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DICK CHENEY VISITS IRBIL

ON 18 March, as part of his tour of the Middle East, the US Vice President, Dick Cheney, made his first visit to Iraqi Kurdistan and Irbil to meet Massud Barzani and other senior officials of the Kurdish government. This makes him the most senior US official to have visited the Region.

Dick Cheney, who was beginning nine-day tour of the Mid-

dle East accompanied by his wife, praised “*the special friendship linking the United States and the people of Iraqi Kurdistan*” and asked the Kurdish President, Massud Barzani, for his “*support in helping advance national reconciliation*”, in particular by passing a number of amnesty laws by the Iraqi Parliament, and for the future of US-Iraqi relations.

The meeting also dealt with the

Oil Law, which is, at the moment, a source of dispute between Baghdad and Irbil, the Iraqi policies of the United States, the Iraqi Constitution and relations with Turkey. Also taking part in the meeting were Kosrat Rasul, Vice President of the Region, Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister and Omar Fatah, Deputy Prime Minister. The US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, was also present.

In his welcoming speech, President Massud Barzani insisted on the historic first constituted by the US Vice President’s official

visit to the Kurdistan Region, which he described as an “*important message*” issued by the USA and a confirmation of American support for the Kurds and for the setting up of a “*free, democratic, plural and federal Iraq*”.

Massud Barzani re-affirmed his determination to be involved in the reconstruction of Iraq and of playing a “*positive*” role in it. Thus, he stressed, the Kurds would be a solution and not a problem for Iraq as well as for the neighbouring states by being “*a factor for peace and stability for the whole region*”.

For his part, Dick Cheney recalled the time, 17 years earlier, when he was himself Secretary of Defence and the Provide Comfort Operation had been launched to stop the massive exodus of Kurds fleeing Saddam Hussein’s repression. The setting up of the interdiction zone for the Iraqi Air Force so as to protect the Kurds from chemical air bombing raids was, according to Dick Cheney, the starting point of a “*very distinctive friendship*” between the USA and Iraqi Kurdistan. He ended by praising “*the remarkable progress*” of the Kurdistan Region regarding prosperity and security, presenting it as an “*extraordinary example for Iraq*”.

This visit to Iraqi Kurdistan by the US vice President came just after the Turkish Army had violated Iraqi territory in operations against PKK bases. The Americans had, at first, supported this incursion by providing the Turks with real time logistic intelligence on PKK movements, which the Kurdish population had sharply criticised. However, faced with the danger of open

clashes between the Turkish Army and the Peshmergas, the United States had rapidly urged Ankara to stop the operation while reiterating their will to fight the PKK.

Dick Cheney’s visit to Iraqi Kurdistan and his official meeting with President Massud Barzani can, indeed, be understood as a message of support for the Kurds

and the Region and a determination to handle with care the United States’ most important ally in Iraq, after having openly supported Turkey in its actions against the PKK.

Dick Cheney also visited Baghdad and the US base at Balad, before successively visiting Oman, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan and then Turkey.

TWENTY YEARS AGO — HALABJA ...



TWENTY years after the chemical bombing of the town of Halabja by the Iraqi Air force, an attack that had caused over 5000 deaths, memorial events took place both in Kurdistan and throughout the world.

In Halabja, the inhabitants, dressed in black, gathered in the centre of the town, with pictures of the victims. A statue in memory of Omar Haro, who died on his own doorstep with a baby in his arms, whose picture had been published at the time by the media, was inaugurated.

The inhabitants also took the occasion to call for the carrying out of the death sentence passed, in June 2007, on Ali Hassan al-Majid, alias “*Chemical Ali*”, the principal architect of the *Anfal* campaign against the Kurds.

The Iraqi government has promised the town 6 million dollars, without specifying to what kind of project this money will be allotted and has also insisted that an enquiry shall be opened to identify the compa-

nies having supplied the Saddam Hussein regime with the chemical weapons used in 1988.

The Kurdistan Regional government and the Province of Suleimaniah, for their part, have promised Halabja 23 million dollars, according to the mayor, Fuad Salih, which, if the money is really allocated, could be the most important aid granted Halabja has received to date.

The Inhabitants have been complaining for years of having been left by the wayside in the Kurdish Region’s development, particularly with regard to health, roadwork’s education and housing. “*The year 2007 was marked by a white stone in Halabja’s rehabilitation*”, explained Fuad Salih to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. “*Several millions of dollars have already been spent. This year yet more projects will be set up*”.

The Suleimaniah Provincial government has promised six billion Iraqi dinars (5 million dollars) for health, roadwork’s and sewage. The Kurdish govern-

ment has offered 4 million dollars to renovate the hospital and raise its capacity to a hundred beds as well as 13 million dollars for building another hospital intended specially for victims of chemical attacks as well as building three schools, as a cost of nearly 800 million dinars each.

However, the inhabitants remain sceptical since many promises made in the past have not been kept, even though the Kurdish Regional Government spokesman, Jamal Abdullah, points out that 500 houses were built last year and that it is planned to build 2,000 more this year.

was to invest in the development of Iraqi gas fields, to both for importing and as a link with Europe". As for the Turkish Minister of Fuel and Power, Hilmi Guler, he again raised the project of building a second oil pipeline from Iraq to Turkey. Turkish exports to Iraq reached \$2.83 billion in 2007 and Iraq imports from Turkey were \$650 million according to Turkish official statistics. It is estimated that the volume of bilateral exchange in 2008 will be \$6 billion. However the Turkish Minister announced that the objective for 2010 is \$20 billion.

TURKEY AND IRAQ: A DIPLOMATIC BALLET DANCE — WITH BOMBING...

AT the beginning of the month, week after the end of the Turkish military incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, went to Ankara for a "working visit". He was welcomed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Cemil Cicek, before meeting President Abdullah Gul, with whom he gave a press conference. The next day, he had lunch with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

By this visit, Turkey hoped to "turn over a new leaf" after the incursion into Iraq, which, they claimed, was solely aimed at PKK bases. It was during these military operations that Jalal Talabani was invited to visit Ankara — a visit he had accepted, attracting many criticisms from Kurds of the Kurdistan Region and of Turkey, even though this meeting only covered, officially, cooperation on issues of fuel and power with Iraq.

Nevertheless, Jalal Talabani reiterated his opposition to any other military actions in his country: "I am President of Iraq

and I swore on the Qoran to preserve the territorial integrity and union of this country. Of course I don't want a new operation". He thus described as "indispensable" a dialogue with the Kurdistan Regional Government to settle the PKK problem.

President Talabani also expressed the wish to establish "strategic and solid links between the two countries and called on Turkish businessmen to invest in Iraq. "I can assure you that you will enjoy all sort of assistance in Iraq as much in Iraqi Kurdistan as in the South or Baghdad". Moreover, Jalal Talabani told his hearers about the Iraqi budget of "over 25 billion dollars for investments and strategic projects".

At the same time, the Turkish Minister responsible for Foreign Trade, Kursad Tuzmen, met with the Iraqi Oil Minister, Hussein Shahrastani, to finalise a "strengthened economic partnership agreement", which would have "the objective of integrating the economies of the two countries as much as possible to form a common prosperity zone". Kursad Tuzmen also stressed: "Turkey's priority

All this has not prevented Turkish bombing of PKK bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, nor the overflying of Iraqi territory by Turkish reconnaissance planes. The Kurdistan Regional Government has confirmed these attacks but indicated that there have been no civilian casualties. Thus in Duhok Province, the villages of Sbindar, Bitkar, and Brorai Bala have been hit.

On 28 March, a 250-vehicle Army convoy travelled towards Iraqi Kurdistan, passing through the Derecik village, in Hakkari province. According to the Dogan news agency, the convoy travelled with their headlights switched off. A few days earlier, helicopters had dropped troops into the village of Semdinli. This was the largest military manoeuvre since the attack last February. Since 11 March, six "temporary security zones" have been set up in Turkish Kurdistan, in the Provinces of Siirt, Sirkak and Hakkari, with the aim of blocking civilian travel near the borders.

In its assessment of its attacks, the Turkish Army claimed to have killed 15 Kurdish fighters in the Avasin-Basyan region.

During a visit to Ankara on 24 March, Dick Cheney declared that the United States supported Turkey against the PKK in “Northern Iraq” but that he hoped that this would not increase tension in that country.

Dick Cheney had earlier visited Baghdad and then Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. According to the US Ambassador to Turkey, Ross Wilson, Dick Cheney had informed the Turkish officials of his impressions of his meeting with Massud Barzani, stating that the Iraqi central government as well as the leaders of Kurdistan were agreed to cooperate with Turkey in resolving the PKK problem. “*The USA has always encouraged the parties to dialogue*” added Mr. Ross Wilson without detailing Dick Cheney’s remarks to the Turkish leaders.

Following the visit by US Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, on 28 March a Turkish Foreign office delegation, led by Murat Ozelik, met the governor of Dohuk Province (Iraqi Kurdistan) and the director of the External Relations Office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Safeen Diyazee. This was the first official contact between leaders of the Kurdistan Region and Turkey.

Then a Turkish delegation went to Baghdad and Basra, where Turkey is considering opening a Consulate and to Mosul, before returning to Turkey by the Khabur border post, again meet-

ing with officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Parallel to these Army operations, an probably as a result of US pressure, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, stated, on 13 March, that he wished to invest \$15 billion in development and infrastructure projects in the Kurdish South-East as well as starting a Kurdish language television channel.

The “*development of the South-East*” project has, in fact been in the air since the 80s and particularly noted by the controversial building of huge dams in the Kurdish regions. These have hitherto led to the expropriation of local inhabitants, which has hardly improved the lot of the rural population, and to the creation of great landed estates owned by a minority closely linked with the governing authorities. Thus the Ilisu Dams, which would drown the town of

Hasankeyf, is fiercely opposed both because of the historical as well as the human and ecological character of the site. In addition to dams, the Prime Minister wants to set up irrigation systems and start mine clearance of the regions bordering on Syria.

He also recently been announced the impending launch of a television channel in Kurdish, Persian and Arabic by the public corporation, without specifying the number of hours or the content of the broadcasts. The public TRT corporation has already been broadcasting in Kurdish since 2004, but with many restriction (compulsory sub-titles in Turkish and the banning of children’s programmes) which make these broadcasts quite unattractive to the Kurdish audience, especially as there are several Kurdish language satellite channels based on Europe or Iraqi Kurdistan, which offer full programmes.

THE ASSASSINATION OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF MOSUL

ON 13 March, the Chaldean Archbishop of Mosul, Mgr. Paulos Faraj Rahho, was found dead near Mosul, where his kidnapers had buried him. The news was officially announced by Mgr. Shlemon Warduni, the assistant Arch-bishop of Baghdad.

Mgr. Rahho, who was 65, had been kidnapped on 29 February while travelling with his chauffeur and two bodyguards, who were all killed during the operation. His kidnapers had then contacted the religious authorities,

demanding a million dollar ransom. However, according to Mgr. Rabban al-Qas, Bishop of Amadiya, Mgr. Rahho refused to allow payment of any ransom, as had Mgr. Casmussa, Syrian Archbishop of Mosul, who had also refused to allow ransom to be paid, when he was kidnapped in January, and who had been released 24 hours later.

The Archbishop had been threatened once before by mafia-like or islamist groups, and when visited by Mgr. Stenger, Bishop of Troyes, had told him, on 13

February, about a “*visit*” to his presbytery by terrorists who had demanded \$500,000. He had not given in to these demands just as he had not wanted to leave Mosul for Qosh, a locality protected by the Kurdish Region’s Peshmergas where many clerics have sought refuge.

According to the French delegation led by the Bishop of Troyes, Mgr. Rahho had declared, before the tomb of Father Rajhid Ganni, kidnapped and slaughtered in Mosul in June 2007: “*He died a martyr. This is a great loss for our community but also a great testimony of faith. Abuna Rajhid-nus encourages us to remain in this land that has been Christian since the first century*”.

Mgr. Rahho had, in fact, very good relations with the Moslems in Mosul, who have also been subjected to kidnappings and assassinations by extremist or mafia-type groups, as is confirmed by Mgr. Rabban al-Qas: “*The Moslems of Mosul are shocked and revolted by this assassination. Their religious leaders have come to tell us that Mgr. Rahho was not only Bishop of the Christians but theirs as well. They have come to pay their respects to his body, mourning him as a son of Mosul and have asked us to remain with them and not flee from this land that we all share*”.

Speaking after this assassination, Mgr. Spenger stated: “*This innocent man was the victim of a rotten system in which peoples’ lives are worthless. I feel powerless before such horror, but I will remain still more committed to ensure that violence does not win, to ensure that Iraq be not forgotten, to ensure that horror does not have the last word*”.

Paulos Faraj Rahho was born in 1942 at Mosul, where he spent nearly all his life. Entering St. Peter’s seminary, in Baghdad in 1954, he was ordained on 10 June 1965 and ministered at St. Isaiah’s Church in his home town. He was ordained Archbishop of Mosul on 16 February 2001. Suffering from heart troubles that required urgent medical treatment that was interrupted, he died in the hands of his kidnappers who then buried him and warned the ecclesiastic authorities

When his death was announced, Pope Benedict XVI sent a

telegram to the Patriarch of the Chaldeans, Emmanuel III Delly, in which he strongly deplored “*an act of inhuman violence that offends human dignity and seriously harms the cause of the brotherly conviviality of the well beloved Iraqi people*”. Moreover, Benedict XVI insisted that, during the Holy week celebrations, he would pray for Mgr. Rahho “*at the end of the Stations of the Cross, asking the lord for His Mercy so that this tragic event might serve to build a future of peace for this martyred land of Iraq*”. On Sunday 16 March, the Pope celebrated Mass for Mgr. Rahho.

NEWROZ 2008 CELEBRATIONS

As always, the Kurdish New Year was widely celebrated throughout the world, whether in Kurdistan or in the diaspora. In Paris, it was officially celebrated, for the first time, at the head offices of the Regional Council of the *Ile de France* (the region that includes Paris), on the initiative of the Paris Kurdish Institute, with the support and participation of Jean-Paul Huchon, President of the Regional Council and Jean-Vincent Placé, President of the Council’s Green group. A representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government was also present. Several Kurdish singers from all parts of the world — from Iraqi Kurdistan, from Georgia and Russia but also Issa Hassan from Paris — took turns to perform to a numerous audience, both French and Kurdish.

In Turkey, Newroz was celebrat-

ed in different ways by the Kurds of Turkey — at first peacefully in Diyarbakir, but violently in Van and Hakkari.

In Diyarbakir, the capital of Turkish Kurdistan, where the celebrations were authorised, hundreds of thousands of Kurds gathered, supervised by hundreds of riot police and troops. All through the day of 21 March the celebrations took place without any incidents as authorisation had only been given for that day. Any celebrations or demonstrations beyond that date being considered illegal and repressed. Thus, on Saturday 22 March, although the prefect of Van had banned any extension of the celebrations, parades took place despite this. Two members of the DTP, the pro-Kurdish party, took part in the parade. The police at first tried to disperse the demonstrators with tear gas

and water cannons while the latter retaliated with Molotov cocktails and barricades. Police sources also report looting of shops and official buildings, and estimate the number of demonstrators at 1,500. In all, 132 people were arrested, including the DTP regional president and his assistant.

The riots cause two deaths at Van and Yuksekova. According to official reports, 53 people were injured, including 15 police. Three of the injured are in the hospitals intensive care unit, one of them a policeman.

Several TV channels showed scenes in which sitting demonstrators, including women, were violently beaten by the police or charged by armoured cars, while boys with masked faces threw stones at the police.

Even in towns outside the Kurdish region but with a substantial Kurdish population, Like Adana or Izmir were carried away by the unrest. In Mersin 10 people were arrested following some demonstrators had burnt tyres in the streets, thrown stones at the police and attacked some shops. In Izmir, 18 people were arrested “as a preventive measure” by the police.

In Urfa, 93 people were rounded up by the police in addition to more than 16 demonstrators detained at Viransehir since 21 March after Molotov cocktails and stones had been thrown at the security forces.

In Hakkari, 16 people, including three policemen, were injured and 17 demonstrators were arrested and kept in detention.

Throughout the country about 300 people were arrested.

Still in connection with the Newroz events, an enquiry has just been initiated against the DTP woman M.P., Pervin Buldan, who is accused of “*justification of criminal activity*” in a speech made during the festivities at Igdir.

At Siirt, where the celebrations had been banned, 5 people were injured, including 2 police. Moreover, the Siirt police chief refused to shake hands with the local M.P., Akin Birdal, saying: “I do not shake hands with those who refuse to call a child-killer a terrorist”, alluding to Ocalan. Akin Birdal then retorted: “*I am a Member of Parliament and a public official responsible for State security should not adopt such an attitude or speak in this way*”, adding “*I am speaking as a citizen*”.

According to Akin Birdal, the Minister of the Interior had promised that he would take every measure to ensure that the demonstrations remained peaceful, but “*It is clear that his orders were not carried out*”. He also pointed out that the DTP was questioning the government in Parliament about the “*excessive*” police violence over Newroz and the behaviour of the Siirt police chief. As for the Prime minister, he refused to meet the DTP despite several requests from leaders of the party.

Several DTP leaders and members of that party’s parliamentary group accused the government and the security forces in a press conference held at Diyarbekir. Thus the Diyarbekir provincial

president of the DTP, Necdet Atalay, stressed that wherever the celebrations had been allowed they occurred without any incidents. He also criticised “*the hostility*” of the security forces in Van and Yuksekova. Amongst those taking part at the press conference were Aysel Tugluk, M.P. for Diyarbekir, and the M.P.s Ayla Akat Ata, of Batman and Osman Ozçelik, of Siirt as well as Osman Baydemir, the mayor of Diyarbekir.

For its part, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) threatened Turkey with reprisals in Turkish Kurdistan for the violence at Newroz.

At Qameshli, a Kurdish town in Syria, the Syrian security forces opened fire on some young Kurds who were walking in the streets singing and carrying candles to celebrate their New Year, causing three deaths and five seriously injured.

Muhammad Yahya Khalil and Muhammad Zaki Ramadan were died on the spot when the police opened fire. Muhammad Mahmud Hussein died later in hospital. The victims were all aged between 18 and 25.

These serious incidents were condemned both by the Human Rights defence organisations in Syria and by the President of the Kurdistan of Iraq, Massud Barzani, who made a statement on the subject on 23 March: “*We strongly condemn the murder of innocent victims in Qamishili. Those people only wanted to celebrate the beginning of the new year and had not committed any crime*”. The Kurdish president hoped for an enquiry on the circumstances

of these deaths and called on the Syrian President to punish “*those responsible for this crime*”.

The human rights organisation Human Rights Watch also called for an enquiry into the circumstances in which the Syria forces had opened fire and which allowed the presumption of immoderate and disproportionate repression “*in violation of international law*”. “*The Syrian authorities must explain the reasons why their forces fired on a Kurdish festival*” declared Joe Stork, director of the Middle East department of Human Rights Watch, before adding that those responsible should be tried.

Eye witnesses described the events to human rights organisations in this way: about 200 people had gathered in a street in the Western part of Qamishili at about 6.30 pm. The lit candles by the side of the road and a bonfire in the middle so as to dance round it in the traditional manner. “*It was a Newroz celebration, not a political demonstration*”, insisted those taking part. On 29 March, the United States officially condemned these three deaths and demanded that Syria get to the bottom of these events.

“*The United States condemns the attack on the Kurdish population of Syria by the Syrian security forces that caused three civilian victims and injured several others*”, stated the state Department spokesman Sean McCormack. “*We call on the Syrian government to abstain from violent measures of repressing the Kurdish civilians and to open a full and independent enquiry into these incidents*”.

From the beginning of March arrests had been taking place in Kurdish circles, possibly in support of a policy of “*preventive intimidation*”. Thus, some days before Newroz, the writer Pir Rustem, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, was

arrested at his home. The Syrian secret services also seized his papers, his computer and mobile telephone. In Damascus, four Kurdish brothers were arrested in their tailors shop as they were making Kurdish style clothes for Newroz.

THE OIL BILL: A TRIAL OF STRENGTH BETWEEN IRBIL AND BAGHDAD

BAGHDAD intends to block the contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional Government with foreign companies. This was declared on 9 March by the Iraqi Oil minister, Hussein Shahrastani at a press conference given in Ankara jointly with the Turkish Oil Minister Hilmi Guler at the beginning of the month.

“*No contract signed with any region of Iraq will be recognised by the Iraqi government. Those companies will not be allowed to work on Iraqi soil so long as their contract has not been approved by the central government in Baghdad*”.

In November 2007, the same minister had already announced the cancellation of 15 contracts made by the Kurdish Regional Government with foreign companies. The Prime Minister of Kurdistan, Nechirvan Barzani, had, however, insisted that contracts already signed would be honoured and that no one would be able to cancel them. Following this, seven additional contracts were signed by the Kurdistan Region, despite the Iraqi minister’s insistence in considering them “*illegal*”. Hussein Shahrastani even attempted to

threaten these companies, stating that they would, in the future, have no possibility of working with the Iraqi government. However, these treats had little effect, especially as the issue is far from being unanimously agreed in Baghdad itself. Thus the spokesman of the Iraqi National Assembly had opposed this view as early as 10 March, stating that these contracts were in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution. He added, however, that the Constitutional Amendment Commission had received demands from “*certain parties*” calling for natural resources to be controlled by the central government, and that some modifications were under way. Al-Mashahadani did not, however, specify whether or not these constitutional amendments met such demands. On the issue of the legality of the contracts made with Kurdistan, the Iraqi Parliament’s spokesman indicated that the Federal Court would have the last word.

Regarding the Oil and Gas Law, which is being drafted, al-Mashahadani stated that nearly 90% of the work had been completed, but that there remained certain “*economic, and technical*” aspects to settle, and that they were waiting

to discuss these at the next parliamentary session. Furthermore, the Norwegian Oil company, DNO, that had been the first foreign company authorised to carry out prospecting in Iraq after the

overthrow of Saddam Hussein, has announced revisions to the contract made with the Kurdistan Regional Government so as to bring in into conformity with the new Iraqi legislation.

seeking to dominate the situation in Basra and to seize control of vital positions ... They had been involved in smuggling oil, in organised crime and the infiltration of government structures, encouraging corruption at all levels”.

VIOLENT CLASHES BETWEEN THE SADRIST MILITIA AND THE IRAQI ARMED FORCES

THROUGHOUT the month of March, there were violent clashes between al-Sadr's Shiite militia and troops of the regular Iraqi armed forces, especially around Basra. Indeed, “*Al-Mahdi's Army*”, refused to accept the disarming of militias and armed groups desired by the government, which had passed a law to enforce this.

The fighting began in Basra and spread to Baghdad and other towns, causing 275 casualties. In a press conference, US general Kevin Bergner indicated that nearly 2,000 Iraqi troops had been sent to Basra, as Prime Minister al-Maliki had given the Sadrists 72 hours in which to lay down their arms. In Baghdad, Moqtada as-Sadr's supporters came out into the streets in protest, calling for Nuri al-Maliki's resignation, and the leader of the *Mahdi's Army* threatened to start a civil war if the attacks on his militia continued.

As for George Bush, he described the clashes as a “*positive*” stage in the development of the Iraqi security forces and a proof that the Baghdad government was in a position to ensure its own defence itself, assuring it of his support against “*criminal elements*” in Basra.

Nuri al-Maliki affirmed, in a statement, that he had intervened in Basra at the call by civilians for “*protection against the armed gangs that were terrifying them*”. An AFP correspondent in Basra reported heavy fighting during the day of 27 March, the militia attacking the Iraqi Army with mortar, rockets and hand grenades. The Basra chief of police, Abdul Jalil Khalaf, survived car bomb attack on him by a suicide bomber, which killed three other policemen.

In the city of Karbala, clashes took place in several localities, despite the curfew. An anonymous witness recounted, on the PUKMedia Web site that an armed group had attack the al-Ghadir police station, and that “*mortar fire could be heard*”.

On 28 March, the curfew was extended to Baghdad from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. On 30 March, the fighting continued in Basra, Hila, Kout, Nassiria, Karbala and Babylon as well as I Baghdad. While attending an Arab summit in Damascus, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, stated that his government was determined to fight on to victory over the Shiite militia and that no dialogue was possible with the Sadrists so long as fighting continued. “*These militia, these organised groups, are*

Hoshyar Zebari added that the fighting on site was complicated by the rivalries between the Shiite militia, that were competing for power and influence over the district of Southern Iraq against one another in preparation for the elections in October. He denied, moreover, any direct involvement of Iran in the fighting. “*Iran has some influence in Basra, but I think that this is more an internal conflict of interest between the different militia operating in Basra*”.

According to this Iraqi Government minister, it is hard to predict long these clashes would last, explaining that the Iraqi forces lacked air power but that the Americans were prepared to provide this help. Hoshyar Zebari denied that this was a general Shiite uprising, affirming that the majority of Shiites supported the government.

On the same day, Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, and the President of the Kurdistan Region, Massud Barzani, made known their support for Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, in his efforts to apply the law dismantling the militia. The Iraqi Presidential Council has called on the population, the tribes and the political parties to cooperate with the security forces in eliminating the armed groups and ensuring that Basra takes the road to “*security, prosperity and reconstruction*”.

AS WELL AS ...

• **A 71-YEAR-OLD MAN CONSCRIPTED: THE EUROPEAN COURT FINDS TURKEY GUILTY.** The European Human Rights Court sentenced Turkey to paying 5,000 euros damages to a 71-year-old Kurd who had been forcibly conscripted into the Army to do his national Service. For 4 weeks, despite his age and physical condition, Hamdi Tasthan had been subjected to the same physical training as young conscripts.

This illiterate shepherd, who only speaks Kurdish, was born in 1929. However, he had never left his home village, and was only entered on the civil registers in 1986. Although, on the official records, he appears as a bachelor and childless, he is in fact a widower with a dependent son. After the death of his wife, he gave up shepherding to look after his children. In retaliation, his former employers seem to have denounced him to the authorities as a “deserter”.

On 15 February 2000, Hamdi Tasthan was summoned by the gendarmerie who took him to the Sanliurfa recruiting office. There, he was subjected to a medical examination by Army doctors who decided, despite his age (71), that he was fit for military service. The old man was thus sent to Erzincan for a month's army training, along with twenty-year-old conscripts. Mr. Tasthan indicated, moreover, that he had been subjected to “degrading treatment” and harassment from his officers. His

physical health suffered from this, firstly because of the difficulty of feeding properly, as he was now toothless, and also because of the low temperature (-30°C), which caused heart troubles. He also complained that he had never been able to communicate with his son, who had remained in the village.

At the end of his training period, Hamdi Tasthan was enrolled in the 10th infantry Brigade at Ercis (Van). There his physical condition worsened, but he had to wait for two separate medical examinations before being admitted to the Van Army hospital, then that at Diyarbakir.

It was only three months after being summoned to serve in the army, on 26 April 2000, that Hamdi Tasthan was finally able to secure a medical certificate of unfitness for service on the grounds of “*heart trouble and age*”. Subsequently his military records were destroyed by the Army “*in conformity with the usual practice in similar cases, according to the Turkish government*”.

• **IRAN: A JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR THE SECOND TIME.** In Iran, a Kurdish journalist, Hiwa Butimer, was sentenced to death for the second time, the Supreme Court having confirmed the earlier sentence.

Hiwa Butimer, had been sentenced the first time in July 2007, for “*espionage*”, together with Adnan Hassanpur another

journalist. In November 2007, the latter had been pardoned. However, at his second trial, despite an international campaign on his behalf, the sentence was upheld. The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, of Portugal, the Italian and French governments as well as 60 Italian members of parliament have called for the lifting of this sentence.

• **ISTANBUL: AN IRAQI KURD THREATENED AT THE AIRPORT FOR “ATTEMPTING TO CREATE A COUNTRY”.** An Iraqi Kurd, who was a British citizen, who was passing through Turkey in his way to Iraqi Kurdistan, was violently attacked by security forces at Istanbul airport, while in transit, solely because his place of birth, “Duhok, Kurdistan” appeared on his identity papers.

After passing the passport control point, Mr. Abdulrahman, who was going to Duhok to see his family, was suddenly surrounded by police who insulted and manhandled him, one of them going so far as to put a gun to his temple.

Not speaking an Turkish and the police not speaking any English, Mr. Abdulrahman could not understand what offence he was supposed to have committed until a woman member of the airport staff explained his “*crime*”: “*Attempting to create a country*” she pointed out: “*There is no country called Kurdistan*”.

• **IRANIAN SHELLING OF THE KURDISH BORDER.** On 2 March, at a press conference while on a visit to Baghdad, the Iranian President, Mahmud

Ahmedinjad, called for cooperation between Iran, Turkey and Iraq to fight the PKK Kurdish fighters.

On 23 March, the head of the Zarawa district reported artillery shelling on the border by the Iranian Army, though without causing any casualties. The shelling was aimed at the villages of Rizka, Mardo, Shinawa, Sorkola, Basti and Spikola, in the Qala Diza district, 160 Km North of Suleimaniyah. Although they had not caused any casualties, they had obliged the inhabitants of eight villages to evacuate the area.

These attacks, according to Teheran, were aimed at Kurdish fights of the PJAK organisation, which is fighting the Iran regime and is close to the PKK.

• A SUICIDE ATTACK AT SULEIMANIAH: ONE DEATH. On 10 March at 6.40 p.m., a car bomb driven by a “kamikaze” blew up in front of the largest hotel in Suleimaniah, the Palace, causing one death and thirty injured. Although the attack has not been claimed, the authorities suspect the networks linked to al-Qaida of being the source of the attack. According to the police, the suicide bomber

was a man who seemed in his twenties.

On the approach of Newroz, security had been tightened in the city as well as at the checkpoints on the roads and at the entry points to built up areas. The Kurdish government has expressed its outrage at this “*cowardly attack aimed at innocent people*”.

There has been no attack on Suleimaniah since October 2005. The Palace Hotel hosted several businessmen and officials of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The two Islamist groups most likely to be involved, according to local observers, are the *Islamic State of Iraq* and *Ansar al-Sunna*.

Not only was the hotel damaged, but also a neighbouring supermarket, the Zagros, some fashionable boutiques and a café were affected. The Supermarket manager, Sirwan Muhsin, pointed out that he had lost half his clients since the attack as well as losses worth about \$8,000.

• GENERAL ELECTIONS IN IRAN: A VICTORY FOR THE CONSERVATIVES. The general elections, which began mid-March in Iran, are showing a net swing to the con-

servatives, which will strengthen the position of the Supreme Guide, Ayatollah Khamenei, but may cause problems for the President, Mahmud Ahmadinjad. As for the supporters of reforms, they suffered from very severe screening by the Election Committee responsible for endorsing their right to stand, even before the elections took place. However, their results seem to have been encouraging, since they seem likely to win 40 more seats in the Iranian parliament.

In the first round, 190 members out of 290 had already won their seats. Amongst these, 67 were supporters of the President of Iran, 30 were reformers while conservatives hostile to Ahmedinjad have already secured 46 seats. Independent candidates claim to have secured 42 seats, while 5 are reserved for minorities (Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians).

The elections are due to continue through the next month and, according to an Iranian Minister, the conservatives hope to end up with 70% of the seats, which could mean a hardening of the country's foreign policy, particularly on the nuclear issue.

A Diyarbakir, la guerre turque contre le PKK oppose le soldat Erdal à son frère Murat

Les chasseurs turcs qui décollent de l'aéroport militaire de Diyarbakir (sud-est de la Turquie), en direction des montagnes du nord de l'Irak, font trembler les vitres des maisonnettes de Baglar, l'un des quartiers les plus pauvres de la capitale des Kurdes de Turquie. Dans ce dédale de ruelles insalubres peuplées de villageois kurdes chassés par la guerre, le soutien aux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) reste une évidence.

Chez les Kaya (le nom de la famille a été modifié), les couleurs du Kurdistan – rouge, jaune et vert – sont accrochées au mur du salon. Sur le téléviseur, la chaîne satellitaire kurde Roj-TV égrène les dernières nouvelles du front. Le visage entouré d'un foulard blanc typique des paysannes du Sud-Est turc, Emine dissimule mal son anxiété. Elle grille cigaret-

te sur cigarette. Son mari, Kejjo, lui, a arrêté de fumer. L'état de son cœur l'y a contraint.

Deux de leurs fils sont mobilisés dans les montagnes et participent aux violents combats qui opposent, depuis le 21 février, l'armée turque et la guérilla marxiste-léniniste du PKK. Erdal, 21 ans, effectue son service militaire dans les commandos de gendarmerie, dans la région de Sirmak, frontalière de l'Irak. Murat, 17 ans, « a disparu », dit Kejjo. En 2006, il est parti grossir les rangs du PKK. Les deux frères se retrouvent face à face dans ce conflit qui déchire des dizaines de familles de la région.

« Nos enfants s'entre-tuent »

Kejjo montre une photo encadrée de ses deux fils, se tenant par les épaules. Les deux frères étaient très proches. Du moins jusqu'à ce

que Murat décide de prendre les armes. Agé de 16 ans, le jeune homme claque la porte de la maison de Baglar à l'été 2006. « Le 10 juillet », précise la petite dernière, 10 ans.

Murat est d'abord parti pour fuir les conflits familiaux et l'autorité d'un père tyrannique. Sans rien dire, il a rejoint un frère qui travaillait à Istanbul. Mais l'aîné l'a aussitôt renvoyé à Diyarbakir. Une semaine plus tard, il est parti dans les montagnes. « Un soir, il est sorti vers 21 heures, se souvient sa mère. On ne l'a jamais revu. »

Erdal, lui, n'a pas eu le choix. Le service militaire est obligatoire en Turquie. « Il est contre la guerre et il soutient la guérilla, certifie Kejjo : mais nous sommes inquiets pour l'un comme pour l'autre. Nous voulons la paix entre les Turcs et les Kurdes. Les leaders sont assis bien au chaud et, pendant ce temps-là,

nos enfants s'entre-tuent. Il faut arrêter cette effusion de sang. »

Le soldat Erdal a appelé ses parents mercredi. Tout allait bien. « On sait ce qu'il mange, comment il s'habille, dit sa mère : pour l'autre, on ne sait pas. » Fatma, la jeune sœur, âgée de 20 ans, confirme : « C'est plus dur pour celui qui est dans les montagnes. » Serdar, l'aîné des neuf enfants, avoue, admiratif, qu'il n'a pas eu le courage de son frère. « C'était un jeune garçon révolté qui voulait défendre ses droits. Je n'ai pas essayé de le retenir », explique-t-il. « S'il meurt, lance Kejjo, ce sera un martyr de son peuple et de sa terre. » ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER
DIYARBAKIR (SUD-EST
DE LA TURQUIE), ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

TURQUIE-IRAK APRÈS HUIT JOURS D'INCURSION DE L'ARMÉE TURQUE

Ankara met fin à son offensive dans le Kurdistan irakien

SILKÉ, MERUZ, SIRYÉ, BAMARNI
(Kurdistan)

ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Ankara a mis fin, vendredi 29 février, à son offensive en Irak. Après huit jours d'opérations militaires contre les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), les troupes turques ont « regagné leurs bases », se retirant de la région du Kurdistan irakien – au moins provisoirement. « Les activités terroristes dans le nord de l'Irak seront suivies de près, a précisé l'armée. Aucune menace depuis ce territoire contre la Turquie ne sera tolérée. »

Côté irakien, les tensions demeurent fortes dans la zone frontalière. Et la région de Zab a continué de retentir des raids aériens. Posté sur le toit de sa maison, le vieux Tafo Abdulrahman écoute, fataliste, « la petite musique turque » : des bombes larguées à rythme soutenu dans la vallée en contrebas de son village de Silké, semblant ébranler les sommets enneigés.

Non loin, les habitants de Meruz ont été évacués pour céder la place à plusieurs centaines de peshmergas (armée kurde d'Irak) chargés de surveiller que les Turcs ne franchissent pas « la

ligne rouge » au-delà de laquelle ils ont promis d'intervenir.

Une centaine de villages, sous contrôle du PKK, sont en deçà de cette limite, ainsi que Wharakhalé, nom de la vallée bombardée, à 10 kilomètres à l'intérieur du territoire irakien. Les peshmergas affirment qu'elle fut, la veille, le théâtre de rudes combats.

