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEP).

• **A US FEDERAL JUDGE SENTENCES IRAN TO PAY \$2.65 BILLION TO THE FAMILIES OF 241 US SOLDIERS KILLED IN 1983 IN THE LEBANON.** A US Federal judge sentenced Iran to pay \$2.65 billion damages to the families of 241 US soldiers killed in the Lebanon in 1983. This is the largest compensation ever demanded by the US courts of a foreign country. These US soldiers were amongst the 220 Marines killed on 23 October 1983 by a bomb attack in Beirut when a lorry, stuffed with 19 tonnes of explosives that charged into the US Forces General Headquarters

near the Lebanese capital's international airport. This was the bloodiest bomb attack against the US until the attacks of 11 September 2001. It was attributed to the Lebanese fundamentalist Hezbollah, who were backed by Iran. On the same day, 58 French parachutists were killed by a similar bomb attack in Beirut.

Although the attack took place over 20 years ago, *"it is clear from the evidence (...) that the immense sufferings endured to this day have had a lasting effect on the plaintiffs"*, the judge con-

cluded, Royce Lamberth, of a Washington Federal Court. Nearly a thousand relatives and descendents of the victims had applied to the American courts, affirming that the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iranian Ministry of Information *"had been responsible for the consequences of the attack, for having supplied help and material support to the Hezbollah, the terrorist organisation that perpetrated the attack"*. In 2003, the court had already given a ruling recognising that Iran was *"legally responsible for having provided financial and material*

support that had helped perpetrate the tragic attack against the 241 soldiers in Beirut in 1983".

The families, that fully intend to secure the sum allocated them by the judge against Iran, went to Congress immediately after the decision. They wanted, by their presence, to exert pressure in favour of the adoption of two Bills, in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, aiming at allowing assets indirectly controlled by Iranians to be seized.

Nucléaire Après un accord entre Téhéran et l'AIEA, les Occidentaux veulent maintenir une ligne de fermeté

Paris réfléchit à des sanctions hors ONU contre l'Iran

La France est disposée à passer à une phase de sanctions contre l'Iran en dehors du cadre de l'ONU. Ce tournant a été imprimé par le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, sans faire, pour l'heure, l'objet d'annonces publiques, et sans qu'une décision n'ait encore été prise quant au contenu de telles sanctions.

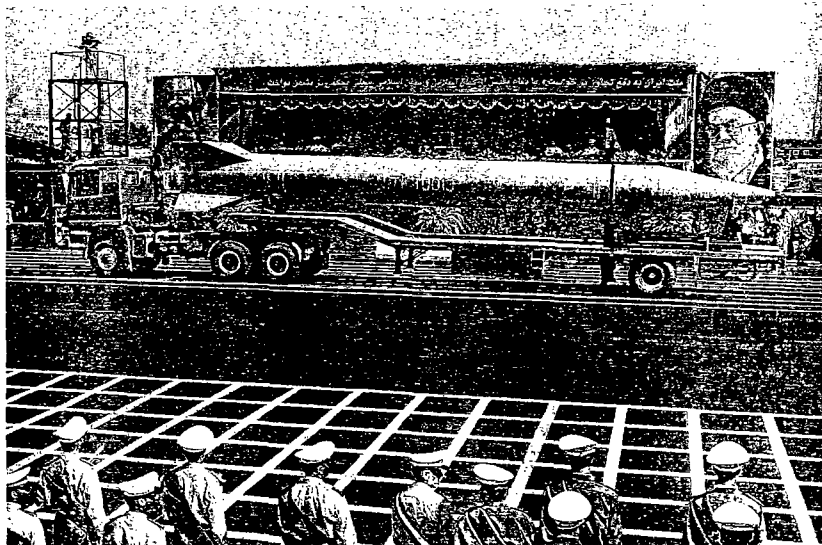
Il s'agit d'un changement car, sous la présidence de Jacques Chirac, une approche de nature unilatérale, hors de l'ONU, était rejetée par l'Elysée. Les Etats-Unis appliquent depuis les années 1980 une série de sanctions unilatérales, notamment d'ordre financier, contre la République islamique.

Les diplomates français ont désormais intensifié la réflexion, aux côtés de leurs interlocuteurs américains et d'autres Européens, à propos de mesures coercitives supplémentaires contre l'Iran hors ONU. L'idée d'agir en dehors de l'ONU a été évoquée à Paris fin juin, lors d'une rencontre entre M. Sarkozy et la secrétaire d'Etat américaine Condoleezza Rice, en marge d'une réunion sur le Darfour. M. Sarkozy a alors signifié qu'il était

ouvert à cette option. En avril, pendant la campagne électorale française, M. Sarkozy avait déjà indiqué que, pour lui, des sanctions hors ONU ne posaient « pas un problème de principe ».

La recherche de nouveaux moyens de resserrer l'étau contre l'Iran est motivée par un double constat. D'une part, Téhéran refuse toujours de suspendre ses activités d'enrichissement d'uranium, en dépit des injonctions successi-

L'idée d'agir en dehors de l'ONU a été évoquée lors d'une rencontre entre M. Sarkozy et M^{me} Rice, fin juin



Un missile Shahab-3, d'une portée de 1 500 kilomètres, lors d'un défilé militaire en septembre 2005, près de Téhéran. JAVAD MONTAZERI/WPN

ves du Conseil de sécurité. D'autre part, le processus de négociations à l'ONU sur une troisième résolution contenant des sanctions risque de s'enrayer – du moins de traîner en longueur.

Un élément nouveau, intervenu cet été, menace en effet de fissurer l'unité entre les grandes puissances à l'ONU sur le dossier nucléaire iranien. Il s'agit d'un accord conclu le 21 août, entre l'Iran et le secrétariat de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), sur un « plan d'action » où Téhéran s'engage à répondre de façon échelonnée, jusqu'en novembre, à une série de « questions en suspens » sur ses activités nucléaires, qui sont soupçonnées de comporter un volet militaire.

Les Etats-Unis, le Royaume-Uni et la France ne voient pas cet accord d'un bon œil. Ils ont rappelé que la demande centrale faite à l'Iran, par la communauté internationale, était de suspendre l'enrichissement d'uranium, et qu'il n'était pas question de s'y soustraire en détournant l'attention vers d'autres questions. Ils ont réitéré leur intention de préparer à l'ONU un troisième train de sanctions.

La Russie, en revanche, a déjà fait passer le message aux Occidentaux que l'accord sur le « plan d'action » était à prendre en compte et qu'il ne fallait pas presser la cadence vers de nouvelles sanctions à l'ONU. Elle pourra aussi tirer argument du fait que, dans son dernier rapport sur les agissements nucléaires de

l'Iran, le directeur de l'AIEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, a qualifié l'accord de « pas en

avant significatif ».

Le consensus à l'ONU sur l'Iran avait été obtenu avec difficulté à l'été 2006. Il portait sur un double mécanisme de « carotte » et de « bâton » : les Etats-Unis acceptaient de s'associer à une offre européenne de coopération avec l'Iran appuyée par Moscou, tandis que la Russie acceptait de voter des sanctions à l'ONU. Ce processus a mené à l'adoption de deux textes de sanctions, en décembre 2006 et en mars 2007.

Le passage à des sanctions hors ONU constituerait une rupture dans le traitement diplomatique de ce dossier, assuré au niveau européen depuis 2003 par trois pays, le Royaume-Uni, la France et l'Allemagne. Un consensus pourrait être difficile à arracher entre Européens car des pays comme l'Allemagne et l'Italie ont de forts intérêts économiques en Iran. L'Union européenne a déjà adopté, par le passé, des mesures contre l'Iran séparément de l'ONU – notamment un embargo sur les ventes d'armes et des restrictions de visas. Mais cela s'était fait assez discrètement. M. Chirac se méfiait d'un engrenage de sanctions pouvant mener à un conflit armé, ou à des risques d'attentats. Dans un discours prononcé lundi, M. Sarkozy a parlé de « sanctions croissantes » contre l'Iran. « L'alternative catastrophique » serait le fait d'avoir à choisir entre « la bombe iranienne ou le bombardement de l'Iran », a-t-il dit. Les efforts français portent donc sur la préparation de sanctions à l'ONU, mais aussi en dehors – si le front commun avec les Russes devait se rompre. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

CHRONOLOGIE

24 mars. Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU adopte la résolution 1747, comportant un deuxième train de sanctions contre l'Iran.

21 août. L'AIEA et l'Iran concluent un accord sur un « plan d'action » : Téhéran s'engage à faire la lumière sur l'histoire de ses activités nucléaires. Les Etats-Unis, le Royaume-Uni et la France expriment des réserves.

27 août. Nicolas Sarkozy évoque des « sanctions croissantes » si l'Iran ne se conforme pas à ses obligations.

30 août. Un rapport de l'AIEA constate que l'Iran poursuit l'enrichissement d'uranium à Natanz, en y faisant fonctionner près de 2 000 centrifugeuses.

The New York Times September 3, 2007

American University Reflects Normality of Life in Kurdish Corner of Iraq

By DEXTER FILKINS

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq, Aug. 31 — In this corner of Iraq largely untouched by war, people are able to focus on the more normal attributes of building a nation — like starting a new university.

In a ceremony here this week, Iraqi leaders gathered to mark the groundbreaking for the American University of Iraq, a private institution they hope will one day grow to mirror the more well-known American universities in Beirut and Cairo. The first classes, which will be conducted in English, are set to begin in a donated office this fall.

In the shorter term, supporters hope that the new university will stand as a symbol for the sort of positive change that is possible — if not in all of Iraq, then at least in its Kurdish north.

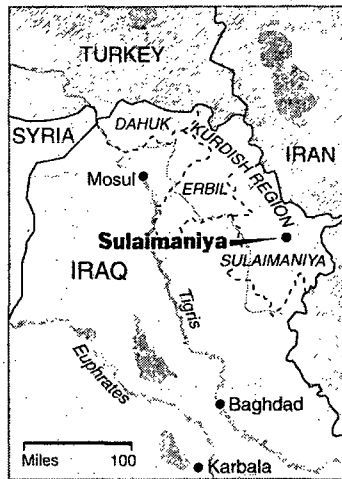
“This shows what Iraq could be like,” Barham Salih, Iraq’s deputy prime minister, told the gathering here, which included the American ambassador, Ryan C. Crocker, and the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani. “This is a dream that has to come true.”

They got a pretty good down payment on the dream this week. After a sumptuous lunch for local businessmen here, Mr. Salih secured promises for \$10 million in donations. That, along with the other pledges secured so far — including one for \$10.5 million from the United States Congress

Hoping for a symbol of positive change, at least in part of a war-torn nation.

— brought the total promised so far to \$40 million. In meetings with Americans and Iraqis, Mr. Salih was pleading for as much as he could get. “Your moral support is good, but your financial support is even better,” Mr. Salih said to Mr. Crocker.

The construction of the university here is another measure of the growing distance between



The university in Sulaimaniya will be built on donated land.

the predominantly Kurdish northern territories and the rest of Iraq. The three majority Kurdish provinces, which constitute about 15 percent of Iraq’s population, have experienced relative stability since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and are developing rapidly on their own. While a university like this might naturally be found in Baghdad, Iraq’s capital, the violence there makes such a project inconceivable at this point.

Pro-American sentiment still runs high among the Kurds, too. The Kurds bore the brunt of Saddam Hussein’s furies and benefited from more than a decade of American protection after the Persian Gulf war in 1991. That protection allowed the Kurds to set up the near-independent state that they have today. In much of the rest of Iraq, four years of war have left America unpopular among many Iraqis.

The money raised for the project so far is enough to begin construction of the campus, on about 400 acres near the airport. The land was donated by the

Kurdish regional government, which operates in virtual autonomy from the central government in Baghdad. The university’s backers are hoping to raise an additional \$90 million to complete the construction of the first phase, which is planned to in-

clude classrooms, dormitories and a museum.

So far, the university’s board of trustees has hired an American chancellor, Owen Cargol, and a staff of 23. The first undergraduate classes are set to begin in October and the graduate-level courses in November. University officials are planning a curriculum heavily tilted toward business skills, with undergraduate and graduate degrees in areas like information technology and management. Degrees in the liberal arts, and in petroleum engineering and other areas, are planned for later.

University officials are not expecting many students this fall; probably, they said, no more than 50. The plan is to accommodate about 1,000 students by 2009, the target date for completion of the first phase of construction. The American University of Iraq is being modeled after the successful and influential English-language institutions in Beirut and Cairo, which are known for their high academic standards and competitive admission policies.

Those universities have a big head start: the American University in Beirut was founded in 1866 by American missionaries; the American University in Cairo was established in 1919.

At the American University of Iraq, entering students will be expected to be fluent in English and to have scored in the top 20 percent on their college entrance exams. Tuition is being set at \$10,000 per academic year, an extraordinary sum in Iraq, where higher education at public institutions is free. The university’s leaders are planning to make scholarships of varying amounts available to every student.

The university’s leaders are hoping that an institution with an American name and American standards will prove attractive here. Fouad Ajami, director of the Middle Eastern studies program at Johns Hopkins University and a member of the Iraqi university’s board of trustees, put it this way: “America’s greatest exports are Hollywood and higher education.”

Thomas L. Friedman

The Kurdish secret

Iraq today is a land of contrasts — mostly black and blacker. Traveling around the central Baghdad area the past few days, I saw little that really gave me hope that the different Iraqi sects can forge a social contract to live together. The only sliver of optimism I find here is in the one region where Iraqis don't live together: Kurdistan.

Imagine for a moment if one outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq had been the creation of an American University of Iraq. Imagine if we had triggered a flood of new investment into Iraq that had gone into new hotels, a big new convention center, office buildings, Internet cafés, two new international airports and Iraqi malls. Imagine if we had paved the way for an explosion of newspapers, even a local Human Rights Watch chapter, and new schools. Imagine if we had created an island of decency in Iraq, with public parks, where women could walk unveiled and not a single American soldier was ever killed — where Americans in fact were popular — and where Islam was practiced in its most tolerant and open manner. Imagine.

Well, stop imagining. It's all happening in Kurdistan, the northern Iraqi region, home to 4 million Kurds. I saw all of the above in Kurdistan's two biggest towns, Erbil and Sulaimaniya. The Bush team just never told anybody.

No, Kurdistan is not a democracy. It has real parliamentary elections, but the region's executive branch is still more "Sopranos" than "West Wing," more Singapore than Switzerland — dominated by two rival clans, the Talibanis and the Barzanis. It has a vibrant free press, as long as you don't insult the leadership, and way too much crony-corruption. But it is democratizing, gradually nurturing the civil society and middle class needed for a real democracy.

On Oct. 17, the new American Uni-

At least America's invasion of Iraq midwifed something really impressive in Kurdistan.

versity of Iraq will open classes in Sulaimaniya. "The board wanted three campuses, one in Kurdistan, one in Baghdad and one in Basra, but this is the only part of the country where an American University can open and function safely," said Owen Cargol, the school's chancellor.

Iraq is a disaster in so many ways, but at least America's invasion midwifed something really impressive in Kurdistan. And in the best way: We created the opening and the Kurds did the rest. But while the Kurds liberated their region from Saddam's army in the 1990s — with U.S. air cover — their current renaissance was only possible, they say, thanks to the overthrow of Saddam, their mortal enemy.

"Saddam's eyes were always on this region," said Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan regional government. Once he was toppled, "it gave us psychological hope for the future. Those who had even a limited amount of money started to invest, start small businesses or buy a car, because they thought they could see the future. The uncer-

tainty was removed. We have to thank the American people and government. But we are a lover from only one side. We love America, but nothing in response. They don't want to give the perception that they are helping us."

Added Hoshyar Omar, a 23-year-old student-translator: "My father was buried alive (by Saddam's men) when I was 3. I want to thank Mr. George Bush personally. He may have made some bad decisions, but freeing Iraq was the best decision he has ever made. We had nothing and we built this Kurdistan that you see."

Why is Kurdistan America's best-kept secret success? Because the Bush team is afraid the Kurds will break away. But the Kurds have no interest in splitting from Iraq now. Iraq's borders protect them from Turkey, Iran and Syria.

The Kurdish autonomous zone should be our model for Iraq. Does Bush or Condi Rice have a better idea? Do they have any idea?

Right now, we're surging aimlessly. Iraq's only hope is radical federalism — with Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds each running their own affairs, and Baghdad serving as an ATM, dispensing cash for all three. Let's get that on the table — now.

Months after Saddam's capture, a story made the rounds that he was asked, "If you were set free, could you stabilize Iraq again?" He supposedly said it would take him only "one hour and 10 minutes — one hour to go home and shower and 10 minutes to reunify Iraq."

Maybe an iron-fisted dictator could do that. America can't.

"No one here expects to be ruled ever again by the other," Kosrat Ali, Kurdistan's vice president, told me. "If you get all the American forces to occupy all of the towns and the cities of Iraq, you might be able to centralize Iraq again. That is the only way." Otherwise, "centralized rule is finished in Iraq."

It's not just Ahmadinejad

Two years ago this month, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the little-known mayor of Tehran, was inaugurated as president of Iran. Since then, his fiery rhetoric and combative style have provoked hyperbolic claims of Iranian peril from the Bush administration and its allies.

The menacing Ahmadinejad is portrayed as pushing Iran in a bold new direction, developing nuclear weapons with plans to destroy Israel and evict America from the Middle East. Yet these

dire assertions have only limited basis in reality. Halfway through his term, Ahmadinejad's foreign policies are not all that different from those of his reformist or pragmatic predecessors.

Iran's danger is nowhere more evident than its accelerating nuclear program. Neither America's veiled threats of military retribution nor a series of UN Security Council resolutions seem to distract Iran from its nuclear course.

While it is tempting to ascribe Tehran's defiance to Ahmadinejad,

Iran's nuclear program began in earnest under former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, a pragmatist acclaimed in the West as someone we can do business with.

During the presidency of the reformist Mohammad Khatami, Iran did suspend its nuclear activities for more than two years in the hope of reaching an accommodation with the Europeans. Still, it was the same Khatami government that ended the suspension in 2005 and denounced further diplomatic efforts.

Had Ahmadinejad not been elected, Iran's nuclear trajectory would not have been all that different. The desire to deter the United States and project power in the Middle East has pressed successive Iranian regimes toward the nuclear option.

And while Washington bitterly complains of Iran's mischief and intervention in Iraqi politics, blame for Iran's influence in Iraq rests not with Ahmadinejad but with an ill-advised American invasion that facilitated the rise of Shiite parties closely associated with Iran.

Tehran's strategy is not necessary to export its Islamist revolution next door, but to promote Shiite allies who share its vision of the Middle East. Iran has sought to win over average Shiites with

The Iranian president's foreign policies are not all that different from those of his predecessors.

economic assistance, while its military aid is meant to ensure that the Shiite militias will have sufficient hardware to fight Sunni insurgents. This policy is hardly Ahmadinejad's innovation.

What causes the greatest alarm in capitals around the world is Ahmadinejad's persistent calls for Israel to be "wiped off the map." Despite the disavowal of Iran's diplomats, such incendiary rhetoric has been the mainstay of the theocratic regime's discourse.

However, such rhetoric conceals more than it reveals. Tehran does not seek eradication of Israel, but sees such slogans as a means of gaining the acclaim of the Arab street. It is the tragedy of the Middle East today that such despicable rhetoric is a pathway to political popularity.

Ahmadinejad's presidency has, in fact, had a measurable impact on life in the Islamic Republic. An inordinately suspicious regime has been busy closing down nongovernmental organizations, suppressing civil-society groups, and arresting Iranian-Americans on spurious charges of espionage.

Yet Iran's core foreign policy objectives have not changed, despite the rise

of Ahmadinejad and his paranoid style of politics.

Since 1989, the year the war with Iraq ended and revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died, pragmatic considerations have gradually displaced ideology as the basis of Iran's international orientation. The reality remains that Iran's quest for nuclear arms and assertion of influence over Iraq makes strategic sense, especially in light of Iran's historic goal of regional preeminence.

Because Iran's ambitions are based on rational calculation, the United States can deal with it through dialogue.

Only when the perception of an unreasonable Ahmadinejad is removed from the scene can Washington begin the painstaking task of diplomacy.

Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and author of "Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic." This article first appeared in The Boston Globe.

Will there be a clash? Turkey's 5 key issues

By Sabrina Tavernise and Sebnem Arsu

After nearly 80 years of strictly secular rule, Turkey last week got a new president, Abdullah Gul, who is strongly disliked by the Turkish military because he is an observant Muslim with a background in Islamic politics.

In his first speech as president, Gul, a 56-year-old economist, praised Turkey's secular tradition, saying it guaranteed personal freedoms. But the officer corps, which considers itself the guardian of secularism and generally does not trust political leaders like Gul, showed its dislike for him by skipping his appointment ceremony.

Whether the officers defy him, or try to overthrow him, as they have four elected governments since 1960, is another matter, and represents one of the largest unanswered questions hanging over Turkey's politics.

Gul and his colleagues say that they abandoned religious politics long ago. They know, they say, that all but a small percentage of Turks are very happy with their secular state.

Still, even if religion in public life is not on the table now, questions of power and class are. Gul, like many observant Muslims, is from Kayseri, a working-class city in Turkey's heartland. The urban secularists who were in power for so long are used to thinking of themselves as the elite.

Will there be a clash?

Five issues that will play out in coming weeks and months could begin to provide an answer.

■ **THE CONSTITUTION:** Turkey's Constitution was written in 1982, at the time of a military coup, and liberal Turks say it is out of date.

It limits the authority of the Constitutional Court and takes an authoritarian view of individual freedoms and rights. The members of Gul's party have made revising it a central project for their time in power. One change they want, according to Ergun Ozbudun, a constitutional law professor who worked on the draft, would limit the powers of the president over appointments.

■ **THE EUROPEAN UNION:** Gul was a leading figure in Turkey's hopes to join the European Union, and in his first speech as president he reiterated his intent to continue to pursue membership. Progress toward that might inhibit any impulse for the army to interfere in government, since democracy is a prerequisite for EU membership.

But Turkey's application faces strong opposition from some countries like France, whose newly elected president, Nicolas Sarkozy, wants new talks in which Turkey would be considered for a lesser "special status" as well as full membership.

■ **APPOINTMENTS:** As president, Gul has the final say over thousands of appointments to important official positions. The former president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a secularist, vetoed more than 400 appointments proposed by Gul's party during its four and a half years in control of Parliament, accord-

ing to the presidential Web site.

Opposition parties now can do little to stop Gul from approving any candidate his party nominates, and Turks in the secular establishment fear that a disproportionate number will come from religious backgrounds. His decision on the head of TRT, the state-owned television network, and on the director of the Istanbul office of the Ministry of Education, will be watched closely.

■ **ARTICLE 301:** Gul wants to ease a rule against "insulting Turkishness," which is known as Article 301 and has been invoked against journalists and writers, including Orhan Pamuk, who received the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. The two main opposition political parties — representing nationalists and the secular establishment — are expected to oppose changing the law, as are some leaders in Gul's party. But the party is expected to amend it, in the face of strong criticism from the EU.

■ **KURDISH SEPARATISM:** Gul's party has taken a more conciliatory line toward Kurds in the country's southeast than has Turkey's military, but that point of friction between them may be easing. Many Kurdish politicians are known for their loyalty to Abdullah Ocalan, the Kurdish militant leader now in prison, and Kurdish political leaders in Parliament did not sing along to the national anthem during Gul's inauguration, which is sure to irritate many Turks and make it harder for Gul to reconcile with the Kurds.

At the same time, the military's attitude may be moderating from the other direction. In June, it was advocating a large-scale push into northern Iraq, where it says many Kurdish militants hide, but that pressure has since lessened.

The End of Secularism

THIS FALL, I PLAN TO TEACH A COURSE ON TURKISH secularism at Georgetown University. The class was originally listed as current politics. But given the direction in which Turkey's headed, it could well become a history course instead.

For after some 80 years, Turkish secularism is withering away.

In late July, the ruling Justice and Development Party (known in

post seen as the bastion of Turkish secularism. Secularists boycotted the vote, millions of liberal Turks took to the streets, the military warned darkly against a Gul presidency, and the constitutional court ultimately blocked his accession.

Conspicuously absent from these proceedings were Turkey's conservative masses. The AKP sought to convince them that secular forces had unfairly blocked a candidate who just happened to be religious. Suddenly, the traditional split in Turkish politics was transformed from a secular-fundamentalist divide to a secular-Muslim one. The secularists were cut off from their traditional allies, and conservatives flocked to the AKP in droves. This realignment has left the secular parties enfeebled. Ataturk's own Republican People's Party (CHP), for example, got less than half the AKP's tally in the recent election.

Where does this leave Turkey? It all depends on whether the secularists can figure out a way to reinvigorate *laïcité* and attract conservative Muslims. The secular parties must also overcome internal divisions and improve their management credentials. And they must tackle the public's increasing anti-Western sentiments. Should they fail, the consequences could be devastating. The Turkish military, which sees itself as the guardian of Ataturk's legacy, is unlikely to tolerate the unraveling of Turkish secularism. While it has intervened before, it has never done so in opposition to strong public opinion. If it did so now, it would only deepen the rifts in Turkish society and strengthen the AKP.

The AKP is unlikely to end Turkish secularism overnight. Gradually, however, religion will assume a larger and larger place in the country's politics and society. Turkey will become a more Islamic society in its foreign-policy outlook and culture. Anti-Western sentiments will grow. Headscarves, religious education and the rejection of alcohol will become more common. The Turkey of old will slowly disappear, leaving in its place a profoundly different—and potentially much more unstable—nation.

CAGAPTAY is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the author of "Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey."



Turkish as the AKP) won 47 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections, strengthening its already commanding position. Now the AKP, a party with an Islamist pedigree, seems set to elect its foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, as president. Once marginal, Turkey's Islamists have become mainstream, and the consequences could prove enormous.

To understand the stakes, it helps to grasp the particular nature of Turkish secularism. When Kemal Ataturk founded Turkey as a secular republic after World War I, he looked to Europe for his model, especially France. Whereas U.S. secularism provides freedom of religion, the French version that Ataturk adopted, known as *laïcité*, emphasizes freedom from religion—that is, keeping mosque out of politics.

Laïcité proved quite durable in Turkey—somewhat surprising given its conservative Muslim character. But the role of religion there was always complex. On questions of Islam, Turks fall into

three camps: a minority of irreligious liberals; a minority of fundamentalist Muslims; and a vast majority of conservative Muslims, who practice Islam at home but don't want to live in a Sharia state. After Turkey became a multiparty democracy in 1946, secular parties forged a lasting alliance between liberals and conservative Muslims (and the military), marginalizing and demonizing the fundamentalists.

The AKP, which rose to power in 2002, challenged this old arrangement. It provided better governance and higher economic growth than its secular predecessors, showing that devout politicians could also be good managers. Second, after a few early stumbles, it pursued a pro-business and pragmatic foreign policy. And the AKP tried hard to shed its Islamist image, repositioning itself as a mainstream—albeit conservative—movement. Then came the events of April and May, which helped the already popular AKP increase its standing. The AKP attempted to get Parliament to elect Gul as president—a

THE AKP MANAGED TO SEPARATE THE OLD GUARD FROM ITS ALLIES.

AP Associated Press

Hundreds Displaced in Northern Iraq

By YAHYA BARZANJI Associated Press Writer September 1, 2007

MARDOW, Iraq (AP) -- As explosions boomed in the distance, a Kurdish woman stood outside her house and pointed to where shells scorched parts of her father's grapes and plum orchards.

"It was a bad day when some 20 shells hit our village in a single day last week. We were crying as we prayed to God to protect us from the bombs of the Islamic Republic of Iran," said Serwa Ibrahim, one of the few remaining villagers in Mardow, about 25 miles from the Iranian border. "Despite the shelling, I will stay in my village until the end," Ibrahim, 33, said Thursday.

Iranian troops have been accused of bombing border areas for weeks against suspected positions of the Free Life Party, or PEJAK, a breakaway faction of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party. Iran says PEJAK - which seeks autonomy for Kurds in Iran - launches attacks inside Iran from bases in Iraq.

Shelling of border areas resumed Saturday after a brief lull, with Iranian shells hitting the Iraqi side of the border and causing some fires. AP Television News showed white smoke billowing from mountainous areas, and Kurdish shepherds carrying carcasses of sheep killed by the shelling.

The Iranian shelling has been criticized by Iraqi officials and Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari warned it could have negative effects on the crucial relations between Iran and Iraq's Shiite-led government.

Ari Yashir, a PEJAK member, took a reporter in a tour around several deserted villages and claimed the Iranian attacks only serve to harm civilians.

"The bombing is only targeting villages where we have no bases," he said. "After three weeks of Iranian shelling none of our positions was hit and not a single member of our party was wounded."

Most of the people who fled their homes have gathered in an area known as Shewe Hasow, a valley with water springs in the Qandil Mountain area that borders Iran and Turkey. Many of them stay in tents or under covers mostly supplied by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"We are here because the refugees are in need," said ICRC member Patrick Youssef, standing by a truck with canned food and bottled water. "We are helping them with needed stuff because most of them left their homes leaving their things behind."

The Kurdish region's interior minister, Othman Haji Mahmoud, told the Kur-



dish regional parliament Tuesday that the Iranian shelling led to the displacement of some 450 families in 20 villages, adding that several people were wounded in addition to material damages.

He said the latest wave of shelling began Aug. 14.

In Baghdad, Zebari said Tuesday that the main areas struck are in the northern provinces of Irbil and Sulaimaniyah. Iranian shelling "has been ongoing and unfortunately has become a daily or a routine practice. Recently, we summoned the Iranian ambassador and handed him a note of protest."

"PEJAK sometimes moves in border area, but this does not permit all this continuous, daily and intensive shelling," said Zebari, a Kurd, who noted that Iraq was prepared to hold negotiations with Iran on the disputes over Kurdish rebel groups. "We hope that these attacks will stop immediately."

To some Kurds in the region, they have been living the war for decades, including widespread atrocities blamed on Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s.

"We are the victims of a continuous struggle. My house was destroyed five times and I rebuilt it. Let this be the sixth time," said Abdullah Wasou Ibrahim, who fled to the refugee camp with 10 family members.

TODAY'S ZAMAN

05.09.2007, Today's Zaman, Ankara

Diyarbakır mayor takes flak after 'call for war'

Diyarbakır Mayor Osman Baydemir was the recipient of harsh words from the government and the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) yesterday after he complained his southeastern city was subject to discrimination and declared his pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) was ready if the government wants to launch a war on Diyarbakır.

The MHP directed criticism against the government, saying its soft stance on separatist terrorism had encouraged the controversial mayor to make such a statement, while the party at the heart of criticism, the DTP, defended Baydemir, saying it is tired of such debates and wants some empathy. During discussions of the government's plan for the next five years, there was an exchange of words between the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the DTP. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during a speech in Parliament on Tuesday, had said the DTP should declare the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) a terrorist organization.

The discussions and the exchange of words on the issue continued on Wednes-

day, but this time with the involvement of the MHP and the Republican People's Party (CHP). The DTP, while backing Mayor Baydemir, also underlined they are tired of being in the spotlight all the time and want empathy, but will maintain their policy of constructive opposition. Siirt DTP deputy Osman Özçelik also added that the other parties are trying to use them as a tool.

MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman Mehmet Şandır said Prime Minister Erdoğan is preparing the groundwork for politics based on ethnicity. While talking to reporters in Parliament yesterday, Şandır said Erdoğan and his discourse are encouraging Baydemir. "Diyarbakır is a very important city of Turkey, but Erdoğan is acting like he is the official of another



country. Turkey is a state governed by law, and the judicial system should be the venue for Baydemir," Şandır said.

Şandır reiterated Erdoğan's words on

Tuesday, urging the DTP to declare the PKK a terrorist organization, and said, "These words mean renouncing wrong actions." "Only after this declaration will we see what has changed and what has not," Şandır added.

Erdoğan also harshly reacted to Baydemir and categorically rejected the claims that there is negative discrimination against the city. In his speech yesterday at his party's parliamentary group, he said: "No one should try to exploit the people of one city. The municipalities should produce projects instead of producing words." Erdoğan added that they are against all kinds of politics based on ethnic or religious lines.

Baydemir also claimed "Diyarbakır is a castle and cannot be conquered," referring to his party's local administration in the city. Some AK Party deputies evaluated

these words as preparation for the local elections in 2009. In the general elections in Kurdish-populated areas, the AK Party took some of the DTP votes; this fact has led to discussions within the DTP.

The CHP also got involved in this fierce discussion. Its deputy chairman, Mustafa Özyürek, said the AK Party does not support the municipalities administered by opposition parties and that it is not right to treat Diyarbakır as a city which lies outside of Turkey. Özyürek said the job of the municipalities is to serve people, not to be castles.

Despite these discussions, the DTP supported Mayor Baydemir. Diyarbakır deputy Akın Birdal said at a parliamentary press conference that Baydemir's statements should not be considered a challenge, rather statements trying to serve peace.

"Why are we entering into polemics over

some words? Baydemir, as the mayor of Diyarbakır, is showing his reaction to the fact that the city cannot get aid. Peace and justice depend on guarding the people from starvation," Birdal said.

Özçelik said they are tired of being in the spotlight all the time, but will not give up. He said since they entered Parliament, they have been constantly told to "behave."

"Let's say we declare the PKK a terrorist organization. What will change? Will those demanding this from us be able to put forth any project to solve the Kurdish problem?" he said.

Özçelik added they entered Parliament to democratically and peacefully solve the Kurdish question. "Turkey should get used to us. We have a different point of view. We want empathy, tolerance and dialogue," Özçelik stressed.

Experts discuss creation of Kurd nation

The Daily Utah Chronicle By: Tina Sju September 7, 2007

The Kurdish population in northern Iraq and Turkey were to form an official nation, there is a strong possibility it would be the second non-Islamic state in the Middle East, Robert Olson said.

This topic, along with other issues facing the Kurdish population in the Middle East, was discussed during the opening presentation of the 2007 Middle East and Central Asia Politics, Economics and Society conference on Thursday.

"It's a zigzag process but development in Kurdistan, Iraq and Turkey is historically unprecedented," said Olson, a University of Kentucky professor. "There is lots of development in Kurdistan, but little development in Iraq proper." Kurdistan is a term used to refer to the area of land where the Kurds live. The area overlaps parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

The only other non-Islamic nation in the Middle East is Israel.

Olson emphasized the competition between Kurdish nationalism and capitalism. An independent nation may be founded in Iraq if the conditions between these two factors become sufficient.

Whether a Kurdish nation would truly be non-Islamic was a matter of debate among the international scholars attending the conference in the Union.

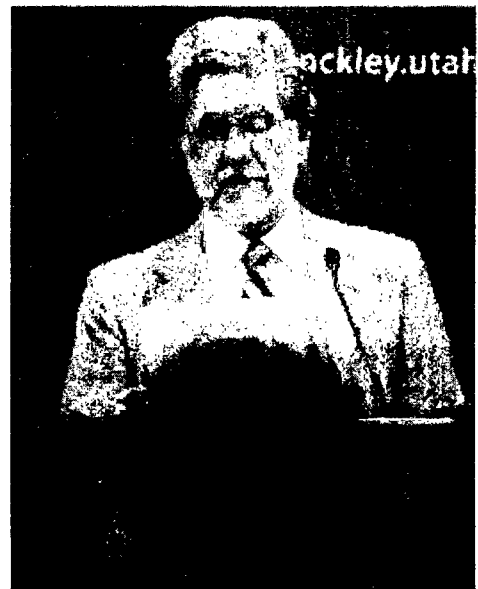
"Professor Olson took the first approach and in broad lines, I agree that there will probably be secular logic to follow the development," said Üner Daglier, an assistant professor at Çag University in Turkey.

The presentation helped others better understand the Kurds.

"I'm not very familiar with the situation in Kurdistan, but I have friends who were Kurds, so I understood some of the situations and it was a little more personal," said Kyle Stegerwald, a sophomore in computer science and history.

Olson compared the Kurdish situation to the Zionist movement, which led creation of Israel 31 years later.

"The policies pursued by the U.S. lead to stronger state-formulating possibilities for the Kurds," Olson said.



Media Credit: Jarad Reddekopp

Dr. Robert Olsen, Kurdish Politics specialist from the University of Kentucky, delivers a speech at the Hinkley Institute of Politics to start off the Middle East and Central Asia conference

The Kurds can claim many different identities, Olson said, including Islamic.

"Political Islam is a dynamic dissenting force against reigning powers," Olson said. "(The Kurds) recognize non-religious objectives they want to achieve and non-religious principles will remain dominant."

The conference continues until Sept. 8. All the presentations are held on campus and are free and open to the public.

The New York Times September 4, 2007

Iraqi Foreign Minister Demands That Iran Stop Shelling of Kurdish Area in North

By JAMES GLANZ

TEHRAN, Sept. 3 — Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, delivered a strongly worded demand to Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and other Iranian officials here on Monday to halt the shelling of a mountainous border region in Iraq's north, where Mr. Zebari said the bombardment has driven as many as 3,000 Kurdish villagers from their homes and set orchards and fields ablaze.

Mr. Zebari said in an interview that the Iranians, who have refused to acknowledge publicly that the shelling was taking place, did not dispute his account.

He said the Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, described the shelling as Iran's response to guerrilla attacks against it by a group that is opposed to the Iranian government and is believed to have bases on the Iraqi side of the border.

Members of that group, Pezak, have claimed responsibility for attacks inside Iran, and they are believed to have shot down at least one Iranian helicopter in recent months. But Mr. Zebari said the shelling of the villages was indiscriminate and was achieving little against Pezak positions, and he made clear that Iraqi patience was wearing thin with the bombardment, which has taken place intermittently for about two weeks.

"In a normal relationship between two countries, this amounts to an act of aggression," Mr. Zebari said.

Although Mr. Zebari conceded in the interview that the conflict in Iraq made this time far from ordinary, his words were likely to be sobering against the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, during which millions died.

In a news briefing during President Bush's visit to Iraq on Monday, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki also discussed the situation in the north and suggested

that Turkey too was shelling across the border into Iraq.

Before Turkish elections last month, Turkey's military staged an enormous troop buildup on its border and by some accounts was on the verge of a major attack, citing incursions by Kurdish armed groups from Iraq into Turkey. Some of those groups are believed to favor an independent Kurdish nation that would include parts of Kurd-dominated southern Turkey.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry did not respond to requests in

Tehran on Monday by The New York Times for comment on the bombardments, and a Times reporter accompanying the Iraqi foreign minister was effectively barred from a diplomatic conference attended by Mr. Ahmadinejad and Mr. Mottaki.

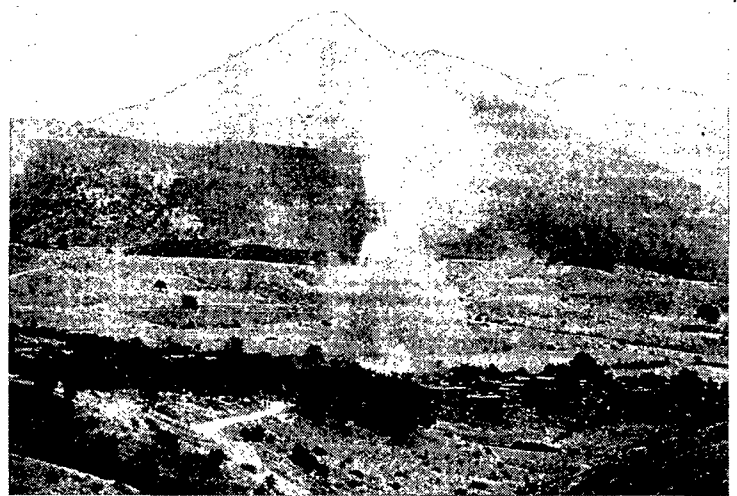
The Iraqi government had previously sent an official letter of protest to Iran about the shelling. But the Iraqi ambassador to Iran, Mohammad Majid al-Sheikh, said Monday that Iran had ignored that letter.

"We have not received any sensible response from them," Mr. Sheikh said. "We demand that they respond to our protest."

As senior government officials discussed the attacks, poor villagers in the area, which is north and east of the provincial capitals of Erbil and Sulaimaniya, were paying the price. On Monday, Awella Saleem, 62, returned to his largely destroyed house near the border. He said his family was inside when bombs started falling several days ago.

"We survived by coincidence, and two of our family were injured," Mr. Saleem said. "Why are we under such a savage attack by Iran? There is nobody in our village who would harm Iran."

Officials in the Kurdish Regional Government and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, a relief organization, said that about 500 families had been displaced by the bombing, figures that were generally consistent with the estimates by Mr. Zebari, who is



SHERKO/REUTERS

Smoke rose from the site of an attack last month 200 miles north of Baghdad. Villagers said Iran had shelled the area.

Kurdish. Othman Haji Mahmoud, the interior minister for the regional government, said last week that the government denounced the bombing and offered to open direct talks with Iran on the subject.

Members of Pezak are said to be Iranian Kurds essentially seeking autonomy for Kurds in Iran. How long their cross-border incursions have been taking place is not known.

Senior Iraqi government officials suspect that the Iranian shelling may be in part a response to American assertions that Iran is supplying deadly weaponry to armed groups, particularly Shiite militias, in Iraq.

The United States has demanded that Iran stop supporting the armed groups, and now Iran is demanding that Iraq and the United States stop the Pezak attacks. Privately, Iran has said it

believes the United States could be backing the Pezak group, an assertion that could not be confirmed late Monday.

Mr. Zebari said that controlling the group should fall to Iraqi government forces, in particular the Kurd-dominated national army in the northern region.

But with so many of those troops committed to security operations in the unstable center of Iraq, the northern government was short of troops to send to the

border regions, he said.

In an interview near the border on Monday, Hawere Kareme, who described himself as a Pezak official, asserted that Iran was aiming to empty the border villages of Kurds and fill them with what he called Islamic extremists.

The sectarian tension between Kurds, who are generally Sunni, and Arab and Iranian Shiites is high in the area, adding yet another troubling dimension to the Iraq conflict.

"Iran wants to destroy what the Kurds of Iraq have built and destabilize the province," Mr. Kareme said. "Take a look at our headquarters and our fighters in the Kandeel Mountains; none of them was injured. These villages are far from our activities and movements, but Iran shells it fiercely."

Sabrina Tavernise contributed reporting from Baghdad, and an Iraqi employee of The New York Times from northern Iraq.



Trois rebelles kurdes tués en Iran

TEHERAN (REUTERS) - 03/ Juillet 2007 - Des Gardiens de la révolution iraniens ont tué trois rebelles kurdes entrés dans le pays et ont saisi leur matériel, a rapporté la télévision nationale dimanche soir.

Ces rebelles appartenaient au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), mouvement séparatiste kurde qui combat en Turquie et dont une branche iranienne a pour nom le Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan (PJAK).

"Les terroristes de ce groupe du PKK qui étaient entrés dans notre pays ont été pris dans le filet des Gardiens de la révolution et ont été tués", a dit la télévision, ajoutant que les soldats iraniens avaient saisi du matériel de vision nocturne, des téléphones satellitaires et des armes.

Elle n'a pas fourni d'autres précisions. Des accrochages ont été signalés cette année entre forces iraniennes et activistes du PJAK dans la région où se rencontrent les frontières de l'Iran, de la Turquie et de l'Irak.



Iran: sept policiers tués par des rebelles dans l'ouest du pays

TEHERAN, 5 sept 2007 (AFP) - Sept policiers iraniens ont été tués lors d'une fusillade entre les forces de sécurité et des "rebelles" dans la province kurde de Kermanshah (ouest), a annoncé mercredi la télévision d'Etat.

"Deux rebelles ont été blessés", a ajouté la télévision, sans donner de précision sur l'identité du groupe impliqué dans la fusillade, qui s'est déroulée dans une région peuplée de Kurdes iraniens et proche de la frontière avec le nord de l'Irak.

De fréquents accrochages ont lieu à la frontière de l'Iran avec la Turquie et l'Irak entre les forces iraniennes et les militants kurdes, notamment le Pejak, un groupe lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Téhéran accuse également régulièrement les Etats-Unis de tenter de fomenter des troubles parmi les minorités en Iran.

L'Iran a signé un accord avec la Turquie pour combattre le le PKK, qui lutte depuis 1984 contre les forces de sécurité turques pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien à la population majoritairement kurde.

En retour, Ankara s'est engagé à combattre le principal groupe d'opposition armé iranien, les Moudjahidine du peuple.

La Turquie a salué les efforts iraniens dans sa lutte contre le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne. L'Iran a toutefois démenti les accusations de responsables kurdes irakiens selon lesquels il bombardait des bases kurdes en Irak.



L'Iran accuse les Etats-Unis d'aider les rebelles kurdes

TEHERAN, 6 sept 2007 (AFP) - L'Iran a accusé les Etats-Unis d'aider des groupes rebelles kurdes iraniens dans le but d'affaiblir Téhéran, a rapporté jeudi l'agence de presse officielle Irna.

"Les Etats-Unis se sont tellement affaiblis qu'ils cherchent à renforcer des groupes comme le Pejak et des groupes rebelles pour mener des actions comme faire sauter des oléoducs en Iran", a déclaré Ali Larijani, le secrétaire du Conseil suprême de la sécurité nationale.

Le Pejak est un groupe rebelle kurde, lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui a mené ces derniers mois de nombreuses actions armées dans les provinces frontalières avec la Turquie et l'Irak, comprenant d'importantes populations kurdes.

Téhéran accuse régulièrement les Etats-Unis de tenter de fomenter des troubles parmi les minorités en Iran. Mercredi, la télévision d'Etat a annoncé que

sept policiers iraniens avaient été tués lors d'une fusillade entre les forces de sécurité et des "rebelles", dans la province kurde de Kermanshah (ouest).

Mi-août, six membres de la force d'élite des Gardiens de la révolution ont été tués et cinq autres blessés dans la chute d'un hélicoptère, lors d'une opération dans le nord-ouest de l'Iran, près de la frontière irakienne.

Selon l'agence semi-officielle Mehr, l'incident s'était produit lors d'une opération contre des rebelles kurdes du groupe Pejak. Un responsable du PKK a lui affirmé que l'hélicoptère avait été abattu par un groupe kurde allié, le Hayat al-Hur (Vie libre).

En février, 14 militaires iraniens, dont deux responsables des Gardiens de la révolution, ont été tués dans la chute d'un autre hélicoptère, lors d'une opération contre des rebelles, près de la frontière turque.



Irak: Talabani refuse de signer l'ordre d'exécution d'un proche de Saddam

SOULAIMANIYEH (Irak), 7 sept 2007 (AFP) - Le président irakien Jalal Talabani a indiqué vendredi qu'il ne signera pas l'ordre d'exécution d'un ancien ministre de la Défense de Saddam Hussein, condamné à mort par la justice irakienne et qui doit être pendu d'ici trente jours.

"Je connais Sultan Hashim al-Tai. Nous étions en contact sous le régime de Saddam Hussein", a déclaré M. Talabani au cours d'une conférence de presse à Soulaïmaniyeh, au Kurdistan irakien.

"Nous l'incitons à l'époque à se révolter contre Saddam. Comment pourrais-je signer aujourd'hui l'ordre de son exécution (...) Non, non et non. Je ne le ferai pas", a commenté le chef de l'Etat irakien.

Sultan Hashim al-Tai et deux autres dignitaires du régime de Saddam Hussein, condamnés à mort en juin dernier par la justice irakienne pour leur rôle dans une campagne d'exécutions de masse et de bombardements chimiques menée au Kurdistan à la fin des années 80, ont vu leur appel rejeté le 4 septembre.

Tous trois doivent être pendus d'ici trente jours, selon la loi irakienne, qui

prévoit également que l'ordre d'exécution soit signé de trois membres de la présidence.

En décembre 2006, le président Talabani, un Kurde du nord de l'Irak, avait refusé de signer l'ordre d'exécution de Saddam Hussein, prétextant son opposition à la peine de mort. L'ex-dictateur avait été pendu le 26 décembre.

"De nombreux officiers irakiens ont été forcés d'appliquer des ordres (qu'ils n'approuvaient pas) et ont été menacés de mort pour cela. Cela ne justifie pas les crimes qu'ils ont commis mais le peuple irakien devrait prendre cela en considération", a estimé M. Talabani.

Les autorités irakiennes n'ont donné aucune indication sur la date de la pendaison des trois hommes, parmi lesquels figurent également l'un des plus proches collaborateurs de Saddam Hussein, Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique".

Interrogé à ce sujet, le président Talabani a démenti des informations de la presse irakienne faisant état de leur pendaison dès samedi. "Cette date est incorrecte", a-t-il simplement affirmé.

Op-Chart

JASON CAMPBELL, MICHAEL O'HANLON AND AMY UNIKEWICZ

The State of Iraq: An Update

SEPTEMBER 4, 2007

The New York Times

IN advance of the much-anticipated Congressional testimony next week of Ryan Crocker, the ambassador to Iraq, and Gen. David Petraeus, the top United States military commander, many have agreed on what appear to be two crucial realities in Iraq: there is military momentum for combined American-Iraqi forces and there is political paralysis in Baghdad. While the recent Government Accountability Office report on the 18 benchmarks set out by Congress in May gave a very pessimistic view, our data above, culled from official Iraqi and American sources and press reports, support a more mixed picture.

Unfortunately, at the moment the political paralysis seems to be a more powerful force than the military momentum, and progress in security is unsustainable without sectarian compromise among Iraq's Kurds, Sunni Ar-

abs and Shiites. The country remains very violent, and the economy rather stagnant.

Nonetheless, the military momentum appears real, despite the tragic multiple truck bombings in Ninevah Province on Aug. 14 that made that month the deadliest since winter. Overall, civilian fatality rates are down perhaps one third since late 2006, though they remain quite high. There are also signs that roughly six of Iraq's 18 provinces are making significant economic and security gains, up from three a year ago. The story in Sunni-dominated Anbar Province is by now well known: attacks in the city of Ramadi are down 90 percent, and the economy is recovering. But there is progress in several regions with more complex sectarian mixes as well.

Given the continuing violence, and the absence of political progress, Iraq is not now on a trajectory toward sustainable stability — and America is not yet on a clear path to an exit strategy. With sectarian tensions so high, and hatreds so freshly stoked, Iraq's own dynamics would probably lead to an accelerating civil war if left unchecked. □

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	AUGUST 2003	AUGUST 2004	AUGUST 2005	AUGUST 2006	AUGUST 2007
U.S./Other Foreign Troops in Iraq (in thousands)	139/22	140/24	138/23	138/19	138/19
U.S. Troop Deaths	36	65	65	65	65
Iraqi Security Forces (in thousands)		91	183	298	360
Iraqi Security Force Fatalities	65	65	65	283	100
Daily Attacks by Insurgents and Militias	18	77	70	60	20
Prisoners Held by U.S./Iraq (in thousands)	6	6	14	27	60
Attacks in Region Near Mosul	1	5	10	10	8
Sunni Volunteers Working With U.S. and Iraqi Forces (in thousands)		0	10	10	40
Number of U.S./Iraqi Daily Patrols	0	600	600	1,000	4,500
Iraqi Civilian Deaths	700	1,500	2,000	3,000	2,500
Iraqi Civilians Newly Displaced by Violence (monthly; in thousands)	25	25	15	200	80
Multiple-Fatality Bombings	4	13	27	30	30
Oil Production (in millions of barrels per day; prewar: up to 2.5)		2.1	2.2	2.2	1.7

Household Fuel Supply (as percentage of estimated need)	57	84	96	71	88
Electricity Production (average gigawatts; prewar: 4.0)		4.7	4.0	4.4	4.1
Unemployment Rate (percent)		35	33	33	33
Resources Going From Baghdad to Average Iraqi Province (in millions of dollars per year)		0	25	50	100
Iraqis Supporting Strong Central Government (percent)	85	80	70	65	55

KEY
More Favorable Conditions (lighter shading)
Less Favorable Conditions (darker shading)

Iraq failing to achieve objectives, report says

By Brian Knowlton

WASHINGTON: A congressional report issued Tuesday, as the war debate enters a pivotal phase, concludes that "violence remains high" in Iraq and that the Baghdad government has made only mixed progress on security and insufficient movement toward political reconciliation.

Democrats immediately seized on the report, from the independent Government Accountability Office, or GAO, to say that the time for a change had come.

"Over all, key legislation has not been passed, violence remains high, and it is

unclear whether the Iraqi government will spend \$10 billion in reconstruction funds," said the report from David Walker, comptroller general of the United States. "These results do not diminish the courageous efforts of coalition forces and progress that has been made in several areas, including Anbar Province."

The report came a day after President George W. Bush, in a surprise visit to a military base in Anbar Province, suggested that a reduction in forces might be possible if what he described as security successes there continued.

But the report placed greater emphasis on shortcomings than successes, saying that Iraq had failed to meet 11 of the 18 military and political objectives set by Congress while partly meeting 4.

And that assessment was noticeably rosier than a draft version of the GAO report, which had found that Iraq was short of meeting 13 of the 18 standards for progress. After the draft report, Pentagon officials contended that at least two more categories deserved passing grades; in the final version, both got mixed reviews.

In contrast, an interim White House report in July found progress on 8 of the

18 benchmarks.

"No matter what spin we may hear in the coming days, this independent assessment is a failing grade for a policy that simply isn't working," said Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Senator Harry Reid, the majority leader, said the administration's calls for patience should no longer be heeded.

"September is the month for policy change in Iraq," Reid declared Tuesday, as he reopened the Senate for business after the summer break. He noted that many Republican lawmakers had urged patience until General David Petraeus, the military commander in Iraq, and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador there, issue their progress reports this month.

"The calendar has not changed," Reid said. "It's September. We have reached this goal. It's time to make a decision. We can't continue the way we are."

But the minority leader, Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, said he still planned to wait to hear from Petraeus and Crocker, as well as Bush, before reaching any conclusions.

Lawmakers had ordered the GAO report in hopes of obtaining a perspective against which to gauge the reports from Petraeus and Crocker. They are due to appear before Congress early next week, then issue their reports by Sept. 15.

The GAO report found that only two of nine security benchmarks had been met, dealing with improvements in Baghdad security.

But the government had not eliminated militia control of local security, ended political intervention in military operations, ensured even-handed law enforcement, increased army units capable of independent operation or ensured that the political authorities made no false accusations against security forces.

The report said the Iraqi government had met only one of eight legislative benchmarks, protecting minority-party rights in the legislature. It had not enacted legislation on de-Baathification, oil-revenue sharing, provincial elections, amnesty or militia disarmament.

It said that it was unclear whether sectarian violence had decreased.



During a foot patrol in Baghdad, U.S. soldiers took a break inside a private home Tuesday as the occupants ate their breakfast.

Iranian uses crises to solidify his power

Feud with West fuels Ahmadinejad

By Michael Slackman

TEHRAN: Rents are soaring, inflation has been hovering around 17 percent and 10 million Iranians live below the poverty line. The police shut down 20 barbershops for men in Tehran last week because they offered inappropriate hairstyles and women have been banned from riding bicycles in many places, as a crack-down on social freedoms presses on.

For months now, average Iranians have endured economic hardship, political repression and international isolation as the nation's top officials remain defiant over Iran's nuclear program.

But in a country whose leaders see national security, government stability and Islamic values as inextricably entwined, problems that usually would constitute threats to the leadership are instead viewed as an opportunity to secure its rule.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic missteps and the animosity generated in the West by his aggressive posture on the nuclear issue have helped his government stymie what it sees as corrupting foreign influences by increasing the country's economic and political isolation, economists, diplomats, political analysts, businessmen and clerics said in interviews over the past two weeks.

Pressure from the West — including economic sanctions — over Tehran's nuclear program and its role in Iraq has also empowered those pushing the harder line, many of those interviewed said.

Saeed Leylaz, an economist and former government official, said: "The leader is concerned that any effort to make the country more manageable will lead to reform and will undermine his authority."

The effort to keep Iran's doors to the West sealed tight was on display Sunday, when Ahmadinejad announced that Tehran's scientists had developed 3,000 centrifuges and then mocked the West for trying to press Iran to stop uranium enrichment and slow its nuclear program.

On Monday, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, tried to use such Western tactics to rally public sentiment behind the government. "Iran will defeat these drunken and arrogant powers using its artful and wise ways," he said to a group of students, state run television reported.

The remarks were seen here by Western diplomats and political analysts as an attempt by the president to undermine months of careful negotiations between more pragmatic conservatives in the leadership and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which days earlier had said that Iran was being more cooperative.

The message was clear, a Western diplomat said. "They are convinced the rest of the world is trying to put pressure on Iran to keep Iran down," said the diplomat, who requested an-

onymity so as not to compromise his ability to work in Iran. "They believe if Iran makes a concession to the West on the nuclear issue, it will be the first step toward regime change."

The economic component of Iran's go-it-alone approach began with Ahmadinejad's election two years ago. He laid down a series of erratic economic decrees that he said were aimed at helping the poor, but often made their lives harder. Recently, the head of the central bank and the ministers of oil and industry resigned, warning that Iran was heading toward trouble. The president's decisions have frightened away investors, derailing efforts to open Iran to world markets, analysts said.

The leadership has been able to ease some of the pain because of the income from its crude oil sales. Ultimately, those interviewed agreed, Ahmadinejad has continued unimpeded because he has the support of Khamenei, who has the final say on all key decisions.

"The only thing that has kept Ahmadinejad in power is the support of the leadership," said Muhammad Atrianfar, publisher of two newspapers that have been closed and an ally of former President Hashemi Rafsanjani. "As soon as the leader stops supporting him, he can easily be impeached and dismissed."

No one accuses the leadership of deliberately fostering economic chaos. Instead, analysts here said Ahmadinejad fails to understand the effects of his policies. "He feels the pain of the poor but doesn't have any solution," said Ali Rashadi, an economist. "He is wrecking a system that was patched together over 25 years."

Many journalists, academics and former government officials said they thought Ahmadinejad had been more active, and reckless with the economy, than Khamenei had expected. But he is comfortable with Ahmadinejad because he can count on him to preserve the system and to roll back political, economic and social changes that conservatives feared were insidious steps toward revolution, some of those interviewed said.

A Western-allied ambassador here said that the supreme leader and the security services arrested Haleh Esfandiari, an Iranian-American scholar who was imprisoned here for months before being allowed to leave the country last weekend, partly as a warning to Iranians who have expressed dismay over the direction of the country.