Selon le porte-parole du PKK, Ahmet Denese, interrogé par téléphone, « les troupes turques ont battu en retraite, mais 200 de leurs soldats sont bloqués à Wharakhalé, encerclés par nos combattants. Ces raids aériens visent à les sortir de là ». Information impossible à vérifier, les peshmergas empêchant l'accès au front.

Les pertes déclarées par l'un ou l'autre des deux camps restent sujettes à caution. Vingt-sept soldats turcs et 240 rebelles kurdes auraient été tués, selon Ankara. Le PKK avance le chiffre de 130 soldats turcs tués, dont « beaucoup sont morts de froid », ainsi que cinq de ses combattants et douze blessés. Pour ces derniers, les contreforts montagneux de l'Irak ne recèlent aucun hôpital. Et la centaine de villages, considérés comme sympathisants des rebelles ou susceptibles

de les recueillir, ont tous été désertés.

Aux premiers bombardements, leurs habitants ont pris la fuite, une fuite rendue périlleuse par la destruction de plusieurs ponts par l'armée turque.

Plus au sud, à Syrié, les familles réfugiées, indifférentes à l'annonce de la cessation des combats, creusent frénétiquement des abris dans le sol gelé. « Ils ont bombardé des ponts. Le PKK n'a pas de tanks ! Preuve que les Turcs en veulent au Kurdistan [d'Irak]. Ils reviendront », rugit, sans cesser de creuser, et sous l'approbation générale, Jalal Saadullah, père inquiet d'une ribambelle de gamins.

Peur panique

Autre source de tension, la présence de bases turques établies dans cette région avec l'accord des maîtres kurdes du nord de l'Irak, en 1997, à une époque où les rivalités interkurdes avaient dégénéré en affrontements sanglants entre peshmergas et combattants du PKK.

Le village de Bamarni a eu une peur panique, au début de l'incursion turque, le 21 février, en voyant les 350 soldats d'une de

ces bases, suivis de vingt tanks, prendre la route de la montagne. Probablement pour prendre les positions PKK à revers, ou alors « pour occuper de nouveaux points stratégiques et nous envahir ».

Les habitants racontent leur avoir barré la route, kalachnikov à la main, deux kilomètres plus haut, à l'appel des peshmergas. Il n'y a pas eu de clash. Les soldats ont fait demi-tour, mais leurs canons sont désormais pointés sur le village, attisant le ressentiment.

Autour des zones de combat, les villages ont été inondés de tracts, mercredi 27 et jeudi 28 février, représentant un combattant du PKK au centre d'une cible tracée en rouge, ou une jeune rebelle au visage couvert de pustules rêvant à une vie de famille tranquille...

La zone frontalière attend, avec le sentiment d'être prise en étau entre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, évoqué avec admiration ou haine tenace mais toujours comme recelant de redoutables guerriers, et la puissante armée turque, redevenue unanimement dans les esprits le grand ennemi des Kurdes. ■

CÉCILE HENNION

M. Ahmadinejad : « L'Iran est la première puissance du monde »

LE PRÉSIDENT iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a affirmé, jeudi 28 février, dans un discours télévisé, que l'Iran est « la première puissance du monde. Son nom résonne comme un coup de poing dans les dents des puissants et les remet à leur place ». Mise au point qui, à l'heure où de nouvelles sanctions

sont discutées au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, a permis à M. Ahmadinejad de mettre en garde ses adversaires qu'il accuse de « collaborer avec l'ennemi ».

À l'approche des législatives du 14 mars en Iran, les critiques des réformateurs, mais aussi de certains conservateurs, ne l'ont pas

épargné sur les carences de sa politique économique aggravées par les sanctions en cours, de même que sur son jusqu'au-boutisme sur le dossier nucléaire qui a,

disent-ils, « isolé l'Iran ». La veille, dans une attaque à la violence inattendue, l'ex-négociateur nucléaire Hassan Rohani – un des représentants du Guide, l'ayatollah Khamenei, au Conseil suprême de la sécurité nationale – avait lancé : « Est-ce que la politique étrangère signifie dire des grossièretés et fanfaronner ?

Le Monde

Samedi 1^{er} mars 2008

Il faut un comportement accommodant pour faire baisser les menaces et assurer les intérêts du pays. »

Cette sortie faisait suite à une diatribe en apparence contradictoire du Guide. Après avoir laissé son représentant esquisser une perspective plus ouverte envers l'Occident, il avait salué « le rôle personnel » du président « dans les progrès sur le nucléaire ». Ce qui a été interprété comme un soutien électoral, mais avec réserve. ■

M.-C. D.

Visite historique d'Ahmadinejad à Bagdad pour consacrer un lien étroit avec l'Irak

Le président iranien effectue une visite à risque sous l'œil américain. Téhéran n'a cessé de renforcer son influence depuis l'invasion de 2003

Les Etats-Unis, qui occupent l'Irak avec près de 160 000 soldats sur le terrain depuis près de cinq ans, et qui sont officiellement en charge de la sécurité nationale irakienne au moins jusqu'au vote d'une nouvelle résolution des Nations unies en juillet 2008, « espèrent » que la visite historique que le président de la République islamique d'Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, s'apprete à effectuer en Irak, dimanche 2 et lundi 3 mars, se passera bien.

Sans précédent et à très hauts risques, cette visite « pourrait être, et ce serait une bonne chose, le catalyseur d'une politique iranienne cohérente au bénéfice de la stabilité à long terme » du pays, déclarait, jeudi 28 février, Philip Reeker, le porte-parole de l'énorme chancellerie américaine qui trône au centre de la « zone verte » ultra-fortifiée à Bagdad. « Il serait bon, ajoutait le diplomate, d'entendre que l'Iran va prendre des mesures pour mettre son action sur le terrain en accord avec sa politique déclarée... »

Les Etats-Unis détiennent encore quatorze Iraniens, dont deux « diplomates », en Irak. Ils accusent périodiquement Téhéran, ses services secrets et ses unités clandestines de pasdarans, l'armée idéologique du régime, de « contribuer à la déstabilisation » du pays en fournissant

armes, explosifs et entraînements aux dizaines de milliers de miliciens chiites qui écument les grandes villes. Ces derniers s'en prennent parfois aux forces américaines et participent aux nettoyages interconfessionnels qui ont ensanglanté notamment Bagdad et Bassora, la deuxième ville du pays.

L'Iran réplique régulièrement qu'il n'en est rien et que, au contraire, il est « dans l'intérêt de la République islamique de tout faire pour stabiliser » la situation de son voisin. La stabilisation de l'Irak étant également l'objectif déclaré des Etats-Unis, des diplomates iraniens et américains –

bien que les deux pays n'aient plus de relations diplomatiques depuis 1980 après la révolution khomeyniste – se sont rencontrés à trois reprises à Bagdad pour débattre des « questions de sécurité ». La date de la prochaine rencontre, qui devrait réunir cette fois « des militaires de haut rang », sera déterminée « avant le 15 mars », selon Philip Reeker.

En d'autres temps moins troublés, la visite du président de la République iranienne eût sans doute été considérée logique, sinon « normale », entre deux voisins. Les deux pays partagent une frontière commune de plus d'un millier de kilomètres. L'islam chiite, religion dominante en Iran, est également celle d'au moins 60 % des Irakiens. Beaucoup des plus importants dirigeants politiques actuels à Bagdad, chiites, mais aussi kurdes, ont passé des alliances avec l'Iran. Et souvent de longues années d'exil à Téhéran pour préparer la chute de Saddam Hussein.

Aujourd'hui, c'est d'Iran, où il passe l'essentiel de son temps depuis près d'un an, que le jeune prêcheur chiite radicalement anti-américain Moqtada Al-Sadr vient de renouveau, pour six mois, l'ordre de cessez-le-feu donné aux 60 000 miliciens de son Armée du Mahdi. Les Américains reconnaissent que cet ordre « a significativement contribué » à la diminution d'au moins 60 % des violences enregistrées en Irak depuis huit mois.

Certains des partis au pouvoir à Bagdad, comme le vieux Daawa du premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki ou le Conseil suprême islamique chiite, première formation politique de l'Assemblée élue à Bagdad (fondé à Téhéran au début des années 1980 et à laquelle appartient Adel Abdel Mahdi, vice-président de la République d'Irak), ont fait le coup de feu avec les Iraniens contre l'invasion ordonnée en 1980 par Saddam Hussein. La guerre entre l'Iran khomeyniste et l'Irak saddamiste alors soutenu par les Etats-Unis – et par la France – a duré huit longues années et fait près d'un million de morts et de blessés dans les deux camps.

Invité par Jalal Talabani, le président (kurde) de la République d'Irak, qui fut un temps allié avec le chah d'Iran contre Saddam Hussein, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad veut tourner cette page sanglante. Mais aussi, dans l'espoir d'un éventuel retrait des forces américaines qu'il appelle régulièrement de ses vœux, renforcer les relations de son pays avec le voisin.

Selon des sources irakiennes, le chef de l'Etat iranien offrira, au

cours de sa visite, un prêt de 1 milliard de dollars pour la reconstruction du pays.

Les Iraniens qui, selon beaucoup de sunnites qui le déplorent (20 % de la population), « sont déjà partout en Irak, et jusque dans les allées du pouvoir », financent de nombreux projets. Notamment la construction d'une centrale électrique à Sadr City dans les faubourgs chiites de Bagdad, des hôtels et des installations touristiques à Nadjaf et Kerbala, les deux villes saintes du chiisme mondial où se rendent désormais chaque année, depuis fin 2003, plusieurs millions de pèlerins iraniens. Des milliers d'Irakiens, privés de médecins chez eux, se rendent désormais régulièrement en Iran dans des « charters médicaux » pour se faire soigner.

Depuis 2003, les échanges entre les deux pays ont décuplé. Ils sont à présent estimés à 10 milliards de dollars. Une banque iranienne a ouvert une succursale à Bagdad en juillet 2007. Une partie de l'électricité, de l'essence et des bombes de gaz nécessaires aux Irakiens des villes proches de la frontière, comme Bassora et certaines localités du Kurdistan irakien, viennent ou passent par l'Iran. Matériels de construction, poisson, épices, fruits secs, tomates, légumes, appareils à air conditionné sont massivement importés de Téhéran jusqu'à Bagdad.

Les Peugeot blanches sorties des usines d'Iran depuis 2005, circulent désormais par milliers dans les villes irakiennes. Un oléoduc est en projet entre la région pétrolière de Bassora et le port iranien d'Abadan à 10 km seulement. En un mot, « l'intégration » des deux économies s'accélère. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Le Monde

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La guerre entre l'Iran khomeyniste et l'Irak saddamiste a duré huit ans et fait près d'un million de morts. M. Ahmadinejad veut tourner cette page sanglante

LE TEMPS 1 mars 2008

Après huit jours de combats, l'armée turque se retire du nord de l'Irak

Delphine Nerbollier, envoyée spéciale à Diyarbakir

TURQUIE. Officiellement, l'incursion en territoire kurde au nord de l'Irak a permis à l'armée turque d'atteindre ses objectifs, même si elle n'a pas totalement mis le PKK hors d'état de nuire. D'autres opérations sont envisageables.

L'annonce du retrait des troupes turques du nord de l'Irak avait filtré dès vendredi matin. Mais à Diyarbakir, principale ville kurde du sud-est de la Turquie, cette rumeur avait soulevé peu d'enthousiasme. La confirmation, en début d'après-midi par l'état-major, a certes été accueillie avec soulagement, mais aussi avec suspicion. «Je doute que l'armée ait atteint ses cibles», estime Hussein, un Kurde d'une cinquantaine d'années. Son collègue, une cigarette au bord des lèvres, confirme: «Pensez-vous que l'armée ait pu être très efficace dans ces conditions météo? En décembre, l'aviation a bombardé la zone. Il y a peu de chances que la guérilla soit restée sur place. Est-ce que vous resteriez dans une maison qui a été bombardée?»

Difficile pour ces deux hommes, habitués depuis huit jours à voir décoller des avions de chasse de la base militaire toute proche, de prendre au pied de la lettre les informations diffusées par l'armée. L'annonce du retrait des troupes a semé le trouble vendredi dans les esprits, vu les divergences entre les commentaires d'Ankara et ceux du PKK.

Dans un long communiqué publié sur Internet, l'armée annonce en effet avoir «atteint ses objectifs initiaux», même si elle admet que cette opération «n'a pas totalement mis (le PKK) hors d'état de nuire». Officiellement, cette incursion terrestre aura permis de détruire 12 bases du PKK, 6 camps d'entraînement et

290 abris et aura «montré à l'organisation que le nord de l'Irak n'est pas une zone sûre pour les terroristes». L'armée estime ainsi que cette opération «assure davantage de stabilité sur le long terme pour l'Irak». En huit jours de combats, Ankara fait état de 240 morts du côté du PKK, de 24 militaires tombés en service et de 27 membres de la sécurité turque également tués.

Les commentaires des dirigeants du PKK sont en revanche très différents. «Si ce retrait est complet, c'est une victoire pour le PKK et pour le Kurdistan», estime l'un des porte-parole de l'organisation kurde, Ahmed Danis. Le PKK, qui selon l'armée comptait près de 4000 membres dans le nord de l'Irak avant l'opération, fournit un bilan provisoire sans point commun. Il affirme avoir perdu seulement 9 de ses hommes et tué au moins 108 militaires turcs.

A Diyarbakir, le responsable local du parti prokurde DTP (parti pour une société démocratique) s'est dit «soulagé» par l'annonce de ce retrait que sa formation exigeait depuis huit jours. Nejdet Atalay se demandait toutefois ce qui avait motivé l'armée turque. «A-t-elle perdu trop d'hommes? Est-ce lié aux mauvaises conditions météo? L'armée a-t-elle répondu aux pressions internationales? On ne le saura certainement jamais.»

La question de l'influence des Etats-Unis était en effet dans toutes les bouches vendredi, même si l'armée turque a officiellement nié avoir été contrainte au retrait. Depuis quelques jours, Washington a fait preuve d'insistance sur le sujet. George Bush a demandé jeudi à la Turquie de se retirer dans les plus brefs délais. La veille, le secrétaire d'Etat à la Défense, Robert Gates, avait affirmé que cette opération ne devait pas durer plus de deux semaines.

Dans les faits, elle aura duré huit jours. «Nous savons que les Américains détiennent les clés de tout dans la région», estime Hamit, un lycéen suspicieux quant à l'aspect définitif de ce retrait. «Que va-t-il se passer au printemps?



La confirmation vendredi après midi du retrait des troupes turcs du nord de l'Irak a été accueillie avec soulagement, mais aussi suspicion. La question de l'influence américaine est dans toutes les bouches. Photo: Keystone

Rien n'est certain.» Le ministre turc de la Justice, Mehmet Ali Sahin, a laissé entendre que de nouvelles opérations étaient envisageables. En octobre, le parlement a autorisé l'armée à intervenir en Irak durant un an. L'état-major a de son côté déclaré qu'il «continuera à traquer les activités (du PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak».

Les Etats-Unis ont quant à eux favorablement accueilli l'annonce de ce retrait. «C'était une opération limitée et relativement courte», a déclaré le porte-parole de la Maison-Blanche, Gordon Johndroe. «Mais, à moins que le PKK renonce au terrorisme, je pense que nous devons continuer à travailler avec les Turcs et les Irakiens pour poursuivre (le PKK).»

AFP

LE RETRAIT DES TROUPES TURQUES PAS LIÉ À DES PRESSIONS AMÉRICAINES (ARMÉE)

ANKARA, 1 mars 2008 (AFP) - - Le général commandant l'état-major de l'armée turque Yasar Büyükanit a affirmé dans un entretien publié samedi que le retrait des troupes turques du nord de l'Irak avait été motivé par des considérations purement militaires et a rejeté l'hypothèse de pressions américaines.

"Personne n'a dit 'retirez vous'. Il s'agissait d'une décision prise pour des raisons militaires. Il n'y a même pas eu d'implication de politiciens ou d'étrangers en faveur du retrait", a déclaré M. Büyükanit dans un entretien au quotidien à grand tirage Milliyet.

L'état-major a annoncé vendredi avoir mis fin à une offensive d'une semaine visant les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak. Les troupes turques se sont retirées dans la matinée de vendredi.

Ce repli est intervenu un jour après un appel du président américain George W. Bush à un retrait "le plus vite possible", un message réitéré le même jour à Ankara par le secrétaire américain à la Défense Robert Gates.

Le général Büyükanit a affirmé que la décision avait été prise avant l'arrivée de

M. Gates en Turquie, après la mort de 240 des 300 rebelles visés par l'offensive et la fuite du restant des rebelles, mais qu'elle n'avait pas été annoncée pour des raisons tactiques.

"Un tiers de nos forces étaient (de retour) en Turquie mercredi, mais cela aurait été un meurtre d'annoncer le retrait à ce moment là", a-t-il expliqué.

"La phase la plus délicate d'une opération est le retrait (...) Quand vous dites que vos forces se replient, cela revient à suggérer aux terroristes de préparer une embuscade. Ce serait une énorme erreur", a-t-il ajouté. "C'est pour cela que les critiques sont vraiment injustes".

Les allégations évoquant un retrait précipité d'Irak ont été alimentées vendredi après-midi par la distribution sous embargo par les services du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan du texte de son discours mensuel à la nation, prévu pour le soir et mentionnant que l'opération se poursuivait.

Quelques heures plus tard, les mêmes services ont distribué un second texte prenant en compte le retrait des troupes.

M. Büyükanit a affirmé que M. Erdogan était prévenu du retrait mais ne pouvait en faire mention pour des raisons de sécurité.

AFP

INTERROGATIONS SUR LE RÔLE DES Etats-Unis DANS LE RETRAIT TURC D'IRAK

ANKARA, 1 mars 2008 (AFP) - - Le chef d'état-major de l'armée turque a affirmé samedi que l'arrêt de son offensive contre les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak n'avait pas été motivé par des considérations politiques mais les médias s'interrogeaient sur le rôle de Washington dans le repli des troupes turques.

Surprenant de nombreux observateurs, l'armée turque a annoncé vendredi avoir mis fin à une offensive d'une semaine contre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés en Irak. Les troupes turques se sont retirées dans la matinée de vendredi.

Ce repli est intervenu au lendemain d'un appel du président américain George W. Bush à un retrait "le plus vite possible", un message réitéré au même moment à Ankara par le secrétaire américain à la Défense Robert Gates.

"Que s'est-il passé à la dernière minute?", questionnait samedi le quotidien populaire Aksam, rappelant le refus exprimé jusque-là par Ankara de fixer un calendrier pour le retour d'Irak de ses troupes.

"Bush nous a dit de partir et nous l'avons fait. On ne pourrait pas quitter sa chambre d'hôtel aussi rapidement, dans une telle panique", a commenté l'éditorialiste Yilmaz Özdil dans le journal à grand tirage Hürriyet.

Un éditorial du quotidien populaire Vatan est allé jusqu'à qualifier de "dégradant" le repli des troupes turques.

Dans un entretien diffusé samedi par le quotidien à grand tirage Milliyet, le général commandant l'état-major Yasar Büyükanit a qualifié d'"injustes" ces critiques et assuré que la décision du retrait avait été prise bien avant la visite de M. Gates, mais tenue secrète pour des raisons de sécurité.

"Il s'agissait d'une décision prise pour des raisons militaires. Il n'y a même pas eu d'implication de politiciens ou d'étrangers", a déclaré M. Büyükanit.

Un tiers des troupes avait quitté l'Irak dès mercredi, mais il aurait été suicidaire d'annoncer le retrait à ce moment-là, car cela aurait permis aux terroristes de préparer des embuscades et cela aurait été "une énorme erreur", a-t-il expliqué.

Mais de nombreux observateurs demeuraient sceptiques et faisaient remarquer que le texte initial du discours mensuel à la nation du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, distribué sous embargo vendredi après-midi, quelques heures avant l'allocution, mentionnait toujours la poursuite des opérations.

Un peu plus tard, les services de M. Erdogan ont distribué un second texte prenant en compte le retrait des troupes.

Ce brusque arrêt de l'offensive est un échec majeur pour le gouvernement et l'armée, et il "pourrait redonner courage" au PKK qui lutte depuis 1984 pour l'autodétermination du sud-est anatolien, à la population en majorité kurde, a estimé le quotidien Vatan.

Certains analystes ont suggéré que l'image des Etats-Unis dans l'opinion publique turque, déjà écornée par des accusations d'inaction des forces américaines en Irak face au PKK, pourrait empirer.

Washington a paru se ranger au côté d'Ankara en lui fournissant à partir de novembre des renseignements en temps réel sur les déplacements des rebelles, cruciaux pour les frappes aériennes de l'armée turque pendant les deux mois précédant l'offensive terrestre lancée le 21 février.

Mais Washington s'inquiétait du risque d'un conflit entre ses deux alliés régionaux, les Turcs et les Kurdes d'Irak, en cas d'enlèvement de l'opération turque.

Quand les Américains "ont vu que leurs propres intérêts étaient en danger, ils ont dit à la Turquie de partir" d'Irak, a commenté Milliyet.

AFP

L'OPÉRATION TURQUE A "ÉCHOUÉ", SELON LE CHEF DU PKK

SOULEYMANIYEH (Irak), 1 mars 2008 (AFP) - - Le chef du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a estimé samedi que l'opération turque dans le nord de l'Irak avait "échoué", dans un entretien téléphonique à l'AFP.

"Ankara souhaite contrôler de grandes régions dans le nord de l'Irak pour créer une zone sécurisée qu'il utiliserait comme base pour lancer des attaques contre n'importe quel endroit et s'ingérer dans les affaires du Kurdistan", a affirmé à l'AFP Mourad Qarilan depuis son refuge dans le montagnes du Qandil.

"Il s'agissait de l'objectif de la Turquie mais elle n'a pas pu faire face à la résistance des combattants du PKK. Son opération contre nos bastions a échoué", a-t-il assuré.

"La Turquie a attaqué nos forces en trois endroits dans la région de Zab mais a échoué à remplir ses objectifs malgré le fait que l'armée turque dispose de toute la technologie et d'avions de chasse qui survolaient les zones de combats et bombardaient sans arrêt", a ajouté le chef du PKK.

Selon Mourad Qarilan, la Turquie, en lançant cette opération de huit jours, voulait "frapper le PKK" mais aussi "affaiblir le Kurdistan (...) et empêcher que

Kirkouk ne soit rattaché à la région".

Située dans l'ère géographique du Kurdistan irakien, Kirkouk n'a jamais fait partie de cette région autonome, et a été la cible d'une campagne d'arabisation forcée à l'époque du président Saddam Hussein dans les années 1980.

L'Etat-major turc a annoncé vendredi soir que la vaste offensive de l'armée turque visant les rebelles du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak était terminée et que les unités engagées avaient regagné vendredi leurs bases.

"Il a été conclu que l'opération a atteint ses objectifs et nos troupes ont regagné leurs bases dans le pays (...) le 29 février au matin", a assuré l'état-major vendredi.

L'armée turque affirme qu'au moins 240 rebelles du PKK ont été abattus en huit jours d'offensive. Côté turc, 27 personnes ont été tuées, selon ce décompte.

Au total 272 cibles ont été pilonnées par air et 517 autres ont été attaquées du sol lors de l'offensive qui visait surtout la région de Zap, où se trouvait une importante base du PKK, selon l'armée.

AFP

LE PRÉSIDENT TURC AFFIRME QUE LE RETRAIT DES TROUPES D'IRAK ÉTAIT PRÉVU

ANKARA, 2 mars 2008 (AFP) - - Le retrait des troupes turques du nord de l'Irak s'est déroulé selon le calendrier prévu, a affirmé dimanche le président Abdullah Gul, rejetant les rumeurs selon lesquelles l'armée a mis fin à l'offensive contre les rebelles kurdes à la suite de pressions de Washington.

L'opération "s'est terminée comme prévu". "C'était juste une question de tactique militaire", a déclaré M. Gul aux journalistes avant son départ pour une visite officielle en Roumanie.

"Laissez-moi vous dire en toute sincérité que les Américains n'ont eu aucune influence", a-t-il ajouté.

L'armée turque a annoncé vendredi avoir mis fin à une offensive d'une semaine contre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés en Irak.

Ce repli est intervenu au lendemain d'un appel du président américain George W. Bush à un retrait "le plus vite possible", un message réitéré au même moment à Ankara par le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Robert Gates, suscitant des interrogations sur le rôle de Washington.

Gul a affirmé qu'il était personnellement au courant de la date de la fin de l'opération mais que le public n'en a pas été informé pour protéger les soldats.

"Expliquer publiquement la tactique militaire revient à mettre les soldats en danger", a-t-il déclaré.

Dans un entretien publié samedi, le chef de l'état-major turc, Yasar Büyükanit, avait aussi assuré que la décision de retrait avait été prise sans aucune intervention américaine et que les troupes avaient commencé à se retirer dès mercredi après avoir tué la majeure partie des rebelles visés.

Le Point 01 mars 2008

L'armée turque récuse l'idée d'un retrait précipité d'Irak

Les militaires turcs qui se sont retirés vendredi du nord de l'Irak au terme d'une vaste offensive contre les séparatistes kurdes du PKK, l'ont fait en temps voulu et l'opération est un succès, assure le chef d'état-major de l'armée dans un entretien diffusé samedi.

Le général Yasar Buyukanit assure dans les colonnes du quotidien *Mil-liyet* que ce retrait a été décidé sur la base de données militaires et récuse les critiques des ceux qui regrettent que la guérilla kurde n'ait pas été éradiquée.

"S'ils disent que l'armée s'est retirée trop tôt, laissons les rester là-bas 24 heures", s'indigne-t-il, évoquant, semble-t-il, les conditions météorologiques très rudes des montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Le général nie en outre toute influence étrangère, bien que le président américain George Bush ait fermement invité jeudi Ankara à mettre un terme à l'incursion.

"Les forces armées ont accompli leur mission (...) Elles ont réalisé des choses incroyables, là-bas", se félicite-t-il, faisant état de 242 tués dans les rangs du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et de la destruction de leurs moyens de communication. [Reuters](#)



Militaires tués à Cukurca, à la frontière avec l'Irak. Les militaires turcs qui se sont retirés vendredi du nord de l'Irak au terme d'une vaste offensive contre les séparatistes kurdes du PKK, l'ont fait en temps voulu et l'opération est un succès, affirme le général Yasar Buyukanit, chef d'état major de l'armée. /Photo prise le 29 février 2008/REUTERS/Fatih Saribas

rfi 01 mars 2008

Les alliés d'Ankara soulagés par la fin de l'offensive

Avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

L'opération d'ampleur de l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak aura duré un peu plus d'une semaine. Hier, les unités engagées dans le Kurdistan irakien ont regagné leurs bases, après une vaste offensive destinée à déloger les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, le PKK, de la zone frontalière avec la Turquie. Au total, selon l'état major turc, au moins 240 rebelles du PKK ont été tués, alors que l'armée turque reconnaît 27 morts dans ses rangs. Le bilan de cette opération est difficile à établir, en tout cas, les alliés d'Ankara sont soulagés qu'elle soit terminée.

Après l'Irak, c'est la Maison Blanche qui s'est réjouie hier soir du retrait rapide de l'armée turque. Washington nie avoir pesé dans la décision d'Ankara, mais le chef d'état-major turc n'a pas dissipé les soupçons d'une armée sous influence des Etats-Unis, en indiquant que sa décision était antérieure à la visite du secrétaire d'Etat à la Défense à Ankara, jeudi.

La Maison Blanche promettant aussitôt de poursuivre sa lutte contre la rébellion kurde, aux côtés de la Turquie et de l'Irak, on comprend mieux l'intérêt partagé des Turcs et des Améri-

cains de couper court à une opération incertaine si elle durait dans le temps et surtout si elle s'enlisait dans les profondeurs de l'Irak.

Le communiqué de l'armée turque souligne d'ailleurs les difficultés de cette intervention en raison des conditions atmosphériques, dit-il, les mettant à l'actif de son héroïsme. Mais sous-entendu : tenter plus loin l'aventure eût été trop risqué. En coupant court, Ankara satisfait à l'appel de Bagdad et de Washington de ne pas s'attarder, et garde le bénéfice de leur coopération promise dans la lutte contre le PKK.

L'opinion publique turque est ainsi elle aussi rassurée, car l'armée a juré de surveiller de près les activités de la rébellion et d'empêcher qu'elle ne menace la sécurité de la Turquie, son honneur est sauf.



AFP

BOMBARDEMENTS TURCS SUR LE KURDISTAN IRAKIEN

ERBIL (Irak), 5 mars 2008 (AFP) - Des frappes aériennes et des tirs d'artillerie turcs ont visé tôt mercredi une zone du Kurdistan irakien, a annoncé à l'AFP un porte-parole de la formation indépendantiste du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

"A 03H00 (00H00 GMT), le bombardement a commencé dans la région de Bazger dans le district de Sidikan, dans la région d'Erbil, et ils se poursuivent sporadiquement", a assuré Ahmad Danis, responsable des relations extérieures du PKK.

Il n'a pas été en mesure de faire état d'un bilan pour ces bombardements, dans ce secteur largement inhabité, ni d'en indiquer l'intensité. Il n'a pas non plus précisé les cibles éventuelles.

L'armée turque a conduit du 21 au 29 février une offensive dans le Kurdistan irakien contre les rebelles du PKK qui mènent depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre l'Etat turc qui a fait quelque 37.000 morts.

Le chef d'état-major de l'armée turque, le général Yasar Büyükanit a assuré lundi que cette incursion contre les bases du PKK dans la zone de Zap, proche de la frontière turque, avait été un "énorme succès".

Il a annoncé que la Turquie mènerait de nouvelles opérations contre les rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak quand elle le jugerait nécessaire.

L'armée turque affirme qu'au moins 240 rebelles du PKK ont été tués en huit jours d'offensive, qui a fait 27 morts, côté turc. Au total 272 cibles ont été pilonnées par air et 517 autres ont été attaquées du sol lors de l'offensive, selon l'armée.

Le chef du PKK Mourad Qarilan a estimé que l'opération turque avait "échoué", dans un entretien téléphonique à l'AFP depuis son refuge dans les montagnes du Qandil, et qu'Ankara n'avait pas réussi à créer une zone sécurisée dans le nord de l'Irak pour lancer des attaques.

Turkey withdraws its troops from Iraq

U.S. sought pullout; Ankara military says goals were achieved

By Sabrina Tavernise
and Richard A. Oppel Jr.

The Turkish military announced it had withdrawn all of its troops from northern Iraq by Friday morning, bringing an eight-day ground offensive to an abrupt close, a day after the U.S. defense secretary, Robert Gates, had warned Turkey to pull out.

Reports varied as to the extent of the pullout, however, with a senior American military official in Iraq saying it had only begun and the Turks and an Iraqi official saying it was already complete.

In Turkey, the military bristled at the suggestion that it had been influenced by the United States and said that the ground campaign — in which 24 Turkish soldiers and as many as 243 Kurdish fighters were killed — had simply run its course as its goals had been met.

“Both the start and the ending of the operation were fully determined on our part,” the military said in a statement. “Any internal or outside influence on the decision of the Turkish Armed Forces is out of discussion.”

Still, there were indications that the American urgings played a serious role. The Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari, said in a telephone interview in Baghdad that he believed that pressure from U.S. officials, including Gates, who visited Ankara, Turkey’s capital, on Thursday, was critical to convincing the Turks to withdraw.

“It was a combination of reasons, but the United States position was very instrumental,” Zebari said. “The United States position was admirable for reminding the Turkish side of the gravity of the situation.”

Turkey began a ground offensive against fighters from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party on Feb. 21, using fighter jets and ground artillery to destroy the fighters and their hideouts. The group, known as the PKK, hides in the mountains in both Turkey and Iraq and has fought the Turkish military for decades, demanding more rights for Turkey’s Kurds.

The conflict has put the United States in a difficult spot, setting Turkey, a member of NATO and a close ally, against Iraqi Kurds, its strongest



A Turkish soldier returning Friday from northern Iraq. The Turkish military said 24 soldiers had been killed in the offensive.

partners in the war in Iraq. But last autumn, the United States agreed to offer intelligence and other assistance to Turkey in its fight against the group, in a new cooperation that paved the way for Turkish strikes, and eased pressure that had been building in Turkey to take action against Kurdish militants.

Reports on the extent of the withdrawal varied.

The Turkish military said “our troops returned to their home bases by the morning of Feb. 29, 2008,” and NTV, a private television network, reported that Turkey’s chief of staff told senior government officials of the withdrawal as early as Thursday night.

Zebari, a Kurd, said his contacts in the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq had assured him that the Turkish forces had crossed the border back into Turkey, beginning “in the early hours of the morning.”

Still, a senior U.S. military officer in Iraq said it was “too early to call this a withdrawal” and a representative of the Kurdish fighters in Iraq, Ahmed Denis, said some Turkish troops were still inside Iraq.

“We are seeing a limited portion of the troops that had entered into Iraq moving back toward Turkey,” the American official said.

In Turkey, the withdrawal seemed abrupt. The text of a speech to be delivered by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday night was rewritten hours before to include news of the withdrawal. A government official said the change did not imply haste.

Turkish officials said that the withdrawal was already under way when Gates arrived in Turkey on Thursday and that the timing of the pullout was purely coincidental.

“The timing of the visit makes it look like it influenced the decision, but it’s not true,” said Suat Kiniklioglu, deputy

chairman of external affairs for Erdogan’s party. “We didn’t want to make this public, in order to secure the withdrawal of our troops in safety.”

Senior Turkish officials had known the operation would not last long, he said, but “we couldn’t say it.”

The Turkish military does not allow reporters on operations, and as the fighting took place in a remote area, it was impossible to verify claims.

According to the Turkish military, the operation dealt a serious blow to the PKK’s network. The military offered lists of places it had destroyed — 126 caves, 290 hideouts and shelters, 12 command centers and 59 antiaircraft sites, among others. In addition to the Turkish soldiers, three Kurds working for the military were killed, it said.

Denis, the Kurdish fighters’ representative, presented a different version of events, contending that the soldiers had partly withdrawn after a counterattack by the militants that kept the Turks from seizing a strategically important area. He said that only 5 militants had been killed and that the death toll among the Turks was 130.

Turkish officials emphasized that they reserved the right to send soldiers back in, whenever they felt it was necessary. Parliament gave Erdogan the permission for operations in Iraq in October, and it is valid for one year.

Zebari said the Iraqi government did not want any more operations inside its borders.

“This has been a serious distraction for all of us,” he said. “It was very awkward for everybody, for the United States, for the Iraqi government, and even for Turkey.”

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting from Istanbul and Balen Y. Younis from Baghdad.



Kurdistan Regional Government

KRG.org - 01 Mar. 2008

US Congressmen complete fact-finding visit to the Kurdistan Region

Erbil, Kurdistan Region - Iraq (KRG.org) - A bipartisan delegation of six US Congressmen has completed a visit to Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Region, as part of a fact-finding tour of Iraq.

The delegation, led by Representative Jim Costa, Democrat of California, was in the Kurdistan Region to see the progress being made in Iraq's most stable and prosperous region.

Mr Masoud Barzani, the Kurdistan Region's president, briefed the Congressmen on the current political situation in Iraq, the recent history of the Kurdistan Region and its current priorities. He said, "I want to thank the delegation for their visit. It is important for them to understand how grateful the Kurdistan Region is for the US Government's continued assistance and our sincere desire to create a long term and strategic partnership that will benefit the people of the Kurdistan Region and all Iraq."

During their meeting with President Barzani, the Congressmen said they were happy to have seen for themselves the progress being made in the Kurdistan Region and that the achievements of the region should act as a model for the rest of the country.

The delegation also met Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. Prime Minister Barzani discussed KRG relations with Baghdad, especially the KRG's policy on Article 140 which deals with Kirkuk and other disputed terri-

ories, the national hydrocarbons law, and revenue sharing mechanisms.

Regarding Article 140, the Prime Minister said, "This is a question of property rights and righting a historical wrong in a peaceful, democratic and constitutional way. We believe the people of the disputed areas should have the right to determine by whom they are governed."

On the KRG's recent oil contracts, Prime Minister Barzani confirmed that the oil exploration agreements signed by the KRG strictly adhere to the Iraqi constitution.