"They think little by little we have moved away from Islamic values," said Mohsen Kadivar, a cleric who was removed from his teaching job at Tehran University. "They see Ahmadinejad as the man to return Iran to these values."

Kadivar added, "What's important for them is being in power."

When Ahmadinejad was elected, he campaigned as a Robin Hood, promising to redistribute Iran's oil wealth from the rich to the poor. One of his first edicts was to order banks to lower interest rates to 12 percent, from as high as 17 percent. The order, like others, backfired, making loans harder to come by.

In another case, Ahmadinejad decided that the price of cement was too high, so he ordered it reduced. Rashadi, the economist, said the decree frightened away investors who had planned to build new cement factories around the country.



Newsha Tavakolian/Polaris, for The New York Times

A bazaar in Tehran, a city coping with economic hardship and political repression.

Rashadi also said the president's constant insults aimed at the stock market had undermined investor confidence, which he said encouraged people with money to invest in real estate, driving up property values.

"My income does not match my cost of living," said Hassan Khalili, 37, who rents a small apartment in the village of Vardan, a meandering hillside community of about 9,000 people an hour outside Tehran. "I thought it was going to get better under Ahmadinejad, but it didn't."

But with its oil revenues, the government has, in the short term, been able to buy itself out of an economic meltdown by using \$60 billion for subsidies and a massive increase in imports — although that has undermined local manufacturing, economists here said.

Some of those interviewed said the oil revenues also have helped shore up the regime by enriching a new ruling class made up of members of the Revolutionary Guard and alumni of the Basij militia, who have their hands in nearly every aspect of the economy — and now in much of the government as well.

Ahmadinejad's economic policies have also cushioned many homeowners because property values have skyrocketed. Three years ago, for example, a four-bedroom apartment in a good Tehran neighborhood sold for \$200,000; it could be worth more than \$1 million today.

Mehdi Panahi lives in central Tehran and runs a small snack shop in the mountains just north of the city, where

**'They are convinced
the rest of the world is
trying to put pressure on
Iran to keep Iran down.'**

many people hike and relax on the weekends.

He has had to raise his prices 20 percent since March, he said, because his rent doubled in the last year. The cost of cooking oil shot up 50 percent, tomato paste rose 70 percent and prices of dairy products increased by 70 percent.

But in the current environment of fear and caution, Panahi said: "Of course I am optimistic. What is there not to be optimistic about?"

The economic upheaval has been coupled with a far-reaching, months-long security clampdown. Analysts said the authorities have arrested prominent Iranian-American intellectuals, suppressed the student movement, rolled back social freedoms, purged university faculties, closed newspapers and moved to marginalize political figures who are out of step with the government.

Those arrested included a once-prominent ally of the leadership, Hossein Mousavian. The former nuclear negotiator — and ally of Rafsanjani — was detained on espionage charges in May.

The repression is calibrated. Students and female activists have been encouraged to leave the country or face more serious pressure. The idea is to send a message without spreading the pain too widely.

As a result, the streets are calm but there is an undercurrent of unease and confusion. People routinely say that life is good, better even under this president — then rattle off a litany of complaints.

Last week, Ahmadinejad attended a conference of religious leaders in the north of Tehran. Ali Akhbar Akhbari, his wife and two young daughters live in a tent a block from the convention center. They said they were homeless and collected bottles to make money for food. Marziah, 13, and Roziah, 9, slept in their own small tent decorated with Looney Tunes characters.

"No one will help them!" shouted Valioalah Ghiyasi, 60, as he walked down the street, his hands deep in the pockets of his sport coat. He pulled a pay stub from his pocket, showing his own small government salary, the equivalent of about \$130 a month.

"It was a better situation before," he said. "My wife has cancer and I can't afford the medicine. I haven't been able to pay my rent in five months. My rent is \$250 a month. I don't know what to do. I am begging."

The net effect of the president's policies can be seen in the village of Vadan. Property values have gone up so much that a local man, Ghalan Abbas Mahmoodi, has been able to open a real estate office.

Farmers are selling off land, and wealthy people from Tehran are building villas on scenic hills overlooking the rolling countryside.

Those who do not own land and have seen their rents soar, like Khalili, said they were facing a catastrophe.

Mahmoodi, the realtor, had a different view. "As my income increases, my purchase power increases," he said.

While the president has lost a great deal of political support within the system, he has not shown any signs of being deterred. "There is an honorable butcher in our neighborhood who is aware of all the problems of the people," Ahmadinejad said, "and I also get important economic information from him."

Moderate wins Iran election

By Michael Slackman

TEHRAN: In another sign of the growing discontent with Iran's radical policies, former President Hashemi Rafsanjani won an election to lead the Assembly of Experts, a body of 86 senior clerics that monitors the nation's supreme leader and chooses his successor.

Rafsanjani, who some analysts say is interested in reversing Iran's international isolation, was elected chairman of the assembly with 41 votes. His opponent, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, received 31 votes from a total of 76 cast.

Rafsanjani's victory came in the face of a campaign by the conservative government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to secure the post for Jannati. This week it removed Rafsanjani's autobiography

from store shelves because it contained a passage claiming that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini supported plans to drop the slogan "Death to America," a popular conservative rallying call. Rafsanjani and that passage in his book were then derided in the newspaper Kayhan, the voice of the most radical forces in Iran.

Analysts said that Rafsanjani's influence is as low as it has ever been and that it was not clear if his victory would improve his status or drag down the assembly. Rafsanjani was

defeated by Ahmadinejad in the race for president two years ago and has found his voice increasingly muffled ever since. His advice to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is largely ignored, the analysts said.

"I don't think anything will change at the assembly," said Abbas Abdi, a

political analyst in Tehran. "It does not have anything to do with the political trends."

Theoretically, Rafsanjani should be a powerful force. In addition to leading the assembly, he will retain his post as head of the Expediency Council, which negotiates differences between Parliament and the hard-liners on the Guardian Council. The supreme leader has final say on all matters of state, and he has shown no interest in reinstating Rafsanjani's influence. He has long viewed him as a challenge to his own authority, the analysts said.

Just before the vote, Rafsanjani hinted that he might push the assembly to raise its profile; in the past three decades it has not issued a single public report.

"If the experts assembly wants to play a more active role in the country's affairs, it has the religious and legal justification to do that," the state news agency IRNA quoted Rafsanjani as saying.

Le Monde
4 septembre 2007

L'armée britannique évacue son QG de Bassora, dans le sud de l'Irak

LONDRES
CORRESPONDANT

C'est une décision hautement symbolique. Les troupes britanniques sont en train de quitter la dernière ville où elles étaient présentes en Irak. Elles ont commencé, dimanche 2 septembre, à se retirer de leur base du palais de Bassora, deuxième localité du pays. L'opération ne devrait pas prendre plus d'un ou deux jours. Les 550 soldats stationnés dans leur quartier général au cœur de la grande cité du Sud irakien sont redéployés sur l'aéroport, situé à 25 km et où se trouvent les quelque 5 000 hommes opérant encore dans le pays.

Le retrait a été annoncé par le général Mohan Tahir, chef des forces de sécurité de la province. Les troupes irakiennes, a-t-il affirmé lors d'une conférence de presse, contrôlent désormais le palais de Bassora. L'opération a été confirmée par un porte-parole du premier ministre britannique, Gordon Brown. La base évacuée abritait les logements de militaires et de diplomates depuis l'invasion du pays, en 2003.

Regroupé totalement à l'aéroport, le contingent britannique continuera à jouer un rôle de « supervision ». Il entraînera et conseillera la 10^e division irakienne. Il l'épaulera si nécessaire lors d'opérations ponctuelles. Ce repli devrait permettre, comme prévu, de réduire à 5 000 le nombre total de soldats d'ici à décembre.

L'opération comporte bien sûr un risque : laisser le champ libre aux nombreuses milices chiïtes qui se disputent le contrôle de la ville. L'armée irakienne pourra-t-elle ou voudra-t-elle les tenir en respect ? Le retrait du palais de Bassora marque une étape nouvelle et significative dans la poursuite de la réduction de l'engagement britannique en Irak. Au nombre de 18 000 en mai 2003, après la chute de Saddam Hussein, et de 7 000 au début de 2007, les soldats ne sont plus que 5 500 aujourd'hui. Ils ont évacué trois provinces en un an.

Gordon Brown se refuse toujours, cependant, à fixer un calendrier de retrait, de peur de « miner le travail magnifique » des troupes en Irak, a-t-il souligné, il y a quelques jours, dans sa réponse à une lettre de Sir Menzies Campbell, chef du Parti des démocrates libéraux (LibDem), hostile à la guerre. Ce dernier a accueilli la nouvelle du retrait de Bassora comme la preuve que l'armée britannique ne peut plus jouer un « rôle efficace » sur le terrain.

L'évolution de la situation lui donne largement raison. Les relations entre les soldats, accueillis avec une certaine sympathie en 2003, et les civils se sont gravement dégradées après une série d'incidents en 2005. La surenchère entre les milices chiïtes, entraînées ou soutenues par l'Iran voisin, le noyautage par elles de la police et le manque d'autorité du pou-

Londres devrait ramener à 5 000 le nombre de ses soldats encore présents en Irak d'ici à décembre. Des généraux critiquent la gestion de l'après-guerre par Washington



Soldat britannique près de Bassora, en avril : de 18 000 en mai 2003, le contingent militaire de Londres en Irak a été ramené à 5 500 soldats. ESSAM AL-SUDANI/AFP

voir central ont placé les Britanniques face à des attaques au coût humain toujours plus fort et jugé de plus en plus intolérable par l'opinion. Londres a perdu 159 soldats en Irak.

En cautionnant un désengagement progressif, quoique prudent, Gordon Brown tient compte aussi des vœux de l'état-major, inquiet des tensions subies par une armée aux effectifs insuffisants et désireux de puiser en Irak les troupes qui lui permettront de « mettre le paquet » en Afghanistan, dans une guerre à ses yeux beaucoup plus légitime.

Les anciens chefs militaires ne se gênent plus maintenant pour critiquer ouvertement l'allié américain. « Il n'y a aucun doute, avec le recul, que le plan américain pour l'après-guerre était défectueux, et nombre d'entre nous le présentaient à l'époque », a déclaré, dimanche, au *Sunday Mirror* le général Tim Cross. Cet officier supérieur était le plus haut gradé britannique chargé de la planification de l'après-guerre. Il met en cause directement l'ancien ministre de la défense américain, Donald Rumsfeld : « Dès le tout début, nous étions très préoccupés par le manque de précision du plan pour l'après-guerre. Rumsfeld n'a pas voulu entendre ce message. Les Américains étaient convaincus que

l'Irak s'en sortirait assez rapidement comme une démocratie stable. »

Même son de cloche du côté du général à la retraite Sir Mike Jackson, chef de l'armée au moment de l'invasion. « M. Rumsfeld est l'une des personnes les plus responsables de la situation actuelle en Irak », écrit-il dans son autobiographie, dont des extraits ont été publiés par le *Daily Telegraph*. Le général y qualifie la politique américaine de « faillite intellectuelle ». Réagissant à ce jugement, l'ancien ambassadeur américain à l'ONU, John Bolton, accuse le général de donner « une version de l'Histoire appuyée par aucune preuve ».

Les politiques sont aussi montés au créneau. Des Browne et David Miliband, ministres de la défense et des affaires étrangères, ont jugé « déplacées » les remarques d'un général américain à la

retraite faisant état de la « frustration » des Etats-Unis face à la dégradation de la sécurité autour de Bassora. « Les troupes britanniques ont-elles échoué ? demandent les ministres, dans une tribune au *Washington Post* : la réponse est non. Il n'y a aucune insurrection antigouvernementale à Bassora, et très peu d'indications d'une présence d'Al-Qaida dans le sud de l'Irak. » ■

JEAN-PIERRE LANGELLIER

Le Monde
5 septembre 2007

Irak Visite du président américain dans la province d'Al-Anbar, où des sunnites se sont retournés contre Al-Qaida

Bush évoque un retrait d'Irak « en position de force »

Un livre sur les coulisses de la Maison Blanche

Dans un livre publié mardi 4 septembre, le journaliste Robert Draper révèle, selon le *Washington Post*, que plusieurs conseillers de George Bush lui ont affirmé que la vision du président de l'après-guerre en Irak avait été déterminée par une rencontre avec trois exilés irakiens dans le Bureau ovale plusieurs mois avant l'invasion du pays en mars 2003. Ces exilés assuraient que « l'Irak accueillerait les forces américaines avec enthousiasme, que les tensions ethniques et religieuses disparaîtraient avec la chute du régime », écrit le journaliste dans *Dead Certain : the presidency of George Bush*.

L'auteur indique par ailleurs que Karl Rove, chef adjoint du cabinet présidentiel, démissionnaire depuis juillet, s'est opposé au choix de Dick Cheney comme vice-président avant les élections de 2000.

.WASHINGTON
CORRESPONDANTE

Pour sa troisième visite en Irak depuis 2003, le président Bush a soigneusement évité Bagdad. A 7 h 42, lundi 3 septembre, son avion s'est posé sur la base aérienne d'Al-Assad, à 180 km à l'ouest de la capitale, alors que la presse le croyait à Washington. L'objet du déplacement, en préparation depuis six semaines, était clair : souligner le « succès » remporté par les forces américaines dans la province d'Al-Anbar, exemple opposé depuis des mois par la Maison Blanche à ceux qui réclament un retrait d'Irak.

En novembre 2003, M. Bush était venu passer la fête de Thanksgiving avec les troupes américaines. En juin 2006, sa deuxième visite avait été consacrée au soutien du tout nouveau gouvernement

du chiïte Nouri Al-Maliki. Cette fois, M. Bush a fait venir M. Maliki dans cette province sunnite où il se rend rarement pour lui signifier que les Etats-Unis entendent poursuivre dans la voie du rapprochement avec les anciens partisans de

« Des succès ont été enregistrés sur le plan de la sécurité »

George Bush

Saddam Hussein, et faire « monter » la réconciliation « de la base », si Bagdad continue à se montrer incapable de partager le pouvoir. « Des succès ont été enregistrés sur le plan de la sécurité », a dit M. Bush. *Maintenant, le gouvernement doit suivre.* »

Les Américains veulent faire d'Al-Anbar un modèle pour le pays. Il y a un an, la province était considérée comme « perdue » par le renseignement militaire lui-même. Au printemps, elle a été le théâtre d'un renversement d'alliances spectaculaire. « Des sunnites qui combattaient aux côtés d'Al-Qaida contre les trou-



George Bush, le ministre de la défense Robert Gates, et la secrétaire d'Etat Condoleezza Rice, sur la base d'Al-Assad. JASON REED/REUTERS

pes de la coalition combattent maintenant à nos côtés contre Al-Qaida », a souligné M. Bush, après avoir rencontré les chefs tribaux. Mais il n'est pas sûr que le modèle fonctionne dans des régions où la population est moins homogène qu'à Ramadi ou Fallouja.

A une semaine de l'audition au Congrès du commandant en chef des forces américaines, le général David Petraeus, et de l'ambassadeur à Bagdad, Ryan Crocker, M. Bush a montré qu'il n'avait pas l'intention de changer de stratégie. S'il a évoqué une possible réduction des effectifs, c'est assorti d'une condition : le succès. « Le général Petraeus et l'ambassadeur Crocker me disent que, si le type de succès que nous voyons actuellement continue, il sera possible de maintenir le même niveau de sécurité avec moins de troupes », a-t-il dit à l'issue de ses entretiens. Devant un parterre de plusieurs centaines de marines enthousiastes, il a été encore plus clair. « Quand nous commencerons à réduire nos effectifs en

Irak, ce sera à partir d'une position de force et de succès, non de crainte et d'échec. »

M. Bush était accompagné de son « cabinet de guerre » au complet, du ministre de la défense, Robert Gates, qui s'est déclaré « plus optimiste qu'il ne l'a jamais été », à la secrétaire d'Etat, Condoleezza Rice, en passant par le général Peter Pace, qui termine son mandat de chef d'état-major interarmées et qui passe pour être favorable à une réduction d'au moins 50 000 hommes (sur 160 000) avant 2008. Après avoir passé huit heures à Al-Anbar, M. Bush a repris sa route vers Sydney, en Australie, où se tient le sommet annuel du forum de Coopération économique Asie-Pacifique (APEC).

Le général Petraeus et l'ambassadeur Crocker doivent être entendus les 10 et 12 septembre au Congrès. Ensuite, la Maison Blanche publiera son propre rapport d'évaluation sur la stratégie mise en place en janvier (l'envoi de 30 000 soldats en

renfort). M. Bush pourrait aussi s'adresser à la nation pour faire part de ses décisions.

La principale inconnue réside dans l'attitude des démocrates. Feront-ils ce que le candidat à l'investiture du parti John Edwards n'a pas manqué de réclamer, à savoir « s'opposer de front à la stratégie de M. Bush » en bloquant les fonds supplémentaires de 50 milliards de dollars demandés par la Maison Blanche ?

Une vingtaine de parlementaires se sont rendus en Irak au mois d'août. Ils ont déjeuné de tortellinis à la langouste avec l'ambassadeur Crocker mais aussi, pour certains, essayé des tirs au décollage de leur hélicoptère. Peu en sont revenus avec des certitudes catégoriques... ■

C. Ls

Sarkozy, Kouchner et l'Irak

Le Monde
5 septembre 2007

Ne cherchons pas à opposer le président de la République et son ministre des affaires étrangères. Constatons simplement que, à propos de l'Irak, Nicolas Sarkozy a tempéré la fougue de Bernard Kouchner, qui éprouve une jubilation manifeste à bousculer les lignes de la politique internationale. Dans son discours devant les ambassadeurs français à la fin août, il a – sur deux points qui ne sont pas secondaires – tracé les limites de l'inflexion apportée par la visite du chef de la diplomatie à Bagdad. Il va sans dire que ce voyage n'aurait pas eu lieu sans l'accord de l'Élysée, mais les suites qu'il faut en attendre font l'objet d'interprétations nuancées sur les deux rives de la Seine.

Le président est plus affirmatif que son ministre sur le nécessaire départ des forces américaines d'Irak et plus réservé sur l'aptitude de la France à agir entre-temps. Une solution politique « implique que soit défini un horizon clair concernant le retrait des troupes étrangères », a dit M. Sarkozy, reprenant la position qui était celle de son prédécesseur. « L'horizon » a remplacé la « perspective » d'un retrait réclamée par Jacques Chirac, mais l'idée est la même.

A son retour de Bagdad, M. Kouchner a accordé un entretien à l'hebdomadaire américain *Newsweek*. Dans la version vidéo de cette interview, il répète à plusieurs reprises que « personne ne veut faire partir les troupes américaines dans l'immédiat. Ils [les Irakiens] ont besoin des troupes américaines. Il faut arrêter l'occupation, mais pas immédiatement ». Ce qui constitue un son de cloche sensiblement différent, même si le décalage peut être ramené à une question de calendrier. C'est toutefois sur ce point que se cristallise justement la discussion aux États-Unis.

Le deuxième sujet concerne la latitude d'action de la France. Sur le dossier irakien, M. Kouchner paraît plus activiste que le président. Il voudrait « faire quelque chose », entraîner ses collègues

International Daniel Vernet

européens à suivre son exemple... M. Sarkozy paraît moins pressé. Il veut attendre une décision américaine sur un calendrier de réduction des forces étrangères dans le pays avant d'évoquer une action de la communauté internationale : « C'est alors, et alors seulement », a-t-il déclaré devant les ambassadeurs, qu'il sera possible d'agir « le plus utilement ». Autrement dit, il convient au moins de voir les conclusions que le président Bush tirera – s'il en tire – du rapport que devraient lui

remettre dans quelques jours le général Petraeus et l'ambassadeur Ryan Crocker, les deux représentants militaire et civil américains en Irak, avant que « tous les acteurs prennent leurs responsabilités ». « La France, a ajouté le chef de l'État, y sera disposée. »

Ne cherchons donc pas à opposer le président de la République et son ministre des affaires étrangères, symbole parmi d'autres de l'« ouverture ». D'ailleurs, il s'agit à peine de nuances, plutôt d'un partage des rôles. Jean-David Lévitte, conseiller diplomatique de Nicolas Sarkozy, donne la grille de lecture dans un entretien au *New Yorker* (décidément, la presse américaine est choyée par les dirigeants français) : « En nommant Kouchner, Sarkozy poursuivait un objectif. Il n'y a aucune naïveté de sa part. Il comprend le côté le plus réaliste de la Realpolitik. Mais il comprend aussi qu'on ne peut pas avancer et impliquer les Français sans en appeler à leur sens de la justice et des valeurs. Pour se réengager dans le monde, les Français doivent percevoir la politique française comme quelque chose qui ne soit pas cynique. Ils doivent être convaincus qu'elle est humaine et déterminée. Ainsi des infirmières bulgares. (...) C'est un cas où la morale politique et la politique réaliste sont une seule et même chose. »

Notons toutefois que, dans cet exemple, M. Sarkozy n'a pas eu besoin de M. Kouchner pour incarner à la fois le business et la justice. ■

Un rapport américain recommande de démanteler la police irakienne

La commission sur les forces de sécurité irakiennes, dirigée par le général James Jones, affirme que Bagdad ne pourra pas assurer la sécurité avant « douze à dix-huit mois »

WASHINGTON
CORRESPONDANTE

Depuis des mois, la stratégie de l'administration Bush en Irak consiste à assurer la formation de la police et de l'armée irakiennes. Comme l'a répété le président américain, « au fur et à mesure que les Irakiens montent, nous diminuons ». L'état de préparation des Irakiens a fait l'objet de polémiques entre le Congrès et l'administration, mais, jusqu'ici, un large accord existait autour de l'objectif. Mais une question iconoclaste commence à être entendue : pourquoi entraîner les forces irakiennes ? Elle est posée par les partisans de la partition de l'Irak, par ceux qui préconisent un retrait militaire rapide et aussi par un certain nombre de vétérans, perturbés par le fait que l'armée américaine distribue désormais des armes dans des régions sunnites, jusque-là hostiles à la présence des GI.

Trois élus démocrates, membres du groupe Out of Irak, ont déposé, le 5 septembre, un projet de loi visant à cesser de financer l'entraînement des forces irakiennes. « Ce ne sont pas des forces de sécurité

que nous entraînons, ce sont des factions. Comment être sûrs que nous ne mettons pas ces armes dans les mains de nos futurs ennemis ? Dans le passé, Saddam Hussein et Oussama Ben Laden ont été soutenus par les Etats-Unis dans des circonstances très similaires », explique la représentante de Californie, Maxine Waters. « Nous ne sommes pas seulement en train d'armer un côté contre un autre », ajoute Lynn Woolsey, autre représentante démocrate de Californie. Nous armons les deux côtés contre nos propres troupes. »

Depuis 2003, le Pentagone a dépensé 20 milliards pour l'armement et l'entraînement des Irakiens. Un rapport officiel a estimé à 190 000 le nombre d'armes dont le Pentagone a perdu la trace. Début août, à Bagdad, la représentante démocrate de l'Illinois, Jan Schakowky, a demandé des explications au commandant des forces américaines, le général Petraeus. « Il n'a pas du tout apprécié, raconte-t-elle. Il a dit qu'elles n'étaient absolument pas perdues, qu'elles étaient allées à leurs destinataires, mais qu'il n'avait pas les papiers, c'est tout. »

Pour Lawrence Korb, ex-secrétaire adjoint à la défense, certains Irakiens sont « mieux formés » que certains des jeunes Américains qui sont envoyés au combat. « Mais il y a un problème de motivation », critique-t-il. Le général William Odom,

ancien directeur de l'Agence nationale de renseignement (NSA), qui soutient aussi le projet de loi, comprend mal la politique du président Bush. Il n'y a « pas d'exemple dans l'Histoire où des Etats stables aient été créés en disséminant des armes et le pouvoir aux groupes locaux », souligne-t-il. « Les sunnites qui acceptent de combattre Al-Qaïda aux côtés des Etats-Unis en échange d'armement le font, car ils n'ont aucune confiance dans le gouvernement central. En d'autres termes, nous armons les ennemis d'un gouvernement dont nous avons soutenu l'élection et la légitimité. »

Les partisans de cet amendement ont été confortés, jeudi 6 septembre, par les conclusions de la commission sur les forces de sécurité irakiennes, un groupe indépendant dirigé par le général James Jones, ancien commandant des forces alliées en Europe, et composé de 20 ex-officiers supérieurs. Selon cet organisme, les forces irakiennes ne seront pas capables d'assurer seules la sécurité en Irak avant « douze à dix-huit mois ». L'armée a fait des progrès et commence à « développer les infrastructures de base d'une capacité de défense nationale, mais la police est minée par les divisions confessionnelles et la corruption ». Forte de 26 000 membres, elle devrait être « démantelée », préconise la commission. ■

CORINE LESNES

« Ce ne sont pas des forces de sécurité que nous entraînons, ce sont des factions »

Maxine Waters, représentante de Californie

L'Iran veut des explications sur la présence en Allemagne du chef du Pejak



TEHERAN, 11 sept 2007 (AFP) - Téhéran a demandé au gouvernement allemand des explications sur la présence en Allemagne du chef du groupe kurde Pejak, qui mène des actions armées dans le nord-ouest de l'Iran, a déclaré le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, Manouchehr Mottaki, cité mardi par l'agence Irna.

"Nous avons demandé des explications au gouvernement allemand" sur la présence du chef du groupe Pejak, a affirmé M. Mottaki, sans préciser la date à laquelle l'Iran avait fait une telle demande.

"Le gouvernement allemand doit répondre à propos de la présence de certains membres du groupuscule terroriste Pejak dans ce pays", a ajouté M. Mottaki.

Le Pejak est un groupe rebelle kurde, lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui a intensifié ces derniers mois ses actions armées dans les provinces frontalières iraniennes avec la Turquie et l'Irak, comprenant d'importantes populations kurdes.

M. Mottaki a également affirmé qu'"il est nécessaire d'empêcher l'entrée de terroristes sur le territoire iranien depuis l'Irak et il faut prendre les mesures

nécessaires dans ce sens".

Le gouvernement irakien a récemment accusé l'Iran de bombarder des zones du Kurdistan irakien où sont censés se réfugier des membres du Pejak.

Jeudi, Ali Larjani, le secrétaire du Conseil suprême de la sécurité nationale, a accusé les Etats-Unis d'aider le Pejak dans le but d'affaiblir Téhéran.

Le chef du Pejak, Rahman Haji-Ahmadi, a expliqué en juin à la chaîne de télévision allemande ARD qu'il habite depuis 43 ans en Europe, principalement en Allemagne.

Mercredi dernier, la télévision d'Etat a annoncé que sept policiers iraniens avaient été tués lors d'une fusillade entre les forces de sécurité et des "rebelles", dans la province kurde de Kermanshah (ouest).

En février, 14 militaires iraniens, dont deux responsables des Gardiens de la révolution, ont été tués dans la chute d'un hélicoptère lors d'une opération contre des rebelles près de la frontière turque.

Iraqi Kurdistan

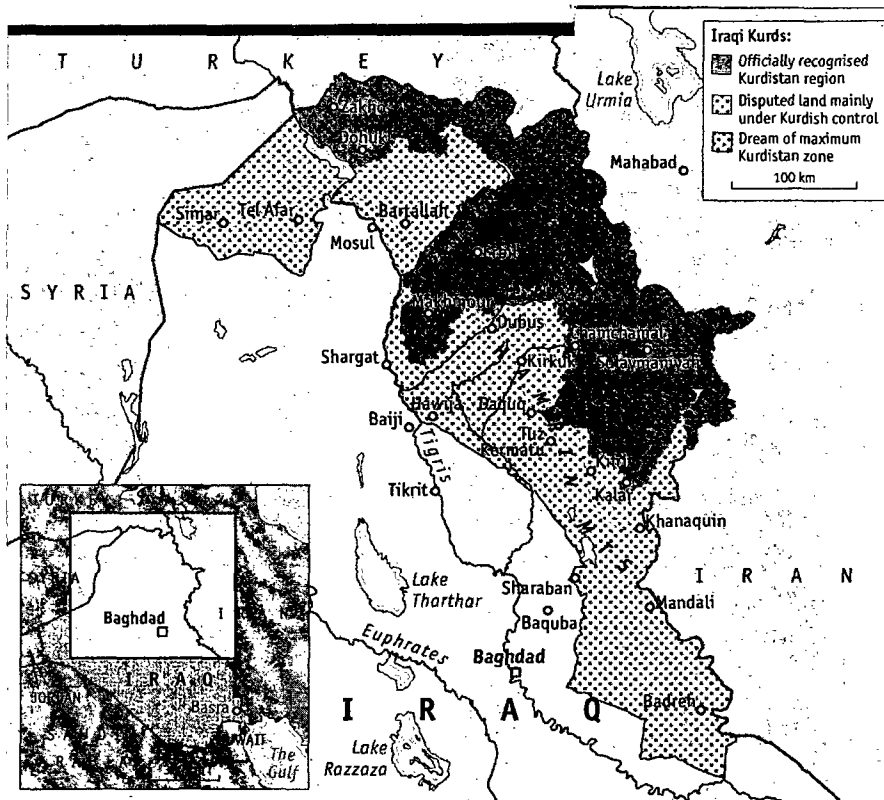
The Economist

Does independence beckon?

SEPTEMBER 8TH-14TH 2007

ERBIL AND SULAYMANIYAH

Iraq's Kurds have never had it so good. But they still have a long way to go before securing a safe and stable, let alone democratic, future



The issue of maps (above left) is just as toxic and tricky. Where, indeed, are the borders of Iraqi Kurdistan (let alone those of the parts of Turkey, Iran and Syria, where another 21m-plus Kurds reside, alongside 4.6m Iraqi ones)? The Iraqi Kurds' standard map that hangs nowadays on ministry walls, in restaurants and for sale in kiosks shows Iraqi Kurdistan stretching a lot further than the area currently under the Kurds' control.

It sweeps in an arc from Sinjar and Zakho, in the north-west, near the border with Turkey, brushes Mosul's once largely Kurdish east side, then runs down the east bank of the river Tigris, taking in the whole of the contested province of Kirkuk (which Arab maps call Tamim), then runs on along the Hamrin mountains north-east of Baghdad, all the way down to a sliver of land east of the Iraqi capital, abutting the Iranian border near the town of Badreh.

Even the most acquisitively nationalist Kurds do not take this maximal map seriously. For one thing, some of it is inhabited predominantly by Arabs—who would not be trusted in Kurdistan. But most Kurds do demand fat chunks of extra territory, especially but not only in Kirkuk province, which they were deprived of by Saddam when he Arabised Kurdish lands by expelling Kurds and bringing in Arab settlers from Iraq's south and centre.

It is hard to say exactly where Kurdish influence or control now extends, though a "green line" has roughly demarcated their zone since the end of the first Gulf war in 1991, giving Kurds an area in which they could safely govern themselves. But after ►►

DURING a recent voyage around Iraqi Kurdistan, not a single sign or hint that the place is officially part of a federal Iraq was in evidence. Landing at Erbil International Airport (as the Kurds call it, invariably also noting that it has one of the longest runways in the world), you see no shadow of an Iraqi, as opposed to Kurdish, presence. You show your passport or offer your bags for inspection to officers bearing bright Kurdish insignia on crisp uniforms.

In the past month, virtually no insurgent violence has been recorded in Iraqi Kurdistan, bar a shocking but isolated spate of suicide-bombings that killed more than 400 members of the Yazidi sect in two villages near Sinjar, on the fringe of the area controlled by the Kurds. Otherwise, the last big attacks were in May—one in Erbil, the Kurds' capital, the other in a town of mixed population, Makhmour, on the region's contested western edge of the region, killing at least 30 people.

In the rest of Iraq, by contrast, nearly a thousand civilians and insurgents have been killed in the same period, along with more than 70 American soldiers. There are no American forces in Iraqi Kurdistan, bar a handful guarding a small American dip-

lomatic compound outside Erbil. The only sizeable foreign military presence is a South Korean force of around 1,200, which spends much of its time helping with construction and IT. In short, Iraqi Kurdistan is a haven of peace in a sea of turmoil.

Travellers arriving at Erbil airport jostle with Lebanese bankers, Norwegian oilmen and Dubai traders sniffing for business; most now give bomb-ridden Baghdad, 250 miles (400km) to the south, a wide berth. At the eight or nine security checkpoints through which you pass on the road from Erbil to Sulaymaniyah, the two main cities of Iraq's Kurdistan Region, as international documents officially call it, you never spot the name of Iraq on a military or police badge.

Arabic is used hardly at all; few Kurds under 25 understand more than a smattering of it. Schools are starting to teach English as much as Arabic as a second language. Increasingly, you are expected to call Erbil by its Kurdish name, Hawler (pronounced, roughly, "How-lair"). Above all, the Iraqi flag, in a region where flags matter mightily, flutters nowhere. It has no place at the airport or over any official building, such as the Kurds' lively parliament.

► the American invasion of 2003 they extended their zone of influence, marked by their own checkpoints (technically manned by the Iraqi army but actually by Kurdish units of it), in predominantly Kurdish areas west and south of the green line, which has become blurred and sporadically shifts.

The Iraqi Kurds' standard map tactfully omits to paint the Greater Kurdistan where their ethnic brethren predominate in neighbouring Turkey (14m of them), Iran (some 6m) and Syria (1m). It certainly does not lay claim, as dreamers of a unified Greater Kurdistan do, to a fantastical spur of land that would jut across south-eastern Turkey and northern Syria to reach the Mediterranean, plus another tongue of territory stretching south-eastwards to let Kurds dip their toes in the Persian Gulf beyond Basra. That would be going too far.

But for every Iraqi Kurd, Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution that was endorsed in an Iraq-wide referendum in late 2005 is a national mantra repeated in almost every political conversation. That article provides for a further referendum, following a census and a supposedly voluntary exchange of populations known optimistically as "normalisation", to determine whether people in Kirkuk province "and other disputed territories" want to stay as part of the Arab-ruled part of Iraq or join Kurdistan or perhaps, in the case of Kirkuk, live in a specially administered region.

Too many Kirkuks

That census, due to have been completed by the end of July, has barely begun. Most Kurdish politicians still insist publicly that the December 31st deadline for holding the referendum will, as the constitution says, be met. In private, most admit it will not. What they dread most is an open-ended postponement which may, they fear, let Kirkuk, with some 5% of the world's oil reserves, slip out of their grasp.

Nor has it been decided just what questions would be asked, nor whether the people's wishes would be assessed district by district or province-wide. Officially, the Kurds want the whole province. In fact, many realise it would be more sensible to take just those districts where they are a large majority rather than incorporate slices of territory full of sullen Sunni Arabs who might make Kurdistan unworkable. At the least, the Kurds would take back the large chunks of Kirkuk province that Saddam gerrymandered out of the old Kurdish region. But the blanket of stability covering the area of Iraqi Kurdistan recognised by the government in Baghdad emphatically excludes Kirkuk city, now sealed off from the rest of Kurdistan by a series of intrusive checkpoints.

Indeed, the tinderbox city at the heart of the matter is fizzling ever more menacingly. Per head of population, acts of vio-



Talabani and Barzani, pals for the cause

lence are now more frequent there than in bloody Baghdad, according to a Western diplomat who monitors the score. Moreover, in some nearby towns in Kirkuk province to the south and west of the city, such as Arab-dominated Hawija, al-Qaeda and Saddam loyalists have established a brooding presence.

Though the Kurds' line of influence (if not control) extends into some two-thirds of Kirkuk province, there are plenty of blurred areas. Kurds control the towns of Chamchamal, Kifri and Kalar, to the east of Kirkuk city, and hold sway over Khaniquin, near the border with Iran. But other towns, such as Tuz Kurmatu, which has a strong and twitchy Turkmen populace, and Dubus, where Arabs predominate, resist what they see as the Kurds' expansion into Kirkuk province's southern half.

The oil factor is important but not crucial: if Kurdistan stays part of a federal Iraq, the Arabs in non-oil-rich parts of Iraq would still get a fair share of oil revenues, whether or not Kirkuk is run by the Kurds. The Kurds have agreed that they would get 17% of Iraq's oil income from fields already in operation. But they are still arguing with the authorities in Baghdad over the management, exploration and contracts in unexploited or not-yet-discovered fields.

Economically viable?

Several oil companies, mostly mid-sized and small independent ones, have signed deals with the Kurdistan regional government, and a dozen more are in negotiation, all waiting impatiently for the government in Baghdad to give the green light. The Kurds say they can dish out export permits, though the authorities in Baghdad disagree. More to the point, the Kurds do not control the existing pipelines for export. So they want to build their own "feeder" pipelines to join the national one just before it reaches the Turkish border. Several Western firms hope to get in on this act.

Plainly, the Kurds are seeking to be as independent in economics as a landlocked country can be: a huge challenge.

From 1991 until 2003, when the Americans invaded, the Kurds depended on smuggling, minimal trade with neighbouring countries, foreign handouts and a share (often stingily and belatedly distributed) of the UN's corrupt and maladministered oil-for-food programme. In the past few years they have tried valiantly to create an economy of their own. But they are starting almost from scratch.

Farming was virtually destroyed by Saddam. According to today's planning minister, the percentage of Kurds in agriculture has dropped from some 60% to around 10% in the past generation. During his Anfal (Spoils) campaign to suppress the rebellious Kurds in the late 1980s, Saddam's forces destroyed more than 4,000 villages and killed tens of thousands of civilians—180,000, according to the Kurds.

There is no banking ("We have no access to money," says Osman Shwani, the planning minister), no insurance, no postal service and in the past few years the Kurds' budget has entirely lacked public scrutiny. Commercial law is less than rudimentary. There is a gaping lack of statistics. Mr Shwani freely admits he does not know the size of Kurdistan's GDP.

Starting from zero

There is virtually no tax system. In theory, income tax of between 3% and 10% is paid by salaried earners. "But no one has ever paid taxes," says Mr Shwani. One of the biggest brakes on the economy is the vast proportion of people on the public payroll, which gobbles up about three-quarters of the budget.

But things are starting to move in the right direction. Parliament, elected five times since 1992, has had vigorous debates over Kurdistan's own oil laws—on how, for instance, to handle contracts with foreign investors. But even they will depend to a degree on harmonisation with the oil laws still not passed by a dismally weak and divided central government in Baghdad.

Another huge problem for Iraqi Kurdistan is the fact that it has been run, since 1991, by two rival administrations. In the provinces of Dohuk and Erbil, the Barzani family, which runs the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), has called the shots for generations. To the east, the province of Sulaymaniyah has been run by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), run by Jalal Talabani; this, too, has become something of a family affair. In the late 1990s, the two outfits fought a vicious civil war, in which at least 3,000 people—some put the figure at more than 10,000—were killed.

To a large degree, the party and the union are tribal fiefs, with power, money and even land distributed from the top by the ruling families. While Mr Talabani is currently president of federal Iraq, Massoud Barzani is president of Kurdistan; his nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, is its prime ►

► minister; Massoud's son, Masrur Barzani, heads the powerful intelligence service. At the end of the year, one of Mr Talabani's men is supposed to take over as Kurdistan's prime minister. No one is sure whether that will happen smoothly.

Moreover, the notion that Iraqi Kurdistan is a haven of democracy is far-fetched. The two fiefs control virtually all public activity, including the media, hitherto with remarkably little scrutiny; outright opposition has invariably been squeezed out, often amid accusations of betraying the sacred cause of Kurdistan. Patronage—some call it corruption—is the norm. The Islamists, with a reputation for honesty, are the third force, small for now, but waiting in the wings. If Kurdistan is to thrive, its own politics must loosen up and become more open, if not a Western-style free-for-all.

Real country, real democracy?

Yet on both scores—democracy and unity—there has been progress. The two administrations are undergoing a merger. All but three ministries have joined up (the last to unite being the most awkward: defence, interior and finance). On the democracy front, parliament, which includes four small blocks of opposition parties with the Islamists to the fore, has lively debates and is making government more accountable. A decent constitution for the region is set to enshrine an array of rights, including for Christians, Yazidis (a sect of their own) and other minorities in Kurdistan.

Two small but plucky opposition newspapers give an airing to the peccadillos of the party duopoly. And even some of the party-owned media outlets—for instance, Kurdsat TV, owned and run by Mr Talabani's modernising wife, Herro—occasionally broach topics that were once taboo.

Especially compared with the rest of Iraq, Kurdistan has been making strides on every front. But this does not mean it will survive as a fledgling nation.

The Iraqi Kurds depend, in the end, on three main things: their hardened fighting men, known as the Peshmergas ("those willing to die"), technically a "regional protection force" within Iraq; their neighbours, especially the Turks; and the mountains ("the Kurds' only friends", as their centuries-old saying goes).

The Peshmergas are probably Iraq's best fighting forces in terms of discipline, morale and motivation. According to Jafar Ali Mustafa, the Kurds' minister of state for Peshmerga affairs (in fact, the PUK's defence boss), they number some 200,000; half are loyal to his union, half to the Barzanis' KDP. A merger is proceeding steadily, he says.

The Kurds' relations with their neighbours are just as critical. Turkey, with its 14m-odd Kurds of its own (many of them well assimilated) in a population of 75m, has frequently issued threats to invade

Iraqi Kurdistan and clobber its Kurds if they make a grab for Kirkuk, where Turkey considers itself the guarantor of the rights of the Turkmens, their ethnic kinsfolk from the days when the area was part of the Ottoman empire. It also threatens to invade if Iraq's Kurds do not oust or corral the 3,000-plus guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who hide in the remotest mountains of northern Iraq, where they plan and train for their lethal operations in south-eastern Turkey.

The Iraqi Kurds consider the PKK a nuisance, but are unlikely to spill the blood of their ethnic brothers. They argue, instead, that the Turks should negotiate with them. The Iraqi Kurds' leaders may, however, turn a blind eye if the PKK is attacked within Iraqi Kurdish territory, perhaps even with the complicity of the Americans, who sorely need to improve their relations with Turkey, a rare and crucial Muslim ally of America in the Middle East. But many rank-and-file Kurds would be furious.

However, the Turks and Iraqi Kurds have been getting on better, as the Kurdish government settles down and since Turkey's mildly Islamist government was re-elected in July, scoring notably well in Turkey's Kurdish areas. Moreover, Turkey is by far the Iraqi Kurds' biggest economic partner. Erbil's huge new airport, for instance, is a Turkish (and British) project. If Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan could come to an accommodation, which looks more feasible than before, it would vastly boost the chances of the latter's survival. To a lesser extent, the same goes for the Iraqi Kurds' relations with Iran and Syria, both of which are wary of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan but could probably live with it.

Iraq's Sunni Arabs and Iraq's other Arab neighbours, mainly Sunni (as are



Kurds must plot their next move cunningly

most Kurds), both remain deeply hostile to the notion of an autonomous, let alone independent, Kurdistan. They see the Kurds as destroyers of an Arab nation and bent on undermining the Arabs' professed unity on a wider scale. They are enraged by the Kurds' refusal to fly the Iraqi flag, and ritually accuse them of being a fifth column for Israel and Zionists.

Without fail, say Kurdish ministers, visiting Arab journalists raise both topics. In response, the Kurds point out that several Arab countries have relations with Israel. "The chauvinist Arabs always call us a second Israel," says Mr Jafar, the Peshmerga leader. He denies that Israel and the Kurds have military or intelligence contacts. "I wish we did," he says breezily.

Kurdish leaders are as candid about their desire for the Americans to stay on in Iraq or, if they are bound to withdraw, to keep a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan as a guarantor of the Kurds' national safety. "We'd like the Americans to put their biggest base in Kurdistan," says Mr Jafar.

But the Americans have so far been wary of too warmly embracing the Kurds, concentrating instead on trying to reconcile Sunni and Shia Arabs in Baghdad. "We love the Americans but they don't love us," Nechirvan Barzani, the Kurds' prime minister, is said recently to have sighed.

Hanging on to what you've got

Could the Kurds be satisfied with extreme autonomy in northern Iraq? An informal referendum in 2005 suggested that 98% of them would like outright independence if they could have it. But almost every senior Kurd in Iraq says he would accept extreme autonomy—provided there is a genuine federation and that the central government in Baghdad gives the Kurds a good deal, especially over the management and exploration of oil in the north. Getting back Kirkuk means a lot too; conceivably, a special deal could be arranged there to leave the city with a status of its own.

Is it possible to feel both Kurdish and Iraqi? A former long-serving minister in Iraq's Kurdish government, who is a noted historian, barely blinks. "Frankly, no." Then, after a pause, he adds: "If Iraq ever became truly democratic, maybe."

Masrur Barzani, the 38-year-old intelligence chief and possible future head of the Barzani clan, recommends a "three-state solution", presumably meaning that Iraq, which he calls "the illusion of a country that doesn't really exist", should one day be divided into a three-way confederation. To most Iraqi Kurds, the emergence of a kindly, federal, Arab-run Iraq in which they could have a comfy existence is an absurd prospect.

Briefly after the Ottoman Turks' empire collapsed, the Kurds seemed in reach of a homeland of their own—only to be betrayed by the great powers, Britain to the ►►

fore. Now they are enjoying a golden age of not-quite-independence for longer than at any time in their modern history. So why would they risk a reversion to a past of subjugation by Arabs, Turks or Persians?

If they are sensible, the Kurds will not rush towards independence. To be landlocked and without permanently friendly neighbours is a pretty hopeless recipe for statehood. The outside powers on which the Kurds ultimately depend, especially Turkey and the United States, would not allow them to break away. The Turks could throttle them economically if not bash

them militarily; the Americans may well turn their backs, reckoning that it is strategically more important to curry favour with Turks and Arabs.

But if the Iraqi Kurds can bed down quietly for, say, five or ten years, securing their borders, making their economy work, building a modicum of freedom if not full-fledged democracy, and staying out of the trouble swirling around them in the rest of Iraq, it will be increasingly impossible for the rest of the world to ignore their patently rightful claim to self-determination. They have at least a chance of getting it. ■

Thomas L. Friedman

Where we stand in Iraq

BAGHDAD
I saw many contradictory things on this visit to Iraq — too many to declare a definitive trend. So let me share three scenes that had an impact on me:

Scene 1: I went on a patrol that visited a U.S. Army platoon based in the Ameriya neighborhood of Baghdad, alongside the “Ameriya Knights,” who, as General David Petraeus put it to me, “are not a rugby team.”

Ameriya is a Sunni neighborhood that had been home to doctors, lawyers and other professionals. Today it is a ghost town. It is chilling to see how much this city has been fragmented into little pieces. What were clearly upper-middle-class homes are almost all abandoned, and the streets are full of litter and rubble. This neighborhood first came under assault from Shiite militias, then from pro-Al-Qaeda Iraqi Sunnis, who moved in on the pretext of protecting the Sunnis from the Shiites and then imposed a reign of Islamist terror on them.

The Ameriya Knights are predominantly secular Sunni boys from the neighborhood, who banded together to both drive out the pro-Al-Qaeda forces — which took root here more deeply than I realized — and to protect their homes from Shiite death squads. They decided to work with the Americans because we Americans threaten them — today — less than either the pro-Al-Qaeda Iraqi Sunnis or the Shiites. Many looked like former Baathist army vets to me. They mostly wore jeans, each brandishing a different kind of weapon.

When I asked one of them, Omar Nassif, 32, why he had gone from shooting at Americans to working with them, he said, “I saw an Al-Qaeda man behead an 8-year-old girl with my own eyes ... We want American support because we fought the most vicious organization in the world here ... I would rather work

with the Americans than the Iraqi Army. The Americans are not sectarian people.”

At one point we took a walk around the neighborhood, trudging through the powdery dust in 126 degree heat. When I looked up, I saw a surreal scene — former Baathist insurgents, guns pointed in all directions, providing a security cordon around a senior U.S. officer.

That is the good news and bad news from Iraq. Good news: The surge is

Peace in Iraq has to be built on a Shiite-Sunni consensus, not a constant balancing act by the United States.

tamping down violence. Bad news: The relative calm stems largely from a Sunni-Sunni war that has pushed mainstream Iraqi Sunnis into America’s camp to fight the jihadist Sunnis — rather than from any real Sunni-Shiite rapprochement.

Peace in Iraq has to be built on a Shiite-Sunni consensus, not a constant balancing act by the United States. So far, the surge has created nothing that is self-sustaining. That is, pull us out and this whole place still blows in 10 minutes. You’ll know there’s progress if Shiites or Sunnis do something that surprises you — actually reach out to the other. Up to now, though, all I’ve heard from them is either “I’m weak, how can I compromise?” or “I’m strong, why should I compromise?” No happy medium, no stable Iraq.

Scene 2: On my way into Iraq, I had a private chat with an Arab Gulf leader. He said something that still rings in my ear: “Thomas, everyone is keeping you busy in Iraq. The Russians are keeping

you busy. The Chinese are keeping you busy. The Iranians are keeping you busy. The Saudis are keeping you busy. Egypt is keeping you busy. The Syrians are keeping you busy.”

He’s right. Everyone loves seeing Americans tied down here. One need only observe how Vladimir Putin is throwing his weight around Europe, how China is growing more influential by the day, how Iran has been emboldened and how all the Arab dictators are relieved that America is mired in Iraq so we can’t push any democracy on them to understand that there’s a huge “opportunity cost” for staying here without either success or an exit strategy.

Scene 3: I’m visiting the new American field hospital in Balad, in central Iraq. The full madness that is Iraq is on display here: U.S. soldiers with blast wounds, insurgents with gunshots to the stomach and a 2-month old baby with shrapnel wounds from an insurgent-planted IED scattered over her face. The hospital commander, Brigadier General Burt Field, looks at her and says to me: “There isn’t a 2-month-old on the planet who knows how to hate anybody. It’s all taught.”

Visiting Centcom commander, Admiral William Fallon, chats with the hospital staff, who are all here on different rotations — 30 days, 60 days, 180 days. He asks how they coordinate everyone. A voice from the back, an American nurse, says: “We’re all on the same team, sir.” I look around the room. I see African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans — the whole melting pot that is America — working together. Half are women, including mothers who have left their families for long stretches to serve here.

We don’t deserve such good people — neither do Iraqis if they continue to hate each other more than they love their own kids.

September 6, 2007

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune



KRG signs oil and gas contract with US-based Hunt Oil

Kurdistan Regional Government KRG 08 Sep. 2007-

Erbil, Kurdistan- Iraq (KRG.org) The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) together with Hunt Oil Company of the Kurdistan Region, a subsidiary of Hunt Oil Company of Dallas, Texas, and Impulse Energy Corporation (IEC) announced today that they have signed a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) covering petroleum exploration activities in the Duhok area of the Kurdistan Region. Under the terms of the agreement, Hunt Oil Company of the Kurdistan Region will serve as operator. This is the first PSC to be signed by the KRG since the Oil and Gas Law of the Kurdistan Region was issued by the Kurdistan National Assembly, Kurdistan's parliament, in early August, 2007.

Hunt Oil Company of the Kurdistan Region will begin geological survey and seismic work by the end of 2007 and plans to be in a position to drill an exploration well in 2008.

Dr Ashti Hawrami, the KRG Minister for Natural Resources, commented, "The signing of this PSC by Hunt is evidence that the KRG's enactment of a modern and balanced oil and gas law has created a supportive and transparent business environment which promotes investment by international oil companies in our Region for the benefit of all. Revenues from this Kurdistan petroleum development will be shared by the KRG throughout Iraq, consistent with the Iraq constitution and the new Oil and Gas Law of the Kurdistan Region."

Mr Ray L. Hunt, CEO of Hunt Oil Company in Dallas, Texas, said, "We are very pleased to have the opportunity to be a part of these landmark events by actively participating in the establishment of the petroleum industry in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq."

Mr Mathew Heysel, an IEC representative, added, "We are pleased to partner with Hunt Oil on this important project to develop the oil and gas resources in the Kurdistan Region."

Hunt Oil Company of the Kurdistan Region is a wholly-owned affiliate of the Hunt Oil Company, Dallas, Texas, USA, which is a part of the Hunt family of companies directed by Ray L. Hunt. Hunt Oil Company is one of the largest privately held independent oil companies and conducts a variety of petroleum related operations in several regions of the world, including a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Peru which is considered the largest project ever built in that country. In addition to oil and gas interests, the Hunt family of companies is engaged in real estate; private investments; refining; electrical power, ranching and farming interests.

Impulse Energy Corporation is a private company that invests in the energy sector in developing economies targeting oil, gas and power.

TODAYS ZAMAN

September 8, 2007

Talabani: Iraq will expel PKK if attacks on Turkey continue

M. Aîhan Hasanoğlu Suleimaniya

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani warned the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Iranian offshoot the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) to stop attacks on Turkey and Iran from Iraqi bases, saying Iraqi authorities will expel them if the attacks continue.

In remarks apparently signaling an emerging Iraqi Kurdish impatience with the PKK -- considered a terrorist group by the US, Turkey and the EU -- Talabani, a Kurd, said the Iraqi constitution does not allow armed groups to take shelter in Iraqi territory. "We will never let these groups hide in our territory, attack neighboring countries and then come back here," he told a press conference in Sulaimaniya. "These organizations must stop this behavior. Otherwise we do not want them on our soil."

He also ruled out, however, any military action against the groups, saying the Iraqi army lacks the capacity to undertake an operation on such a scale. "If the Iraqi government had the power, it would have carried out a military operation to push these organizations out of our borders. The Iraqi army's capacity is enough only to ensure security in the Baghdad streets," he said, adding: "It is not possible for us to launch an operation against these groups."

Turkey has accused Iraqi Kurdish groups of supporting the PKK, which has mountain bases in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. Chief of General Staff Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt once called Iraqi Kurds the biggest supporter of the PKK



and refused to meet with Iraqi Kurdish officials, saying he cannot talk to people supporting the terrorists.

Both Büyükanıt and the government have repeatedly said Turkey would launch a cross-border operation into northern Iraq to hit the PKK bases there if the United States, which leads the international coalition forces occupying Iraq, and the Iraqi government fail to take action to eliminate the camps.

In Ankara, Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek played down Talabani's remarks, saying Turkey expected action, not words, from Iraq. "Terror is something that action should be taken for; words cannot address such a problem," he told NTV. "We have heard a lot of words from both the East and the West. Now it's time for action."

Iraqi Kurds have been complaining that Iran, which is fighting PJAK, has been shelling northeast Iraq to hit PJAK camps, though Iranian officials have declined to confirm the charges. Turkey has implicitly backed Iranian operations in Iraq, with then Foreign Minister Ab-

dullah Gül saying countries have the right to secure their borders. Turkish officials have denied any cross-border attack in northern Iraq in pursuit of PKK terrorists, but the Iraqi government complains that both Turkey and Iran resort to military measures affecting Iraqi territory.

Talabani said in Sulaimaniya that Iraqi officials have had official contact with Turkish and Iranian authorities "for the attacks to stop," adding that the Iraqis said the military activity was a response to PJAK attacks against Iranian targets.

The Iraqi president also said he had written a letter 10 years ago to Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's now-jailed leader, for the clashes to end, adding: "Clashes and war must end now. The Justice and Development Party [AK Party] won a victory in the Turkish elections because it wants justice and democracy -- it won a majority of votes, even in Diyarbakır," he said. "For me, the AK Party defeated the Kurdish parties in Turkey."

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AK Party won a landslide victory in the July 22 elections, getting 46.7 percent of the votes. It led the polls in almost all of Turkey, including several southeastern provinces where pro-Kurdish parties are traditionally strong. The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) entered Parliament after its candidates stood as independents in the election to circumvent a 10 percent national threshold. The party is currently coming under heavy fire for declining to call the PKK a terrorist group.

Los Angeles Times

By Borzou Daragahi, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer September 9, 2007

Kurdish widows' lives frozen in time

In 1983, the men of Barzan were taken by Hussein's troops, never to be seen again. But the women still wait.

BARZAN, Iraq — Patience, the mothers begged their children. Saddam Hussein will fall. Liberty will come. Your father will return

Years went by. The regime fell. Prison doors were opened. Mass graves were unearthed. Still, the women wait.

"We still have not given up hope. We expect our husbands to return," says Bahar Suleiman, one of the thousands of black-draped women of this valley of widows.

She sits on a red plastic chair in the courtyard of a one-story cinder-block home she shares with six other women who have lost their husbands.

A mountain breeze tempers the August sun. Her reddish locks tumble from the black head scarf wrapping a face frozen in a grimace. "I still believe that someday my husband will walk through that gate there," she says.

Barzan is the ancestral homeland of the Barzani family, which dominates politics here in the semiautonomous region known as Iraqi Kurdistan. It is the birthplace of Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish guerrilla leader who fought for decades against the Baghdad government and is now buried here. His son, Massoud, is president of the Kurdistan region and a major power broker in Iraqi politics. A grandson, Nechirvan Barzani, Massoud's nephew, is the prime minister.

Barzan is a totem of Kurdish nationalism and grievances, and each year thousands of Kurds descend upon the burial site of the man they lovingly call Mulla Mustafa to pay their respects.

This year, the simple stone grave site is being surrounded by a shiny glass-and-steel convention center, museum and hotel complex called the Barzani Memorial Center.

The widows, however, say that they have little money and not enough cooking oil. Over tea, they recount the tragedies that have shrouded their lives.

The heartache began in 1975,

when the shah of Iran, in a deal with Hussein, withdrew support for Kurdish guerrillas fighting Baghdad for autonomy. Thousands, including the elder Barzani and his family, took the long, dreary march into exile to Iran, Europe or the United States in what was called the Great Collapse.

Hussein's government dealt harshly with those who stayed behind. First, they were herded south to the desert near the border with Saudi Arabia. Then, after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, Hussein ordered them to a camp back in the Kurdish region, fearing that they would join rebellious Shiite Muslims in the south.

Trucks full of soldiers came to the camp early on the morning of July 31, 1983. They separated women from men, young from old. The soldiers told the women the men were going to work as laborers for a day. They never came back.

For the women of Barzan, life became a nonstop backbreaking chore. They had to do everything — earn a living, perform household tasks, feed the children — without their men.

They eventually returned to Barzan after Hussein, defeated in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, was forced to accept the Kurdish semiautonomous region in the north. But custom forbade them from remarrying until the fate of their husbands became clear.

So they waited.

In the months before the U.S.-led invasion, they told a visiting reporter that their husbands would be coming home as soon as Hussein was gone. They watched the collapse of the dictator's regime on television and waited for a joyful reunion. The men never came back, but they continue to hope, putting their lives on hold.

"Even now I get questions about him from our sons and daughter," says Gohar Zubair Abdul-Rahman, 67, who lost her husband.

"We kept telling our kids that with Saddam gone, they'll be back," says Fahima Rashid Mohammed, a plump, silver-haired woman in her 60s. Her husband and two brothers disappeared that day in 1983. "We've run out of excuses," she says.

Omar Babak, a Kurdish party official, sits with them in the courtyard. He crosses his arms and looks away, frowning. He checks in on the Barzan women from time to time. He says that few of their children have married or moved on to lead normal lives.

"I tell them all the time that the pain that was inflicted on you, you're inflicting on your

of clothes that might have been her father's. But it was his long hair, still preserved, that gave him away. "I was 100% sure it was my father," she says.

The bloodstains made her faint. She was carried home, and when she came to, she fell into a deep despair.

"I felt it was the saddest moment of my life," she says. "Because I really loved my father very much; he was very special to me. Despite all the sad things that happened to us, I always hoped things would get better once he came back."

But weeks later, a surprise. Her spirits began to revive.



From left, Bahar Suleiman, Fahima Mohammed and Gohar Zubair Abdul Rahman lost their husbands in 1983. They belong to the tribe of the late Kurdish guerrilla Mustafa Barzani

children," he says. "The reality is there's a shortage of men in our tribe," Abdul-Rahman says.

Suleiman's 25-year-old daughter, Leila, has not married. She never will, her mother predicts. "She won't marry because she doesn't want to leave me alone," she says. Babak will have none of it. "The truth is, she won't let her go," he says.

Last year, authorities brought the remains of Barzan residents found in a mass grave in southern Iraq. Sabria Ahmed, whose father was taken in 1983, warily went to examine the remains.

She faintly recognized a set

She felt better than she had in years, unburdened.

"At least I knew he was dead after all those years," she says. "To know his destiny is something of a relief. I was really suffering."

Decades-old wounds healed rapidly. She fell in love, and in February, at 38, she married Haji Yassin, another child of Barzan who lost his father in 1983.

She wanted to be with someone who understood her pain.

"Until now, there was no happiness in my heart," she says. "If you are waiting for something, you cannot move on to something else."

Iranian Raises Possibility of an Intrusion Into Iraq

BAGHDAD, Sept. 9 — In a sharp escalation of a dispute over border fighting, an official Iranian delegation at a diplomatic conference here warned Sunday that if the Iraqi government could not stop militants from crossing into Iran and carrying out attacks, the Iranian authorities would respond militarily.



Mohammad R. Baqiri, an Iranian official, right, issued a warning. With him was Hassan Kazemi Qumi, Iran's ambassador to Iraq.

The Iranian delegation, led by a deputy foreign minister, Mohammad R. Baqiri, also charged that the United States was supporting groups believed to be mounting attacks from Iraqi territory in the Kurdish north.

Mr. Baqiri did not specifically say that Iran would enter Iraq militarily, but his statements, couched in diplomatic terms, raised the clear possibility that Iranian forces could cross the border in pursuit of the militants. But however carefully phrased his statements, many of those distinctions are likely to be lost on hundreds of families on the Iraqi side who have been driven from their villages by weeks of intermittent shelling from Iran.

Hundreds of Kurds demonstrated Sunday against the shelling in the northern provincial capital of Erbil. They gathered outside the Kurdish Parliament building and asked that the northern government and the United Nations intervene.

Senior Iranian officials have privately acknowledged to their Iraqi counterparts that the shelling is taking place in response to guerrilla attacks by a group opposed to the Iranian government that has bases on the Iraqi side of the border. At the conference on Sunday, at the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, Mr. Baqiri did not directly address the shelling, but he told officials from 16 nations, the Arab League, the Islamic Conference and the United Nations that it was time for Iraq to take action.

"Supporting military and political actions

by terrorist elements in Iraq against neighboring countries is considered dangerous behavior that we cannot tolerate, and a major factor in the chaotic security situation and instability in the region," Mr. Baqiri told the assembled delegates, according to an Arabic translation of his remarks, which were made in Persian. "We are waiting for the Iraqi government to do what it takes to resolve this issue."

Later, asked at a briefing about the shelling, Mr. Baqiri said that in dealing with "terrorists who want to enter Iranian soil," the Iranian government "will confront them and stop them."

"We have a long history in standing against terrorist groups," Mr. Baqiri said. "We have made many sacrifices because of this, and we know how to confront these groups."

Mr. Baqiri's comments are likely to raise tensions against the bloody backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted throughout much of the 1980s and began with a border dispute in the south. Perhaps by design, his words seemed especially jarring because they were delivered during a conference organized to promote harmony in the region.

That conference was organized by the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, led by Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd who fought Saddam Hussein's government as a guerrilla commander, often operating essentially as an ally of Iran. But in a diplomatic meeting in Tehran last week, Mr. Zebari called the shelling indiscriminate and far out of proportion to the threat to Iran.

On Sunday, Mr. Zebari acknowledged that the cross-border attacks were taking place, but described them as infrequent and more of a nuisance than a real threat. Still, Mr. Zebari agreed that it fell to the Iraqi government to rein in the groups.

"But at the same time we want this shelling to stop or end because it's causing a great deal of unease, and we don't want to see the atmosphere of confidence to be compromised by these continuing acts," Mr. Zebari said.

The group that has claimed responsibility for the attacks, called Pezak or Pejak for its acronym, is believed to be made up mainly of Iranian Kurds seeking autonomy for Kurds in Iran. Asked specifically about that group, Mr. Baqiri stated publicly what Iranian officials have been claiming privately for months: that the United States supports the group.

This support, Mr. Baqiri said, amounted to

a "double standard" in American policy, given that the United States has repeatedly accused Iran of exporting deadly roadside bombs to Iraq and supporting armed groups here. Those weapons and support, American officials believe, have led directly to the deaths of American and Iraqi troops and other security forces.

Told late Sunday of Mr. Baqiri's accusations, a Pentagon spokesman, Lt. Col. Jonathan Withington, said, "I am not aware of any support being provided" to Pejak.

While Mr. Baqiri's comments appeared to be a direct response to the criticisms leveled by Mr. Zebari in Tehran, their precise timing was unlikely to be coincidental, occurring as they did the day before crucial reports on progress in Iraq were to be delivered to Congress by Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top commander in Iraq, and Ryan C. Crocker, the American ambassador to Iraq. Iran bitterly opposes the American presence in Iraq.

For all the accusations leveled by the Iraqis and the Iranians, the conference, attended by this reporter at the invitation of the Foreign Ministry, offered an extraordinary glimpse into a regional dynamic that generally takes place behind closed doors.

At a gathering in March, Mr. Zebari managed to bring the United States and Iran to the same conference table to discuss issues relating to Iraq. Along with representatives of Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and other nations, the United States and Iran were once again seated at the same table, albeit nearly as far apart as the table's geometry would allow.

And the chill between the two nations was palpable. "The fact is that because of our great love for Iraq, we agreed to come here and sit at one table with our enemies," Mr. Baqiri said.

The American delegation, led by Patricia A. Butenis, the chargé d'affaires here while Mr. Crocker is in Washington, did not respond to that statement. But the overall dynamic in the room became starkly visible when Mr. Zebari proposed creating a "secretariat" to keep track of the Iraq issues being considered at the meetings.

When it became apparent that the United States and Britain backed Mr. Zebari's proposal, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and others quickly took the floor to shoot the proposal down. The conference ended with the issue unresolved.

COMMENTARY

Partition Iraq? It's happening now, from the ground up

It took political Washington a good six months to catch up to the fact that something significant was happening in Iraq's Anbar province, where formerly insurgent Sunni tribes switched sides and joined the fight against al-Qaeda. Not surprisingly, Washington has not yet caught up to the next reality: Iraq is being partitioned - and, like everything else in Iraq today, it is happening from the ground up.

The Sunni provinces. The essence of our deal with the Anbar tribes and those in Diyala, Salahuddin and elsewhere is this: You end the insurgency and drive out al-Qaeda and we assist you in arming and policing yourselves. We'd like you to have an official relationship with the Maliki government, but we're not waiting on Baghdad.

The Shiite south. Last week the British pulled out of Basra, retired to their air base and essentially left the southern Shiites to their own devices - meaning domination by the Shiite militias now fighting each other for control.

The Kurdish north. Kurdistan has been independent in all but name for a decade and a half.

Baghdad and its immediate surroundings have not yet been defined. Despite some ethnic cleansing, the capital's future is uncertain. It is predominantly Shiite, but with a checkerboard of Sunni neighborhoods. The U.S. troop surge is attempting to stabilize the city with, again, local autonomy and policing.

This radically decentralized rule is partition in embryo. It is by no means final, but the outlines are there.

The critics at home, echoing the Shiite sectarians in Baghdad, complain that an essential part of this strategy - the "20 percent solution" that allows formerly insurgent Sunnis to organize and arm themselves - is just setting Iraq up for a greater civil war. But this assumes that a Shiite government in Baghdad would march its army into vast Anbar province, where there are no Shiites and no oil. For what? It seems far more likely that a well-armed and self-governing Anbar would create a balance of power that would encourage hands-off relations with the central government in Baghdad.

As partition proceeds, the central government will necessarily be very weak. Its reach may not extend far beyond Baghdad itself, becoming a kind of de facto fourth region with a mixed Sunni-Shiite population.

Nonetheless, we need some central government. The Iraqi state may be a shell, but it is a necessary one because de jure partition into separate states would invite military intervention by neighboring countries - Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

A weak, partitioned Iraq is not the best outcome. We had hoped for much more. Our original objective was a democratic and unified post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. But it has turned out to be a bridge too far. We tried to give the Iraqis a republic, but their leaders turned out to be, tragically, too driven by sectarian sentiment, by an absence of national identity, and by the habits of suspicion and maneuver cultivated during decades in the underground of Hussein's totalitarian state.

All this was exacerbated by post-invasion U.S.

strategic errors (most important, eschewing a heavy footprint, not forcibly suppressing the early looting, and letting Muqtada al-Sadr escape with his life in August 2004), and by al-Qaeda's barbarous bombing campaign designed explicitly to kindle sectarian strife.

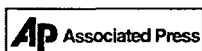
Whatever the reasons, we now have to look for the second-best outcome. A democratic unified Iraq might someday emerge. Perhaps today's ground-up reconciliation in the provinces will translate into tomorrow's ground-up national reconciliation. Possible, but highly doubtful. What is far more certain is what we are getting now: ground-up partition.

Joe Biden, Peter Galbraith, Leslie Gelb and many other thoughtful scholars and politicians have long been calling for partition. The problem is how to make it happen.

What's occurring today on the ground is not geographical line-drawing, colonial style. The lines today are being drawn organically by self-identified communities and tribes, which makes the new arrangement more likely to last.

This is not the best outcome, but it is far better than the savage and dangerous dictatorship we overthrew. And infinitely better than what will follow if we give up in mid-surge and withdraw - and allow the partitioning of Iraq to dissolve into chaos.

Charles Krauthammer (letters@charleskrauthammer.com) is a writer for the Washington Post Writers Group



Turkish Troops Kill 4 Kurdish Rebels

By SELCAN HACA OGLU Associated Press Write Sep 12, 2007

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) -- Turkish troops killed four Kurdish guerrillas in a southeastern province Wednesday, a day after police defused a bomb in the capital that authorities believe may have been planted by separatist rebels.

The clash in the southeastern province of Siirt was the latest bout of fighting between soldiers and rebels who have bases in neighboring Iraq and have been at war with the Turkish state since 1984.

On the sixth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, authorities discovered more than 1,320 pounds of explosives packed into a minibus parked near a marketplace in Ankara.

Police were looking for the driver of the minibus, the state-run Anatolia news agency reported. A witness said an unidentified man parked the minibus at a parking garage lot near a market around 4 p.m. Monday, saying he was bringing goods to sell, the agency said.

Experts said explosives found in the vehicle, which was stolen from Istanbul last year and yielded no fingerprints, were similar to those seized in the past from Kurdish separatists. Police have said the findings so far suggest Kurdish rebels were behind the foiled attack.

Sniffer dogs led officers to the blue minibus as Turkey, an ally of the United States, had increased security ahead of the Sept. 11 attacks.

The Ankara governor's office said police found sacks of bomb-making materials, including chemicals and gas canisters connected to a cell phone - a method often used by Kurdish rebels in roadside bombings against troops in the Kurdish-dominated southeast near the Iraqi border.

Some newspapers said Wednesday the chemicals were ammonium nitrate or cheap fertilizer, a bomb ingredient.

Also on Tuesday, police found explosives and a weapon when they searched a car in the eastern province of Van before President Abdullah Gul's arrival there, according to private Star television. Two people in the car were arrested, Star said.

Suicide bombers linked to al-Qaida hit Istanbul in 2003 with truck bombs containing ammonium nitrate-based bombs, killing 58 people in attacks that targeted two synagogues, the British Consulate and a British bank. In February, a court sentenced seven people to life in prison in the bombings.

Turkey, a predominantly Muslim but secular country, is a key NATO ally. It supports U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq through the Incirlik Air Base in the southern part of the country, one of the most important U.S. military bases in the region.

The van's license plate had been stolen from another vehicle, and the owner had tipped off police about the theft, Anatolia said.

In May, a suicide bombing in one of Ankara's busiest markets killed six people and wounded dozens more. That bombing was blamed on the Kurdistan Workers' Party, but the group denied involvement.

Turkey has accused Kurdish rebels of smuggling hundreds of pounds of explosives into the country from Iraq, where the guerrillas have been based for decades. Turkey is pressuring Iraq and the United States to crack down on the group in Iraq, threatening its own measures if others do not.



What's Missing in Baghdad

Erbil, Iraq One of the most troubling lessons of the Iraq invasion is just how empty the Arab dictatorships are. Once you break the palace, by ousting the dictator, the elevator goes straight to the mosque. There is nothing in between — no civil society, no real labor unions, no real human rights groups, no real parliaments or press. So it is not surprising to see the sort of clerical leadership that has emerged in both the Sunni and Shiite areas of Iraq.

But this is not true in northern Iraq, in Kurdistan. Though not a full-fledged democracy, Kurdistan is developing the key elements of a civil society. I met in Erbil with 20 such Kurdish groups — unions, human rights and political watchdogs, editors and women's associations. It is worth studying what went right in Kurdistan to understand what we still can and can't do to promote democratization in the rest of Iraq and the Arab world.

The United States played a critical role in Kurdistan. In 1998, we helped to resolve the Kurdish civil war — the power struggle between two rival clans — which created the possibility of a stable, power-sharing election in 2005. And by removing Saddam, we triggered a flood of foreign investment here.

But that is all we did. Today, there are almost no U.S. soldiers or diplomats in Kurdistan. Yet politics here is flourishing, as is the economy, because the Kurds want it that way. Down south, we've spent billions trying to democratize the Sunni and Shiite zones and have little to show for it.

Three lessons: 1) Until the power struggle between Sunnis and Shiites is resolved, you can't establish any stable politics in southern Iraq. 2) When people want to move down a progressive path, there is no stopping them. When they don't, there is no helping them. 3) Culture matters. The Kurdish Islam is a moderate, tolerant strain, explained Salam Bawari, head of Kurdistan's Democracy and Human Rights Research Center. "We have a culture of pluralism," he said. "We have 2,000 years of living together with people living around us." Actually, there are still plenty of Arab-Kurdish disputes, but there is an ethos of tolerance here you don't find elsewhere in Iraq.

While visiting Kurdistan, I read a timely new book, "Democracy's Good Name: The Rise and Risks of the World's Most Popular Form of Government," by my friend Michael Mandelbaum, a foreign affairs expert at Johns Hopkins University. It is highly relevant to America's democracy project in Iraq and beyond.

Mr. Mandelbaum argues that democracy is made up of two elements: liberty and popular sovereignty. "Liberty involves what governments do" — the rule of law, the protection of people from abuses of state power and the regulations by which government institutions operate, he explains. Popular sovereignty involves how the people determine who governs them — through free elections.

What Baghdad exemplifies, Mr. Mandelbaum says, is what happens when you have elections without liberty. You end up with a tyranny of the majority, or what Fareed Zakaria has labeled "illiberal democracy." Kurdistan, by contrast, has a chance to build a balanced democracy,

because it is nurturing the institutions of liberty, not just holding elections.

What the Kurdistan-Baghdad contrast also illustrates, notes Mr. Mandelbaum, is that "we can help create the conditions for democracy to take root, but people have to develop the skills and values that make it work themselves."

In the southern part of Iraq "you have people who are undemocratic who have a democratic government," said Hemin Malazada, who heads a Kurdish journalists' association. "In Kurdistan, you have a democratic government for a democratic people."

One way a country develops the software of liberty, Mr. Mandelbaum says, is by nurturing a free market. Kurdistan has one. The economy in the rest of Iraq remains a mess. "A market economy," he argues, "gives people a stake in peace, as well as a constructive way of dealing with people who are strangers. Free markets teach the basic democratic practices of compromise and trust."

Democracy can fail because of religious intolerance, the curse of oil, a legacy of colonialism and military dictatorship, or an aversion to Western values — the wellspring of democracy. The Middle East, notes Mr. Mandelbaum, is the one region afflicted by all of these maladies. That doesn't mean democratization is impossible here, as the Kurds demonstrate. But it does mean it's really hard. Above all, Iraq teaches us that democracy is possible only when people want both pillars of it — liberty and self-government — and build both themselves. We're miles away from that in Baghdad

Telegraph. By Damien McElroy in the Qandil mountains Sep. 10, 2007

Kurdish guerillas launch clandestine war in Iran

Kurdish guerrillas have launched a clandestine war in north-western Iran, ambushing troops as they seek Western backing to secure an ethnic homeland.

In retaliation, the Iranian army has carried out a series of counter-attacks in the mountains, which span the border with Iraq.

Murat Karayilan, a Kurdish guerilla commander, told The Daily Telegraph that Teheran had originally tried to recruit the outlawed groups to fight coalition troops in Iraq.

"The US and Britain came to Iraq to establish a democratic system, but this scared the Iranians, so they negotiated with us and offered many things to attack the coalition," he said under a canopy of trees near his headquarters on Iraqi territory in the Qandil mountains.



Kurdish fighters in training. Iran claims that the US is secretly supporting Kurdish attacks upon its infrastructure and troops

"But we told the Iranians that the US and Britain were going to solve the Kurdish problem and we will be with them."

Iranian newspapers have reported the

deaths of seven soldiers in recent clashes with Kurdish guerrillas. Last month, the rebels claimed responsibility for shooting down an Iranian helicopter.

A loose alliance of guerrillas, styling itself the Kurdistan Democratic Federation, is fighting for an independent state which would cover the Kurdish-majority areas of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Mr Karayilan, who is from the PKK guerilla group, said that Iran and Turkey were acting in tandem to repress their Kurdish regions. But, he added, the Kurds have been inspired by the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, which has been relatively secure since Saddam Hussein's downfall in 2003.

"The regional government in Iraqi Kurdistan has increased the national feeling of Kurds everywhere," he said.

Iran believes that the US and Britain are

now arming and training the Kurdish guerrillas to strike its territory from bases inside Iraq.

Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, accused the US of supporting terrorism inside the Islamic Republic.

"America wants to carry out actions such as blowing up the country's oil pipelines by supporting bandits and small groups of Kurdish rebels," he told the Iranian press.

In the Qandil mountains, signs of a conflict gathering momentum are easily found.

US army helicopters are reportedly used to shuttle officers to regular meetings with Kurdish fighters.

There is a landing pad complete with

spotlights near Mr Karayilan's headquarters, while four-wheel-drive vehicles belonging to a US private security contractor, are easily seen.

PKK officials say privately that its fighters have left in recent months to join cells inside Iran.

But Mr Karayilan, an apparently jovial figure who delights in the literal translation of his surname, Black Snake, suggests that the US has so far done too little for the Kurds.

"We are defending the developments in the region since 2003," he said. "In this we are ready to be on the right side and have the benefits of that.

"So far we keep our stance apart because American and Britain are not doing

enough to help us."

Meanwhile, artillery shells are reportedly fired into this region almost every day and families have been forced to abandon summer farmsteads.

"Every day it gets worse," said Abdullah Hamid, 52. "I have crops still in the ground but I can't take it any more."

Iran has denied responsibility for the shelling. Yet Abdulwahid Gwany, the mayor of nearby Chomin, recalls a telling encounter with his counterpart on the other side of the border.

"I was showing him some photos on my desk when he saw one of Tony Blair with our Kurdish president. He was so startled he left immediately."



Interview: Governor of Kirkuk province

Sept. 12, 2007 By BEN LANDO UPI Energy Editor

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates, Sept. 12 (UPI) -- Iraq's future rests on the future of Kirkuk. The province holds at least 13 percent of Iraq's oil reserves, but like the rest of the country, its infrastructure needs massive investment.

Article 140 of the 2005 constitution calls for a referendum in which voters in Kirkuk and others of the disputed territories in the north will decide whether to join Iraqi Kurdistan. The vote itself is controversial, and many experts attribute an increase in violence in Kirkuk to the debate over its future.

United Press International sat down with the Kirkuk Gov. Abdul Rahman Mustafa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on the sidelines of the Iraq Development Program's Iraq Oil, Gas, Petrochemical and Electricity Summit. He spoke of the need for investment and the needs of his citizens and all Iraqis, especially facing violence and lack of fuels and electricity.

UPI: What was your goal of the conference, what did you hope to get out of the conference?

Mustafa: After issuance of the investment law and the coming approval of the oil and gas law, this conference is held to invite companies and people interested in the oil and gas business, to give them an idea about these laws and about the investment in Iraq and to introduce the business opportunities to the intended or prospective investors. Also, to show the current status of oil and gas in Iraq and to point out the requirements of the country in these fields.

Q: What about for Kirkuk specifically?

A: Kirkuk is a governorate well-known for oil. It has destroyed infrastructure. The oil facilities and upstream facilities in Kirkuk are old and there is aged equipment. It is supposed to have integrated equipment of refineries and gas equipment, gas facilities, and petrochemicals, all should be integrated systems. But all these things are unavailable now. I presented the requirements for such facilities and our demand for power plants in this conference and in previous conferences. I pointed out the investment opportunities in Kirkuk.

Q: Let's talk about specifically the fuels problem. What is the extent of the fuel shortage for Kirkuk residents and what would you like to see to address that?

A: Our problem in fuel shortages, we are facing a very big crisis. It's in the all of Iraq, not just our province. This came from we don't have any refineries, because there is an old refinery and small refinery but it is not enough for us and is not suitable for our needs for this issue. There is a big refinery in Baiji. We send them the crude oil by the pipelines and they send to us the products oil from the refinery to Kirkuk. These pipes are attacked by terrorists and caused it to stop. We haven't another source for the products. For that we are facing this problem.

In addition to that there is increasing numbers of vehicles, cars, in Kirkuk, after the liberation of Iraq. They need the fuels. We need the kerosene, we need the gas oil, we need to cover our needs or our peoples needs for these issues.

Q: When do you think this will be resolved?

A: There is a decision from the minister of oil in Baghdad and he promised us; he invited 15 experienced companies to build refineries in Kirkuk and in Karbala and he promised us in the near future they would come to Kirkuk to put the foundations to build this project.

Q: How much electricity are your residents and your businesses and citizens receiving each day?

A: There is nothing the same every day. On average, maybe between 10 and 12 hours a day. But there are days that decrease to six or seven hours. Sometimes less than that.

Q: For Iraq, you're one of the highest.

A: As I told you, it is not always. At such times it is not very hot or very cold. But in the summer or in the winter when it is very cold and very hot, maybe four hours or five hours.

Q: Do you want to get a power plant?

A: There is a plan, yes.

Q: How important is the security issue and what would you suggest needs to be focused on in terms of security?

A: The security is a very important issue. Without security no one will be able to work and to invest in Kirkuk or anywhere else. Our security situation is not very bad. Reality is we have some problems and we're suffering from some problems where sometimes, but this doesn't mean our situation in security is bad. Maybe 80 percent of Kirkuk's area is safe. Maybe 20 percent is not secure.

Q: There is an expectation that violence will increase as the referendum grows closer, the referendum for Kirkuk and the disputed territories. What are you doing to prepare for that?

A: I don't think there is any relationship between the referendum, between the implementation of Article 140 and terrorist actions. Terrorists implement their criminal actions in all of Iraq and all the world. In Baghdad there is no article 140, in Basra there is no article 140, but there are terrorist actions.

Q: Do you support the referendum being held?

A: Yes.

Q: How are you going to vote? Do you want to join the KRG?

A: Myself, I represent all Kirkuk people. I follow the majority. Whatever they decide, I follow them.

Q: Sure, but you as a member of a democracy, you get to vote ...

A: I haven't any comment about this issue, (smiling, chuckling).

Q: A very serious issue is the fact that there have been a lot of attacks, kidnapping and attacks on prominent members of the government. A number of governors have been murdered recently. Are you worried about that? What are your thoughts as a governor as well?

A: I am a responsible person and in assuming government responsibility, I will not be afraid. I was subjected to many assassination attacks but I was not afraid. Since I've accepted to assume responsibility, I should be able to cope with such responsibility and I'm never afraid and I'll never be afraid. This is a motive for me to work harder and harder to make things more secure and stable.

Iraq needs new politics

General David Petraeus has been given the very unfair task of behaving like a Victorian illusionist, offering the audience a completely distracting flash and bang, while drawing their eyes away from the real act elsewhere on stage.

Petraeus has been put on stage by his political masters to dazzle the American public and the Houses with tales of military success, but the reality is that there has been no political initiative to take advantage of any military gain.

The senior American general in Iraq has plenty of experience and is a thoughtful man. He holds a PhD in international relations from Princeton, and served in action in Bosnia and during the invasion of Iraq. The Bush administration also knows this, and is very aware that General Petraeus will be respected in what he says, and will be better than any politician as an ambassador for defending its Iraq policy against a very sceptical Congress and American public.

Testimony

Petraeus's report on the situation in Iraq, and his testimony to Congress this week, has been built up as a crucial launch pad to take the Bush administration through its final year. He may succeed in that mission although the next few weeks will tell how well he does with the American

public, but that his report has not been reassuring for the Iraqis and the surrounding region.

Petraeus said that the "coalition and Iraqi forces have achieved progress in the security area", and he went straight on to address US domestic concerns on how long the war will continue, by saying that the military progress will allow 30,000 of the total 160,000 US troops in Iraq today to return home by next summer.

While the report states that the surge has reduced attacks in the past few months, there is a growing debate on the way the numbers have been worked by the US military, and some independent analysts disagree with the upbeat assessment of the report.

But regardless of the military situation, the much more important and fatal flaw in what has been disclosed so far is the absence of any new political initiative in Iraq, without which any military success will be only temporary. As Petraeus himself said to Congress this week "Iraq's problems will require a long term effort. There are no easy answers of quick fixes". What the general did not say was that the Americans have to recognise the need to start again politically, not militarily.

If they get the politics right, the security situation will become manageable. Bush should call a major conference, in collaboration with the Iraqi government, which should include all the significant leaders in Iraq, including those who presently are boycotting the political structure, and in some cases running substantial militias. There cannot be a long-term peace in Iraq unless Shiite leaders like Muqtada Al Sadr

and Ammar Al Hakim are bought into it, as well as the senior Sunni and Kurdish leaders. They all need to agree on how to move forward.

This new initiative will be much stronger if it has the support of Iraq's major neighbours. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey all have substantial influence on what happens in Iraq, and they need to be incorporated into taking responsibility for what is happening. And in Iran's case, this will not happen if the Bush administration persists in picking a fight over the nuclear issues.

One of the key points in Petraeus's report, and of Bush's recent visit to Iraq, was the success in Anbar province in halting the tribal leaders' alliance with Al Qaida forces in the area, and persuading them to work with the Iraqi and coalition forces to fight Al Qaida.

Of course, it is good that some Iraqi allies of Al Qaida are turning against them. But a success in the sparsely populated Anbar province is not a blueprint for the rest of Iraq. The tribes of Iraq's interior were politically diminished for decades, by the British, the Hashemites, and by Ba'athists until 1991. After the failure of the invasion of Kuwait Saddam rearmend the tribes, giving their leaders more authority in order to manage the population better and have a further line of defence if needed.

Such a political history does not match the experience of the rest of Iraq, especially in its major urban centres. So any success in Anbar may stay exactly that, and not transfer to the wider Iraqi political field. That will need the commitment of all Iraqi leaders, and that needs a political restart, not just a military surge.

Turkish troops kill four rebels as Gul reaches out to Kurds

Turkish soldiers killed four Kurdish rebels in the country's restive southeast, hours after Turkey's new president, Abdullah Gul, called for national unity and solidarity Wednesday during his first trip as head of state to the country's troubled, mainly Kurdish region.

Fighting erupted during a security sweep against rebels of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Siirt Province, the governor's office said in a statement carried by the Anatolia news agency.

Choosing the impoverished southeast for his first visit outside Ankara since his election by Parliament last month, Gul seemed keen to show the Kurds they are valued and respected by a state they often accuse of neglecting or repressing them.

"If we can strengthen our unity, the brotherly feelings among us, everything will be better ... Then you will see, the years of neglect will soon pass," Gul told cheering crowds in the town of Yuksekova near the Iraqi border.

Residents hurled roses at his motorcade - his surname means "rose" in Turkish - in a sign of welcome, although security was also very tight. The region remains dogged by Kurdish separatist violence and the army keeps a high profile.

Gul's ruling center-right Justice and Development Party (AKP) performed well in July elections in the southeast, beating the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) into second place in some areas.

Many Kurds hope the AKP government will help boost investment and public

services in the region - Turkey's poorest.

The AKP government, in which Gul previously served as foreign minister, has also championed reforms key to European Union entry, easing some restrictions on the Kurdish language and culture.

The region's economy has suffered greatly from separatist violence waged by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) since 1984.

Gul's predecessor, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, rarely left Ankara. But Gul says he plans to travel often both in Turkey and abroad.

- Reuters



IRAN'S WAR ON THE KURDS

For the past year at least, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the backbone of the Islamic Republic in Iran, has been engaged in a bloody war against Kurdish rebels in four provinces bordering Iraq.

Initially, the authorities in Tehran tried to keep the war a secret, referring to it only occasionally as "operations against evil-doers".

However, things changed last February when "evil-doers" destroyed an IRGC combat helicopter killing nine officers, including the regional military commander General Saeed Qahhari. The incident took place in a place called Jahannam-Darreh (Hell Valley) close to Khoy, a town in West Azerbaijan province where Kurds, though present in big numbers, form only a minority.

The IRGC retaliated with a series of attacks against alleged Kurdish rebel positions in the mountainous area around the border town of Salmas in which at least 17 "Kurdish evil-doers", including their overall local commander, a naturalised German citizen of Turkish-Kurdish origin, code-named Doctor Meraat, were killed.

Since then, the IRGC has issued cryptic reports about dozens of other "engagements" in which scores of policemen, border patrols and IRGC members have been killed or wounded while killing at least 100 Kurdish insurgents.

There is no doubt that what is known in Tehran as "the Kurdish threat", represents one of the key security concerns of the Islamic Republic leaders as they prepare for a broader regional war. In response to the insurgency, the IRGC has set up a special command centre at the Hamza Base, near the Iraqi border, and committed one full division plus a unit of airborne Special Forces to curb the insurgency.

The IRGC claims that the rebels are based in Iraqi Kurdistan. The fact, however, is that all the fighting reported until earlier this month has taken place well inside Iranian territory, often in areas with a non-Kurdish majority.

In June, the IRGC started shelling Iraqi Kurdish villages. An unknown number of Kurds, both Iraqis and Iranians who had sought refuge in Iraq, were killed. Despite protests by the Iraqi government, including one delivered face-to-face by Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki in his meeting with the Iranian "Supreme Guide" Ali Khamenei in Tehran earlier this summer, the IRGC has continued its attacks on Iraqi villages.

The shelling has forced thousands of

Kurdish villagers, both Iranians and Iraqis, to abandon their homes and join the flow of "displaced persons" heading for towns deeper inside Iraq. The areas most affected by the fighting are within the strongholds of Iraqi Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. Both have a history of close ties with Iran going back four decades. Nevertheless, because both allied themselves with the US in toppling Saddam Hussain in 2003, Tehran suspects them of trying to foment a Kurdish insurgency in Iran as part of a bigger "American plot" to destabilise Iran. However, the three Kurdish groups involved in the insurgency can hardly be regarded as vassals of either of the two Iraqi Kurdish chiefs.

New outfit

The group most active in the recent fighting is a new outfit named Kurdistan Free Life Party, better known under its Kurdish acronym of PJAK. Judging by its literature, PJAK is an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) a guerrilla movement of Turkish Kurds that has been fighting for a Kurdish state in eastern Anatolia since the 1970s.

Ironically, Tehran has given the PKK shelter and support against Turkey for years, as a means of bleeding Nato's lone regional member. Some analysts claim that Ankara may have decided to repay Tehran in its own currency by creating PJAK. Others, however, regard PJAK as an effort by PKK to expand its constituency beyond the Kurdish minority in Turkey.

What is certain, however, is that most of PJAK's leaders are not Iranian Kurds. Some of the party's key figures are Turkish Kurds who have lived in exile in Germany for at least a quarter of a century. The fact that PJAK has been operating in areas in Iran that are close to PKK strongholds in Turkey and Iraq is another indication that the two parties may well be one with two names.

The areas where PJAK is active in Iran are home to substantial numbers of ethnic Kurds. But in almost all of them the majority of the population consists of ethnic Turkic-speaking Azeris.

In the Kurdish heartland of Iran, the two provinces of Kurdistan and Kermanshah, where ethnic Kurds are in majority, PJAK appears to have little support.

There, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK), created 62 years ago, enjoys the largest support, followed by Komalah, a formerly Communist outfit that claims to have converted to democracy after the fall of the Soviet empire.

The PDK, a self-styled social-democratic

group, has campaigned for greater autonomy for Iranian Kurds since the 1940s. After the mullahs seized power in 1979, PDK helped their regime in the hope of obtaining concessions. The mullahs, however, banned the PDK and organised the assassination of two successive generations of its leaders in exile in Vienna and Berlin in 1989 and 2002.

Since the murders, the PDK has joined Iranian opposition groups that call for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic, but has not preached armed uprising as a means of achieving that goal.

Komalah, however, has waged a guerrilla war against the Islamic Republic for the past 25 years, paying a high price in human terms.

The Tehran rumour mill claims that the replacement of the senior IRGC leaders, including its overall commander, is a sign that the "Supreme Guide" is unhappy about the spreading Kurdish insurgency along the border with Iraq.

As always in the Islamic Republic, however, Tehran's claims of a US-hatched plot to incite the Kurds against the mullahs should be taken with a pinch of salt. The Tehran leadership may be using the claim to justify building a string of fortifications along the border with Iraq in anticipation of conflict with the US. The idea is that, if attacked, Iran would retaliate by entering Iraq from the three Kurdish provinces most loyal to Washington and regarded as the only "safe haven" for American forces there, while inciting the Iraqi Shi'ites to rise in revolt in the central and southern provinces.

Talk of a Kurdish insurgency also helps Tehran impose what amounts to a state of emergency in parts of the four provinces with large Kurdish populations. This has enabled the authorities to arrest hundreds of opponents, including trade unionists, student leaders, journalists, lawyers, and Sunni Muslim clerics without bothering about legal formalities.

There is no doubt that the areas where Iran's estimated 4.5 million ethnic Kurds live are in turmoil, posing a challenge to the leadership in Tehran. The challenge, however, comes from political dissidents, especially working class activists, not guerrillas operating from bases in Iraq

Iranian author Amir Taheri is based in Europe and is a member of Bena-dor Associates

Aggression not the answer, says Barzani



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani addresses the Kurdistan parliament.

Kurdistan region President Massoud Barzani replies to member's questions about current Kurdistan political, economic and security situations at parliament session.

Kawa Jam

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In the opening session of the second period of Kurdish Parliament, President Massoud Barzani said that the Kurdish issue cannot be solved through aggression and that Kurds will in no way cede their rights. "Therefore," said the president, "the problems must be addressed through negotiations."

Lately, the Turkish government is bombarding Iraqi Kurdistan border areas, claiming PKK fighters are holed up there. This has resulted in hundreds of displaced residents and material losses.

Turkish authorities claim that PKK fighters enter Turkey through Kurdistan Region's borders and perform military operations against the Republic. This comes at a time when the PKK, established more than 25 years ago, twice announced a one-sided ceasefire, but the Turkish government continued attacking them both times.

Also, since the middle of August 2006, border areas have been bombed where there are allegedly fighters of the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK). In some areas, the bombardment has reached 5 kilometers inside Kurdistan Region.

PJAK is a branch of the PKK that concentrates its activities in Iranian Kurdistan. The spread of

news on meetings between U.S. officials and PJAK and clashes between their fighters and the Iranian Army resulted in bombardment of those areas by the Iranian government. The bombardment also resulted in displacing many Kurdish inhabitants of those border areas, and led to protests in different Kurdish cities and towns. "The existence of some PKK and PJAK fighters in the border areas is not a reason to displace innocent people of Kurdistan," said President Barzani, criticizing the acts of Turkey and Iran.

Kirkuk, the permanent problem of the Kurds
The Iraqi permanent Constitution, approved by a majority of Iraqis, emphasizes that the situation of Kirkuk and other disputed areas should be solved according to the Constitution's Article 140.

Kirkuk is a rich city with natural resources, especially oil, and it contains different ethnic groups, such as Kurds, Arabs, Turkomen, and Chaldeo-Assyrians.

In the time of Saddam Hussein's regime, Kurdish citizens of the city were transferred to other parts of the country and Iraqi Arabs from other parts were settled there instead. According to Article 140, the citizens of the city will decide whether to be part of Kurdistan or to remain with Baghdad in a referendum at the end of 2007.

The fear of returning Kirkuk to Kurdistan Region, thereby strengthen-

ing Kurdistan, has become the concern of neighboring countries that have Kurdish citizens.

Referring to the latest explosions in Shingar, the Kurdish president believes that there now is an organized plan to hamper the return of Kirkuk and other disputed areas to Kurdistan Region and to force Kurds

out of those places. In mid-August of this year, four explosions occurred in Shekhan district, populated mostly by Yezidi Kurds, which caused 400 deaths and 800 injuries (according to latest reports). Barzani asked the inhabitants of the people of Shekhan to be patient.

"What is done against the Kurds of those areas is planned," he commented.

The strategic agreement

At the end of July 2007, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), headed by Massoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, signed an agreement. Working to reduce the influence of political parties in the works of Parliament and the government was one of the major components of the agreement.

People's views differ on the agreement. Some think it results in a power monopoly by the two parties; others think it is a step toward more liberty and democracy.

Most of the parties outside of the agreement see this as a significant step for improving the function of the government, and be-

lieve it is in no way a monopoly of power.

However, Ghafur Makhmouri, General Secretary of the Kurdistan National Democratic Union, which has a seat in Kurdish Parliament, believed that the agreement would restrict the freedom of other parties and prevent the formation of opposition groups. Nevertheless, Barzani

guarantees Kurds that the agreement is to their benefit.

Reunion of the ministries

KDP and PUK, two major and powerful parties in Kurdistan, were in a continuous struggle until 1998. Then, according to the Washington Agreement, they agreed to end tensions. Since the downfall of Saddam Hussein's Baathist Regime in 2003, they have participated in most of the political decisions and elections as one list.

Before 2005, Kurdistan had two administrations: the Erbil administration, run by the KDP, and the Suleimaniya administration, run by the PUK. Each of them had its own ministries and institutions.

In spring 2005, the two administrations were unified to form Kurdistan Region's fifth cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. However, still some of the ministries have not been unified, such as the Ministry of Peshmarga and Finance. According to officials, technical problems are the issue.

Kurdistan Region's President Barzani said in a speech in Parliament that those ministries should be reunified before the year 2008.

"We need administrative reform, and the parties and the government should change themselves," Barzani said.

Unemployment

Though some economists believe that the rate of unemployment is negative, a great number of people in

Kurdistan are seeking employment.

After the collapse of the Baathist Regime in 2003, Kurdistan Region has seen rapid economic development as a gateway to Iraq's reconstruction.

Hundreds of foreign companies from Canada, Norway, Iran, Turkey, and other countries came to Kurdistan and initiated work in different sectors like extracting oil, and constructing roads, bridges, and buildings.

Lately, due to allocating three-fourths of the KRG's budget to public employees' salaries, Kurds working in construction and other service sectors were replaced by foreign workers coming from countries like the Philippines and Somalia.

After the KRG's 2007 budget was sent to Parliament for approval after a seven-month delay, the fact of allocating the greatest part of it for salaries forced the government to suggest a plan to improve the situation.

Reducing the number of ministries and public employees and encouraging them to work in the private sector are among those improvement measures that the government wants to take.

President Barzani said that the government has to work hard to create job opportunities for people instead of paying them.

Attempts to ouster "Kurdish group" in Turkish Parliament

Other members pledge to "do anything" to maintain the Kurdish group

September 11, 2007

The Kurdish Globe

In an attempt to draw Kurdish Parliament members outside of the legal immunity of Turkish Parliament, Turkish courts have begun to implement a decision that will do away with a "Kurdish group."



REUTERS/Uniti Bekins (TURKEY)

The pro-Kurdish DTP deputy Ahmet Turk addresses his party deputies during their meeting at the Turkish parliament in Ankara August 20, 2007.

The Globe- Erbil

The court of punishment number 9 in Istanbul has, for the first time in Turkish history and without the agreement of or consultation with Parliament, decided to take Kurdish parliamentary members who are in the Democratic Society Party (DTP) list to Turkish courts in an attempt to dissolve the Kurdish group in the Turkish Parliament.

Aysel Tuğluk, Ayla Akat Ata, and Sebahat Tuncel are some of the leading Kurdish parliamentarians of the DTP who are being taken to court, this in spite of the fact that, according to Turkish law, Parliament members are supposed to have legal immunity. The courts have used Article 14 of Turkey's Constitution to try the parliamentarians in this unprecedented case.

The DTP holds 20 seats, and therefore functions as a parliamentary group. The trying of these three persons and the making of a court judgment could lead to the expulsion of the Parliament members from Parliament.

Ufuk Oras, an independent Turk Parliament member, has declared that he will do anything to maintain the Kurdish group in Parliament, and for this he has decided to join the DTP. Along with Oras, the parliamentary representative of the Hakari region, Hameed Gaylane, is also ready to join the DTP, but because of the political enactment

law he is unable to do that until after 2008.

When speaking to the *Globe*, the DTP leader commented on the disagreement between the head of the Amed region municipality and the prime minister,

declaring that what Mr. Osman Baydemir did was to speak on the policies of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and that from now on they want to prepare to take charge of the municipalities of Amed and other municipalities of the northern Kurdistan area.

"Turkish newspapers and the state are misconstruing what Baydemir is saying; the officials of the AKP criticize Baydemir, saying since Baydemir has become head of the Amed municipality, the city hasn't been served and isn't provided with needed services," said Ahmet Turk.

"We have decided to remove him from the DTP list in the upcoming municipality elections of 2009. And Osman Baydemir has responded and said that you can't take this away from us, and if you are serious then come to Diyarbakir and say this. Diyarbakir is the forum, and if you are determined, come and say what you have to say. This competition is a natural thing, but sadly the sayings of Baydemir have been badly taken by the newspapers and the officials and are given the wrong meaning. To be honest, right now whatever we say is taken the wrong way by

government officials and is purposefully perverted and communicated to the public in order to put obstacles in the path of the development of the rightful Kurdish cause and the free expression of the demands of the Kurds," Turk stated.

Concerning the issue of why the AKP got 54% of the Kurdish vote at a time when the DTP was seen to be the voice of the Kurds, Türk said, "In Turkey, politics is practiced at the expense of the Kurds; the Kurdish nation is made poor and deprived, and on top of that they were given bribes and disgusting politics is practiced. They have economically impoverished the people, and by this they have sentenced them to be bound to them. And on another level apart from

the AKP, the Republic People Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) are those who practice a chauvinistic policy, but in comparison, AKP has been more lenient with the Kurds.

Unfortunately, AKP hasn't understood. I don't deny that we have our shortcomings, but let's not forget that we participated as independent parliamentary candidates, not as a political party."

Regarding the suggestion that the marginal failure of the DTP is due to its lack of a clear national Kurdish policy, Türk said that this is unfair and untrue, and they do practice a Kurdish national policy. "We bring the needs and wants of our nation to the forefront. When DTP is discussed in Turkey, it is said that it's a Kurdish party and our guilt is this Kurdish identity. The state says that the DTP only reacts to Kurdish issues. So when it's said that DTP doesn't practice a Kurdish national policy, I don't consider it to be true."

Considering the weakness of the Kurdish fraction and the plans against it, Turk said, "The Turks are powerful, and we have found a solution in Parliament for the furtherance of the Kurdish cause in a peaceful manner through Parliament; if this path is blocked, it's natural that we give up and stay at home. We haven't gone to Parliament for five Qrooshes (Turkish old currency). It is natural that if they target us we would give up and stop. And then we wouldn't be the only ones to suffer."

The DTP didn't vote for Abdullah Gül in the second presi-

dential elections. As for why, Türk said, "Abdullah Gül visited our headquarters, but he didn't say anything nor did he make even the smallest of promises to help the Kurdish cause. If we, as representatives of the Kurdish nation, gave him our vote, and afterwards he had failed to do anything for the Kurds, people would have said, "Why did

you vote for Gül?" and we then would be ashamed in front of our nation."

On the issue of whether the AKP has a concrete plan to resolve the Kurdish issue or not, the head of the DTP reiterated that so far they don't see anything of the kind, but when they have a democratic plan to help the Kurdish nation, the DTP would then help them. "If the AKP takes steps toward responding to the demands of the Kurds, then we would go to their aid. But if we voluntarily get in the middle and support them, but the AKP fails to do anything, what would we say to the Kurdish people?" he said.

Asked what the position of the DTP is to Sedat Laçner's claim that there is an agreement between the government and the army to launch an operation outside the borders, Türk said, "We are against any type of operation inside or outside the borders, because the problems will not be solved by operations and violence."

Discussing the matter of furthering the dialogue between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Turkish government and the role of the DTP in the middle, Türk said, "We are ready to advance any form of dialogue between the Kurdistan government and Turkey, and also Kurdish-Turkish dialogue. We want to solve the problems in a peaceful and democratic way, and the Turkish government must understand that the Kurdish problem will not be solved through the military."

Regarding the strong criticism of the DTP made by Abdullah Öcalan and its effect on the Turkish parliamentary results, Türk said, "Abdullah Öcalan is also a human being who wants to express his opinion; that is a normal thing. He is a Kurd too and has a right to criticize."

In partnership with Hewler newspaper

The wrong model ■ Geneive Abdo

Islamists won't follow Turkey's lead

WASHINGTON

Can Turkey's Justice and Development Party become a model for the ideal marriage between Islam and democracy that could be replicated in the Middle East?

Some Muslim intellectuals, politically correct commentators in the West and officials from the European Union seem to think so. They argue that the recent election of Abdullah Gul as president of Turkey and the success in parliamentary polls last July of his AK Party (as it is known in Turkey) are sound reasons to believe that a party comprised of Islamists can hold free elections, win at the polls and then run a state that is democratic and secular.

This presumption, however, rests upon the false belief that Turkey is much like the rest of the Islamic world and that all Islamists are similar to the leaders of the AK Party. For one thing, AK Party leaders should not be identified as "Islamists." As Gul declared during his acceptance speech: "Secularism, one of the basic principles of our republic, is a rule of social peace."

Islamists in most Muslim societies do not favor a secular state. In Jordan and Egypt, for example, unofficial Islamist parties and movements are fighting for Shariah, Islamic law, to be the guiding light for governing. Shariah-based governance, in fact, has been one of the foundations of opposition movements against authoritarian rulers in the Arab world for the last 30 years.

And it is not only the Islamists who are advocating Islamic law. The majority of Muslims surveyed in Arab countries, and in other Muslims societies, say they prefer that Islamic law be either a source, or the sole source, of legislation. By contrast, according to a recent report by the International Crisis Group, support for Islamic law in Turkey has never exceeded 20 percent.

As far back as 1981, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt tried to appease his country's Islamists by revising the Constitution to mandate Shariah as the primary source of legislation. Islamic law has never been enforced, however, and today this has become one of main battle cries of the Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition to Egypt's governing National Democratic Party.

Although many moderate Islamists in the Middle East admire the AK Party's success, the way ahead for them is far more difficult. The vast historical differences between Turkey and the region's other countries also have to be taken into account.

The AK Party was born out of the more ideological Welfare Party, but then evolved to become more in line with Turkey's secular tradition. By contrast, secularism in the Arab world peaked in the 1950s and 60s, then came to a halt with the Six Day War of 1967. The Arabs' humiliating defeat by Israel inspired the rise of political Islam, which has grown in influence since then.

If Islamists came to power in many Arab states they would likely ban alcohol, homosexuality and pornographic images on the Internet and in film. For years, Islamists have complained about the millions of bikini-clad foreign tourists who frequent beach resorts in Arab countries, even though tourism helps keep their beleaguered economies afloat.

In addition, Arab societies have transformed over

the last 30 years and are far more religious than Turkish society, even though an increasing number of Turks are embracing Islam in ways unseen since the Ottoman Empire.

Even if the Islamists in the Arab world had every intention of emulating Turkey's secular-style of government, they still would have to answer to the growing influence of religious authorities. These range from the scholars at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the 1,100-year-old seat of learning for Sunni Islam, to respected clerics in mosques and institutions stretching from Saudi Arabia to Qatar who have followers across the Arab world.

Religious authority in Turkey has always been part of the state structure, unlike in the Arab world, where religious scholars and imams have been free to interpret Islamic doctrine at will. Sheiks at Al-Azhar and religious scholars in the Gulf have been at odds over a range of fatwas, from whether the 9/11 attacks on the United States were justified to whether female circumcision is an Islamic duty or simply a cultural tradition that began in Africa and was adopted in Arab society.

By contrast, the state's control over Islamic interpretation has a long history in Turkey, one that continues today.

In forging his country into a secular state, Kemal Ataturk did not allow Islam to become a basis for opposition movements, as happened in the Arab world after the Muslim Brotherhood was created in 1928. Instead, the Turkish state institutionalized Islam by controlling the message and the messenger — only imams licensed by the state are allowed to preach in mosques — making interpretations of the faith subject to state approval.

Policy makers and pundits in the United States and Europe should not rush to judgment by assuming that the Turkish model can be applied elsewhere. Just as the Islamic world is not monolithic, so too will Islamic-style democracy vary in each country, should it develop at all.

Geneive Abdo, a fellow at The Century Foundation, is the author of several books on contemporary Islam, most recently "Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America After 9/11."



Irak: le gouvernement kurde réclame la démission du ministre du Pétrole

AFP

ERBIL (Irak), 13 sept 2007 (AFP) - Le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan irakien a demandé jeudi la démission du ministre irakien du Pétrole en l'accusant de se mêler des affaires intérieures de la région, pour des propos qu'il aurait tenus sur un contrat pétrolier signé par les Kurdes.

L'exécutif kurde "rejette les déclarations du ministre Hussein Chahristani et exige qu'il démissionne immédiatement", a déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse à Erbil (nord) le porte-parole du gouvernement, Khalid Saleh.

A l'en croire, au cours de la réunion de l'Opep, mardi à Vienne, M. Sharistani aurait qualifié "d'illégal" un contrat d'exploration pétrolière signé début septembre par le gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien avec une société américaine.

"Ce qui se passe au Kurdistan ne regarde pas M. Chahristani", qui "ferait mieux de se consacrer à des choses plus positives pour le pays plutôt que de saper les efforts du gouvernement du Kurdistan en faveur du peuple irakien", a déclaré M. Saleh.

Le ministre du Pétrole "n'a aucune autorité pour remettre en question la légalité des contrats signés par le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (...)", a-t-il estimé.

"Il ferait mieux de s'occuper de la contrebande de pétrole qui se déroule sous ses yeux, ainsi que des difficultés qu'il a lui-même créées concernant la nouvelle législation sur le pétrole", a poursuivi le porte-parole.

Dans le cas contraire, "il ferait mieux de démissionner et de laisser sa place à quelqu'un d'autre, car l'industrie pétrolière irakienne mérite mieux", a-t-il ajouté.

Le porte-parole a par ailleurs accusé M. Chahristani d'avoir fait pression sur la Turquie et l'Iran pour que ces deux pays cessent d'approvisionner le Kurdistan irakien en essence et produits pétroliers, ce qui révèle "sa profonde rancune envers le peuple kurde".

Début septembre, le gouvernement régional kurde a annoncé la signature d'un contrat avec une filiale locale des compagnies américaines Hunt Oil company of Dallas et Impulse Energy Corporation (IEC), pour l'exploration de champs pétroliers dans la province kurde de Dahuk.

Il s'agissait du premier contrat signé par le gouvernement régional kurde après l'adoption début août par le Parlement de cette région du nord de l'Irak d'une nouvelle législation sur le pétrole et le gaz.

Le Parlement national irakien examine par ailleurs de son côté un projet de loi controversé sur le pétrole, déjà approuvé en juillet par le gouvernement.

Considérée par Washington comme un point essentiel pour la réconciliation nationale en Irak, cette loi visant à partager équitablement les revenus du pétrole entre les 18 provinces constitue un dossier des plus sensibles dans ce pays assis sur les troisièmes réserves mondiales d'or noir.

Le gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien est hostile à ce projet de loi depuis qu'un amendement y a été ajouté "stipulant que les contrats d'exploration de pétrole seront du ressort du gouvernement central", selon l'exécutif kurde, qui y voit une perte de ses prérogatives et une menace à ses intérêts.

AFP

Turquie : le PKK vise un train de fret, quatre soldats blessés par une mine

ANKARA, 14 sept 2007 (AFP) - Un train de fret a déraillé jeudi soir à Bingöl, dans l'est de la Turquie, à la suite de l'explosion d'une mine posée, selon les autorités, par des séparatistes kurdes, tandis qu'une autre mine a blessé quatre soldats à Siirt (est), a-t-on annoncé vendredi de source officielle.

Deux machinistes ont été légèrement blessés dans le déraillement de la locomotive et de cinq de ses wagons.

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) s'en prend régulièrement

aux trains de marchandises dans cette région théâtre de combats.

Dans un incident séparé survenu également jeudi, quatre soldats ont été blessés par l'explosion d'une mine posée également par des rebelles kurdes, dans la localité montagneuse de Genç, dans la province de Siirt, a indiqué l'armée dans un communiqué.

Le PKK, qui revendique l'indépendance du Sud-Est et de l'Est, est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. Il a multiplié ses opérations cette année

AFP

La France va ouvrir une représentation au Kurdistan irakien (Kouchner)

PARIS, 14 sept 2007 (AFP) - Le ministre français des Affaires étrangères Bernard Kouchner a annoncé vendredi à son homologue irakien Hoshyar Zebari, reçu à Paris, la décision de la France d'ouvrir une représentation diplomatique à Erbil, au Kurdistan irakien, a rapporté une porte-parole.

"Le ministre a confirmé à son homologue que la France avait pris la décision d'établir une représentation diplomatique à Erbil", au Kurdistan irakien, selon un communiqué de la porte-parole ministère français, Pascale Andréani.

Elle a ajouté que cette ouverture "se fera dans les meilleurs délais et permettra de renforcer la présence française dans cette région".

Situé dans le nord de l'Irak, le Kurdistan irakien dispose désormais d'un gouvernement autonome.

MM. Kouchner et Zebari, qui ont par ailleurs "évoqué la situation en Irak et dans la région, ainsi que l'état des relations bilatérales" entre la France et l'Irak, ont confirmé qu'ils se retrouveraient le 22 septembre à New-York, pour une réunion sur l'Irak sous l'égide du secrétaire général des Nations Unies Ban Ki-moon et du Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki.

Après une visite à Bagdad le mois dernier, M. Kouchner avait dû présenter des excuses à M. al-Maliki après des déclarations dans lesquelles il demandait sa démission.

AFP

Un rebelle kurde tué lors de combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie

ANKARA, 16 sept 2007 (AFP) - Un rebelle kurde du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a été tué et deux autres ont été blessés lors de combats dans le sud-est anatolien, a rapporté dimanche l'agence de presse Anatolie.

L'affrontement s'est produit dans une zone rurale de la province de Batman, près de la localité de Besiri, a indiqué l'agence, précisant que les deux blessés avaient été transportés dans un hôpital de la ville de Batman.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-

Unis et l'Union européenne, a accru depuis le début de l'année ses attaques dans le sud-est anatolien, où la population est en majorité kurde.

Le conflit kurde de Turquie a fait plus de 37.000 morts depuis le début, en 1984, de l'insurrection menée par le PKK.

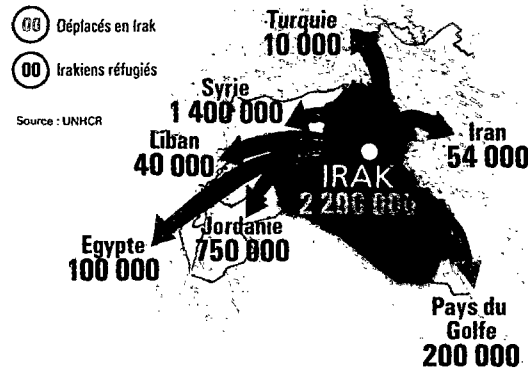
Déjà 2 millions de personnes déplacées Sunnites-chiites : le fossé s'élargit

Malgré quelques succès américains en trompe-l'œil, l'Irak s'enfonce dans l'anarchie et la guerre civile

C'est sans aucun doute la mort dans l'âme que le général David Petraeus vient de recommander, devant les commissions des Forces armées et des Affaires étrangères de la Chambre des Représentants, qu'une brigade de combat (environ 4 000 hommes) qui doit revenir en décembre ne soit pas remplacée. Ce processus de non-remplacement de troupes plutôt que de réduction d'effectifs ramènerait l'été prochain le nombre de soldats présents à celui du début de 2007, c'est-à-dire avant l'envoi de troupes supplémentaires. Soit à quinze brigades. Ses recommandations ont sans doute été dictées par des impératifs de politique intérieure mais aussi, surtout, par un souci d'humanité. Il sait qu'il ne peut imposer à ses hommes, déjà épuisés par cette guerre à laquelle plus personne ne croit, des rotations de dix-huit mois. En novembre 2003 à Mossoul, nous avons vu le général sangloter, inconsolable de la perte de ses soldats, lorsqu'un hélicoptère de la 101^e division aéroportée avait été abattu. « Cette génération de soldats est formidable », s'était-il exclamé en larmes. Il avait aussi émis des réserves sur la stratégie de Paul Bremer, l'ancien administrateur civil en Irak, affirmant déjà que ses résultats à Mossoul avec ses propres méthodes étaient meilleurs que dans le reste de l'Irak.