The Prime Minister commended the delegation's visit. "We want more Congressional delegations to come to the Kurdistan Region," he said. "We are proud of what we have achieved. We want to express our gratitude to the United States for removing the former regime. The Kurdistan Region is now making good progress, we are the gateway to Iraq and an engine of economic growth. It is important that US lawmakers come and see this with their own eyes."

The other members of the delegation were Representatives Mike Pence, Republican of Indiana; Joseph Crowley, Democrat of New York; J. Gresham Barrett, Republican of South Carolina; and Addison Graves "Joe" Wilson, Republican also of South Carolina, Michael Arcuri and their staff.

The Boston Globe

March 1, 2008

Gen: Turkish pullout had been planned

By C. Onur Ant Associated Press Writer /

ISTANBUL, Turkey—Turkey's top general said the country's troop withdrawal from Iraq had nothing to do with U.S. calls to keep the cross-border campaign against Kurdish rebels as short as possible, a newspaper reported Saturday.

Gen. Yasar Buyukanit said withdrawal had already begun when U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates asked on Thursday for a quick end to Turkey's military operation in northern Iraq against separatist rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, Milliyet newspaper reported. Announcing the pullout then would have been a security risk, the general was quoted as saying.

Turkey withdrew its troops from northern Iraq on Friday, eight days after the military began a ground incursion to hit the rebels, who use their bases in northern Iraq as a launch pad for hit-and-run attacks on Turkish targets.

"This decision (for withdrawal) was made due to military reasons only," Buyukanit was quoted as saying.

President George W. Bush had also asked Turks to "move, move quickly, achieve their objective and get out."

Turkey declined on Thursday to set a timetable for withdrawal, saying troops would pull out once the job was done.

Buyukanit said timing of the pullout was decided before Gates' arrival in the Turkish capital of Ankara on Wednesday, Milliyet reported.

He said troops had already started returning when Gates was in Ankara, the newspaper said.

"But announcing a withdrawal then would be a murder. Announcing withdrawal is equivalent of telling those terrorists there to set up their traps and ambushes," Milliyet quoted him as saying.

Turkey, a NATO-member, has long sought cooperation from Washington in its fight against the PKK, which it considers a terrorist organization. The U.S. and the European Union also



consider the group as terrorist.

Bush and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met in November, when Washington agreed to share intelligence about the rebel group.

Turkey has launched a series of air assaults against PKK targets in Iraq since December, the first such operations since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The ground operation, launched on Feb. 21, was also the first of its kind that Turkey has conducted in almost a decade.

The PKK has waged a guerrilla war against Turkey since 1984, seeking self-rule for Kurds in southeastern Turkey. The fighting has claimed up to 40,000 lives.

March 3, 2008

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune
THE WORLD'S DAILY NEWSPAPER



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, at left on podium, and President Jalal Talabani of Iraq listening to anthems on Sunday.

Ahmadinejad welcomed in Iraq

By Richard A. Opiel Jr.

BAGHDAD: President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, arriving Sunday in Iraq to begin what he declared was a "new chapter" in relations between the two countries, warned President George W. Bush that America's problems in the Middle East would worsen as long as he continued to point fingers at Iran.

The historic trip, the first by an Iranian leader since the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s, spurred heated protests in Sunni Arab areas that seemed to underscore how growing Iranian influence could thwart hopes of mending the Iraqi government's sour relationship with Sunnis inside its own borders.

"Today, by the grace of God, our two countries' leaders have agreed to cement their brotherly relations," Ahmadinejad said after meeting with President Jalal Talabani of Iraq.

The Iranian leader plans to stay for two days and strike deals on energy and other investment projects.

Talabani, a Kurd, said that "economic, oil, political, and security issues" were all on the table. He also reiterated previous vows by Iraqi officials to eliminate the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, a group of anti-Iranian guerrillas that is in Iraq.

The visit made plain the determination of Iraqi leaders to move closer to Tehran despite American accusations that Iran, which is largely Shiite Muslim, finances and supports militias inside Iraq. Ahmadinejad received hugs from several dignitaries who greeted him, including Vice President Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shiite.

At a news conference with Ahmadinejad, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq seemed to defy American hopes that he would criticize Iran for meddling inside Iraq.

"I think that the level of trust is very high," Maliki said. "And I say frankly that the position Iran has taken recently

First Iranian leader to visit in decades

was very helpful in bringing back security and stability."

A question by an Arab television correspondent to Ahmadinejad — about Bush's statements that Iran provides weaponry to militias — appeared awkward for Maliki, who turned to Ahmadinejad as if to distance himself from the query.

"That's what he said," Maliki told his counterpart, making clear that what the reporter was asking about was not something Maliki had said.

Ahmadinejad responded: "You can tell Mr. Bush that making accusations about others will increase the Americans' problems in the region. They will have to accept the facts in the area. The Iraqi people do not like the Americans."

Ahmadinejad's trip almost seemed choreographed to draw a contrast to Bush's visits to Iraq, which took place inside highly protected American military compounds.

After arriving at Baghdad International Airport, Ahmadinejad rode in a motorcade — and not aboard helicopters — to central Baghdad down a road that once was controlled by Sunni insurgents. He arrived to warm smiles from Talabani and a line of Iraqi officials at Talabani's compound, where he was under the protection of Kurdish pesh merga fighters and other Iraqi forces. Iraqi authorities locked down the neighborhood surrounding Talabani's compound and closed two major bridges across the Tigris River, snarling traffic in much of the capital.

Outside of Baghdad it was clear the visit outraged many Sunni Arabs, who still have raw emotions from the Iran-Iraq war and also believe that Maliki's Shiite-dominated government now

functions as a proxy for Iran.

"I think Ahmadinejad is the most criminal and bloody person in the world," said Emad Abbas, a 21-year-old university student in Samarra, a city in the Sunni heartlands north of Baghdad. "This visit degrades Iraq's dignity, and it proves that Iraq is occupied twice, once by the United States and once by Iran."

Protests broke out in a number of places. In Kirkuk, where Sunni Arabs are fighting efforts by Kurds to control the city, Arab tribes and political parties rallied against the visit.

"How can we tolerate this?" said Salman Abdullah Al-Hamad, an Arab tribal leader in Kirkuk. "We have lost hundreds of thousands of people since the 1980s and today we live under the regime of the clerics. The Iranian revolution has been exported to Iraq."

Hundreds of Sunnis also took to the streets in Falluja and demanded that Iraq quit meddling in the internal affairs of Iraq.

"Ahmadinejad is the main reason why the occupiers remain in Iraq," said Muhammad Dira Farhan, 50, a Falluja businessman. "His visit is intended to reassure his followers here," he said, but he is "provoking and enraging" many Iraqis.

■ Airstrike kills a Qaeda leader

A U.S. military helicopter fired a guided missile to kill a wanted leader of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia from Saudi Arabia who was responsible for the deaths of five American soldiers in a bomb attack, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad, citing a military spokesman.

Rear Admiral Gregory Smith of the U.S. Navy said the Qaeda leader, Jar Allah, also known as Abu Yasir al-Saudi, and another Saudi known only as Hamdan, were killed Wednesday in Mosul.



March 3, 2008

PKK TRIUMPHANT AS ANKARA RETREATS FROM NORTHERN IRAQ

By David Romano

After only eight days, Turkey abruptly ended its military incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan on Friday February 29. The withdrawal of Turkish troops caught many observers, as well as the Turkish public, by surprise.

Only one day earlier, Turkish Chief of Staff General Yasar Buyukanit refused to announce a withdrawal date following pressure from U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and President George W. Bush. Both Gates and Bush publicly asked Turkey to keep its incursion "as short as possible," to which Buyukanit responded, "The shortest time is a relative concept. It may be one day or it might mean a year" (NTV, February 28). Turkish media at the same time reported about the Turkish military's plans to go as deep as 50 kilometers into Iraq and capture the main Qandil base of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Yeni Safak, February 26).

The abrupt withdrawal only one day after Gates's request and visit to Ankara led to accusations that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government had caved into U.S. pressure to end the operation. While both Erdogan and the Turkish military insisted that the withdrawal was already planned for February 29 and not the result of outside pressure, various observers speculated otherwise. Writing for one of Turkey's most widely read newspapers, columnist Yilmaz Ozdil speculated that Turkey received its recent \$6.2 billion World Bank loan in return for ending the operation. He added that "Bush asked us to get out. We got out. When on holiday, you can't even check out of your hotel room that quickly" (Hurriyet, March 1). Today's Zaman, on the other hand, cited reports that the military's withdrawal surprised even the Turkish government: "...[on Friday] Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had to revise the text of an address to the nation to take into account the troop withdrawal. In the text,

Erdogan spoke of continued operations" (March 3). Turkish opposition leader Deniz Baykal (CHP) added that "We all wish that the operation had achieved lasting results. This is not possible in eight days" (Today's Zaman, March 3).

The PKK claimed victory from the withdrawal. Speaking from his still very much intact base in the Qandil Mountains, PKK leader Murat Karayilan announced that Turkey "attacked our forces on three fronts in the Zap region, but failed to achieve their goals even though the Turkish army has advanced technology and jet fighters that flew over the combat zone and bombed us non-stop" (AFP, March 1). While the Turkish army claims to have killed some 250 PKK militants and lost 24 soldiers, the PKK admits to only a handful of losses and claims 130 Turkish soldiers killed and one helicopter downed (which Turkey admits to as well). Karayilan also tried hard to portray the Turkish incursion as an attack on all Kurds, rather than just the PKK. Other Kurdish sources claim that in addition to the PKK's stiff resistance, the heavy snows of this remote part of Iraqi Kurdistan forced Turkey to abandon the operation (Kurdistan Observer, February 29).

From the Iraqi Kurds' perspective, the difficulties that the Turkish operation faced vindicates their reluctance to move against the PKK militarily. If Turkey, with advanced attack helicopters, F-16s, heavy artillery, tanks, and airborne commandos can not dislodge the PKK, how can the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) be expected to do so? KRG representative Safeen Dizayee commented to Turkish media that "5,000, even 50,000 troops" could not control Qandil, just as Saddam never managed to control the area either (Hurriyet, February 28).

Although Turkey undoubtedly caused the PKK some damage with this latest incursion, guerrilla forces typically disperse

quickly in the face of large scale attacks, leaving few casualties. Lost supply depots and recruits can then be replaced in short order, particularly if the fighting raises the profile and legitimacy of the guerrillas. In fact, Iraqi Kurdish leaders told Jamestown that they suspect that the latest round of fighting made a weak and isolated PKK more politically relevant than before (Interview with Qubad Talabany, KRG Representative to the U.S., March 1).

The tally of casualties for the PKK and Turkey in this latest round of fighting may remain difficult to determine conclusively. In the larger scheme of things, it may not matter much either: if the PKK manages to portray itself as having given the Turkish army a bloody nose this time around, the group will have burnished its Kurdish nationalist credentials, legitimacy, and stature - which are the main objectives in this kind of guerrilla war.

To really undercut the PKK's legitimacy and support base, Ankara would need to go further in convincing Kurds in the country that there is little justification for the PKK's resort to violence. Prime Minister Erdogan's government may now turn around and tell Turkey's public and powerful military that a change in strategy is needed, and to push more economic development in the southeast as well as human rights, minority rights, and other political reforms. This kind of political program might also get a more willing collaboration from the Iraqi Kurds. KRG officials are eager to act as intermediaries in negotiations for a political settlement that would bring the PKK down from their mountain camps. The PKK itself has called for this dialogue. Such a strategy has a better chance of scoring a real victory against the PKK, in contrast to the frequently proclaimed, but ever elusive, military solutions.

March 1 2008

FINANCIAL TIMES

Turkey brings abrupt end to Iraq foray

By Vincent Boland in Ankara

Turkey's military yesterday ended its incursion into northern Iraq, claiming it had achieved its objectives and rejecting suggestions that political pressure had forced it to bring its troops home early.

The withdrawal follows a ferocious eight-day assault on PKK separatist bases in the Iraqi mountains and will be greeted with relief in Washington.

US officials, led by George W. Bush, the president, had become increasingly vocal in recent days in demanding a swift end to the operation amid fears that it could spark a wider

conflict inside Iraq.

Announcing the end of the incursion, which involved ground troops and the air force and was the biggest Turkish operation in Iraq for at least a decade, the general staff said: "It has been - determined that the aims of the operation have been achieved."

Troops returned to their bases yesterday morning, it said.

The timing of the pull-out, a day after Robert Gates, US defence secretary, visited Ankara to urge Turkey to leave quickly, caused surprise and prompted some angry speculation

that it had been influenced by the US. The military high command denied this charge, saying that the timing of the start and finish of the operation was determined by military needs and that "any internal or external influence is out of the question".

Tom Casey, a US state department spokesman, said yesterday: "We're pleased to see that the Turks carried out their commitment to us and to the Iraqis to have this operation be limited in scope and duration.

In a lengthy statement, the military said the incursion targeted a region of

northern Iraq that was "the heart" of the PKK, killed 240 rebel fighters and destroyed much of the organisation's infrastructure. Some 27 Turkish military personnel were also killed. The PKK has disputed the casualty figures on its side and said it killed about 100 Turkish troops.

The Turkish government and the military had insisted the operation would target only the PKK, a Kurdish separatist group that is branded a terrorist organisation by the US, the European Union and Turkey.

Young Iraqis are losing faith in religion

By Sabrina Tavernise

BAGHDAD: After almost five years of war, many young Iraqis, exhausted by constant firsthand exposure to the violence of religious extremism, say they have grown disillusioned with religious leaders and skeptical of the faith that they preach.

In two months of interviews with 40 young people in five Iraqi cities, a pattern of disenchantment emerged, in which young Iraqis, both poor and middle class, blamed clerics for the violence and the restrictions that have narrowed their lives.

"I hate Islam and all the clerics because they limit our freedom every day and their instruction became heavy over us," said Sara Sami, a high school student in Basra. "Most of the girls in my high school hate that Islamic people

control the authority because they don't deserve to be rulers."

Atheer, a 19-year-old from a poor, heavily Shiite neighborhood in southern Baghdad, said: "The religion men are liars. Young people don't believe them. Guys my age are not interested in religion anymore."

The shift in Iraq runs counter to trends of rising religiousness among young people across much of the Middle East, where religion has replaced nationalism as a unifying ideology. While religious extremists are admired by a number of young people in other parts of the Arab world, Iraq offers a test case of what could happen

when extremist theories are applied.

Fingers caught smoking were broken. Long hair was cut and forced to its owner. In that laboratory, disillusionment with Islamic leaders took hold.

It is far from clear whether the shift means a wholesale turn away from religion. A tremendous piety still predominates in the private lives of young Iraqis, and religious leaders, despite the increased skepticism, still wield tremendous power. Measuring religiousness, furthermore, is a tricky business in Iraq, where access to cities and towns that are far from Baghdad is limited.

But a shift seems to be registering, at least anecdotally, in the choices some young Iraqis are making. Professors reported difficulty recruiting graduate

students for religion classes. Attendance at weekly prayers appears to be down, even in areas where the violence has largely subsided, according to worshippers and imams in Baghdad and Faluja. In two visits to the weekly prayer session in Baghdad of the followers of Moktada al-Sadr last autumn, vastly smaller crowds attended than had in 2004 or 2005.

Such patterns, if lasting, could lead to a weakening of the political power of re-

Extremism breeds a disenchantment

ligious leaders in Iraq. In a nod to those changing tastes, political parties are scrubbing overt references to religion.

"In the beginning, they gave their eyes and minds to the clerics, they trusted them," said Abu Mahmoud, a moderate Sunni cleric in Baghdad, who now works deprogramming religious extremists in American detention. "It's painful to admit, but it's changed. People have lost too much. They say to the clerics and the parties: You cost us this."

"When they behead someone, they say 'Allah Akbar,' they read Koranic verse," said a moderate Shiite sheik from Baghdad. "The young people, they think that is Islam. So Islam is a failure, not only in the students' minds, but also in the community."

A professor at Baghdad University's School of Law, who would identify herself only as Bushra, said of her students: "They have changed their views about religion. They started to hate religious men. They make jokes about them because they feel disgusted by them."

That was not always the case. Saddam Hussein encouraged religion in Iraqi society in his later years, building Sunni mosques and injecting more religion into the public school curriculum, but always made sure it served his authoritarian needs. Shiites, considered to be an alternate political force and a threat to Hussein's power, were kept under close watch. Young Shiites who worshiped were seen as political subversives and risked attracting the attention of the police.

For that reason, the American invasion was sweetest to the Shiites, who for the first time were able to worship freely. They soon became a potent political force, as religious political leaders appealed to their shared and painful past and their respect for the Shiite religious hierarchy.

"After 2003, you couldn't put your foot into the husseiniya, it was so crowded with worshipers," said Sayeed Sabah, a Shiite religious leader from Baghdad, referring to a Shiite place of prayer.

Religion had moved abruptly into the Shiite public space, but often in ways that made educated, religious Iraqis uncomfortable. Militias were offering Koran courses. Titles came cheaply. In Abu Mahmoud's neighborhood, a butcher with no knowledge of Islam became the leader of a mosque.

A moderate Shiite cleric, Sheik Qasim, recalled watching in amazement as a former student, who never earned more than mediocre marks, whizzed by stalled traffic in a

long convoy of sport utility vehicles in central Baghdad. He had become a religious leader.

"I thought I would get out of the car, grab him and slap him!" said the sheik. "These people don't deserve their positions."

An official for the Ministry of Education in Baghdad, a secular Shiite, described the newfound faith like this: "It was like they wanted to put on a new, stylish outfit."

Religious Sunnis, for their part, also experienced a heady swell in mosque attendance, but soon became the hosts for groups of religious extremists, foreign and Iraqi, who were preparing to fight the United States.

Zane Muhammad, a gangly 19-year-old with an earnest face, watched with curiosity as the first Islamists in his Baghdad neighborhood came to barber-shops, tea parlors and carpentry stores before taking over the mosques. They were neither uneducated nor poor, he said, though they focused on those who

In a nod to changing tastes, political parties are scrubbing overt references to religion.

were. Then, one morning while waiting for a bus to school, Muhammad watched a man walk up to a neighbor, a college professor whose sect Muhammad did not know, shoot him at point-blank range three times and walk back to his car as calmly "as if he was leaving a grocery store."

"Nobody is thinking," Muhammad said in an interview in October. "We use our minds just to know what to eat. This is something I am very sad about. We hear things and just believe them."

By 2006, even those who had initially taken part in the violence were growing weary. Haidar, a grade school dropout, was proud to tell his family he was following a Shiite cleric in a fight against American soldiers in the summer of 2004. Two years later, however, he found himself in the company of gangsters.

Young militia members were abusing drugs. Gift mopeds had become gift guns. In three years, he saw five killings, mostly of Sunnis, including that of a Sunni cabdriver shot for his car.

It was just as bad, if not worse, for young Sunnis. Rubbed raw by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, they found themselves stranded in neighborhoods that were governed by seventh-century rules. During interviews with a dozen Sunni teenage boys in a Baghdad detention facility on several sticky days in September, several expressed relief at being in

jail, so they could wear shorts, a form of dress they would have been punished for in their neighborhoods.

Some Iraqis argue that religious-based politics was much more about identity than faith. When Shiites voted for religious parties in large numbers in an election in 2005, it was more an effort to show their numbers than a victory of the religious over the secular.

"It was a fight to prove our existence," said a young Shiite journalist from Sadr City. "We were embracing our existence, not religion."

The war dragged on, and young people from both sects became more broadly involved. Criminals had begun using teenagers and younger boys to carry out killings. The number of juveniles in American detention was up more than sevenfold in November from April, and Iraq's main prison for youth, in Baghdad, has triple the prewar population.

But while younger people were taking a more active role in the violence, their motivation was less likely than adults to be religion-driven. Of the 900 juvenile detainees in American custody in November, fewer than 10 percent claimed to be fighting a holy war, according to the American military. About one-third of adults said they were.

A worker in the American detention system said that by her estimate, only about a third of the adult detainee population, which is overwhelmingly Sunni, prayed.

"As a group, they are not religious," said Major General Douglas Stone, the head of detainee operations for the military. "When we ask if they are doing it for jihad, the answer is no."

Muath, a slender, 19-year-old Sunni with distant eyes and hollow cheeks, is typical. He was selling mobile phone credits and plastic flowers, struggling to keep his mother and five young siblings afloat, when a recruiter, a man in his 30s,

a regular customer, offered him cash in western Baghdad last spring to be part of an insurgent group, whose motivations were a mix of money and sectarian interests. Muath, the only wage earner, agreed. Suddenly his family could afford to eat meat again, he said in an interview in September.

Indeed, at least part of the religious violence in Baghdad had money at its heart. An officer at the Kadhamiya detention center, where Muath was being held this autumn, said recordings of beheadings fetch much higher prices than those of shooting executions in the CD markets, which explains why even non-religious kidnappers will behead hostages.

When Muath was arrested last year, the police found two hostages, Shiite brothers, in a safe house that Muath revealed. Photographs showed the men looking wide-eyed into the camera; dark welts covered their bodies.

Violent struggle against the United States was easy to romanticize at a distance.

"I used to love Osama Bin Laden," proclaimed a 24-year-old Iraqi college student. She was referring to how she felt before the war took hold in her native Baghdad. The Sept. 11, 2001, strike at American supremacy was satisfying, and the deaths, abstract.

Now, the student recites the familiar complaints: Her college has segregated the security checks; guards told her to stop wearing a revealing skirt; she covers her head for safety.

"Now I hate Islam," she said, sitting in her family's unadorned living room in central Baghdad. "Al Qaeda and the Mahdi Army are spreading hatred. People are being killed for nothing."

Parents have taken new precautions to keep their children out of trouble. Abu Tahsin, a Shiite from northern Baghdad, said that when his extended family built a Shiite mosque, they purposely did not register it with the reli-

gious authorities, even though it would have brought privileges, because they did not want to become entangled with any of the main religious Shiite groups that control Baghdad.

In Falluja, a Sunni city west of Baghdad that had been overrun by Al Qaeda, Sheik Khalid al-Mahamedie, a moderate cleric, said that fathers now came with their sons to mosques to meet the instructors of Koran courses. Families used to worry most about their daughters in adolescence, but now, the sheik said, they worry more about their sons.

"Before, parents warned their sons not to smoke or drink," said Muhammad Ali al-Jumaili, a Falluja father with a 20-year-old son. "Now all their energy is concentrated on not letting them be involved with terrorism."

Recruiters are relentless, and, as it turns out, clever, peddling things their young targets need. Stone describes it as a sales pitch a pimp gives to a prospective prostitute. American military officers at the American detention center said it was the Al Qaeda detainees who were best prepared for group sessions and asked the most questions.

The population they focused on was poor and uneducated. About 60 percent of the American adult detainee population is illiterate and is unable to even read the Koran that religious recruiters are preaching.

That leads to strange twists. One young detainee, a client of Abu Mahmoud's, was convinced he had to kill his parents when he was released, because they were married in an insufficiently Islamic way.

There is a new favorite game in the lively household of the Baghdad journalist. When they see a man with a turban on television, they crack jokes. In one of them, people are warned not to give their cellphone numbers to a religious man.

"If he knows the number, he'll steal the phone's credit," the journalist said. "The sheiks are making a society of nonbelievers."

Herald  Tribune

March 3, 2008

Lessening of violence in Iraq tied to progress

Economy and politics hold key, general says

By Michael R. Gordon

FORT HOOD, Texas: The former No. 2 American commander in Iraq said that without economic and political progress, it would not be possible to substantially reduce violence there.

"In order to have another significant decline, it is going to take economic progress, governance progress, and I think that's the next step," the former commander, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, said in an interview Wednesday at his Fort Hood headquarters.

Odierno completed a 15-month tour in mid-February as the day-to-day commander of military operations in Iraq. The general, who currently serves as head of the U.S. Army's III Corps, has been nominated to serve as the service's next vice chief of staff.

Odierno said that the surge of American reinforcements and the adoption

of a counterinsurgency strategy had succeeded in reducing attacks by insurgent and militant groups to the level of early 2005. "We had a significant decrease in violence from June through December," he said. "It has kind of leveled off."

The success of the American and Iraqi military operations, he asserted, had encouraged more Sunni volunteers to align themselves with the United States and established a climate in which the Iraqis had begun to tackle a long-deferred political and legislative agenda.

Odierno said that about half of the attacks currently being carried out against American and Iraqi forces and civilians were conducted by Shiite militant groups. The remainder, he said, are primarily orchestrated by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the Sunni insurgent group that American intelligence says is primarily made up of Iraqis but foreign-led.

The general asserted that Iran continued to train and finance Shiite extremists in Iraq and that Iran's goal was to ensure that Iraq remained too weak to challenge the growth in Iranian power.

"What we have seen is a steady state in terms of some of the Shia extremist

activities that still occur that are supported by both training and funding by Iran," he said.

"I think Iran's interests are a weak government in Iraq."

Odierno insisted that the Iraqi Army was improving and planned to expand by 40 battalions in 2008. But he noted

that the Iraqi military still faced equipment shortages.

"They are still lagging in being equipped properly to do this on their own," he said.

"That will take a year or so to get that improved."

UN votes to sanction Iran for 3rd time

By Warren Hoge and Elaine Sciolino

UNITED NATIONS, New York: The Security Council on Monday adopted its third resolution imposing sanctions on Iran for its refusal to cease enriching uranium, an activity that Western nations believe is designed to build nuclear weapons.

The previous two measures gained unanimous support of the 15-member panel, but in the Monday balloting, Indonesia abstained, saying it "remained to be convinced of the efficacy of adopting additional sanctions at this juncture." Fourteen countries voted in favor.

The resolution authorizes inspections of cargo to and from Iran that is suspected of carrying prohibited equipment, tightens the monitoring of Iranian financial institutions, and extends travel bans and asset freezes against persons and companies involved in the nuclear program.

It adds 13 names to the existing list of 5 individuals and 12 companies subject to travel and asset restrictions. The new names include people with direct responsibility for building fast-spinning centrifuges that enrich uranium ore, and a brigadier general engaged in "efforts to get round the sanctions" in the two earlier resolutions.

The new measure also bans all trade and supply of so-called dual-use items — materials and technologies that can be adapted for military as well as civilian ends.

In Vienna on Monday, Mohamed El-Baradei, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said that newly disclosed intelligence reports that Iran secretly researched how to make nuclear weapons were of "serious concern" and would be pursued by his office.

"Iran continues to maintain that these alleged weaponization studies related to conventional weapons only are fabricated," ElBaradei said in a speech to the agency's 35-country policy-making body. "However, a full-fledged examination of this issue has yet to take place."

The studies were described Feb. 25, in a briefing for the governing body by Olli Heinonen, the agency's senior inspector.

They included sketches and a video that appeared to have come from Iran's own military laboratories, and Heinonen said they showed work "not consistent with any application other than the development of a nuclear weapon."

The display of new and newly declassified information was part of the latest effort to pressure Iran to disclose

information about its past atomic activities and offer proof that its current program is benign.

The French ambassador, François-Xavier Deniau, said questions raised by the Vienna meeting had opened a "new chapter" in the West's effort to keep Iran from acquiring nuclear arms, according to participants.

This confrontation was different from the long-running U.S.-led campaign. Gone are the veiled threats of military action from the White House. The wind largely went out of that effort in December when U.S. intelligence officials surprised Western allies — and angered Bush administration hawks — with a report saying that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

The presentation Feb. 25 in Vienna did not contradict that conclusion, but disclosed many new details suggesting the depth of Iran's past work on weapons design.

The new effort to pressure Iran has been led by Europeans and the atomic agency. It reached the Security Council on Monday as it voted to begin the third round of economic sanctions.

In a thinly veiled criticism of Iran, El-Baradei said Monday, "I urge Iran to be as active and cooperative as possible in working with the agency to clarify this matter of serious concern."

Iran says that the agency's findings support its claim that its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes, and it has rejected all suggestions that it was studying how to make nuclear weapons.

The Iranian ambassador to the agency, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, called the intelligence data "forged and fabricated" and denounced the new Security Council resolution Monday as "irresponsible" and "an arrow aiming at the heart" of the atomic energy agency.

Iran argues that its program is devoted solely to producing fuel for nuclear reactors that generate electricity. The United States and its European allies on the council contend the real purpose is to make Iran an atomic power, and they say they are determined to prevent that from happening.

The resolution approved Monday was originally scheduled for a decision last Friday, but its two sponsors, Britain

Council cites refusal by Tehran to cease enriching uranium

Iran Web users face restrictions

TEHRAN: The Iranian government might block private access to the Internet for the general legislative election on March 14, two Iranian news outlets reported Monday.

But the two accounts appeared to differ on the rationale. "Shutting down the Internet service will depend on security plans and on the Ministry of Telecommunication," said Mostafa Pourmohammadi, the interior minister, according to Etemad Melli, a daily.

At the same time, a senior election official, Muhammad Javad Mahmoudi, said a shutdown would help ensure that the government had unimpeded Internet service for the election, even though the governments' Internet lines had been upgraded, according to ISNA.

Iran has placed many restrictions on the Internet, but it has never shut down the Internet on such a scale. Several million Iranians follow political news on the Internet, and political parties have their own active Web sites.

In 2006, the authorities banned download speeds on private computers faster than 128 kilobytes per second.

The government also uses sophisticated filtering equipment to block hundreds of Web sites and blogs that it considers religiously or politically inappropriate. Many bloggers have been jailed in the past years, and dozens of Web sites have been shut down.

and France, delayed consideration in the hope of getting as close to past unanimity as possible. In addition to Indonesia, three other Council countries — Libya, South Africa and Vietnam — had expressed reservations.

To address them, the final version included last-minute language changes

making it clear that cargo inspections must conform to local and international laws, and stressing the central role of the International Atomic Energy Agency and evidence in the latest report from ElBaradei, on Feb. 22, that Iran was cooperating with the agency.

The resolution extends the reach of punishments in the two earlier measures, adopted in December 2006 and March, 2007, but it does not make them any tougher.

The text was drawn up after months of talks among the Security Council's five permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — and Germany, which is not a council member.

It repeats a pledge from the six countries to establish full relations and economic cooperation with Tehran should it agree to suspend enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.

In Vienna, Britain, France and Germany said they were preparing a draft resolution critical of Iran that could be adopted by the agency's policy-making body later this week. The United States, Canada, Australia and Japan have already indicated privately that they would support such a move.

It would be the first time the board had passed such a resolution on Iran since it sent Iran's file to the Security Council for review two years ago.

The United States, which in the past

has criticized ElBaradei for not being tough enough on Iran, expressed support for this approach.

"Despite some progress in addressing past issues, troubling questions remain about Iranian activities that strongly suggest a clandestine weapons-related program," Gregory Schulte, the American envoy to the agency, told reporters in Vienna.

He added, "Between the indications of weapons work, which would constitute a violation of Iran's treaty obligations and Iran's blatant violations of Security Council resolutions, there is strong reason for Iran's file to remain open both in New York and in Vienna."

17 killed as Iranian leader visits Iraq

By Mudhafer Al-Husaini and Michael Kamber

BAGHDAD: A spate of attacks against Iraqi security forces on Monday marked the second day of the first state visit to Iraq by the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Most of those killed in the violence were bystanders who had witnessed attacks on Iraqi soldiers and police officers.

In Baghdad, three bombings killed at least 17 people and wounded at least 56. At least four of the dead were Iraqi police officers or soldiers.

In the most deadly attack, a car bomb exploded in the Bab al-Muadham neighborhood, a busy central Baghdad district, as an Iraqi Army convoy passed by.

Hadi Abdul Ridha Abdullah, 45, a guard for a local telephone exchange facility near the blast site, said he had seen someone driving an American-made sport utility vehicle through the jammed traffic. The truck exploded when Iraqi Army Humvees rolled past.

"One of the guards with me was on the ground a few feet away and was bleeding badly," said Abdullah, weep-

ing. "He died later. I even saw people burning inside their trucks and asking for help. But nobody could reach them. I'll never forget what I saw today."

Hours after the explosion, Iraqi security forces had towed away the husks of burned-out cars, while business owners and local residents hosed down streets and walls.

Many witnesses expressed anger that such attacks had continued to occur in Baghdad despite increased security during Ahmadinejad's visit.

"I'm not against the visit of the Iranian president, but this is not a suitable time to receive any important officials," said Aboud Qasem, 38, the owner of a nearby restaurant. As he scanned the chaotic scene he said: "It is always the innocents who pay the highest price."

In a coffee shop near the scene, Hajji Abbas, 73, was more direct in his condemnation of Ahmadinejad's visit. "We get all these problems from Iran and the other neighboring countries, including the Arab nations," he said. "Let them go to hell and leave us alone."

Iraqi security officials were clearly on edge as attacks mounted throughout

the day. In a separate bombing in eastern Baghdad, a man driving a pickup truck exploded his truck at an Iraqi police checkpoint.

The Iraqi police said that the driver had been attempting to reach a police station, but was deterred by the checkpoint guards, three of whom were killed in the explosion.

A third explosion in the capital, in Baghdad's Wazirya neighborhood, killed three people.

In Basra, Iraq's oil-rich port city, a visiting police colonel was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen as he drove along a central street, according to a witness who declined to be identified.

Three other policemen in Basra were wounded in a separate attack, according to an Iraqi police source.

Western and Iraqi officials say that Basra, Iraq's southernmost city, is dominated by competing Shiite militias. Even the local police force is heavily infiltrated by militiamen and outlaws, government officials say.

Solomon Moore contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Baghdad, Basra, Kut and Tikrit.

■ Ex-officials' charges dropped

An Iraqi court dropped charges Monday against two former government officials accused of allowing Shiite death squads to use ambulances and government hospitals to carry out kidnappings and killings, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

A U.S. Embassy spokesman, Philip Reeker, said the United States understood that the three-judge panel had found the former deputy health minister, Hakim al-Zamili, and Brigadier General Hameed al-Shimmari, who was in charge of the ministry's security force, not guilty of kidnapping, murder and corruption charges.

However, the defendants remained in American military custody, and the charges could be reinstated if prosecutors successfully appeal the decision.



Agence France-Presse

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, center, greeting tribal leaders in Baghdad on Monday. Deadly attacks against Iraqi security forces marked Day 2 of his visit.

3 MARS 2008



L'armée turque se retire du nord de l'Irak

Ankara affirme avoir détruit plusieurs camps des rebelles kurdes en Irak, mais l'armée pourrait conduire une nouvelle offensive au printemps

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie)
De notre envoyée spéciale

L'annonce du retrait des troupes turques du nord de l'Irak, vendredi, après huit jours d'offensive contre les séparatistes kurdes, trouble les esprits à Diyarbakir, principale ville kurde du sud-est de la Turquie. «*Je doute que l'armée ait atteint ses cibles*», estime Hussein, un Kurde d'une cinquantaine d'années.

Difficile pour cet homme, habitué depuis huit jours à voir décoller des avions de chasse de la base militaire toute proche, de prendre au pied de la lettre les informations diffusées par l'armée. Dans un long communiqué, l'armée turque annonce avoir «*atteint ses objectifs initiaux*». Officiellement, cette incursion terrestre aura permis de détruire 12 bases du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, le mouvement séparatiste kurde de Turquie, et aura «*montré à l'organisation que le nord de l'Irak n'est pas une zone sûre pour les terroristes*».

En huit jours de combats, Ankara fait état de 240 morts du côté du PKK, de 24 militaires tombés en service et de 27 membres de la sécurité turque également tués.

« Nous savons que les Américains détiennent toutes les clés dans la région. »

Les commentaires des dirigeants du PKK sont sans rapport. «*Si ce retrait est complet, c'est une victoire pour le PKK et pour le Kurdistan*», estime un porte-parole de l'organisation kurde, Ahmed Danis. Le PKK, qui selon l'armée comptait près de 4 000 membres dans le nord de l'Irak avant l'opération, fournit un bilan provisoire très différent. Il affirme avoir perdu seulement neuf de ses hommes et tué au moins 108 militaires turcs.

À Diyarbakir, le responsable local du parti pro-kurde, DTP (Parti pour une société démocratique), se dit «*soulagé*» par l'annonce de la fin de l'offensive turque que sa formation exigeait depuis huit jours. Necdet

Atalay se demande toutefois ce qui a motivé le retrait de l'armée turque.

Même si les militaires turcs se défendent d'avoir cédé aux demandes américaines, c'est bien vers Washington que se tournent tous les regards. George W. Bush a en effet demandé jeudi dernier à la Turquie de se retirer dans les plus brefs délais. «*Nous savons que les Américains détiennent toutes les clés dans la région*», estime Hamit, un lycéen. «*Que va-t-il se passer au printemps? Rien n'est certain.*» Le ministre turc de la justice, Mehmet Ali Sahin, a laissé entendre que de nouvelles opérations sont envisa-

geables car le Parlement, en octobre, a autorisé l'armée à intervenir

en Irak durant un an. L'état-major a de son côté déclaré qu'il «*continuera à traquer les activités (du PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak*».

Les États-Unis ont favorablement accueilli l'annonce de ce retrait. «*C'était une opération limitée et relativement courte*», s'est réjoui le porte-parole de la Maison-Blanche, Gordon Johndroe. «*Mais, à moins que le PKK ne renonce au terrorisme, je pense que nous devons continuer à travailler avec les Turcs et les Irakiens pour (le) poursuivre*», a-t-il prévenu.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER

Turquie

Libération

4 MARS 2008

Bilan contrasté pour l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak

L'intervention militaire turque menée du 21 au 29 février était la plus grosse depuis onze ans en Irak du Nord contre les bases arrières des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Cette opération de neuf jours a été menée avec l'accord des Américains.

L'opération turque en Irak est-elle un succès?

L'armée turque affirme que 270 «terroristes» ont été tués et que nombre d'infrastructures logistiques du PKK dans la zone frontalière ont été détruites. Le PKK assure contre toute évidence n'avoir perdu que 5 hommes mais avoir tué 130 soldats turcs. «*On leur a donné une leçon et nous en donnerons d'autres si nécessaire*», a affirmé hier le chef d'état-major turc Yaşar Büyükanıt. Nombre de commentateurs relativisent la portée de cette «victoire». Les services de renseignement turcs estimaient en effet qu'il y avait entre 3 500 et 4 000 combattants du PKK dans les montagnes du Nord de l'Irak dans des zones échappent à tout contrôle du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien. Ankara n'en a pas moins réussi à mener une opération dans des conditions hivernales difficiles pour casser une partie des

infrastructures du PKK, qui se prépare comme tous les ans à lancer une vague d'attaque à partir du 21 mars, le nouvel an kurde. «*Si le PKK peut encore attaquer à partir du territoire irakien, nous devons alors nous interroger sur l'efficacité même de l'option du tout-militaire*», analyse Cengiz Çandar, chroniqueur du quotidien économique Referans. «*Pour la majorité des Kurdes de Turquie le PKK reste encore une bonne référence*», souligne Ümit Firat intellectuel kurde et partisan de longue date d'une solution politique. Une partie croissante des élites turques rappelle qu'il est impossible de briser la rébellion kurde sans trouver une solution garantissant plus de droits culturels mais aussi économiques et sociaux à cette population qui représente un cinquième de celle du pays. Les Européens et Washington insistent aussi sur ce point.

Est-ce le signe d'un réchauffement entre Ankara et Washington?

Les commandos et l'aviation turcs ont bénéficié en temps réels des renseignements donnés par les Américains. Massivement antiaméricaine depuis le début de la guerre d'Irak, l'opinion publique turque est convaincue que l'opération a dû s'arrêter plus tôt que prévu

à cause de Washington. «*Les Américains qui ont gardé le silence contre Israël dévastant la bande de Gaza ont empêché la poursuite de l'opération antiterroriste dans le Nord de l'Irak*», clame Deniz Baikal, le leader de l'opposition nationaliste de gauche. Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan et les militaires nient. «*Si on peut démontrer des pressions américaines, je renonce à mon uniforme*», a affirmé le chef d'état-major.

Il n'en est pas moins évident que les Américains voulaient une intervention courte craignant une déstabilisation du Kurdistan irakien qui échappe au contrôle de Bagdad depuis 1991 et a été jusqu'ici épargné par le chaos. Mais Washington tente depuis quelques mois de réchauffer les liens avec une Turquie, qui, pilier du flanc sud-est de l'Otan, fut longtemps son principal allié régional. «*Il est sûr que les Américains vont demander la contrepartie de cette aide*», affirme Ruşen Çakır, chroniqueur du quotidien Vatan et spécialiste de la question kurde. Washington pousse ainsi Ankara à instaurer de bonnes relations avec le gouvernement central irakien mais aussi avec le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien.

De notre correspondant à Istanbul

► RAGIP DURAN



4 MARS 2008

Les Kurdes d'Irak parlent d'échec de l'offensive turque

L'offensive de l'armée turque a voulu montrer que les rebelles du PKK ne sont pas en sécurité dans le nord de l'Irak

AMADIYA
(Kurdistan irakien)
De notre envoyée spéciale

La petite ville d'Amadiya est logée au sommet d'un piton rocheux. Trois jours après le retrait des troupes turques du Kurdistan irakien où elles pourchassaient les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés en Irak, le calme est revenu dans cette petite bourgade, qui n'a subi aucun dégât. La seule marque visible des combats se trouve à quelques kilomètres de là. Inutilisable, le pont Summark, jaune et bleu, gît, éventré, au pied de falaises monumentales. C'est la zone du nord de l'Irak qui a été la plus bombardée durant les huit jours qu'a duré l'incursion. Une autorité locale affirme que quatre ponts ont été détruits dans cette zone. Mais l'information reste invérifiable, car l'accès à la montagne est interdit.

La petite route qui se poursuit de l'autre côté du pont serpente jusqu'à la frontière turque. Entre les deux points, la zone est dite « dangereuse ». « Si vous voyez des combattants, surtout ne prenez pas de photos », lâche, mal à l'aise, le soldat qui nous interdit de passer. « Personne ne peut aller plus loin, même pas nous », avoue-t-il, kalachnikov en bandoulière.

La zone au-delà de la rivière opale

marque donc le début d'une zone visiblement laissée aux mains des 4000 membres de la guérilla du PKK. « Nous n'avons pas les moyens de vérifier les dégâts causés par l'attaque turque », admet le lieutenant-colonel Guhdar Ali, installé dans la principale ville du district, Dohuk. Il assure pourtant que l'armée régulière kurde dispose de bases dans ces mêmes montagnes et que la zone n'est pas « un no man's land » : « Si nous ne sommes pas intervenus contre l'armée turque, c'est seulement que nous n'en avons pas reçu l'ordre. »

Le président de l'autorité kurde d'Irak, Massoud Barzani, avait en effet annoncé que les forces armées interviendraient uniquement si des civils étaient visés. « La Turquie a respecté l'accord passé avec l'Irak, ajoute le lieutenant-colonel. Mais si elle avait voulu occuper le Kurdistan, il aurait été de notre honneur de nous défendre. »

Selon des accords secrets passés à l'époque de Saddam Hussein, Ankara est autorisée à intervenir dans le nord de l'Irak contre le PKK, sur

une vingtaine de kilomètres. « Nous n'aimons pas le PKK, car c'est une force importante déployée sur notre terre, explique un membre du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (KDP), sous le couvert de l'anonymat. Mais nous ne pouvons pas aller dans les montagnes pour les déloger. Nous avons déjà combattu contre eux dans les années 1990 et ça n'a rien donné. Le PKK est un problème interne à la Turquie. Nous ne voulons pas interférer. »

La montagne étant interdite d'accès, impossible de vérifier les dommages causés à l'organisation kurde. Toutefois, les commentaires vont bon train. « Selon moi, cette opération n'est pas une victoire pour les Turcs, estime Guhdar Ali. Peut-être ont-ils tué quelques personnes, mais par rapport à leurs propres pertes, ce n'est rien. » Dans le village de Surye, Ali Hasan partage la même opinion : « Moi, je n'aime pas le PKK, mais je pense qu'il a gagné. Les Turcs sont repartis car ils n'ont rien trouvé. Ils ne visaient pas le PKK, mais le Kurdistan. »

Durant l'opération, ce père de sept enfants a quitté sa maison, près d'Amadiya, pour s'installer chez son oncle, à quelques kilomètres. « Les Turcs n'ont pas arrêté de survoler la ville, les enfants avaient peur. L'hôpital du village a été un peu endommagé, on a décidé de partir. » Une petite construction à proximité de l'hôpital s'est écroulée, sous l'effet, apparemment, de balles perdues. À proximité, un autre villageois montre, dans sa cour, un autre impact de balle.

Le Croissant-Rouge, basé à Erbil confirme ne pas avoir observé de mouvements massifs de populations, contrairement au mois de décembre, lors des premiers bombardements turcs sur la zone. À l'époque, le CICR avait assisté plus de 800 familles déplacées dans les régions d'Erbil, Zarho et Souleimaniya.

DELPHINE NERBOLIER



CHRISTOPHE PETIT-TESSON/MAXPPP

La famille d'Ali Hasan, dans le village de Surye. Ils ont fui provisoirement la zone des combats, mais l'opération turque au Kurdistan irakien n'a pas provoqué d'exode semblable à celui qui avait suivi les bombardements de décembre.

TURQUIE-IRAK OPÉRATION « SOLEIL » CONTRE LE PKK

La fin de l'« incursion » turque laisse les Kurdes d'Irak soulagés mais inquiets

ARBIL (Kurdistan irakien)

ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Des guérilleros effectuant une danse traditionnelle kurde, des uniformes turcs déchirés, des armes et des restes de nourriture éparpillés dans une plaine verglacée : tel est le spectacle auquel ont pu assister les Kurdes irakiens en regardant, lundi 3 mars, les images diffusées par Roj TV, la chaîne satellitaire du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), trois jours après le retrait des troupes turques du nord de l'Irak le 29 février. Nul n'est en mesure d'affirmer que ces démonstrations de rebelles triomphants ne sont pas une grossière mise en scène, ni que les récentes déclarations d'Ankara selon lesquelles son « incursion surprise » a « rempli ses objectifs » en frappant durement les bases du PKK ne sont qu'une autre forme de propagande.

Des observateurs à Arbil estiment que le total des tués – 27 soldats turcs et 240 rebelles selon Ankara, 130 soldats turcs et 5 combattants selon le PKK – de ces huit jours de conflit se situe quelque part entre les chiffres fournis par chacun des belligérants. Soutenue par son aviation, l'armée turque a démontré qu'elle était en mesure d'attaquer, au cœur de l'hiver, dans des montagnes soumises à une météorologie calamiteuse, laissant présager quelle pourrait être sa force dans des conditions climatiques plus clémentes.

Un aperçu de la zone frontalière suffit à comprendre que ses reliefs vertigineux et crevassés, les rivières et les grottes au ras des falaises, ne sont pas à l'avantage d'une armée conventionnelle, mais



constituent au contraire un terrain idéal pour les rebelles. Les peshmergas (soldats kurdes irakiens) qui les ont affrontés dans les années 1990 décrivent les hommes du PKK comme des combattants rompus aux conditions extrêmes, aussi dangereux qu'imprévisibles. Les fantômes, la haine, mais aussi la vague de sympathie que suscite le PKK, notamment à Arbil, capitale régionale du Kurdistan, témoignent aussi de sa puissance.

Le gouvernement régional kurde, misant sur l'apaisement, s'est déclaré « satisfait du retrait des troupes turques ». « En cantonnant nos peshmergas à une position défensive, en ayant évité tout débordement d'une population bombardée, apeurée et en colère, nous avons prouvé que nous ne faisons pas partie de ce problème et que nous ne soutenons pas le PKK », déclare Fallah Moustafa Bakir, ministre des affaires étrangères pour la région.

Les Kurdes proposent un dialogue à quatre : Washington, Bagdad, Arbil, Ankara. « Nous n'avons plus aucun contact officiel avec la Turquie, regrette le ministre, la seule communication s'effectue à travers les médias. Nous voulons de bonnes relations, basées sur ce que nous partageons : des intérêts économiques et une frontière, et non sur le PKK. » Si la Turquie le souhaite, Arbil acceptera de jouer les médiateurs auprès des rebelles. « Le PKK doit déposer les armes. Mais il devrait être autorisé à mener une action pacifique. A plusieurs reprises, il a proposé une trêve. Le fait qu'il soit étiqueté "terroriste" par tout le monde complique les choses », ajoute-t-il.

Le sentiment que, malgré la fin des bombardements, rien n'a été réglé entretient l'angoisse. A Arbil, au-dessus des dominos qui claquent sur les tables des cafés, l'opération « Soleil », ainsi que l'a baptisée la Turquie, reste le principal sujet de conversation. Les Kurdes n'ont reçu de Bagdad qu'un soutien tardif. Les Etats-Unis, l'allié préféré, ont fourni des renseignements à l'armée turque plutôt que de protéger leurs frontières. Le Kurdistan a réalisé sa fragilité et sa grande dépendance.

Beaucoup considèrent que le message d'Ankara visait directement le Kurdistan, à freiner ses prétentions sur la cité pétrolière de Kirkouk, dont le rattachement à la région kurde devait faire l'objet d'un référendum en décembre 2007, hypothétiquement reporté à l'été 2008. L'avenir se jouera à Kirkouk. En attendant, « les militaires turcs et le PKK peuvent bien échanger quelques coups de feu, dit-on dans un café, cela leur permet de justifier leur présence. Les perdants, dans cette bagarre, sont, déjà, les Kurdes d'Irak ». ■

CÉCILE HENNON

Troisième série de sanctions contre l'Iran au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU

La communauté internationale veut forcer Téhéran à suspendre l'enrichissement d'uranium. Le directeur de l'AIEA fait part de son « inquiétude grave » au sujet du nucléaire iranien

NEW YORK (Nations unies)

CORRESPONDANT

Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU a adopté, lundi 3 mars, une troisième série de sanctions pour forcer l'Iran à suspendre ses activités nucléaires suspectes. Les nouvelles mesures, soutenues par quatorze des quinze membres du Conseil, sont d'une portée limitée, mais contribuent, selon leurs concepteurs, à marginaliser l'Iran commercialement et

financièrement. La résolution a été dénoncée comme « illégale » par le représentant de l'Iran à l'ONU, Mohammad Khazaee, qui a défendu le droit de son pays à l'enrichissement d'uranium à des fins civiles.

A Vienne, le directeur de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), Mohamed ElBaradei, a jugé que les informations récentes fournies par des services de renseignement sur les visées militaires du programme iranien étaient un sujet « d'inquiétude grave ». Selon Téhéran, ces informations ont été « fabriquées ». « Il reste cependant à mener un examen complet de cette question », a affirmé, lundi, M. ElBaradei, qui a exhorté Téhéran à être « le plus actif et le plus coopératif possible ».

La résolution est le fruit d'un compromis entre les puissances occidentales, favorables à des sanctions plus dures, et le

tandem russo-chinois, inquiet devant le programme nucléaire iranien, mais soucieux de préserver ses relations commerciales avec Téhéran. Selon les diplomates, le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, a joué un rôle « déterminant » pour rallier la Libye et l'Afrique du Sud au texte. Seule l'Indonésie s'est abstenue.

La résolution 1803 donne « un tour de vis supplémentaire » aux sanctions déjà adoptées, unanimement, en décembre 2006 et mars 2007. Cinq personnalités iraniennes, responsables des programmes suspects, sont désormais frappées d'une interdiction de voyager à l'étranger. La liste des individus et entités liés aux activités « sensibles » dont les avoirs doivent être gelés est augmentée de 25 noms. Dont celui du général de brigade Mohammad Reza Naqdi, un responsable des Gardiens de la révolution, accusé d'avoir « participé aux activités de contournement

des sanctions ».

L'embargo sur les biens et les technologies qui pourraient alimenter le programme nucléaire iranien est par ailleurs étendu aux biens à « double usage ». Selon un expert, cette mesure pourrait avoir des conséquences sur le secteur pétrolier. Les Etats devront « inspecter dans leurs aéroports et ports maritimes les chargements à destination et en provenance d'Iran », à condition qu'il existe « des motifs raisonnables » de penser qu'ils contiennent « des biens prohibés » et qu'ils soient transportés par Iran Air Cargo ou l'Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line.

Au volet « incitatif », la résolution appelle les Etats à « faire preuve de vigilance lorsqu'ils souscrivent de nouveaux engagements d'appui financier public aux échanges commerciaux avec l'Iran ». Cette vigi-

lance doit aussi s'appliquer aux activités de « toutes les banques domiciliées en Iran, en particulier la banque Melli et la banque Saderat ». Le directeur de l'AIEA devra présenter, sous trois mois, « un rapport concernant la suspension complète et durable par l'Iran » de ses activités suspectes.

Les ministres des affaires étrangères des six pays derrière la résolution (France, Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, Allemagne, Russie et Chine) ont promis de « développer » une offre faite à l'Iran en juin 2006. Celle-ci prévoyait une coopération dans le nucléaire civil si l'Iran suspendait l'enrichissement d'uranium. Ces ministres ont demandé au haut représentant euro-

péen pour la politique étrangère, Javier Solana, de reprendre contact avec le négociateur iranien, Saïd Jalili.

Ces sanctions seront-elles efficaces ? « Ce sont des mesures modestes dans leur périmètre, mais qui sont très significatives », explique l'ambassadeur adjoint de la France à l'ONU, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, « elles incitent beaucoup d'acteurs, notamment économiques, à réfléchir avant de s'engager en Iran ». Selon Mohammad Khazaei, l'Iran a toutefois « appris à vivre avec les sanctions » qui n'auront, selon lui, « pas d'impact sur la stature politique ou économique » du pays. ■

PHILIPPE BOLOPION

IRAN-IRAK LA VISITE DU PRÉSIDENT IRANIEN SE CONCLUT PAR SEPT ACCORDS ÉCONOMIQUES

Le Monde
5 mars 2008

A Bagdad, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appelle au retrait des « forces étrangères » et se positionne en leader régional



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad lors de la prière, lundi 3 mars, dans la mosquée de Kadhimiya, ville voisine de Bagdad. Au cours d'une conférence de presse, le président iranien a appelé « les troupes étrangères à retourner d'où elles sont venues ». FARS NEWS/AFP

LORS d'une conférence de presse, lundi 3 mars, au terme de sa visite de deux jours à Bagdad, le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, répétant que la présence de 158 000 soldats américains en Irak n'a « apporté que des destructions », a appelé « les troupes étrangères à retourner d'où elles sont venues ». Il a par ailleurs annoncé la signature de sept accords dans le domaine des assurances, des douanes, de l'industrie, de l'éducation et des transports, pour concrétiser la « nouvelle page » qu'il a indiqué vouloir ouvrir entre les deux voisins, opposés par une guerre meurtrière de 1980 à 1988.

Dans un communiqué, la présidence irakienne a conclu que les deux pays avaient « décidé d'assurer la sécurité à leurs frontières, afin de prévenir toute infiltration de terroristes ou de trafiquants ».

Au moment où le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies vient d'adopter une troisième série de sanctions contre l'Iran, accusé de poursuivre un programme nucléaire militaire, le président iranien est en butte à de fortes critiques de l'oppo-

sition à l'approche des élections législatives du 14 mars. Ses détracteurs l'accusent d'avoir isolé le pays par son jusqu'au-boutisme qui effraie l'Occident et met mal à l'aise voisins et pays de la région.

Aussi ce voyage à Bagdad était-il le point d'orgue des efforts de M. Ahmadinejad pour montrer que l'Iran n'est pas isolé et qu'il est même le « leader » régional qui manque face aux Etats-Unis. Prenant acte de ce que la République islamique n'a pas réussi à exporter sa révolution, M. Ahmadinejad, jouant la carte d'une certaine « solidarité musulmane », a courtoisé les pays arabes. Ces derniers comprennent que Washington ne sera pas un rempart sans faille pour les protéger d'un Iran nucléaire érigé en champion du chiïsme. Et beaucoup craignent l'émergence d'un « croissant chiite » à travers leurs minorités.

Par l'intermédiaire du Hezbollah libanais qu'il parraine et finance, l'Iran s'est fait aussi le champion de la cause palestinienne. D'où ces diatribes contre Israël – cette « tumeur » qui doit « disparaître » – destinées « à l'exportation » (le mot est

d'un diplomate iranien). Effort couronné de succès. En 2006, lors de la guerre entre le Hezbollah et Israël, M. Ahmadinejad, critiqué dans son pays, était dans les sondages le dirigeant le plus estimé derrière Hassan Nasrallah dans les capitales arabes. Le président iranien a été le premier à être convié, récemment, au sommet du Conseil de coopération du Golfe à Doha. Et le premier à se rendre, invité par les Saoudiens, en pèlerin à La Mecque. On a vu ensuite M. Ahmadinejad dans les Emirats arabes unis. Fin janvier, son ministre des affaires étrangères, Manouchehr Mottaki, annonçait que l'Iran et l'Egypte allaient renouer des liens. Une visite du président iranien est possible.

Enfin dernière initiative, plus large, M. Ahmadinejad anime un « front du refus » anti-américain. N'a-t-il pas multiplié les alliances avec des pays aussi disparates que Cuba, le Venezuela d'Hugo Chavez, la Bolivie d'Evo Morales ou la Biélorussie avec laquelle l'Iran a signé en 2007 un pacte de défense ? ■

MARIE-CLAUDE DECAMPS

L'intervention turque en Irak suspendue

Turquie. L'armée d'Ankara a entamé son retrait du Nord irakien après une offensive de grande envergure qui aura duré plus de huit jours. Elle menace d'y retourner.

« L'opération a atteint ses objectifs et nos troupes ont regagné leurs bases dans le pays, le 29 février au matin », a indiqué un communiqué de l'état-major turc. Il prévient aussi que « les activités terroristes dans le nord de l'Irak seront suivies de près et aucune menace depuis ce territoire contre la Turquie ne sera tolérée (...). La lutte antiterroriste dans le pays et à l'étranger sera poursuivie avec détermination ». Selon le même communiqué, 240 « rebelles » kurdes ont été tués, 227 cibles ont été pilonnées et 517 autres ont été attaquées par des forces terrestres dans la région de Zap où se trouvait une importante base du PKK. Toutefois, en affirmant qu'« il n'était pas question de liquider complètement

l'organisation terroriste », mais de montrer que « le nord de l'Irak n'était pas un havre sûr pour elle », l'état-major turc a illicitement minimisé le succès de ses opérations. En effet, n'avait-il pas déclaré initialement que l'objectif était d'éradiquer complètement les bases du PKK ?

En outre, à en croire les militaires turcs, les pressions américaines, invitant Ankara à quitter l'Irak « le plus vite possible », n'ont joué aucun rôle : « Le déclenchement et la fin de l'opération ont été déterminés par nous. Il n'est pas question d'une influence intérieure ou étrangère dans la décision des forces armées », a précisé l'état-major turc.

Plus que la crainte d'un enlèvement de l'armée turque dans le nord irakien, deux facteurs ont dû inciter l'armée turque à se retirer d'Irak. D'une part, les États-Unis craignaient que l'offensive turque ne conduise à un affrontement direct avec les peshmergas irakiens qui sont, par ailleurs, alliés de Washington. D'autre part, l'appel lancé par le chef militaire du PKK, Bahoz Erdal, pour une « Intifada » kurde en Turquie, avait des chances d'être entendu tant est grande l'exaspération des populations de cette région anatolienne. « S'ils veulent nous détruire, nos jeunes gens doivent rendre les villes turques inhabitables », a-t-il assuré. « Dans les grandes villes, la jeunesse kurde doit engager une riposte aux opérations militaires.

Les combattants du Kurdistan ne sont pas seulement 7 000 ou 10 000, ils sont des centaines de milliers. Ils sont partout dans toutes les villes turques », a-t-il conclu.

Reste que, comme le souligne l'universitaire Ahmet Insel (1), à défaut d'une solution politique, il ne peut y avoir de solution militaire à un conflit politico-identitaire qui dure depuis plus de vingt ans.

(1) Professeur à l'université de Galatasaray d'Istanbul et éditeur du prix Nobel Orhan Pamuk.

H. Z.

DE NOUVELLES OPÉRATIONS CONTRE LE PKK EN IRAK SI NÉCESSAIRE (ARMÉE TURQUE)

AFP

ANKARA, 3 mars 2008 (AFP) -- La Turquie mènera de nouvelles opérations contre les rebelles kurdes retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak quand elle le jugera nécessaire, a affirmé lundi le général commandant l'état-major de l'armée turque Yasar Büyükanit.

Le général Büyükanit a déclaré à un groupe de journalistes à Ankara que l'opération menée du 21 au 29 février contre les bases des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans la zone de Zap, proche de la frontière turque, avait été un "énorme succès".

"Nous devons leur (le PKK) donner une leçon et nous l'avons fait", a-t-il dit. "Nous avons d'autres leçons à donner. D'autres opérations seront menées quand ce sera nécessaire. Ceci n'était qu'une étape dans la lutte contre le terrorisme", a-t-il dit.

"L'incursion a surpris (le PKK) - nous allons les surprendre à nouveau", a-t-il ajouté.

Le général a réfuté avec colère comme "une attaque non seulement contre l'armée, mais aussi contre la Turquie" les allégations affirmant que l'incursion avait été brusquement interrompue sous la pression de Washington.

"Ni l'Amérique, ni personne à l'intérieur (en Turquie) ne nous a dit, 'arrêtez l'opération'", a assuré le général. "Si quelqu'un peut prouver qu'il y a eu une pression américaine, je retirerai mon uniforme".

Le repli des troupes turques a été annoncé au lendemain d'un appel du président américain George W. Bush à un retrait "le plus vite possible", un message réitéré au même moment à Ankara par le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Robert Gates, suscitant des interrogations sur le rôle de Washington.

M. Büyükanit a indiqué que l'opération ne visait que les "principales bases

opérationnelles du PKK dans la région de Zap", abritant selon lui quelque 300 rebelles, dont 240 ont été abattus.

"Nous avons transformé les désavantages en avantages", a-t-il dit, décrivant des conditions de combat difficiles, principalement de nuit, sur un terrain accidenté, dans une neige épaisse et par des températures inférieures à zéro.

Toute l'opération a été menée à pied, "général et colonels inclus", a expliqué le général, faisant remarquer que les conditions météorologiques avaient rendu inopérantes les mines activées à distance, principale arme des rebelles.

Parmi les objectifs de l'opération terrestre figurait la volonté de "montrer nos capacités à nos amis et nos ennemis et, plus important, de réduire à néant les espoirs de succès des terroristes" en portant le combat sur leur propre terrain, dans les pires conditions possibles, a-t-il commenté.

Le chef d'état-major a souligné que les armes seules ne résoudraient pas la question kurde, tandis que le chef de l'armée de terre, le général Ilker Basbug, évoquait un "cercle vicieux" entraînant les jeunes kurdes vers les rangs du PKK.

"Il y a deux principales raisons pour lesquelles ces pauvres jeunes s'engagent: la propagande efficace, plus le chômage et la pauvreté", a déclaré M. Basbug.

"Si les mesures économiques (en faveur du sud-est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes) atteignent ces jeunes alors que nous poursuivons des mesures militaires efficaces, la lutte contre le terrorisme parviendra à son terme plus rapidement", a-t-il poursuivi.

Le général Basbug a évalué le nombre de rebelles du PKK retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak à "entre 2.320 et 2.640, dont on doit déduire 240".

"Les autres sont encore là-bas", a-t-il ajouté.

AFP

IRAK: L'ARMÉE TURQUE REJETTE DES CRITIQUES DE L'OPPOSITION SUR SON OFFENSIVE

ANKARA, 5 mars 2008 (AFP) L'armée turque a rejeté mardi soir des critiques de l'opposition parlementaire sur la façon dont elle a mené son offensive contre les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, après avoir été soupçonnée notamment d'avoir mis fin à cette opération sous pression américaine.

Dans un communiqué publié sur son site internet, l'état-major rejette comme "injustes" des critiques émises par le Parti d'action nationaliste (MHP) et le

Parti républicain du peuple (CHP) à propos de la conduite des opérations, menées du 21 au 29 février contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

"Pour la première fois dans notre lutte menée pendant 24 ans contre le terrorisme, les forces armées turques ont été la cible de ces attaques insensées", souligne l'état-major.

"Ces attaques portent atteinte à la détermination des forces armées à lutter contre le terrorisme, plus que ne le font les traîtres", ajoute le texte.

Le chef du MHP, Devlet Bahçeli, avait critiqué mardi l'armée, fait rare de la part de ce parti qui soutient traditionnellement l'armée turque, et notamment la façon dont a été annoncé le retrait des troupes.

M. Bahçeli a également affirmé que dans le bilan qu'elle a fourni de l'opération, l'armée a renforcé l'image des "terroristes" du PKK en parlant d'eux comme d'une "force conventionnelle".

Les communiqués de l'armée avaient utilisé les termes de centres de commandement, d'installations logistiques et de batteries de DCA.

Le leader du CHP, principal parti d'opposition au Parlement, Deniz Baykal,

s'était lui demandé pourquoi l'armée s'était retirée du nord de l'Irak sans avoir porté un coup fatal au PKK, qui a lancé en 1984 une lutte armée sanglante contre l'Etat turc.

L'armée s'était expliquée lundi sur son retrait du Kurdistan irakien, considéré comme une surprise et intervenu après des appels en ce sens du président américain George W. Bush et de son secrétaire à la Défense Robert Gates.

Le commandant en chef de l'armée, le général Yasar Büyükanit, avait affirmé que les objectifs fixés avaient été atteints et rejeté des allégations selon lesquelles l'incursion avait été brusquement interrompue sous la pression de Washington.



05 mars 2008

Point de Vue

La Turquie, le Kurdistan et les chrétiens

par Pierre de Charentenay (*)

Quatre jours après le retrait des troupes turques du Kurdistan, où elles ont pourchassé les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés en Irak, le calme semble revenu dans cette région. Ankara, qui estime à 4 000 le nombre d'éléments du PKK disséminés dans le nord de l'Irak, voudrait affaiblir durablement un mouvement qui menace l'intégrité de la Turquie depuis 1984.

Il faut rappeler que, au Kurdistan, un gouvernement autonome assure la sécurité, faisant de cette région un modèle pour l'avenir de l'Irak tout entier. Des chrétiens y habitent depuis des siècles, des Chaldéens qui parlent araméen. Ils ont été victimes de Saddam Hussein et ont dû quitter ce territoire dans les années 70. Ils y reviennent depuis quelques années, chassés par la violence qui règne à Bagdad, à Mossoul et

dans les villes du sud de l'Irak.

Membre de la délégation de Pax Christi, qui a parcouru le nord de l'Irak du 11 au 19 février, j'ai rencontré ces communautés qui sont, pour la plupart, privées d'avenir, mais qui avaient, au moins, une zone de paix et des soutiens financiers minimums. 200 000 chrétiens, dont 100 000 réfugiés, vivent sur ce territoire. Aujourd'hui, ils subissent une nouvelle instabilité, avec l'intervention militaire turque. Ce n'est pas la première fois, puisque les Turcs avaient envahi le nord de l'Irak, avec 35 000 hommes, en 1995.

Mais les conditions ont changé depuis treize ans. Les Américains sont intervenus dans le pays. Saddam Hussein a disparu. Et, surtout, le Kurdistan irakien a renforcé son organisation interne et ses capacités d'autonomie. Beaucoup d'experts, y com-

pris aux États-Unis, pensent que cette action militaire est beaucoup plus large que la simple recherche de quelques terroristes cachés dans les montagnes. Car le Kurdistan irakien, désormais pacifique et organisé, représente un modèle pour tous les Kurdes de la région, ceux d'Iran, mais surtout ceux de Turquie. Les premières victimes de l'opération turque seront les chrétiens, car ils sont fragilisés dans leur statut de réfugiés. Qui viendra les aider dans un territoire contrôlé par les Turcs ? Qui viendra investir pour relancer l'agriculture, construire des petites entreprises, animer des ateliers de production, organiser le commerce ?

Après cinq ans de guerre en Irak, un scénario se dessinait, celui d'une partition du territoire irakien où le Kurdistan aurait sa part d'autonomie. Dans cette région, les chrétiens étaient bienvenus ; ils

pouvaient même songer à une région de référence chrétienne au nord-ouest de la province. Le ministre des Finances, Sarkis Algajan, y travaille depuis des années pour construire avec succès de nombreux villages. La stabilité et la sécurité commençaient à leur permettre de projeter un établissement permanent dans cette zone, même si les jeunes ne pensent qu'à une chose : s'en aller le plus loin possible de ces terres agitées pour retrouver des parents en Amérique ou dans des pays d'Europe.

Après les violences de Saddam Hussein, après celles de la guerre américaine, les chrétiens du Kurdistan supportent une nouvelle instabilité. Il revient à l'Union européenne d'intervenir pour que cessent des violences dont les chrétiens sont une fois encore les victimes.

(*) Rédacteur en chef de la revue *Études*.

CPT: ÖCALAN N'EST PAS EMPOISONNÉ MAIS SON ISOLEMENT DOIT CESSER

AFP

STRASBOURG (Conseil Europe), 6 mars 2008 (AFP) -- Le Comité antitorture (CPT) du Conseil de l'Europe a conclu, après une visite à Imrali en Turquie, qu'Abdullah Öcalan n'était pas victime d'empoisonnement, mais il demande à la Turquie de faire cesser l'isolement de l'ex-chef du PKK, préjudiciable à son état mental.

Les autorités turques ont refusé cette demande.

Dans un rapport publié jeudi à Strasbourg, après une visite en mai 2007, les experts du CPT indiquent que, contrairement aux accusations des partisans d'Öcalan, les concentrations de métaux lourds trouvés dans l'organisme du prisonnier "ne sont pas de nature à être interprétées comme dangereuses pour la santé de l'intéressé", qui est âgé de 59 ans.

Les valeurs de ces produits, trouvés dans les cheveux et poils thoraciques d'Öcalan, sont certes élevées, "mais elles sont probablement liées aux conditions environnementales de l'intéressé", qui vit dans un environnement marin, et à ses habitudes alimentaires, indique le rapport en citant une expertise réalisée par des spécialistes du CPT à Genève.

En revanche, les experts indiquent que la santé mentale d'Öcalan, qui vit dans l'isolement total depuis son emprisonnement le 16 février 1999 à Imrali, "s'est notablement détériorée" depuis les précédentes visites du comité en 2001 et 2003.

Les experts évoquent les conséquences sévères d'un "stress chronique et un isolement social et émotionnel prolongé", liés "à un sentiment d'abandon et de déception".

Le CPT enjoint les autorités turques de "réviser complètement la situation d'Abdullah Öcalan avec l'objectif de l'intégrer dans un endroit lui permettant d'avoir des contacts avec d'autres prisonniers et une plus large série d'activités".

Il demande notamment pour le prisonnier le droit d'avoir la télévision, de téléphoner régulièrement à ses proches, de voir ses avocats sans la présence d'un membre de l'administration, d'avoir des visites plus fréquentes et de partager sa détention avec d'autres détenus.

Mais dans leur réponse adjointe au rapport, les autorités turques expriment

une fin de non-recevoir à ces demandes: "le condamné est le chef d'une organisation terroriste qui a mené des actes de violence brutaux entraînant la mort de 25.000 personnes", écrit le gouvernement.

Les risques pour la sécurité d'Öcalan et celle des autres prisonniers, ainsi que le risque de fuite sont trop importants, selon le gouvernement turc.

Abdullah Öcalan, né le 4 avril 1949, fondateur et ex-chef du Parti des travail-

leurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a été arrêté le 15 février 1999 au Kenya par des agents turcs avec l'aide des services de renseignement américains.

Transféré en Turquie, il a été condamné à mort pour "séparatisme" en juin 1999, une peine commuée en 2002 en prison à vie après l'abolition de la peine capitale. Il purge sa peine dans la prison de la petite île d'Imrali où il est seul détenu.

TURQUIE: DÉCÈS D'UN MANIFESTANT KURDE APRÈS DES HEURTS AVEC LA POLICE (POLICE)

AFP

ANKARA, 6 mars 2008 (AFP) - La police turque a annoncé jeudi la mort d'un manifestant kurde dans l'est de la Turquie après des heurts avec les forces de sécurité, un décès qui a donné lieu à des explications contradictoires.

Mehmet Deniz a succombé à ses blessures dans la nuit de mercredi à jeudi à l'hôpital après avoir été atteint à la tête par une pierre, a déclaré par téléphone à l'AFP un responsable de la police de la ville de Van.

L'homme a été blessé près dans la localité voisine d'Ercis après un festival organisé par le principal parti pro-kurde de Turquie, le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), qui a dégénéré en manifestation en faveur du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), selon cette source.