Si on lui laissait du temps et des hommes, le général Petraeus pourrait-il inverser le

Plus de 4,5 millions d'Irakiens
réfugiés et déplacés



Les civils, premières victimes

Les pertes militaires...

Depuis le 20 mars 2003

Irakiens*	12 000
Américains	3 719
Britanniques	168
Italiens	32
Ukrainiens	18
Polonais	20
Bulgares	13
Espagnols	11
Danois	7
Salvadoriens	5
Slovaques	4
Lettons	3
Estoniens	2
Thaïlandais	2
Néerlandais	2
Tchèque	1
Kazakh	1
Australien	1
Hongrois	1
Roumain	1
Sud-Coréen	1

(*) Policiers irakiens tués depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein



Source : AFP - Iraq Body Count

cours dramatique des événements ? « Des progrès politiques ne se produiront que s'il y a une sécurité suffisante », a-t-il souligné devant la Chambre des Représentants. Dans la région d'Al-Anbar, le général a enregistré quelques avancées. En contractant des alliances avec les cheikhs sunnites locaux qui étaient jusqu'ici le fer de lance de la guérilla antiméricaine

et en leur fournissant des armes, les stratèges américains les ont incités à se retourner contre les « Arabes », c'est-à-dire contre les étrangers d'Al-Qaïda. Or il s'agissait bel et bien d'un changement profond puisque

jusqu'à les Américains avaient préféré s'appuyer sur les potentats chiites afin de réduire la rébellion.

Mais ce succès partiel, s'il n'est pas négligeable, suscite nombre d'interrogations. Car cette pacification très limitée est tenue à bout de bras par les Américains. Le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki, dont l'autorité ne dépasse guère le périmètre de la « zone verte » de Bagdad, n'est pas reconnu à Al-Anbar. Or les militaires américains y ont réarmé des tribus hostiles au gouvernement central, ce qui entraînera des difficultés supplémentaires dans la perspective, même à long terme, d'un retrait. Le rapprochement des Américains avec la guérilla sunnite a aussi exaspéré non seulement les militants des partis chiites mais surtout l'Iran, qui demeure un acteur majeur dans le conflit irakien. En juillet dernier, à Téhéran, Ali Larijani, le négociateur iranien sur les questions nucléaires, avait eu des mots très durs contre l'ex-ambassadeur américain en Irak, Zalmay Khalilzad, à qui il imputait la paternité de cette nouvelle stratégie.

Quant au reste du pays, où se poursuit un nettoyage ethnique et confessionnel, près de 2 millions d'Irakiens y ont déjà été déplacés, victimes de l'instauration progressive d'un réel apartheid. Sous les yeux des Américains, la géographie confessionnelle de l'Irak se redessine : les sunnites ont ainsi pratiquement déserté l'ouest de Bagdad, où ils étaient encore très présents il y a seulement quelques mois.

Dans les rares quartiers à population encore mixte, des chicanes de béton et des barbelés installés par les forces américaines séparent les communautés. Dans le quartier d'Amal, où il reste moins de 5 000 sunnites pour 100 000 chiites, les troupes américaines, témoins des massacres, doivent souvent s'interposer entre les escadrons chiites de l'Armée du Mahdi et la population sunnite. Selon le général Raymond Odierno, les forces américaines sont désormais plus souvent attaquées par les milices chiites que par les insurgés sunnites. Et ailleurs, comme à Kerbala, les milices chiites se font même la guerre entre elles. Au point que le chef Moqtada al-Sadr lui-même a reconnu qu'il lui faudrait faire le ménage dans les rangs de son armée.

A la fois acteur et témoin principal de cet engrenage tragique, le général Petraeus n'a d'autre choix que d'accepter le non-remplacement d'une partie de son contingent d'hommes épuisés. Même s'il est conscient, plus que quiconque, des terribles conséquences d'un retrait américain : déchu de leurs droits et défaits par les Américains puis par les chiites, les sunnites d'Irak sont aujourd'hui un peuple en sursis.

SARA DANIEL

IRAN

Une certitude : Washington attaquera Téhéran

Abd Al-Bari Atwan, directeur du quotidien nationaliste panarabe *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, énumère neuf indices tendant à prouver qu'une guerre va avoir lieu au cours des six prochains mois.

AL-QUDS AL-ARABI (extraits)

Londres

Après l'été, les affaires sérieuses redémarrent. La diplomatie occidentale se remet en branle, et tout indique qu'elle se focalisera à nouveau sur le Moyen-Orient. Dans les mois à venir, le point de fixation sera l'Iran, prochaine cible des Américains. Nous devons nous attendre à une escalade politique, diplomatique, médiatique et militaire sans précédent contre ce pays et son programme nucléaire. Car le temps qui reste au président George Bush est désormais compté pour traiter ce dossier. Un certain nombre d'évolutions récentes donnent à penser que la guerre aura lieu dans les six prochains mois, à moins d'un miracle sous forme de capitulation, semblable à celle de la Libye ou, plus récemment de la Corée du Nord.

Premier indice Pour parler du danger nucléaire iranien, George Bush a utilisé les termes d'«holocauste nucléaire», avertissant ainsi clairement Téhéran de ne pas aller plus avant dans son programme d'enrichissement d'uranium, comme s'il voulait à la fois accentuer la menace contre l'Iran et préparer l'opinion publique américaine, voire internationale, à l'éventualité d'un usage d'armes nucléaires américaines contre ce pays.

Deuxième indice Le nouveau président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, commence à occuper la place laissée vacante par Tony Blair, à savoir celle du meilleur allié de Washington. Il a donc abandonné la ligne chiraquienne au profit d'une américanisation de ses positions à propos du Moyen-Orient. A son retour de ses vacances d'été américaines, il a déclaré aux 188 ambassadeurs qui représentent la France à travers le monde que l'acquisition de l'arme nucléaire était la ligne rouge à ne pas franchir et que l'Iran s'exposerait fatalement à des bombardements s'il ne renonçait pas à ses ambitions.

Troisième indice Le journaliste américain Seymour Hersh a affirmé devant un groupe de confrères français

rencontrés il y a quelques semaines à Paris qu'il avait appris de la part de sources à la Maison-Blanche que la décision de frappes contre l'Iran avait déjà été prise, que le dernier mot dans ce dossier revenait désormais au camp proche du vice-président Dick Cheney [faucon], et que le ministre de la Défense Robert Gates présenterait prochainement sa démission en raison des conséquences catastrophiques auxquelles il s'attend en cas de guerre.

Quatrième indice Un des vice-secrétaires d'Etat américains, Nicholas Burns, a expliqué à Roger Cohen, du *New York Times*, que la plupart des pays sunnites de la région considèrent l'Iran comme un trublion soutenant le terrorisme et comme une menace pour la stabilité régionale. Il a ajouté que ces pays, et notamment les pétromonarchies du Golfe, ont compris que l'Iran représentait une menace plus sérieuse qu'Israël.

Cinquième indice Les Etats-Unis ont fait inscrire les gardiens de la révolution iraniens [les pasdarans] sur la liste internationale des organisations terroristes. Ils ont également durci le ton en accusant à nouveau Téhéran de soutenir la résistance irakienne, y compris Al-Qaïda, avec des livraisons d'armes sophistiquées qui alourdissent le bilan humain des forces américaines.

Sixième indice L'Arabie Saoudite a signé un contrat d'un montant estimé à quelque 5 milliards de dollars avec une société américaine pour entraîner et équiper quelque 35 000 hommes chargés de protéger ses installations pétrolières. Il faut savoir qu'il y a un an Al-Qaïda avait préparé un attentat contre ces installations, mais n'avait pas réussi à pénétrer dans les zones de haute sécurité. L'Iran, en revanche, aurait les moyens de les attaquer avec un avion suicide ou avec ses missiles Shihab, ce qui pourrait provoquer l'effondrement des exportations de brut saoudien. C'est d'ailleurs pourquoi les Américains maintiennent leurs batteries de missiles antimissiles Patriot dans la région, notamment au Koweït et à proximité des côtes saoudiennes.

Septième indice La précipitation

avec laquelle Washington prépare une conférence internationale de paix, prévue pour l'automne, et presse Mahmoud Abbas et Ehoud Olmert de se rencontrer pour annoncer un accord de principe. Un succès dans ce domaine faciliterait un recours à l'option militaire contre l'Iran, dans la mesure où cela satisferait les sunnites de la région, qui pourraient alors faire cause commune avec les Etats-Unis et Israël pour combattre les alliés de l'Iran que sont la Syrie, le Hezbollah libanais et le Hamas palestinien.

Huitième indice Le soudain revirement de George Bush au sujet du Premier ministre irakien Nouri Al-Maliki. Après avoir laissé entendre qu'il souhaitait sa démission, il lui a ensuite délivré un satisfecit. L'explication la plus plausible de ce changement est que les plans concernant l'Iran ont été accélérés et que l'administration américaine estime ne plus avoir assez de temps pour provoquer un changement gouvernemental en Irak.

Neuvième indice Le tout récent retrait des troupes britanniques de Bassorah, qui signifie d'une part que la Grande-Bretagne est désormais convaincue que la victoire en Irak est impossible, d'autre part qu'elle souhaite soustraire ses troupes au risque de représailles iraniennes en cas de frappes aériennes américaines. Les soldats britanniques stationnés à Bassorah, à quelques encablures de la frontière iranienne, seraient en effet une cible idéale pour les Iraniens.

Face aux deux défaites en Irak et en Afghanistan, Bush estime que la seule possibilité qui lui reste pour sauver sa présidence et préserver les chances de son parti aux prochaines élections consiste à tenter le tout pour le tout, c'est-à-dire à attaquer l'Iran. Il accepte le risque d'une nouvelle défaite, sachant parfaitement que les missiles iraniens n'atteindront pas New York ou Washington, mais Tel-Aviv, Riyad ou Dubaï.

Abd Al-Bari Atwan

Hoshyar Zebari : « Un retrait brutal aurait des conséquences dévastatrices »

En visite à Paris, le ministre irakien des affaires étrangères estime que le gouvernement Maliki va être soumis à de fortes pressions américaines pour obtenir plus de résultats

Quel jugement portez-vous sur la présentation faite devant le Congrès américain de la situation en Irak et sur le discours de George Bush, le 13 septembre ?

Les rapports [du général David Petraeus, chef des forces américaines en Irak, et de l'ambassadeur Ryan Crocker] étaient très importants, ils ont atténué la pression du Congrès et de l'opinion publique avec des informations de première main. Quel est le tableau qui a été dressé : si nous restons, ce sera difficile et coûteux et nous n'avons pas la garantie du succès, mais si nous partons, ce sera bien pire.

Le président Bush a tenu un discours audacieux. Il a rappelé ses engagements, mais il a aussi ouvert pour la première fois la perspective d'un retrait graduel, en fonction de la situation sur le terrain. L'engagement le plus important a été que la présence américaine ira au-delà de sa présidence. Il y aura toujours des troupes américaines en Irak lorsqu'un nouveau président et une nouvelle administration s'installeront à Washington.

Cette présence des troupes américaines est-elle toujours nécessaire ?

Je crois que oui. Nos forces n'ont pas encore atteint un niveau qui leur permettrait d'être autonomes. Par exemple, l'Irak n'a toujours pas de forces aériennes, il ne peut donc pas défendre son espace aérien. Compte tenu des pressions régionales, sans les forces présentes sur notre sol, nombreux auraient été nos voisins tentés d'y envoyer leurs troupes, au nord, à l'est, à l'ouest... Du fait des tensions politiques, communautaires et de la violence, un retrait brutal aurait des conséquences dévastatrices, une véritable guerre civile pourrait éclater. Dans un tel chaos, les réseaux terroristes, Al-Qaïda, pourraient établir en Irak une base autrement plus pratique que l'Afghanistan.

La reconstruction de nos forces est une question de temps, nous partons de zéro. Il y a des retards, mais la seule sortie possible pour les troupes américaines, c'est quand nous aurons assez d'hommes pour combler le vide.

Quand ?

C'est un processus. Au cours des deux dernières années, l'entraînement et la formation de l'armée ont été plus professionnels. Ses performances actuelles ont été très bonnes. Nous avons, en revanche, des problèmes avec le ministère de l'intérieur et la police qui a été infiltrée par les milices, qui n'ont pas été établies sur des bases nationales, qui est rongée par la corruption et qui agit trop souvent en dehors de la loi.

Aux Etats-Unis, les critiques sont de

plus en plus vives vis-à-vis des Irakiens qui sont accusés de ne pas être capables d'atteindre les objectifs qui leur ont été fixés.

Les objectifs évoqués par le Congrès américain sont les nôtres à l'origine : la réconciliation nationale, la disparition des milices, la loi sur la gestion des ressources pétrolières... Mais nous ne pouvons pas régler ces problèmes, comme dans n'importe quelle démocratie, selon la règle de la majorité. Nous cherchons au contraire le consensus entre les différentes communautés, ce qui prend beaucoup plus de temps. Toutes ces questions sont existentielles pour nous parce qu'elles détermineront notre avenir.

Après ces rapports au Congrès et le discours de Bush, la pression va monter vis-à-vis du gouvernement pour qu'il agisse et qu'il avance. Pour qu'il ne soit pas entravé par l'absence ou le boycottage de telle ou telle faction.

Faut-il changer le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki ?

Il a été désigné par la faction la plus importante. Maliki comme n'importe quel autre sera jugé à ses résultats. J'ai indiqué à mon bon ami (Bernard) Kouchner que ses propos concernant un changement de premier ministre avaient vexé tout le monde. Il s'agit d'une question intérieure irakienne. Il a réitéré ses excuses et il s'est expliqué en m'indiquant que

c'était ce qu'il avait entendu de la bouche de nombreux Irakiens. Je lui ai indiqué que c'était là leur opinion et qu'il est ministre des affaires étrangères de la France et que c'est tout autre chose.

Craignez-vous que les tensions entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran aient un impact en Irak ?

L'Irak paie le prix de ces tensions, c'est pourquoi nous avons poussé pour un dialogue direct entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran. Plus il y aura des tensions, d'affrontements, plus cela aura des conséquences en Irak parce qu'il s'agit du principal champ de bataille. ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR
RÉMY OURDAN ET GILLES PARIS



Pour le ministre irakien des affaires étrangères, Hoshyar Zebari, en visite le vendredi 14 septembre à Paris, « l'Irak paie le prix des tensions » entre Washington et Téhéran. STEPHANE LAVOUÉ/MYOP/POUR « LE MONDE »

LeNouvelliste

17 septembre 2007

Entre mondialisation et attentats-suicide



Retour au Kurdistan d'Irak

Superficie: 83 000 km² (le Kurdistan dans sa totalité - Turquie, Iran, Syrie - s'étend sur 500 000 km²).

Population: 5.6 millions (16% de la population totale des Kurdes et 28% de la population irakienne). Plusieurs minorités cohabitent avec les Kurdes d'Irak: Turkmènes, Arabes.

Religion: en majorité musulmans (sunnites), mais aussi chrétiens (assyriens, chaldéens).

Ressource: le pétrole, céréales, fruits et légumes (projets touristiques).

Président: Massoud Barzani (fils du général Mustafa Barzani).

Premier ministre: Nechirvan Barzani (neveu du précédent).
Président du Parlement: Adnan Mofiti.

Les deux principaux partis politiques sont le PDK (Barzani) et l'UPK (J. Talabani, président de l'Irak). Tous les partis politiques sont représentés au Parlement dont 25% des députés sont des femmes.

GILBERTE FAVRE

J'ai retrouvé un pays certes «sur le chemin de la modernité» ainsi que me l'avaient appris les médias occidentaux, mais pas invulnérable pour autant. En effet, alors que cet «autre Irak» et «havre de paix» - comme le disent les Américains - n'avait plus connu d'attentats depuis 2004, mon séjour fut ponctué par deux attentats-suicide: 80 morts au moins et près de deux cents blessés...

En attendant le référendum sur le statut de Kirkouk, annoncé pour la fin de cette année, d'autres attentats pourraient encore meurtrir ce pays paradoxalement en pleine expansion, mais au statut précaire. Encouragée depuis quinze ans par les protecteurs américains, l'indépendance de facto du Kurdistan d'Irak n'est pas sans susciter la convoitise des Etats voisins et en premier lieu celle de la Turquie.

«Welcome in Kurdistan!»

En octobre 1991, après la Première Guerre du Golfe et l'exode des Kurdes, j'étais venue au Kurdistan d'Irak via la Turquie. Alors, plusieurs centaines de milliers de Kurdes vivaient sous des toits de branchages et autres abris de fortune - les anciens centres de torture et de détention de Saddam - et leur avenir semblait loin d'être radieux. Quinze ans plus tard, j'arrive au Kurdistan d'Irak par un vol direct Vienne-Erbil. La bourgade provinciale que j'avais connue est devenue un chantier géant. Au-delà des check points de l'aéroport se profilent les tours géantes de la «Dream City». Conçue par des architectes libanais, cette immense cité futuriste émergera à proximité du quartier chrétien d'Ain Quava. A raison de 900 000 dollars la villa, les Kurdes devraient, selon les promoteurs, y «vivre le rêve». Un rêve sans doute accessible aux 5000 millionnaires (sur environ 1 million d'habitants) que compte la capitale kurde d'Irak... où le terrain se vend en moyenne à 500 francs le m² et où les appartements se louent entre 800 et 1500 dollars par mois. Si la grande majorité des Kurdes d'Erbil ne peuvent pas s'offrir ce «rêve», que dire des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes, réfugiés en Iran, où ils crouissent depuis la Première Guerre du Golfe dans des camps, et qui n'ont pas les moyens de rentrer chez eux?

De Maurice Chappaz au Centre Arthur Rimbaud

Indépendant de facto depuis 1992, mais non reconnu officiellement, le Kurdistan d'Irak ne bénéficie pas de l'aide de l'UNESCO et autres organismes culturels qui pourraient, en lui offrant des livres, favoriser son essor culturel. J'étais venue au Kurdistan

en emportant dans mes bagages plusieurs ouvrages d'auteurs romands parmi lesquels deux livres spécialement dédiés à l'intention des Kurdes par Maurice Chappaz. «Ce sont nos premiers livres d'auteurs suisses», me dira Khasro Botan, traducteur et professeur de français à l'Université Salaheddine. Quant à Mathieu Saint-Dizier, directeur du Centre culturel Arthur Rimbaud - dit «Rambo» par les habitants de la région -, il accueille «A rire et à mourir» avec une curiosité extrême. Voilà trois ans que ce jeune Français s'efforce de diffuser la culture francophone à Erbil, milieu traditionnellement anglophone. Il organise des échanges artistiques entre la France et le Kurdistan, propose des concerts et projections de cinéma ainsi que des conférences. En plus, il trouve encore le temps de donner des cours de français dans les écoles. L'enthousiasme de Mathieu - son centre est hébergé au cœur de la Citadelle en voie de restauration -, n'est tempéré que par une seule perspective. «Si des attentats devaient toucher la région, c'est simple, nous n'aurions plus qu'à fermer le centre...»

Premier attentat-suicide: la main d'Al-Qaïda

Le lendemain, il est seulement 8 heures lorsqu'un bruit de détonation résonne. En vérité, l'hypothèse d'un attentat n'effleure pas un instant mon esprit car la région est dite «100% sûre». Les hommes d'affaires se regroupent aussitôt dans le hall de l'hôtel, tapotant frénétiquement sur leurs portables, mais toutes les communications ont été coupées. Au bout d'une heure, notre interprète réussit à nous atteindre pour s'excuser de son retard dû à quelques «embouteillages»... Il arrive peu après pour nous informer d'un attentat qui a visé le Ministère de l'intérieur. Il est encore sous le coup de l'émotion car la voiture de son frère roulait très exactement 500 mètres derrière le camion piégé. «Mon frère a vu le camion dévier vers la gauche, tourner sur lui-même puis exploser: Il a réussi à freiner à temps. Mais le pare-brise de sa voiture a volé en éclats. Heureusement, il est sain et sauf...»

Bien que notre interprète soit de nature plutôt discrète, il ne peut cacher son trouble. «Treize véhicules suspects auraient passé tout récemment de Bagdad au Kurdistan», nous apprend-il. La Direction de la sûreté est en train de les rechercher. Il reste à trouver les douze autres...»

Sirènes et ambulances

Commis par un seul homme, ce premier attentat aurait causé une vingtaine de morts et plus de 70 blessés parmi les ouvriers d'un

BIO EXPRESS



Gilberte Favre

- 1945: naissance à Sion
- 1965-1967: stage de journaliste à la «Feuille d'Avis du Valais», à Sion.
- 1969-1973: reporter à «L'Illustré» (Suisse et Moyen Orient).
- 1972: mariage avec Noureddine Zaza, homme politique et écrivain kurde, fondateur du Parti démocrate kurde de Syrie. Noureddine Zaza prônait pour le Moyen-Orient une Confédération d'Etats sur le modèle helvétique.

► 1974: Voyage au Liban avec Corinna Bille et Maurice Chappaz.

► 1988: mort de son mari.

Gilberte Favre, journaliste, est retournée après quinze ans d'absence au Kurdistan. Elle en rapporte ses impressions. Un mélange d'espoir et de crainte sur le futur de ce pays.

Gilberte Favre est l'auteure d'une dizaine de livres (romans, récits, poèmes) parmi lesquels la biographie «Corinna Bille, le vrai conte de sa vie», «L'Hirondelle de vie, chronique des enfants du Liban» (préface d'Andrée Chedid), «Comme un acte de mémoire» et «Survivre».

chantier et les passants se rendant à leur travail. Toute la journée, nous entendrons les sirènes des ambulances.

L'après-midi, sur les lieux de l'attentat, nous serons frappés par l'ampleur des dégâts ainsi que par la largeur et la profondeur du cratère.

La plupart des vitres du ministère ont été brisées. Pêle-mêle, nous voyons: un siège de voiture, des chaussures, des lunettes... Vingt minutes avant notre arrivée, c'est un crâne qui fut retrouvé, seul, et que les secouristes enterrèrent immédiatement sur place. Il appartenait au conducteur d'un rouleau compresseur, nous confia un responsable du chantier en précisant: «Nous l'avions déjà enseveli dans la matinée... mais sans la tête...»

Le président du Parlement: trois fois rescapé

Serait-ce pour nous faire oublier «le mauvais souvenir» de la veille? Nos hôtes ont tenu à nous faire découvrir le parc Sami Abdulrahman*. Nous nous éterniserions vo-

lontiers dans ces lieux enchanteurs – profusion de roses sur 50 000 m2 de verdure et parfum envoûtant de jasmin... –, mais nous sommes attendus par le président du Parlement.

Adnan Mofti est un homme «sage» qui s'exprime en un excellent français – il a fait une partie de ses études à Paris – et d'une voix très douce. Interrogé sur l'indépendance du Kurdistan d'Irak, il répond: «Ce n'est pas le plus important pour l'instant. Comme vous le savez, il y a le problème de Kirkouk – un référendum sur son statut aura lieu d'ici à la fin de l'année – qui doit d'abord être résolu. Et nos voisins, en particulier les Turcs, ne seraient pas nécessairement d'accord avec cette perspective.»

Le président du Parlement kurde d'Irak connaît bien la valeur de la vie pour avoir échappé à trois reprises à la mort. La première fois, en 1987, il fut visé par un bombardement de l'aviation irakienne. Quelques années plus tard, les services de renseignements irakiens l'empoisonnèrent au thallium.

La troisième fois, enfin, Adnan Mofti fut miraculeusement épargné par l'attentat-suicide de février 2004 puisqu'il en ressortit «seulement» blessé. En dépit des séquelles résultant de tous ces événements, le président du Parlement kurde d'Irak ne semble pas pour autant habité par le ressentiment ni par la haine. «Il faut savoir être patient...»

* Du nom de ce leader kurde tué lors de l'attentat-suicide en février 2004 et qui fit 117 morts. Son nom et ceux de ses compagnons ont été gravés dans une pierre monumentale.

LE FIGARO

17 septembre 2007

Bernard Kouchner : « Il faut se préparer au pire, à la guerre » face à l'Iran

DIPLOMATIE

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères était l'invité hier du « Grand Jury-RTL-Le Figaro-LCI ».

LA CRISE du nucléaire iranien impose de « se préparer au pire » qui « est la guerre », a déclaré hier Bernard Kouchner. Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, qui était l'invité hier du « Grand Jury- LCI-RTL-Le Figaro », a précisé sa pensée : « On se prépare en disant : "nous n'accepterons pas que cette bombe [atomique iranienne] soit construite, suspendez l'enrichissement de l'uranium et on vous montre que nous sommes sérieux. »

Alors que l'Iran refuse de suspendre son activité d'enrichissement de l'uranium, Bernard Kouchner a proposé que soient mises au point des «sanctions plus efficaces». Il a confirmé que la France était favorable à « des sanctions économiques européennes » qui seraient donc prises en dehors de celles de l'ONU. Déjà, a-t-il ajouté, le gouvernement a demandé aux entreprises françaises de ne pas signer de contrats en Iran.

L'hypothèse d'un bombardement de l'Iran n'est toutefois pas d'actualité. « Je ne crois pas que nous en soyons là », mais il est « normal qu'on fasse des plans », a-t-il expliqué. «L'armée française

n'est pas pour le moment associée à quoi que ce soit ni à aucune manœuvre que ce soit.»

«Nous devons négocier jusqu'au bout», a-t-il poursuivi. La possession de l'arme atomique par Téhéran serait un «vrai danger pour l'ensemble du monde». Bernard Kouchner devrait aborder le dossier iranien lors de ses visites cette semaine à Moscou puis à Washington.

Le ministre Affaires étrangères a aussi été interrogé sur d'autres polémiques en France. La suppression éventuelle de l'amendement à la Constitution qui oblige le président de République à convoquer un référen-

dum en cas d'élargissement de l'UE ne le dérange pas.

Contrairement à la politique d'immigration du gouvernement. Le ministre a pris ses distances avec l'objectif de 25 000 expulsions en 2007. Cette politique « ne recueille pas entièrement mon adhésion. Je n'aime pas ces histoires de chiffres », a-t-il lancé. « Si elles sont nécessaires, les expulsions devraient être décidées au cas par cas. » Et les tests ADN pour les candidats au regroupement familial? « Cela ne me plaît pas, mais ne m'indigne pas. Le jour où je m'indignerai vraiment, je partirai. »

C. B.

Iran Le ministre des affaires étrangères s'explique, après avoir évoqué, dimanche, l'éventualité d'un conflit Kouchner : « Des sanctions pour éviter la guerre »

Le Monde
19 septembre 2007

MOSCOU

ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Je ne veux pas qu'on dise que je suis un va-t-en-guerre ! Mon message était un message de paix, de sérieux, et de détermination. » Dans l'avion qui le conduit à Moscou, Bernard Kouchner s'efforce, ce lundi 17 septembre, d'éclaircir le sens des propos qu'il a tenus la veille à Paris, lors d'une émission de radio, à propos de la crise autour du nucléaire iranien. Il avait parlé de la nécessité de « préparer la pire », qui est « la guerre ». Les mots du chef de la diplomatie française ont semé l'effroi. Il tient maintenant à dissiper les interprétations erronées, tout en confirmant le tournant pris par la diplomatie française, qui pousse pour des sanctions européennes contre l'Iran hors du cadre de l'ONU.

« La situation la pire serait la guerre. Pour éviter cela, l'attitude française est de négocier, négocier, jusqu'au bout, sans craindre les rebuffades. Et de travailler avec nos amis européens à des sanctions crédibles », explique M. Kouchner. « S'il y a une nouvelle résolution de l'ONU, nous en serons heureux. S'il n'y en a pas, nous construirons en tout cas des sanctions », ajoute-t-il.

M. Kouchner est arrivé lundi soir à Moscou, après avoir effectué la semaine dernière une tournée au Proche-Orient, où il a pu mesurer le poids pris par l'Iran dans la région ainsi que la perception de cette menace par Israël et les pays arabes sunnites. Il s'est entretenu, vendredi par téléphone, avec la secrétaire d'Etat américaine, Condoleezza Rice, qu'il doit retrouver dans quelques jours à Washington, avant de se rendre à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU. A chaque étape, la question

des agissements de l'Iran a figuré, et figurera, en bonne place.

Le raid du 6 septembre mené par Israël en Syrie, pays allié de l'Iran, a accru la tension. Selon la presse américaine et britannique, ce raid a visé du matériel nucléaire ayant pour origine soit l'Iran, soit la Corée du Nord. Israël a-t-il procédé à un coup de semonce en prélude à d'éventuelles frappes, un jour, sur l'Iran ? Cette hypothèse est évoquée par des diplomates.

« Mon message était un message de paix, de sérieux, et de détermination »

Bernard Kouchner

M. Kouchner dit qu'il a voulu « attirer l'attention sur la gravité de la crise » autour de l'Iran, pays dont « le rôle dans un contexte régional explosif est particulièrement inquiétant ». Il estime probable que la République islamique cherche à se doter de l'arme atomique, et rappelle que son président, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a parlé d'effacer Israël de la carte. La poursuite de l'enrichissement

d'uranium par les Iraniens fait que « nous sommes obligés de penser que cela peut constituer le prélude à l'usage militaire » de cette technologie, dit le ministre.

La France cherche à convaincre ses partenaires européens d'élaborer un régime de sanctions allant plus loin que celles décidées par le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. En parlant de risque de « guerre », comme l'a fait M. Kouchner, ou d'« alternative catastrophique : la bombe iranienne ou le bombardement de l'Iran », ainsi que l'a dit Nicolas Sarkozy, le 27 août, les responsables français se positionnent en pointe dans la crise. « En ce moment, on exprime une opinion forte, mais on exprime une opinion pacifique », dit M. Kouchner.

Le ministre français décrit une stratégie d'endiguement de l'Iran, doublée d'un effort de dialogue. Une stratégie fai-



te à la fois « de négociations continues, comme s'il n'y avait pas de sanctions, et de préparation de sanctions, comme s'il n'y avait pas de négociations ».

« Le système pour éviter la guerre, c'est les sanctions », insiste M. Kouchner. « Celles qui sont efficaces sont celles des Américains : économiques, sur les grosses fortunes, les banques. »

A Moscou, M. Kouchner devait plaider mardi auprès de son homologue, Sergueï Lavrov, pour que la Russie accepte la préparation d'une troisième résolution de l'ONU en faveur de nouvelles sanctions contre Téhéran.

Une réunion à six (Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Allemagne, Russie, Chine) est prévue à ce sujet vendredi, à Washington. Les Russes sont réticents. Ils préfèrent donner une chance à des pourparlers relancés cet été entre Téhéran et l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA). Vladimir Poutine prépare par ailleurs une visite en Iran, à la mi-octobre, avec l'espoir d'infléchir la position de M. Ahmadinejad. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

CHRONOLOGIE

7 mai : le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Manouchehr Mottaki, déclare que l'Iran est disposé à discuter avec le président Nicolas Sarkozy.

24 mai : le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, se prononce pour l'adoption rapide de « nouvelles sanctions », si l'Iran n'accepte pas de suspendre l'enrichissement de son uranium.

27 août : M. Sarkozy déclare qu'un « Iran doté de l'arme nucléaire » est « inacceptable ».

28 août : le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, estime que les propos de M. Sarkozy traduisent son « manque d'expérience ».

16 septembre : M. Kouchner affirme que le monde doit se « préparer au pire », c'est-à-dire à la possibilité d'une « guerre » avec l'Iran.

Téhéran souligne une atteinte à la « crédibilité de la France »

L'Iran a réagi en deux temps aux propos de Bernard Kouchner. L'agence officielle IRNA a tout d'abord estimé que « le locataire de l'Elysée [Nicolas Sarkozy] veut aujourd'hui copier la Maison Blanche : cet Européen s'est mis dans la peau des Américains et imite leurs hurlements ». Le porte-parole du ministère iranien des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, a ensuite indiqué que « le fait que les déclarations des responsables français concordent avec la position de la puissance dominante [les Etats-Unis] porte atteinte à la crédibilité de la France devant les opinions publiques mondiales, en particulier du Proche-Orient ». M. Hosseini a exprimé l'espoir que « ces déclarations soient de pure forme et ne correspondent pas aux positions réelles et stratégiques de la France ». - (AFP.)

Le Monde
15 septembre 2007

Bush concède un retrait partiel d'Irak des forces américaines

WASHINGTON

CORRESPONDANTE

Dans sa huitième allocution télévisée depuis le début de la guerre, le 19 mars 2003, le président américain, George Bush, a annoncé, jeudi 13 septembre, une réduction des effectifs en Irak – la première en quatre ans – tout en prévoyant que l'armée américaine sera toujours dans ce pays lorsqu'un nouveau président s'installera à la Maison Blanche en janvier 2009.

Assis dans le Bureau ovale, M. Bush a prononcé un discours de quinze minutes. Il n'a rien annoncé, sur le plan opérationnel, qui n'ait été préparé depuis des semaines par une campagne de relations publiques intense auprès des membres du Congrès et de l'opinion pour vanter les « progrès » réalisés depuis l'envoi de renforts en Irak. « *Les succès obtenus nous permettent de faire rentrer une partie de nos soldats* », a-t-il dit, en résumant sa stratégie d'une expression : « *retour après succès* ».

George Bush a repris à son compte les recommandations faites le 10 septembre par le commandant militaire en Irak, le général David Petraeus. 5 700 soldats seront rapatriés avant la fin de l'année. Les renforts – dont la mission devait de toute façon prendre fin avant l'été 2008 – ne seront pas reconduits au-delà de juin. Il restera 130 000 militaires en Irak, soit le niveau

précédent les élections de novembre 2006, gagnées par l'opposition démocrate, ce qui avait conduit au « *changement de stratégie* » décidé en janvier par M. Bush.

Le président américain a en même temps évoqué la « *relation de longue durée* » qu'il souhaite établir avec l'Irak et qui verra la présence de troupes américaines « *après la fin de [sa] présidence* ». Quelques heures avant son discours, il avait reçu à déjeuner les présentateurs des journaux télévisés. Ceux-ci ont été frappés par la manière avec laquelle il s'est projeté dans l'après-2008. « *Le prochain président aura encore 100 000 soldats en Irak* », ont annoncé Charles Gibson et Brian Williams, les journalistes des chaînes ABC et NBC.

Un conseiller de M. Bush a expliqué sous couvert d'anonymat aux correspondants à la Maison Blanche que le président se préoccupe de faciliter la tâche de son successeur et qu'il reviendra à celui-ci le soin d'« *évaluer quel est le niveau de troupes* » suffisant pour protéger l'intérêt national.

Mais le chef de file démocrate au Sénat, Harry Reid, n'a pas été convaincu : « *Le président Bush essaie de jouer la montre et de laisser les décisions difficiles au prochain président* », a-t-il dit.

Au-delà des discours, les démocrates ont pris la mesure de leur

impuissance. N'ayant pas au Sénat les 60 voix nécessaires pour briser les manœuvres d'obstruction conduites par les républicains, ils espèrent atténuer certaines dispositions de la politique irakienne par des amendements dans le budget du Pentagone. L'un de ceux-ci, imposerait de donner aux soldats un repos équivalent à leur période de déploiement. Une autre possibilité serait d'imposer des limites au nombre de troupes déployées.

La gauche antiguerre, qui a prévu de manifester samedi 15 septembre à Washington, réclame des élus démocrates qu'ils aillent plus loin et bloquent le vote du budget de l'armée. Mais ceux-ci craignent d'être accusés par l'opinion de ne pas soutenir l'effort des soldats, alors que la guerre a déjà fait plus estimer démocrate se sont lancés dans une surenchère antiguerre. John Edwards, qui n'est pas membre du Congrès, ayant beau jeu de mettre ses adversaires Barack Obama et Hillary Clinton au défi de voter pour un retrait immédiat.

La prochaine échéance a été fixée par M. Bush à un nouveau rapport du général Petraeus mi-mars. D'ici là, les deux partis auront probablement choisi leurs candidats pour la présidentielle.

Il est difficile d'imaginer que le président changera de politique avant la fin de son mandat. Comme l'a dit le démocrate David Obey, M. Bush gouverne désormais avec « *un tiers du pays et un tiers du Congrès* ». Rien dans le système constitutionnel américain ou la configuration politique actuelle ne peut l'en empêcher. ■

CORINE LESNES

Etats-Unis Discours du président Bush à la nation américaine, huit mois après l'envoi de renforts à Bagdad

L'Amérique ne croit plus en une « victoire » en Irak

NEW YORK

CORRESPONDANT

Débat sur une chaîne de télévision américaine. Sujet : l'Irak. Un « *expert* », le colonel (retraité) Douglas McGregor, coupe court : « *Allons, chacun sait que c'est fini. L'Amérique aurait 300 000 soldats sur place que cela n'y changerait rien !* » Personne sur le plateau ne se formalise.

Deux tendances en apparence inverses dominent aujourd'hui l'opinion américaine : d'une part, la conviction croissante qu'une victoire est désormais irréa-

liste, de l'autre une plus grande confiance envers les militaires qu'envers les politiques.

A la question : « *Qui est le mieux à même de trouver avec succès la solution à la guerre en Irak ?* » (sondage CBS-New York Times du 10 septembre), 68 % des Américains répondent « *les chefs militaires* » et 21 % privilégient « *le Congrès* ». « *L'administration Bush* », elle, recueille 5 % des suffrages. Mais 53 % contre 19 % estiment que l'envoi de renforts supplémentaires n'a eu « *aucun impact* » sur la situa-

tion en Irak. La question de la confiance en la victoire, elle, n'est plus posée.

Lançant l'offensive militaire, le président George Bush avait déclaré, en mars 2003, que l'Amérique « *n'acceptera aucune autre issue que la victoire* ». En 2005, un document officiel de la Maison Blanche s'intitulait encore : « *La stratégie nationale pour la victoire en Irak*. »

En janvier 2007 s'est produite la première inflexion. « *La victoire*, a expliqué

M. Bush, ne ressemblera pas à celle qu'ont obtenue nos parents et nos grands-parents. Il n'y aura pas de capitulation sur le champ de bataille. » Mais le terme était maintenu : « une victoire en Irak » apportera au monde arabe « quelque chose de neuf : une démocratie qui fonctionne ».

Aujourd'hui, « plus personne de normalement constitué n'utilise le mot "victoire" », dit Steven Biddle, directeur de recherches sur les questions militaires au Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). L'administration est confrontée à une opinion qui n'y croit pas plus qu'elle ne croit en l'avenir démocratique de l'Irak. Selon le même sondage, 53 % des Améri-

cains pensent que ce pays « ne deviendra jamais une démocratie stable ».

« Plus personne, ni M. Bush, ni le Congrès, ni le général (David) Petraeus, n'envisage de "vaincre". Il s'agit de trouver une solution qui stabilise suffisamment l'Irak », note M. Biddle. D'où le glissement de « victoire » à « succès », nouveau mot-clé de la Maison Blanche. Un succès consisterait d'abord à « ne pas perdre ». « Un départ américain qui laisserait le

chaos aurait des conséquences très dangereuses pour toute la région et pour les Occidentaux », rappelle le chercheur.

De ce point de vue, les Etats-Unis n'ont plus, selon lui, que « deux options ». La première : un déploiement militaire en Irak offensif, forcément long et coûteux, avec le maximum de troupes possibles, afin d'« imposer un cessez-le-feu général relativement stable », ce qui constituerait le vrai « succès ».

Pour espérer y parvenir, dit-il, l'armée américaine doit « cesser de s'évertuer à protéger les groupes irakiens les uns des autres » et changer de ligne :

« Qui est le mieux à même de trouver avec succès la solution à la guerre en Irak ? » 5 % des Américains ont répondu : « L'administration Bush »

« Faire pression sur tous – le gouvernement inclus, qui n'est qu'une des factions – pour qu'ils trouvent un intérêt » à baisser les armes. Lui y est favorable.

« Les chances de réussite sont faibles, mais il faut parfois prendre des risques pour éviter le pire. »

L'alternative ? « Si vous jugez la première option irréaliste, ou le prix à payer trop élevé, alors il faut se désengager main-

tenant. » Aucune « position intermédiaire » – le maintien des forces actuelles, un retrait minimal ou plus vaste qu'annoncé – n'est opérationnelle, estime-t-il.

Mais, face à une opinion opposée à l'envoi de renforts mais qui perçoit qu'un désengagement complet immédiat s'apparenterait à une débâcle, « aucun politicien » ne dira les choses comme elles sont, conclut M. Biddle.

Durant l'audition du général Petraeus, le sénateur républicain John Warner (Virginie) lui demande : « Cette guerre rend-elle l'Amérique plus sûre ? » C'est la question qui préoccupe le plus l'opinion. Les yeux dans ses chaussettes, le chef des forces américaines en Irak chuchote alors un « je ne sais pas »... ■

SYLVAIN CYPEL

Le ton monte entre la France et l'Iran

En n'excluant pas l'hypothèse d'une « guerre » contre l'Iran, Bernard Kouchner, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, a suscité une réponse immédiate et violente du président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

La France a accentué dimanche soir ses pressions sur la République iranienne pour qu'elle cesse son programme d'enrichissement d'uranium, suspecté d'être établi à des fins militaires. Considérant « qu'il n'y a pas de plus grande crise » actuellement, le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, a prévenu lors d'une interview dimanche soir sur RTL : « Il faut se préparer au pire », allant jusqu'à évoquer la possibilité d'une « guerre ». Il souhaite également que l'Union européenne

La tension est à son extrême

François Fillon

prenne des sanctions indépendantes de l'ONU. Elles seraient exercées par chaque pays individuellement, en complément des mesures prises par les Américains. Washington s'est d'ailleurs félicité des propos du ministre français, qui selon son porte-parole, Sean McCormack, « souligne la sérieux de la position française ». L'hypothèse d'éventuelles sanctions, déjà défendue par la Grande-Bretagne, a reçu le soutien des Pays-

Bas. « Nous préférons le renforcement des sanctions à travers le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU », a précisé le chef de la diplomatie néerlandaise, Maxime Verhagen, « mais si le Conseil de sécurité n'est pas d'accord, nous sommes prêts et nous voulons appliquer des sanctions européennes ». La proposition de la France ne fait toutefois

pas l'unanimité parmi les 27 pays européens. La ministre autrichienne des Affaires étrangères, Ursula Plassnik, a critiqué hier la « rhétorique martiale » de la France, privilégiant « une solu-

tion négociée ».

Cette déclaration du ministre français intervient alors que les organisations en charge du dossier du nucléaire iranien, l'ONU et l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), se réuniront une nouvelle fois cette semaine. Après deux projets de résolution qui n'ont pas abouti, un nouveau projet de l'ONU prévoyant des sanctions doit être discuté vendredi à Washington entre les six grands pays impliqués dans ce dossier (France, Etats-Unis, Grande-Bretagne, Chine, Russie et Allemagne). Par ailleurs, le nucléaire iranien sera toute la semaine au cœur des débats des 144 pays membres de l'AIEA, réunis à Vienne.

Le président iranien Ahmadinejad a rapidement réagi, hier, aux propos tenus par Bernard Kouchner :

« Nous ne reculerons pas. Nous maîtrisons la technologie de l'enrichissement de l'uranium et nous sommes arrivés au stade industriel. Ils [les Occidentaux] parlent de nous imposer des sanctions. Mais ils ne peuvent pas le faire. » L'agence de presse officielle iranienne, Irna, a quant à elle tenu des propos plus virulents, accusant les dirigeants français d'être les « traducteurs de la volonté de la Maison Blanche ». La position de l'ex-président français Jacques Chirac, qui prônait des sanctions dans le cadre de l'ONU exclusivement, avait évité jusque-là à la France d'être la cible des attaques verbales de l'Iran.

Cette fois, la situation est telle que le Premier ministre François Fillon a estimé hier soir que « La tension (était) à son extrême », tout en rappelant que la diplomatie avait encore sa place. « Une confrontation avec l'Iran serait la dernière extrémité que n'importe quel responsable politique doit souhaiter », a-t-il précisé. Le directeur de l'AIEA, Mohamed ElBaradei a pour sa part rappelé que les « autres options » étaient loin d'être épuisées. Ces derniers jours, des rumeurs d'une intervention militaire en Iran avaient couru après le raid aérien d'Israël en Syrie, dont l'objectif suscite beaucoup de spéculations. Pour l'ancien ambassadeur américain à l'ONU, John Bolton, il s'agirait d'un message clair envoyé à la Syrie, mais aussi à l'Iran, pour lui signifier « que ses efforts continus pour acquérir des armes nucléaires ne resteront pas sans réponse ».





Des affrontements dans le Sud-Est de la Turquie font six morts

Reuters - 19 septembre, 22h04 TUNCELI, Turquie - Cinq séparatistes kurdes du PKK et un responsable des forces de sécurité turques ont péri mardi soir et mercredi dans des affrontements dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on appris de source militaire.

Des soldats turcs, appuyés par des hélicoptères, ont attaqué un groupe d'une trentaine de séparatistes armés, membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (hors la loi) dans la province de Sirnak, frontalière de l'Irak. L'opération se poursuivait en fin de journée, a-t-on ajouté.

Un responsable des forces de sécurité turques a été tué mardi soir lors d'un raid de combattants séparatistes kurdes contre une caserne de gendarmerie

dans le sud-est de la Turquie, rapportent mercredi des responsables de la sécurité.

Les activistes ont réussi à prendre la fuite après cette opération, menée dans la province anatolienne de Bitlis.

L'armée turque a lancé cette semaine une vaste offensive contre les combattants du PKK, impliquant 10.000 militaires. Le PKK a pris les armes contre l'Etat turc en 1984 pour la constitution d'un Etat kurde indépendant dans le sud-est du pays. Le conflit a fait quelque 30.000 morts.



Neuf rebelles kurdes tués dans des combats en Turquie

ANKARA, 22 sept 2007 (AFP) - Neuf rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes) ont été tués dans des combats avec l'armée dans le sud-est anatolien, ont annoncé samedi les militaires.

Deux affrontements distincts se sont produits, a précisé l'armée dans un communiqué publié sur son site internet.

L'un, qui a fait quatre morts dans les rangs du PKK, a eu lieu dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi dans la province d'Hakkari, frontalière de l'Irak et de l'Iran.

Cinq autres ont péri vendredi dans la province de Sirnak Friday, selon la même source.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, a accru depuis le début de l'année ses attaques dans le sud-est anatolien.



Deux soldats turcs tués, quatre blessés par une mine, des heurts avec le PKK

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 25 sept 2007 (AFP) - Deux soldats turcs ont été tués et quatre autres blessés mardi lors de deux incidents impliquant des rebelles séparatistes kurdes dans l'est et le sud-est anatolien, ont affirmé des sources locales.

Une bombe posée par des membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) près d'un poste militaire du village de Kocakoç, dans la province de Tunceli (est), a été actionnée à distance alors que des soldats contrôlaient un véhicule leur apportant de la nourriture, a déclaré dans un communiqué le gouvernorat de Tunceli.

L'explosion a tué un soldat et en a blessé quatre autres, a indiqué cette source, ajoutant que six personnes, dont le conducteur du véhicule, avaient été arrêtées.

Les rebelles du PKK sont actifs dans la région de Tunceli, où ils ont déjà pris pour cible en juin un poste militaire, tuant sept soldats.

Un sous-officier a par ailleurs été tué lors d'un accrochage avec des rebelles kurdes survenu dans la province de Sirnak (sud-est), dans une zone montagneuse de Beytüssebab, à une centaine de kilomètres de la frontière irakienne.

Le PKK, qui revendique l'indépendance de l'est et du sud-est anatoliens, à la population majoritairement kurde, est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. Il a multiplié ses opérations cette année.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 37.000 morts depuis le déclenchement de l'insurrection du PKK en 1984.

Gamk 24 Septembre 2007

Zoom sur la presse Turquie.

Les minorités, ce talon d'Achille pour Ankara.

Les minorités, ce talon d'Achille pour Ankara. Coup dur pour les défenseurs des droits de l'homme en Turquie : la Cour Suprême de Révision a rejeté l'acquiescement de Baskin Oran et d'Ibrahim Kaboglu, les deux universitaires accusés à l'origine d'« incitation à la haine et à l'animosité » pour leur rapport très controversé sur les droits des minorités.

Commandé par le gouvernement Erdogan et présenté en octobre 2004, ce rapport, qui préconisait l'élargissement de la définition du mot "minorité", avait provoqué un très vif débat dans la société turque.

La Cour Suprême de Révision vient d'estimer qu'en appelant à accorder le statut de minorité à de nouveaux groupes ethniques tels que les Kurdes, le rapport en question « mettrait en danger la structure unitaire de l'Etat et l'indivisibilité de la nation ». Car au regard du Traité de Lausanne de 1923, antérieur de trois mois seulement à la création de la République turque, Ankara ne reconnaît que trois minorités religieuses : les Arméniens, les Grecs et les Juifs.

Le verdict de la Cour Suprême de Révision souligne que « par ses recommandations, le rapport, en allant au-delà des limites

autorisées en matière de critique et de liberté de pensée, est devenu une menace pour la paix sociale ». La Cour a même estimé que les deux universitaires devraient être rejugés pour incitation à la haine raciale.

L'an dernier, un tribunal avait acquitté Baskin Oran et Ibrahim Kaboglu, considérant qu'ils avaient exercé leur droit à la liberté d'expression en recommandant au gouvernement d'élargir les droits des Kurdes et des citoyens non musulmans. Membres du Conseil consultatif sur les Droits de l'Homme rattaché au bureau du Premier ministre, les deux universitaires



n'ont pas vu leur rapport publié, suite au désaveu infligé par le gouvernement lui-même sous la pression des groupuscules ultranationalistes.

Selon les commentaires lus dans la presse turque à l'époque, le rapport estimait que la Turquie était en retard en matière de droits de l'homme, et il proposait des amendements importants à la Constitution et à la législation sur les minorités. MM. Oran et Kaboglu affirmaient en outre que l'idée selon laquelle octroyer des droits spécifiques aux minorités pouvait déboucher sur l'éclatement du pays relevait de la « paranoïa ».

Le verdict de la Cour Suprême de Révision a été mal accueilli par la société civile. Lors d'une conférence de presse dont le Turkish Daily News s'est fait l'écho, des représentants des organisations non gouvernementales, des chambres de métiers, des syndicats et des milieux universitaires ont dénoncé une décision qui « entrave les libertés d'expression et de pensée », lesquelles constituent « la pierre angulaire » des sociétés démocratiques. Ibrahim Kaboglu, lui aussi, a réagi au verdict de la Cour, qui montre selon lui que « les obstacles à la démocratisation de la Turquie sont de plus en plus grands

». Cette décision révèle à ses yeux la nécessité d'étudier en profondeur les changements à apporter aux articles du Code pénal sur la liberté d'expression. « Accuser deux universitaires simplement pour leurs écrits dans un rapport commandé par le gouvernement me fait dire que certains juges ont oublié l'habit qu'ils portent et appréhendent ces sujets sur un plan personnel. Cette décision s'inscrit au-delà du champ politique », a expliqué Ibrahim Kaboglu.

S'ils sont rejugés, les deux universitaires risquent de un à trois ans d'emprisonnement.

L'Iran confirme des tirs d'artillerie contre des rebelles kurdes en Irak



TEHERAN, 23 sept 2007 (AFP) - 07h48 -

Un haut responsable militaire iranien a confirmé dimanche que l'artillerie iranienne bombardait des rebelles kurdes du groupe Pejak (PJAK) en Irak d'où ils opèrent en Iran.

"Ils s'infiltrent en territoire iranien, ils font sauter des bombes et créent de l'insécurité", a dit le général Yahia Rahim Safavi, conseiller spécial pour les affaires militaires du guide suprême l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, dans une interview à la télévision iranienne Press-TV.

Les propos du général, tenus en persan, étaient directement traduits en anglais par la chaîne.

L'Iran avait démenti au début septembre des informations de responsables du Kurdistan irakien sur le bombardement de villageois de cette région autonome de l'Irak où sont repliés les militants du Pejak.

"Nous avons averti le gouvernement irakien de retirer de la zone (les militants du Pejak) et lui avons demandé de respecter ses obligations, mais malheureusement la région du Kurdistan n'a pas écouté", a dit le général Safavi.

"C'est pourquoi nous estimons de notre droit de viser les bases militaires du Pejak et elles ont été sous le feu de notre artillerie", a ajouté le général, qui commandait jusque récemment le corps d'élite des Gardiens de la révolution.

"Certaines de leurs bases sont à environ dix kilomètres à l'intérieur du territoire irakien, et il est donc de notre droit naturel de sécuriser nos frontières", a-t-il encore dit.

Le ministère iranien des Affaires étrangères avait démenti "catégoriquement" le 3 septembre tout bombardement iranien du nord de l'Irak.

La province iranienne d'Azerbaïdjan occidental, qui compte une importante minorité kurde, est le théâtre d'affrontements réguliers entre l'armée iranienne et les activistes du Parti de la vie libre au Kurdistan (PJAK).

Ce groupe séparatiste est proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie).

Le général Safavi a expliqué que Téhéran ne considérait pas leurs actes "comme une grande menace", mais "leurs agissements commis par des petits groupes de 4 ou 5 hommes créent de l'insécurité".



L'Iran confirme la fermeture de sa frontière avec le Kurdistan irakien

TEHERAN, 24 sept 2007 (AFP) - 12h22

- Un responsable iranien a confirmé lundi à l'AFP la fermeture de la frontière avec la région du Kurdistan irakien pour protester contre l'arrestation le 20 septembre d'un ressortissant iranien par les forces américaines à Souleymanieh.

"Nous avons fermé la frontière et nous espérons que les responsables irakiens agiront le plus rapidement possible pour faire libérer notre collaborateur", a dit Esmail Najar, gouverneur de la province du Kurdistan.

"Un de nos collaborateurs de la province de Kermanshah, chargé des échanges économiques avec le nord de l'Irak, a été arrêté jeudi à Souleymanieh par les forces américaines et a été emmené dans un endroit inconnu", a-t-il ajouté.

"Nous avons dit que s'il n'était pas libéré rapidement, nous allons reconsidérer nos échanges commerciaux", a affirmé M. Najar.

Interrogé pour savoir jusqu'à quand la frontière sera fermée, il a répondu : "nous espérons que les Irakiens agiront le plus rapidement pour faire libérer notre collaborateur".

Le porte-parole du gouvernement de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Jamal Abdallah, avait déclaré à l'AFP lundi matin que Téhéran avait fermé "les cinq postes-frontières entre l'Iran et la région du Kurdistan".

L'Iranien arrêté le 20 septembre, Mahmoudi Farhadi, est accusé par l'armée américaine d'être un officier de la force al-Qods, unité d'élite des Gardiens de la révolution iraniens, et d'être impliqué dans la contrebande

d'armes destinées aux rebelles irakiens.

Téhéran a affirmé que cet homme était responsable du développement des échanges commerciaux régionaux et qu'il faisait partie d'une délégation de la province de Kermanshah, frontalière du nord de l'Irak, invitée officiellement par les Irakiens.

Depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, l'Iran a largement développé ses échanges commerciaux avec l'Irak.

Le président irakien Jalal Talabani, lui-même kurde, a exigé la libération de M. Fahradi notamment "pour la prospérité de la région du Kurdistan".

La chambre de commerce irano-irakienne a fait état de la signature d'accords d'une valeur de 730 millions de dollars entre l'Iran et l'Irak lors d'une conférence à la mi-septembre à Téhéran qui a réuni une centaine d'hommes d'affaires et de responsables irakiens, selon l'agence Irna.

Les accords signés concernent notamment les secteurs pétroliers, du bâtiment, de l'alimentation, les produits électriques et ménagers ainsi que les échanges bancaires et de service, a dit l'agence lundi.

Le 28 août, l'armée américaine avait interpellé pendant quelques heures dans un grand hôtel de Bagdad un groupe d'Iraniens, travaillant pour le ministère irakien de l'Energie.

Les forces américaines détiennent toujours cinq Iraniens appréhendés le 11 janvier 2007 dans le Kurdistan irakien et accusés d'aider les insurgés. Téhéran affirme qu'il s'agit de diplomates.

Split emerges at White House on how to deal with Iran

Rice pushes diplomacy, while Cheney's office wants isolation

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON: A debate within the Bush administration is delaying a decision on how aggressively to confront Iran, even as President George W. Bush has begun more explicitly to describe the U.S. military presence in Iraq as part of a broader effort to counter Iran's influence.

Bush's language has turned up by another notch the administration's continuing proxy war with Tehran for supremacy in the Middle East. But some of Bush's top deputies are still wrangling over whether a diplomatic strategy on Iran that is advocated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her top aides has any hope of reining in Iran's nuclear program or prompting a change in Iranian behavior.

With regard to Iraq in particular, Rice's decision that the United States would participate in talks with Iranian officials prompted second-guessing from more hawkish officials in Vice President Dick Cheney's office, who pushed for further isolation of Iran. Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, acknowledged in his testimony to Congress last week that the talks had done little to restrain what he called Iran's "malign" influence.

Bush administration officials said that a disagreement in the administration had delayed a decision over whether to declare Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, or a unit of it, a terrorist organization and subject to increased financial sanctions.

While White House officials and members of the vice president's staff have been pushing to blacklist the entire Revolutionary Guard, the administration sources said, officials at the State and Treasury departments are pushing for a narrower approach that would list only the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force as well as companies and organizations with financial ties to that group.

The designation would set into motion a series of automatic sanctions that would make it easier for the United States to block financial accounts and other assets controlled by the group.

Administration officials had signaled in August that a measure aimed at the Revolutionary Guard would be announced soon. But with the two camps now at odds in the administration, the designation no longer seems assured.