La police a fait usage de grenades lacrymogènes et tiré en l'air pour disperser les manifestants qui en retour ont jeté des pierres vers les forces de sécurité, ont rapporté les médias.

Dans un communiqué diffusé jeudi, le DTP a affirmé que 10 policiers avaient battu M. Deniz, âgé de 58 ans, le frappant à coups de matraques sur la tête, et avaient empêché physiquement qu'on lui apporte des soins.

L'officier de police contacté par l'AFP, et parlant sous le couvert de l'anonymat, a catégoriquement nié cette version des faits, la qualifiant de "pur mensonge".

Quatorze policiers ont été blessés, dont un grièvement, lors des heurts et 101 personnes ont été arrêtées, a déclaré le chef de la police de Van Salih Kesmez, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les tensions persistaient jeudi à Ercis où les obsèques de M. Deniz ont donné lieu à de nouveaux jets de pierre et tirs de sommation, selon Anatolie.

Les Kurdes de Turquie ont organisé plusieurs manifestations en faveur du PKK depuis le déclenchement à la mi-décembre d'une série d'opérations contre les rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak, qui ont culminé fin février avec une vaste offensive terrestre d'une semaine.

Un jeune homme de 15 ans est mort le mois dernier dans des circonstances non éclaircies au cours d'une manifestation à Cizre (sud-est).

AFP

TALABANI À ANKARA APRÈS LA FIN DE L'OFFENSIVE TURQUE

ANKARA, 7 mars 2008 (AFP) - Le président irakien Jalal Talabani est arrivé vendredi à Ankara pour une visite de deux jours destinée à remettre sur les rails les relations entre les deux voisins, une semaine après la fin de l'offensive turque contre les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak.

M. Talabani, accompagné de plusieurs ministres, a été accueilli à sa descente d'avion par le vice-Premier ministre Cemil Cicek.

Il devait s'entretenir dans la foulée avec son homologue Abdullah Gül, avant une conférence de presse conjointe prévue en début de soirée à la présidence.

La Turquie voit dans ce voyage une occasion pour "tourner la page" dans les liens bilatéraux, empoisonnés par des déclarations des dirigeants turcs qui accusent les Kurdes d'Irak de tolérer, voire soutenir, les agissements sur leur territoire du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

M. Talabani, un Kurde, se rend pour la première fois en Turquie en tant que chef d'Etat et son déplacement intervient juste une semaine après la fin d'une vaste incursion des forces turques dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien, une opération qui a provoqué l'inquiétude de Washington.

Les Etats-Unis, comme la Turquie, considèrent le PKK comme une organisation terroriste et fournissent du renseignement à Ankara pour combattre la rébellion kurde.

Mais l'offensive menée du 21 au 29 février par l'armée turque contre des positions du PKK a placé Washington dans une situation délicate vis-à-vis de son allié irakien.

Après un appel du président George W. Bush à mettre fin le plus vite possible à l'offensive, la Turquie s'est retirée du nord de l'Irak, tout en se réservant la possibilité de revenir si elle le jugeait nécessaire.

"Cette opération est un message qui indique combien nous sommes déterminés à empêcher le PKK d'utiliser le nord de l'Irak comme un sanctuaire", a indiqué Murat Ozcelik, l'émissaire spécial de la Turquie pour l'Irak sur la chaîne d'information NTV.

L'administration de Bagdad a reconnu la menace que représente le PKK pour la Turquie et "cela nous donne une occasion de retourner à la diplomatie", a souligné le diplomate.

Le président turc Abdullah Gül avait invité son homologue à Ankara le 21 février, quelques heures après le déclenchement de l'offensive turque contre les bases du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, utilisées par les rebelles pour mener des attaques en territoire turc.

"Les relations entre la Turquie et l'Irak gagneront un nouvel élan. Nous entreprenons dans une nouvelle période et une nouvelle page sera tournée", a encore



dit M. Ozcelik.

Les craintes turques provoquées par les ambitions des Kurdes d'Irak de créer un Etat indépendant ont également porté un coup aux relations entre les deux voisins. Ankara redoute, dans cette éventualité, un phénomène de contagion chez les Kurdes de Turquie, majoritaires dans le sud-est du pays.

Ces préoccupations avaient poussé l'ancien président turc Ahmet Necdet Sezer, qui a quitté le pouvoir en août, à refuser d'inviter M. Talabani à Ankara, malgré l'augmentation des échanges commerciaux entre Ankara et Bagdad.

Cette fois encore, la visite du président irakien n'est pas "officielle" mais "de travail", ce qui signifie un degré moindre dans le protocole.

Samedi, le président irakien doit déjeuner avec le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan et s'entretenir avec des représentants de la communauté d'affaires turco-irakienne. Les entretiens doivent être particulièrement axés sur les moyens de renforcer la coopération énergétique.

Les Kurdes d'Istanbul tentés de rallier le PKK

LE FIGARO 7 mars 2008

TURQUIE

Les jeunes Kurdes de la banlieue d'Istanbul hésitent face à l'énorme pression policière. Ou se décident à rejoindre les combattants au Kurdistan.

Istanbul

À LA NUIT tombée, une dizaine de « scorpions » sont de sortie : vitesse réduite, gyrophares allumés, les carapaces blindées et trappes remontent la grande rue. « Pour nous rappeler dans quel pays nous vivons », souffle une jeune fille. L'offensive terrestre turque dans le nord de l'Irak s'est achevée précipitamment vendredi 29 février. Mais dans cette banlieue kurde d'Istanbul, les rondes des véhicules anti-émeutes de la police s'intensifient.

Ironie du sort, ce quartier perdu dans une immense mer de

béton s'appelle Gazi, qui signifie « héros de guerre ». Pour ses habitants, les héros ne sont pas les soldats turcs mais les combattants de la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). C'est aux jeunes Kurdes de Gazi et à tous ceux de Turquie qu'un appel à l'insurrection a été envoyé il y a une semaine depuis les montagnes irakiennes pour « rendre la vie dans les grandes métropoles insupportable ». Bahoz Erdal, un chef militaire du PKK, engageait notamment à incendier « des centaines de voitures ».

Dans ce faubourg kurde, on « assure être prêt à suivre les ordres ». Mais, ces derniers jours, les « faits d'armes » y sont finalement assez limités : un groupe de jeunes a lancé quelques cocktails Molotov sur des forces de police, deux voitures ont été brûlées, dans le quartier voisin...

« La pression policière est énorme, les gens hésitent », confie un habitant, qui préfère taire son

nom. Depuis l'automne 2007, « une trentaine de personnes ont été arrêtées, les procès sont en cours », certifie Gülüzler, une des responsables de la section locale du Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), accusé par les autorités turques d'être la vitrine politique du PKK.

Au-delà de la dissuasion des forces de l'ordre, « il y a cette immense lassitude d'un conflit qui dure depuis trente ans, estime Hüseyin, 37 ans dont quatre passés en prison. Problème de logement des familles nombreuses, peur de perdre un petit commerce... Quand les gens arrivent à l'Ouest, ils oublient la guerre, les soucis économiques l'emportent. »

La population a commencé à débarquer de l'Est dans les années 1970, chassée par la misère puis par la guerre civile. Dans le petit parc, les balançoires et les toboggans sont pris d'assaut par des nuées d'enfants poussiéreux.

Dans le local du DTP, une brochette de jeunes désœuvrés a les yeux rivés sur Roj TV, une chaîne prokurde interdite en Turquie et qui émet depuis le Danemark. Une partie non négligeable a de la famille dans les rangs du PKK. Comme s'il s'agissait d'un tribut humain à verser à la guérilla.

Vision romantique

Enveloppée dans son foulard blanc de paysanne kurde, une mère de onze enfants a déjà don-

né deux fils aux montagnes. Le premier est mort. Le deuxième a quitté la maison à 16 ans, « l'âge où il faut y aller, comme les autres, même si ça déchire mon cœur ».

Un jeune homme annonce « trente-huit combattants » dans sa famille depuis son « grand-père ». Mais derrière la fierté de servir le « leader respecté » (Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du PKK, emprisonné, NDLR), une buée brouille ses yeux à l'évocation du petit frère, qui était étudiant en littérature. « Un soir, il m'a dit qu'il avait fait son choix et allait partir à la campagne. Il voulait connaître les surnoms des nôtres qui y étaient déjà. Le matin, il avait disparu. Cela fera cinq ans le 1^{er} septembre. » L'été dernier, la mère lui a rendu visite sur le mont Qandil mais « depuis trois mois, nous sommes sans nouvelle ».

Selon Hüseyin, « la majorité des jeunes ne se révoltera probablement pas, mais les plus radicaux vont continuer à partir », cédant à la « vision romantique » de la « lutte du peuple kurde ». Une perspective toujours plus enthousiasmante qu'un avenir bouché par le chômage. Depuis trois ans, la délinquance a fait son apparition dans le quartier. Loin d'un idéal politique, des bandes, celles des « Kurdes » contre celles des « gauchistes », s'affrontent au couteau. À Gazi, ce sont les émeutes sociales qui grondent.

LAURE MARCHAND

A Bagdad, où les attentats redoublent d'intensité, 633 civils ont été tués durant le mois de février

Le Monde 10 mars 2008

AVEC LE DOUBLE attentat qui a tué 68 personnes, jeudi 6 mars à Bagdad, ce sont près de 200 Irakiens qui ont perdu la vie dans des attaques du même type dans la capitale depuis le 1^{er} février lorsque deux attaques quasi simultanées avaient causé la mort de 99 personnes sur des marchés aux animaux dans deux autres quartiers.

Alors que janvier était le cinquième mois consécutif de baisse des violences en Irak et à Bagdad en particulier, février aura vu la mort d'au moins 633 civils (+ 35 %), étant entendu, comme le soulignent régulièrement les agences de presse internationale, que « beaucoup de morts ne sont ni rapportés ni comptés ». On est encore loin de la moyenne des 1 500

morts enregistrés chaque mois en 2006 et une grande partie de 2007.

Mais ce nouvel attentat justifie la prudence répétée du général David Petraeus. Le commandant en chef du contingent américain ne cesse de dire que « l'amélioration de la situation sécuritaire en Irak reste très fragile ». Il s'apprête à recommander que le Pentagone lui laisse, jusqu'à nouvel ordre, au moins 135 000 soldats sur les 158 000 dont il dispose actuellement. « Al-Qaida en Irak est affaibli, mais cela reste une organisation létale », répète le général.

Islamistes sunnites radicaux

De fait, quoique non revendiqués, les attentats perpétrés à

l'aide d'un colis ou d'un véhicule piégé dont l'explosion précède souvent de quelques minutes une seconde détonation destinée à tuer des policiers et des secouristes accourus sur les lieux, portent, pour tout le monde, la signature de l'organisation extrémiste. « Nous savons même le nom de celui qui a planifié ce crime », a affirmé le lieutenant-colonel Steve Stover, un porte-parole de l'armée américaine, ajoutant : « Ils sont sur nos listes de personnes recherchées (wanted). »

Autant que la méthode qui a consisté, jeudi, à frapper d'abord par un engin piégé dissimulé sous l'étau d'un vendeur de rue et une seconde fois, dix minutes plus tard, par l'intermédiaire d'un

commando-suicide qui s'était mêlé à la foule, le lieu choisi pour ce double attentat fait penser à une responsabilité des islamistes sunnites radicaux. Ces derniers considèrent souvent les chiïtes comme des apostats de l'islam.

Jadis « mixte », le quartier central et très commercial de Karrada est devenu, au cours de ces deux dernières années de guerre civile, très majoritairement chiïte. Quelques milliers de chrétiens, parmi ceux qui n'ont pas fui les violences de Bagdad, y résident encore. Protégés presque exclusivement par des patrouilles et des barrages tenus par la police et l'armée irakienne – fortement dominées l'une et l'autre par des chiïtes –, les grandes artères de Karrada, dont la rue Al-Sattar qui a été visée jeudi, redevenaient peu à peu l'un des rares lieux de rencontre et d'échanges entre les deux communautés. ■ PATRICE CLAUDE

March 4, 2008

More ground incursions into Iraq if need be: Top general

SERKAN DEMİRTAS

ANKARA - Turkish Daily News

Turkey's top general said the military will continue to launch cross-border operations into northern Iraq to hunt down outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorists when needed.

We have taught them a lesson. But there will be more lessons to be taught to them in the future," Gen. Yaşar Büyükanit, Chief of General Staff, said yesterday at a press conference with the Ankara representatives of the press.

In his first press appearance after the eight-day military campaign in Iraq, Büyükanit explained the objectives of the incursion and responded to claims that the military withdrew from the region upon the United States' imposition. If anyone can prove such a thing I will strip off my uniform, Büyükanit said. Arguing such a thing is not only an insult to the Turkish Armed Forces but also the Republic of Turkey."

He said the operation was planned "to deliver the strongest blow to the PKK in the shortest time period and with minimum martyrs and therefore extending it would cause more casualties in the military."

He said he did not discuss the timeline of the withdrawal from the region with Robert Gates, the U.S. defense secretary. "I say it again. There was no influence from outside or inside. In our first statement after we launched the campaign we had made clear that the troops will return home after the objectives are met."

"I advise those who say to us to leave

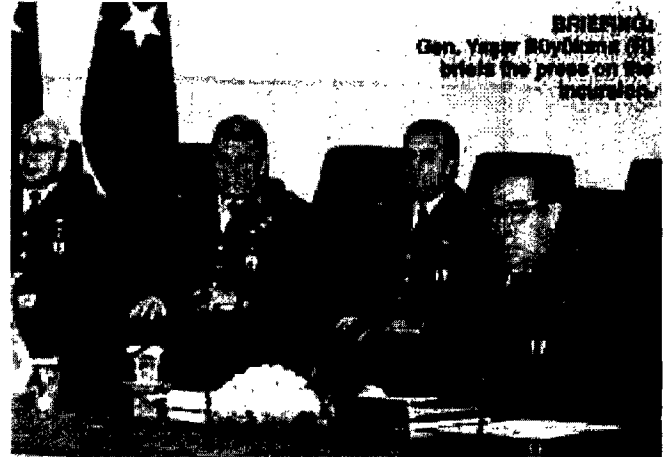
some troops in northern Iraq or to extend the operation to stay two days in these weather and land conditions. There are some people who haven't even seen the region in their dreams and are talking on the matter, he said.

However, the PKK cannot be totally eliminated through a single ground operation, Büyükanit maintained, and said, If need be there will be more incursions.

He also said the operation was in full coordination with the state's institutions and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was aware of the timetable.

The country's top general said the target was only the Zap region in northern Iraq where the assaults against Turkey are planned. We have identified around 300 terrorists in the region, 240 of them were eliminated. I am sure they have given more casualties but it is not possible to precisely know it, Büyükanit said.

He also said the operation was successful and almost all objectives were met. Everyone is asking...Why this season? We knew we could turn the weather and geographical disadvantages into an advantage. And we did it," he said. He also said that no military vehicles were used during the operation except for helicopters and all troops had to walk to reach their targets. Büyükanit said the aims were to inflict a heavy blow to the PKK and to end



its hopes, and to show the entire world the military's operational capacity.

No education in Kurdish

Büyükanit also criticized some circles, which advise the military not to deal with terrorism through solely military means, alluding to a recent statement by Gates who had said, "Turkey should also deal with the problem with other instruments."

"What they refer to is a political solution. What do they mean with political solution? When you ask you are faced with the PKK's program: 'Kurdish identity should enter in constitution. Recognize Kurdish as official language. Issue a general amnesty...!' Büyükanit said.

He said allowing Kurdish education will cause serious consequences for the future of the country. "Sometimes I think that those who suggest this do not think about the complexity of their proposals," he said.

TODAYS ZAMAN

March 4, 2008

Iran says Barzani not supporting terrorism

An Iranian official has said his country could play a positive role in improving dialogue between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership in countering terrorism and insisted that the Kurdish leaders do not support the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

"We have a very special relationship with them. We see each other as friends. We have economic, political and cultural ties," Iranian Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Alireza Sheikh-Attar told Today's Zaman in an interview, referring to the Iraqi Kurdish leaders -- namely Massoud Barzani, who heads the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, and Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president.

He declined to comment when asked whether Turkey has made any requests of Iran to press the Kurdish leadership to classify the PKK as a terrorist organization, but noted: "We have good relations with both sides. We can play a constructive role. We are ready for this."

Noting that he had served in northern Iraq as a diplomat, Sheikh-Attar said, "I am sure that they have never supported terrorism."

Turkey accuses Iraqi Kurds of supporting the PKK and refuses to engage in dialogue with Barzani. The



Kurdish leader has so far refused to designate the PKK as a terrorist organization while saying the problem of the PKK cannot be resolved through military means.

Sheikh-Attar said Barzani's stance on terrorism is clear, adding that Iran does not feel the need to question why the Kurdish leader refuses to recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization.

The Turkish military launched a ground offensive against the PKK in northern Iraq on Feb. 21 and announced that it had destroyed dozens of PKK targets and killed at least 240 terrorists before the operation was called off on Feb. 29. Sheikh-Attar met with President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minis-

ter Ali Babacan during a visit to Turkey on Monday and Tuesday and was briefed by the Turkish officials on the operation. He said Iran supports Turkey's fight against terrorism while noting that Ankara should keep in mind in the course of its anti-terror fight that Iraq is a sovereign nation.

Iran is fighting an offshoot of the PKK called the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK). Tehran has long accused the United States of supporting anti-Iranian groups. Sheikh-Attar repeated Iranian accusations directed at the US and claimed that Washington was the source of the problem of terrorism. "Why has the United States failed to take action against the PKK for so many years?" he asked.

Ahmadinejad to visit Turkey soon

The visiting official also said Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who paid a landmark visit to Baghdad this weekend, will soon visit Ankara. The Iranian leader received an invitation from Ankara and officials of the two countries are still working on determining a date, he said.

According to Sheikh-Attar, Ahmadinejad is likely to visit Turkey before June. "In the worst case, he will visit Turkey before the end of this year," he noted.

SERVET YANATM

Op-Chart

JASON CAMPBELL, MICHAEL O'HANLON AND AMY UNIKEWICZ

The State of Iraq: An Update

The New York Times

MARCH 9, 2008

IRAQ'S security turnaround has continued through the winter. The question for 2008 is whether Iraqi security forces can preserve and build on this improvement as they increasingly bear more of the responsibility as the number of American troops declines (and as refugees and internally displaced Iraqis try to return to their homes).

Iraq's economy is propped up by oil. Attacks against oil fields and production plants are dropping fast (down to one a month this year, after averaging 5 to 10 a month previously), allowing modest increases in output. Still, basic health and education indicators, as well as sewage and water and irrigation services, show little improvement, and unemployment is high.

Jason Campbell is a senior research assistant at the Brookings Institution in Washington. Michael O'Hanlon is a senior fellow at Brookings. Amy Unikewicz is a graphic designer in South Norwalk, Conn.

The most intriguing area of late is the sphere of politics. To track progress, we have established "Brookings benchmarks" — a set of goals on the political front similar to the broader benchmarks set for Baghdad by Congress last year. Our 11 benchmarks include establishing provincial election laws, reaching an oil-revenue sharing accord, enacting pension and amnesty laws, passing annual federal budgets, hiring Sunni volunteers into the security forces, holding a fair referendum on the disputed northern oil city of Kirkuk, and purging extremists from government ministries and security forces.

At the moment, we give the Iraqis a score of 5 out of 11 (our system allows a score of 0, 0.5, or 1 for each category, and is dynamic, meaning we can subtract points for backsliding). It is far too soon to predict that Iraq is headed for stability or sectarian reconciliation. But it is also clear that those who assert that its politics are totally broken have not kept up with the news. □

	FEBRUARY 2004	FEBRUARY 2005	FEBRUARY 2006	FEBRUARY 2007	FEBRUARY 2008
Iraqi Civilian Deaths From Violence	900	1,600	2,200	2,700	700
U.S./Other Foreign Troops in Iraq (in thousands)	115 / 24	155 / 25	133 / 20	135 / 14	157 / 10
U.S. Troop Deaths	21	58	54	81	36
Iraqi Security Forces (in thousands)	125	142	232	323	425
Iraqi Security Force Fatalities	65	103	158	150	110
Daily Attacks by Insurgents and Militias	30	80	110	210	65
Joint U.S.-Iraqi Security Stations in Baghdad	0	0	0	15	72
Sunni Volunteers Working With U.S. and Iraqi Forces (in thousands)	0	0	0	0	60
Iraqi Civilians Newly Displaced by Violence (in thousands)	25	25	15	100	30
Multiple-Fatality Bombings	17	18	39	56	21
Oil Production (in millions of barrels per day; prewar: up to 2.5)	2.3	2.1	1.8	2.1	2.4
Household Fuel Supply (as percentage of estimated need)	88	84	55	61	64
Iraq's Global Rank for Corruption (source: Transparency International)	113	129	137	160	178
Money Going From Baghdad to Average Iraqi Province (in millions of dollars per year)	0	0	25	50	100
Political Progress Achieved (out of 11 "Brookings benchmark" criteria)	0	0	0	1	5

Los Angeles Times

March 6, 2008

Turkey flies into Iraq to bomb Kurdish rebels

Asso Ahmed, Alexandra Zavis, Los Angeles Times

Sulaymaniya, Iraq -- Turkey unleashed air and artillery strikes against Kurdish guerrillas in northern Iraq on Wednesday, officials here said, five days after the Turks completed a major ground offensive in the mountainous border region.

Turkey declared at the time that it had achieved its goal of denying the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, a free hand to attack its territory from sanctuaries in Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region. But U.S. and Turkish military analysts were skeptical the operation would have more than a temporary effect.

On Wednesday, Turkish warplanes crossed about 15 miles inside Iraq to bomb targets in the Dashti Barzji area, north of the city of Dohuk, said Capt. Mohammed Ali, a member of the Kurdish security forces in northern Iraq. Artillery strikes were reported around Amadiya in the same area, he said.

The attacks took place in a sparsely populated region and caused no civilian casualties, Ali said.

Ahmed Denis, a PKK spokesman, confirmed that the attack occurred and that the group has a presence in the area, but he said he had received no reports of damage or casualties. He said the rebel group expects further attacks.

"The (Kurdistan) Workers Party believes that the (Turkish) withdrawal wasn't permanent but,

rather, temporary," Denis said by telephone.

Turkey did not immediately confirm Wednesday's attacks.

Domestic critics had accused Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of bowing to pressure from the United States to wrap up the ground offensive as quickly as possible, charges denied by the Turkish government. The eight-day incursion placed the United States in an awkward position as it attempted to juggle the interests of two allies.

The United States regards the PKK as a terrorist group and has supplied Turkey with intelligence about the rebels' operations in Iraq. But American officials do not want to upset stability in the Kurdish north, which has escaped much of the violence plaguing the rest of Iraq.

Iraqi officials reacted angrily to the incursion, which they called a violation of sovereignty, and said there are other ways to deal with the PKK. President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, is expected to visit Turkey on Friday.

Also Wednesday, two former Health Ministry officials cleared of helping Shiite death squads celebrated their release with friends and family, while outraged Sunni politicians called it a black day that showed just how dysfunctional Iraq's judicial system is.

Former Deputy Health Minister Hakim al-Zamili and Brig. Gen. Hameed al-Shimmari, who was in charge of the ministry's security force, were freed from U.S. custody early Wednesday, two days after an Iraqi court opted to drop kidnapping, murder and corruption charges against them for lack of evidence.

Minority Sunnis viewed the trial as a major test of the judiciary in this Shiite-dominated country, which in the post-Saddam Hussein era is now led by a Shiite prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki.

The case's collapse has struck a blow to U.S.-backed national reconciliation efforts. It sent the Sunnis a message that they won't get justice in a country where tens of thousands of people already are being detained, many of them for months without hearings.

Al-Zamili and al-Shimmari were accused of aiding in some of the most horrifying sectarian violence that gripped Iraq in the wake of the Feb. 22, 2006, bombing of a revered Shiite mosque by Sunni extremists.

The officials allegedly used their positions to help the Mahdi Army, a militia loyal to Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, find and kill Sunni targets. Prosecutors charged that the militiamen were given access to public hospitals and ambulances.

05 March 2008

The Boston Globe

Post-withdrawal phase

The key to a permanent peace will always require dialogue.

By Aso Karim The Globe

Is it possible for the U.S. to draw a plan for Turkey such that the Kurdish populated areas improve and develop economically and socially, and have a hand in the development itself?"

After eight days of military operations on February 22-29, the Turkish Chief of Staff announced the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Iraq (see Zaman, Istanbul, March 1, 2008). I don't care whether all of the Turkish troops have withdrawn or not, nor do I care whether the withdrawal was their wish, a result of U.S. and European pressure, bad weather on the battlefield, or due to human and material losses, nor do I have any comment about how the decision to withdraw has resulted in arguments among Turkish journalists and analysts.

In Iraq, especially the Foreign Ministry, the Presidency, and Kurdistan Region's Presidency have expressed their happiness about this withdrawal. In a statement released on March 1, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani hoped that everyone would be in agreement that war doesn't produce positive results and the most correct and successful solution is to solve issues in a peaceful and democratic way (PNA, March 1, 2008). However, what is important is that Turkey abandon

its thoughts of out-of-border military operations as the first step and think of internal factors that have created the PKK and how to solve them.

Several days before the withdrawal, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates pointed out the fact that Turkey cannot solve the PKK issue through military measures alone, but rather it should undertake economic and political reforms and attract the attention of Turkey's Kurds. Therefore, Gates (i.e., the U.S.), doesn't agree with a military solution alone. We all know that the U.S. has offered and will offer Turkey intelligence on the PKK, and Turkey has benefited much from this information to attack locations that allegedly were PKK fighters' residences. If the U.S. prefers that the Turkish government take political and economic measures to persuade its Kurds, then how does the U.S. help Turkey and its Kurds in this way? Does the U.S. have any plan for that or was it only a slip of the tongue? Does the U.S. work with the DTP (which has its own group plus 54 municipality heads in Kurdish cities, but unfortunately, according to the news, the Turkish Parliament has decided to remove its parliamentary support for two if the DTP members and the U.S. refer their issue to the court) and other Kurdish parties that reject suppression and

have their agenda for the Kurdish issue in Turkey? Does the U.S. defend those Kurdish parties against Turkish psychological pressure, arrest, and oppression? Is the U.S. able to persuade Turkey, through its various U.S. channels, to recognize the Kurdish national identity and its cultural rights inside Turkey? Is it possible for the U.S. to draw a plan for Turkey such that the Kurdish populated areas improve and develop economically and socially, and have a hand in the development itself? Is the U.S. able to persuade Turkey that establishing formal relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government is in both sides' interests and betters security and stability in the region, while the Kurdish leadership has emphasized several times that it is ready to help Turkey find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish Issue? What plans does the U.S. have for the PKK despite the fact that it calls it a common enemy of the U.S., Turkey, and Iraq? Does it have a plan to encourage Turkey to announce a general amnesty for the PKK fighters to be disarmed and engage in the political process in Turkey? Does the U.S. look at the experience from those countries with military problems and later on the opposing parties reconciled and established reconciliation and truth-searching committees to go from the stage of war and chaos to peace and sta-

bility? Despite unpleasant behavior by the PKK, the U.S. has to see the difference between al-Qaeda and PKK. Isn't it necessary that the U.S., at least once, listen to Turkey's Kurds for what they need and what they don't? Or was the purpose of Gates' statements only to calm the situa-

tion and reduce tension, which I hope it was not!

So, what should the PKK do from now on? If Turkey stopped its military attacks and started diplomatic and political activities, what would the PKK do? Will the PKK

become proud and prepare for the "spring storm" to beat the Army, or speak about dialogue, peaceful discourse, and putting an end to insurgency? I hope that it will choose peace and dialogue and announce a unilateral ceasefire once again to prove its positive intentions.

TODAYS ZAMAN

March 7, 2008

US call for dialogue with PKK no slip of tongue

Today's Zaman

William Fallon, commander of the US Central Command, made his remarks during a session at the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday.

The top US commander in the Middle East has suggested that dialogue between Ankara and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would solve Turkey's problem with terrorism, a strong sign that an earlier call for talks with the PKK from a senior US commander was not a slip of tongue.

"They certainly have instigated lots of trouble, and they've had a lot of casualties in Turkey but the real solution here, to me, is that there's some kind of accommodation reached with this group and with the Turks inside of Turkey, to knock this off," Adm. William J. Fallon, commander of the US Central Command, told a House of Representatives committee hearing on Wednesday. "We certainly recognize the pain the Turks have felt from the outlawed and terrorist activities of this group, but we know that the long-term solution is some kind of an accommodation."

Fallon's remarks came a day after a former senior US commander in Iraq, Army Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, said negotiations could be conducted with the PKK after a certain period of pressure on the group. "I believe that the long-term solution in northern Iraq is not a military one. And so -- but obviously there's pressure that has to be put on them, so we can start to talk and have negotiations with these terrorist elements," Odierno, who was second in command in Iraq for 15 months until he returned home in mid-February, said.

Turkey and the United States have managed to

ease troubles in their ties after Washington promised to actively help Ankara in its fight against the PKK, considered a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. But US commanders' calls for talks with the PKK are unlikely to be welcome in Ankara, which rejects outright any sort of dialogue with a terrorist group.

Fallon confirmed that the United States assisted Turkey in its recent cross-border offensives against the PKK in northern Iraq. The Turkish military has carried out several aerial offensives against the PKK targets in northern Iraq since Dec. 16. They were followed by the eight-day ground offensive, the biggest anti-PKK operation in a decade. "We provided indirect support to Turkish military intelligence, helped the incursion achieve some tactical success," Fallon said, when asked whether the ground offensive by Turkish troops, which ended on Feb. 29, was done with US assistance, at the House session.

He however repeated that the "real key issue here is figuring out a way to have the Turks come to grips with this -- the KGK, and to not just try to eliminate them militarily." KGK stands for Kongra-Gel, another name for the PKK. "We certainly recognize the pain the Turks have felt from the outlawed and terrorist activities of this group, but we know that the long-term solution is some kind of an accommodation, to scratch some of the itches of the KGK. And so we'll give them the help that we can, but we're really strongly encouraging them to figure out a political solution here," he added.

Gates: Bring moderates into political fold

US officials have long called for non-military measures to address the PKK problem. The Turkish government has said it was planning

such measures to help the dissolution of the terrorist group but categorically rejects any prospects for dialogue with the PKK.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who visited Ankara last week, said at a media roundtable at the Pentagon on Wednesday that he and the Turkish officials he met in Ankara "talked a great deal about the importance of accompanying the security measures to go after the PKK terrorists with efforts to try and address some of the civilian concerns among the Kurdish population, where the PKK recruits people. And I think that both President [Abdullah] Gül and Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan have put forward proposals in the cultural, economic and political arenas to begin doing that."

He was responding on Wednesday to a question, based on Odierno's remarks, over whether the United States has a policy to have talks with the PKK. He said: "I don't think that anybody -- certainly nobody I talk to -- was of a mind to have any conversations with the PKK. I think that the real objective is to peel away from the hard-core terrorists, those who might be reconciled and brought back into the political fold."

Despite growing calls for a "political solution" from the Pentagon, the State Department has so far avoided making any statement. Responding to a question on the issue, State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said: "We continue to urge Turkey and the government of Iraq to work with one another to confront the challenge posed by the PKK. I know there are discussions that go on on a variety of different levels on that, but certainly there's a lot more work to do before we can end this threat to both Iraq and Turkey."

THE AUSTRALIAN

March 06, 2008

Kurdish former minister killed

From correspondents in Kirkuk

A KURDISH academic who served as Iraqi labour minister in the 1970s was gunned down near the disputed northern oil city of Kirkuk last night, police said.

The killing of Abdul Sattar Taher Sharif, 74, who held a New Zealand passport, came 10 days after he wrote an article in the Kurdish-language monthly *Lizin* criticising Kurdish leaders for not pushing harder for the city's incorporation into the autonomous Kurdish region.

Sharif was shot dead by unknown gunmen at

midday (8pm AEDT Wednesday) on a road just north of Kirkuk, assistant police chief Major General Torhan Yussef said.

Kirkuk University assistant president Mohammed al-Naimi described the murder of the psychology professor as "a big loss to Iraq".

Under the Iraqi constitution, a referendum was due to be held by last year on longstanding Kurdish claims for Kirkuk and its oil wealth to be incorporated in their autonomous region in the north.

But in December, Kurdish leaders agreed to a

six-month postponement of the vote at the recommendation of the United Nations.

Kirkuk has been gripped by ethnic tension since the US-led invasion of 2003, with Arab and Turkmen residents fearful they would be marginalised if the city were handed over to the Kurds.

Under Saddam Hussein's regime, the city was the scene of massive population upheaval, with tens of thousands of Kurdish residents being expelled to make way for Arab settlers.

NEW POLITICS, NEW RULEBOOK

The angry exchanges of the past few days between the Office of the Chief of General Staff and the opposition parties introduces a set of brand new rules in Turkish politics where traditionally secularist and right-wing parties have staunchly backed the military against conservative governments

GÖKSEL BOZKURT

ANKARA TDN Parliament Bureau

Turkish political life witnessed an unprecedented row yesterday as the military and opposition parties confronted each other in battle of words.

The General Staff raged at the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party's (MHP) who decried the sudden end to the eight-day military operation into northern Iraq on outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) lairs.

The Turkish military considers rhetoric targeting it an unjust and lowly attack against an institution that fights terrorists and loses martyrs in the name of the country,"the General Staff said in a statement late Tuesday.

The CHP and the MHP raised the question of American influence on the military's decision to pull out from northern Iraq and claimed that the operation was terminated prematurely.

Chief of Staff Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt challenged opposition leaders to prove their claims. I will take off my uniform if they prove it, Turkey's top general said.

Deniz Baykal, the CHP leader, lamented the end of the operation which he said he was informed of through a declaration by Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari.

It is my duty to interrogate this. I have my signature under the motion that gave the military the mandate for that operation. I do not believe the Turkish army is incapable of carrying the operation beyond eight days, Baykal said.

Leader of the MHP, Devlet Bahçeli, joined him and argued that the report of the General Staff on the outcome of the operations was susceptible of giving a warring party status to the PKK. These declarations may give the PKK undeserved prestige and image, Bahçeli said.

Military slams opposition leaders

The General Staff said: The Turkish military faces these kinds of meaningless accusations for the first time in its 24-year-long fight against terrorism despite its reluctance to enter a polemic with political figures, dealing a serious blow to the leaders of the two parties who remained unsatisfied with the outcome of the land operation against the PKK.

These attacks damage the military's resolve to fight terrorists more than traitors do, the statement read. This is the

first time that the military ever found itself in a row with opposition parties and its first accusation of treason.

The CHP tried to elude the impact of the military's declaration with the first reaction coming from party's deputy chief, Onur Öymen. We do not take offense from the statement. Our words had no content that could hurt the military. We do not want a polemic with the military. The responsibility and the authority of operations falls on the government. No one has ever condemned the CHP so lowly thus far. Therefore, the target of the declaration cannot be CHP, Öymen said.

CHP's official response came yesterday on its Web site, claiming that the military was not right in its arguments. You cannot prove your position by insults... insult is evidence of it being wrong. We are closely watching the general scene,' the CHP said. "General scene" is a reference to Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's historic six days of address to Parliament in 1927 on the preparation and aftermath of the Independence War which he begins by describing the general scene when Ottoman land was under foreign occupation.

CHP also stressed that it was in a democratic discussion and that they directed their criticism to the prime minister. No one can take onto themselves to intervene. It is not only the politicians who should keep the military out of polemics, the CHP said.

It is not your business,' MHP tells the military

MHP slammed the military over its accusations of treason and urged it to steer clear of debates. What ever their duty is, no one may see the right to depict the MHP as an organization giving its country more harm than traitors,the MHP said in a statement, urging the military to stay within the borders of its duties and responsibilities. The MHP reiterated its position on what it considers to be a premature end to the land strikes into northern Iraq.

Parliament's authorization on Octç 17, 2007 aimed to terminate the terrorism threat emanating from northern Iraq, the statement said.



Government supports military

Government spokesman and deputy prime minister, Cemil Çiçek, said that what bothers the opposition the most was the harmony between the government and the military.

We showed perfect cooperation during the operation. We need to end these debates, as the operations did not come to an end. Similar military action may be repeated," Çiçek said.

Baykal's outrage at the military stems from his reaction to the closer relations government-military. However, Parliament harbors other arguments on the anger ignited by the perceived abrupt end to the operation. Among those is the military's compliance with the government, when the latter succumbed to "somebody's" (implying the United States) will and miss the opportunity to abolish the PKK for good. Another reason circulating in Parliament is the military's silence on the constitutional changes that aimed to lift the headscarf ban in universities.

Beyond Iraq ■ Olivier Roy

Iraq will not be a Qaedistan

PARIS

One of the key questions in the U.S. presidential race is what will happen if U.S. troops leave Iraq.

Of course nobody knows for sure. But I can say this: Al Qaeda will not take power and establish an Islamic state.

Too many in the West persist in seeing Al Qaeda as a territorialized Middle East organization bent on expelling the Christians and Jews from the region in order to create a "Dar al-Islam" (land of Islam) under the umbrella of a caliphate.

Al Qaeda is not a continuation of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas or Hezbollah. It is a non-territorial global entity which has never tried to implement an Islamic state, even in Afghanistan, where it found sanctuary in the 1990s.

It is pointless thinking of Al Qaeda as a political organization seeking to conquer and rule a territory. Al Qaeda recruits among disenfranchised youth, most of them without direct connections with the embattled countries of the Middle East.

Second-generation Western Muslims, converts, Saudis, Egyptians and Moroccans make up the bulk of the Al Qaeda traveling jihadists — not Afghans, Palestinians or Iraqis. Al Qaeda does not have the necessary local rooting for taking power.

Al Qaeda's strategy is first to confront the big boys — or rather the big boy, the United States — directly, relying not on the actual damage inflicted (financial cost, number of dead) but on image, media impact and the terror effect.

The mirror effect of those who claim a clash of civilizations, of course, intensifies the impact. In fact, Al Qaeda needs those who demonize it, because it makes it what it is not: the vanguard of the "Muslim wrath."

Al Qaeda goes where the Americans are while the U.S. Army goes where Washington thinks Qaeda

might be ... one day.

Secondly, Al Qaeda seeks to hijack existing conflicts and make them part of the global jihad against the West.

However, in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and now Iraq, the Islamist internationalist groups have been unsuccessful in diverting local and national conflicts, playing only the role of auxiliaries. The key actors of the local conflicts are the local actors: the Taliban in Afghanistan, the different Sunni and Shiite groups in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon. These groups are not under the leadership of Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda has managed only to implant foreign volunteers into these struggles, volunteers who usually do not understand local politics and find support among the local population only as long as they fight a common enemy, such as American troops in Iraq.

But their respective agenda is totally different: Local actors, Islamist or not, want a political solution on their own terms. They do not want chaos or global

jihad. As soon as there is a discrepancy between "the policy of the worst" waged by Al Qaeda and a possible local political settlement, the local actors choose the local settlement.

The Bosnians got rid of the radical foreign fighters once they achieved their independence; the Taliban rank-and-file refused to die for Al Qaeda when the Western forces landed in Afghanistan after 9/11.

In Iraq, many among the Sunnis, including the Salafists, resent not only Al Qaeda's tactics of indiscriminate suicide bombings, but also the strategy of confronting the Shiites.

The fact is Al Qaeda plays a role in the deterioration of the conflicts but is unable to succeed in coordinating them. Local, national, tribal or sectarian religious channels are stronger.

Al Qaeda may recruit some local organizations, acting within a limited area or linguistic region, with their own history. These groups then claim affili-

ation with Al Qaeda. They are to be found in Indonesia (Jemah Islamiyya); in the northern Sahel (the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, which in January 2007 changed its name to the Al Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb); Northern Lebanon (third-generation but still uprooted Palestinian refugees); in the Sunni triangle of Iraq (with the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group); and in Saudi Arabia and Yemen ("Al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabic Peninsula").

But these organizations do not need Al Qaeda in order to recruit or operate. If they have rallied to it, it is because they have difficulty in defining or achieving a local objective (an Islamic state, for example). They become globalized therefore by default.

In short, there may be good reasons for the United States to remain in Iraq, but they have nothing to do with Al Qaeda; they have more to do with a damage-control operation. If the U.S. troops leave, there might be a civil war, there might be a growing Iranian influence, Iraq might be turned into a battlefield by proxies between Saudi Arabia and Iran. There could be a Sunni-controlled area, a Shiite state and an independent Kurdistan, but no Qaedistan.

It would have been better to concentrate the Western forces on Afghanistan, which has been the real cradle of Al Qaeda. If only part of the brains and armor devoted to the "surge" in Iraq had been devoted to Afghanistan, instead of the incessant turnover of disparaged NATO troops with little knowledge of the country, things would have been better.

But in Afghanistan, as anywhere else in the greater Middle East, there is no military solution, only a political solution by dealing with the local actors, and dropping the senseless idea of a "global war on terror."

Olivier Roy, research director at the French National Center for Scientific Research, is author of "Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah" and "Islamist Networks: The Pakistan-Afghan Connection." A *Global Viewpoint* article.

March 8-9, 2008

2 bombings kill at least 54 in heart of Baghdad

Tried-and-true tactic produces mayhem

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

BAGHDAD: Two bombings killed at least 54 people and wounded 123 more in a bustling shopping district in the heart of Baghdad on Thursday, the Iraqi authorities said.

The attack, in the Karrada neighborhood, was the worst the capital has seen since early February, when bombings killed almost 100 people at two Baghdad pet markets, and reinforced fears that insurgents can still carry out devastating bombings in well-guarded areas despite reduced levels of violence in recent months.

According to witnesses, the attackers used an old tactic to maximize the casualties: detonating one bomb and then using a second blast to kill unsuspecting passers-by who rush to the scene to aid the victims of the first explosion.

The initial explosion on Thursday sent shards of glass, shrapnel, blood and flesh across a wide radius. People rushed to the scene to tend to the wounded. Then, minutes later, a man wearing an explosive vest ran into the crowd and blew himself up, killing many more people.

In the chaos that followed, Iraqi security forces arrived and fired their Kalashnikov rifles in the air to try to scare people away. But many people pushed forward anyway to search for family members and others they feared were dead or wounded.

A shoe salesman said the first bomb had slammed him into the ground. He got up, looked behind him and rushed to aid a woman whose leg had been ripped off by the blast. "We managed to drag her away from the spot, and then the police came really quickly, and they were shouting at the people to move back because there might be another explosion," he said. "But the people didn't listen and even some of the policemen who were already there didn't pay attention, and that is when the second explosion happened."

There were no immediate claims of responsibility for the attacks.

On the political front, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki is refusing to move forward with the execution of the man known as Chemical Ali, one of Saddam Hussein's most notorious henchmen, in what seems to be an effort to pressure other top Iraqi leaders to ratify death sentences of two other former military commanders.

Chemical Ali, whose real name is Ali Hassan al-Majid, commanded the brutal Anfal campaign in the late 1980s, which killed as many as 180,000 Kurds. He was sentenced to death last summer, and Iraq's three-member Presidency Council, which has the constitutional power to ratify death sentences, approved his punishment last week.

Now, Maliki is arguing that Majid should not be sent to the gallows unless the American military also hands over for execution two other former military commanders who were sentenced to death at the same time.

One of the men, Sultan Hashem Ahmed al-Jabouri al-Tai, was a respected general who remains a hero to many Sunni Arabs. Some Iraqi leaders and American commanders question the appropriateness of his sentence and fear that executing him may enrage Sunnis already wary of the government, which is dominated by Kurds and Shiites.

But many Shiites say he deserves to be executed and that sparing him would set a dangerous precedent.

The Presidency Council — President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd; Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni; and Vice President Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shiite — has so far refused to ratify the execution of Hashem. Talabani and Hashemi have previously said they do not approve of his sentence.

The American military, which is holding all three of the condemned, is unlikely to transfer custody of the men until the issue is resolved with the Presidency Council. But Maliki contends that the council's power to ratify executions does not extend to sentences imposed against members of Saddam Hussein's former regime that were handed down by the Iraqi High Tribunal, the court that tried Saddam and his most senior lieutenants, said Ali al-Dabbagh, a government spokesman.

"The prime minister feels the Presidency Council has no power to reduce the sentence or give any amnesty to the convicted persons, so it is not necessary for them to approve this verdict," Dabbagh said. "That is why the prime minister feels the execution cannot be done unless the other two are also handed over."

The other condemned man is Hussein Rashid, a former senior Iraqi armed forces commander.

It remains unclear how long this latest twist could leave the fates of all three men in limbo. Dabbagh suggested that Maliki was not interested in any political deal to resolve the conflict with the Presidency Council. "There is no compromise on this," he said.

An American military spokesman in Baghdad, Major General Kevin Bergner, said Wednesday that the Iraqi government had not presented the Americans "with a request yet for the release of Majid" into Iraqi custody. "We will fulfill our responsibility once that request has been submitted to us," he said.

Iraqi leader in Turkey to discuss Kurd rebels

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: President Jalal Talabani of Iraq visited Turkey on Friday in an effort by the Turkish government to expand political dialogue about Kurdish rebels who hide in northern Iraq.

It was Talabani's first visit since he became president of Iraq in 2005, two years after the American invasion. He came at the invitation of President Abdullah Gul of Turkey. Turkey's previous president, Ahmed Necdet Sezer, had refused to extend an invitation, saying that Talabani, who is a Kurd, had not done enough to stop Kurdish militants.

The visit to Ankara came just one week after the Turkish military concluded a ground offensive in northern Iraq to weaken the Kurdish militants, known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and seemed to signal a willingness on the part of Turkey to extend political dialogue to Iraqi Kurds, who had previously been shut out of talks. The Turkish military has been suspicious of Iraqi Kurdish efforts to formalize a Kurdish enclave in the north of Iraq.

Talabani was to meet with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey on Saturday, but had no scheduled meetings with military officials. When he visited Turkey in 2005, it was as the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, his political party.

Also on Friday, a Turkish court upheld a previous ruling that acquitted a Turkish Islamic leader, Fetullah Gulen, of charges of trying to establish Islamic law in Turkey, Turkish television NTV reported. The ruling, by the Court of Appeals, opens the way for Gulen, 69, to return to Turkey from the United States, where he has lived in exile for at least eight years.

Gulen is an enigmatic preacher, who has spent much of his life establishing schools, universities and education networks first in Turkey and then abroad.

The Boston Globe March 8, 2008

Iraqi president visits Turkey after army operation

By Zerin Elci

ANKARA (Reuters) - Iraqi President Jalal Talabani began his first visit as head of state to neighboring Turkey on Friday, just one week after Ankara ended a major army ground offensive against Kurdish PKK rebels based in northern Iraq.

Talabani's visit is aimed at boosting political, trade, energy and security ties with NATO member Turkey, badly strained in recent years by the Kurdish PKK issue and by Ankara's fears that the Kurds of northern Iraq aim to build their own state.

Talabani, himself a northern Iraqi Kurd, will hold talks with President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan during his two-day visit and also attend a meeting of the Turkey-Iraq business council.

Iraq's ministers of finance, oil, water resources, national security and industry were traveling with Talabani, Turkish diplomats said. Talabani and Gul were due to give a joint news conference at 1800 GMT on Friday.

Turkish firms are very active in the construction sector in Iraq, which is also an increasingly important market for Turkish products from food to textiles. A pipeline carries Iraqi oil to Turkey and there are also plans for a natural gas link.

"With Talabani's visit, Ankara wants to make a new start in relations with Iraq," wrote columnist Murat Yetkin in Friday's edition of the liberal daily Radikal.

Gul's predecessor as Turkish president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, had refused to invite Talabani to Ankara because of Iraq's failure to tackle the PKK.

Turkey is also worried that Kurds in northern Iraq, who already enjoy a strong degree of regional autonomy, are plotting to build an independent state which Ankara fears could reignite separatist sentiments among its own large Kurdish population.

MILITARY OFFENSIVE

Ankara has been highly critical of Baghdad's failure to crack down on several thousand Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas who use a remote, mountainous part of northern Iraq as a base from which to stage attacks on targets inside Turkey.



Ankara blames the PKK for the deaths of nearly 40,000 people, mostly Kurds, since the group began its armed campaign for an ethnic homeland in southeast Turkey in 1984.

Angered by a series of deadly PKK attacks last year, Turkey's parliament gave the military a year-long mandate in October to mount cross-border attacks on the rebels in Iraq.

Turkish warplanes and artillery have been bombing and shelling PKK positions periodically over several months, helped by intelligence provided by U.S. forces in Iraq.

On February 21, the military launched a large-scale ground incursion, sending thousands of troops into the remote Zap Valley against the PKK. Turkey's General Staff says 240 rebels were killed in the campaign, along with 27 of its own men.

Baghdad criticized the incursion as an infringement of its national sovereignty. The United States, which like Turkey brands the PKK a terrorist organization, urged Ankara to keep the campaign short and carefully targeted.

TURKISH DAILY NEWS March 8, 2008

'Land operation part of U.S. scheme'

Turkey's main opposition party leader Deniz Baykal suggested that the "premature" end to the land operation in northern Iraq and contradictory statements from Washington on the need to hold talks with terrorists fit into the same scheme, namely to impose a political solution to the Kurdish problem on Turkey

ANKARA - Turkish Daily News

Controversies concerning the role of the United States in Turkey's decision to end the land operation in northern Iraq against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) camps took a new turn when the leading opposition figure called the military's latest action in the region "part of a greater scenario of pushing Turkey toward a political solution."

The quick withdrawal of Turkish troops was part of a U.S. scheme to ease anger and resentment following several PKK attacks in September against Turkish troops, so that a political solution would be possible to sell to the public, main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal said in a live televised interview Friday. You let them

get out their anger but never let them finish off the terrorists for good. From the third day of the operations, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said Turkey should end the operation and spoke of the need for a political solution. He was in Canberra, Australia, but his agenda was Turkey. This is a plan to bring Turkey to the table with terrorists," Baykal said, referring to the U.S. role in the sudden end to the eight-day land operation on Feb. 29. Gates had held talks with the Turkish president, prime minister, defense minister and chief of staff Thursday, asking them to keep the operation short. Washington's mixed signals serve a purpose

Gates urged Turkey on Feb. 24 to keep the operation short and called for increased dialogue between the state and Turkey's Kurds. Turkey should reach some kind of accommodation with the PKK, Admiral William Fallon, Commander of the U.S. Central Command responsible for the Middle East including Iraq, said Thursday. We will give them the help we can, but we are really strongly encouraging them to figure out a political solution here," Fallon

said. His declaration followed Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno's statement that the PKK should be kept under pressure to initiate talks with these terrorist elements.

The U.S. State Department's statements, which say the U.S. sticks to its don't talk with the terrorists policy, were completely in line with statements from the Pentagon. Baykal said that no one in Turkey was talking about a political solution. The Pentagon and U.S. State Department's declarations serve exactly the same purpose, he said. "One throws us into the fire, the other brings us out. The aim is to introduce the political solution topic to Turkey's agenda... Is it possible for a general of such a high rank [Fallon] to speak outside of the main U.S. strategy in the Middle East? Baykal said.

Meanwhile, Turkish people think the operation ended because of U.S. pressure and demand a general assembly meeting on the operation, said CHP Parliamentary Group leader Kemal Anadol. What was our authorities' response to Gates when he repeatedly demanded the withdrawal of Turkish troops from northern Iraq? The public needs to know, he said.

The Washington Post March 8, 2008

A Kurdish Society of Soldiers

In Rugged N. Iraq, Guerrillas Forge a Unity Based on Hardship and Defiance

Washington Post - By Joshua Partlow

ZAP VALLEY, Iraq -- On the day the Turkish soldiers withdrew from Iraq, 40 Kurdish guerrillas convened to bury five of their dead.

The corpses were wrapped in black plastic and camouflage tarp, lashed to stretchers fashioned from branches, and draped in the flag of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. In silence the guerrillas stacked large rocks into five piles, resting the stretchers end-to-end on the cairns. They stood in two rows with machine guns pointed above the mountains that surrounded them and waited for their leader to speak.

"The Turkish army could not capture any of our territory, could not get one of our bases, our weapons or even a scrap of nylon," Bahoz Erdal, the 39-year-old military commander of the Kurdish guerrillas, told his serried ranks. "The Turkish army didn't have any chance to rest. When they attacked, we hit them. When they made camp, we hit them. Even when they pulled back, we hit them."

The conclusion of the eight-day battle last Friday along Iraq's northern border was described by Turkey's government as the scheduled end to a successful incursion that crippled its enemies, destroying hundreds of their caves and hideouts. But ultimately the battle ended where it had begun, with the intractable guerrillas in sole control of hundreds of miles of mountainous terrain.

At the funeral, the quiet ending to their latest war, some guerrillas bowed their heads but no tears were shed.

"In the last 10 days in Zap, our fighters displayed their historic heroism," Erdal told his soldiers. "In this defense, you brought back again the fighting



society, with its own rituals and traditions, that bears no resemblance to the rest of Iraq. Access, however, was limited to the people and places the guerrillas chose to reveal, and it was difficult to verify details of the battle because of the vast distances between locations.

What was clear was that years in these snow-capped mountains have forged the fighters into rugged ascetics. Although they have based themselves in northern Iraq, they are oriented elsewhere, choosing even to live on Turkish time, an hour behind Iraq's. They are based in the heart of the Islamic Middle East but are largely uninterested in religion or the cultures they abandoned in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. They relate their struggle to those of the American revolutionaries who fought the British crown, and the Cuban guerrillas who followed Fidel Castro down from the Sierra Maestra mountains.

back to Iraq. It is more unusual for them to be on the defensive, protecting their territory from Turkish attack. The PKK, with 4,000 to 5,000 fighters, according to the U.S. State Department, represents less of a threat than it once did to the Turkish government. But the group is benefiting from a resurgence of nationalist feeling among the 25 million Kurds dispersed throughout the region.

The PKK leaders say they are no longer fighting for an independent Kurdish state, or even to replicate or expand the semiautonomous Kurdish region in Iraq. Rather, they say, they want their people to speak Kurdish in schools, to receive national identification cards, to have equal rights for women, to avoid persecution by state security forces, and to gain respect and political influence wherever they live. To walk among the guerrillas, however, is to feel some are also fighting to prolong their communal, socialist experiment and to be left alone.

"In society, in the cities, I feel like someone is choking me," said Berivan, a 27-year-old female guerrilla. "In the mountains I feel free."

The guerrillas receive no salaries. They sew their olive-drab wool uniforms and treat their wounded. They have no homes and live in peripatetic motion, walking goat trails and dry creek beds, through mossy boulder fields and across slabs of brindled rock. The small villages that dot this territory are abandoned now, the lone paved road deserted. The guerrillas sleep on bedrolls in caves or under the stars, drink spring water and eat what they can forage or smuggle in from civilization.

"Our life is totally different than yours," one guerrilla said.

Although the PKK welcomes visitors, the Kurdistan Regional Government of northern Iraq has tried to bar outsiders, particularly journalists, from entering the area where the authorities effectively tolerate the guerrillas. After receiving an invitation to tour the area, The Post's journalists hiked for eight hours, first up a rocky path for herders to the top of a mountain overlooking Kurdish towns to the south, then down a precipi-



spirit of the PKK."

A Washington Post correspondent and staff photographer who spent five days inside rebel territory during and after the battle -- the only reporters allowed to accompany the guerrillas through this period -- observed a self-sufficient

"We are fighting for democracy, for freedom," said Osman Delbrine, a 32-year-old guerrilla with eight years in the mountains. "We are fighting for peace and for all Kurds in all nations."

Their tactics can be ruthless. They slip over the border to blow up Turkish soldiers and retreat

tous slope a local guide said was littered with land mines. Along the way, it was necessary to shimmy across a steel bridge mangled by Turkish bombs and crouch below boulders when warplanes flew overhead. The mountains rang with the spatter of gunfire and the discharge of distant bombs. At dusk, the first guerrilla -- wearing camouflage and carrying a Kalashnikov rifle -- appeared from behind a tree in a rock-strewn ravine. Others soon emerged, and one of them held out his hand.

"Welcome to our mountain," he said in English.

'He Was My Best Friend'

The Turkish military invasion, known as Operation Sun, began Feb. 21 with an aerial bombardment, followed by a push of a reported 2,000 ground troops in various passes across the 200-mile border Turkey shares with Iraq.

The thrust of the ground battle targeted the Zap Valley, a crucial region in the western portion of the guerrillas' territory, home to their headquarters, training camps, underground storage rooms, burial plots and fighters manning their Russian-made antiaircraft Dushka machine-gun positions on the snowy peaks. Erdal, the high-strung, fast-talking guerrilla commander, abandoned his medical school studies in Damascus, Syria, two decades ago to join the PKK. Since then, he has fixated on fighting Turkey.

"It's not random that they are attacking this area," he said. "The army that they brought is enough to capture an area like Zap. But when you use a very big army, it's difficult to organize, and your movements will be slow."

In the end, Erdal said, his guerrillas drove Turkey back down from the mountains after killing more than 120 of its soldiers; Turkey claimed to have lost 24. The disparity was larger on the guerrilla side: Erdal and several others insisted that just 10 of their own were killed, while Turkey put the number at more than 230.

One of the corpses lashed to the branches on the day of the funeral belonged to Ayhan Eruh. During preparations for the funeral, the names of the dead were written on scraps of white paper tied to their chests. This was a scene Roshat Sarhat, a 30-year-old guerrilla who once was a journalist in Istanbul, had no interest in seeing. He stayed in an abandoned stone hut on a hillside far from the service. The bare single room was silent but for the crackle of his radio and the buzz of a surveillance drone high overhead.

"He was my best friend," Sarhat said. Eruh had died on the first day of the battle.

'The Mountain Teaches Us'

Throughout the fighting, the hundreds of guerrillas used the same battle-tested tactics they have relied on for years: Move quickly, hit and retreat, harass and confuse the more-powerful enemy. They carry AK-47s, sniper rifles, shoulder-fired rockets and hand grenades.

"Some of our attacks required only five guerrillas, and others used 50 or 60," Erdal said. "For example, you send five guerrillas to a huge army

at night, they attack them and leave the area; then these soldiers cannot sleep until the morning. In a different situation, you use 50 or 60 guerrillas to hold a mountain."

After President Bush met with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in November to discuss the PKK problem, the guerrillas rushed to make arrangements for battle. They stashed ammunition, weapons, food and water in caves and crags throughout the mountains, for quick resupply. Inside one such cave, they installed a cylindrical, metal wood-burning stove and chimney to heat a room constructed of army green cloth and plastic tarp.

"The mountain is a school for us," said Elif, a 32-year-old commander who dropped out of interior design school in Turkey 10 years ago to join the PKK. "The mountain teaches us how to walk, it taught us how to live in cold weather, how to go without eating for a long time," she said. "The Turkish soldiers have huge bodies, but they can't stay in the snow for more than a couple hours."

In the mountains they communicate using cell-phone text messages or speak in code over hand-held Yaesu radios on ever-changing fre-



quencies. If they occupy an abandoned home, they blanket the windows to hide the light and build fires at night to hide the smoke. "We are not scared," Sarhat said. "But we are always careful."

Sarhat, a somber, serious man, joined the PKK a decade ago after working as a television reporter in Turkey. He was born to Kurdish parents in the city of Van but did not learn his ancestral language because teaching it in the schools was forbidden. As he grew older and studied Kurdish history, he felt increasingly angry that his culture was suppressed.

"Anywhere the Kurds live in Turkey, you can't act like a Kurd. You can't have your own identification, you can't have your own history or culture," he said. "I realized that they took my nation's rights, our education, our identity. Then I decided to join the PKK."

In wartime the guerrillas fill various roles. There are medics with UNICEF first-aid kits, cooks and videographers, frontline fighters and logisticians. Yet they are also uniform down to the smallest details. They smoke one brand of cigarettes,

Business Royales, and nearly all wear peach-colored Turkish Mekap sneakers with orange laces.

The guerrillas are not a people's army or ad hoc insurgency, but a trained paramilitary force that requires every new recruit to attend a three-month camp to study military tactics and become indoctrinated in the ideology of the imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan. The PKK's separatist war against Turkish authorities, which began in 1984 and lasted for a decade and a half, claimed the lives of about 35,000 people, mostly Kurds in southeastern Turkey.

In the PKK enclave in northern Iraq, Ocalan's chubby, mustachioed face is emblazoned on hillsides, flags and small pins the fighters wear on their vests. The reverence they exhibit toward Ocalan, captured in 1999 in Nairobi and now in a Turkish prison, borders on cultish. After assassination attempts against Ocalan in the 1990s, guerrillas immolated themselves and some became suicide bombers. To the governments of Turkey, Iraq and the United States, those tactics solidified the PKK's reputation as a terrorist organization.

"We don't want any mother in the world to have to receive the body of her dead son," said Hadar Afreen, a 26-year-old guerrilla who grew up outside Aleppo, Syria. "We don't want to fight; we want to be peaceful. But if they attack us, we will defend ourselves."

The PKK recruits many of its fighters when they are teenagers or college students and has been criticized for exploiting young people and effectively trapping them in the guerrilla force. But more than a dozen people interviewed last week said they came to the fight willingly. Some said they joined because their villages had been attacked or relatives slain by Turkish soldiers.

Afreen came to the mountains as an 18-year-old after she was told by Arab teachers she must join Syria's ruling Baath Party while in high school or face expulsion. She was familiar with the books of Ocalan and considered him a hero. She left a note for her parents saying she was joining the PKK, sneaked out of the house and has not spoken to them since.

"What I'm doing here is more important than my parents," she said.

After Erdal's speech at the funeral, the guerrillas, in solemn procession, marched the corpses up the mountainside, through wild grass meadows and over footbridges spanning two rushing creeks, until they reached their stone-walled cemetery surrounded by craters from Turkish bombs. With shovels and picks, they dug five spaces in the rows of cinder-block graves. They pushed the scraps of paper bearing names inside clear plastic bottles and placed them in the graves. Then they covered their dead with dirt and blank stone slabs and dispersed without ceremony back into the mountains.

Staff photographer Andrea Bruce and special correspondent Dlovan Brwari contributed to this report.

March 8, 2008



A Military Analysis of Turkey's Incursion into Northern Iraq

The Jamestown Foundation - By Gareth Jenkins

The recently concluded eight-day Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq marks the beginning of a new phase in Turkey's nearly 24 year-old struggle against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Despite the Turkish military's claims to have inflicted high casualties and severe damage to the PKK's infrastructure in the region, in the medium term the greatest impact of the operation is likely to be psychological.

The incursion was the first major Turkish ground operation into northern Iraq in over a decade and followed over two months of aerial bombardments of PKK camps and bases in the region. By launching a ground operation in winter, when most of the mountainous terrain was still deep in snow, the Turkish military forced the PKK onto the defensive by demonstrating that organization's presence in northern Iraq is no longer immune to attack—whether by land or from the air—at any time of the year.

Following an eight-hour artillery and aerial bombardment of suspected PKK positions, Turkish ground forces crossed the border into Iraq on the evening of February 21. Initial Turkish press reports suggested a large-scale invasion by at least two brigades, comprising 10,000 troops backed by tanks and targeting a range of PKK positions along the Iraqi-Turkish border. There was even speculation that the ultimate target was the PKK's main bases and training camps deep in the Qandil mountains of northeast Iraq, some 60 miles (100 kilometers) from the Turkish border.

However, following the withdrawal of Turkish troops on February 29, it became clear that the operation had been much more limited in size and intent. At a press conference on March 3, Turkish Chief of Staff General Yasar Buyukanit announced that only "one regiment"—which in Turkey consists of three battalions—had been airlifted into northern Iraq and that no tanks or other vehicles had crossed the border (Radikal, Milliyet, Hurriyet, March 4). He also said that the operation had been concentrated in the Zap region of northern Iraq, close to the Turkish border town of Cukurca. The camps and caves in the valleys and ravines of the Zap region have long been one of the PKK's most important forward bases and served as a platform for infiltrations into Turkey. It appears that the Turkish forces penetrated a maximum of 9-10 miles (approximately 15 kilometers) into Iraq.

The Turkish media later reported that the three battalions comprised a total of 1,400 commandos drawn from the Turkish Second Army and the Gendarmerie. They are reported to have been airlifted in stages across the border into the foothills of the Zap region by around 30 S70 Sikorsky Blackhawk helicopters, after which they marched toward the PKK camps on foot (Milliyet, March 5). Photographs released by the Turkish General Staff (TGS) showed the commandos dressed for winter warfare, carrying their own supplies and equipped with night vision goggles. Defining the Aims of the Turkish General Staff

During the operation, the TGS refused to confirm or deny reports in the Turkish media about the

size or targets of the incursion. This now appears to have been part of a deliberate policy to confuse the PKK and disrupt its response. At his press conference on March 3, Buyukanit noted that deception was one of the arts of war. He said that in the run-up to the incursion, the Turkish military had tried to divert attention from the coming attack on the Zap region by bombing PKK positions around Avasin. It also attempted to move tanks out of its base in Bamerni in northern Iraq—which is around 40 miles (64 kilometers) to the west of the Zap region and one of four semi-permanent Turkish military bases established in northern Iraq in 1997—in order to persuade the PKK that some form of operation in the vicinity was pending (Radikal, March 4).

Buyukanit said that intelligence reports indicated that around 300 PKK militants were located in the Zap region immediately prior to the incursion. He claimed that during the eight days of the operation the Turkish military had killed 240 of the militants, mostly during night attacks. On the Turkish side, 24 soldiers and three members of the Village Guards militia are reported to have died. Buyukanit also said that, in addition to the element of surprise, one of the reasons for the TGS's decision to launch the attack in winter was that the snow made it very difficult for the PKK to use its stocks of explosives. According to the general, ground and air attacks resulted in the partial or total destruction of 126 caves, 290 shelters, 12 command centers, six training centers, 23 logistical facilities, 29 signals and communications facilities, 40 trenches and 59 anti-aircraft emplacements (Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Radikal, March 4); the figures have not been independently confirmed. The TGS has not released information on the quantities of arms and logistical supplies seized or destroyed during the operation.

In a statement posted on its website, the TGS insisted that the aim of the operation was to destabilize rather than to destroy the PKK. "It is not possible to completely destroy the terrorist organization through a single operation," it said. "But it showed the organization that northern Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists" (tsk.mil.tr, February 29). "We needed to give [them] a lesson and we did," added Buyukanit at his press conference on March 3. "This was not the last. We shall give them other lessons. Operations will continue as the need arises" (Radikal, Hurriyet, March 4).

The PKK Claims a Victory

The limited scope of the operation has enabled the PKK to dispute the TGS's version of events. Since the Turkish military withdrew, PKK websites have been lauding what they describe as the organization's heroic resistance. The PKK's military wing, the People's Defense Forces (HPG), has claimed it repulsed a Turkish attempt to push deeper into northern Iraq toward the PKK's headquarters in the Qandil mountains, killing over 130 Turkish soldiers (HPG Press Bureau, March 3). From his hideout in the Qandil Mountains, Murat Karayilan, the chairman of the PKK Executive Committee and currently the most powerful individual in the organization,

described the incursion as a major PKK victory (Rizgarionline, March 3).

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the incursion came as a shock to the PKK and will force it to reconsider its deployments close to the Iraqi-Turkish border, perhaps distributing its forces and supply depots more thinly and relocating some of them deeper into northern Iraq. The movement is probably already re-establishing some form of presence in the Zap region and has traditionally had little difficulty in rebuilding its supplies or recruiting new members. In fact, previous large-scale attacks by the Turkish military have tended to produce an increase in the number of young Kurds seeking to join the organization.

Despite its claims to have repulsed the Turkish incursion, the PKK will feel under pressure to demonstrate its continued capabilities by staging some form of operation inside Turkey. The organization has always attached considerable importance to its claim to be the sole legitimate representative of Turkey's Kurds. Maintaining this claim involves intimidating and assassinating potential rivals; not least in order to ensure that, should the Turkish government ever decide to enter into negotiations over the rights and freedoms of its Kurdish minority, the PKK is its natural interlocutor.

Opening the Urban Front

The PKK's claim to pre-eminence has always been based on its use of violence. However, a combination of being forced onto the defensive in northern Iraq in preparation for expected future Turkish incursions and the disruption and damage caused by the military operations themselves is likely to reduce, though not eradicate, its ability to return to the offensive when the spring thaw melts the snow in the mountain passes along the Iraqi-Turkish border. However, the PKK probably now poses a greater threat not in its traditional battlegrounds in the mountains of southeastern Turkey but in the cities, including the metropolises in the west of the country, not so much in its own right but in its potential to trigger a violent Turkish nationalist backlash through mass demonstrations or a high-casualty bombing.

Until recently, the PKK's urban bombing campaign consisted primarily of small improvised explosive devices (IEDs) built around a few kilos of A4 or C4 explosives. Since fall 2007, however, the organization has demonstrated a new willingness to inflict mass casualties. On January 4 it detonated a car bomb outside a school in Diyarbakir (see Terrorism Focus, January 8). In recent months Turkish security forces have seized large quantities of artificial fertilizers which are believed to have been stockpiled by the PKK for use in vehicle-delivered IEDs. After the Turkish military launched its ground operation on February 21, the PKK warned that it would step up its urban bombing campaign inside Turkey if Ankara persisted with its attacks on the organization in northern Iraq (Firat News Agency, February 24).

PKK supporters staged a series of demonstrations across Turkey even after the Turkish military began to withdraw from northern Iraq on

February 29. On March 1, more than 1,000 PKK supporters clashed with police in Diyarbakir (DHA, March 1). On the same day, police defused an IED which had been left at a bus stop in Adana (Vatan, March 2). On March 2, police broke up a demonstration of 500 PKK supporters who had tried to march to Taksim Square in the center of Istanbul (Radikal, Milliyet, Hurriyet, March 3). On the same day, more than 30 people were arrested during violent clashes at a rally by PKK supporters in the city of Batman (DHA, March 2). More protests can be expected in the weeks ahead, particularly in the run-up to the Kurdish New Year on March 21.

At the press conference on March 3, Turkish Land Forces Commander General Ilker Basbug called for the government to take measures to address the often desperate socio-economic conditions in southeastern Turkey that ensure a steady supply of recruits to the PKK. "They are poor, unemployed and without hope," said Basbug. "These uneducated children believe the propaganda. Unfortunately, there is no counter-propaganda from the government. Economic measures must be taken which reach these children. Measures must be taken to bring them down from the mountains" (Radikal, Milliyet, March 4).

But Cemil Cicek, the spokesman for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), dismissed suggestions that the government was contemplating any new policy initiative. "Nobody should expect us to announce a special package of measures to bring the terrorists down from the mountains," he said. "If we do, then the terrorist

organization will claim 'if it wasn't for me then these measures wouldn't have been taken'." (Radikal, March 4).

Conclusion

The Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq has probably achieved its primary purpose of destabilizing the PKK and forcing it onto the defensive by demonstrating the vulnerability of its camps and bases in northern Iraq to both air and ground assault. Further Turkish commando raids can be expected. Although it would be technically difficult, the PKK will now no longer feel safe from an airborne commando raid against its headquarters deep in the Qandil mountains. However, most subsequent Turkish ground operations are likely to focus on the region closer to the Iraqi-Turkish border, particularly areas which have traditionally been used as springboards for PKK infiltrations into Turkey.

The PKK launched a series of mass attacks against military targets inside Turkey in fall 2007 in the apparent knowledge that, although it would suffer heavy losses, the killing of a large number of Turkish soldiers would increase the pressure both on the civilian government and the TGS to strike at the organization's camps and bases in northern Iraq. The PKK appears to have calculated that the United States would intervene to prevent Turkey from launching any cross-border operations, thus handing the organization a major propaganda victory by demonstrating Turkey's impotence. These hopes received a major blow in November 2007 when the United States agreed to begin providing Turkey with actionable intelligence, which the TGS

subsequently used to launch a series of air strikes against PKK positions in northern Iraq, later demolished completely by the ground operation of February 21-29.

Further Turkish commando raids will degrade, though not destroy, the PKK's infrastructure in northern Iraq and its ability to infiltrate militants into Turkey. Given the failure of its change of strategy in fall 2007, the PKK is likely to return to the tactics it has used since resuming its insurgency in 2004: namely, concentrating primarily on the use of land mines, sniper fire, ambushes and guerrilla raids by small units of 6-8 militants.