During a speech on Iraq on Thursday, Bush cast Iran as a major antagonist of U.S. policy goals in Iraq.

"If we were to be driven out of Iraq, extremists of all strains would be emboldened," Bush said. "Iran would benefit from the chaos and would be encouraged in its efforts to gain nuclear weapons and dominate the region."

The administration is still pressing ahead with other efforts to turn up the pressure on Iran. The State Department has asked top officials from the five other world powers seeking to rein in Tehran's nuclear ambitions to come to Washington on Friday for a meeting in which Nicholas Burns, under secretary of state for political affairs, will press for stronger UN sanctions against Iran.

On Saturday, Rice will meet with her counterparts from Europe, Russia and China to press the Iran sanctions issue.

Beyond its nuclear program, Iran has emerged as an increasing source of trouble for the Bush administration, U.S. officials say, by inflaming the insurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Gaza.

In its report to Congress on Friday, the administration accused Iran of continuing to provide Shiite militias with training, money and weapons, including rockets, which the administration said accounted for an increased percentage of U.S. combat deaths.

The U.S. military in Iraq still has custody of several Iranian officials who were detained on suspicion of involvement in providing aid to Shiite militias.

Iran's government has denied the U.S. charges. Its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Friday in a speech at Tehran University that Bush's Middle East policies had failed and that Bush would one day be put on trial for "the tragedies they have created in Iraq."

But a belief has been growing in Iran, which administration officials have pointedly not tried to stem, that the Bush administration is considering military strikes against Iran. An Israeli airstrike in Syria this month kicked up a flurry of speculation in the Iranian news media that Israel, in alliance with the United States, was really trying to send a message to Iran that it could strike Iranian nuclear facilities if it chose to.

The Israeli government's official silence about the Syrian airstrike has further fueled those fears in Iran, according to U.S., Israeli and European officials.

"If I were the Iranians, what I'd be freaked out about is that the other Arab states didn't protest" the Israeli airstrike in Syria, said George Perkovich, vice president for studies at the Carne-

gie Endowment for International Peace. "The Arab world nonreaction is a signal to Iran that Arabs aren't happy with Iran's power and influence, so if the Israelis want to go and intimidate and violate the airspace of another Arab state that's an ally of Iran, the other Arab states aren't going to do anything."

During the nuclear talks this week, the United States, France and Britain will try to get Russia, China, and Germany to sign on to a stronger set of UN Security Council sanctions against members of Iran's government.

The sanctions are aimed at getting Tehran to suspend its enrichment of uranium. The international efforts to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions have been complicated by the U.S. proxy war with Iran in Iraq, which Russia and some European countries argue should take a back seat to the nuclear issue.

Further complicating things has been a dispute over a pact reached in August between Iran and the international nuclear watchdog agency, for Tehran to answer questions about an array of suspicious past nuclear activities. Gregory Schulte, the U.S. delegate to the watchdog group, the International Atomic Energy Agency, raised questions last week over whether Iran intended to answer those questions. He suggested that Tehran "has no intention of coming clean."

Pentagon expects 'protracted' role in Iraq

Defense secretary favors veto of limits on troop presence

By Brian Knowlton

WASHINGTON: Two days after expressing hope that U.S. forces in Iraq might be reduced to 100,000 by the end of next year, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Sunday that American troops were likely to remain in that country for a "protracted period." He also said he would recommend a presidential veto if Congress approved a Democratic effort to limit the time troops could spend in Iraq.

But Gates emphasized in two television interviews that U.S. troops would play an increasingly circumscribed role. "The idea is that we would have a much more limited role in Iraq for some protracted period of time as a stabilizing force, a force that would be a fraction of the force that we have there now," focusing on border security, fighting terrorists and training Iraqi security personnel, he said.

Gates said that he was talking about "a relatively small number compared to what we have today" but that it was far too soon to nail down precise levels; much would depend, he said, on whether there was no unraveling of the progress reported last week by General David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander there.

The defense secretary also said the United States could deal with Iranian meddling in Iraq without attacking Iran and that the United States was intently watching Syria and North Korea after reports of possible nuclear cooperation by Pyongyang with Damascus. Such cooperation, Gates said, "would be a real problem."

Democrats, forcefully rejecting President George W. Bush's new plan for a gradual troop drawdown as tantamount to an "endless" occupation of Iraq, are preparing this week to advance a new, constraining proposal. It would force the administration to give individual soldiers more time away from the battlefield.

But Gates said the proposal, while "well-intentioned," would leave the Pentagon with "extremely difficult" problems in managing its forces.

"We'd have to look at potentially making greater use" of the national guard and army reserve, Gates said on Fox television, "we'd have to cobble together units" and to withdraw some units before others were able to replace them. He said the Pentagon would face a management nightmare: having to track the service in Iraq of each soldier.

Gates had projected Friday that the U.S. presence could be brought down to 100,000 by the end of 2008. That went beyond, but did not contradict, Bush's plan to move from the 169,000 troops now in Iraq to perhaps 130,000 by July;

by voting against Germany's sending troops into any military operations against the Taliban or Al Qaeda.

The rank and file of the party also voted against extending the use of German Tornado reconnaissance jets, which for six months have been essential for providing intelligence to NATO forces involved in the increasingly violent battle against insurgents in the Afghan south.

That intelligence is also passed to the U.S. forces who are working closely with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Germany has no troops directly involved in the U.S. mission in Afghanistan but is participating in two other aspects of the American effort — around the Horn of Africa and in Kuwait.

The mandate for involvement in the entire mission comes up for renewal in mid-November, with Merkel's conservatives committed to renewing it but the rank and file of the Social Democratic Party reluctant to.

Defense Ministry officials said Sunday that if the mandate was not renewed, then German Tornados could be prevented by the lower house of Parliament, which must sanction every military mission, from passing aerial intelligence on to the Americans.

The Social Democrats will debate the situation in Afghanistan during their party congress next month.

The party leadership, which includes Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has tried to keep the party united over the issue, despite the presence of a strong pacifist wing in this party as well.

Merkel, too, has started explaining to the public why German forces must remain in Afghanistan. In response to the growing criticism from opposition parties, which have either called for a partial or complete withdrawal, she said in her weekly video podcast over the weekend that "there was no alternative" to remaining in Afghanistan.

"We must not leave Afghanistan to the terrorists again," she added. "This military commitment is important for those who live in Afghanistan but also

for the security and freedom of German citizens."

Merkel has spent the past few months trying to steer a middle course by keeping the troops in Afghanistan but not sending them into regions where there is heavy fighting.

So while her government has come under pressure from NATO to send German troops to the south of Afghanistan, Merkel has turned down the request while insisting that Germany remain a steadfast ally because of the work it is doing in the north, where most of its forces are based.

Germany is also involved in training Afghan police forces.

While Merkel's conservative bloc supports prolonging the mandates, the Social Democrats fear that its continuing support for the missions will lead to losing more votes to the Left Party.

The Left Party is led by Oskar Lafontaine, a former chairman of the Social Democrats who has consistently opposed the presence of any German soldiers in Afghanistan.

The stance of the Left Party has attracted pacifists and disgruntled Social Democrats who believe that their party has betrayed its credentials as an anti-war party and genuine leftist party.

The Social Democrats also face a threat from the Greens. The re-emergence of the pacifist wing over the weekend confirmed the end of Joschka Fischer's influence.

As Green leader and foreign minister from 1998 to 2005 in a Social Democrat-led coalition government under Gerhard Schröder, Fischer fought passionately to persuade the pacifist wing of his party to support NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999. Fischer said at the time that Germany had a moral responsibility to help stop the "ethnic cleansing" of Kosovo's Albanians by Serbian forces then led by President Slobodan Milosevic.

Fischer also persuaded the Greens to back sending troops to Afghanistan in 2001 as part of the UN force.

Iranian Influence Increasing in Iraq

SHALAMCHEH, Iran - Trucks line up every day at this border crossing to carry melons, cookies, soft drinks and appliances into Iraq. For truck driver Ala Saeedi, the booming trade is proof his country is helping its war-torn neighbor.

This spot in southwestern Iran, he notes, "was once the scene of chemical attacks by Saddam (Husseini) against Iranian troops. But now it's used for trade. ... Iran is meeting the daily needs of Iraqis."

More than four years after the U.S.-led invasion toppled Saddam, Iran's influence from trade links to political sway has never been greater, a fact bedeviling the United States as President Bush pledges American troops will remain in Iraq in large numbers.

In his speech Thursday night, Bush warned that a U.S. pullout would encourage Iran "in its efforts to gain nuclear weapons and dominate the region."

Washington also has long accused Iran of sending arms and even fighters to help Shiite Muslim militias in Iraq that target U.S. troops, and both British and American commanders have called the fight in parts of Iraq a "proxy war" by Iran. Iran disputes those allegations, saying it doesn't meddle inside Iraq and isn't trying to acquire atomic weapons.

But Iranian officials do agree they play a strong role in Iraq, much as they do with the trade and aid they provide to Afghanistan on their eastern border, as Tehran seeks to

increase its regional influence. "The Iraqi government and nation are close friends of Iran," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in an interview this week. "We are natural allies."

Complicating the U.S. position, Iraq's Shiite-dominated government itself has sought close trade and political ties with Iran, whose people are predominantly Shiite.

Iraq and Iran were hostile to each other throughout Saddam's reign, including fighting a long and destructive war through most of the 1980s. But when Saddam's Sunni regime fell and Iraq's Shiite majority took power, long-standing historical, religious and cultural ties between the Shiites of both countries flourished again.

These days, Iran's influence still is most apparent across Iraq's mostly Shiite south. But it is also felt in Kurdish northern areas and even in Baghdad, where many new reconstruction projects, such as improving Iraq's electricity grid, are financed by Iranian investment.

"Decades of war and U.S. invasion have destroyed almost everything in Iraq. And Iran is well prepared to make good use of this opportunity to flood Iraqi markets with goods and services," said Saeed Leilaz, an economic and political analyst in Iran.

The export of goods to Iraq brings both money and influence, he noted. "Iranian products are sold everywhere in Iraq. This never happened before. Iran is playing a clever

game," he said.

Iran's ambassador to Baghdad, Hasan Kazemi Qomi, said last month that Iran-Iraq trade in 2006 totaled \$2 billion, 97 percent of that going from Iran into Iraq. Hossein Tizmaghz, an Iranian Commerce Ministry official, said he hopes trade will soar to \$10 billion in five years. Shalamchah is one of three major crossings along the 620-mile border.

In the 1980s, it was a dusty battlefield where Iranians and Iraqis exchanged bullets and mortar shells and where Saddam's regime used chemical weapons. Today, its export terminal bustles with trucks as well as Iranian families traveling to Iraq's holy cities for pilgrimage.

The border situation is more complicated in Iraq's Kurdish north. The inflow of goods, including cheap gasoline, booms, but the atmosphere is tense.

Iran has periodically fired artillery across the border in recent weeks at bases used by ethnic militants staging attacks in Iran's Kurdish region. An Iranian envoy warned last weekend that if the Iraqis could not stop the Kurdish raids, Tehran might respond militarily.

There are also tensions in Iraq's south, where there has been fighting between Shiite groups and political parties, some of which have closer links to Iran. But the traffic in commerce and pilgrims remains high.

Each month, more than 40,000 Iranians visit southern Iraq's important Shiite spots such as the holy

cities of Najaf and Karbala, buying religious souvenirs and pumping money into the economy by staying in hotels.

Many pass through the south's biggest city, Basra, just over 30 miles from the border. It has many Iranian cultural and religious centers, and its shops are full of high-quality and cheap Iranian food, kitchen appliances and construction materials. "The Iranian influence is very large," said Ali Abdul Aziz, a retired Sunni teacher in Basra.

Iran has said it wants to build an airport in Najaf and promises to help renovate important shrines. It also has begun work on a railroad between Iranian port of Khorramshahr and Basra, connecting Iran's rail system to Iraq's.

Tehran also has signed a \$150 million contract to build a 300-megawatt power plant in Baghdad. Another project, a 400-megawatt electricity transmission line from the Iranian frontier city of Abadan to the Iraqi town of Alharasa is expected to go into operation in a few months. Iran also is conducting feasibility studies on building two pipelines to carry oil and derivatives from Basra to Abadan.

"Enmity is over," Iranian businessman Bahram Mehrparvar said as he filled out paperwork at the Shalamchah export terminal for the bricks and cement he exports to Iraq. "Business and trade has replaced bullets and mortars."

DTP demands constitutional solution for Kurdish issue

The Democratic Society Party (DTP) asked President Abdullah Gül for a constitutional solution to the Kurdish problem Friday during his visit to Şırnak.

During Gül's four-day trip to the southeastern provinces of Van, Hakkari, Siirt, Şırnak and Diyarbakır, he met with the governor of Şırnak, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, DTP deputies Hasip Kaplan and Sevaahir Bayındır, and Şırnak's DTP Mayor Ahmet Ertak.

"We demand constitutional arrangements regarding the Kurdish problem while the new constitutional changes are being drafted," said Ertak.

The DTP's deputy Kaplan added, "Equal and free citizenship should be embraced.

The constitution is important in this respect. If the [new] constitution opens the door for it, other laws could be made in line with the constitution. If you provide 70 million citizens with equal and free citizenship status, you then eliminate the mentality of discrimination," he said, presenting the Spanish constitution as an example.

"Bringing a solution to the Kurdish issue, which has been delayed and which used to be treated as an issue of security via a constitutional arrangement, will have a vital contribution to the democratization in Turkey," said Bayındır.

Gül said he would evaluate the issue and proposals.

"I said that a constitution, which will

solve all the problems of Turkey in the best way and carry Turkey to brighter days, should be prepared. Now, all these are to be negotiated," Gül said.

Diyarbakır visit:

The last stop Friday on Gül's tour was Diyarbakır. Gül met with Diyarbakır's governor and representatives of local nongovernmental organizations.

Agriculture minister, Mehdi Eker, Diyarbakır mayor, Osman Baydemir, Diyarbakır parliamentarians, and representatives from the Diyarbakır Bar Association, trade organizations, the Human Rights Association's Diyarbakır branch and local trade unions attended the meeting with Gül held in the governor's office.

Kurds fight for freedom on Iran-Iraq border

QANDIL RANGE, Iraq -- Off a rocky mountain road meandering through creek beds, a small, stone military outpost is hidden near the Iraq-Iran border.

Peach, pomegranate and fig trees tremble in the hot breeze. Under a thatched-roof awning, leafy vines cover the outer walls and offer a little relief from the intense sun. A young Iranian guerrilla listens to music on an iPod as his comrades hang Kalashnikov assault rifles, ammunition belts and walkie-talkies on a beam behind the vines.

Amin Karimi, 34, a soft-spoken, bespectacled man, drinks sweet tea and describes his battle against the Islamic Republic of Iran. "If they attack us, we will fight," says Karimi, one of nine leaders of the Free Life Party of Kurdistan, or PJAK, an Iranian-Kurdish guerrilla group fighting for Kurdish autonomy in Iran.

That fight has turned more intense in the past month, with almost daily clashes. Except for the rare car-bombing, it is the only warfare in Kurdistan, Iraq's one largely peaceful region, and the only sustained fighting reported inside Iran.

PJAK claims to have destroyed an Iranian helicopter trying to land in Iraq and killed a dozen or more Iranian Revolutionary Guard soldiers in battles. Iran has shelled the area, forcing villagers to flee and prompting protests by Iraq's foreign minister.

Iran denies launching any attacks. Yet interviews of villagers -- and landscapes littered with twisted metal from artillery or rocket attacks - suggest otherwise. In nearby Soreguli, a stone-house village of 10 families, Abubakir Khokoreh, 58, stands on ground charred, he says, by Iranian shells and rockets.

"We are afraid," he says. "Some of our livestock were killed and our grain supply for the winter was burned." Asked where the shelling came from, he points toward the border and says, "Iran."

Villagers here and elsewhere accuse Iran and Turkey of coordinating artillery attacks on northern Iraq. Iranian leaflets distributed in border villages warn of more.

"Some enemies led by America want to disturb the security on the borders by sending American agents and spies to the Qandil and Khenera areas," read one leaflet obtained by the Tribune-Review. "They are working on plans and conspiracies against us. ... The place where these American agents and spies are settled will be attacked."

Meanwhile, Turkey is pressuring Iraq -- including frequent threats to invade -- to rid the mountains of the PKK, a Turkish-Kurdish separatist group. The PKK draws its troops from the 27 million to 35 million Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

PJAK's Karimi is not worried. "These areas are under our control and there is stability," he says. "They can't make stability and security even in Baghdad, how can you control these areas in the mountains? ... No government can control it -- Saddam couldn't control this area.

"We help the people here." Most villagers agree, crediting the PKK and PJAK with keeping them safe.

Before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Islamic groups such as Ansar Al Islam, with links to al-Qaida and Iran, controlled areas along this mountainous border; brutally enforcing its rule on villages. Karimi says his fighters are essential to preventing the Islamists' return, because "if an Islamic group comes to these mountains, nobody can take them out."

PJAK's origins are nebulous. Many analysts claim it is an extension of the PKK, which the United States classifies as a terrorist group because of its bombing campaign in Turkey. But Karimi says it grew from a 1990s Iranian student movement formed "to fill the political and social vacuum in Iranian Kurdistan and ... to obtain our national and social rights." As in Arab-dominated Iraq, the Kurds are an ethnic minority in Persian-run Iran.

Iran's stifling political atmosphere, grown even more oppressive under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's regime, led to PJAK's militarization in 2004. While some of its members moved into Iraqi Kurdistan, Karimi insists most remain in Iran and are growing "vastly."

"People want hope," he says. "There is no hope in Iranian Kurdistan." Yet some Iranian Kurdish opposition figures criticize PJAK.

"If PJAK can be an independent Kurdish party, we welcome them," says Abdullah Mohtadi, secretary-general of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, now exiled in Iraq. "But they are just taking their orders from somewhere else -- they are just PKK. ... It does not help the Kurdish movement in Iran, and it doesn't help the Iraqi Kurds."

Karimi dismisses Komala and other Iranian-Kurdish opposition parties "Until now, we fight against Iran and they fight each other," he says. "It's terrible."

While denying that PJAK is a PKK offshoot, he admits that "our ideas are the same." Like PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is imprisoned in Turkey, Karimi hopes for a confederation of all Kurds within their national borders instead of a single Kurdish state.

He likens it to the states' rights of America's federal system. "They have their own rules and they have contacts with foreign countries, but they are American, all of them," he says.

He stresses that PJAK is secular, unlike the ever-growing number of Islamic movements across the Middle East.

Analysts say PJAK has 3,000 guerrillas fighting in northern Iraq. Karimi won't give a number but proudly says nearly half are women, including three women on the group's leadership council.

"Kurdish women have the biggest dynamism ... to make a better life, for democracy and a new system," he says. "They really fight better than us and make politics better than us."

In 2006, Ohio congressman and Democratic presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, who accuses President Bush of exaggerating Iran's threat to U.S. security, and journalist Seymour Hersh claimed the United States and Israel support and train PJAK. Karimi calls that Iranian propaganda and flatly denies receiving U.S. support.

"We had some contacts because the Americans are here in Iraq and they are our neighbors now," he says. "Sometimes they want to know who is PJAK and what we are doing here ... but we have no cooperation. We don't need it."

Instead, he says, his force is politically independent and "self-reliant. Our people give us everything. Also, we don't know about American priorities and politics (toward) Iran. ... The American government never speaks about Iranian Kurds." Still, he won't disclose how PJAK is armed.

"Our weapons are the Kalashnikov," he says, shrugging and holding both hands palms-up. "The Middle East is full of weapons. If you have money, you can buy them." "Everyone has guns in the Middle East."

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September 17, 2007 (RFE/RL) -

Iraq: Minister Calls On Iran To Focus On Supporting Government

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari says that relations with Iran have been hurt by Tehran's shelling of areas in Kurdish-administered northern Iraq and its support for anti-coalition militants in the south. RFE/RL correspondent Charles Recknagel spoke with Zebari about Iran-Iraq relations during the minister's visit today to RFE/RL in Prague.

RFE/RL: Washington has frequently criticized Tehran over supplies of weapons that reach groups fighting coalition forces in the south of Iraq. More recently, the Baghdad government has also protested Iranian cross-border shelling that targets anti-Tehran Kurdish groups that Iran says are sheltering in northern Iraq. How would you describe Tehran's policies towards Iraq: helpful or unhelpful?

Hoshyar Zebari: We have been very clear and direct with them on all these issues: of the intervention, of the usefulness or unusefulness of the role they are playing, and we have been very frank with them that on the one hand, politically, Iran does support the government, the political process and so on, but we have insisted that that

should be matched with action and deeds on the ground. And if there is any desire to support the government, that support should go to the government, not to militias, or not to rogue groups here and there.

There is a lot we as Iraq expect our neighbors to do to be more helpful, and soon we will convene a meeting, a ministerial meeting, in Istanbul where all these partners plus the United States, plus the P5, plus the G8 [Group of Eight], will attend at the ministerial level, and we announced that it would be on October 31 and November 1.

RFE/RL: Turning to central Iraq, Washington has said it is much encouraged by cooperation between Sunni tribes and U.S. forces to fight Al-Qaeda in the area. Do you see this as possibly also leading to increased cooperation between Sunni nationalist groups and the government in Baghdad?

Zebari: We've seen the fruit of that [fight against Al-Qaeda] in Anbar, in many parts of Diyala, in some parts of Baghdad, and so on, and this is a very positive development, but at the same time we have to be careful not to create new militias, that these new forces really have to be integrated into the existing Iraqi military, security, police structures, to be part of the state forces and not to act one against the other.

RFE/RL: Moving to southern Iraq, the British government recently withdrew forces from inside the city of Al-Basrah to the airport in preparation for reducing its troop presence in the



region. Is the Iraqi army able to fill the vacuum?

Zebari: We've been reassured by the British government, by the prime minister, by the foreign secretary that Britain does not have any plans to withdraw completely from southern Iraq, but this has been in the planning, it has been worked out with the Iraqi authorities, to hand over responsibility in Baghdad to Iraqi authorities. Already, we are moving troops, we are moving police units to fill that vacuum in Basra.

GULF NEWS

By Basil Adas, Correspondent September 18, 2007

Mosul's four-day curfew is lifted, say residents

Mosul: The four-day curfew imposed on Mosul since late last Friday because of potential threats from Al Qaida to attack targets in the Sunni-dominated city was lifted yesterday, residents said.

Duraid Kashmolah, Mosul's governor, announced in an earlier statement "that because of threats from Al Qaida, and to preserve the security of the city, a curfew was decided starting from late last Friday and early Monday morning."

It was not immediately known what security measures were taken in the city to face any possible threats from Al Qaida.

Mosul has approximately three million inhabitants, mostly Sunni Arabs and Kurds, Christians, Yezides and Sabians. The province is facing disputes between Arabs and Kurds yet is expected to resolve this under article 140 of the permanent Iraqi constitution.

Divided

The deteriorating security situation has turned the province into a city of panic. Citizens erected barricades to the entrance of each neighbourhood after the recent attacks in the Sinjar area which claimed the lives of 344 Yezide Kurds according to the latest statistics.

Meanwhile, Arab-Kurdish tension continues to prevail in the city.

Zuhair Al Tamimi, a political researcher at Mosul University, told *Gulf News*: "I believe there is an American and Turkish conspiracy against Mosul which aims to raise ethnic, religious and sectarian divisions...I think violence has already led citizens to a complete geographical segregation.. It means the city is divided with no official announcement, beside people cannot coexist together nor trust each other."

Talkaif, a Christian-inhabited area rushed to fortify its neighbourhoods with barriers and formed a night watch, Joseph Najeeb, an Iraqi engineer living

in Talkaif, told *Gulf News*.

"Christians will be targeted later by bloody explosions. It does not mean there is an Islamic-Christian conflict because those who do these acts are targeting Christians, Muslims, Arabs and Kurds alike. I think the plan is to empty Mosul from its original inhabitants to be controlled by regional forces."

Mosul turns into a ghost town after about 6pm. Many of its population supported Saddam's regime and some commemorate the anniversary of the deaths of Uday and Qusay (Saddam's sons) in 2003 in Mosul .

Omar Al Faydhi, a cleric in Mosul, told *Gulf News*: "The American occupation succeeded in creating mistrust among Mosul citizens, they managed to make them accuse and kill each other."

The Birmingham News

by The Birmingham News September 16, 2007

Kurdistan not like other parts of Iraq

Four years ago, photographer Hal Yeager and I came home to Birmingham after nearly six weeks on assignment with an Alabama Army National Guard unit in northern Iraq.

Six weeks did not make us experts, but our stay left us with a lot of impressions, one of which was the relatively relaxed atmosphere and prosperity of



Kurdish men sit outside a shop in Dohuk, a city in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan, which was a few hours by car to the north of our camp in Mosul.

In Washington, there is an ongoing debate about how much longer U.S. troops should remain in Iraq. In his congressional testimony last week, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, said about 30,000 U.S. troops could possibly be withdrawn next summer.

If the rest of Iraq were like the Kurdish autonomous region, U.S. troop withdrawals would already be under way.

Kurdistan is not perfect. Far better informed people would scoff at such an assessment. Lethal bombs have gone off there, Kurdish-Arab tensions are simmering in the city of Kirkuk just outside the autonomous region, and Kurdish political rivalries have sometimes turned violent. But just as was the

case four years ago, going from Iraq to Kurdistan is truly a night-and-day experience, and a pleasant one.

For soldiers in the unit with which Yeager and I were embedded, the 877th Engineer Battalion, trips into the Kurdish region, even if they involved official business, were a way to lighten their mental and physical loads. Soldiers began feeling more at ease once they passed through the checkpoint separating Iraq's Nineveh province from the Kurdish-controlled sector.

"It was more like what we've got here than anywhere I saw over there," said Master Sgt. John Pemberton of Hamilton, who made about 40 trips to the Kurdish mountain city of Dohuk to buy tires, batteries, vehicle parts and other supplies for the battalion.

When Pemberton first started traveling to Dohuk, soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division, then commanded by Petraeus, were making what the military calls MWR (morale, welfare and recreation) trips up there from Mosul, staying in a large motel in the center of the city. Once they had settled in Mosul, 877th members started making Sunday shopping trips to Dohuk as well, and to the Kurdish region's capital city, Erbil.

"You just felt relaxed when you were up there in the Kurdish country, you know," Pemberton said.

"Once you got past their checkpoint up there, we could take off the body armor and everything. You just kept your weapon with you for security. You were just comfortable, a lot more comfortable there than you were in Mosul."

On one Sunday, Yeager and I went with two or three dozen 877th soldiers to Erbil. To get there, we had to pass through a part of Mosul that was a mosaic of wrecked vehicles and open storefronts, garbage piles, narrow alleyways, orange and white taxis, solid stone homes, partially built mosques, bare lots with grazing livestock and playing children and

vendors selling soft drinks under flimsy woven canopies. When we got to the checkpoint in Kurdistan country, we almost had to pry soft-drink selling youngsters off one of the humvees.

Upon entering Erbil, we found ourselves on tree-lined boulevards, alongside shopping arcades, sidewalk cafes and well-dressed young men and women who smiled and waved at the passing Americans. In a well-furnished restaurant, the soldiers sorted through bountiful servings of hummus, lamb, tabouli and other fare. Then they were off to shops around Erbil's circular 12th-century citadel, where they checked out carpets, cosmetics, candies and footwear and drew clusters of curious children. One popular draw was Spc. James Bankhead of Sulligent, appropriately nicknamed "Big" because of his size. Some of Big's colleagues even found their way to a downstairs bar.

Erbil and Dohuk were not what you would call shining cities on a hill, so to speak, but, again, they seemed markedly more prosperous and safe than cities across the checkpoints to the south. No doubt they and much of Iraqi Kurdistan were helped by the U.S.-led protection of a no-fly zone enforced after the 1991 Gulf War, but the Kurdish area has done enough on its own to draw investors, international airline flights and take on other attributes of a country in which people are comfortable enough to take risks.

"It's a place to... start if you want to get into Iraq," said Birmingham businessman Dave Nash, who visited the area while overseeing some Iraq reconstruction projects for the Defense Department from July 2003 to September 2004.

If, as some suggest, Iraq were to one day partition itself, the Kurds certainly seem ready to go it alone.

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REUTERS

Little chance of Kirkuk vote in 2007

MARIAM KAROUNY BAGHDAD - Reuters , September 21, 2007

A referendum to decide the status of the potential flashpoint Iraqi city of Kirkuk has little chance of being held this year, partly because time has run out to prepare for the vote, a senior Iraqi politician said.

The referendum for the ancient northern city, provided for in the Iraqi constitution, was due by the end of the year.

But the Independent Electoral Commission would need at least seven months from now to get ready, deputy parliament speaker Khaled al-Attiya told Reuters in an interview late on Wednesday.

Technical difficulties:

Parliament also has to pass a law setting a date for a plebiscite that is hotly disputed by different sects in the oil-rich city.

"Even if we issued a law today and said hold a referendum in Kirkuk, we would not be able to unless the technical side was covered," said Attiya, an independent Shiite lawmaker and senior member of the ruling Shiite Alliance. "The commission said it needs at least seven months to do this. So I think it will not be possible to do it this year."

A red line: Kirkuk is a mixed city of Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen, 250 km (155 miles) north of Baghdad.

Kurdish nationalists want Kirkuk included in their northern autonomous region and the referendum held by the year's end, regarding the plebiscite as a "red line" issue.

Arabs and Turkmen fear they will be pushed out of the city if it goes ahead and want the referendum stalled or put off for good. Analysts fear a bloodbath if the vote goes ahead against the wishes of other sects.

Attiya acknowledged that not holding the vote in 2007 would breach the constitution, but he said there was little choice. Technical difficulties were not the only obstacle, he added.

"There are still political difficulties. It is a sensitive matter and it needs some time," he said. "The issue has regional and international implications."

Normalization: Among the issues that need to be dealt with before a referendum goes ahead are a census and a "normalization" process mandated under Article 140 of Iraq's 2005 constitution.

"Normalization" involves paying compensation to Arab settlers to reverse Saddam Hussein's Arabisation policy of the 1970s and 1980s, when thousands of Kurds and Turkmen were expelled from Kirkuk to be replaced by Arabs.

Sunni Arabs fear that "normalization" - under which Arab families have been offered \$15,000 and land to return to their original hometowns - is an attempt to influence the outcome of the vote by changing Kirkuk's demographics. Others believe it is an unsubtle attempt by Kurds to deny others a share of the area's oil wealth.

Kurdistan Capital Sets Example for Iraq

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) -- For anyone who has spent time in Baghdad, the most startling thing about a visit to Kurdistan's capital, Irbil, is that it resembles a city at peace, at least by Iraqi standards. The last bomb to hit Irbil was on May 9, when 14 people died in a suicide attack on a government building.

Planes flying into Baghdad execute a rapid spiral toward the runway to reduce the chances of getting hit by any ground fire. U.S. and Iraqi military vehicles ply the highway leading into the city from the airport. Traffic crawls through heavily defended checkpoints.

But the biggest hassle for a visitor arriving by plane in Irbil is mundane, a long wait in line at immigration. "Do you have your DOD card?" an officer asked, mistaking an American civilian for a U.S. government employee affiliated with the Department of Defense.

The next cultural shock is the relative lack of guns on the streets of Irbil, an ancient city near the site of a battlefield victory of the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, over forces of the Persian empire. A little more than a decade ago, the city was the scene of fighting among Kurdish factions, one of them backed by Saddam Hussein's military.

Soldiers, some in uniforms of American-made desert camouflage, carry automatic weapons outside key government buildings. Some armed guards, visibly relaxed, stroll down avenues or lounge outside banks, fuel depots and other installations. They don't wear helmets or bulletproof vests.

Security is tighter around a compound in the Ainkawa neighborhood of Irbil where foreign contractors and U.S. diplomatic staff live. Even here, though, the concrete blast walls are fewer, and lower, than those found at similar installations in Baghdad. Ainkawa is a Christian district in a Kurdish city, which is as safe as it gets for Westerners in Iraq.

Kurds are a non-Arab people distantly related to the Iranians and make up about 15 percent of Iraq's 27 million people. Neighboring Iran, Syria and Turkey also have Kurdish minorities that have come into conflict with governments seeking to curb their

separatist movements.

Iraqi Kurds rebelled against Saddam after the Gulf War in 1991. U.S.-led forces created a safe haven for the Kurds, who eventually established a stable, self-governing territory that had little in common with the chaos elsewhere in Iraq.

They rejoined the central government after Saddam was ousted in 2003, though maintain a big say in their own affairs.

As U.S. allies, the Kurds are targets of insurgents, and the area under their control lies close to troubled cities such as Mosul and Kirkuk. But bombings in the Kurds' semiautonomous zone are considered unusual, partly a result of rigorous policing that keeps attackers outside the so-called "Green Line" that divides Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq.

An official of the Kurdistan Regional Government invited an American journalist for ice cream and a walk through downtown late one night to show that Irbil was safe. Such an excursion in Baghdad, for a foreigner or an Iraqi, would be extremely unwise. And unlike the Iraqi capital, Irbil does not impose curfews.

Tea shops were packed and smoke billowed from a barbecue restaurant. Iskan Street, a shopping thoroughfare, was hopping, even though it was quieter than usual because Islam's holy month of Ramadan is under way. The official urged the journalist to walk around at night by himself.

Some foreign investors from neighboring Turkey and elsewhere have been attracted by Irbil's stable security and its income from oil reserves in the region. Half-built, high-rise apartments and office towers are rising from the dusty plains, but public services and infrastructure need to be upgraded.

In one Baghdad-style image in Irbil this week, half a dozen armored, sports utility vehicles carrying a U.S. congressional delegation barreled past the Citadel, a walled, crumbling enclave on the highest point in the city. The convoy was forced to stop on a crowded street as a driver, to the amusement of onlookers, tried to parallel park in front of it.

Sirens whooped, and the convoy sped on.

The U.S. military presence in Kurdistan is minimal. More than 1,000 South Korean troops in the area provide medical care at a hospital on their base and other humanitarian projects. It is easy to reach their compound entrance; just get waved through two lackluster, Kurdish checkpoints without a car or ID check. On a recent day, half a dozen South Korean soldiers without body armor crowded into a kiosk at the main gate to listen to an officer's instructions.

Private car owners in Irbil don't seem to have any qualms about driving around in big, white SUVs. Such vehicles are frequently attacked in Baghdad and other more dangerous parts of Iraq because they are favored by foreign contractors. In Kurdistan's capital, there are even a few Hummers, the civilian version of the American military Humvee.

The largely homogenous, civilian population in Kurdistan, eager to stay away from the sectarian and factional bloodshed among Sunni and Shiite Arabs farther south, keeps in close contact with their trusted security forces.

If a suspicious person loiters too long near a government building, someone will contact the authorities. If someone rents an apartment, the owner will likely demand proof of identity and clearance from security officials. Checkpoint guards want to know where travelers came from, where they're going, and whom they are going to see.

For all the security successes, Kurdistan's safety is fragile by international standards. Last month, Austrian Airlines suspended flights to Irbil because of security concerns, and Sweden has also suspended commercial flights to the region.

Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of Kurdistan's foreign relations department, said the Kurds had appealed in vain to American forces to provide surveillance cameras, equipment that detects explosives and other high-tech security gear. But he said he felt comfortable without bodyguards.

"I drive alone," Bakir said. "I go the market. I go to restaurants

U.S.: Iran is smuggling surface-to-air missiles into Iraq

BAGHDAD - The U.S. military yesterday accused Iran of smuggling surface-to-air missiles and other advanced weapons into Iraq for use against American troops.

The allegations came as Iraqi leaders condemned the latest U.S. detention of an Iranian in northern Iraq, saying the man was in their country on official business. Military spokesman Rear Adm. Mark Fox said U.S. troops were continuing to find Iranian-supplied weaponry including the Misagh 1, a portable surface-to-air missile that uses an infrared guidance system.

Other advanced Iranian weaponry found in Iraq includes the RPG-29 rocket-propelled grenade, 240 mm rockets and armor-piercing roadside bombs known as explosively formed penetrators, or EFPs, Fox said. An American soldier was killed Saturday and another wounded when a bomb hit their patrol in eastern Baghdad, the military said.

Iran has denied U.S. allegations that it is smuggling weapons to Shiite militias in Iraq, a denial that

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reiterated in an interview with CBS' "60 Minutes" that aired yesterday.

"We don't need to do that. We are very much opposed to war and insecurity," said Ahmadinejad, who arrived in New York yesterday to attend the U.N. General Assembly. "The insecurity in Iraq is detrimental to our interests." Tensions between Iran and the United States have worried Iraqi officials - many of whom are members of political parties with close ties to Tehran.

A 240 mm rocket was fired this month at the main U.S. headquarters base in Iraq, killing one person and wounding 11. U.S. officials said the rocket was fired from a west Baghdad neighborhood controlled by Shiite militiamen.

On Thursday, U.S. troops arrested an Iranian in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah. U.S. officials said he was a member of the elite Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards that smuggles weapons into Iraq. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki condemned

the Iranian's arrest, saying he understood the man, who has been identified as Mahmudi Farhadi, had been invited to Iraq.

"The government of Iraq is an elected one and sovereign. When it gives a visa, it is responsible for the visa," he said. "We consider the arrest . . . of this individual who holds an Iraqi visa and a [valid] passport to be unacceptable."

The U.S. military said the suspect was being questioned about "his knowledge of, and involvement in" the transportation of EFPs and other roadside bombs from Iran into Iraq and "his facilitation of travel and training in Iran for Iraqi insurgents."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said Farhadi was in charge of border transactions in western Iran and went to Iraq on an official invitation.

The withdrawal debate ■ Henry A. Kissinger

Putting politics aside to save Iraq

September 18, 2007

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Two realities define the range of a meaningful debate on Iraq policy: The war cannot be ended by military means alone. But neither is it possible to “end” the war by ceding the battlefield, for the radical jihadist challenge knows no frontiers.

An abrupt withdrawal from Iraq will not end the war; it will only redirect it. Within Iraq, the sectarian conflict could assume genocidal proportions; terrorist base areas could re-emerge.

Under the impact of American abdication, Lebanon may slip into domination by Iran’s ally, Hezbollah; a Syria-Israel war or an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities may become more likely as Israel attempts to break the radical encirclement; Turkey and Iran will probably squeeze Kurdish autonomy; and the Taliban in Afghanistan will gain new impetus.

That is what is meant by “precipitate” withdrawal — a withdrawal in which the United States loses the ability to shape events, either within Iraq, on the anti-jihadist battlefield or in the world at large.

The proper troop level in Iraq will not be discovered by political compromise, at home. If reducing troop levels turns into the litmus test of American politics, each withdrawal will generate demands for additional ones until the political, military and psychological framework collapses.

An appropriate strategy for Iraq requires political direction. But the political dimension must be the ally of military strategy, not a resignation from it.

Symbolic withdrawals, urged by such wise elder statesmen as Senators John Warner, Republican of Virginia, and Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana, might indeed assuage the immediate public concerns. They should be understood, however, as palliatives.

The argument that the mission of U.S. forces should be confined to defeating terrorism, protecting the frontiers, preventing the emergence of Taliban-like structures and staying out of the civil-war aspects is also tempting. In practice, it will be very difficult to distinguish among the various aspects of the conflict with any precision.

Some answer that the best political result is most likely to be achieved by total withdrawal. In the end, political leaders will be held responsible — often by their publics, surely by history — not only for what they hoped but for what they should have feared.

Nothing in Middle East history suggests that abdication confers influence. Those who urge this course of action need to put forward what they recommend if

the dire consequences of an abrupt withdrawal foreseen by the majority of experts and diplomats occur.

The missing ingredient has not been a withdrawal schedule but a political and diplomatic design connected to a military strategy. The issue is not whether Arab or Muslim societies can ever become democratic; it is whether they can become so under American military guidance in a timeframe for which the U.S. political process will stand.

In homogeneous societies, a minority can aspire to become a majority as a result of elections. That outcome is improbable in societies where historic grievances follow existing ethnic or sectarian lines.

Iraq is multiethnic and multisectarian. The Sunni sect has dominated the majority Shia and subjugated the Kurdish minority for all of Iraq’s history of less than a hundred years.

American exhortations for national reconciliation

are based on constitutional principles drawn from the Western experience. But it is impossible to achieve this in a six-month period defined by the American troop surge in an artificially created state wracked by the legacy of a thousand years of ethnic and sectarian conflicts.

Experience should teach us that trying to manipulate a fragile political structure — particularly one resulting from American-sponsored elections — is likely to play into radical hands. Nor are the present frustrations with Baghdad’s performance a sufficient excuse to impose a strategic disaster on ourselves.

However much Americans may disagree about the decision to intervene or about the policy afterward, the United States is now in Iraq in large part to serve the American commitment to global order and not as a favor to the Baghdad government.

It is possible that the present structure in Baghdad is incapable of national reconciliation because its elected constituents were elected on a sectarian basis. A wiser course would be to concentrate on the three principal regions and promote technocratic, efficient and humane administration in each. More efficient regional government leading to substantial decrease in the level of violence, to progress toward the rule of law and to functioning markets could

then, over a period of time, give the Iraqi people an opportunity for national reconciliation — especially if no region was strong enough to impose its will on the others by force.

Failing that, the country may well drift into de facto partition under the label of autonomy, such as already exists in the Kurdish region. That very prospect might encourage the Baghdad political forces to move toward reconciliation.

The second and ultimately decisive route to overcoming the Iraqi crisis is through international diplomacy. Today the United States is bearing the major burden for regional security militarily, politically and economically.

Yet many other nations know that their internal security and, in some cases, their survival will be affected by the outcome in Iraq and are bound to be concerned that they may all face unpredictable risks if the situation gets out of control.

That passivity cannot last. The best way for other countries to give effect to their concerns is to participate in the construction of a civil society. The best way for us to foster it is to turn reconstruction step-by-step into a cooperative international effort under multilateral management.

It will not be possible to achieve these objectives in a single, dramatic move. The military outcome in Iraq will ultimately have to be re-

flected in some international recognition and some international enforcement of its provisions. The international conference of Iraq’s neighbors, including the permanent members of the Security Council, has established a possible forum for this. A UN role in fostering such a political outcome could be helpful.

Such a strategy is the best road to reduce America’s military presence in the long run.

None of these objectives can be realized, however, unless two conditions are met: The United States

needs to maintain a presence in the region on which its supporters can count and which its adversaries have to take seriously. And above all, the country must recognize that bipartisanship has become a necessity, not a tactic.

Henry A. Kissinger heads the consulting firm Kissinger & Associates. This article was distributed by Tribune Media Services.

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France wants Europe to be as tough on Iran as the U.S. is

By Katrin Bennhold

MOSCOW: France sent another strong message to Iran on Monday, announcing that it would work to set up a European sanctions regime modeled on the one in place in the United States if the United Nations Security Council failed to agree on tougher measures to stop Iran's uranium enrichment program.

Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, en route to Moscow for his first meeting with his Russian counterpart since taking office, said a combination of "credible" sanctions and direct talks with Tehran was the best tool the West had to resolve the standoff diplomatically. On Sunday he caused some alarm by hinting at the prospect of war with Iran. He later softened his tone, but not his sense of urgency.

But Kouchner said he believed a UN resolution was unlikely. Several European countries, he said, including Britain, France and the Netherlands, were in favor of additional sanctions.

The sanctions being discussed in Paris would focus on business and financial transactions, said a senior diplomat with knowledge of the situation. Measures might include blocking certain bank accounts and inhibiting companies from bidding on Iranian contracts.

When similar sanctions were put in effect by the United States, some Iranian businesses and individuals shifted their transactions from dollars into euros. They could now be vulnerable to European sanctions.

Taking the lead on European efforts to toughen the Iranian sanctions regime is the latest illustration of President Nicolas Sarkozy's drive to put France back on the front line of global diplomacy. A month ago, Kouchner made a surprise visit to Iraq to declare that Paris could be an honest broker in the war-torn country, and in July France succeeded in winning the release of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor from years of imprisonment in Libya.

A hardening of France's attitude toward Iran was articulated this month when Sarkozy warned of the "catastrophic" choice between the "Iranian bomb and a bombardment of Iran" if sanctions failed.

On Sunday Kouchner said that the in-

ternational community had to "prepare for the worst" and then characterized the worst as "war," a statement that made waves the diplomatic community.

On Monday Kouchner played down his comment, saying that Paris remained committed to a peaceful solution. "The worst situation would be war," he said, "and to avoid the worst, the French position is very clear: negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. And work with our European friends on credible sanctions."

The comments came as the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany prepared to meet to discuss what to do next. Russia, one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, has ruled out further sanctions for the time being, a position that frustrates Kouchner.

"If there is a sufficient resolution in the Security Council we will be happy," Kouchner said. He added: "The UN is blocked and for the moment there is no prospect of a third resolution."

Sarkozy has broken with Gaullist tradition by striking a more pro-American tone and Kouchner was one of only a handful of French politicians who supported the invasion of Iraq, on humanitarian grounds. The toughening stance on Iran has been interpreted as a further alignment of the French position with Washington's.

But Kouchner rejected such a reading, arguing that France was steering a course between the "leniency" of the current sanctions regime and the view held by factions in the U.S. administration that tough sanctions should be accompanied by a policy of isolating Iran.

"You never win by not talking to people," Kouchner said on the plane to Moscow. He said he regretted that "the Americans only want to talk to Iran about Iraq" and not the nuclear program.

Kouchner said that Paris had regular contact with Tehran and that his envoy, Jean-Claude Cousseran, would travel to Iran again within a few days.

But he also warned against complacency. "We have to envisage that this enrichment does not lead to the construction of a nuclear reactor," he said. "The role of Iran is particularly worrying in the powder keg that is the Middle East."

Iran reacted angrily to Kouchner's re-

marks. "The new occupants of the Elysée want to copy the White House," the state run IRNA news agency wrote in an editorial Monday, referring to the French presidential palace.

The editorial added that Sarkozy's government was creating obstacles just as Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency were moving toward resolving the question of Iran's nuclear work.

The talk of war with Iran also provoked a reaction from Mohamed El-Baradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna who is brokering the discussions with Iran. "I would not talk about any use of force" in the event that Iran obtains nuclear weapons, he said, The Associated Press reported. "We need to be cool. We need not to hype the issue."

He continued: "There are rules on how to use force, and I would hope that everybody would have gotten the lesson after the Iraq situation, where 700,000 innocent civilians have lost their lives on the suspicion that a country had nuclear weapons."

Negotiations and two sets of UN sanctions have failed to persuade Iran to stop its uranium enrichment program, a process that can produce fuel for nuclear power plants as well as material used in atomic weapons.

On Sunday, Kouchner also asked French energy companies not to invest in Iran. Two of those companies, Total and Gaz de France, declined Monday to comment on his request.

The companies are partners in a consortium that signed a memorandum of understanding in 2004 to build Iran's first liquefied natural gas export terminal. Work on the terminal, due to be completed in 2009, has not yet begun. Iran has valued the deal at about \$12 billion.

Kouchner said Britain and the Netherlands agreed with the French proposal on new sanctions. On Monday morning, he met in Paris with the Dutch foreign minister, Frans Verhagen, who said afterward that in the absence of UN action his country would back tougher sanctions on a European Union level "in common with the United States sanctions."

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Tehran, and Nicola Clark contributed from Paris.

Life in Baghdad: 1 city, 2 societies

Violence forcing Sunnis and Shiites alike to shun diversity

By Sabrina Tavernise

BAGHDAD: Violence swept over the Muhammad family in December, taking the father, the family's house and all of its belongings in one chilly morning. But after the Muhammads fled, the violence subsided and life re-emerged — ordinary and quiet — in its wake.

Now they no longer have to hide their Shiite last name. The eldest daughter does not have to put on an Islamic head scarf. Grocery shopping is not a death-defying act.

Although the painful act of leaving is behind them, their minds keep returning to the past, trying to process a violation that was as brutal as it was personal: Young men from the neighborhood shot the children's father as they watched. Later, the men took the house.

"I lost everything in one moment," said Rossel, the eldest daughter. "I don't know who I am now. I'm somebody different."

They are educated people, and they say they do not want revenge.

But typical of those who are left from Iraq's reasonable middle, the Muhammads have been hardened toward others by violence, and they have been forced to feel their sectarian identity, a mental closing that allows war made by militants to spread.

"In the past the country lived all together, but now, no," Rossel said. "I don't trust anyone."

Iraqis have continued to flee their homes throughout the American troop increase, which began early this year, and, despite assurances that it is becoming safe to return, uncrossable lines have been left in Iraqi minds and neighborhoods. Schools, hospitals and municipal buildings are quickly losing their diversity, and even moderate Iraqis like the Muhammads say they cannot imagine ever going back.

In northeastern Baghdad, Hashem, a polite 14-year-old from a Shiite family, has an acute sense of sect. (For his safety, his last name is not being used.) The players in his soccer club are Shiite. His school is three-quarters Shiite. His five or six close friends are all Shiites. He refrains from telling a joke he likes about a Sunni politician because it might hurt the feelings of the Sunni boys.

Though the alignment is religious, in practice it is more like being on the same sports team: Hashem, like his father, is not at all devout.

"In the beginning it was a shame to say Sunni or Shiite," he said, sitting on a couch in a guest room in a heavily Shiite neighborhood in northern Baghdad, "but we know."

His school has adjusted to new sectarian imperatives; the punishment for arguing about religion is a three-day

suspension. So when he fought with a Sunni boy who was making chauvinistic remarks about Shiites, the two walked away without telling the adults what the fight was about.

Part of the sensitivity comes from trauma inflicted by Saddam Hussein's

government: Years ago, Hashem's grandparents were forced out of their homes by local Baathists and died in the desert.

The segregation is reshaping the structure of families. On a recent Tuesday, a thin parade of tired-looking couples trudged through the office of a family court judge in Sharchiya, a mostly Shiite neighborhood in central Baghdad. Only about 5 percent of the marriage contracts he registers are for mixed-sect couples, down from about 50 percent before the war, the judge said.

"It used to be more festive," he said. The office is one of the city's few family courts, but as a testament to how separated the neighborhoods are now, just one in 10 couples he marries is Sunni.

The patterns started to form in 2005, when militants began pushing Iraqis out of their houses, a deeply personal violation that often leaves families jobless and impoverished.

In a survey of 200 displaced Shiite families living in Karbala, a southern city, researchers from Al Amal, an organization that assists the displaced,

**'They destroyed
all my life. For what?
We don't know.
What is our crime?'**

found that 60 percent were unable to take their furniture or belongings when they fled.

Rossel's father, a suit importer, was killed while he was packing the family's belongings into cars to move out of Dora, an area in southern Baghdad that is controlled by fundamentalist Sunni Islamists.

The Muhammads were never able to return, though a kindly neighbor drove their car to them in their new, mostly Shiite, neighborhood in Baghdad. They lost their past — photograph albums, diaries and heirlooms.

Not everyone in the family wanted to know what happened to the house, but Rossel was told that a Sunni family she did not know had moved in.

"I try to imagine my room and what they do in it," she said, her voice intense.

Rasheed Hameed, a Sunni Kurd, was

forced out of his house this summer in Baya, another southern neighborhood, and moved his family to safety in Syria. Back in Baghdad, he saved some of his furniture with the help of neighbors who have militia connections. His dresser, kitchen chest and bed frame stood awkwardly in a courtyard at his new house last week. Inside, several large printing machines sat like giant unwanted guests, the property of a previous owner.

"They destroyed all my life," Hameed said, gesturing at the furniture. "For what? We don't know. What

is our crime?"

Early in the war, it was extremely rare that an Iraqi would know his or her attacker, but as time went on the violence moved closer to home.

In the Karbala study, 47 percent of families said that their neighbors were directly or indirectly responsible for their flight.

The men who tipped off the killer of Rossel's father lived in the neighborhood and were working as movers for the family on the day he was shot.

Omar, an 18-year-old Sunni who withheld his family name for his safety, said that as Shiites took over his neighborhood in western Baghdad, childhoods spent together seemed never to have existed. Now he and his cousins change the subject when old Shiite friends walk past his stoop. Safe topics are electricity, girls and soccer.

"It's true we used to play with them," he said, "but we couldn't read what was inside their hearts."

Omar's father was shot and killed by six men from the neighborhood in May. Omar can name every one of them. Now they visit his grocery shop and take sodas without paying. They were poor before the war. Now they drive Land Cruisers taken from their victims.

They drive through the neighborhood, windows down, blasting songs about the Shiite cleric Muktada al-Sadr and sometimes honking the horn.

"As if they are telling us, 'We killed him, and now we're driving his car,'" Omar said.

As privileged Sunnis lost status, Shiites became the targets of attacks and the cycle of revenge began.

Shaïma Ali Hussein, a Shiite student from a Sunni-dominated city north of Baghdad, said male medical students she had known for years refused to sit next to her during an exam, and an anatomy professor forced her to examine a cadaver without gloves, behavior strictly forbidden for Shiites, she said.

"Even the patients didn't want to be touched by us," she said.

Despite widespread displacement, large parts of the city are still mixed, and society has not broken down com-

September 19, 2007

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Turkey won't rule out entry into Iraq

By Sebnem Arsu

ANKARA: Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan refused Tuesday to rule out the possibility of military operations in northern Iraq to root out armed Kurdish separatist groups that he said had taken refuge in the border region.

Erdogan also criticized some Western countries for what he called their increasingly hawkish stance against Iran.

Meeting with a group of foreign journalists on the eve of his trip to the United States to meet with President George W. Bush and others attending the United Nations General Assembly next week, Erdogan said that despite the relative calm in the northern region of Iraq bordering Turkey, all options remained open in his country's struggle against Kurdish separatist militants.

the more people in the middle are forced to take a side.

Rossel's brother, Zain, was never interested in his Shiite identity, but after his father's killing, he contacted Shiite leaders in his new neighborhood. He would be naive to ignore it, he said. He said he remembered when Sunni mili-

tants in his old neighborhood stopped hiding their identities.

"My Sunni friends said, 'Join with us or get out.'"

Hosham Hussein and Qais Mizher contributed reporting.

"No country can continue living under the constant threat of terrorism," Erdogan said in his office at his party headquarters in Ankara. "This struggle has the same legitimacy for Turkey as it has for the U.S., Spain or United Kingdom."

The PKK, or Kurdish Worker's Party, has been operating in Turkey since the 1980s, pressing demands for a separate Kurdish state in a conflict that has taken more than 30,000 lives.

There are about 3,500 armed rebels taking shelter in the mountains of northern Iraq and organizing hit-and-run attacks inside Turkey, according to Turkish officials. These attacks, which have been more frequent in recent months, have led the Turkish military to insist on an active operation to counter them.

"We have done our part in joint struggle against terrorism in Afghanistan as requested by the U.S.," Erdogan said. "Now, we expect the same approach from the U.S."

He said Turkey expected "a three-pronged approach — U.S., Iraq and Turkey — to function against the terror organization settled in northern Iraq."

Turkey has unilaterally entered northern Iraq three times since the 1990s with large numbers of troops, while so-called hot pursuits by special army units have become common along the Iraqi border.

A large-scale Turkish military opera-

tion could complicate matters in Iraq.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates have warned Turkey against such a military action, urging a political resolution.

The general elections and presidential election in Turkey this summer stalled any anti-PKK activity, but the issue continues to simmer as Kurdish separatist attacks take lives in the predominantly Kurdish southeast.

The growing international tension surrounding Iran's nuclear ambitions has added another layer of complexity to Turkey's relationship with the United States and Europe, which have accused the Iranians of trying to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran says its nuclear program is for civilian energy.

Erdogan has strongly opposed the idea of military action against Iran, calling instead for an objective analysis of the Iranian nuclear program.

He questioned the accusations against Iran, saying, "We have to trust their word that they are using nuclear power for peaceful humanitarian needs until otherwise is proven."

Turkey has signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation on natural gas with Iran, which is the second largest provider of natural gas to Turkey.

GULF NEWS

September 17, 2007

Paris: France's foreign minister warned on Sunday that the world should prepare for war if Iran obtains nuclear weapons and said European leaders were considering their own economic sanctions against the Islamic country.

Negotiations and two sets of UN Security Council sanctions have failed to persuade Iran to stop its uranium enrichment program, a process that can produce fuel for nuclear power plants as well as material used in atomic weapons.

Iran insists its atomic activities are aimed only at producing energy, but the United States, its European allies and other world powers suspect Iranian authorities of seeking nuclear weapons.

Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, speaking on RTL radio, called for "more

effective sanctions" against Iran if it continues to resist the demands to suspend uranium enrichment.

"We will not accept that such a bomb is made. We must prepare ourselves for the worst," he said, specifying that could mean a war. He did not elaborate on what kind of preparations that would entail.

"We have decided, while negotiations are under way ... to prepare for eventual sanctions outside the United Nations, which would be European sanctions," he said.

Kouchner was not specific about what penalties Europe might impose, other than to say they could be "economic sanctions regarding financial movements."

Sarkozy reportedly floated the possibility of European sanctions against Iran this

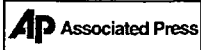
France warns: War with Iran



summer. In a major foreign policy speech last month, he mentioned the possibility of an attack on Iran, which he said would be "catastrophic". In Washington, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the Bush administration is committed to using diplomatic and economic means to counter the potential nuclear threat from Iran

Violence Down in Northern Iraqi

Province



By LAUREN FRAYER Associated Press Writer Sep 21, 2007

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) -- Competent Iraqi security forces and a deluge of tips from residents have helped U.S. troops tamp down violence in northern Iraq despite an influx of al-Qaida fighters responsible for occasional spectacular attacks, U.S. officials say.

But American commanders believe the key to lasting peace is to resolve the region's most vexing political problem - Kurds hold too much power in the local government at the expense of Sunni Arabs.

The situation here is somewhat similar to that in Baghdad, where U.S. troops have managed to reduce violence but politicians have failed to

The imbalance in national government was redressed somewhat in the December 2005 parliament elections, when many Sunnis voted and more of them were elected to parliament.

But the January 2005 election was the last time Iraqis voted for local officials - and the imbalance in provincial government remains. Many Arabs here believe their Kurdish local leaders do not represent them.

The solution, U.S. and Iraqi officials say, is in a draft law that remains stalled in Iraq's parliament: the Provincial Powers Act. It lays out a timetable for new elections, and also delineates the separation of powers between provincial leaders and Iraq's federal government.