Despite the bravado of its public rhetoric, the PKK is aware that it is unlikely ever to defeat the Turkish military on the battlefield. Its main aim appears to be to engage in a long-term campaign of attrition in the hope that continued violence will eventually persuade the Turkish authorities to open political negotiations. But there is currently no indication that Ankara is prepared to negotiate with the PKK. As a result, there is a danger that frustration might lead the PKK to try to raise the stakes by shifting the main focus of its campaign away from the mountains and onto the streets of Turkey's cities by attempting to provoke ethnic clashes between Turks and Kurds. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in aggressive nationalism among both Turks and Kurds. To date, the Turkish authorities have been remarkably successful in preventing ethnic tensions from escalating into inter-communal violence. But the danger remains.



Iraq Seeks Partnership With Turkey

March 9, 2008

By SUZAN FRASER Associated Press Writer

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) -- Iraq's president said Saturday that he wants to promote more Turkish investment in his country, where Turkish troops recently carried out an eight-day ground incursion.

Jalal Talabani spoke to members of a Turkish-Iraqi business group at the end of a visit aimed at easing tensions caused by Turkey's offensive against Kurdish rebels inside Iraq.

Talabani, himself a Kurd, says Iraq wants "to forge strategic relations in all fields, including oil, the economy, trade, culture and politics with Turkey." He suggested that the two countries set up a body whose aim would be to strengthen ties between the neighbors.

Turkey is already an active economic player in Iraq. Despite the political tensions, Iraq's autonomous northern Kurdish region has relied heavily on Turkish food imports as well as Turkish investment in construction works and Turkish electricity.

The Iraqi president arrived in Turkey on Friday, about a week after the Turkish military ended its offensive against the rebels.

The insurgents - who seek autonomy for Kurds in Turkey's southeast - have often launched attacks on Turkey from bases in northern Iraq. Talabani said the rebels would not be tolerated inside Iraq's borders and that the government was pressuring them to lay down their arms.

Turkey launched its cross-border ground operation against rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, on Feb. 21. The Turkish military said it inflicted heavy losses on a large group of rebels in Iraq's Zap region. The PKK has disputed the

claim.

The PKK has said it wants political and cultural autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish region of southeastern Turkey. The conflict started in 1984 and has since killed tens of thousands of people.

Also Saturday, PKK rebels released a man they had taken hostage a day earlier in a southern Turkish province on the border with Syria, Turkey's state-run media reported.

Rebels hiding in a mountainous part of Hatay province kidnapped the man, Mehmet Simsek, on Friday after they killed his friend. The rebels had accused his friend of informing the Turkish security forces of their whereabouts.

Iraq's oil minister said Saturday that his government will not recognize any oil deals that the northern Kurdish self-governing region has unilaterally inked with foreign companies.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has approved several contracts with international companies, causing tensions with the Iraqi government, which is seeking centralized control over the country's oil resources.

"The central government is in charge of the administration of natural resources and agreements not approved by the central government will not be recognized," Iraq's oil minister Hussain al-Shahristani said after a meeting with Turkey's Energy Minister Hilmi Guler.



The New York Times
MARCH 11, 2008



Attila Durak captured both the variety and similarities of cultures within Turkey in the photographs he took over seven summers, while living with families of different ethnic groups around the country.

A Patchwork Land Confronts a Lie of Whole Cloth

By SABRINA TAVERNISE

SAMSUN, Turkey — When the word spread that they were coming, they were suspected of being missionaries. Then fugitives. But when the small band of Turkish intellectuals finally arrived at this Black Sea city in February, people seemed to understand that they really wanted only to tell stories.

The group — a feminist (Kurdish), a writer (ethnic Armenian), an academic and a photographer (both Turkish) — were presenting a book of photographs of people from Turkey.

The book counted 44 different ethnicities and sects across Turkey and captured their members dancing, eating, praying, laughing and playing music. If that sounds innocuous, it is not. For its 85-year history as a nation, Turkey has a very specific line on cultural diversity: Anyone who lives in Turkey is a Turk. Period.

Attila Durak, a New-York-trained photographer born in Turkey, compiled the book, traveling around Turkey for seven consecutive summers, living with families and taking their portraits.

His intent was to show that Turkey is a constantly changing kaleidoscope of different cultures, not a hard piece of marble monoculture as the Turkish state says, and that acknowledging those differences is an important step toward a healthier society.

"People see themselves in the photographs, and they realize they are no different," said Mr. Durak, whose book, "Ebru: Reflections of Cultural Diversity in Turkey," was published in 2006. He said viewers reacted with: "Those Kurdish people have kids who play together like ours. Look, they dance the same kind of wedding dance."

Ever since Turkey became a nation in 1923, it has been scrubbing its citizens of identities other

than Turkish. In some ways, that was necessary as a glue to hold the young country together. European powers were intent on carving up its territory, a patchwork of remains from the collapsed Ottoman Empire, and Muslim Turkishness was a unifying ideology.

But it forced families from different backgrounds, who spoke different languages — Armenian, Kurdish, Greek, Georgian, Macedonian — to hide their identities. Family histories, like the crushing events of Turkey's genocide against Armenians in 1915, were never spoken of, and children grew up not knowing their own past or identity.

"Memories like that were whispered into ears behind closed doors," said Fethiye Cetin, a lawyer who learned only in her 20s that her grandmother was Armenian. "There was a big fear involved in this, so the community itself perpetuated the silence."

It is that locked past that Mr. Durak and his colleagues seek to open. Their method is telling their own stories to audiences across Turkey as an accompaniment to exhibits of Mr. Durak's photographs, to open a conversation about the past and to chip away at stereotypes.

The academic, Ayse Gul Altinay, an anthropology professor from Sabanci University in Istanbul, is a kind of national psychiatrist, identifying the most painful points from the country's past and offering a new way to think about them as a route to healing.

She points to the regional art form, Ebru, the process of paper marbling that produces constantly changing interwoven patterns, as a metaphor for multiculturalism.

"We're not a mosaic, different from one another and fixed in glass," said Ms. Altinay, who earned her doctorate from Duke University. "Ebru is done using



THE NEW YORK TIMES

A traveling exhibit is focusing on Turkey's ethnic groups.

Turks learn to discuss their diversity, above a whisper.

water. It is impossible to have clear lines or distinct borders."

In Samsun, a bustling city with a nationalist reputation, and the fifth in Turkey to see the exhibition, the audience was small but interested. The writer in the group, Takuhi Tovmasyan, talked about how she was gruffly banished from a piano recital hall after winning a competition, when teachers learned her last name, which is plainly Armenian.

"I hid this feeling for a long time," said Ms. Tovmasyan, who has published a book of family recipes and stories as a way to open up a conversation about the past. "But when I saw these photographs, I decided I needed to talk about it."

The discussions have hit a nerve. At a presentation in Kars, in eastern Turkey, a man in his 50s in a suit spoke through tears about discovering that his family had been Molokan, also known as Russian Old Believers. It was the

first time he was speaking publicly about it, he said.

Others have apologized emotionally to Ms. Tovmasyan. In Samsun, a young man in a white sweatshirt said, "I personally apologize for 'Get out,' on behalf of all my friends," eliciting applause. "It's really a terrible thing."

Mr. Durak's subjects look into his camera with a directness that is startling. A Jewish man sits in a chair in Istanbul. A gypsy in a flowered shirt plays the saxophone. A woman from the Black Sea coast stands in a doorway, her fingers touching her collarbone.

Each is labeled for ethnicity and sect, a categorization that initially struck local authorities here in Samsun as something close to seditious.

"They said, 'We have to investigate; maybe they are wanted by the police,'" said Ozlem Yalcinkaya, an organizer from a student group, the Community Volunteers Foundation, who arranged the exhibit. "I said, 'If they are fugitives, why would they be putting their names on the exhibition posters?'"

In the end, authorities relented, and the municipality even allowed the use of its lecture hall.

"The genie is out of the bottle," Ms. Altinay said.

She added, "Too many people are interested in looking into who we are, who lived on this land before us," for the healing process to be stopped.

A young woman in the audience echoed that thought, as she apologized to Ms. Tovmasyan. For as gloomy as the past was, the future was more hopeful, the woman said, because young people are much more flexible and accepting than the older generations.

"In a few years' time, a lot of people will be doing a lot of apologizing," she said.

Turkish offensive upsets political balance

By Steve Negus

In the Iraqi Kurdish town of Amedi, a group of Turkish soldiers rests by their armoured vehicles as a Kurdish maintenance team attaches a winch to their generator.

One of them exchanges greetings with an elderly Kurdish civilian, inquiring after his health.

Less than two weeks ago, the mountains to the north and east of the Amedi valley reverberated with Turkish bombs and shells as Ankara's troops swept the ridges and valleys in pursuit of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Turkish Kurdish guerrilla force that has made its base inside Iraqi territory.

Today, it is back to business as usual in this hilltop town, where shopkeepers say they have grown used to, and even befriended, the Turkish soldiers who come to their stores to buy eggs, shampoo and other goods.

The eight-day incursion into Iraq set off fears that Turkish troops and Iraqi Kurdish security forces would be drawn into clashes that could destabilise the entire region.

Villagers do complain that the fighting, while not generally threatening them directly, terrorises them and disrupts their everyday life.

But the Turkish military presence in

the north is less of a short-term crisis than a long-term burden. The fighting in the north was concentrated in a discrete and isolated area where Ankara and the Kurdish authorities have an established working relationship and Turkish troops have been around for a long time.

The intensity of the recent conflict appears to have put a strain on this arrangement. According to the Turkish military, some 240 guerrillas and 27 Turkish troops were killed in the February 21-29 offensive. The Turks claimed to have destroyed hideouts, training camps and ammunition depots.

Safiya al-Sohail, a member of an Iraqi parliamentary fact-finding mission to the Amedi region and three other border zones that saw violence, says she received reports of about a dozen civilian casualties in late February.

The toll, however, could have been worse had the offensive not been concentrated in what villagers call the "forbidden zone" – a swathe of mountains and valleys along the Turkish border, separated from the Amedi valley by a sharp ridge pierced in a few places by winding canyons.

Turkish aircraft and helicopters did stray across the ridge into the populated area, frightening civilians and destroying a number of bridges in a river canyon running through the

ridge.

In addition, Ms Sohail says that she saw Turkish cluster bomblets scattered in the canyon, a violation of international law, and also heard reports of mines.

"Saddam Hussein and the Turks – they are the same thing," declares Shamseddin Hussein Mirza, a former Kurdish fighter and mayor of the village of Hettite.

Mr Mirza and his neighbours originally lived on the other side of the hill in what is now the forbidden zone, but their village – also called Hettite – was destroyed in the 1980s by Saddam's forces in one of his campaigns to depopulate border regions that could provide shelter for Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas.

The PKK took over the region, and in the past decade fighting between its guerrillas and the Turkish army has prevented the villagers from returning home.

Back then, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) – an Iraqi Kurdish movement which now dominates the government in northern Iraq – and the PKK were rivals in an internecine war, and the KDP entered into an alliance of convenience with the Turkish military. The Turkish bases in Amedi and other locations in northern Iraq date from this time.

Kurdish officials still insist that they have no love for the PKK, but they say they no longer want to sustain casualties fighting against fellow Kurds. They also complain that the incursion will deter foreign investment.

The fighting has reportedly disrupted Kurdish government plans to resettle 12 villages in the forbidden zone this spring – a scheme that could restore KDP control and force the PKK to move elsewhere.

Consequently, the KDP is much less co-operative with the Turkish military than it was a decade ago, and the Iraqi government joined with the US and other countries in pressing Ankara to cut short the attack.

Because of the isolation of the fighting, it is not clear how much damage the Turkish military was actually able to inflict, and how many PKK guerrillas were able to escape to other bases.

The Turkish military, for its part, declared the offensive a success and denied that it had been cut short because of international pressure.

However, one general said there were between 2,320 and 2,640 PKK troops in northern Iraq, "from which we should deduct 240", and that the Turkish army would strike at them again.



11 Mar. 2008

Iraqi leaders urge support at Erbil Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union conference

Erbil, Kurdistan-Iraq (KRG.org)

The Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) conference opened today in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani welcomed the parliamentary delegates from 18 Arab countries. He said, "This conference is an exceptional event that will enhance Iraqi-Arab relations." He added, "We are pleased to have you in Erbil, the Northern gateway to the new federal, democratic and unified Iraq."

With Iraq scheduled to host the AIPU, Erbil was selected as host-city for its record of safety and security.

President Talabani said that the progress experienced in Iraq today was the result of concerted military action coupled with great political cooperation and national reconciliation. He pledged that efforts by the parliamentary blocs, the Presidency Council and the Council of Ministers would continue.

He said, "We are building a new country for Arabs, Kurds, Chaldeans, Assyrians, the religious and the secular, for all sects and ethnicities and we are pleased that you are joining us and showing solidarity with our cause."

Dr Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the Council of Representatives (Iraq's parliament), said, "We ask for the support of our Arab brothers as we face internal, regional and international economic and political challenges. While we continue to fight against terrorism we also focus on human rights, civil society and economic development."

In a meeting yesterday at the Kurdistan National Assembly, Dr



Mashhadani called for the governments of Arab countries to more actively support Iraq's reconstruction and development efforts. Few Arab countries currently maintain embassies in Baghdad or full diplomatic relations with Iraq.

Mr Abdulhadi Al-Majali, President of the AIPU, welcomed the assembled parliamentary delegates and expressed his hope that the conference would help forge strong ties between the assembled countries. Mr Nuraddin Boshkuj, Secretary General of the AIPU, thanked President Talabani, President Barzani and the Kurdistan Regional Government for hosting the conference and welcomed the delegates to the "beautiful city of Erbil."

Also attending the opening session at Erbil Convention Centre were Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani; Kurdistan Region Vice President; Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly and his Deputy; two Deputy Speakers of the Iraqi Council of Representatives; the KRG's Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and members of the diplomatic community.

This 50th session of the 13th AIPU conference will run until 14 March. Representatives from 18 Arab countries are taking part. The AIPU conference meets once every two years to deal with common issues and to adopt and amend the union's statutes.



11 Kurdish Rebels Die in Turkey

Mar 12, 2008

By SELCAN HACA OGLU Associated Press Writer

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) -- Turkish troops killed 11 Kurdish rebels during clashes in southeastern Turkey near the border with Iraq, a private news agency reported Wednesday.

The fighting comes two weeks after Turkey's eight-day incursion into northern Iraq to flush out the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, who have been battling the Turkish government since 1984.

The clashes took place in Sirnak province, the private Dogan news agency said citing unnamed military sources. A government-paid village guard who was assisting the Turkish troops was wounded in the fighting, the report said.

There was no confirmation from the military and officials from the governor's office in Sirnak were not immediately available for comment.

Also Wednesday, the Turkish prime minister announced plans to travel this weekend to the country's poor southeast in an apparent effort to address the concerns of the Kurds.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said a solution to the conflict with the Kurds cannot rely only on security measures, and that economic support in the southeast region where many of them live and nationwide cultural rights must be part of any solution to the conflict.

But the military objects to most concessions to the Kurdish rebels, whose demands for autonomy and greater freedom to use the Kurdish language are backed by many of their ethnic brethren, even if increasing numbers of Kurds have grown disillusioned with violence as a means of achieving their goals.

Some Turkish nationalists fear that increasing cultural rights could lead to the breakup of the country along ethnic lines. They worry that Turkish Kurds could be encouraged by the U.S.-supported Kurdish region in northern Iraq, which has its own government and militia.

Many Kurds have pinned their hopes on Turkey's push to join the European Union, which has said Ankara's treatment of the Kurds will be a key factor in its decision on whether to accept the country. But that process could take at least a decade and Kurdish frustration is growing.

The New York Times March 12, 2008

TURKEY SET TO INVEST IN BETTER RELATIONS WITH KURDS

By SABRINA TAVERNISE

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's government is planning a broad series of investments worth as much as \$12 billion in the country's largely Kurdish southeast, in a new economic effort intended to create jobs and draw young men away from militancy, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

The program is intended to drain support for the militant Kurdish group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, by improving the lives of Turkey's impoverished Kurdish minority, Mr. Erdogan said in an interview with The New York Times on Tuesday.

As part of the push, the government will dedicate a state television channel to Kurdish language broadcasting, a measure that Kurds in Turkey have sought for years. The Turkish state has imposed severe restrictions on the use of Kurdish, arguing that allowing that freedom would strengthen the Kurds' desire to form a separate state.

Turkey, a vibrant Muslim democracy and a strong American ally, has for years fought the militant group, known as the P.K.K., which hides in Turkey and Iraq and seeks greater autonomy for Kurds in Turkey.

That fight has put it at odds with the United States, whose strongest allies in the war in Iraq are Kurds. But after an ambush of Turkish troops last fall, and subsequent lobbying by Mr. Erdogan and the Turkish military, the Bush administration agreed to let Turkey strike at the group inside Iraq, opening up airspace there and even offering intelligence.

"Turkey is not a guest," said Mr. Erdogan, 54, sitting in a cream-colored high-backed chair in his official residence in Ankara, Turkey's capital. "Everyone who has entered Iraq until now will stay for a while and go away, but we will stay."

"We are the most important door for northern Iraq to open up to the world," he added. "We are the healthiest door."

Last month, Turkey conducted an eight-day ground offensive into Iraq, and Mr. Erdogan said that the United States had been fully behind it.

"I can openly and freely say that this short process has been done with the total understanding of Turkey, the United States and the central government of Iraq," he said.

"But the fight against terrorism is not only this," he added. "It also has a socioeconomic part, a psychological part, a cultural part."

Mr. Erdogan was the first public figure to speak openly about Turkey's troubles with its Kurdish population in a speech several years ago that won him a measure of respect among Turkey's approximately 12 million Kurds, about a sixth of its population. Kurds voted in large numbers for his political party in a national election last July. Since then, many say his efforts have stalled, replaced by frequent military operations just over the border.

Mr. Erdogan sought to allay Kurds' fears Tuesday, emphasizing Turkey's efforts to engage them on both sides of the border. Turkey has chosen not to negotiate directly with the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, led by Massoud Barzani, despite the fact that many of the militants it is chasing hide in that territory. Mr. Erdogan added, however, that informal contacts had been made with the area's representatives.

"We have relatives in northern Iraq," he said. "And people living there have relatives in our southeastern region. With whom will we have good relations other than with ourselves?"

Efforts to improve relations with Iraq include plans to open a consulate in the southern city of Basra, Mr. Erdogan said. Turkey has an embassy

in Baghdad and a consulate in Mosul, a major city in the north.

Mr. Erdogan is still identifying funds for the economic effort, which was started years ago by a previous administration but languished. The state will invest between \$11 billion and \$12 billion over five years to build two large dams and a system of water canals, complete paved roads and remove land mines from the fields along the Syrian border, he said.

Plans for the project will be completed within two months, he said, at which point construction on the two dams will begin. He said he had dedicated one of his deputy prime ministers to visit cities across the largely Kurdish southeast to work on it.

"Everything we can see in the western part of the country we can see in the east," he said.

The television channel will also include Persian and Arabic, Mr. Erdogan said, and should be running in several months. "This will be the most important step providing cultural rights to the region," he said.

Turkey, a member of NATO, has ambitions to join the European Union, though Mr. Erdogan has recently come under criticism for allowing the required democratic and economic retooling needed for membership to drop from the agenda.

"There is no stalling or slowing down," he said. "We are determined."

A social security law required to meet European standards will be submitted to Parliament in the next two to three weeks, he said, and a long-awaited revision of a law that limits freedom of speech is nearly ready. At every weekly cabinet meeting, one of the topics is Turkey's European bid, and each ministry is working on it.

"There is no alternative for us other than full membership," Mr. Erdogan said.

The New York Times MARCH 12, 2008

Turkey Set to Invest in Better Relations With Kurds

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Spending up to \$12 billion now to reduce militancy later.

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Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would finance projects in Kurdish regions and start a Kurdish TV channel.

In Iran election, the campaign of a 'principlist'

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN: During the Iranian presidential election campaign in 2005, Mohammad Khoshchereh was one of the biggest boosters in Parliament of the candidacy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Khoshchereh, an economist and urban planner, appeared frequently in public on behalf of Ahmadinejad, criticizing the economic performance of his main opponent, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president.

But only three months after Ahmadinejad won the election, Khoshchereh had become one of his most outspoken critics. Three years later, with parliamentary elections coming up Friday, many other former supporters have also become critics, and there is much anger over unemployment, inflation and fuel shortages in this oil-producing country.

With most reformists barred from running by a conservative investigating body, the election has come down to a contest between conservatives who still support the president and those who have become his opponents.

"Very soon I realized that I agreed with Mr. Ahmadinejad's goals but not with his policies," Khoshchereh said recently. "My first criticism was that you cannot run the country with projects. You have to have plans and policies."

"But Mr. Ahmadinejad has no plans at all," Khoshchereh continued, referring to economic and foreign policy. "He wants to run the country with charity projects, like giving out loans."

Khoshchereh, who is running for re-election to Parliament on Friday, entered politics for the first time in the elections four years ago. Ahmadinejad,

who was the mayor of Tehran at that time, made Khoshchereh a senior adviser for two months before the election.

Khoshchereh, 55, is one of a new generation of politicians in Iran who was not involved in the Islamic revolution in 1979, nor in the 1980-1988 war with Iraq.

Between 1979 and 2004, he held administrative positions at the Ministry of Education and taught economics at state-run universities. He was in Britain from 1990 to 1993 working on his doctorate at the University of Strathclyde, where he was a member of the soccer team.

Unlike some of the somber clerics or Islamic conservatives, he smiles easily,



Aslon Arfa for The NYT

Mohammad Khoshchereh is a critic of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

wears short sleeves and holds a black belt in judo.

On his bookshelf at his office at the School of Economics of Tehran University he has dozens of books on economic theories, but also novels, like a Persian-language version of "One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Gabriel García Márquez.

But Khoshchereh refers to the supreme religious leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final word on all state matters, with the utmost respect. He calls himself a principlist, one of the religious conservatives who threw their support behind Ahmadinejad and who are now divided between his supporters and his critics.

He said that a principlist is a politician "who was loyal to his principles and did not sacrifice national interests for the sake of his party's interests."

Khoshchereh was one of the critics of Ahmadinejad's budget in Parliament in February. The budget, he said, would allow the president to withdraw \$65 billion from oil revenues, as opposed to the \$15 billion called for in the country's four-year plan.

He said that influential supporters of the president in Parliament had forced through the budget, and he accused the critics of causing tension between Parliament and the government.

He has warned that Ahmadinejad's economic policies have led to inflation and have only made the poor poorer and the rich richer.

"People's hope grows like a bubble when politicians give populist promises," said Khoshchereh. "But if these hopes are not materialized, the bubble bursts and the consequences are disastrous."

Khoshchereh began expressing his concerns about the president as early as October 2005, three months after Ahmadinejad took office.

"The three principles of dignity, wisdom and expediency are mere slogans on the country's foreign policy agenda," the English language newspaper Iran Daily quoted him as saying, criticizing the way the president was approaching foreign policy.

Last year, he said in an interview with the press agency ISNA that he worried that the perception among many Iranians that Ahmadinejad had failed as president would make people disappointed with religion. He said this was because Ahmadinejad had said his government would be based on religious values.

"The failure of the government would make the system pay the price," he said, "and society will move toward secularism."

In the recent interview, he expressed concern about Ahmadinejad's confrontational approach to foreign policy. "This approach might have results in the short term, but it is not proper foreign policy," he said.

Analysts view Khoshchereh as part of the new class of politicians who have grown more moderate because of the need to deal with the realities of governing as members of Parliament.

"These people are faced with people's increasing demands," said Hamidreza Jalaipour, a sociologist and a former reformist politician. "Mr. Khoshchereh is educated and he realizes that he has to be practical. He does not chant populist slogans."

U.S. sees long fight to oust Al Qaeda in Mosul

American soldiers say the battle for the northern Iraqi city is a complicated mix of counterterrorism, economic incentives, and political solutions.

By Sam Dagher | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Mosul, Iraq

US and Iraqi troops are now repairing breaches in an earthen berm, a 20-foot high barricade built around this northern city in 2004. It's perhaps the most visible part of a grinding fight for control of the last supposed urban stronghold of Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Baghdad and other parts of Iraq still face sporadic insurgent attacks – as they have in recent days. But in Mosul, the thump of explosions is almost as much a part of the daily soundtrack as cars honking. The city averages 60 to 80 roadside bombs – exploded or found – per week.

US officers here acknowledge that security is the No. 1 priority. But they quickly add that talk of a decisive battle in Mosul is misguided. This, they say, will be a protracted struggle in which US soldiers juggle an array of complicated tasks related to counterterrorism, economics, and politics. "In Mosul, based on what we have done in three months, we are at a turning point ... we need to be here long enough to build basic capacity in the government and basic systems in the [Iraqi] military," says Lt. Col. Bob Molinari.

While the US is spending \$7 million to repair the Mosul embankment and add checkpoints along the barrier, it also plans more permanent US-Iraqi security stations, or garrisons, inside some of the city's toughest neighborhoods in addition to the 20 that are already in place.

But as Iraqi military and civilian leaders look on, they say that the security improvements alone will not end the cycle of violence in Mosul. A political solution is needed, they say, to end the struggle for power between ex-Saddam Hussein loyalists and newly powerful Kurds and Shiites. It's a solution, many hope, that will ultimately help drive Al Qaeda in Iraq elements from the city.

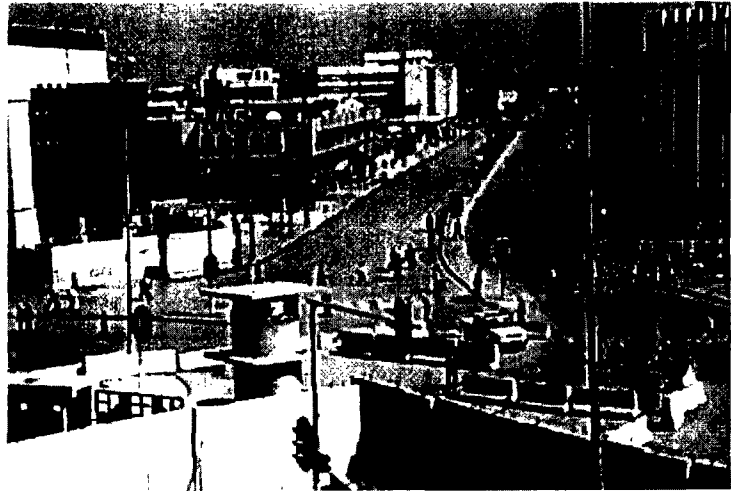
Political tinderbox

Nineveh Province is home to nearly 3 million people, half of whom live in the capital, Mosul. At least 60 percent are Sunni Arab with the rest divided among Kurds, Kurdish-speaking Yazidis, Christians, and other minorities. One Sunni Arab politician estimates that nearly 100,000 members of the former Iraqi Army are in Mosul.

This ethnic and religious mix continues to fuel Mosul's volatility and has turned the city into a political tinderbox.

Brig. Gen. Nouredin Tatar Khan, a Kurdish leader of the elite peshmerga unit here, now officially part of the Iraqi Army division stationed in Mosul, says Al Qaeda and its affiliate, the Islamic State of Iraq, continue to find a common cause with former regime elements and other insurgent groups like the Islamic Army by lumping the Americans, Kurds, and those supporting the Shiite-led government together as one enemy. He says this message continues to have an impact on many average citizens.

In a statement posted on its website last week, the Islamic Army – believed to be made up mostly of former regime elements – lamented the recent killings of two of its Mosul-based leaders, identified as Abu Fatima and Abu Ibrahim, at the hands of Al Qaeda in Iraq and called on its followers not to be distracted by this and to instead "focus all their energies on hitting the enemy: the Americans and the Shiites and peshmerga forces collaborating with them."



Indeed, the animosity toward Kurds, who some charge are trying to gain a foothold in the city, runs deep among many Sunni Arabs.

Osama al-Nujaifi, a member of the Iraqi parliament who is a Sunni Arab from Mosul, claims that "90 percent of the present resistance would die out if the peshmerga left Mosul," accusing General Tatar Khan's men of "committing unspeakable abuses" against Sunnis. "Kurdish parties want to take over Mosul, and we will confront them."

But Nineveh Province's deputy governor, Khasro Goran, says his fellow Kurds have a historic presence in the city, mainly on the east side. And, he says, nearly 1,600 Kurds in this area alone have been killed since 2003 and an estimated 100,000 have been forced to flee to the neighboring semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

Thafer Issam, a Kurd born in Mosul, fled two years ago to Kurdistan's capital, Erbil, and says he's too "terrified" to return.

Three years ago, mainly Sunni Arab western Mosul was regarded as the most violent part of the city, but many parts of the east side have now matched that description. Several bombed structures are completely on the ground, graffiti glorifying the Islamic State is seen everywhere, and public buildings there are ringed with both concrete and earthen barricades. A major bridge and many streets in the center are cut off to vehicle traffic for fear of car bombings.

In an effort to dispel rumors on the street, especially among Sunni Arabs, that Kurds were behind a high-profile bombing in January that killed almost 60 people, Maj. Gen. Riad Jalal, a Sunni Arab ex-Army officer and ranking member of the former ruling Baath Party, gathered local media to parade in front of them three men who allegedly carried out the attack.

Cameras rolled as the men, including the owner of a popular local teahouse, confessed their guilt and expressed their regret in the presence of General Jalal's US military advisers.

Iraqi reporters seemed skeptical about the men's guilt, but their prodding questions were met with this comment from the general: "Leaders do not bother with details."

When told that Mosul's residents were growing skeptical of his ability to restore security in the city, especially given the fact that the much-touted

"decisive battle" against Al Qaeda in Iraq never materialized, he said, "There is no military operation in the traditional sense in Mosul because the enemy is amongst our sons and brothers, taking advantage of social and religious sympathies.... The terrorists are like an octopus."

Despite doubts by residents and political leaders alike about his abilities, the US has embraced Jalal, appointed in January by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to coordinate the activities of the Iraqi Army, police, and border guard in the province, as a "bright hope" in the city.

But the US military says the January explosion, which blew up dozens of 55-gallon drums of ammonium nitrate stored in a warehouse basement here, was an accident, triggered when an Iraqi explosives expert accompanying a contingent headed by Tatar Khan detonated a small amount of explosives at the warehouse, not knowing what was stored in the basement.

Economic development

The US military says another crucial piece of the puzzle in Mosul is employing military-age males and providing basic services to residents.

On Saturday, Iraq's Minister of Planning and Development Ali Baban came to Mosul to survey the province's economic needs. They are staggering and range from chronic power shortages, destroyed highways and roads, overflowing sewers, and insufficient schools. The province does not get its fair share of fuel and food rations from the central government due to chronic inefficiencies and corruption.

Add to this the threat that a major dam in the area is in danger of collapsing and flooding big parts of the province. The cost of repair ranges from \$2 billion to \$6 billion, according to Mr. Goran.

"There is no question I support the resistance," says Taha Khalaf, a Sunni Arab resident of the violence-ravaged west side.

"I live on 'death road' and my neighborhood looks like it was hit by an earthquake. I do not have a job and the Americans run our provincial government."

The US military is not only having to combat Al Qaeda in what's described as its last urban stronghold, but it's also building residents' trust in their own government and security forces, pressuring Baghdad to spend money on the provision of the most basic services, easing bubbling sectarian and

ethnic tensions and preventing the province from bursting at the seams by cracking down on the flow of fighters through the Syrian border and forging alliances with tribes in outlying areas.

All of this takes place in a city where no day goes by without attacks against Iraqi and coalition forces, kidnappings, and assassinations.

On Tuesday nine people including four policemen were killed in an attack on a checkpoint in the city and a prominent academic escaped an assassination attempt. A police station was leveled in a bombing on Friday that killed four, and eight Kurds were assassinated on the city's east side last week.

'Shuttle diplomacy'

The US military has been working on easing political as well as ethnic and sectarian tensions through

what it calls "shuttle diplomacy."

It recently flew Goran, who also heads the Nineveh branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and other provincial officials to meet with Sheikh Abdullah al-Yawar, a powerful chieftain from the powerful Shammar tribe at his fiefdom in Rabiah in western Mosul near the Syrian border.

The US needs the sheikh's support to win his people away from Al Qaeda's sway. It also needs to maintain good relations with Kurds. But a bitter disagreement between the two camps illustrates the difficulties that America faces in appeasing all sides in Iraq.

Goran says 90 percent of the residents of the district of Sinjar, nearly 70 miles west of Mosul, are Kurdish-speaking Yazidis who must be given the option to join Kurdistan in a referendum mandated

by the Constitution. The Yazidis were victims of devastating bomb attacks in Sinjar that killed nearly 500 people last summer. Tal Afar, halfway between Sinjar and Mosul, has been the scene of bloody sectarian battles between its Sunni and Shiite residents.

The sheikh says the Kurds are "dreaming" if they think they will get Sinjar and he hopes that Sunni Arabs who, in sharp contrast to Kurds, shunned local elections here in January 2005 will have a chance to assert "their rights" in the next round of voting.

Goran, however, is hopeful that the US can help broker some kind of deal. "We must find solutions to these problems and secure everyone's rights. We must not be afraid."

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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TURKEY OFFERS REFORMS FOR KURDISH MINORITY

Long-simmering tensions with Kurdish militant separatists led to a week-long incursion into northern Iraq in February to target bases.

By Julien Spencer

The Turkish government has announced a significant aid package for the country's Kurdish population just weeks after it ended a military incursion into northern Iraq. That fight had been aimed at rooting out militants fighting for an independent Kurdish state.

The government appears to be appealing for greater support among Turkey's Kurdish population and preventing a domestic backlash over the recent attack. Turkey has long struggled to accept its Kurdish minority seeing them as a separatist threat. Approximately 12 million Kurds live in Turkey, equaling about a fifth of its population.

Since the US invasion of Iraq, Turkey's political and military establishments have grown more wary of Kurdish separatism following the establishment of a strong Kurdish entity in northern Iraq. From there, Turkish officials claimed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has launched military raids on Turkey. The PKK is outlawed in Turkey and has been labeled a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union.

Turkey's fight against PKK militants has put the US in a somewhat uncomfortable position, as its strongest allies in the Iraq war are the Army's Kurdish contingents, reported The Christian Science Monitor. But following numerous clashes in the fall of 2007, US officials agreed to allow a "very limited," week-long invasion of northern Iraq by the Turkish Army in February, the BBC reported.

The aim [was] to isolate the organisation and prevent it using northern Iraq as a launch pad for attacks on Turkish soil.

Turkey's recent announcement about the planned economic and cultural aid package will be formally presented April 6 when Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan visits southeast Turkey, one former adviser told the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet*.

"Mr. Prime Minister will make very important statements in Diyarbakir. He will deliver important initiatives to promote Kurdish culture and language as well as a comprehensive package for the region. He will say Turkey has entered

the solution process. We are working on that."

The New York Times interviewed Mr. Erdogan about Turkey's relationship with the Kurds.

Turkey's government is planning a broad series of investments worth as much as \$12 billion in the country's largely Kurdish southeast, in a new economic effort intended to create jobs and draw young men away from militancy.

The projects will include a Kurdish language state television channel, a measure that Kurds in Turkey have sought for years as they have battled with restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language. The New York Times also reports the government will make significant investments in local infrastructure.

Mr. Erdogan is still identifying funds for the economic effort, which was started years ago by a previous administration but languished. The state will invest between \$11 billion and \$12 billion over five years to build two large dams and a system of water canals, complete paved roads and remove land mines from the fields along the Syrian border.

Critics have been quick to blame Turkish policies toward the Kurds as the cause of resentment and separatist desires, arguing that a policy of greater democratic freedom and Kurdish rights rather than military actions is needed. In a recent opinion piece in the *International Herald Tribune*, Aliza Marcus and Andrew Apostolou, two Kurdish experts, criticized Turkey's military response. The core of Turkey's "Kurdish problem" is not the PKK. It is Turkey's denial of basic political and cultural rights to its Kurds, who are about one-fifth of the population.

An editorial in the news blogging site *Poli-Gazette* also affirmed Turkey's struggle with its Kurdish minority.

It's undeniable for anyone that Turkey has made a lot of mistakes when it comes to its Kurdish population. For a long time, Turkey tried to 'assimilate' the Kurds, basically forcing them to break with their own culture and language. This approach hasn't exactly been successful, to put it mildly, and has, instead, only angered many Kurds.

With the announced aid package, the govern-

ment is now hoping to appease the Kurdish population, reports The New York Times.