The law is among several key pieces of power-sharing legislation that Washington considers essential to peace. But the bills are still bogged down in Baghdad.

U.S. and Iraqi forces have managed to keep violence under control despite the ethnic tension and occasional high profile attacks such as the August truck bombings in the town of Qahataniya that killed at least 400 people.

In Ninevah's provincial capital, Mosul, the U.S. military says the number of attacks has dropped to 66 per week, compared to a weekly average of 95 in January. That's been a boon for Mosul, Iraq's third-largest city.

But the provincial council's makeup has stymied progress on the political front.

"When you go from 18 attacks a day to 10 a day now, I think, 'Somebody help us out here on the political side,'" said Twitty, from Spartanburg, S.C.

The U.S. commander in northern Iraq, Army Maj. Gen. Benjamin Mixon, had recommended that Ninevah province shift to Iraqi control in August.

But with a springtime influx of al-Qaida fighters, along with the province's precarious political balance, that date was pushed back to at least November.

This past May, Ninevah's scruffy hills absorbed hundreds of al-Qaida fighters seeking refuge from coalition offensives farther south around Baghdad, Mixon said.

They joined about 15 foreign militants who remained in Ninevah after a prison break in Mosul freed up to 70 terror suspects in March, he said. The influx of al-Qaida militants fleeing U.S. and Iraqi operations around Baghdad, plus the escaped inmates, mixed for a deadly recipe.

On May 16, nine car bombs went off near marketplaces and Iraqi police stations across Mosul. Since then, U.S. and Iraqi officials say they've been able to quell what could have been a sustained al-Qaida campaign.

"We have a saying in Iraq, that when you stumble and fall down, you end up rising twice as tall," said Akeed Hassan, the 37-year-old head of Mosul police, noting that residents are given many tips to authorities about movements by al-Qaida in Iraq. He refused to give his full name out of security concerns. While attacks on civilians by al-Qaida in Iraq have occurred only rarely since May, Hassan and other Iraqi security officials are still frequent targets.

Hassan and other Iraqi and American officials said the province's Sunni Arabs turned against al-Qaida after the May 16 attacks, and anonymous tips from the local community have doubled.

Most of Ninevah's Arabs now support the provincial government, and are pushing for new elections in which they believe they will win a greater share of power, officials said.

"We meet with Sunnis here in public forums and in very discreet ones, and they all readily acknowledge (the 2005 election boycott) was a mistake," said Joshua Polacheck, public diplomacy officer for the U.S. State Department's provincial reconstruction team in Ninevah. "I don't know one Sunni Arab who says it wasn't a mistake to boycott those elections."



reach agreements for long-term stability.

With about 2.7 million residents, Ninevah is Iraq's second-largest province in area behind Anbar, and second only to Baghdad in population. Ninevah's parched, rolling hills - crisscrossed by the Tigris River - are bounded by Syria to the west, and stretch up to snowcapped mountains in Kurdish territory to the north and east.

It is also the country's most diverse, with dozens of ethnic and religious minorities including the ancient Yazidi sect. Homeland of the biblical prophet Jonah, Ninevah contains many archaeological ruins and some of the oldest Christian monasteries in the world.

About 45 percent of Ninevah province is Sunni Arab, 40 percent is Kurdish and 15 percent is Christian or Shiite. Yet three-quarters of provincial council members won their seats running on a Kurdish ticket. The governor is a Sunni Arab and his deputy is Kurdish.

That imbalance leads some Sunni Arabs to suspect the Kurds are trying to expand their influence southward from their autonomous - and more peaceful and economically flourishing - Kurdish zone to the north, said Col. Stephen Twitty, the top U.S. military commander in Ninevah province.

Such suspicions, he said, have fueled the insurgency.

"I think if we solve the Arab-Kurdish issue here, we go a long way toward solving the Sunni Arab insurgency," Twitty said.

Ninevah's lopsided political layout is a consequence of the Sunni Arab boycott of January 2005 elections, which ushered in representational government across Iraq for the first time in modern history.

At the national level, the Sunni boycott gave Iraq's majority Shiites and their Kurdish allies a much bigger share of power than would have been expected based on their percentage of the population.

Le Monde
14 septembre 2007

Editorial

Inflexion sur l'Iran

Nicolas Sarkozy durcit la politique française envers l'Iran. Le chef de l'Etat s'efforce de convaincre les pays européens, Allemagne en tête, d'adopter des sanctions accrues contre Téhéran, hors du cadre du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, qui a adopté deux volets de sanctions en décembre 2006 et mars 2007. Déjà, le 27 août, dans son premier discours de politique étrangère, il avait donné l'impression que Paris remplaçait le dialogue par la menace, en indiquant que si les Iraniens ne suspendaient pas, comme le réclame la communauté internationale, leurs activités d'enrichissement d'uranium, il ne resterait qu'« une alternative catastrophique : la bombe iranienne ou le bombardement de l'Iran ».

M. Sarkozy semble opérer ainsi un véritable tournant diplomatique. En juin, il avait évoqué l'hypothèse de sanctions accrues et autonomes avec la secrétaire d'Etat américaine, Condoleezza Rice. Et les diplomates ont travaillé activement après sa rencontre avec le président George Bush, en août. Il donne l'impression de s'aligner sur Washington, qui prend déjà des sanctions unilatérales contre Téhéran.

L'Iran fait peur. C'est une réalité – même si Téhéran

ne cesse de répéter qu'il n'a pas de programme nucléaire militaire. Il fait peur à ses voisins, Israël ou pays arabes sunnites, et au-delà. Nul ne conteste qu'il faut sanctionner les Iraniens pour leur refus de donner des garanties absolues qu'ils ne cherchent pas à fabriquer la bombe atomique – et actuellement leur refus de suspendre l'enrichissement d'uranium –, et nul ne conteste que la communauté internationale a raison d'agir préventivement plutôt que de découvrir un jour que les mollahs au pouvoir à Téhéran possèdent l'arme nucléaire. Mais le tournant diplomatique de M. Sarkozy pose problème.

D'une part, des sanctions hors ONU risquent de faire voler en éclats un très fragile consensus international. Elles inciteraient la Russie et la Chine, voire certains pays européens, à contester une politique qui pourrait être perçue comme émanant d'un nouvel axe Washington-Londres-Paris. D'autre part, un alignement sur Washington, et plus précisément sur une administration Bush qui, elle aussi, fait parfois peur, et dont la diplomatie est fortement contestée, ternirait l'image de la France auprès de tous ceux qui contestent la vision du monde qui est celle du président américain.

Concernant l'Iran et le dossier nucléaire, personne ne peut prétendre détenir la clé d'une solution idéale, brandir des certitudes ou donner des leçons de diplomatie. Mais une mise au diapason de Paris sur un George Bush décrédibilisé et en fin de règne est une autre affaire. Même sans certitudes sur l'Iran, ce serait une erreur. ■

Le Monde
21 septembre 2007

Washington concentre ses attaques sur les Gardiens de la révolution iraniens

WASHINGTON
CORRESPONDANTE

A la veille d'une réunion du groupe des six (les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité, plus l'Allemagne) à New York, vendredi 21 septembre, prélude à des négociations aux Nations unies sur une nouvelle résolution concernant le nucléaire iranien, les Etats-Unis maintiennent la pression contre Téhéran. Ils soulignent son rôle « néfaste » en Irak et en Afghanistan tout en répétant qu'ils veulent s'en tenir à une approche visant à contenir le régime iranien. Et si le terme de « guerre » est parfois employé, c'est de « guerre froide » dont il est fait mention.

Les accusations américaines portent sur les agissements des Gardiens de la révolution, l'armée idéologique du régime iranien, dont est issu le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Devant le Congrès, l'ambassadeur américain à Bagdad, Ryan Crocker, et le général David Petraeus, commandant des forces américaines en Irak, n'ont pas caché, le 10 septembre, que l'influence grandissante de l'Iran dans la région est l'une

des raisons pour lesquelles Washington juge nécessaire une présence de longue durée en Irak. « Le président Ahmadinejad a dit que si les Etats-Unis quittent l'Irak, l'Iran est prêt à combler le vide. C'est cela qui est en jeu », a expliqué le 12 septembre la secrétaire d'Etat, Condoleezza Rice.

Soutien à l'opposition

L'ambassadeur Crocker, qui a été autorisé à entamer le premier dialogue officiel entre les deux pays depuis 1979, a affirmé que les Gardiens de la révolution avaient entrepris de créer en Irak un mouvement de type Hezbollah libanais. Le général Petraeus a précisé que la capture du chef des commandos de l'armée du Mahdi, Qaïs Khazali, a permis de confirmer que la milice chiïte a été entraînée par l'unité d'élite Al-Qods des Gardiens de la révolution.

A propos de l'Afghanistan, les responsables américains ont laissé filtrer que la force multinationale conduite par l'OTAN avait inter-

cepté le 6 septembre une importante livraison d'armes iraniennes destinées aux talibans alors que ceux-ci luttent contre le gouvernement d'Hamid Karzai, dont Téhéran est l'allié. Là encore les Américains ont mis en cause les Gardiens de la révolution et non pas les plus hautes autorités à Téhéran. Les militaires américains sont inquiets de constater que ce sont les mêmes mines meurtrières contre les véhicules blindés qui sont utilisées en Afghanistan et en Irak.

Ces exemples ont été avancés pour convaincre, semble-t-il, le Congrès et l'opinion du danger stratégique que représenterait un retrait précipité d'Irak. Quand le sénateur et « faucon » démocrate Joseph Lieberman a demandé au général Petraeus si le moment n'était pas venu de lui donner les moyens de poursuivre les fauteurs de troubles Iraniens de l'autre côté de la frontière, le militaire a été pris de court. « La Force multinationale devrait se concentrer sur l'Irak », a-t-il répondu.

A l'approche de la venue de M. Ahmadinejad à l'ONU, les Iraniens ont libéré, mercredi, le sociologue Irano-Américain Kian Tajbakhsh qu'ils détenaient depuis mai sous l'accusation de chercher à provoquer un changement de régime. Emprisonnée pour les mêmes raisons pendant plusieurs mois, l'universitaire Irano-Américaine, Haleh Esfandiari, a aussi pu quitter l'Iran, début septembre. De leur côté, les forces américaines détiennent les cinq « diplomates » iraniens capturés à Erbil, dans le Kurdistan irakien, en janvier. Selon l'agence iranienne IRNA, le premier ministre irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki, a promis d'obtenir leur libération à l'occasion du Ramadan.

Les Etats-Unis continuent à soutenir financièrement les opposants et les organisations de défense des droits de l'homme iraniens. Selon le *Washington Post*, des actions clandestines américaines auraient été entreprises en Iran, notamment de désinformation. ■

CORINE LESNES



Des militaires américains surveillent la frontière irako-iraniennne. L'armée US a annoncé la création d'une nouvelle base à l'est de Bagdad.

Bush et Ahmadinejad dans une logique d'affrontement

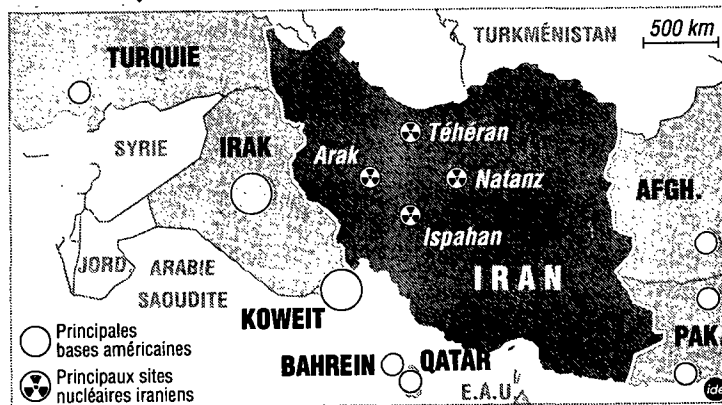
Les Américains accusent de plus en plus l'Iran d'être le principal responsable de leur échec en Irak.

LA POSSIBILITÉ de voir la crise du nucléaire iranien déboucher sur des bombardements américains massifs de l'Iran n'a rien d'un scénario de politique-fiction. Les rapports exécrables entre les deux pays se sont encore dégradés depuis le début de l'année, et leurs politiques respectives suivent aujourd'hui une trajectoire de collision.

Les relations diplomatiques entre les deux pays n'existent plus depuis la prise d'otages de l'ambassade américaine à Téhéran en 1979, épisode qui continue d'ailleurs de peser lourdement sur la psychologie des deux parties. Les Américains n'ont jamais digéré l'affront. Les Iraniens en ont fait leur prise de la Bastille, et l'acte fondateur de la République islamique.

L'occupation de l'Irak n'a pas contribué à réduire les risques d'une confrontation, bien au contraire. La chute de Saddam au printemps 2003 a un moment inquiété les Iraniens. Hasard du calendrier, c'est à ce moment que Téhéran a multiplié les signes de bonne volonté, allant jusqu'à suspendre son programme d'enrichissement nucléaire.

Mais les déboires américains ont rendu confiance aux dirigeants iraniens, même si plusieurs factions à Téhéran s'opposent sur l'évaluation de la menace. Celle des durs comme Ahmadinejad est persuadée que les Américains ne



seront pas plus capables de mettre leurs menaces à exécution qu'ils ne le furent en 1979 et est prête à la surenchère nucléaire. Le guide de la République islamique, l'ayatollah Khamenei, le seul ayant théoriquement le pouvoir d'arrêter le programme nucléaire, a expliqué la semaine dernière dans un discours télévisé que les États-Unis avaient échoué au Moyen-Orient, et que leur influence était « déclinante ». Un camp plus pragmatique craint cependant de tout perdre à force de trop jouer et s'oppose dans les coulisses à cette fuite en avant. Hachémi Rafsandjani, récemment élu à la tête du Conseil des experts, est l'un de leurs chefs de file.

« Sortir par le haut »

Du côté américain, on voit de plus en plus l'enlèvement irakien comme une conséquence des manœuvres iraniennes, et Téhéran comme une partie du problème. George Bush, affaibli politiquement par l'Irak, reste un président

sûr de sa mission historique. Il a annoncé à plusieurs reprises son intention de régler la question du nucléaire iranien avant la fin de son mandat.

Militairement, l'enlèvement américain immobilise une partie des forces terrestres, mais ne touche guère les énormes moyens aériens et navals du Pentagone. L'US Air Force dispose à présent de bases aériennes en Irak, plates-formes idéales pour lancer une campagne de bombardements. Les installations nucléaires iraniennes sont à la fois dispersées, entre Natanz, au centre du pays, Busher, sur les rives du Golfe, et Arak, près de Qom, et enterrées, parfois à plusieurs dizaines de mètres de profondeur ou sous d'épaisses chapes de béton. Certaines sont aussi proches de grandes agglomérations, comme le centre d'essais d'Ispahan.

Mais la précision et la puissance des nouvelles munitions intelligentes américaines se sont encore accrues depuis l'attaque contre l'Irak en 2003. Et selon un modus

operandi déjà soigneusement rodé contre l'Irak ou contre la Serbie en 1999, les avions américains ont toutes les chances de ne faire qu'une bouchée de la défense aérienne iranienne.

Le calendrier diplomatique s'accélère. Les Iraniens sous-estiment les capacités militaires et la volonté politique américaine. L'Administration Bush est tentée de « sortir par le haut » du borbier irakien en lançant une nouvelle campagne contre l'Iran. À ces facteurs s'ajoutent les risques de voir

dégénérer la drôle de guerre que se livrent actuellement Américains et Iraniens en Irak et dans le Golfe.

Les raids américains se sont multipliés ces derniers mois en Irak, et notamment à Bagdad, contre des installations abritant des agents iraniens. Des armes livrées par l'Iran à diverses factions irakiennes ont été saisies, notamment les redoutables mines à explosif formé, les « penetrators », capables de percer les blindages les plus épais. Les Américains ont aussi annoncé la création d'une nouvelle base, à Zurbatiya, à l'est de Bagdad, pour contrôler la frontière avec l'Iran.

Dans le Golfe, les vedettes des pasdarans jouent à cache-cache avec les navires de guerre américains qui croisent le long des côtes iraniennes, multipliant les risques d'incidents susceptibles de dégénérer en crise diplomatique, comme lors de la capture des Royal Marines britanniques l'an dernier. Mais avec un dénouement plus dramatique.

ADRIEN JAULMES

ISRAËL

Le raid sur la Syrie, une répétition avant l'Iran ?

L'incursion de l'aviation israélienne menée le 6 septembre sur le territoire syrien avait un but précis : prouver que Tsahal est capable de répondre à toute menace régionale. Un avertissement pour Téhéran.

OBSERVER (extraits)

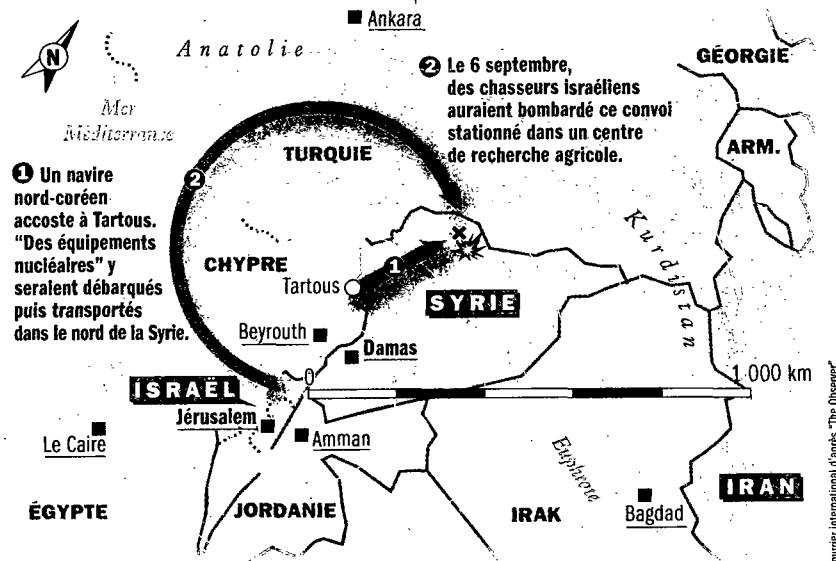
Londres

Le général Eliezer Shkedi, commandant en chef de l'armée de l'air israélienne, visitait la semaine dernière une base dans la ville côtière de Herzliya. Pour cet officier de 50 ans, qui dirige également le commandement iranien de Tsahal, l'organisme qui serait chargé de mener une guerre contre Téhéran si on lui en donnait l'ordre, il s'agissait de remonter le moral des troupes en rencontrant les pilotes et les navigateurs qui avaient volé durant le mois de guerre contre le Liban, en juillet 2006. Les journalistes, présents en grand nombre, étaient là pour une autre raison : ils comptaient interroger Shkedi à propos d'un mystérieux raid aérien mené tout récemment en territoire syrien, et qui portait le nom de code de "Verger".

Le général a ignoré toutes les questions, donnant ainsi le ton pour les jours suivants. Il a continué à garder résolument le silence, tout comme les politiciens et les responsables israéliens, même quand les interrogations sont venues du ministre des Affaires étrangères français, Bernard Kouchner, alors en visite officielle. Mais les rumeurs circulaient non seulement en Israël, mais à Washington et ailleurs. Le *New York Times* a affirmé que la cible du raid était un site nucléaire géré conjointement avec des techniciens nord-coréens. D'autres ont prétendu que les avions avaient frappé soit un convoi du Hezbollah, soit une usine de missiles, soit un camp terroriste.

Au beau milieu de la confusion, quelques détails troublants sont venus corroborer les faits connus. Deux réservoirs largués par un chasseur israélien ont été retrouvés de l'autre côté de la frontière turque. D'après des sources militaires turques, ils appartiendraient à un Raam F-15 I, la dernière génération de bombardiers israéliens à longue portée, qui dispose d'une autonomie de combat de plus de 2 000 kilomètres quand il est équipé de réservoirs largables. Cela leur permettrait d'atteindre des cibles en Iran, d'où les spéculations sur le fait qu'il s'agissait d'une "répétition" pour une frappe sur les installations nucléaires de Téhéran.

Quoi qu'il en soit, les premières informations tangibles ont enfin com-



mencé à faire surface vers la fin de la semaine dernière, grâce à une source israélienne impliquée dans l'opération Verger. Les détails sont encore flous, mais une chose est claire. Loin d'avoir été une incursion mineure, le survol de l'espace aérien syrien par les Israéliens, qui sont passés par le territoire de leur allié turc, aurait été beaucoup plus ambitieux. Environ huit appareils y auraient participé, dont les F-15 et les

F-16 les plus modernes, équipés de missiles Maverick et de bombes de 250 kilos. *The Observer* est en mesure de révéler qu'un appareil de collecte de renseignements électroniques aurait accompagné les chasseurs.

En dépit du scepticisme ambiant, la nature des allégations, à défaut des faits eux-mêmes, s'est précisée, essentiellement d'après des sources proches du gouvernement Bush. Une succession de fuites fragmentaires de la part de responsables américains, fuites laissant l'impression d'avoir été coordonnées, permet de reconstituer un récit qui associe magouilles nucléaires et les derniers membres de l'"axe du mal" – Iran, Corée du Nord et Syrie.

UNE DÉSINFORMATION COMME AVANT LA GUERRE EN IRAK

Elle inclut également plusieurs des priorités de la politique étrangère des néoconservateurs : le fait que la Corée du Nord n'ait pas été suffisamment surveillée dans le cadre de l'accord portant sur son désarmement nucléaire,

et qu'elle se déleste de son matériel en Iran et en Syrie, lesquels, à leur tour, aident le Hezbollah à réarmer. Sous-tendant toutes ces accusations, on retrouve un soupçon qui n'est pas sans rappeler les renseignements falsifiés qui ont abouti à la guerre contre l'Irak : les trois pays collaboreraient pour fournir une arme non conventionnelle au Hezbollah.

Le raid en lui-même paraît étrange, tout autant, ironie du sort, que l'atmosphère de mystère délibéré qui l'entoure, quand on sait à quel point Israël s'est vanté par le passé d'avoir accompli de telles opérations – y compris une frappe sur un réacteur irakien. Là, le secret avait été si bien gardé qu'au moment où ils sont montés dans leurs appareils, les pilotes israéliens ne connaissaient rien de la nature de la cible qu'ils avaient reçu l'ordre de "traiter". Selon un spécialiste du rensei-

gnement cité dans le *Washington Post* qui s'est entretenu avec des pilotes ayant pris part au raid, la cible de l'attaque, qui ne leur a été révélée qu'une fois en l'air, était une installation située dans le nord de la Syrie, présentée comme un centre de recherche agricole sur l'Euphrate, près de la frontière turque. D'après cette version des événements, un navire nord-coréen, transportant officiellement une cargaison de ciment, avait accosté trois jours plus tôt dans le port syrien de Tartous. Il aurait également transporté des équipements nucléaires.

Andrew Semmel, adjoint au secrétaire d'Etat américain pour les questions de non-prolifération, a été le plus direct. Depuis Rome, il a déclaré le 15 septembre que "des Nord-Coréens se trouvaient en Syrie" et que Damas avait peut-être eu des contacts avec des "fournisseurs secrets" pour se procurer du matériel nucléaire. "Certaines indications montrent qu'ils sont bel et bien actifs dans ce secteur, a-t-il dit. Nous savons qu'un certain nombre de techniciens étrangers se sont rendus en Syrie. Nous savons qu'il y a peut-être des contacts entre la Syrie et certains fournisseurs secrets d'équipements nucléaires. Reste à savoir si cela a débouché sur quelque chose."

D'autres responsables ou anciens responsables connaissant à la fois la Syrie et la Corée du Nord ont accueilli ces affirmations avec scepticisme. Ils ont souligné que la Syrie, au bord de la faillite, n'a ni les moyens économiques ni la base industrielle nécessaire pour soutenir le type de programme nucléaire dépeint, et ont ajouté que Damas avait depuis longtemps renoncé à s'engager dans la voie du nucléaire. D'autres encore ont rappelé que, de toute façon, la Corée du Nord et la Syrie entretiennent depuis longtemps des relations étroites. La présence des Nord-Coréens en Syrie n'aurait donc rien d'exceptionnel.

Bruce Reidel, du centre Saban de la Brookings Institution, un ancien

membre des services secrets américains, se montre lui aussi sceptique dans les colonnes du *Washington Post* : "Il s'est agi d'une opération israélienne importante, mais je n'arrive pas à savoir si la cible était nucléaire", ajoutant que "cette hypothèse rencontre un fort scepticisme" et qu'en réalité les installations auraient pu être liées à des armes chimiques ou biologiques.

Le flou qui entoure l'opération Verger s'est encore accru. En effet, certains ont prétendu que les informations dont disposaient les Etats-Unis à propos du prétendu "site agricole" ne venaient pas de leurs propres renseignements et de leurs satellites, mais leur avaient été transmises par Tel-Aviv au cours des six derniers mois.

L'ARMÉE DE L'AIR ISRAËLIENNE SANS ÉGALE DANS LA RÉGION

Quelle que soit la vérité de ces allégations contre la Syrie - Israël étant connu pour avoir souvent recours à des manœuvres de désinformation pour masquer ses opérations -, le message de Tel-Aviv est, lui, sans ambiguïté : si l'allié de la Syrie, l'Iran, est sur le point d'acquiescer à une arme nucléaire et que le monde ne parvient pas à l'en empêcher par la voie diplomatique ou militaire, alors l'Etat hébreu l'en empêchera par ses propres moyens.

On peut donc considérer l'opération Verger comme une répétition, un raid déployant le même type d'appareils modifiés à longue portée ache-

tés précisément aux Etats-Unis en ayant les sites nucléaires iraniens à l'esprit. Israël fait ainsi la démonstration, à l'intention de Damas et de Téhéran, des capacités de ses avions. Le raid pourrait par conséquent avoir pour but de dissuader la Syrie d'intervenir dans l'éventualité d'un raid sur l'Iran. C'est également une façon de rappeler que, si les forces terrestres d'Israël ont été humiliées lors de la deuxième guerre du Liban, son armée de l'air reste puissante et sans égale dans la région.

Surtout, ce raid sur la Syrie a eu lieu alors que, après un été relativement tranquille, les spéculations à propos d'une guerre contre l'Iran vont à nouveau bon train. Il est peut-être plus inquiétant d'apprendre que, selon des sources bien informées proches de consultants conservateurs aux Etats-Unis, le bureau du vice-président Dick Cheney aurait diffusé des "instructions" recommandant de battre le rappel en faveur d'une guerre contre Téhéran. Au bout du compte, il n'y a pas de mystère. Tout juste un avertissement terrifiant. Dans un monde de menaces et d'actions par procuration, le risque d'une opération militaire contre l'Iran reste apparemment à l'ordre du jour.

Peter Beaumont

Le Monde Dimanche 23 - Lundi 24 septembre 2007

Iran : M^{me} Rice et M. Kouchner privilégient la diplomatie

Les ministres des affaires étrangères américain et français ont évoqué à Washington la possibilité de nouvelles sanctions contre Téhéran

WASHINGTON
CORRESPONDANTE

Les Etats-Unis et la France privilégient la solution diplomatique pour amener l'Iran à cesser l'enrichissement d'uranium. A l'issue d'un tête-à-tête suivi d'un déjeuner de travail à Washington, les chefs des diplomaties américaine et française, Condoleezza Rice et Bernard Kouchner, ont affirmé, vendredi, leur unité de vue alors que leurs négociateurs cherchaient avec les autres pays du groupe de sanctions sur

l'Iran (Chine, Russie, Allemagne, Royaume-Uni) à renforcer leurs moyens de pression sur Téhéran.

Lors de leur conférence de presse commune, M^{me} Rice et M. Kouchner ont exposé les différentes voies par lesquelles ils cherchent à amener l'Iran à suspendre son programme d'enrichissement. Une réunion d'experts européens a eu lieu vendredi matin, a dit M. Kou-

chner, pour explorer la formule désormais préconisée par la France, de sanctions en dehors du régime de l'ONU. Celles-ci porteraient sur « le système bancaire et industriel de l'Iran ». Une autre réunion, des membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité plus l'Allemagne, présidée par l'Américain Nicholas Burns, a commencé à explorer parallèlement les élé-

ments d'une nouvelle résolution à l'ONU. Les ministres poursuivront la discussion le 28 septembre à New York, a indiqué M. Burns.

Une voie « intéressante »

M. Kouchner a aussi parlé d'une autre voie qu'il trouve « personnellement tout à fait intéressante » : celle qu'a entreprise d'explorer le directeur de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) Mohamed ElBaradei. Celui-ci a conclu, le 21 août, un accord avec la république islamique sur la mise au jour par l'Iran de son programme nucléaire antérieur à 2002. L'initiative de M. ElBaradei avait été désapprouvée mi-septembre par les Etats-Unis mais aussi par la France. Lors d'une conférence de presse, jeudi, M. Kouchner a indiqué qu'aucune résolution ne pourrait être adoptée tant que M. El-

Baradei n'aurait pas fait sa première évaluation du degré de coopération des Iraniens en novembre.

Alors que les Etats-Unis poussent à accentuer l'étranglement de l'Iran, le Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, un organisme indépendant spécialisé dans les questions de non-prolifération, vient de montrer qu'ils n'ont pas encore réussi à appliquer les sanctions précédentes. Sur les 25 individus désignés par le Conseil de sécurité, deux seulement ont jusqu'à présent été soumis à restrictions aux Etats-Unis. Sur les 25 compagnies répertoriées, 8 n'ont pas vu leurs avoirs gelés.

Les raisons invoquées sont d'ordre pratique, liées à la bureaucratie et à l'absence de relations diplomatiques entre Washington et Téhéran. Les Etats-Unis estiment manquer de précisions suffisantes sur les identités et les numéros de passeport. Les formalités sont aussi ralenties par le fait que le dossier est géré à la fois par le département du Trésor et par le département d'Etat. Les experts du Wisconsin Project sont d'autant plus étonnés que les listes de l'ONU sont généralement réalisées à partir des listes américaines. ■

CORINE LESNES

TURQUIE

Le général Basbug souligne la menace grandissante du séparatisme en Irak

Nouvelles d'Arménie

25 septembre 2007, par Stéphane/armenews

Le général Ilker Basbug, commandant des Forces armées terrestres turques, a souligné lundi la menace grandissante du Pkk dans le nord de l'Irak et le danger du séparatisme.

"L'entité (administration autonome kurde) au nord de l'Irak et les évolutions dans cette région de l'Irak ont donné des forces - comme cela n'a jamais été le cas auparavant dans l'histoire - politique, juridique, militaire et psychologique aux Kurdes irakiens", a-t-il déclaré lors d'un discours à l'académie militaire d'Ankara, en soulignant la mauvaise influence que pourrait

avoir cette situation sur une partie des citoyens turcs dans les provinces frontalières avec l'Irak. "Un nouveau modèle d'appartenance pourrait influencer nos citoyens", a-t-il mis en garde.

"Les autres problèmes politiques importants sont la présence du Pkk dans le nord de l'Irak, le fait qu'elle puisse s'alimenter dans cette région, le silence des USA et des autorités irakiennes face à la présence de l'organisation terroriste", a-t-il ajouté. "Il est temps pour les Etats-Unis de comprendre que toute solution qui n'est pas approuvée par la Turquie ne peut pas être

permanente pour l'Irak", a-t-il encore ajouté et enchaîné : "Les USA doivent également comprendre que la présence du Pkk dans le nord de l'Irak représente un danger vital pour la Turquie et que le moment n'est plus celui des palabres mais celui de passer à l'action". Faute de réponse à ses démarches répétées auprès de Washington et du gouvernement central irakien de mettre fin aux agissements du Pkk au nord de l'Irak, Ankara menace d'intervenir contre les bases de l'organisation terroriste, regroupées dans la région montagneuse au nord de l'Irak.

AP Associated Press

L'Irak refuse d'autoriser la Turquie à pourchasser les rebelles

Associated Press 28 sep, 2007 ANKARA, Turquie-

La Turquie et l'Irak ont signé vendredi un pacte antiterroriste pour coopérer contre les rebelles séparatistes kurdes, mais Bagdad a refusé une des principales demandes d'Ankara: l'autoriser à envoyer des troupes sur son territoire pour pourchasser les rebelles du Pkk.

Les deux parties, néanmoins, ont annoncé qu'elles continueraient les pourparlers concernant la demande turque de pouvoir franchir la frontière afin de poursuivre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui conservent des bases dans les zones reculées du nord de l'Irak.

Le ministre irakien de l'Intérieur, Jaouad al-Bolani, a apparemment rejeté la

demande sous la pression de l'administration kurde irakienne, qui s'oppose fermement à une intervention militaire turque dans le nord de l'Irak. Les autorités kurdes ont fait savoir qu'elles devraient accepter l'accord si cette demande était retirée.

"Il n'a pas été possible de parvenir à un accord sur des mesures contre des organisations terroristes dans les régions frontalières, et sur un accroissement de la sécurité et de la coopération dans les zones frontalières", a déclaré le ministre turc de l'Intérieur Besir Atalay lors d'une conférence de presse. "Toutefois, nous espérons que cette question sera résolue dans l'avenir".

AFP

Irak: rejet du plan partition américain, seuls les Kurdes se réjouissent

BAGDAD (AFP) 29 sep. 2007

- Responsables chiites et sunnites en Irak ont fait front contre une proposition du Sénat américain de partition de leur pays, alors que les dirigeants kurdes la saluaient samedi "comme l'unique solution" à l'actuel chaos.

Le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, un chiite, a estimé qu'une division de son pays "serait catastrophique non seulement pour l'Irak, mais pour toute la région". De retour de New York, où il a assisté à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU, il a ajouté qu'il "appartient aux Irakiens de décider de telles questions et ils souhaitent maintenir l'unité de leur pays".

Le Sénat américain a approuvé mercredi par 75 voix contre 23 une résolution non-contraignante sur un découpage de l'Irak en trois régions de nature confessionnelle: chiite dans le sud, sunnite au centre et kurde dans le nord.

Ce plan aux accents fédéralistes est, selon ses défenseurs, la seule solution pour mettre un terme aux violences qui secouent l'Irak.

Il est parrainé par le sénateur démocrate et candidat à la Maison Blanche Joseph Biden, qui le présente comme la clé politique pour permettre un retrait des troupes américaines tout en empêchant le chaos.

Le partage du pays en Etats distincts en fonction des différentes communautés est toutefois rejeté par l'administration du président George W. Bush. Ce vote, symbolique, est avant tout une nouvelle péripétie du débat de politique intérieure américaine sur le dossier irakien.

Il a cependant suscité une vive émotion en Irak, où la question du fédéralisme reste un sujet très sensible alors que le pays est ravagé par les violences confessionnelles.

M. Maliki a ainsi souhaité que le parlement irakien se réunisse dès que possible pour rejeter formellement, par un vote des députés, la proposition du Sénat américain.

"Ce plan de division va contre les intérêts des Irakiens et contre la paix", a commenté de son côté un porte-parole du grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, princi-

pale autorité spirituelle des chiites irakiens.

"Tout pays voisin qui soutiendrait ce projet en paierait le prix par une instabilité dans toute la région", a averti cheikh Abdoul Mahdi al-Karbalai, qui s'exprimait au nom du grand ayatollah.

"Nous rejetons ce vote, sur la forme comme sur le fond", a pour sa part réagi un membre du bureau du jeune chef radical chiite Moqtada Sadr, très populaire parmi les chiites irakiens.

Le mouvement Sadr a "demandé que le gouvernement rejette le projet du Sénat américain et le condamne très clairement comme une atteinte aux aspirations du peuple irakien", a expliqué Issam al-Moussaoui, dénonçant une "flagrante interférence dans les affaires intérieures de l'Irak".

Le Conseil des oulémas musulmans, importante organisation sunnite et considérée comme proche de l'insurrection, a également condamné la proposition américaine, qui "prend le prétexte d'éviter les violences pour imposer la division de l'Irak". Cette division est "l'un des principaux objectifs de l'occupation américaine", a accusé le Conseil des oulémas, qui a appelé les Irakiens à la rejeter.

Le vote du sénat américain a également provoqué une vaste condamnation sur la scène internationale: de la part de l'Iran, des monarchies du Golfe, de la Ligue arabe, de l'Organisation de la conférence islamique ou de la France.

La seule note discordante est venue du gouvernement de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, qui a salué chaleureusement la résolution américaine comme "la seule solution viable aux problèmes de l'Irak".

Cette résolution est un appel "à reconstruire l'Etat irakien sur la base du fédéralisme", s'est réjoui le gouvernement du Kurdistan, qui bénéficie déjà d'une large autonomie par rapport à Bagdad.

"Une solution fédérale pour l'Etat irakien ne signifie pas la division, mais plutôt une union volontaire", selon les autorités kurdes irakiennes

Bush attaquera-t-il

l'Iran ?

Analyse

Corine Lesnes

George Bush attaquera-t-il l'Iran ? Une nouvelle fois, le président américain est décrit le doigt sur la détente ou, sinon lui, son vice-président Dick Cheney. L'enlèvement de l'armée américaine en Irak ne les dissuaderait pas : l'attaque serait effectuée par l'aviation et porterait sur les « 2 000 cibles » qui auraient été repérées par le Pentagone. La théorie des néoconservateurs selon laquelle l'Irak ne retrouvera la stabilité que lorsque la crise avec Téhéran sera réglée triompherait.

Cinq ans après le discours où M. Bush mit en demeure les Nations unies d'agir pour « désarmer Saddam Hussein », les comparaisons avec l'Irak sont inévitables. M. Bush devait intervenir, le 25 septembre, devant l'assemblée générale de l'ONU. Mohamed ElBaradei, le chef de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), semble se placer en travers du chemin, comme hier Hans Blix et ses inspecteurs en armements chimiques et bactériologiques. Comme sur l'Irak, le dénouement semble inexorable. Deux porte-avions sont prépositionnés dans la région ; l'Iran est rendu responsable de l'échec en Irak : « La politique iranienne de l'administration porte certaines des marques de la campagne destinée à "vendre" la guerre en Irak », relève William Hartung de la New America Foundation.

Depuis deux ans, la liste est longue des révélations sur les préparatifs de guerre. Les bruits de bottes coïncident avec chaque échéance importante : que ce soit le renouvellement des sanctions à l'ONU ou le débat américain sur l'Irak. En janvier, alors qu'il annonçait le « surge » [nouveau plan], M. Bush a fait monter la tension en dénonçant les ingérences de l'Iran en Irak et en promettant de s'y

opposer. Le 13 septembre, il a justifié le maintien de 130 000 hommes en Irak par la menace stratégique posée par l'Iran, qui « profiterait du chaos » qui suivrait un retrait et serait « encouragé à se doter de l'arme nucléaire et dominer la région ».

Le tout-Washington bruisse de nouveau de rumeurs. Dans son blog, Barnett Rubin, un spécialiste reconnu de l'Afghanistan, ne veut pas « alarmer » ses lecteurs mais juge qu'il y a « trop de signes » qu'une autre « aventure militaire » est en préparation. Steve Clemons, de la New America Foundation, raconte un dîner où les convives ont voté à main levée sur la probabilité de bombardements contre l'Iran. Seize, dont le démocrate Zbigniew Brzezinski, ont prédit que George Bush allait passer à l'attaque. Deux, dont le républicain Brent Scowcroft, ont parié le contraire.

Le principal argument de ceux qui croient aux frappes est que M. Bush a dit qu'il n'accepterait pas un Iran doté de l'arme nucléaire sous sa présidence. Connaissant son obstination, ses amis, comme ses ennemis, pensent qu'il tiendra parole. Mais plus le temps passe, plus il apparaît que M. Bush n'aura pas forcément besoin de passer à l'action pour remplir son engagement. Il lui reste 14 mois avant les élections qui doivent désigner son successeur. D'ici là, il y a peu de chances que l'Iran ait été déclaré doté de l'arme nucléaire.

« Nous affronterons ce danger avant qu'il ne soit trop tard », a dit M. Bush le 28 août, en évoquant le spectre d'un « holocauste nucléaire ». Reste à

définir « trop tard ». Il fut un temps où la conversion de l'hexafluorure d'uranium était vue comme un seuil catastrophique par les diplomates engagés dans la négociation. Aujourd'hui, Téhéran enrichit tranquillement l'uranium. Selon les experts, il faudrait que les Iraniens réussissent à faire tourner 3 000 centrifugeuses pendant presque un an pour obtenir le combustible nécessaire à une bombe. Le dernier rapport de l'AIEA a fait état de 2 000 centrifugeuses en opération.

Dans un article du magazine en ligne Salon.com, « Pourquoi Bush n'attaquera pas l'Iran », M. Clemons estime que le président est conscient que la Chine ou la Russie n'attendent qu'un nouveau faux pas de Washington, qui leur donnerait un contrôle renforcé des flux énergétiques. Et, ajoute-t-il, « si les bombes étaient prêtes, Bush ferait beaucoup plus pour préparer la nation et l'armée ». L'absence de surenchère sur l'urgence de la menace iranienne est en effet étonnante. A l'été 2005, le rapport de synthèse des agences du renseignement, le *National Intelligence Estimates*, donnait cinq à dix ans avant que l'Iran ne soit doté d'une capacité nucléaire militaire. Un an plus tard, John Negroponte, alors directeur national du renseignement, portait l'échéance à 2015. « C'est clairement erroné », affirme Gary Milhollin, le directeur du Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control. Le gouvernement essaye de nous faire croire que « si on ne peut pas le réparer, c'est que ce n'est pas cassé ». Les experts européens ont fini par s'étonner de se voir plus alarmistes que leurs homologues américains.

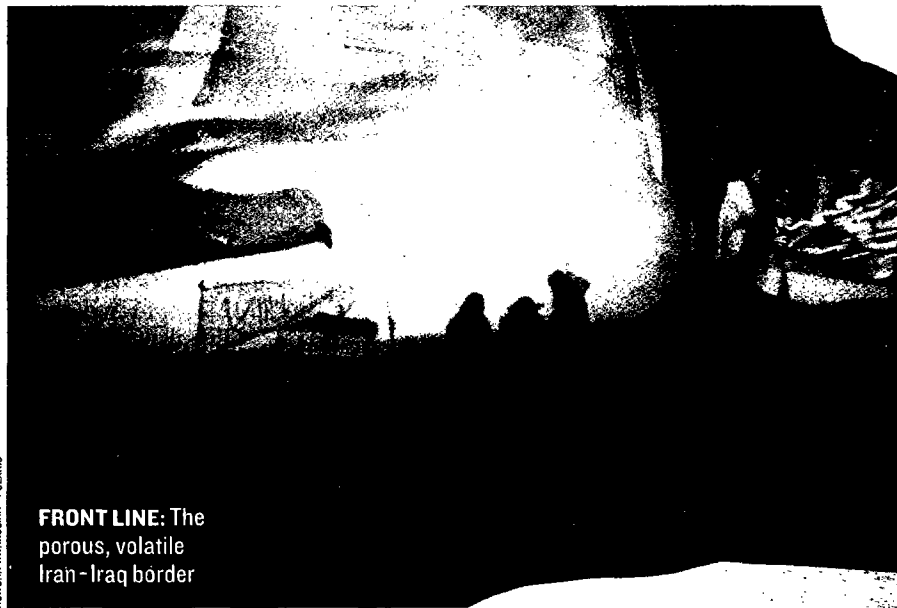
Ceux qui ne croient pas que M. Bush a pris sa décision craignent néanmoins le scénario d'une guerre « accidentelle » (pour l'éviter, les commandants américains dans le Golfe voudraient passer un accord avec les Iraniens pour éviter les « incidents en mer », a rapporté le *Washington Post*). Le cercle du vice-président Dick Cheney, quoique amoindri, reste paré de pouvoirs imprécis mais néfastes que la secrétaire d'Etat, Condoleezza Rice, et le secrétaire à la défense, Bob Gates, s'efforceraient de juguler. Un conseiller de Dick Cheney, David Wurmser, aurait évoqué, avant de quitter la Maison Blanche en juillet, la possibilité de « leurrer » le président : Israël, par exemple, procéderait à une frappe contre le réacteur de Natanz sans avertir Washington... Dans ce contexte, la mystérieuse frappe israélienne le 6 septembre contre une installation syrienne, présumée suspecte, a éveillé l'inquiétude de ceux qui croient au scénario d'une frappe préventive israélienne visant à entraîner l'Amérique dans un conflit.

Autre idée répandue : M. Bush serait obligé de frapper avant que les Etats-Unis n'entrent dans le vif de la campagne électorale. Là aussi, l'argument peut être retourné. Ni le président ni le vice-président ne sont candidats. Le tandem Bush-Cheney a les mains libres, sans avoir à s'embarrasser de considérations électorales. L'Iran est un sujet largement consensuel. Les démocrates n'ont pas réussi à adopter un projet d'amendement qui exigeait que le président demande l'autorisation du Congrès avant de lancer une action contre l'Iran.

Pour le professeur Norman Birnbaum, le scénario le plus probable est qu'il « préparera une attaque et remettra les plans à son successeur » comme Dwight Eisenhower le fit en 1961 avec John Kennedy à propos de Cuba et l'invasion de la baie des Cochons. George Bush se sert de la menace iranienne pour éviter un retrait d'Irak qui l'humilierait. Cela ne signifie pas qu'il ait l'intention d'attaquer. ■

What They Are Missing

QANDIL MOUNTAIN IS AN UNUSUAL TROUBLE SPOT. STRADDLING the Iran-Iraq border in the Kurdish regions of both countries, it is inaccessible and inhospitable. When I drove up the mountain in 1992, valleys with scorching summer temperatures gave way to large snowfields. At the time, Qandil was home base for a Western-oriented Kurdish democratic movement that infiltrated



FRONT LINE: The porous, volatile Iran-Iraq border

NEWSMA TAVAKOLIAN-POLARIS

political activists and guerrilla fighters into Iranian Kurdistan. Today that base is used by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a separatist group on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations for attacks in Turkey, and PJAK, its Iranian branch. Though the Petraeus and Crocker testimony last week focused on violence in and around Baghdad, the Kurdish border regions pose an explosive threat that could embroil Iran, Turkey, Iraq and the United States.

The PKK fought a 15-year war with Turkey that ended in 1999 with the capture of its leader Abdullah Ocalan. PKK remnants then fled to Qandil; ever since, Turkey has accused them of terrorist attacks and threatened to send troops against them. Iran has made the same accusations against PJAK, retaliated by shelling Kurdish border villages, and last week also threatened to send troops into Iraq.

All parties act as if the Kurds on Qandil were someone else's problem. Iran and Turkey demand that the Iraqi government stop the cross-border attacks. But the Iraqi government has no presence within a hundred miles of Qandil, which is in territory

nominally controlled by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government. For its part, the regional government has neither the stomach to battle fellow Kurds nor the helicopters to reach the remote Qandil base.

The United States, on the other hand, has the military power to dislodge both the PKK and the PJAK, but the last thing Washington needs now is to open a new front in the Iraq War. The Bush administration has told Ankara it sympathizes with its concerns but has no resources to strike the PKK. Meanwhile, the Iranians accuse the United States of supporting PJAK, a charge Washington denies.

The Bush administration has appointed Gen. Joe Ralston, the former NATO Supreme Commander, as a special envoy between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds. Although well regarded in both camps, Ralston's mission is only part-time and it is limited to the PKK. Washington should do more to smooth ties between the two sides. Apart from the PKK, relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan are surprisingly good. Iraqi Kurds remain grateful for Turkey's role in setting up and protecting

the Kurdish enclave after the 1991 gulf war. Turkey is now by far the largest investor in Iraqi Kurdistan. And most important, Turkey seems to have accepted the reality of an independent Kurdistan; even Kenan Evren, the Turkish president who prosecuted the war against the PKK, has acknowledged that "a Kurdish state" now exists in Iraq and that Turkey must get used to it. One major hurdle ahead is the upcoming referendum—due to be held at the end of the year—that will likely bring Iraq's oil-rich Kirkuk province into Kurdistan. U.S. diplomats should ease Turkey's concerns about Kirkuk's Turkmens—ethnic Turks who remained after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire—by ensuring they enjoy local autonomy and an outsize role in Kirkuk's future administration.

The United States should also encourage Turkey's efforts to address the grievances that enabled the PKK to gain so much support. In recent years, Turkey has legalized Kurdish-language broadcasts and permitted schooling in the Kurdish language. The cities of Turkey's southeast now have elected Kurdish mayors. And in the recent national elections, 20 Kurdish nationalists won seats as independents. The PKK itself has moderated, renouncing separatism in favor of Kurdish rights within Turkey. If Turkey were to enact a comprehensive amnesty (so far resisted by its military), most of the fighters on Qandil Mountain would return home and the PKK problem would disappear.

There is little hope for a settlement with Iran, however. In April 1992, I listened to the Kurdish leader Sadik Sharafkindi outline his hopes for peace with Tehran. But four months later he was shot dead by Iranian agents posing as peace emissaries. To this day, Iran has refused to deal with even moderate Kurds, and the price it pays is growing support for extremists like PJAK. But Washington must keep Iran from destabilizing Iraqi Kurdistan. At a minimum, the administration should be as vocal about Iranian shelling of Kurdish villagers as it is about Iran's other activities in Iraq. The matter might also be referred to the U.N. Security Council. Kurdistan's stable, democratic and pro-Western government represents America's only enduring success in Iraq; Washington should do all it can to protect it.

GALBRAITH is a former U.S. ambassador to Croatia, and has advised Iraq's Kurds.

Uncharted territory: Iraq's Kurdish region tries to rebuild its economy

Billboards in Iraqi Kurdistan's capital boast that luxury malls and hotels are on the way, but banking and insurance systems barely function. Cranes loom over building sites, but few government inspectors check the quality of construction.

This is economic development, on the fly. A sign at the office of a trade association sums up the freewheeling business environment in the part of Iraq controlled by a Kurdish administration.

"Please leave your gun at reception," it says.

The Kurdish zone north of Baghdad is mostly peaceful, while much of the rest of Iraq is a patchwork of factions at war with U.S.-led troops or one another. Development occurs because security is relatively good, but the economy is weak, dependent on imports, and prone to political uncertainty, institutional pitfalls and a lack of transparency.

Some investors are diving into this poor region full of untapped oil wealth, taking



risks that would be unacceptable in a Western-style business environment. They include Kurdish businessmen based in Europe and the United States, Turks, Gulf Arabs, and a smaller number of Europeans and Americans.

Sigma International Construction, a Chantilly, Virginia-based company, is building more than 350 luxury homes on the outskirts of Irbil. Right now, the "American Village" development is little more than leveled earth and shells of half-completed houses, designed with walk-in closets, back doors of sliding glass and fully equipped kitchens.

Jim Covert, Sigma's director in Iraqi Kurdistan, said 80 homes had been sold in advance, and several ministers from the regional Cabinet were clients. The most expensive residence, the "Palace," sells for US\$580,000.

"People don't blink," said Covert, who employs Serb foremen and Bangladeshi laborers because they are more skilled than Kurdish workers. "People have money here and they have nothing nice to spend it on."

The same optimism is visible at construction sites across the city, though most of them seem a long way from the Utopian billboard images of gleaming office towers and five-star hotels bordered by lush lawns. At least one housing development near the airport, named "Dream City," is behind schedule.

The regional investment board has licensed 51 projects with a total value of US\$5 billion since last year; about 20 percent of that money has been spent.

Two decades ago, most of Iraqi Kurdistan's villages were systematically destroyed during Saddam's Anfal campaign against the Kurdish population. U.N. sanctions imposed on the dictatorship also hurt the Kurds, even though they enjoyed a U.S.-backed safe haven.

Pell-mell development since the fall of Saddam in 2003 has yielded real benefits in the territory of about 4 million.

The two main cities, Irbil and Sulaimaniyah, have new airports and are building new roads, housing, malls and schools. Despite a recent outbreak of cholera in Kurdistan, many Irbil residents have access to clean water from a treatment facility built with help from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Irbil, home to the regional government, has a big park with rose beds, trimmed lawns and a canal with paddle boats. A granite monument displays the names of 98 people, including top Kurdish officials, who were killed in two suicide bombings in February 2004.

One new gasoline station in Irbil looks as good as anything in an American suburb or freeway stop. It takes credit cards, and has 16 pumps and a mini-market that sells potato chips, chocolate bars and other junk food from neighboring Turkey.

Hundreds of Turkish companies operate in Iraqi Kurdistan, even though their government has threatened to stage a cross-border attack on a separatist rebel group of Turkish Kurds who have bases in remote parts of northern Iraq.

Another source of political uncertainty is Kurdistan's relationship with Baghdad, where disputes over drafts of oil and revenue-sharing laws have blocked progress toward a unified, central government. Kurdistan's leaders signed an exploration deal with Hunt Oil Co. of Texas after drafting their own oil law, and the national oil ministry quickly questioned its legality.

Nazaneen Muhammad Wusu, regional minister of municipalities, said international bank loans for Kurdistan have to be approved by the central government, which amounts to a bottleneck on progress.

"Baghdad is not in a normal situation,"

she said. "They are more busy with security issues, political difficulties. We are suffering indirectly from the situation



there."

Iraqi Kurdistan is also on the national power grid, and suffers constant blackouts that force people to use private generators.

Eager to attract business, Iraqi Kurdistan passed an investment law last year that allows foreign investors to get free land, as well as import materials and repatriate profits without paying tax. But the banking system is so basic that it is difficult to wire money out of the country, and insurance is virtually nonexistent; most car owners, for example, drive without it.

Foreign agencies are helping to build up Iraqi Kurdistan's institutions, teaching basic skills such as how to use a computer. Still, a culture of transparency has yet to take hold and business deals often rely on the power of personal connections.

"There may be some corruption here and there, we don't deny it," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of the foreign relations department of the regional government. But he said Iraqi Kurdistan was committed to an open business environment that could eventually make it an economic "gateway" to the rest of Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdistan, however, lacks a strong industrial and agricultural base and is heavily dependent on imports of products such as milk and grain, a legacy in part of the U.N. oil-for-food program during Saddam's rule that delivered foreign products to Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdistan has bottled water plants, but many Kurds prefer to buy water from Iran and Turkey because they think the quality is better.

For all their problems, many Kurds exude an optimism that is all but impossible to find elsewhere in Iraq.

"I think things will get better," said Ali Abdullah, an Irbil bookshop owner whose best-sellers are romance novels and books of Islamic teachings. "There's a lot of development in this city. It will have a knock-on effect on other businesses

Guardian

Mark Tran and agencies - September 24, 2007

Iraqi Kurds caught up in US-Iran tensions

Iraqi Kurds today felt the squeeze from tensions between the US and Iran, as Tehran closed its border with the north of Iraq after US troops arrested an Iranian.

"Iran is setting up pressure in a bid to release its citizens detained by American (forces)," the Kurdistan trade minister, Mohammed Raouf, told Reuters.

US forces last week said they had arrested an Iranian they accused of smuggling roadside bombs into Iraq and training foreign fighters. The man was arrested in a raid by American soldiers on a hotel in Sulaimaniya, 160 miles north-east of Baghdad.

The US alleged that the man was a member of the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Iranian and Iraqi officials said the man was a member of a trade delegation.

The US is still holding five Iranians in the Kurdish city of Irbil after their arrest earlier this year. By closing its borders, Iran is putting economic pressure on the Kurdish regional government, a close ally of the US.

Mr Raouf complained that the move would cost the Kurdish authorities about \$1m (£500,000) dollars a day. "Closing the borders by Iran will create a spike in prices of imported commodities, like kerosene and foodstuffs," he said.

Mr Raouf also criticised Iran for closing the border during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, when prices were already higher.

Jamal Abdullah, a spokesman for the Kurdish government, told the Associated Press that Iran's move "will have a bad effect on the economic situation of the Kurdish government and will hurt the civilians as well".

"We are paying the price of what the Americans have done by arresting the Iranian."

The US has accused Iran of supporting Shia extremists as they target American troops in Iraq. In the latest allegations, a US military spokesman, Rear Admiral Mark Fox, said yesterday that Iran had smuggled advanced weapons into Iraq for use against American troops, including the Misagh 1, a portable surface-to-

air missile that uses an infrared guidance system.

Iran has rejected US allegations that it is smuggling weapons to Shia militias in Iraq - a denial that the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, reiterated in an interview aired yesterday on the CBS programme, 60 Minutes.

"We don't need to do that. We are very much opposed to war and insecurity," said Mr Ahmadinejad, who arrived in New York yesterday for the UN general assembly. "The insecurity in Iraq is detrimental to our interests."

Tensions between Iran and the US have aroused concern among Iraqi officials - many of whom are members of political parties with close ties to Tehran.

The Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, has also protested against the latest US arrest. Mr Talabani demanded the Iranian's release, warning the arrest could affect relations between the two neighbours.

Today's Zaman Ankara - september 25..2007

TODAYS ZAMAN

Gen. Başbuğ slams US inaction against PKK, EU reforms

A top Turkish military commander targeted Turkey's NATO ally, the US, on Monday in remarks indicating that the military has had almost no patience left for US inaction over threats posed by members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) based in northern Iraq, saying that launching a military operation into Iraq to end the PKK remained a viable option for Turkey.

Land Forces Commander Gen. İlker Başbuğ used his address to army cadets at a ceremony marking the start of the new academic year as an opportunity for touching on the issue of terrorist threats to Turkey by the PKK and Turkey's expectations of its allies in its fight against the PKK.

Reformist moves for widening cultural freedoms in the country constituted another key topic in the address by Başbuğ, who suggested that cultural freedoms were expanding into the political arena, thus increasing polarization in the country.

"It is a fact that the entity of and developments in the north of Iraq have brought a political, legal, military and psychological power to the Kurds in the region, the likes of which have never before been seen. It should be noted that this situation can create a new model of belonging for a certain part of our citizens," Başbuğ said, voicing Turkey's pro-establishment forces' constant fear that the Iraqi Kurdish entity in the northern part of the neighboring country would provide political encouragement for Kurdish citizens who feel sympathetic towards separatism in Turkey.

The US must become aware of the fact that a formula of resolution for clearing out the existing quagmire in Iraq will not yield any positive result without Turkey's support and that the presence of the separatist terrorist organization in the northern region of Iraq poses a vital threat against Turkey, Başbuğ said.

"The US should understand and see that it is not time for words, but for action,"

Başbuğ said.

The fight between Turkish security forces and the PKK, listed as a terrorist organization by Washington and the 27-member



European Union as well as by a majority of the international community, dates back to 1984 and has caused the deaths of tens of thousands of both civilians and soldiers.

In apparent reference to questions raised about the efficiency of the Turkish milita-

ry's fight against the PKK, the top general said he wanted to respond to questions asking why the PKK continued to exist if the Turkish military really has inflicted significant damage on the PKK.

"The first reason is not being able to prevent new participation in the armed wing of the terrorist organization. This duty belongs to all institutions and organizations of the state," Başbuğ said, adding that the regional conjuncture had helped the PKK to regain its power as well.

The government's efforts for drafting a new civilian constitution instead of the existing 1982 Constitution, which was drafted following the military coup of 1980, as well as government reforms aimed at becoming a full European Union member also received their share of Başbuğ's criticism. Başbuğ said the army opposes providing education in Kurdish or other minority languages. The government has signaled the new constitution might allow for some teaching of Kurdish in state schools, while affirming Turkish as the

country's official language.

"The Turkish army has always been a party to the protection of the nation state and always will be," Başbuğ continued, while condemning what he called "the anarchy of ideas" -- an apparent reference to efforts encouraging the questioning of national taboos as Turkey presses on with EU-linked reforms -- and said intellectuals must be careful.

"Movements against secularism and ethnic nationalists have a common target, which is the structure of the nation state," said Başbuğ, using the term "ethnic nationalists," widely employed for denoting Kurdish separatists who want to create a homeland in the southeast of Turkey.

The Turkish military has ousted four governments in the past 50 years, most recently in 1997 when, with strong public support, it drove out a Cabinet viewed as too "Islamist." In April, it helped trigger a political crisis by signaling its opposition to Abdullah Gül, who is widely defined as a "conservative democrat," becoming Tur-

key's president. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called a snap parliamentary election which his party won resoundingly.

Gül became president in August in a parliamentary election, but the military top brass has made clear its continued unease and defends its right to intervene in politics if it feels secularism is in danger. As of Monday, Başbuğ reaffirmed the importance of secularism in Turkey amid debates over the draft constitution, which some secularists see as a cover for boosting the role of Islam.

"The functional definitions of the principle of secularism in the constitution should not become a topic of discussion," Başbuğ said.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) says the new charter will bolster individual rights and freedoms and bring Turkey closer to the EU, which it hopes to join.

Bombings Strike Towns in Northern Iraq

The New York Times

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS September 26, 2007

BAGHDAD (AP) -- A suicide truck bomber struck a Sunni tribal leader's house near the Syrian border on Wednesday, killing at least five people in the latest attack by suspected Sunni extremists on provincial officials and tribal figures.

Elsewhere in northern Iraq, a parked car bomb also exploded near a group of black market gasoline vendors, killing another five people and wounding seven, police said. Another bomb struck wounded victims as they were being taken to the hospital.

The blast was intensified when the barrels of gasoline being sold exploded in the center of Shurqat, 140 miles north of Baghdad, according to the police, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release the information.

Nobody claimed responsibility for the attacks, but they bore the hallmarks of al-Qaida in Iraq, which has warned that it planned a new campaign of violence during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, the military said a U.S. soldier was killed Tuesday during a small-arms attack in an eastern neighborhood of Baghdad.

The first blast occurred about 10:30 a.m. near the house of Sheikh Kanaan Iqhaimar, the Sunni chieftain of the Mawali tribe, in a village 55 miles west of Sinjar, according to the town's mayor.

Mayor Dukheel al-Sinjari said the sheik's son worked for the government as a contractor. Insurgents frequently have targeted government employees and other officials they accuse of collaborating with U.S.-led efforts in Iraq.

The attack occurred in the same area where

quadruple bombings struck Yazidi communities, a small Kurdish-speaking religious sect in northern Iraq.

Al-Sinjari said five people were killed and nine wounded, including the sheik. He said the casualty toll could rise because more bodies were believed to be in the rubble.

A series of other bombings have struck police officers and Shiite and Sunni leaders who have joined forces with U.S.-led forces against al-Qaida in Iraq in recent days.

On Tuesday, a suicide car bomber attacked a police headquarters in the southern city of Basra, killing at least three policemen, wounding 20 people.

Fears about security in Basra have been mounting since the British army left its last position in the city on Sept. 2 and redeployed to the municipal airport, about 12 miles to the north.

For more than two years, Basra, Iraq's second-largest city and headquarters of the country's vast southern oil fields, has been beset by violence from rival Shiite militias that have infiltrated police and government ranks.

Several of the biggest militias are associated with major Shiite political parties.

But suicide attacks -- the hallmark of Sunni religious extremists -- are rare in the mostly Shiite city. Officials were quick to point the finger at al-Qaida in Iraq, a Sunni extremist group.

"It seems that al-Qaida wants to make use of the fragile situation in the city caused by the tension among the parties and the city's officials," said Maj. Gen. Abdul-Jalil Khalaf, Basra's police chief.

An al-Qaida front group -- the Islamic State of Iraq -- also claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing near the entrance of a mosque where a U.S.-promoted reconciliation meeting was being held late Monday in Baqouba, the Diyala provincial capital 35 miles northeast of Baghdad. The police chief and two other senior officers were among the 24 people the military said were killed.

Diyala provincial leaders pledged to push ahead with efforts to bring Shiites and Sunnis together.

"This attack will not stop the provincial government's efforts to reconcile the tribes and help them put aside their differences to achieve unity," said provincial Gov. Raad Rashid al-Tamimi, who was among the 37 wounded.

In a Web statement, the Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaida-led group, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying a member of its "martyrdom squad ... plunged with his suicide belt amid a gathering for national reconciliation."

"God enabled him to reap most of the chiefs of that fetid council," the statement said.

At least eight people were killed and 10 wounded in scattered violence Wednesday in Baqouba, while the bullet-riddled bodies of a Shiite man and three sons also were found left on a street in an eastern section of the city.

In other towns northeast of Baghdad, a policeman was killed and two others injured in Khan Bani Saad, and a civilian was killed and one wounded by random gunfire in Khalis.

U.S. looks to press a defiant Iran, but avoid war

By David E. Sanger
and Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON: A year and a half after President George W. Bush told top aides that he feared he might be forced to choose between acquiescing to Iran's nuclear ambitions or ordering military options to stop it, the struggle to find an effective alternative — sanctions with real bite — is entering a new phase.

The speech at the United Nations on Tuesday by the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, gave new impetus to the American concerns, with his declaration that "the nuclear issue of Iran is now closed" and his assertion that whatever differences remained were nothing more than technical issues to be resolved by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In interviews, American diplomats, White House officials and military officers acknowledge that the strategy of slowly choking off Iran's access to new lending from banks has been largely ineffective.

The American officials also say there is little enthusiasm in the White House or the Pentagon for carrying out military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities, though they acknowledge that such war plans are always being refined.

The officials say the White House cannot figure out a way to credibly threaten the use of force in Iran, out of concern that such threats could heighten attacks on American forces in Iraq, and destabilize governments from Lebanon to Pakistan.

Stephen Hadley, the national security adviser, conceded that the United States was still struggling to understand how much pressure it would take to force the Iranians to make a "strategic choice," and said that the intelligence estimates "vary widely" about how much time remains before the Iranians could have a weapon.

Privately, administration officials say that the chances are slim that the United States can enlist Russia and China behind tougher sanctions against Iran, and they say that if such sanctions do emerge it will likely not be for several months — and they will probably be too weak to do much good.

But for the first time, administration officials say, the European allies are talking about a far broader cutoff of bank lending and technology to Iran than any that has been attempted so far. The effort, Hadley said in a conversation Tuesday with reporters and editors of The New York Times, is to persuade Iranians that the nuclear program is "taking us into the ditch," and to make the pressure so great "that they finally have to make a strategic choice."

A senior European official in the middle of the conversations in New York this week to design sanctions that the entire European Union might agree to said it was now "a race between how fast they can build centrifuges and we can turn up the pain."

So the discussions now center on cutting off even more lending and, for the first time, supplies of technology and other goods to the Iranians. But that would require cutting, one by one, deep ties between European and Iranian businesses, and what Hadley called a consensus for "aggressive action, even if that means compromising their commercial interests."

Inside the administration, senior officials say they have also considered organizing a regional forum to confront Iran, using as a model the "six party" talks with North Korea, an effort to put pressure on the country from all its neighbors. But in the Middle East, officials say, the idea has hardly got off the ground.

"As we talk to the regional leaders, we have yet to hear a single good idea for ways to find common ground, or a forum or framework for dealing with Iran," said a senior official involved in Iran policy. The problem, officials say, is none of Iran's neighbors are willing and able to play the decisive role alongside the United States.

They have been similarly frustrated in their effort to design an effective military option to set the Iranian program back for many years without creating unmanageable backlash around the world that could overwhelm other national security interests.

While many of the sites have been long known — especially the underground facility at Natanz, where just shy of 2,000 centrifuges have been installed — there is no certainty that military action could take out the entire system of well-disguised factories and laboratories, some known and some hidden.

And the turmoil certain to follow such an attack may not be worth military action that simply delays nuclear development.

That most likely explains why Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have both vowed to pursue the diplomatic track, saying that military action is a last resort. But those comments have not silenced the speculation here, in Europe and in the region that America is planning for an attack.

"This constant drumbeat of war is not helpful and it's not useful," said Admiral William Fallon, the senior American commander in the region.

In a telephone interview this week as he visited a number of regional capitals,

It is 'a race between how fast they can build centrifuges and we can turn up the pain.'

Fallon pledged that the United States would "maintain our capabilities in that region of the world in an attempt to make sure that if they opt for military activity there, that is not going to be very useful to them."

At the same time, he said, "we will pursue avenues that might result in some kind of improvement in Iranian behavior."

"I am not talking about a war strategy, but a strategy to demonstrate our resolve," Fallon said. "We have a very, very robust capability in the region, especially in comparison to Iran."

That is one of the things that people might want to keep in mind. Our intention is to make sure they understand that, but we are being prudent in our actions and certainly not trying to be provocative."

In recent days, others have begun to speak openly about the "what if" and "what then" of the other option: that Iran is successful, and that it either fields nuclear weapons or manufactures enough uranium to make clear it could produce weapons in short order. It is that second goal in which Iran would stay within the strict rules of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty that worries many in the intelligence community.

General John Abizaid, who retired this year as senior American commander in the Middle East, said last week that while the United States must do all it can to prevent Iran from going nuclear, the world could live with a nuclear Iran, and could contain it.

Abizaid, in a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington policy institute, said that the broad rules of deterrence that kept a nuclear peace between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and remain in effect with nuclear Russia and China today, would be effective against a nuclear Iran.

"I believe nuclear deterrence will work with the Iranians," Abizaid said. "I mean, Iran is not a suicide nation. They may have some people in charge that don't appear to be rational, but I doubt that the Iranians intend to attack us with a nuclear weapon."

Iran closes border to Iraqi Kurdistan

Arrest of official has enraged Tehran

By Andrew E. Kramer

BAGHDAD: Iran sealed its border crossings into the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq on Monday to protest the arrest by the U.S. military of an Iranian it accused of smuggling roadside bombs.

The army on Sept. 20 arrested Agai Mahummdi Firhadi on suspicion of smuggling weapons into Iraq for use against U.S. soldiers. The military said Firhadi was an officer in the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force.

Iran closed the border Monday. By evening scores of trucks were backed up along the border. The closure, if it persists, could damage Kurdistan's economy, officials in the semi-autonomous region said.

Tehran is angered that the Kurds tacitly accept bases on their territory for an Iranian Kurdish separatist movement known as the Pejak. Iranian officials contend the group carries out raids into Iran and is supported by the United States.

At the time of his arrest, the American military said in a statement that Firhadi had been involved in transporting bombs into Iraq and in training militants.

The arrest prompted immediate

protests from the Iraqi government; officials said they had not been consulted. Tensions already were high between Washington and Baghdad because of an incident last week in which employees of the private American security contractor Blackwater USA killed at least 11 civilians.

President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, expressed anger Saturday at Firhadi's arrest, saying he was an Iranian diplomat.

The Americans asserted he was posing as a businessman. A statement from the president's office said Talabani had "sent a message of anger" to the U.S. ambassador, Ryan Crocker, and the U.S. military commander, General David Petraeus.

Talabani told the Americans then that the Iranian government had threatened to close its borders with the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq if the official was not released, a threat that Tehran apparently followed through on Monday. The military has continued to insist the Iranian is a weapons smuggler who is helping insurgents kill U.S. soldiers.

A military spokesman, Rear Admiral Mark Fox, suggested that the United States was building a more serious case against Firhadi. Fox said Firhadi was also part of a wider Iranian smuggling network that has been bringing more advanced weaponry into Iraq, including surface to air missiles.

"We would like to be able to confirm Iran's excellence in fulfilling their public commitments to improving security and stability in Iraq," Fox said. "However, in the absence of that excellence, we are fulfilling our professional responsibility to detain those individuals who are smuggling these illegal and lethal weapons into Iraq."

Also Monday, U.S. forces attacked an insurgent group in eastern Baghdad that the military said could be supported by Iran, killing one person and wounding four.

While the Americans were attacking, militants placed roadside bombs along their exit route, the military said. They included one shaped charge of the type the United States has accused Iranian agents of smuggling into Iraq.

In other violence, a suicide bomber struck a U.S.-promoted reconciliation meeting in Baquba of Shiite and Sunni

tribal sheiks Monday, killing at least 15 people, including the city's police chief, and wounding about 30, The Associated Press reported, citing U.S. and Iraqi officials. Two U.S. soldiers were wounded in the blast.

Iran leader declares atom issue 'closed'

By Warren Hoge

UNITED NATIONS, New York: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, considers the dispute over his country's nuclear program "closed" and says Iran will disregard the resolutions of the Security Council, which he said is dominated by "arrogant powers."

In a defiant 40-minute speech Tuesday to the opening session of the General Assembly, he said Iran would henceforth consider the nuclear issue not a "political" one for the Security Council, but a "technical" one to be decided by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the nuclear watchdog of the United Nations.

Ahmadinejad's assertion that the matter belonged with the energy agency indicated his preference to work with Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the agency.

ElBaradei has been at odds with Washington and some European powers, which have accused him of meddling in diplomacy by seeking separate accords with Iran, and, in their eyes, undercutting the Security Council resolutions.

"Today, because of the resistance of the Iranian nation, the issue is back to the agency, and I officially announce that, in our opinion, the nuclear issue of Iran is now closed and has turned into an ordinary agency matter," Ahmadinejad said.

A senior Bush administration official said after the address that the only person who thinks the issue is closed is Ahmadinejad.

Without mentioning the United States by name, the Iranian president used his speech to unleash a full-scale assault on the country as power-mad and godless. He said its leaders "openly abandon morality" and act with "lewdness, selfishness, enmity and imposition in place of justice, love, affection and honesty."

The seats of the American delegates were empty as the Iranian president spoke, with only a note-taker present. Ahmadinejad's speech occurred just hours after President George W. Bush had spoken from the same podium about the need for countries to live up to the rights guaranteed by the United Nations.

In a barely disguised barb, Ahmadinejad asserted, "Unfortunately, human rights are being extensively violated by certain powers, especially by those who pretend to be their exclusive advocates."

Ahmadinejad's declaration that the nuclear issue is closed comes just as the Bush administration is seeking to turn up the pressure on the country, both through the UN Security Council and in concert with European powers.

"In the last two years," the Iranian president said, "abusing the Security Council, the arrogant powers have repeatedly accused Iran and even made military threats and imposed illegal sanctions against it."

In recent weeks, both American and French officials have described an emerging strategy of broadening the number of banks, mostly in Europe, that have refused to lend new capital to Iran, making it difficult for the country to invest in new oil facilities or other infrastructure.

"We want more banks, and now suppliers, to assess the risk" of dealing with Iran, Stephen Hadley, Bush's national security adviser, said Tuesday.

The issue now, he said, is "at what point the regime, or elements of the regime, say, 'This policy is taking us into a ditch.'"

Last month, Iran's leaders reached an agreement with ElBaradei to answer questions that nuclear inspectors have been raising for years about possible connections between the Iranian nuclear program and military projects.

Inspectors are in Iran this week, seeking further answers to questions that Iran has so far refused to discuss.

September 25, 2007

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TURKISH DAILY NEWS

Turkey, Iraq to sign counter-terrorism deal, hot pursuit on agenda

Turkey and Iraq finalize talks over counter-terrorism agreement. The deal allows Turkey to engage in "hot pursuit" of PKK terrorists and establish liaison offices on the border to coordinate the fight against the outlawed group

ANKARA – Turkish Daily News

In a joint effort to quash members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), neighboring countries Turkey and Iraq Wednesday agreed to sign a counter-terrorism agreement today allowing Turkey "hot pursuit" of the terrorist group at its base in northern Iraq, under the condition that permission is first granted by Baghdad.

The agreement was reached during an overdue visit by Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani to the Turkish capital to finalize talks and sign the

agreement that would enable the two countries to cooperate in their fight against terrorism.

Al-Bolani arrived in Ankara Tuesday for talks on Turkish concerns over the PKK presence in northern Iraq. The Iraqi minister was supposed to travel last month as agreed between officials from both countries during Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's visit to Turkey in August.

Turkey and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding to combat terrorism during al-Maliki's visit but the two failed to finalize another deal specifically aimed at cracking down the PKK bases in the Kurdish-controlled north due to pressure from Iraqi Kurdish groups.

Iraq's deputy Interior Minister Aydın Halit said the sides had reached an agreement and a deal would

be signed Thursday. The officials were working on Turkish, Arabic and English versions of the text, he added.

Halit's statement to the press came after a one hour long meeting between the interior minister of Turkey, Beşir Atalay, and his Iraqi counterpart.

Halit did not confirm whether the agreement would allow Turkish troops to engage in hot pursuits. "Everything will become clear tomorrow," he said. It remains unclear yet at what level the issue of hot

pursuit is included in the document.

Turkey would seek Iraqi authorization for future hot pursuit operations to track down and eliminate PKK groups holed up in the mountains of northern Iraq, said diplomatic sources. In addition, under the agreement, liaison offices in charge of coordinating the fight against the PKK will be set up on the Turkish-Iraqi border.

Turkey has long been pressing Iraq for a counter-terrorism agreement to crack down on the PKK bases but the Iraqi prime minister said then that the Iraqi parliament would have the final say on efforts to halt the cross-border attacks by the PKK into Turkey.

In a bid to secure a clear commitment to root out the PKK, Ankara recently sent a draft cooperation agreement to Baghdad that entails cutting off financial and logistic support to the outlawed group, blocking its media broadcasts, allowing for the extradition of terrorists and the exchange of intelligence.

Turkey has threatened military action in northern Iraq to hit the camps of the PKK if Iraq and the United States fail to take measures against the terrorists. In June, the Turkish military said there were some 5,000 PKK terrorists in total, an estimated 3,000 of them based in northern Iraq.



Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad al-Boulani, in Ankara for the past two days, visited Turkish Interior Minister Beşir Atalay on Wednesday. Atalay welcomed Boulani with a ceremony.

Iraq Kurdish region says new oil deals are legal

REUTERS

DUBAI (Reuters) By Simon Webb Sep 28, 2007

- Iraq's Kurdish regional government (KRG) said on Friday that oil and gas deals it has signed since February are legal, rejecting Baghdad's claim that the deals breach the country's law.

Iraq's cabinet agreed a draft law for dividing the world's third-largest oil reserves in February, but rows with the KRG, as well as objections from some Shi'ite and Sunni Arab politicians have slowed its progress.

Frustrated by Baghdad's delays, the semi-autonomous KRG approved its own oil law in August and announced this month it had signed a production-sharing contract with a unit of U.S.-based Hunt Oil Co. and with Impulse Energy Corp. In April the KRG signed a service contract with the United Arab Emirate's Dana Gas.

"The Hunt contract was signed...according to the enacted regional law based on the federal constitution. There is no question about the legality of that or any other deal," KRG government spokesman Khaled Salih said in a statement sent to Reuters by e-mail.

It would be unconstitutional for Baghdad to punish the companies that had signed deals with the semi-autonomous region in the north of Iraq, Salih said.

"How can any serious government official think they are in a

position to punish any company working in Iraq legally to contribute to the country's revenue for the benefit of the whole country?," Salih said.

Iraq's Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani said on Monday that deals signed since February were illegal, and warned that the firms involved "will bear the consequences."

Shahristani also said that crude from the deals could not be legally exported, as under the draft oil law only Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organisation (SOMO) held the right to export.

But Salih said the draft oil law gave no such exclusive right to SOMO.

Salih said that companies with an interest in the Kurdish oil and gas industry were no longer discouraged by Shahristani's statements. Oil majors have to date shown little interest in the Kurdish region, as they fear by alienating Baghdad they may miss out on potentially more lucrative contracts elsewhere in Iraq.

"In the early days people took the statements seriously," Salih said. "Several oil companies informed us about the discouragement and implied threats of doing business in Kurdistan. However, as time passed... it seems to us that people are no longer deterred by such statements from Dr Shahristani."

The New York Times By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS September 26, 2007

Turkey, Iraq Agree on Kurdish Rebels

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) -- Turkey and Iraq have agreed to sign a counterterrorism deal cracking down on separatist Kurdish rebels holed up in bases in northern Iraq, officials said Wednesday.

The agreement would require Turkish forces to seek Iraqi authorization to cross into Iraq for small-scale operations to chase separatist Kurdish rebels, private NTV television reported, citing unnamed Iraqi and Turkish sources.

The agreement was reached during a visit by Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani, who arrived in Ankara on Tuesday for talks on Turkish concerns over rebels of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, launching attacks against targets in Turkey from bases in northern Iraq.

Turkey has long been pressing Iraq for a counterterrorism pact to crack down on the PKK and has threatened to stage a military incursion into northern Iraq to eradicate rebel bases there if U.S. or Iraqi forces failed to take action against

the group.

The guerrillas have been fighting for autonomy in southeast Turkey since 1984. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people. The PKK is considered a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union.

Iraqi Interior Ministry Undersecretary Aidn Khalid said the sides had reached an agreement on Wednesday and a deal would be signed Thursday. Officials would work on Turkish, Arabic and English versions of the text, he said.

NTV television, citing Iraqi sources, said that under the agreement, Turkey would seek Iraqi authorization for future "hot pursuit" operations -- cross border military offensives aimed at tracking down and eliminating rebel armed groups that are limited in time, scale and in scope.

But Khalid would not confirm that the agreement would allow Turkish troops to engage in hot

pursuits. "Everything will become clear tomorrow," he said.

During a visit by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to Ankara in August, Turkey and Iraq agreed to try to root out the rebels. But al-Maliki said the Iraqi parliament would have the final say on efforts to halt the guerrillas' cross-border attacks into Turkey.

On Tuesday, a soldier was killed and four others were wounded when suspected Kurdish rebels detonated a bomb that was placed inside a van at the entrance of a Turkish military outpost in the southeastern province of Tunceli, the private Dogan news agency reported.

A soldier and four Kurdish rebels also were killed in two days of fighting in the province of Sirnak, near the border with Iraq, according to the agency and the military.

THE DAILY STAR

Compiled by Daily Star staff September 29, 2007

Baghdad fumes over 'federalism' plan passed by US Senate

The Iraqi government on Friday firmly rejected a Bosnia-style plan approved by the US Senate to divide Iraq on ethnic and religious lines, saying Iraqis will themselves decide their future.

"The government and its Premier [Nuri al-Maliki] reject this vote," said government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh.

"It is the Iraqis who decide these sorts of issues, no one else," Dabbagh said on state-run Al-Iraqiyya television. "The Iraqi Parliament too should express its total rejection of this plan."

The plan, touted by backers as the sole hope of forging a federal state out of sectarian strife, was approved by the US Senate Wednesday in a 75-23 vote.

The nonbinding resolution would provide for decentralizing Iraq in a federal system to stop the country from falling deeper into civil war.

It proposes to separate Iraq into Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni entities, with a federal government in Baghdad in charge of border security and oil revenues.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Friday condemned the resolution, saying it would complicate matters further in the war-torn country.

The Bosnia-style plan "would add new complications to the already difficult Iraqi situation," GCC chief Abdel-Rahman al-Attiyah said in a statement. "Instead of calling for division, the causes that led to the current situation should be addressed. These include the [US-led] occupation, the sectarian and ethnic quota system, absence of law and security and the paralyzed administration."

The GCC groups Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab

Emirates. The chief of the oil-rich bloc warned that any plan to divide Iraq would also have a "detrimental impact" on regional and international stability.

Yemen also decried the US Senate plan, labeling it an "unprecedented flagrant interference" in Iraq's internal affairs, according to a Foreign Ministry statement carried by the state-run Saba news agency.

A US air raid in Baghdad Friday killed at least eight people, medical sources said, while the Iraqi Army said it had killed 30 suspected Al-Qaeda insurgents north of the capital.

A medical source at Yarmouk Hospital in Baghdad said eight bodies had been brought in from a southern neighborhood after US helicopters targeted a building. A police source put the toll at 10, saying many were believed to be civilians.

The US military had no immediate comment.

It is the second time this week US forces have been accused of killing civilians in air strikes. US forces are investigating an attack in southern Iraq this week which local police said killed five women and four children.

In Washington, a military spokeswoman said the first US military unit - the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, some 2,200 Marines who were stationed in the western Anbar Province - scheduled to withdraw from Iraq under President George W. Bush's plan to cut troop levels had left the war zone.

Fifty-nine US soldiers have been killed in September, according to the Web site icasualties.org which tracks military deaths, making it the least deadly month for US troops since July last year.

"What we found is that the current operations ... managed to disrupt a lot of [militant] cells," said Lieutenant-Colonel Rudy Burwell, a US military spokesman. "We were able to push them from Baghdad and pursue them. That's what we attribute the lower casualties to."

A senior leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq was killed in a US air strike in Iraq this week, a US military commander said Friday.

Brigadier General Joseph Anderson identified the man as Abu Osama al-Tunisi, a Tunisian described as in line to succeed Abu Ayyub al-Masri, Al-Qaeda in Iraq's Egyptian leader.

"Abu Osama al-Tunisi was one of the most senior leaders within Al-Qaeda in Iraq," said Anderson, the chief of staff of Multi-National Corps Iraq.

The general said the September 25 strike that killed Tunisi was a "significant blow" to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which he said has been severely disrupted by US operations and may now be reassessing its position in Iraq. He said his opinion was that Al-Qaeda would shift its forces from Iraq to Afghanistan, and try to expand its operations there.

A Syrian cleric who recruited foreign fighters traveling to Iraq to fight US-led forces was assassinated in the Syrian city of Aleppo Friday, an aide said.

Sheikh Mahmoud Abu al-Qaqa was shot dead after he emerged from Friday prayers, Ahmad Haidar told Reuters.

"A man fired several bullets into the sheikh's chest. A crowd chased him and he was eventually caught. He is now with the authorities under custody," Haidar said

Chaos and unity in a fragmented Iraq

▪ Roger Owen

What General David Petraeus and his master, President George W. Bush, would like us to believe is that recent American policy in Iraq can be seen as a military success but a political failure judged in terms of the inability of the country's sectarian leaders to unite. What they cannot see is that the two are much more closely related than they are willing to admit.

One factor is that by arming and financing the Sunni tribes in Anbar Province as local militias, the U.S. military is both recognizing the lack of central government control and helping to undermine it still further.

But there is much more to it than that. The major reasons why sectarian leaders cannot come together to create a united leadership for a united Iraq is that, rather than being able to control their followers outside the Green Zone, they are now, to a larger extent, controlled by them.

How and why this came about can be summed up under two related reasons. One concerns the long history of the devolution of local power by British and American authorities, first to the Kurds, then to those Iraqi sectarian parties that won a majority in the provincial elections in 2005.

In the case of the British in particular, control over the local administration and the police was simply handed to whichever Shiite party, or coalition of parties, gained the most electoral support. The same happened in the northern provinces, for example in the Mosul region, a process that greatly added to sectarian fighting in and around the city itself as a result of the fact that the Sunnis, by boycotting the election, had excluded themselves from the official political process.

The second, increasingly important reason is the fact that, as in the case of Lebanon during its own civil war, there were enough economic resources scattered around the country for local warlords who controlled them to maintain their own loyal militias and civilian constituencies without having to rely on the leadership's financial support.

These included such tangible assets as police stations and armories, as well as economic assets like oil pipelines or refineries, electricity substations able to route local supplies, ports, and vital roads where traffic coming in and out of Kuwait in the south and Jordan and Syria in the east could readily be taxed, used for the smuggling of drugs and weapons or both.

Circumstances of this type provided an impetus to the fragmentation of sectarian cohesion as well. The intensity of the struggle to control local resources often pitted one Shiite group against another, a process sometimes further encouraged by politicians at the center, as the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki sought to use the provincial police forces, controlled by its Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council allies, against the Mahdi army militia of Moqtada al-Sadr and against those of the Fadhila movement.

A system based increasingly on a struggle for local resources provided huge encouragement for all kinds of criminal mafias to muscle in, further undermining sectarian cohesion in the interests of sheer

**Iraqi leaders do not
control their followers;
they are controlled
by them.**

opportunism and extortion. In many cases, these groups, with the identical cross-border connections, had been active in much the same way during the last years of the Saddam Hussein regime.

To make matters worse, it was relatively easy to draw American and British troops into the fight in support of one group against another, the more so if it could be alleged that the latter was Al Qaeda or Iranian-controlled.

Meanwhile, initial loyalties based on the promise of rewards for electoral support are becoming more tenuous as the likelihood of further elections became less sure. The result: a patchwork of local groups and alliances no longer neatly split, if they ever really were, into different sectarian parties, management of which has mutated far beyond the capacity of the Maliki government, the occupying forces or even the Iraqis to understand, let alone direct or control.

The implications are that Anglo-American policy aimed at building a central government consisting of a working arrangement among the leaders of all the larger sectarian parties has failed. Without the power over their constituents that comes from their ability to provide them with resources, these leaders have become largely captive to the more bellicose and outspoken among their followers.

Indeed, this inconvenient fact is often recognized on the ground as, given the chaos in Baghdad itself, American reconstruction teams become forced to hand over new projects to whichever of the factions can be trusted to operate them on a local basis. Such tendencies can only increase in strength once there appears to be anything like a reasonable timetable for American military redeployment or withdrawal.

Even more alarming, without any central mechanism for guiding policy and arbitrating disputes, let

alone controlling the putative national army, the temptation for one of the sectarian parties to use its military power to try to subdue the others becomes daily more attractive, particularly if this could be done in concert with the U.S. Army, or perhaps even the Iraqis if they would agree to enter the country in strength.

Given the present tendency for members of one party or militia to assassinate the leaders of another, it may come to seem the only rational means of self-preservation.

If this analysis is correct, then Bush is right to believe that the presence of a large American military force is all that now holds the country together. But, by the same token, it cannot succeed in uniting Iraq behind a strong central government because the forces of disintegration unleashed by the occupation are now far too strong.

As a result Iraq faces a situation roughly analogous to Lebanon during its civil war in the late 1970s and 1980s or Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army in the 1990s; a situation in which warlord militias will increasingly rule the roost until one or other of them, or perhaps a combination, can obtain enough strength to create the beginnings of a new order.

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No Friends But the Mountains

Kurdistan is the Other Iraq, the Iraq a surprising number of people in the West have not heard of and know almost nothing about. The media mostly ignore Kurdistan, for the same reason they ignore Kansas and Iowa: it is a sleepy and stable place where hardly anything of note happens.

Ethnic Kurds make up around 20 percent of Iraq's population. They, along with Persians, are indigenous to the upper Middle East, having lived there long before Arabs invaded from the south and Turks from the east. A few live in Baghdad and along the Iranian border east of the capital, and a larger number live in the provinces of Nineveh and Kirkuk. The majority, though, live in the northern mountains, high above the dusty plains of Mesopotamia, in the officially recognized and constitutionally sanctioned Kurdish Autonomous Region. There, the war is already over. In fact, the war was hardly fought there at all. The only Kurdish insurgency in Iraq was against Saddam Hussein, and the only Kurdish terrorists in Iraq were those of Ansar al-Islam--which has since changed its name to al-Qaida--who were driven from the border town of Biyara into Iran in 2003.

The Kurds have their own capital and parliament in the city of Erbil. They have their own army, the Peshmerga, which in Kurdish means "Those Who Face Death." They have their own police, their own border patrols and checkpoints, and their own immigration and passport control. They have two international airports, with regular flights to and from Europe. They have their own flag, their own diplomats, and their own Department of Foreign Relations. The only things they don't have are a currency of their own and a seat in the United Nations. In all but name, then, Iraqi Kurdistan is an independent nation.

Erbil, the largest city in Kurdistan, has suffered three terrorist attacks since coalition forces terminated the Baath regime in 2003. The second-largest city, Suleimaniah, was struck only once. The third-largest city, Dohuk, has never been hit at all. More people have been wounded or killed by terrorists in Spain than in Iraqi Kurdistan since 2003. No one has been kidnapped.

Arab nationalism, Islamic radicalism, religious sectarianism, and anti-Americanism are alien ideologies in Kurdistan, rejected root and branch by the Kurds. They have, in fact, forged one of the most aggressively anti-terrorist communities in the world--no small feat, given what is happening just a few miles to the south in Iraq. This conservative Muslim society secures its own cities and territories better than the United States military shores up the Green Zone in Baghdad.

Over the past few years, I have traveled and worked in Kurdistan frequently, often staying there for long periods of time, and have always moved about freely, without need of a gun, body armor, or bodyguards. Americans can go there on holiday, if they so desire, and feel just as relaxed as they would in Canada. Even more so, perhaps: The Kurds are friendlier, and more pro-American, than Canadians. Thomas Friedman wrote a few years ago that "after two years of traveling almost exclusively in Western Europe and the Middle East, Poland feels like a geopolitical spa. I visited here for just three days, and got two years of anti-American bruises massaged out of me." I felt much the same in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Indeed, it is hard to overstate how pro-American the people of Kurdi-stan are. They are possibly more pro-American than Americans themselves. If Bill Clinton was America's first "black" president, people in at least one part of the world say Bush is the first "Muslim" one: He is sometimes referred to in Kurdistan as "Hajji Bush" (meaning that he made the Muslim pilgrimage, or Hajj, to Mecca), an undeniably high honor for a Republican Christian from Texas. No, Kurdistan is not a "red state," and Kurds are not Republicans. Nor does it occur to most of them to prefer America's conservatives over its liberals. Rather, their warm feelings of gratitude and friendship extend to all Americans and both political parties for having liberated them from the totalitarian dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

If you ask them, it was a real liberation--but one need not ask. Any reference to the Iraq war as an invasion will be quickly corrected. The United States destroyed the Hussein tyranny in 2003, but the slow-motion liberation of Kurdistan in truth began a decade before. After the 1991 Gulf War, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France imposed no-fly zones over Iraq's Kurdish north and Shia south. American, British, and, initially, French pilots patrolled the skies and threatened to shoot down any Iraqi aircraft they encountered.

Massive uprisings began in the south and north. The Shia were beaten by the regime, as they had always been beaten. Horrible war crimes and atrocities followed. But the Kurds were a force to be reckoned with. They had mountains, disciplined organizations, and battle-hardened fighters with years of experience in guerilla warfare. Civilians fled en masse from the cities to the mountains, Turkey, and Iran, thus clearing the battlefield for the Kurds' final, epic battle against Saddam Hussein. The Peshmerga then descended from above and fought the Iraqi army in the streets. After bloody clashes, the Iraqi army finally withdrew in 1991. Kurdish villages, neighborhoods, and cities, and eventually all of Iraq's northernmost provinces were cleared of Baath soldiers and agents. The Kurds have been strictly autonomous ever since, and have lived, to one extent or another, under a protective Western umbrella the entire time.

The Kurds have "no friends but the mountains," or so an old saying goes. It is hard for Westerners to grasp just how isolated the Kurds feel: They are hated by almost everyone in the region, and ignored by or unknown to almost everyone else in the world. That partly explains their fanatical pro-Americanism: *A friend, at last!* Israelis, perhaps, can relate.

Iraqi Kurds, though, are much more aggressively pro-American than Israelis. They arguably take their pro-Americanism to the point of absurdity. Fake McDonald's restaurants with names like "MaDonal" pop up in Kurdistan nearly as fast as real McDonald's chains devour the landscapes of Western cities. Teenagers wear United States Army uniforms, T-shirts, and pants as a fashion statement--and they do so without irony. Even some of the waiters in restaurants wear button-up shirts with the words us army stitched above the breast pocket.

However, strident Kurdish pro-Americanism is older than the no-fly zones and the liberation from Iraq. As the Peshmerga's famous guerilla leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani once told Jim Hoagland of the *Washington Post*, "We can become your fifty-first

state and provide you with oil." That was in 1973.

"Saddam Hussein intended to be the leader of the Arab nation, the whole Arab world," said Peshmerga general and member of parliament Mam Rostam when I visited him recently in the terror-wracked city of Kirkuk, in Iraq's Red Zone. "He didn't want anyone other than Arabs to exist around him. That was his policy." Saddam said to the Kurds, *You are Arabs*. The Kurds said, *No, we are Kurds*.

So Saddam launched the genocidal Anfal Campaign in 1986 to ethnically cleanse the Kurds from his country. "They wanted to remove all the Kurds from everywhere in Iraq," Rostam said. "They just destroyed whole villages and provinces and moved people into collective towns and concentration camps. Some of the Turkmen villages around here were demolished for the same reason. The point was to make it an Arab area, and no other."

Iraq's Kurdish cities were devastated by air strikes, artillery, and chemical weapons. Forests were cleared. Concrete was poured into wells. Between 100,000 and 200,000 people were murdered in massacres, and 85 percent of Kurdish villages were destroyed. Tens of thousands, including children, were tortured to death in prison blocks. "All of Iraq suffered terribly during those years," wrote Christopher Hitchens in *Vanity Fair* of his first trip to Iraqi Kurdistan after the 1991 Gulf War. "But its Kurdish provinces were among the worst places in the entire world--a howling emptiness of misery where I could catch, for the first time in my life, the actual scent of evil as a real force on earth."

Since that era of horror, however, Kurdistan has seen nothing less than a renaissance. It is now the safest, freest, and richest place in Iraq, and for the very same reason it once suffered the most: Because the people who live there are Kurds. The mayor of Halabja, the now-infamous city where Saddam once used chemical weapons to kill five thousand people in a single day, wanted to make sure I understood what that means. "We never terrorized anyone in any country," he said. "We occupied no one's land. We defended ourselves with humble military force against a powerful enemy. We consider our nation a protector of human rights."

The president of Dohuk University, Asmat M. Khalid, whose office is in that city's old Baath Party headquarters, told me that the Kurds intend to build a new country with this idea as its foundation: "We have a different way of thinking here. We believe the key is to be civilized. We don't want our new generation to be aggressive. We don't want them to have to fight. It is not our habit to kill." President Masoud Barzani, speaking on the al-Arabiya news channel, put it bluntly: "We devoted our greatest efforts to expanding the Kurdistan experience to the rest of Iraq. But the brothers in the other region, I'm sad to say, did not benefit from our experience. We adopted a culture of forgiveness, whereas they adopted a culture of vindictiveness."

It is obvious why the Kurds reject what passes for politics in Baghdad: Iraq's Baath Party was the most brutal and thoroughly oppressive Arab Nationalist party in history, and no one suffered at its practitioners' hands more than the Kurds. Their rejection of Arabism does not stop at politics, though. Most reject the prevailing interpretation of Islam as well. "I speak and read Arabic fluently,"

one Kurd told me. "I have read the Koran in its original language. I know it's more flexible than most Arab imams admit." Note to Westerners: Many blame religion itself for what ails the Iraqis, but the Kurds are as Muslim as anyone else. And the Baath Party--whose remnants make up some part of the insurgency--is brutally secular.

True, religion is an important part of the texture of every society, but religion alone doesn't determine a society's course. Ethnic traditions matter too, which is what the Kurds mean when they say *We are Kurds*. Abdullah Mohtadi, secretary general of Iranian Kurdistan's Komala Party, puts Kurdish exceptionalism into historical context: "Kurds were one of those rare nations which resisted to the end the Arab and Islamic invasion," he told me. "They defended their land, and they also defended their own religion. Our loyalty to our Kurdishness is much more important than our loyalty to Islam. In official national anthems we say we are Kurds before we are Muslims. It's a general belief. The Kurds--and also the Persians, but especially the Kurds--are the only nation [in the region] apart from Israel where Islamic fundamentalism has no real roots. Kurds are not fanatic in their religion. When I was a child before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, most of the people, the young generation, they didn't pray. They didn't fast during Ramadan. People made jokes about religion, about God, about everything. They were so relaxed. They were not bigots about religion. I don't know why, but that was the case. And that still is the case."

Even so, most Iraqi Kurds are conservative Muslims. Theirs is undoubtedly a man's world, and on average less than a quarter of the people out in public are women. Even in Suleimaniah, Iraqi Kurdistan's most liberal city, around half the women wear the headscarf. Boys and girls are schooled separately, nightclubs are taboo, and while alcohol is available, outside of Suleimaniah most of its vendors are Christians. At the same time, though, the Iraqi Kurds aren't as culturally foreign to the West as they first appear. Political extremism of every conceivable variety is discouraged. Even a self-described Islamist said in an interview, "Extremes are bad, the middle is better."

"Kurds don't get upset about religion," English teacher Birzo Abdulkadir told me. "We believe in arguments based on reason, not emotion. If people don't agree with me about something, I'm not going to get mad at them. We will just have different opinions."

Sadly, the two major Kurdish political parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, are corrupt machines that skim money from almost every business that matters. They own most of the media, and they have their own intelligence agents who sometimes spy on civilians. But there are third, fourth, and even fifth parties as well. They also run in elections and hold seats in parliament. They own newspapers and magazines and operate freely. There is certainly a great deal of corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan, and it is one of the most acknowledged problems among the Kurds themselves--but at least no one has a monopoly on it. No single party or clan, let alone person, holds all the power. And part of the reason is that Iraqi Kurdistan isn't a police state. The people there grouse about their elected officials, and they do it openly. Indeed, if Kurdistan-style graft were the scourge of Baghdad rather than death squads and car bombs, Iraq would be showcased as a smashing success and a model for the entire Middle East.

Perhaps the most refreshing thing about Kurdistan is that, its name notwithstanding, it is not an ethnicity state. Arabs can and do move there from the center and south of Iraq. As of May 2007, seven thousand Arabs per month are permitted to relocate to Kurdistan after they clear internal security checks. Of course, not everyone is happy about Arabs moving in. "The Arab, he is wild," said lawyer

Iqbal Ali Muhammad over dinner one night. "He is not a civilized person." Racist-sounding comments like his are not typical, though. Even if most Kurds agree with what Muhammad says about Iraqi Arab culture, they nonetheless contort themselves like good Western liberals to avoid expressing their thoughts in racial terms. They stress that many Arabs do not fit that description at all, that they do not mean to conflate a culture's worst elements with the whole. It is a strange thing to behold in a region where political correctness and racial sensitivity do not, as a rule, exist.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Kurdish culture in Iraq is uncorrupted by terrorism. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Kurdish culture in Turkey. There, the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been waging a low-level guerilla and terrorist war against the government and civilians for years. By contrast, Iraqi Kurds never murdered Arab civilians in Iraq or anywhere else--even though Saddam's regime was incomparably more oppressive than Turkey's. "Abdullah Ocalan was our own Yasser Arafat," one Kurd told me, referring to the PKK's former leader, who was at one time supported by some Iraqi Kurdish parties. "The difference between us and the Palestinians is that we learn from our mistakes."

And here we come to the most striking thing of all about the Iraqi Kurds, the thing that shows just how different they really are from most of the region: The Kurds are all right with the Jews.

Hatred and distrust of Jews in Kurdistan is but a whisper compared to what festers in the Arab and Muslim world. I have not knowingly encountered a single anti-Semitic person in Kurdistan, even after spending months there talking to people about regional politics. Of Kurdish bigotry against Jews, I have heard only secondhand.

"Is *Jew* the right word to use to describe Jewish people?" my translator asked me. "Yes," I said. "Jews call themselves Jews. Why do you ask?" "I want to make sure I'm not using an offensive word," he said, all but bristling with political correctness. "Some people use *Jew* as a bad word." Who? I wanted to know. I never heard anyone in Kurdistan use "Jew" in the pejorative. "Just some old people," he said. "Never young people?" I asked. "No, not at all," he said. "Young people have no reason to think Jews are bad people."

He could have been describing attitudes in the United States, which, after Israel, is probably the least anti-Semitic country in the world. In fact, young and old alike in Kurdistan both have reason to distrust those who think Jews are bad people: Saddam Hussein routinely libeled Iraq's Kurds as Zionist agents--which encouraged them to think highly of Zionism. Nor did that canard die with Saddam. "The Arabs call us a second Israel all the time," Peshmerga colonel Salahdin Ahmad Ameen told me in 2007. "They instigate their people and say we want to make a second Israel here in the middle of their area."

Arab nationalists and Islamists have been at war with the State of Israel since its founding, and at war with the presence of Jews in the Middle East before then, during the period of *aliya* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Iraq, they have been at war with the Kurds for almost as long, and for many of the same reasons. So it is quite natural that the Arab-Israeli conflict looks different from the vantage point of Kurdistan than from, say, Damascus or Cairo. Indeed, Kurds and Israelis have something very important in common--they are, and have long been, besieged minorities in the Middle East, and at war with the same people.

But the Kurds have something important in common with the Palestinians, too--statelessness. One might

imagine, then, that Kurdish culture would be more or less equally divided on the matter of the Arab-Israeli conflict, or that individual Kurds might be conflicted internally, or even that Kurdish opinion would naturally side with fellow Muslims rather than with Jews. And indeed there are many Kurds who *are* conflicted when it comes to the Arab-Israeli dispute; you can find individuals who sympathize more with Israelis, and you can find, in principle, individuals who sympathize more with Palestinians. But every Kurd I have met supports the Israelis.

It is not hard to understand why: No one in Iraq can forget that Saddam Hussein's staunchest apologists in the Arab world were the Palestinians. In the run-up to the 1991 Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush assembled a coalition that included numerous Arab and Muslim countries, but Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat sided with Saddam Hussein. And the Kurds know that the primary weapon in the Palestinians' fight against Israel is terrorism--the one violent act Kurds in Iraq refused to commit, even when they were victims of genocide. Palestinian terrorism may be explained away, even celebrated, in most of the Arab world, but in Kurdistan it is offensive.

I asked Peshmerga colonel Mudhafer Hasan Rauf if the Kurdish army or regional government has any relations with the Israelis. "We live in the Middle East," he said. "The Arab countries don't want to have a relationship with Israel. Many Islamic groups inside the Arab world regard a relationship with Israel as something unholy. We believe in Islam, but if you compare us and the Arabs we think of Islam as a religion of brotherhood and peace. The Arab chauvinists wronged the religion's direction and made it another thing."

"We would like to have a relationship with Israel," Colonel Ameen said. "We have the same destiny. We are secretly their friends. We have many Jewish Kurds there now. They write articles for our magazines."

"The problems in the area are because of a misunderstanding of each other's religion," Colonel Rauf concurred. "Between the Jews and the Muslims and the Christians. I believe in the Koran. I know that Allah is the only God. God orders people and nations to have relationships with each other. But the fundamentalist Muslims don't think like this."

A member of the Kurdistan regional government explained how the Kurdish government is compelled to publicly split the difference between Arabs and Israelis, because Baghdad demands it. "Right now we have to follow Baghdad on foreign policy. But at the same time, we say we have nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict. If you told me you were Israeli I wouldn't have any problem with that. Most people here would rather meet an Israeli than an Arab. Arabs murdered our people." Thus is Kurdish affection for Israel an open secret. Kurdistan regional government President Masoud Barzani said more or less the same thing on al-Arabiya earlier in the year: "The constitution does not give us the right to maintain ties with any country," he said. "Diplomatic relations are the exclusive authority of the federal state. If an Israeli embassy were opened in Baghdad, we would no doubt open an Israeli consulate in Erbil. If diplomatic relations are not established between the Iraqi and Israeli states, there will be no relations between the Kurdistan provinces and Israel. But, in fact, as I have said in the past, I do not consider relations with Israel to be a crime or something forbidden... I support the rights of the Palestinian people, but at the same time I am against driving Israel into the sea. This is impossible... this policy is wrong, illogical, and unreasonable. Why annihilate a people? I do not believe in annihilating the Israeli people."

I asked General Rostam why the Kurdistan regional government does not simply cooperate with Israel clandestinely, since both have few friends and

many common enemies. "We don't have enough relations to be able to cooperate or discuss," he said. "But we expect to have that in the future. We will have relations and cooperation." It is unclear whether Rostam means he expects Baghdad to come around, which would mean that Erbil could cooperate openly, or if he expects Kurdistan to declare independence, in which case it will do whatever it wants. But one can make an educated guess.

If Kurdistan is a nation in all but name, Iraq is a nation in name only. Indeed, almost everyone in Iraqi Kurdistan thinks Baghdad is the capital of a deranged foreign country. The belief that northern Iraq is actually a nascent Kurdish state is so widespread, in fact, that the only people one meets there who think of Kurdistan as "Iraq" are from somewhere else.

In January 2005, the Kurds held an informal and non-binding referendum on Kurdistan's status. 98.7 percent voted to secede permanently from Iraq. This is not surprising: If Middle Easterners had drawn their own borders, Iraq would not exist in its current form; the British shackled Kurds and Arabs together when they created the post-imperial map. But the dream of an independent Kurdistan dates back to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, when Arab and Turkish nationalism were born as well. The League of Nations promised the Kurds autonomous rights. Instead, their homeland was broken up and parceled out to Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran. Only in Iran, where the Kurds call Persians "cousins," do they feel much kinship with their nominal countrymen.

And nowhere do Kurds feel more distant from their fellow citizens than in Iraq. Old people's views of Baghdad are colored by memories of brutal oppression, genocide, and war, but young people have no memories of living under Saddam, no memories, in fact, of living among an Arab majority. Most do not even speak Arabic; English is now the second language taught in schools. Nor do they see any point in *creating* ties with Baghdad that haven't existed in living memory, especially when Baghdad is burning. Today, the Iraqi flag is not flown in Erbil; it has been banned. The defiance of the Kurds may be quiet, but it is strong, and hardening.

Kurdistan regional government officials, when they are speaking on the record, say they support federalism in Iraq, and do not seek independence. Privately, though, they say they are simply stalling. Even *that* puts them out of step with most Kurdish citizens--but everyone knows they are not sincere. Maintaining nominal relations with Baghdad is a pragmatic, temporary, and likely prudent position for them to take. Better, they think, to hold off on declaring independence until their nation is strong enough--or until that independence can be guaranteed by foreign powers.

Kurdistan regional government President Barzani, who is little more than a figurehead, plays the bad cop. He has influence but little real power, and he isn't constrained by Iraq's internal politics. So he broods in his mountain palace and openly threatens secession. "Self-determination is the natural right of our people," he says. "When the right time comes, it will become a reality." As Christopher Hitchens has written, "The Kurds have now stepped onto the stage of Middle Eastern history, and it will not be easy to push them off it again. You may easily murder a child, as the parties of god prove every single day, but you cannot make a living child grow smaller."

The United States will possibly withdraw from Iraq before the fighting is finished. American public opinion may well demand it. But if that should happen, the war will simply rage on without the Americans, and the Iraqi government might not survive the post-withdrawal scramble for power from insurgents, militias, terrorists, and their foreign

patrons. And if the government falls, there probably won't be another.

Iraq may end up resembling other regional weak-state anarchies, such as Somalia, which exist solely as geographic abstractions. Or it could go the way of Lebanon in the 1980s and divide into ethnic and sectarian cantons. Perhaps it will be invaded and picked apart by Turkey, Syria, and Iran, all of which have vital interests in who rules it and how. Iraq could even turn into a California-size Gaza, ruled by militants who wear black masks instead of neckties or *keffiyehs*.

But one certainty, at least, is that if Kurdistan declares independence and is *not* protected, one of two possible wars is likely to begin immediately. The first will involve Turkey; after all, few things are more undesirable to Ankara than Turkish Kurdistan violently attaching itself to Iraqi Kurdistan. The second will be about borders: Iraqi Kurdistan's southern borders are not yet demarcated. If Turkey doesn't invade, the Kurds will want to attach the Kurdish portions of Kirkuk Province, and possibly also Nineveh Province, to their new state.

Even if Kurdistan doesn't declare independence, there may still be more war on the way. "We believe if the Americans withdraw from this country there will be many more problems," Colonel Mudhafer said. "The Sunni and Shia want total control of Iraq. We are going to get involved in that. Iran is going to be involved in that. Turkey is going to be involved in that. Syria is going to be involved in that. The Sunni and Shia fighting in Baghdad will pull us in. We are going to be involved. Turkey and Iran will make problems for us. It is not going to be safe. All the American martyrs will have died for nothing, and there will be more problems in the future. Americans should build big bases here." For obvious reasons, the idea of the American military garrisoning its forces in Kurdistan is wildly popular among the Kurds.

It should be obvious by now why an American-guaranteed independent Kurdistan would benefit the Kurds of Iraq. But few Americans seem to realize that--after Kurdistan itself--no country would benefit more from this than the United States.

For starters, if the United States insists on cutting its losses in Iraq, it would be best to cut *only* its losses. And clearly, Kurdistan is not a loss. Indeed, it would be a waste and a disgrace if this eminently decent society is abandoned to war, terror, and mayhem. Certainly the Kurds would have to be crazy to trust, let alone work with, Americans ever again. Moreover, the complete and permanent liberation of Iraqi Kurdistan and its rehabilitation from mass grave to free state would surely be one of the great foreign policy successes in American history. It would rightly take its place alongside the democratic transformation of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and the rescue of South Korea from the Stalinist starvation monarchy in Pyongyang. Losing Arab Iraq would be a partial loss, for sure. Yet no serious person says America unambiguously lost in Korea because only *part* of that country was saved.

Declaring partial victory isn't just a matter of pride. Al-Qaida has set up shop in Iraq and hopes to defeat America there, just as the Mujahadeen drove Soviet troops from Afghanistan in the 1980s. The Mujahadeen's defeat of the Soviets there has long been one of al-Qaida's most effective ideological talking points and recruiting slogans, insisting (however wrongly) that the economic and military superpowers are in fact easily defeated facades. Osama Bin Laden insisted that America would be next, and millions of radical Muslims loved him for it. Many wished to help him and joined al-Qaida.

And for a time, particularly in the weeks and months following September 11, it might have looked as though they were right. But they have been in decline ever since, unable to top their murder of three thousand civilians in New York and Washing-

ton. If they drive the American *military* out of Iraq, however, they will surely have topped themselves. They will no longer be in decline; they will, rather, be at a whole new peak. Bin Laden's old and dubious claim that America is "next" will look almost plausible, and he will have a new case in point when he says that America and the West are the "weak horse." Now, a partial American victory in Iraq won't stop al-Qaida from declaring its own partial victory. But a draw certainly beats a rout. If al-Qaida manages to build a statelet in the Sunni Arab portion of Iraq--the only part of the country it *could* take over, even in theory--that statelet will exist right on the border of Kurdistan. How much better it would be if American troops were just minutes, and not time zones, away. Without a doubt, no better strategic location exists for American forces to disrupt or destroy al-Qaida's new base--or, for that matter, to undertake future operations, should the need arise, in Iran or Syria.

As if more reason were needed, the odds of American soldiers facing a Kurdish insurgency are vanishingly close to zero. A few hundred troops are based there already, and not a single shot has been fired at them. In fact, Iraqi Kurdistan is where American soldiers go to relax on the weekend, a place where they can briefly take off their body armor. Nearby Arab countries--even those with friendly governments--are scarcely as welcoming: Most Kuwaitis, for example, don't mind hosting American troops, since it was America that liberated them from Saddam Hussein. But some Kuwaitis think it's time for American troops to go home now that Baghdad has a new government. American troops in Saudi Arabia also protected that country from an Iraqi invasion after Saddam swallowed Kuwait, but Osama Bin Laden cites that very protection as one of the grievances that triggered al-Qaida's formation. Moving American troops to friendly Kurdish soil and away from hostile Arab soil will help put this long-standing problem to bed. American bases won't be needed in Saudi Arabia or Arab Iraq if they are re-located to Kurdistan.

And one thing is certain: The United States military needs bases it can use without walking into the minefield of regional politics. If radical regimes like those in Syria and Iran are more emboldened than ever in the wake of recent American setbacks, new bases in Kurdistan may prove their worth very quickly.

In the mid-1970s, the United States quietly armed and funded a Kurdish insurgency against Saddam Hussein. This was before America's notorious--and bogus--alliance with Iraq during that country's war against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Although the Iran-Iraq war broke out just after the 1979 revolution that forced Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi into exile and brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power, hostilities had long been brewing: The shah, an American client-state dictator, was no more enamored of Saddam than the Islamic Republic would prove to be. So the United States and the shah were all too happy to back Iraq's Kurds in their fight against Baghdad. When the shah signed a peace treaty with Saddam, however, American aid to the Kurds was cut off without warning. The Kurds were left stranded, cruelly exposed to Saddam's murderous retaliation.

Between 150,000 and 300,000 Kurdish civilians were forced to flee to Iran. Some sought asylum in the United States, but Washington refused to grant them refugee status: "Covert action," said then-secretary of state Henry Kissinger, "should not be confused with missionary work." Indeed, Washington refused even to provide humanitarian assistance to the people Congressman Otis Pike admitted were used as mere "tools."

Today, the Kurdistan regional government is bracing itself for another round of more of the same. "As a military person, I am disturbed by what is going on in America now," said General Karam.

"They want to withdraw their troops. We want the Americans to stay. Why are people thinking like this? I want you, as a reporter, as a journalist, to get our Kurdish voice to the American people so they know about Kurdish suffering in Iraq. We don't want the American army to leave this area. The terrorists are excited about what is going on in the Congress."

True, the Kurds have a lot less to worry about than do most Arab Iraqis. Those who work with the United States in the Iraqi government, the Iraqi army, and the Iraqi police are already on the hit lists of numerous death squads, terrorist cells, and militias. Doctors, lawyers, writers, journalists, and countless others have already been singled out for extermination for choosing democracy and civil society over politics by bullets and car bombs. The terror that plagued Pol Pot's Cambodia in the 1970s and Algeria in the 1990s now stalks every decent person in the center and south of Iraq.

When American troops leave, they can't (or, more accurately, won't) bring all these people home with them. Fortunately, the Kurdish Autonomous Region already admits some of them as refugees. Iraqi Kurdistan is about twice the size of Switzerland: Not big enough to absorb every moderate person in Iraq who wants to live in a normal country, but with room enough to shelter those who are exposed by name. Securing Kurdistan with American forces, on the condition that Erbil admits a certain number of refugees, could demonstrate that the United States at least tries to keep its word—not only with its Kurdish allies, but with its Arab ones as well.

It may also serve as a lesson on what happens to those who *don't* cooperate with the United States. After all, the Sunni Triangle and Iraq's Shia south could have followed Kurdistan's lead; the choice was theirs alone to make. Sadly, both the innocent and the guilty alike will likely suffer the terrible consequences of that decision. Let Middle Easterners beyond Iraq's borders pay heed: If they wish to experience a less convulsive transition of power when their tyrants are deposed, Kurdistan will stand as the model to emulate. Arab Iraq will be the anti-model, the warning: *If you prefer bullets to ballots, you will be left to your fate.*

Fifteen million Kurds live in eastern Turkey, and the separatist war between the government and the PKK has raged there, at varying degrees of intensity, for decades. In the all but impassable mountains on Iraq's northeastern border with Turkey, the PKK has dug in its heels. Its guerillas launch hit-and-run-attacks against soldiers—and sometimes civilians—in Turkey, then retreat into their Iraqi valleys and caves. The Turkish military shells the redoubt from its side of the border, crosses the frontier in hot pursuit of the terrorists, and threatens to launch a major invasion if the Kurdistan regional government won't militarily shove the PKK back into Turkey.

Why won't the Kurds of Iraq evict the PKK? Why do they give Turkey an excuse to invade? Colonel Mudhafer was tired of that question. He impatiently unscrolled a map when I met with him in his office. "That's where we lived when we fought against Saddam Hussein. We chose that place for a reason. It was impossible for Saddam to flush us out there, and it's impossible for us to flush out the PKK now."

If only it were that simple. The Kurdistan regional government *could* work with the Turks to prevent this from exploding into a larger, international struggle. But the Kurds are torn. Kurds in every country have a terrible history of fractious, internecine war. After Saddam was ejected from Iraqi Kurdistan, and before he was removed from power in Baghdad, Iraq's Kurds fought a pointless civil war over resources and power. The results were devastating,

but at least they learned an important lesson from the experience: When surrounded by enemies, don't go fighting each other.

As their inaction in dealing with the PKK shows, however, the Kurds may have learned that lesson too well. Like both Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank, the PKK arguably harms Kurds and their interests far more than their enemies do: It brings increasingly destructive reprisals down on their heads and makes a diplomatic solution to their problems all but impossible.

"Fighting is not a solution," one Kurd told me. Nor do the Iraqi Kurds want to fight, he continued, because the reason for the PKK's terrorist activity is that the Kurdish people in Turkey don't have rights.

Now, apologists for Palestinian terror say much the same thing. The analysis is partly persuasive, though, because it isn't entirely wrong. Kurds in Turkey really *do* have legitimate grievances, just as stateless Palestinians do. But those grievances can't be addressed by exploding bombs in Tel Aviv and Istanbul.

Iraq's Kurds know better, but they are locked in a holding pattern. They are pulled in one direction by their political morality, and in another by ethnic solidarity. They'll need help if they are to avoid an all-out war with Ankara.

And make no mistake: The Turks may say their problem is the PKK, but they have also threatened to launch a full-scale invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan should the people there dare to declare independence. After all, Turkey fears a Turkish Kurdish unraveling of its own—not to mention an emboldened PKK—should an independent Kurdish state exist anywhere.

Certainly these are legitimate fears, not to be dismissed. But they don't change the fact that nations inconvenient to Turkey have a right to exist. The United Nations can't—or won't—act as an honest broker between the two sides: It's too weak and uninterested. But the United States can. Indeed, Americans are the only people in the world who consider both Turkey and Kurdistan allies. The Turkish-American alliance is strained, to be sure, but it is still an alliance. American soldiers could flush out Iraq's PKK terrorists on the condition that Turkey's relationship with its Kurdish minority is properly liberalized. And they should.

On the matter of Iran and Syria, however, the United States should make no such deals. Both these countries have restive Kurdish populations of their own—and both also sponsor insurgencies against the United States, Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq. Surely, they don't deserve insurance against insurrections of their own.

The Americans are learning that a violent insurgency against conventional state forces works. And the insurgency's sponsors—Tehran and Damascus—are learning it, too.

The Kurds of Iran and Syria would like nothing more than American assistance in launching anti-regime insurgencies of their own. An American-guaranteed Kurdish state in Iraq would serve to make such insurgencies only more likely, even without American help. Of course, the United States should never sponsor, or threaten to sponsor, an insurgency that isn't morally just, or that's merely temporarily useful. The Kurds of Iraq were used this way once before, with terrible and shameful results. Yet a Kurdish insurgency in Iran and Syria could be both a useful weapon *and* a just cause, so long as the moral corruption from the likes of the PKK can be neutralized.

Some critics would no doubt accuse Americans of imperialism were they to support Kurdish resistance in these countries. Yet it can more plausibly be

argued that such support demonstrates the very opposite. Take the case of Iran: Almost half the country isn't even Persian. That's because Iranian territory is, in fact, what remains of the Persian Empire, which includes not only Persia but also Kurdistan, Western Azerbaijan, Balochistan, and the Arab region of Khuzestan. Iran, much like Iraq, is thus a nation state in name only. If Palestinians, Tibetans, and Chechens (to name just three examples) should have the right to self-determination, so should Kurds, Azeris, Balochis, and Iranian Arabs. True, there may be a case for the preservation of what's left of the Persian Empire. But so long as Tehran is ruled by clerical tyrants, the case for American-supported Kurdish resistance may be the stronger one. Therefore a large presence of American troops between Turks and Kurds may be the only military force in the world that can prevent a bloodbath.

Terrorism works. Up to a point. That is the tragic lesson of recent history in the Middle East. The Palestinians aren't the only people in the world who seek and deserve a homeland of their own. But the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The Kurds do not receive billions of dollars in Western aid. The Kurds do not receive endless media attention. There are no rallies on Western campuses demanding their freedom, nor does the United Nations Security Council require that a state be created for them, although—unlike the Palestinians—they fought honorably against their enemies and have already carved out a moderately prosperous, free, and functional de-facto state of their own. They are America's allies, but most Americans know nothing about them.

One could argue—and thank God the Kurds of Iraq don't—that waves of suicide bombers would surely attract world attention and garner sympathy for their cause. After all, the international community has long acted as an enabler of violent national liberation movements, not because terrorism is acceptable but because appeasing it is the path of least resistance for the conflict-averse. Meanwhile, liberal and moderate groups that seek the same goal but do not employ terrorism are shunted aside. The way of reason and morality, it would seem, is bound to go unrewarded.

If the Kurds of Iraq get their state before the terrorists in Turkey and Palestine get theirs, it will be the great reversal the Middle East desperately needs. Terrorism will have proven to be the less effective tactic. And who knows? Perhaps others who seek independence will take note. Palestinian terror groups like Hamas won't, of course, but Kurdish terrorists in Turkey just might. And the Kurds of Iran and Syria are even more likely to do so.

But the real moral case for an American-guaranteed Kurdistan is simpler than that: They've earned it. They fought alongside the United States in Iraq and built a decent society there. They don't start wars, they don't terrorize people, and they don't deserve to be bullied and lorded over by others. America owes them. Everyone owes them.

"I ask Americans not to leave us," Colonel Ameen said to me at the Ministry of Peshmerga. "From 1920 until now, we have been frustrated and disappointed by their pledges and promises. Eight times we have been disappointed. I ask the American people, do not make it nine."

Michael J. Totten is an independent journalist who has traveled regularly to Iraqi Kurdistan. He blogs at www.MichaelTotten.com.

U.S. Senator Joe Biden Plan for Iraq Emerges as Consensus, Bipartisan Path Toward Ending War : passes Senate, Vote: 75-23 in Favor

BIDEN: "Slowly but surely, we're building a consensus in the Congress around a way forward in Iraq. That's significant, because it's the only real way to end this war. Everyone agrees that there is no military solution in Iraq, only a political solution. That begs the question: so, what is your political solution? We have an obligation to answer that question and today, leaders from both parties answered with one voice."

BIDEN: "This may be President Bush's war. But it is America's future. Together, we have to get this right. Today, we are one step closer to doing just that."

Though critics dismissed the plan little over a year ago, Sen. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.'s (D-DE) plan for a federal system in Iraq passed the Senate today by a vote of 75-23, garnering key bipartisan support from leaders of both parties in the U.S. Senate. In May of 2006, Sen. Biden, along with President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations Leslie H. Gelb, announced a detailed plan for promoting a political settlement in Iraq that would allow our troops to leave, without leaving chaos behind. The plan called for a decentralized, federal system in Iraq, which would give its people local control over the fabric of their daily lives, including police, jobs, education and government services. A limited central government would be responsible for protecting Iraq's borders and distributing its oil revenues.

Sen. Biden's amendment today to the Defense Authorization Bill is based on his federalism plan for Iraq and is a product of his year-long effort working across the aisle to build support. During the vote, Sen. Biden's plan secured the support of key leaders in the U.S. Senate from both parties, including Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin (D-MI), former Chairman John Warner (R-VA) and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Richard Lugar (R-IN).

"For the first time in this incredibly divisive national debate we've been having about Iraq, a strong bi-partisan majority of senators – including fully half of the Republicans – has voted to change course," said Sen. Biden. "It's the first time there is some real hope that we can put ourselves on a course to leave Iraq without leaving chaos behind."

Sen. Biden's amendment also has 17 sponsors: Joe Biden (D-DE), Sam Brownback (R-KS), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Arlen Specter (R-PA), John Kerry (D-MA), Gordon Smith (R-OR), Bill Nelson (D-FL), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Harry Reid (D-NV), Diane Feinstein (D-CA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Ken Salazar (D-CO) and Tom Carper (D-DE).

"Slowly but surely, we're building a consensus in the Congress around a way forward in Iraq. That's significant, because it's the only real way to end this war," said Sen. Biden. "Everyone agrees that there is no military solution in Iraq, only a political solution. That begs the question: so, what is your political solution? We have an obligation to answer that question and today, leaders from both parties answered with one voice."



Sen. Joseph Biden: "Federalism is not partition. In fact, it's probably the only way to prevent partition or, even worse, the total fragmentation of Iraq. Federalism will not accelerate sectarian cleansing it's the only way to stop it."

The Biden amendment states that the U.S. should actively support a political settlement among Iraqis based on the provisions of Iraq's constitution that call for creating a federal system of government, with strong regions and a limited central government. It also urged the administration to bring in the international community – including the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Iraq's neighbors – to support a settlement based on federalism and to convene a conference with Iraqis to help them reach that settlement.

"The Bush Administration is pursuing a fundamentally flawed political strategy in Iraq. They believe that if we just give it enough time, a democratic central government in Baghdad will emerge that secures the support of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. Others believe that the mere fact of us leaving will force Iraqis to come together at the national level. In my judgment, both are wrong," said Sen. Biden. "There is no trust within the government in Baghdad; no trust of the government by the people; no capacity on the part of the government to deliver basic security or services; and no prospect the government will develop that trust and capacity anytime soon."

"Simply put, absent an occupation we cannot sustain or a dictator we cannot support, Iraq cannot be governed from the center at this point in its history. In my opinion, supporting a decentralized Iraq with strong regional governments and a limited central government is the only way we can end this war without leaving chaos behind," added Sen. Biden.

"This may be President Bush's war. But it is America's future. Together, we have to get this right. Today, we are one step closer to doing just that," said Sen. Biden.

A few key facts about the Biden amendment:

0. The legislation does not tell Iraqis what to do. It speaks only to what U.S. policy should be.
0. Federalism is not a U.S. or foreign imposition on Iraq. Iraq's own constitution calls a "decentralized, federal system" and sets out the powers of the regions (extensive) and those of the central government (limited). The Constitution also says that in case of conflict between regional and national law, regional law prevails.
0. Federalism is not partition. In fact, it's probably the only way to prevent partition or, even worse, the total fragmentation of Iraq.
0. Federalism will not accelerate sectarian cleansing; it's the only way to stop it. Iraqis are already voting with their feet, as yesterday's article in the New York Times demonstrates. Before the surge, Iraqis were fleeing their homes at a rate of about 40,000 month; now, it's about 100,000 a month. Unless Iraqis come to some kind of agreement on sharing power peacefully, the cleansing will continue.

Sen. Biden's plan for Iraq has received accolades and bipartisan support from public officials, former Secretaries of State, foreign policy experts and editorial pages across the country [see enclosure below].

Public Officials on the Biden Plan for Iraq

Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA): "What Senator Biden has understood for several years now, and why I was so interested in supporting him from the very start as a proud member of his Foreign

Relations Committee, is we have to deal with the Iraq we have, not the Iraq we wish we had. If that sounds similar to someone—I understand that is a similar sentence. But we don't have an Iraq that is romantically wish we had. After all, as Senator Biden has said many times, for Iraq to survive and thrive, they have to want democracy as much as we want it for them. I think that quote by Senator Biden has been in my mind since the very start of this war that I did not vote for. So I see a light at the end of a very dark tunnel—a darkness that is impacting our Nation." [Congressional Record, 9/25/07]

"With your leadership, sometime ago, the United States devised a plan that allowed Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims their autonomy with power sharing. And that is the model that makes sense for Iraq today. A continuing military surge is not the answer. We need a diplomatic surge. And that is what your proposal allows us to do." [Press Conference, 6/7/07]

"Our chairman has come forward with a vision of how this thing can end up in a place where people will stop killing each other, and yet keep together the country of Iraq, to do the things a country has to do, including making sure the oil is shared in a fair way. It's not three separate countries -- he's gotten a rap on that; never was -- always semi-autonomous; policing by your own people; trust built up in that kind of situation. It's just what's happening in Kurdistan." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/31/07]

Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL): "At the end of the day, you have to have a plan that the players in the region are going to buy into, all of those neighbors of Iraq as well as the U.N. Security Council. What is the one plan that can bring all those people together? And that is this plan, a federal kind of plan that is allowed under the existing Iraqi constitution." [Press Conference, 6/7/07]

Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN): "My own view is that... we have to continually advise our friends in Iraq to get on with this question of the division of the oil money or the dedication of the various groups, as well as how a federation can work.

"It may not be an absolute division of the country into three parts, but at least some ways in which the Kurds, who already have a great deal of autonomy, are joined by a lot of Shiites that want the same thing and Sunnis that are worried that they're going to be left out of the picture. And that takes heavy lifting. Politically, a lot of objections even to bringing it up before their congress, but we have to keep insisting that they do. That has to be on the agenda." [PBS Newshour with Jim Lehrer, 9/19/2006]

Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS): "I think this idea of maybe the three autonomous regions within one country may be the one that we start to move more and more towards." [The Hill, 10/24/06]

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX): "Allowing the Kurds, Sunni and Shia to govern their own territories while sharing in Iraq's oil revenues through a national revenue stream could help quell the bloodletting." [Houston Chronicle, 10/17/06]

Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY): "Mr. Schumer said, he hopes that a controversial plan strongly advocated by Senator Joe Biden of Delaware—which essentially calls for the dissolution of Iraq into three autonomous ethnic enclaves (and which Mr. Schumer quietly supported last year)—will emerge as a concrete Democratic alternative to current administration policy. "It may actually move into play," said Mr. Schumer. "I've always believed that the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds hate each other more than they will ever love any central government." [New York Observer, 11/20/2006]

Bill Richardson, Governor of New Mexico: "I

would also study Senator Biden's federation [proposal]. I think that may be ultimately the right solution." [Christian Science Monitor, 9/27/06]

Muwaffaq al-Rubaie, National Security Advisor of Iraq: "I don't think Senator Biden has said that Iraq should be divided into three sections. What I think -- and I can't agree more with Senator Biden and his article, and I think he is a very well-informed person. What we are talking here -- and he's talking about Iraqi constitution. The constitution of Iraq has said very clearly that you can form provinces, regions, federal -- this is a democratic federal system, and any two or three or nine or 10 provinces can get together and form a region, and form a federal unit. And this is exactly what Joseph Biden is saying, or I believe when I read his article... I think Biden's idea is a good idea, with some modification because it's very compatible with our permanent constitution, which was ratified on the 15th of October last year." [CNN Late Edition, 5/7/06]

Congressman Chris Van Hollen: "Democrats have been making some of the most creative proposals. Senator Biden has a proposal for reconciliation in Iraq, but the stay the course rhetoric you hear from this administration clearly isn't getting us anywhere, things are getting worse not better. [T]he American people want a congress that's going to deal with this issue in reality not in the fantasy world." [MSNBC Live, 10/20/06]

General Jay Garner, former director, Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs in Iraq: "[Biden] is the only one of our sparring politicians who has laid out a realistic plan for pacifying Iraq. Everyone else just gives us rhetoric while Iraq slides toward civil war." [Congress Daily, 7/31/07]

Former Secretaries of State on the Biden Plan for Iraq

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: "It is possible that the present structure in Baghdad is incapable of national reconciliation because its elected constituents were elected on a sectarian basis. A wiser course would be to concentrate on the three principal regions and promote technocratic, efficient and humane administration in each. The provision of services and personal security coupled with emphasis on economic, scientific and intellectual development may represent the best hope for fostering a sense of community. More efficient regional government leading to substantial decrease in the level of violence, to progress towards the rule of law and to functioning markets could then, over a period of time, give the Iraqi people an opportunity for national reconciliation — especially if no region is strong enough to impose its will on the others by force. Failing that, the country may well drift into de facto partition under the label of autonomy, such as already exists in the Kurdish region." [Washington Post, 9/16/07]

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: "I'm sympathetic to an outcome that permits large regional autonomy. In fact, I think it is very likely that this will emerge out of the conflict that we are now witnessing."

"If the Iraqis cannot solve the problems that have been described, I've told the Chairman privately, that I thought that this [a federal system in Iraq] was a possible outcome, and at the right moment we should work in the direction that will (inaudible) for maximum stability and for maximum chances of peace." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/31/07]

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: "[T]he idea of the... constitution of Iraq [as] written, which allows for and mandates, in fact, a great deal of regional autonomy, is appropriate. I think there are certain central powers that a government needs. Some of it has to do with the oil revenue

and various other parts. So without endorsing any plan, I do think reality here sets in that there will be regional autonomy."

"[W]hen asked about Senator Biden's plan, I have said that, in fact, it is an attempt to keep the country together, which I do believe is what it is about. I'm just talking about in the long run what might happen that we do have to watch out for. But I think it is very clear from my reading of the plan that it is done in order to keep the country together. And I do think that is an essential point." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/31/07]

Former Secretary of State James Baker: "... I was and still am interested in the proposal that Senator Biden and Les Gelb put forward with respect to the idea that ultimately you may end up with three autonomous regions in Iraq, because I was worried that there are indications that that might be happening, in fact, on the ground anyway and, if it is, we ought to be prepared to try and manage the situation. So we have a sentence in our report that says, 'If events were to move irreversibly in this direction, the United States should manage the situation to ameliorate the humanitarian consequences, contain the violence and minimize regional stability.'" [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/30/07]

Editorial Pages and Columnists on Biden Plan for Iraq

Richard Cohen, Washington Post Columnist: "The way it [Iraq] should go was long ago devised by Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee... Biden and Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the Council of Foreign Relations, advocate breaking Iraq into a federation consisting of three parts: a Kurdish north, a Sunni center and a Shiite south. Those terms -- north, center and south -- are the vaguest approximations, but they represent a thought, or a despair, or a resignation: The only way Iraq is going to work is if we concede that it is not likely to work the way we wanted it to..."

"Since the Biden-Gelb plan was promulgated four years ago, the vaunted facts on the ground have initiated its implementation. Iraqis of one sort or another are drawing into themselves, circling the proverbial wagons so that they remain safely with their own kind and creating somewhat autonomous regions. Presently, Iraqis are fleeing their homes at the rate of 100,000 a month -- Sunnis moving to Sunni areas, Shiites to Shiite ones and the Kurds going nowhere because they already have what amounts to their own state..."

"The main virtue of the Biden-Gelb plan is that it does not stand athwart history. It enlists it. The volcanic eruption of nationalism and sectarianism that drenched the 20th century in blood -- the Holocaust above all -- has not yet run its course. The farmer and the rancher, to put things in Rodgers and Hammerstein terms, will not be friends. East Africa ousted its Indian and Chinese merchants. Some of Asia did the same. Tutsi will murder Hutu, Bosnian Serb will murder Bosnian Muslim and the same thing would happen, incidentally, if a single-state solution of Muslims and Jews were imposed on Israel. Even Belgium threatens to come apart, French speakers (Wallons) and Dutch speakers (Flemish) going their own ways." [Washington Post, 9/25/07]

Charles Krauthammer, Washington Post Columnist: "A weak, partitioned Iraq is not the best outcome. We had hoped for much more. Our original objective was a democratic and unified post-Hussein Iraq. But it has turned out to be a bridge too far. We tried to give the Iraqis a republic, but their leaders turned out to be, tragically, too driven by sectarian sentiment, by an absence of national identity, and by the habits of suspicion and maneuver cultivated during decades in the underground of Saddam Hussein's totalitarian

state...

"We now have to look for the second-best outcome. A democratic, unified Iraq might someday emerge. Perhaps today's ground-up reconciliation in the provinces will translate into tomorrow's ground-up national reconciliation. Possible, but highly doubtful. What is far more certain is what we are getting: ground-up partition." [Washington Post, 9/7/07]

Thomas Friedman, New York Times Columnist: "The Kurdish autonomous zone should be our model for Iraq. Does George Bush or Condi Rice have a better idea? Do they have any idea? Right now, we're surging aimlessly. Iraq's only hope is radical federalism — with Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds each running their own affairs, and Baghdad serving as an A.T.M., dispensing cash for all three. Let's get that on the table — now." [New York Times, 8/29/07]

David Brooks, New York Times Columnist: "Most American experts and policy makers wasted the past few years assuming that change in Iraq would come from the center and spread outward. They squandered months arguing about the benchmarks that would supposedly induce the Baghdad politicians to make compromises. They quibbled over whether this or that prime minister was up to the job. They unrealistically imagined that peace would come through some grand Sunni-Shiite reconciliation.

"Now, at long last, the smartest analysts and policy makers are starting to think like sociologists. They are finally acknowledging that the key Iraqi figures are not in the center but in the provinces and the tribes. Peace will come to the center last, not to the center first. Stability will come not through some grand reconciliation but through the agglomeration of order, tribe by tribe and street by street.

"The big change in the debate has come about because the surge failed, and it failed in an unexpected way. The original idea behind the surge was that U.S. troops would create enough calm to allow the national politicians to make compromises. The surge was intended to bolster the "modern" — meaning nonsectarian and nontribal — institutions in the country. But the surge is failing, at least politically, because there are practically no nonsectarian institutions, and there are few nonsectarian leaders to create them. Security gains have not led to political gains." [New York Times, 9/4/07]

Eugene Robinson, Washington Post Columnist: "Biden's plan is concrete and very well thought-out. I was skeptical at first — I thought the Turks would never accept even a semi-independent Kurdistan — but events may be heading in the direction of Biden's vision anyway. The Bush administration and its war policies remain committed to the idea of a unitary Iraq — no matter what's happening on the ground. Biden's idea of three basically autonomous mini-states ought to get more attention." [Washington Post Live Discussion, 6/5/07]

Michael Hirsh, Newsweek Columnist: "Joe Biden is dead right on Iraq... [Biden] has been on the record for a year with a fully thought-out vision for Iraq that offers a real alternative to the bleak choice we're getting from everyone else." [Newsweek.com, 4/26/07]

Thomas L. Friedman, New York Times columnist: "[T]he person I think who has been where I've been from the very beginning, seeing the potential, you know, that this could have for a positive outcome but really, really cautious and worried all the time, that if we weren't doing it right is, Joe Biden. I think Joe Biden has been on top of this from the very beginning. He was on top of the opportunity. He was on top of what stakes we

needed or what we needed to do to get some chance of realizing that opportunity and he's been top of saying this isn't working. [CNN The Situation Room, 4/20/2007]

David Brooks, New York Times columnist: "Senator Biden is the one exception. What happened Friday was significant with this intelligence report. It drove a missile right into the Bush policy. Because what it said was these two people, Sunni and Shia, will never get back together. That destroys the Bush policy. It drove a missile to the Democratic policy because it says we can't get out. So what's the other option? To me it's the soft partition idea that Joe Biden, lone among the leading Democrats, has been in favor of." [ABC This Week, 2/4/07]

"As Joe Biden points out, the Constitution already goes a long way toward decentralizing power. It gives the provinces the power to have their own security services, to send ambassadors to foreign countries, to join together to form regions. Decentralization is not an American imposition, it's an Iraqi idea. ... In short, logic, circumstances and politics are leading inexorably toward soft partition. The Bush administration has been slow to recognize its virtues because it is too dependent on the Green Zone Iraqis. The Iraqis talk about national unity but their behavior suggests they want decentralization. Sooner or later, everybody will settle on this sensible policy, having exhausted all the alternatives." [New York Times, *Parting Ways In Iraq*, 1/28/07]

"There is one option that does approach Iraqi reality from the bottom up. That option recognizes that Iraq is broken and that its people are fleeing their homes to survive. It calls for a 'soft partition' of Iraq in order to bring political institutions into accord with the social facts -- a central government to handle oil revenues and manage the currency, etc., but a country divided into separate sectarian areas to reduce contact and conflict. When the various groups in Bosnia finally separated, it became possible to negotiate a cold (if miserable) peace. Soft partition has been advocated in different ways by Joe Biden and Les Gelb, by Michael O'Hanlon and Edward Joseph, by Pauline Baker at the Fund for Peace, and in a more extreme version, by Peter Galbraith." [New York Times, *Breaking the Clinch*, 1/25/07]

"The liberals who favor quick exit never grappled with the consequences of that policy, which the Baker-Hamilton commission terrifyingly described. The centrists who believe in gradual withdrawal never explained why that wouldn't be like pulling a tooth slowly. Joe Biden, who has the most intellectually serious framework for dealing with Iraq, was busy yesterday, at the crucial decision-making moment, conducting preliminary fact-finding hearings, complete with forays into Iraqi history." [New York Times, *The Fog Over Iraq*, 1/11/07]

Philadelphia Inquirer, Editorial Board: "One shining exception to 'slogans over substance' is U.S. Sen. Joe Biden (D., Del.). Gutsily, he's put forth a plan for dividing Iraq into semi-autonomous Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni zones, with Baghdad as a federal city; a fair division of oil revenues; and U.S. troops nearby as a watchdog against neighbors' mischief. You can name a dozen ways Biden's approach could collapse. But at least he has put a reality-based proposal on the table. That's more than most of the people seeking your vote right now seem willing to do." [Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/1/06]

David Broder, Washington Post columnist: "At a time when most people see nothing but hopeless discord in Iraq, it is healthy to have someone offering alternatives that could produce progress." [Washington Post, 5/4/06]

Jackson Diehl, Washington Post columnist:

"Instead, the time may finally be ripe for some of the ideas that have been doggedly pushed for some of this year by Democratic Sen. Joseph Biden, who has been one of his party's most serious and responsible voices on Iraq... It's easy to find holes in this strategy, as with any other plan for Iraq... But Biden's basic idea -- of an external political intervention backed by an international alliance -- is the one big option the Bush administration hasn't tried." [Washington Post, 10/2/06]

David Ignatius, Washington Post columnist: "The Democrat who has tried hardest to think through these problems is Sen. Joseph Biden. He argues that the current government of national unity isn't succeeding in holding Iraq together, and that America should instead embrace a policy of 'federalism plus' that will devolve power to the Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish regions. Iraqis are already voting for sectarian solutions, Biden argues, and America won't stabilize Iraq unless it aligns its policy with this reality. I disagree with some of the senator's conclusions, but he's asking the right question: How do we fix Iraq?" [Washington Post, 9/30/06]

Bill O'Reilly, Fox News: "See, I favor Biden's — Senator Biden's solution of the three regional areas. Because you've already got one, the Kurds in the north that's autonomous. If you could carve the two out, divide up the oil revenue, have a central government protected by the Americans to make sure that the Iranians don't come in, I think that might work." [The O'Reilly Factor, 9/29/06]

Portland Press Herald (ME) Editorial Board: "Biden's scenario opens the door for Congress to conduct a needed discussion about options that fall between the status quo and immediate withdrawal." [The Portland Press Herald (ME), 5/9/06]

Delaware News Journal Editorial Board: "Sen. Joseph Biden has done the country a service by forwarding a thoughtful, realistic plan for the future of Iraq." [Delaware News Journal, 5/3/06]

The Barre Montpelier Times Argus (VT) editorial board: "Let's hope someone in the White House reads the Biden-Gelb essay and draws Bush's attention to a solution he can embrace." [The Barre Montpelier Times Argus (VT), 5/2/06]

St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Board: "Together with incentives (i.e., a share of oil revenue) to attract the Sunnis, a phased American troop withdrawal and a regional non-aggression pact (Iran and Syria, stay out), the Biden-Gelb plan offers at least a semblance of hope. You could even call it a turning point." [St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO), 05/02/06]

The Journal Standard (IL) Editorial Board: "Sen. Joe Biden [is] among the few Democrats offering something resembling a plan. On Sunday, he floated the idea of separating Iraq along sectarian lines into three largely autonomous states under the umbrella of a weak central government. That may or may not be the ideal policy. The point is we need to do something radically different. The alternative is a mission perpetually unfulfilled and ever more costly in American blood and treasure." [The Journal Standard (IL), 5/2/06]

Foreign Policy Experts on the Biden Plan for Iraq

Michael O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution: "The time may be approaching when the only hope for a more stable Iraq is a soft partition of the country. Soft partition would involve the Iraqis, with the assistance of the international community, dividing their country into three main regions. Each would assume primary responsibility for its own security and governance, as Iraqi Kurdistan already does. Creating such a structure could prove difficult and risky. However, when measured against the alternatives—continuing to police an ethno-sectarian war, or withdrawing and

allowing the conflict to escalate—the risks of soft partition appear more acceptable. Indeed, soft partition in many ways simply responds to current realities on the ground, particularly since the February 2006 bombing of the Samarra mosque, a major Shi'i shrine, dramatically escalated inter-sectarian violence. If the U.S. troop surge, and the related effort to broker political accommodation through the existing coalition government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki fail, soft partition may be the only means of avoiding an intensification of the civil war and growing threat of a regional conflagration. While most would regret the loss of a multi-ethnic, diverse Iraq, the country has become so violent and so divided along ethno-sectarian lines that such a goal may no longer be achievable." ["The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq," Brookings Institution Analysis Paper, 06/07]

"It would be preferable... to retain some level of multi-ethnic society... However, let's be clear about what the data show—it's happening already. And right now, it's the militias and the death squads that are driving the ethnic cleansing, and the movement towards a breakup of Iraq. And the question pretty soon is going to be whether we try to manage that process, or let the militias alone drive it, because it's happening. 100,000 people a month are being driven from their homes. Iraq looks like Bosnia more and more." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/10/07]

Former Iraq Defense Minister Ali Allawi: "I think the solution has to be to really face the fact that the invasion, occupation of the country has led to really enormous consequences, not only inside the Iraq but in the region. Unless you administer and control the effects of the invasion, you're unlikely to have much peace. And to do that I think you have to take into account that certain irreversible changes have taken place, especially, for example, the empowerment of the Shiite community, the empowerment of the Kurds, and the effects of that on the various countries of the Middle East.

JON STEWART: So you see sort of a central government, kind of existing to mediate between Kurds, Shi'a, and Sunni, but then they also have autonomy of their own?

Allawi: I think so. In the long term, if you want to have a nation state, these components have to be brought together again. You have to reweave the structures of the country and society. And a central government that is based on a kind of federal arrangement is possibly the best outcome." [The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, 4/18/07]

Ambassador Dennis Ross, Counselor and Ziegler Distinguished Fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy: "The only thing I would say, though, as I've noted before, with 100,000 Iraqis being displaced a month, you're beginning to create the outlines of that on the ground [a federal system in Iraq]. So I was actually in favor of the idea before, and I think it may have more of a potential now because of that reality." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing,

1/17/07]

Ambassador Richard Haass, President Council on Foreign Relations: "I've long admired the chairman's idea [Of a federal system in Iraq]... The problem is—it's also put forward by my predecessor—the problem is not the idea. The idea's a reasonable idea; it's a good idea. The problem facing the idea is that it's a reasonable idea that's been introduced into an unreasonable political environment. If Iraqis were willing to sign on to this idea of distribution of political and economic power and so forth, federalism, all Iraqis would be better off and a large part of the problem would fade. The problem is that we can't get Iraqis to sign on to a set of arrangements that, quite honestly, would leave the bulk of them better off. We can't force them to be reasonable. And at the moment, they've essentially embarked on a path which is in some ways self-destructive of a society. So again—but the flaw is not inherent in the ideas; it's just, again, we can't—the very reasonableness that's at the heart of the chairman's idea is rejected again by -- virtually across the board, particularly by Shi'a and Sunnis, because they can't agree on the precise balance, if you will, of political and economic power within their society. So at the moment, there's not yet a federal scheme they would sign on to." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/17/07]

Yahia Said, Director, Iraq Revenue Watch: "I think the constitution, the Iraqi constitution, with all its shortcomings, serves as a good starting point for dialogue. But the constitution needs to be transformed through genuine dialogue from a dysfunctional to a rational federal structure. Oil and negotiations on an oil deal, which have apparently concluded recently, also provide a model for the -- for that rational federalism. The main principles that the negotiators have agreed on is to maximize the benefit of Iraq's oil wells to all Iraqis, to use oil as a way to unite the nation, and to build a framework based on transparency, which is very important in a situation of lack -- of poor trust, and on efficiency and equity." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 1/10/07]

Former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke: "I urge [President Bush] to lay out realistic goals, redeploy our troops and focus on the search for a political solution. We owe that to the Iraqis who welcomed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and put their trust in us, only to find their lives in danger as a result. By a political solution, I mean something far more ambitious than current U.S. efforts aimed at improving the position of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki by changing ministers or setting timelines for progress. Sen. Joe Biden and Les Gelb have advocated what they call, in a reference to the negotiations that ended the war in Bosnia in 1995, a "Dayton-like" solution to the political situation -- by which they mean a looser federal structure with plenty of autonomy for each of the three main groups, and an agreement on sharing oil revenue." [Washington Post, 10/24/06]

Ambassador Peter W. Galbraith: "And, Mr. Chairman, if I may say, I am often asked what is

the difference between the plan that you and Les Gelb put forward and the plan that I have outlined. And I would say that the central point is what they share is that we believe that the future of Iraq is up to the Iraqis. You and Les Gelb are more optimistic about what that future might bring. And if you're right, I think that would be terrific." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, 1/11/07]

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter, Vice President for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies, CATO Institute: "And I believe there is a regional -- there is a reasonable prospect of convincing even Iran and Syria that a proxy war can easily spiral out of control and it would not be in their best interests to tolerate that kind of development, that it is better to quarantine this conflict and allow the dynamics in Iraq to play themselves out. Perhaps at some point the various factions in Iraq will agree on compromise, either a reasonably peaceful, formal partition, or a very loose federation with adequate political compromise. But they have to determine that. We cannot determine that for them." [Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, 1/11/07].

Walter Russell Mead, Council on Foreign Relations: "I thought that the Joe Biden op-ed ... in the *Wall Street Journal* yesterday was also a very sober and thoughtful approach.

JIM LEHRER: For those who didn't read that, capsule it for us.

Mead: Well, they were basically talking about a way forward in Iraq that would have some bipartisan support, and something that the administration could work with. And I think what we're seeing now is a sense that the country does need to try to move as united as possible." [PBS Newshour, 10/25/06]

Anne Marie Slaughter, Dean of Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University: "I think that the Biden-Gelb plan is the best option out there." [TPMcafe.com, 5/18/06]

Eric Leaver, Institute for Policy Studies Research Fellow: "The two alternatives that have been fleshed out most deeply are 'strategic redeployment' and plans for partition... The five-point plan of Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., calling for a virtual partition of Iraq has its roots in proposals made by Peter Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador with a long involvement in policy on Iraq, and Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations... Both of these plans have merits... These measures would draw in Iraq's neighbors who are desperately needed for a long-term solution." [TomPaine.com, 9/5/06]

David Phillips, Council on Foreign Relations, author of *Losing Iraq*: "What they are proposing makes absolute sense. By decentralizing power and giving regions control over governance, economy and cultural affairs, you have some chance of holding the country together." [The Guardian, 5/2/06]



26 SEPTEMBRE 2007

Face à un Iran nucléaire militaire, que faire ?

Entre intensification des sanctions économiques et intervention armée, les réponses possibles des Occidentaux.

Une certitude: selon tous les experts, au rythme actuel, dans deux ans, Téhéran aura la maîtrise du nucléaire. Face à ce danger, Washington avance des options militaires si les sanctions de l'ONU ne font pas plier un pouvoir iranien désuni. Six questions-réponses pour examiner cette alternative.

Où en est le programme nucléaire iranien ?

L'Iran continue de construire des «cascades» de centrifugeuses nécessaires à la production d'uranium enrichi - elle en disposerait d'une dizaine, pour un total de 1640 machines. De son côté, Téhéran prétend disposer de 3000 centrifugeuses, ce qui, en théorie, lui permettrait de fabriquer une bombe par an. Mais, pour cela, il lui faut enrichir l'U-235 (destiné au réacteur nucléaire) à 90%, et non à 4% comme actuellement.

Existe-t-il une «solution militaire» à la crise nucléaire iranienne ?

C'est ce que laisse entendre l'administration américaine, et, récemment, Sarkozy et Kouchner. Si attaque il devait y avoir, il s'agirait essentiellement de frappes aériennes conjuguées à des actions menées par les forces spéciales. Une «invasion» terrestre de l'Iran,

comme celle de l'Irak en 2003, semble totalement exclue. Deux pays sont militairement capables de conduire ces frappes aériennes: les Etats-Unis et Israël - la France et la Grande-Bretagne possèdent des capacités offensives nettement plus réduites.

La première difficulté est d'identifier clairement les cibles: lesquelles faut-il détruire pour stopper le programme nucléaire iranien ou pour déstabiliser le régime, en particulier les Gardiens de la révolution qui constituent son bras armé? Il existe aussi un risque de contamination radioactive en cas de frappes directes de matériel fissile. Dans toutes les hypothèses, une seule frappe ne serait pas suffisante: il ne s'agit donc pas de rééditer le bombardement de la centrale nucléaire irakienne de Tamouz, conduit par l'aviation israélienne en juin 1981.

Autre difficulté: les Iraniens se préparent à une telle attaque. Ils ont donc dispersé leurs sites, les ont renforcés en les enfouissant, parfois sous des tonnes de béton. Enfin, ils ont développé des défenses sol-air. Dernier problème: si des frappes aériennes anéantissent ou réduisent les capacités nucléaires de l'Iran, Téhéran ne restera pas sans réagir. Les cibles potentielles sont nombreuses: l'US Army est en Irak, en Afghanistan et dans le Golfe. En cas d'implica-

tion d'Israël, c'est le front du Liban qui pourrait se «rallumer» via le Hezbollah. Comme en Irak, le déroulement des premières heures d'une opération militaire est assez prévisible. Pour les suivantes, c'est beaucoup moins sûr...

Où se situe la «ligne rouge» ?

Il y a plusieurs lignes: diplomatique, technologique, militaire... La plus communément admise par les experts, c'est lorsque l'Iran aura accumulé assez de matière fissile pour fabriquer une bombe. Un horizon qui devrait être atteint en 2009 si Téhéran poursuit son programme au rythme actuel.

Les sanctions du Conseil de sécurité sont-elles efficaces ?

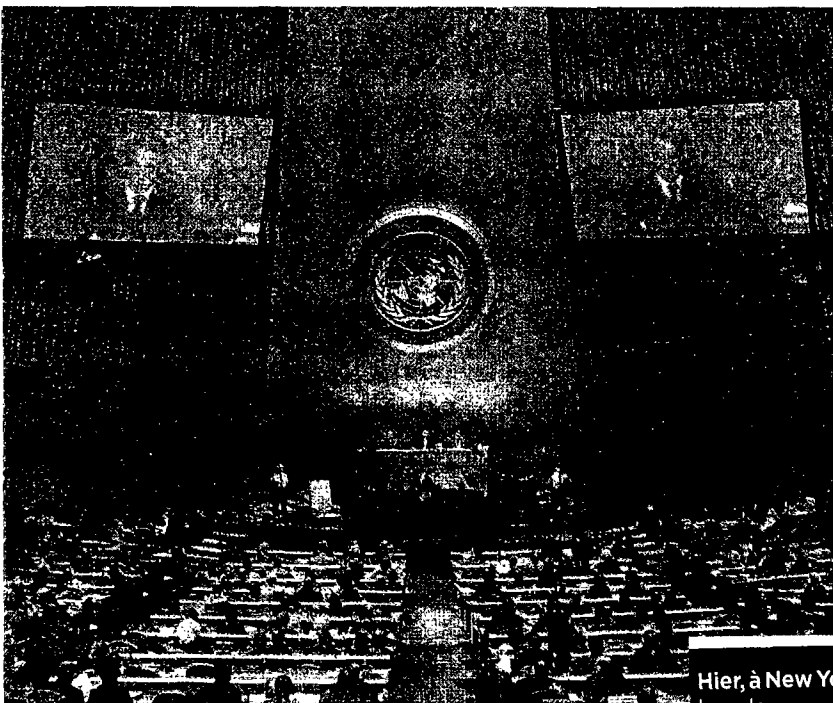
Même si elles ont une portée limitée, les deux résolutions du Conseil de sécurité, la 1737 et la 1747, adoptées à l'unanimité en décembre 2006 et mars 2007, ont déjà sérieusement affecté l'économie iranienne, comme le soulignait un rapport du FMI publié en mars. C'est le secteur financier qui est le plus touché. Parallèlement, la réduction des investissements étrangers dans le secteur pétrolier va aggraver la baisse de la production - estimée à 5% par an, selon Akbar Torkan, directeur de la compa-

gnie iranienne Pars Oil and Gas. Le secteur du raffinage, capable de ne répondre qu'à 60% de la demande intérieure, est, lui aussi, affecté. Fin juin, un plan de rationnement de l'essence a été instauré, provoquant des émeutes à Téhéran. Par ailleurs, l'augmentation des primes d'assurance à l'exportation a entraîné le renchérissement des produits importés par Téhéran. D'où une hausse de l'inflation, estimée à présent à 40%. Une troisième résolution pourrait encore aggraver la situation, mais ni la Russie ni la Chine n'y sont favorables. D'où la volonté de Paris de contourner l'ONU par des sanctions prises dans un cadre européen.

Face aux sanctions et aux menaces, le régime iranien serre-t-il les rangs ?

Il apparaît au contraire divisé, même s'il maintient une unité de façade. Ainsi, les ex-présidents Rafsandjani et Khatami sont soucieux d'éviter l'isolement de l'Iran. Dans l'ensemble, le régime craint une intervention militaire que ne semble pas redouter, en revanche, le président Ahmadinejad. C'est dans ce contexte qu'il faut replacer la déclaration de Kouchner, dont on peut imaginer qu'elle était destinée à inquiéter le pouvoir iranien. ◀

JEAN-DOMINIQUE MERCHET et JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN



Hier, à New York, lors de l'intervention du président français.

M. Sarkozy s'oppose à M. Ahmadinejad sur le dossier du nucléaire iranien

Le président iranien affirme que le dossier nucléaire est « clos ». Le président français, qui dénonce « un risque inacceptable » pour « la stabilité du monde », affirme que l'Iran « travaille sur l'arme nucléaire militaire »

NEW YORK (Nations unies)
CORRESPONDANT, ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Profitant de la reprise de ses négociations avec l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a « officiellement » affirmé, mardi 25 septembre, que « la question nucléaire de l'Iran est close » et relève désormais « des affaires ordinaires » de l'AIEA. Face à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU, le dirigeant iranien s'est même dit prêt, sous le contrôle de l'Agence, à partager ses expériences nucléaires avec d'autres pays.

Le 21 août, l'Iran s'est accordé avec le directeur de l'AIEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, pour répondre, jusqu'en décembre, aux questions qui demeurent sur près de vingt années d'activités nucléaires secrètes. Téhéran est ainsi parvenu à entraver les efforts des Etats-Unis, du Royaume-Uni et de la France, qui souhaitent obtenir une nouvelle vague de sanctions au Conseil de sécurité. Bien que Téhéran poursuive l'enrichissement d'uranium, en violation des résolutions de l'ONU, la Russie et la Chine veulent donner une chance à ce processus.

Plusieurs pays occidentaux ont protesté contre l'initiative de M. ElBaradei, qu'ils jugent être une diversion. M. Ahmadinejad, lui, a complimenté le directeur de l'AIEA, mardi, pour son « respect du droit ». Le président iranien a par ailleurs accusé les « puissances arrogantes » d'avoir « exercé une grande pression » sur l'AIEA pour faire « dérailler » la question nucléaire iranienne de sa « voie légale ».

Alors que le président américain, Geor-

ge Bush, a à peine abordé la question iranienne dans son discours devant l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU, Nicolas Sarkozy a affirmé qu'il n'y aura « pas de paix dans le monde si la communauté internationale fait preuve de faiblesse face à la prolifération des armements nucléaires ». « L'Iran a droit à l'énergie nucléaire à des fins civiles, a-t-il affirmé, mais en laissant l'Iran se doter de l'arme nucléaire, nous ferions courir un risque inacceptable à la stabilité de la région et du monde. »

M. Sarkozy a affirmé que « tous les experts de toutes les parties du monde sont d'accord pour dire que [les Iraniens] travaillent sur l'arme nucléaire militaire ». Cette affirmation va au-delà des observations contenues dans les rapports de l'AIEA, qui a dit ne pas être en mesure de déterminer avec certitude la nature, pacifique ou militaire, du programme iranien, en raison du manque de coopération de Téhéran. ■

PHILIPPE BOLOPION
ET NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

LE FIGARO samedi 29 - dimanche 30 septembre 2007

La Turquie et l'Irak signent un accord face aux Kurdes du PKK

PROCHE-ORIENT

Cet accord a minima ne permet pas à Ankara de poursuivre les rebelles du PKK en territoire irakien.

CET ACCORD vise à « empêcher les activités d'organisations terroristes, et en premier lieu, du PKK », a affirmé le ministre turc de l'Intérieur, Besir Atalay, qui faisait référence au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, qui mène une lutte armée contre Ankara, depuis ses bases arrières dans le nord de l'Irak, sous contrôle kurde. S'il constitue une avancée, après des mois de tension à la frontière turco-irakienne, ce texte, signé à Ankara par les ministres de l'Intérieur des deux pays, ne constitue qu'un accord a minima.

Ambitions autonomistes

En effet, les Irakiens ont refusé d'accéder à l'une des principales exigences turques, celle qui concerne le droit de poursuite des rebelles du PKK jusqu'en territoire irakien. Une question de souveraineté sur laquelle le pouvoir irakien, qui s'appuie sur sa composante kurde, peut difficilement transiger. Les négociations devraient se poursuivre, ainsi que celles sur l'extradition des dirigeants du PKK réfugiés en Irak, autre exigence turque rejetée hier par Bagdad.

Ankara estime que 3 000 insurgés liés au PKK utilisent le nord de l'Irak pour attaquer le sud-est de la Turquie. Les Turcs accusent même l'une des principales factions kurdes d'Irak, le Parti démocratique

du Kurdistan, d'approvisionner la rébellion en armes et munitions. Au début de l'été, les 50 000 soldats déployés par Ankara à la frontière irakienne avaient fait craindre une intervention militaire turque chez leur voisin.

Fréquentes du temps de Saddam Hussein, ces opérations se sont fortement réduites depuis l'occupation américaine de l'Irak. Aujourd'hui, Ankara prendrait un risque en lançant ses troupes contre les Kurdes d'Irak, principaux alliés des Américains. En s'y opposant, comme ils l'ont montré hier à Ankara, les Kurdes irakiens tiennent, de leur côté, à garder un levier de pression sur la Turquie, dans la perspective du référendum sur le statut de Kirkouk, cette cité riche en pétrole que les Kurdes irakiens revendiquent, pour mieux asseoir leurs ambitions autonomistes. Ce que redoutent les Turcs, craignant un effet de contagion sur leur minorité kurde.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT (avec AFP)

Urgence humanitaire pour la population irakienne

La Croix

30 SEPTEMBRE 2007

Après quatre ans de guerre civile en Irak, les ONG s'alarment. Les services de base ne sont plus accessibles à la grande majorité de la population dont quatre millions ont fui de chez eux

La guerre civile n'en finit pas de faire des ravages en Irak. Selon les sources humanitaires, au moins huit millions de personnes ont besoin d'une aide d'urgence. Parmi elles, la moitié ne mange pas à sa faim et souffre d'un manque cruel d'assistance dans des domaines essentiels, comme celui de l'accès à l'eau potable, à l'assainissement, aux soins médicaux.

L'ampleur de la crise humanitaire, qui s'aggrave dans le pays depuis deux ans, est prise très au sérieux par la communauté internationale et notamment les Nations unies. Au début du mois, cinq agences onusiennes – le Fonds pour la population (UNFPA), le Haut-Commissariat aux réfugiés (HCR), le Programme alimentaire mondial (PAM), l'Organisation mondiale de la santé (OMS) et l'Unicef – ont lancé un appel aux donateurs pour un montant de 85 millions de dollars (60,9 millions d'euros) afin de lutter contre la malnutrition et le manque d'accès aux soins qui affectent plus de 2 millions d'Irakiens déplacés.

Depuis plusieurs mois déjà, les ONG sur place, irakiennes ou internationales, essaient d'alerter sur l'urgence et l'ampleur des besoins. En juillet dernier, l'organisation britannique Oxfam, qui appuie des ONG locales, associée au Comité

de coordination des ONG en Irak (NCCI), a rendu un rapport très détaillé sur la situation humanitaire.

« Sur les quatre millions d'Irakiens dépendant de l'aide alimentaire, 60 % ont actuellement accès aux rations du système public de distribution, contre 96 % en 2004 », expliquent les auteurs du rapport. Selon eux, 43 % des Irakiens souffrent d'une « absolue pauvreté » et plus de la moitié de la population est sans travail. Les enfants sont frappés de plein fouet par cette situation, avec un taux de malnutrition qui a grimpé de 19 % avant l'invasion américaine à 28 % aujourd'hui. La proportion de bébés nés avec un poids inférieur à la norme est passée de 4 % à 11 % en quatre ans.

La situation s'avère particulièrement difficile pour les familles chassées de leur foyer par la violence. « En 2006, 32 % des déplacés n'avaient pas accès au système public de distribution de nourriture, tandis que 51 % n'en recevaient que de temps en temps », précise encore le rapport. Seuls 17 % ont reçu régulièrement leurs rations, mais beaucoup étaient incomplètes.

Quant à l'eau potable, elle n'atteint plus que 30 % de la population, contre 50 % en 2003. Le réseau d'adduction a été largement endommagé durant la guerre et le retraitement

des eaux usées ne fonctionne quasiment plus. Ce qui provoque une hausse des maladies diarrhéiques. Le réseau électrique n'est pas en meilleur état, ne fournissant que deux heures de courant par jour dans la plupart des villes.

« Sur les 180 hôpitaux que compte le pays, 90 % manquent de tout. »

Enfin, l'accès aux soins est catastrophique. Kemadia, la compagnie d'État censée approvisionner les hôpitaux et les centres de soins en médicaments et matériel médical, est dans l'incapacité de le faire correctement. « Sur les 180 hôpitaux que compte le pays, 90 % manquent de tout », expliquent les auteurs du rapport qui dénoncent la « bureaucratie et la gestion centralisée » de Kemadia.

En outre, le personnel médical compétent fait défaut. La moitié des 34 000 médecins répertoriés en Irak en 2003 ont quitté le pays. En 2006, la revue scientifique *The Lancet* avait estimé que les multiples conséquences du climat de violence ont pu provoquer la mort indirecte de 655 000 personnes depuis 2003.

Quant à l'éducation, elle est de-

venue un lointain souvenir pour 800 000 enfants, tandis que les écoles servent de plus en plus d'abris pour les familles chassées de chez elles. En outre, le climat de peur qui règne inhibe les capacités d'apprentissage de 92 % des élèves.

La nécessité de recevoir des fonds supplémentaires pour faire face est d'autant plus évidente pour les humanitaires que l'enveloppe d'aide d'urgence est passé de 325 millions d'euros en 2005 à simplement 68 millions.

Les auteurs du rapport proposent plusieurs pistes pour améliorer la situation. Notamment, d'attribuer des cartes d'identité provisoires pour les déplacés qui sont sans papiers, ce qui leur permettra d'accéder aux aides d'État; d'augmenter l'allocation mensuelle pour les veuves (70 % des déplacés) de 100 dollars à 200 dollars (71 à 143 €). « À raison d'un million de bénéficiaires, cela ferait un coût de 2,4 milliards de dollars par an (1,7 milliard d'euros), ce qui reste dans la capacité financière de l'État », estiment les auteurs.

Autre proposition : décentraliser le stockage et la distribution de l'aide d'urgence, puisque la violence se concentre essentiellement sur Bagdad.

CATHERINE REBUFFEL



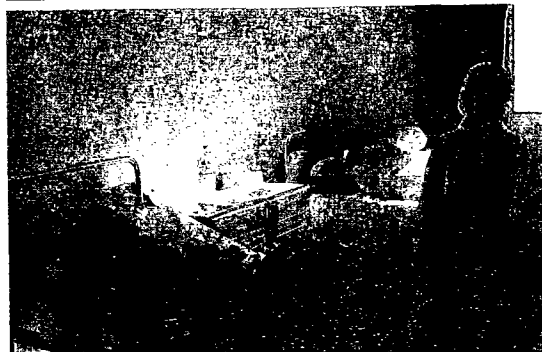
AMHED AL HARBIR/REUTERS



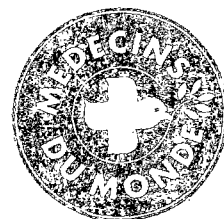
Distribution de vivres au nord de Bagdad.

En haut : Repas sans électricité. L'alimentation en eau et électricité devient désormais aléatoire.

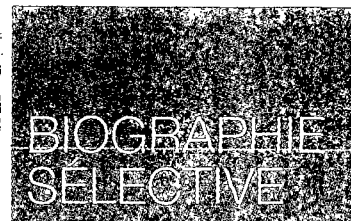
Ci-contre : Malades atteints de choléra à l'hôpital de Sulaimaniyah (à 260 km de Bagdad). Les centres de soins sont démunis en médicaments comme en personnel.



AMHED YANVARI/AP



Rencontre / Kendal Nezan



1949 Naissance à Diyarbakir, en Turquie
1968 Arrive en France ; étudie la physique des particules élémentaires à Orsay
1983 Inauguration de l'Institut kurde à Paris
2005 Création du département de langue et civilisation françaises à l'université d'Erbil, au Kurdistan d'Irak

La voix des Kurdes

MINORITÉS / Président de l'Institut kurde de Paris, créé en 1983, Kendal Nezan diffuse largement la culture des Kurdes à travers le monde et se bat pour leur intégration.

Quel est le rôle de l'Institut kurde ?

K. N. : Il a pour objectif de faire connaître les Kurdes

à l'opinion publique. C'est un trait d'union entre les différents peuples et le peuple kurde. Pour cela, on a créé une bibliothèque kurde qui est la plus importante du monde occidental. Nous organisons des conférences en France mais aussi aux États-Unis, en Italie, en Allemagne, en Russie pour internationaliser la voix kurde qui est persécutée. On joue un peu le rôle « d'ambassade culturelle ».

Quelle est la situation des droits de l'homme au Kurdistan ?

Le tableau est nuancé. En Irak, la situation est plutôt bonne : les

Kurdes ont un gouvernement, un Parlement, la région est prospère économiquement et la culture est en essor. Mais en Iran et en Syrie, les dictatures sont très dures et la voix des Kurdes est totalement étouffée. Entre les deux, il y a la Turquie. Les Kurdes n'étudient pas leur langue à l'école et ne peuvent pas créer de médias. Sur le plan politique, les députés kurdes n'ont pas le droit de se présenter aux élections sous prétexte qu'ils ont commis un délit d'opinion pour avoir voulu donner leur point de vue. En plus, c'est l'armée qui contrôle l'État. Elle a par exemple fait un « e-coup d'État » en avril en déclarant sur son site Internet que si le Premier Ministre se présentait aux élections présidentielles, elle interviendrait par la

force. C'est donc finalement le ministre des Affaires étrangères, plus consensuel, qui s'est présenté. Dans ce contexte, les Kurdes essaient de s'exprimer à travers la société civile, qui est très active, mais des jeunes rejoignent les rangs de la guérilla et du PKK. Nous sommes dans l'impasse.

La possible intégration de la Turquie dans l'Union européenne représente-t-elle un espoir pour les Kurdes ?

Malheureusement, l'État turc s'est contenté jusqu'à présent de quelques mesures purement symboliques comme la création d'une émission télévisée doublée en langue kurde, diffusée une fois par semaine à 6 h du matin et vantant les mérites des régions touristiques de la Turquie. C'est bien peu pour les

18 millions de Kurdes qui vivent en Turquie, c'est-à-dire un quart de la population turque. Cela dit, nous sommes pour des négociations sur l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'UE si elle remplit certaines conditions comme le respect des minorités et des droits de l'homme.

Qu'en est-il de la reconnaissance du génocide arménien ?

Si la Turquie, rejoint l'Union européenne, elle devrait également reconnaître le génocide arménien ainsi que les droits des minorités vivant en Turquie comme c'est le cas pour les Basques ou les Catalans en Espagne, les Écossais en Grande-Bretagne... ■

STÉPHANIE SENET

À SUIVRE SUR LE WEB :
L'INTÉGRALITÉ DE LA RENCONTRE