The program is intended to drain support for the militant Kurdish group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, by improving the lives of Turkey's impoverished Kurdish minority, Mr. Erdogan said.

A former aide to the prime minister confirmed the analysis, reports United Press International: If civilian and cultural openings follow the military operations and unemployment problem of the people in region is solved, the DTP [the Kurdish Democratic Society Party] will get a very heavy defeat and lose its claim. Unless the [ruling Justice and Development Party] AKP takes such a step, things will get harder for AKP in the region.

The announcement of the new plans follow the visit of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to Turkey in response to the recent military incursion. During his trip he condemned the PKK but also called on Turkey to recognize the Kurdish element, reports the *Eurasia Daily Monitor*.

"During his recent two-day recent visit to Ankara, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, an ethnic Kurd, pleased his hosts by condemning the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and inviting Turkish businesses to bid for Iraqi infrastructure projects. But he also defied Turkey's reluctance to acknowledge the Kurdish political reality in northern Iraq by referring to the region as "Kurdistan."

The new investment deal was signed during Mr. Talabani's visit and, the Associated Press reports, affirmed the strong links between Turkey and northern Iraq.

Turkey is already an active economic player in Iraq. Despite the political tensions, Iraq's autonomous northern Kurdish region has relied heavily on Turkish food imports as well as Turkish investment in construction works and Turkish electricity.

Having sought to land a knock-out blow on the PKK's military capacity, Turkey it seems is now engaged in an attempt to woo both its own Kurdish population, as well as those in neighboring Iraq, through the establishment of more solid economic ties.

March 13, 2008



NEW YORK TIMES TOUTS OLD KURDISH INVESTMENT PLAN AS NEW INITIATIVE

By Gareth Jenkins

Recent reports quoting Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as announcing \$12 billion in new investments in the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey have been greeted with considerable skepticism inside the country.

Erdogan is currently provisionally scheduled to visit southeastern Turkey on April 6. On March 10 Metin Metiner, who spent several years working as an advisor to the prime minister, told the daily Sabah that Erdogan would take the opportunity of his visit to the region to announce a package of economic, cultural, and political measures for Turkey's Kurdish minority (Sabah, March 10).

On March 12 the New York Times quoted Erdogan as saying in an interview the previous day that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was planning to invest \$12 billion in "a new economic effort" to create jobs and draw young men away from the militancy of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The paper reported him as saying that the government would use the money to build two large dams and a system of water canals and to complete paved roads. In addition, Erdogan reportedly promised that the AKP would assign one channel of the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) to the minority languages used by the population of southeast Turkey, including Kurdish, Arabic, and Farsi (New York Times, March 12).

In fact, none of these initiatives are new. TRT already includes a few hours of broadcasts in minority languages. On February 17, during a visit to Germany, Erdogan declared that TRT would dedicate an entire channel to Kurdish, Arabic, and Farsi. There is no question that there is a demand in southeastern Turkey for broadcasting in Kurdish. Many houses in the poorest areas have satellite dishes on their roofs, which are assumed to be used for Kurdish channels beamed into Turkey from outside the country, such as by the pro-PKK Roj TV. But the real demand is for independent Kurdish stations, not a state channel that would be regarded as a vehicle for state propaganda (Radikal, March 13).

Erdogan's proposals have already been dismissed by the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP).

"The basis of the Kurdish problem is the attempt to create a nation based on a

single language, a single religion and a single ethnicity," said Selahattin Demirtas, the head of the DTP parliamentary party. "Broadcasting in Kurdish on TRT won't solve the Kurdish problem. What is needed is a change in mentality" (Radikal, Milliyet, Hurriyet, March 13).

It is unclear whether, in his interview with the New York Times, Erdogan was being disingenuous in presenting the promised \$12 billion as a new initiative or whether the reporters were unaware of the project's background and thus assumed it was a new initiative. In fact, the dams, water canals, and roads form part of what is known as the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP), which was first formulated in the 1970s and began to be implemented in the early 1980s.

GAP is an irrigation and hydroelectric power project covering nine provinces of southeastern Turkey in the basins of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. GAP has always been politically controversial, not least because it reduces the quantity and quality of the water flowing to downstream countries such as Syria and Iraq. Opposition to GAP was one of the main reasons for Syrian support for the PKK during its first insurgency in 1984-99. During the early 1990s, the PKK even attacked some GAP facilities in southeast Turkey.

GAP was originally expected to cost \$32 billion and to have been completed by 2010. At its heart lies a system of 22 dams, 19 hydraulic power plants, and the irrigation of 17,000 square kilometers (approximately 6,500 square miles) of land. GAP is currently only two-thirds complete, and a shortage of funds has meant that it is running well behind schedule. The dams, irrigation channels, and paved roads mentioned by Erdogan are all part of the uncompleted project. The two dams, which are at Ilisu and Silvan, are currently provisionally scheduled to be built by 2013. However, Turkey is unlikely to be able to finance them completely from its own resources. Nor, in the prevailing economic climate, is there a great appetite in the foreign investment community for the funding of large-scale infrastructure projects in developing countries.

One only has to fly over the region to see the effect of GAP on agriculture in the Tigris and Euphrates basins, transforming large tracts of what was previously semi-arid land into cultivated fields. In areas

such as the Harran plain, annual yields of cotton, wheat, barley, and lentils have tripled. However, GAP has had a greater impact on agricultural productivity than on employment. Even though it has undoubtedly created jobs in local service industries, GAP's overall impact on employment in southeast Turkey has been minor.

As well as being the poorest region in Turkey, the southeast also has the highest rate of population increase. Even in some of the richest areas in the GAP region, the pace of job creation has lagged behind the growth in available workforce. In most of the cities of southeast Turkey the unemployment rate is double or triple the 9.9% average in the country as a whole. Among young people in the cities of southeastern Turkey, unemployment often reaches 50-60%. There is no reason to suppose that, even if they can be completed, the Ilisu and Silvan dams and their associated irrigation systems will have a major impact on employment in the region.

The political controversy over GAP has not been restricted to Turkey's foreign relations. The filling of the dams that have already been completed necessitated the forced evacuation of a large number of villages. Some of the displaced villagers received free housing in nearby towns. Others did not. None were provided with an alternative livelihood. The filling of the dams also inundated numerous archaeological sites. When it is completed, the Ilisu dam will inundate most of the ancient city of Hasankeyf, whose history goes back 10,000 years.

Many Kurds already resent not only the displacements resulting from GAP, but also what they regard as the resulting destruction of their heritage through the filling of the dams, which are also used to produce electricity for the rest of the country.

It is also difficult to see how the completion of a project that was originally formulated in the 1970s will be interpreted as demonstrating the AKP's commitment to the region. Perhaps more significant, although it is impossible to be sure of the precise impact of the two-thirds of GAP that has been completed to date on recruitment to the PKK, what is certain is that it has not prevented it. Whatever else the PKK and other militant organizations in southeast Turkey - which is also the main recruiting ground for violent Islamist groups - may be short of, it is not recruits.

AFP

ANKARA ET BAGDAD COMPTENT SUR L'ÉCONOMIE POUR APAISER LEURS TENSIONS

ANKARA, 8 mars 2008 (AFP) - Responsables turcs et irakiens ont affirmé samedi à Ankara leur volonté de développer leurs relations économiques pour tourner la page des tensions suscitées le mois dernier par une opération militaire turque contre les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Notre principal objectif avec cette visite est d'avoir une relation stratégique durable avec la Turquie sur tous les plans: économique, commercial, pétrolier, politique, culturel...", a déclaré le président irakien Jalal Talabani au deuxième et dernier jour d'une visite à Ankara.

Devant un parterre d'homme d'affaires, M. Talabani, qui faisait sa première visite en Turquie en qualité de chef d'Etat, a appelé les entrepreneurs turcs à investir massivement en Irak.

"Je peux vous assurer que vous bénéficierez de toutes sortes d'aides en Irak, aussi bien au Kurdistan irakien que dans le sud, à Bagdad", a-t-il affirmé, indiquant que son ministre des Finances "disposait de plus de 25 milliards de dollars pour des investissements et des projets stratégiques".

"Nous sommes anxieux d'avoir nos amis turcs en Irak pour plusieurs raisons d'intérêt mutuel. Je pense que vous comprenez que le peuple irakien considère le peuple turc comme un peuple et un pays frères", a-t-il ajouté.

Les déclarations de M. Talabani surviennent alors que l'armée turque a mené le mois dernier une offensive militaire d'une semaine contre les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak -opération condamnée par Bagdad comme une atteinte à sa souveraineté.

Au cours d'un déjeuner donné en son honneur par le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, M. Talabani a proposé de créer une institution chargée de favoriser le développement des relations bilatérales.

"Créons un conseil politique à un haut niveau pour soutenir et contrôler le développement des relations", a-t-il suggéré, tout en encourageant Ankara à agir en concertation avec Bagdad pour lutter contre la "calamité" du terrorisme, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Assurant que "la Turquie a toujours agi envers l'Irak avec des sentiments amicaux et fraternels", M. Erdogan a pour sa part appelé à "ouvrir un nouveau chapitre".

"Je pense que nous sommes en mesure aujourd'hui de manifester la volonté politique nécessaire pour ouvrir un nouveau chapitre dans les relations turco-irakiennes", a affirmé M. Erdogan, cité par Anatolie, se déclarant convaincu du haut degré de complémentarité des économies des deux pays.



Le ministre d'Etat turc chargé du Commerce extérieur, Kürsad Tüzmen, a indiqué samedi, après avoir reçu le ministre irakien du pétrole, Hussein Chahristani, que leurs deux pays allaient finaliser fin mai un "accord de partenariat économique renforcé".

Cet accord aura pour "objectif d'intégrer les économies des deux pays autant que possible pour former une zone commune de prospérité", a-t-il dit, ajoutant que "la priorité de la Turquie était d'investir dans le développement des champs de gaz irakiens, pour l'importation et pour servir de lien vers l'Europe".

Le ministre turc de l'Energie, Hilmi Güler, a évoqué un projet à long terme de construction d'un second oléoduc entre l'Irak et la Turquie.

Les exportations turques en Irak ont atteint 2,82 milliards de dollars (1,83 milliard d'euros) en 2007 et les importations irakiennes en Turquie 650 millions de dollars (422 millions d'euros), selon les statistiques officielles turques.

M. Tüzmen a évalué à 6 milliards de dollars le volume des échanges bilatéraux attendu en 2008 et affirmé que l'objectif pour 2010 était de 20 milliards de dollars.

Les entreprises turques sont particulièrement actives en Irak dans le domaine du bâtiment. Depuis 2003, elles y ont engrangé des contrats d'une valeur de 4,2 milliards de dollars, selon ces statistiques.

AFP

IRAK: ATTENTAT SUICIDE DEVANT UN HÔTEL DE LUXE DE SOULEIMANIYEH, UN TUÉ

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 10 mars 2008 (AFP) - Au moins une personne a été tuée et treize autres blessées lundi dans un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée devant un grand hôtel de la ville de Souleimaniyeh, au Kurdistan irakien (nord), a indiqué un responsable local.

En début de soirée, un kamikaze a fait exploser sa voiture piégée devant l'hôtel Palace, a déclaré à l'AFP le gouverneur de Souleimaniyeh, Dana Ahmad Majid.

Une personne a été tuée et treize autres blessées, selon un premier bilan fourni par M. Majid.

L'incident a eu lieu vers 18H40 (15H40 GMT) en plein centre-ville. L'hôtel Palace est le plus grand hôtel de Souleimaniyeh, l'une des deux principales villes du Kurdistan irakien située à 330 km au nord de Bagdad.

La région autonome du Kurdistan, entité alliée des Etats-Unis et de facto indépendante du gouvernement de Bagdad, est habituellement épargnée par les violences qui frappent le reste de l'Irak.

AFP

TURQUIE/ÉMEUTES KURDES: DEUX DIRIGEANTS KURDES CONDAMNÉS À 10 MOIS DE PRISON

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 11 mars 2008 (AFP) -- Deux anciens dirigeants d'un parti pro-kurde ont été condamnés mardi à 10 mois de prison chacun par une Cour de Diyarbakir pour leur implication dans les émeutes qui avaient secoué en 2006 cette principale ville du sud-est de la Turquie, majoritairement kurde.

Necdet Atalay, ex-chef provincial pour Diyarbakir du parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), principale formation pro-kurde du pays, et son ex-adjoint Musa Farisogullari étaient jugés en absentia dans le cadre des violents incidents qui avaient dévasté la ville en mai-avril 2006.

La cour a décidé d'acquitter sept autres prévenus.

Les émeutes ont débuté à Diyarbakir le 28 mars lors de funérailles de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) abattus par l'armée puis se sont étendues à d'autres villes de la région.

Seize personnes, dont trois enfants, ont été tuées durant les heurts, les forces de sécurité faisant usage de leurs armes et de grenades lacrymogènes pour disperser les manifestants, qui ont attaqué les policiers avec des cocktails Molotov et ont saccagé des bâtiments publics et des magasins.

Turquie: offensive pour la paix

De nombreuses voix s'élèvent contre les opérations militaires visant la guérilla kurde.

Huit jours après le début, le 21 février, de son opération terrestre dans le nord de l'Irak, l'armée turque a amorcé son retrait des montagnes kurdes. Pendant tout ce temps, le pays a semblé devoir retourner à ses réflexes nationalistes habituels. Les médias annonçaient, chaque jour, le nombre de morts de part et d'autre à la manière d'un match de foot. Les scènes dramatiques des enterrements des jeunes militaires au son des cris de douleur des familles alimentaient la colère des manifestants maudissant la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Le slogan « Les martyrs ne meurent pas, la patrie ne peut se diviser » retentissait à nouveau

dans les rues.

C'est dans cette atmosphère que l'une des légendes de la scène pop turque, le transsexuel Bülent Ersoy, a, lors de son programme télévisé, tenu des propos antimilitaristes critiquant l'opération. En annonçant que s'il avait un fils il ne voudrait pas l'envoyer se faire tuer à la guerre, Ersoy s'est retrouvé promu porte-parole de la masse silencieuse des pacifistes. De nombreux intellectuels, les organisations kurdes, les militants des droits de l'homme ont pris parti pour l'artiste. Une pétition intitulée « Assez de morts, nous voulons une solution » a été lancée par ces mêmes cercles. Les

Etats-Unis, mal à l'aise face à cette opération, ont demandé son interruption rapide.

L'attaque contre les positions du PKK aura duré neuf jours. 27 jeunes militaires turcs et plus de 240 militants du PKK seraient morts dans ces combats. Le gouvernement AKP (conservateur musulman) a répété maintes fois que l'action militaire ne pourrait seule résoudre le problème kurde. Même si le Parlement a autorisé des opérations armées jusqu'en octobre, on attend désormais les mesures sociales et politiques que les autorités d'Ankara tardent à annoncer.

Nükte V. Ortaç

Irak: 44 tués, début des négociations sur la présence américaine

BAGDAD (AFP) — Quarante-quatre personnes ont été tuées, dont seize dans un attentat contre un autocar, mardi en Irak, où Irakiens et Américains ont entamé des discussions sur l'épineuse question de la présence militaire américaine à long terme dans le pays.

L'attaque la plus meurtrière a visé un autocar transportant des civils sur la principale route du sud du pays, entre Nassiriyah et Bassorah. Un engin piégé a explosé au passage du véhicule, tuant 16 passagers et blessant 22 autres, selon un responsable de la police de Nassiriyah, le lieutenant-colonel Ali Siwan.

Au nord de Bagdad, à Dhoulouiya, au moins huit personnes ont été tuées et 13 blessées dans un attentat suicide contre un barrage conjoint des forces de sécurité irakiennes et de miliciens sunnites en lutte contre Al-Qaïda, selon une source policière.

Environ 80.000 Irakiens, pour la plupart sunnites, se sont alliés aux forces américaines pour combattre Al-Qaïda et sont la cible d'attaques redoublées du réseau d'Oussama Ben Laden.

A Mossoul (nord), au moins neuf personnes, dont quatre policiers, ont été tuées dans des affrontements entre policiers et hommes armés non identifiés.

Mossoul -troisième ville du pays abritant une population majoritairement arabe sunnite, mais également des chiites et des Kurdes- est considérée par les militaires américains comme l'épicentre de la lutte contre Al-Qaïda.

A Kout (centre-sud), dix personnes, dont deux civils, ont été tuées dans des affrontements entre forces de sécurité et combattants de l'Armée du Mahdi.

Dirigée par le jeune chef chiite Moqtada Sadr,



l'armée du Mahdi, une des milices chiites les plus puissantes d'Irak, est engagée dans le sud du pays dans une lutte sans merci avec des factions chiites rivales accusées par les partisans de Sadr d'être infiltrées au sein de l'appareil d'Etat et des forces de sécurité.

Enfin, à Bassorah, un civil a été abattu par des hommes armés.

Ces violences surviennent au lendemain de la mort de huit militaires américains dans deux attaques distinctes, faisant du 10 mars la journée la plus meurtrière en sept mois pour l'armée américaine.

Le bilan total des pertes américaines depuis l'invasion de mars 2003, approche le seuil symbolique des 4.000 morts, avec 3.983 soldats américains tués, selon un bilan de l'AFP établi à partir de chiffres du site internet indépendant www.icasualties.org.

Environ 2.000 GI's ont commencé la semaine dernière à quitter l'Irak dans le cadre du retrait annoncé de cinq brigades de combat --soit l'équivalent d'environ 30.000 hommes-- d'ici juillet.

La question d'un calendrier de retrait des troupes américaines reste sujet à controverse aux Etats-Unis, et constitue l'un des principaux enjeux de l'élection présidentielle de novembre, alors qu'ont



commencé à Bagdad des négociations sur l'avenir des relations bilatérales.

"Les deux parties ont débuté (mardi) au ministère irakien des Affaires étrangères les négociations (...)", en particulier sur la "question de la présence temporaire des troupes américaines en Irak", indique un communiqué officiel du ministère.

Fin novembre, le président américain George W. Bush et le Premier ministre irakien Nouri Al-Maliki avaient signé une "déclaration de principes" fixant la matrice de ces négociations, pour donner un nouveau cadre à la présence militaire américaine en Irak après 2008 et régir les relations bilatérales à long terme.

Selon ce texte, les forces américaines en Irak ne seront plus placées sous mandat des Nations unies après 2008, mais en vertu d'un accord entre Washington et Bagdad.

Cet accord, qui doit être signé d'ici le 31 juillet, s'inscrirait dans ce que la Maison-Blanche a présentée comme un partenariat "stratégique" à long terme, comprenant aussi les relations politiques et diplomatiques, économiques ou culturelles.

LEXPRESS 12 mars 2008

"L'Iran souhaite devenir la puissance dominante de la région"

Propos recueillis par Marc Epstein et Pierre Ganz dans le cadre de l'émission RFI L'Express L'Invité de la semaine

Yann Richard, professeur à l'université Paris III et auteur de L'Iran. Naissance d'une république islamique (La Martinière), décrypte les ambitions régionales de Téhéran.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a été reçu avec les honneurs, les 2 et 3 mars, à Bagdad. Un président iranien en Irak, quel sens cela a-t-il? D'abord, je constate que, parmi tous les chefs d'Etat de la région, c'est lui qui se déplace. Il n'a pas peur d'aller dans ce pays, pourtant dominé par les Américains, en particulier sur le plan militaire. L'Iran et l'Irak ont des liens extrêmement anciens, d'ordre culturel et religieux. L'Irak est un pays artificiel, créé en 1920 par les Britanniques, avec une composition ethnique hétéroclite qui le rend très difficilement gérable. Et voici que, pour la première fois, les chiites, majoritaires dans la population, y ont la mainmise dans les principaux organes du pouvoir, et notamment à la présidence de la République. Pour l'Iran, lui-même chiite, il était inespéré de voir émerger ainsi un tel tremplin pour son influence dans la région.

Existe-t-il un axe chiite Bagdad-Téhéran? C'est la hantise des puissances de la région, à majorité sunnite - Jordanie, Egypte, Koweït, Arabie saoudite... Ces pays craignent la montée d'un pouvoir qui donnerait aux Iraniens un rôle prépondérant. De fait, les liens entre les dirigeants

actuels de l'Irak et l'Iran sont nombreux. Plusieurs étaient exilés pendant des années en Iran, au temps de Saddam Hussein. En outre, la communauté kurde est présente de part et d'autre de la frontière. Enfin, les deux Etats ont des intérêts communs. En particulier sur le plan économique. Nombre de produits industriels iraniens sont exportés vers l'Irak, légalement ou non.

Le gouvernement en place à Bagdad satisfait-il les Iraniens? Non, car c'est un régime inféodé et faible. Cela dit, Téhéran ne veut pas d'un Irak fort. Le souvenir de la guerre meurtrière entre les deux pays, de 1980 à 1988, a laissé des traces : l'Iran ne souhaite pas voir à nouveau une puissance arrogante, le long de ses frontières, qui pourrait tenter de lui rogner des avantages commerciaux ou politiques.

Des discussions directes réunissent experts américains et iraniens sur la sécurité en Irak. Ces débats peuvent-ils mener à un rapprochement quelconque? Téhéran rêve depuis très longtemps que Washington lui tende la main. Les Iraniens désirent normaliser leurs relations avec les Américains.

Ils ont une façon très particulière d'y parvenir! Sur ce sujet, il y a le discours et la

réalité...

Quelles sont les ambitions régionales de Téhéran? Le régime iranien a un avantage stratégique: il peut mettre en place, au-delà du territoire national, des relais d'influence au sein des minorités chiites. Depuis la révolution islamique, en 1979, Téhéran a beaucoup utilisé la communauté chiite au Liban, qui a été instrumentalisée dans la lutte contre Israël. A mon avis, l'Iran ne peut causer aucun dégât à Israël et ne souhaite pas sa disparition. Si la question palestinienne était réglée, les Iraniens reconnaîtraient sans doute l'Etat d'Israël. En attendant, leur ambition est d'utiliser le conflit israélo-palestinien afin de déstabiliser les pays de la région, tels que l'Egypte ou la Jordanie, alliés des Etats-Unis. A terme, l'Iran voudrait devenir la puissance régionale dominante. Sa stabilité, son importance économique et démographique sont telles que cette ambition ne me semble pas surproportionnée.

Quelle est l'utilité stratégique du dossier nucléaire? Je suis persuadé que les Iraniens ont en vue une dimension militaire dans ce domaine. Non pour agresser qui que ce soit, mais pour jouer la carte de la dissuasion.

TIRS D'ARTILLERIE IRANIENS SUR TROIS VILLAGES DU KURDISTAN IRAKIEN

AFP

SOULEIMANIYAH (Irak), 13 mars 2008 (AFP) -

Trois villages du Kurdistan irakien, frontaliers de l'Iran dans le nord de l'Irak, ont été la cible jeudi matin de tirs de l'artillerie iranienne qui n'ont pas fait de victime, a affirmé un responsable administratif local.

Ces bombardements visaient des bases du groupe séparatiste kurde du Pèjak (PJAK), a déclaré le maire de Zarawah, l'une des trois localités touchées.

"Vers 6H00 (03H00 GMT) ce matin, l'armée iranienne a bombardé à l'artillerie trois villages frontaliers", a expliqué à l'AFP le maire, Azad Wassu.

Les tirs ont duré une trentaine de minutes. "Ces bombardements n'ont fait aucune victime mais ils ont terrifié les habitants", selon M. Wassu.

Le village de Zarawah est situé près de la ville de Qalat Dizhan, à environ 160 kilomètres au nord de la ville de Souleimaniyah, dans la région autonome du Kurdistan.

Le groupe séparatiste du PJAK est lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), basé dans le nord de l'Irak.

AFP

TURQUIE: ERDOGAN PROMET DES INVESTISSEMENTS ET UNE CHAÎNE TV POUR LES KURDES

ANKARA, 13 mars 2008 (AFP) - 12h36 - Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a déclaré jeudi que son gouvernement envisageait d'investir plusieurs milliards de dollars dans des projets d'infrastructure dans le sud-est du pays, à majorité kurde, et de lancer une chaîne de télévision en kurde.

Le gouvernement projette d'investir jusqu'à 15 milliards de dollars ((9,6 mds d'euros) sur cinq ans dans le projet d'Anatolie du Sud-Est, un gigantesque programme de développement (barrages, irrigation, développement social) lancé au début des années 1980, a dit M. Erdogan aux journalistes.

L'argent sera dépensé pour la construction de deux barrages, de systèmes d'irrigation, de routes et le déminage de la frontière avec la Syrie pour la rendre à l'agriculture, a-t-il souligné.

"Nous avons achevé les préparatifs quant au financement", a dit le Premier ministre.

Il a en outre expliqué que le groupe public de radio et télévision TRT allait bientôt lancer une chaîne qui diffuserait depuis le sud-est, frontalier de l'Irak et de l'Iran, essentiellement en Kurde mais aussi en Farsi et Arabe.

La TRT diffuse depuis 2004 certains programmes en Kurde, une décision qui à l'époque avait favorisé l'ouverture des négociations d'adhésion d'Ankara à l'Union européenne.

M. Erdogan est sous le feu des pressions dans son pays et des Etats-Unis pour accompagner les mesures militaires contre les rebelles kurdes par des initiatives politiques et économiques en faveur de la communauté kurde, afin d'éroder le soutien populaire au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Les Etats-Unis, comme la Turquie, considèrent le PKK comme une organisation terroriste. Mais l'offensive terrestre menée du 21 au 29 février par l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak contre des positions du PKK les a placés dans une situation délicate vis-à-vis de leur allié irakien.

AFP

10 REBELLES KURDES TUÉS PAR L'ARMÉE DANS LE SUD-EST DE LA TURQUIE (ARMÉE)

ANKARA, 13 mars 2008 (AFP) - Dix rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués lors de combat avec les forces de sécurité depuis mercredi dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a affirmé jeudi l'armée.

Les accrochages, qui se sont poursuivis de manière discontinue depuis mercredi, ont eu lieu dans la province de Sîrnak, riveraine de l'Irak où l'armée a mené le mois dernier une opération terrestre contre les rebelles, a indiqué l'état-major de l'armée turque dans un communiqué.

Une femme figure parmi les victimes, ajoute le communiqué, qui précise que

les militaires ont découvert un nombre important de grenades disposées comme des pièges ainsi que des explosifs et des vivres appartenant aux rebelles.

L'armée turque a mené plusieurs raids aériens depuis la mi-décembre et une opération terrestre d'une semaine fin février contre les rebelles du PKK retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak. Ceux-ci se servent de cette région comme d'une base arrière pour leurs actions en Turquie.

L'armée turque lutte depuis 1984 contre le PKK dans le sud-est anatolien. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

AFP

HALABJA PLEURE SES MORTS ET DEMANDE JUSTICE

HALABJA (Irak), 16 mars 2008 (AFP) - Les habitants d'Halabja ont commémoré dimanche l'attaque au gaz qui a fait 5.000 victimes il y a 20 ans dans ce village du Kurdistan irakien, et demandé la mort de celui qu'ils en tiennent pour responsable, un fidèle de Saddam Hussein, "Ali le Chimique".

Tous vêtus de noir, ils se sont rassemblés dans le centre du village qui porte encore les traces des batailles qui opposaient dans ce secteur, alors que la guerre Iran-Irak touchait à sa fin, l'armée irakienne aux combattants kurdes et à des unités iraniennes.

Des femmes, le visage baigné de larmes, portaient des portraits de parents tombés lors de cette attaque liée aux campagnes militaires lancées, dans les années 80, par Saddam Hussein contre les organisations kurdes opposées au régime de Bagdad.

Ces opérations ont dévasté quelque 4.000 villages et fait 180.000 victimes, et ont été considérées comme des tentatives de génocide par la communauté internationale.

Le régime de Saddam Hussein a été accusé d'avoir utilisé des armes chimiques contre Halabja le 16 mars 1988, et le bilan de ces bombardements a été établi à 5.000 tués par des organisations humanitaires internationales.

Vingt ans plus tard, des personnes affectées meurent encore, comme Ismail Abed al-Rashid, âgé d'une quarantaine d'années, décédé le 13 mars de complications respiratoires.

"Ismail enterrait des victimes des bombardements chimiques lorsque lui-même en a été victime. Il est finalement mort vendredi après une longue agonie", a expliqué à l'AFP Luqman Mohammed, l'un des responsables de l'Association des victimes d'Halabja.

Les commémorations ont été entourées de mesures strictes de sécurité et la circulation des véhicules a été interdite de crainte de voitures piégées.

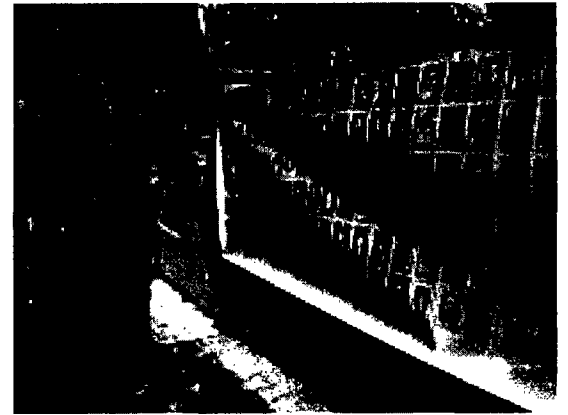
Une statue à la mémoire d'un courageux père de famille, Omar Haro, a été inaugurée. Selon les autorités locales, il a tenté de sauver ses enfants de la mort et a succombé au gaz en serrant contre lui sa petite fille et son petit garçon.

Mais ces cérémonies ont également été l'occasion pour des habitants d'exprimer leur colère à l'égard des autorités kurdes et irakiennes.

"Nous demandons la reconstruction d'Halabja", explique Ahmed Abdallah, 75 ans, qui raconte qu'il a perdu six de ses enfants, trois filles et trois garçons, dans le bombardement.

Il exige également que le gouvernement du Kurdistan attaque en justice les entreprises étrangères qui ont fourni les gaz de combat à l'armée irakienne, pour demander des compensations.

"Halabja souffre de sa destruction, et le gouvernement irakien ne fait rien. Le



village est un symbole de la tragédie nationale et nous avons besoin de beaucoup d'argent pour le reconstruire", assure Nemat Marof, un habitant de 36 ans.

Mais, se plaint Souad Hassan, une mère de famille de 50 ans, "les responsables ne pensent à Halabja que le jour de l'anniversaire", et elle dénonce la saleté des rues et le manque d'eau et d'électricité.

Comme la majorité des habitants de cette région, elle exige aussi que le cousin de Saddam Hussein tenu pour responsable des campagnes contre les Kurdes, Ali Hassan Al Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique", soit exécuté.

Il a été condamné à mort en juin dernier par un tribunal irakien et sa peine est exécutoire, mais elle a été retardée par des dissensions politiques sur l'opportunité de pendre le condamné après la controverse ouverte par la mort de Saddam Hussein, le 30 décembre 2006.

"Nous demandons des compensations et l'exécution d'Ali le Chimique", ajoute-t-elle, en expliquant avoir perdu ses parents et ses frères dans l'attaque du village.

"Nous exigeons que le gouvernement exécute Ali le Chimique et ses complices", a encore déclaré à l'AFP Aras Abdi, porte-parole de l'Association des victimes d'Halabja.

"Peu importe qu'il soit exécuté à Halabja ou non. L'important c'est qu'il soit mis à mort quelque part en Irak".

AFP

DES MILLIERS DE BOUGIES À STOCKHOLM EN MÉMOIRE DES VICTIMES DE HALABJA

STOCKHOLM, 16 mars 2008 (AFP) - Des milliers de bougies ont été allumées dimanche dans le centre de Stockholm en mémoire des 5.000 victimes du bombardement à l'arme chimique, le 16 mars 1988, de la ville kurde de Halabja en Irak par les forces de Saddam Hussein.

Près de 500 personnes dont beaucoup étaient vêtues de noir se sont réunies dans un square de Stockholm et ont déployé une banderole sur laquelle était écrit "plus jamais Halabja" alors que des centaines de ballons noirs ont été lâchés dans le ciel.

"C'est important de se souvenir. Cinq mille personnes ont été assassinées", a déclaré à l'AFP Hamid Rahimzadeh, 18 ans, qui était venu avec son cousin de 4 ans et qui a allumé l'une des bougies posées sur l'escalier d'accès au square Sergels torg.

"Ce n'est pas quelque chose que l'on peut oublier", a renchéri Nawroz Zakholly, 15 ans, qui vit depuis toujours en Suède mais dont les parents, Kurdes, parlent "constamment" du massacre commis il y a exactement 20 ans.

Nombre de responsables politiques suédois étaient également présents.

"Le massacre de Halabja est l'un des pires événements que l'humanité ait connus à l'époque moderne", a affirmé Mona Sahlin, la dirigeante du parti socialiste citée par l'agence de presse TT.

En Norvège, près de 500 personnes devaient participer dimanche soir à une marche aux flambeaux dans le centre d'Oslo à la mémoire des victimes du massacre, selon les organisateurs.

Le Monde
Mercredi 12 mars 2008

Irak Les janissaires de l'Amérique

Cinq ans après l'invasion, les Américains ont engagé un formidable pari tactique en Irak. Ennemis d'hier, 80 000 sunnites, anciens « terroristes », ex-saddamistes et guerriers tribaux sont désormais salariés des États-Unis. Amis ou « chevaux de Troie » de la rébellion ? A Bagdad, le débat fait rage.

PATRICE CLAUDE
BAGDAD, ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL



Un membre d'un comité populaire d'autodéfense, le 18 janvier, à Saha, dans la banlieue sud de Bagdad. YURI KOZYREV

C'est un jeune officier aux yeux clairs qui termine son troisième séjour en Irak. Face au Français qui l'apostrophe dans le lobby de l'Al Rachid, dernier « palace » à peu près en état de marche au cœur de la fameuse « zone verte » ultra-fortifiée de Bagdad, Dexter F. a une hésitation. « *Sorry "frenchie", je n'ai pas le droit de vous parler nommément, vous le savez bien.* » On sait. Depuis un an environ, les autorités irakiennes font la même chose et interdisent à leurs policiers, soldats et même aux médecins de s'exprimer dans la presse. Notamment sur les attentats, les attaques, le nombre des victimes. Heureusement, tout le monde n'obéit pas...

Para de la 82^e unité aéroportée, le soldat américain a fini par se laisser tomber sur la banquette de cuir noir. On l'avait rencontré début 2007 dans un Pizza Hut de Camp Victory, l'immense base logistique d'environ 60 000 hommes et femmes que

l'US Army a édifée comme une ville de banlieue texane près de l'aéroport international de Bagdad. A l'époque, Dexter entamait un troisième séjour irakien qui allait durer quinze mois. Il était hors de lui.

« *Franchement, lâche-t-il à la première question, heureusement qu'on s'en va, je n'en peux plus. Voilà maintenant qu'on nous oblige à siroter le thé avec des types qui nous tiraient dessus il n'y a pas six mois. Et qui nous tirent encore peut-être à la nuit tombée, on n'en sait rien. Des types qui ont parfois tué les nôtres, qui ont torturé, mutilé ou décapité des civils. C'est dégueulasse...* » Tout Bagdad ne parle plus que de ces « types », les « *sahwas* », les « *Fils d'Irak* », les « *comités populaires d'autodéfense* » ou encore les « *citoyens locaux concernés* », comme les a curieusement baptisés l'ambassade américaine.

Peu importe l'appellation, ce sont bien les mêmes hommes, les mêmes groupes, tous avec la même paye et la même mission, qui sont recrutés depuis un an environ pour aider, moyennant 10 dollars

par jour, à établir dans leurs quartiers, dans leurs villes ou leurs tribus, la *pax americana* en Irak. Payer l'ennemi pour qu'il cesse ses attaques. Salaries les « bad guys », les « bandits », les « rebelles », les « insurgés », les « terroristes » pour qu'ils changent de camp, qu'ils deviennent les yeux et les oreilles de l'armée, qu'ils cessent, à tout le moins, de tirer sur les « boys » ou de placer des engins explosifs sous leurs pieds.

L'idée, qui, comme dit le général David L. Petraeus, commandant en chef du corps expéditionnaire, « *a largement contribué* » à la baisse de 60 % à 70% des attaques et des attentats depuis huit mois, était tellement simple que certains, dans les chancelleries, se demandent pourquoi il a fallu près de 4 000 soldats tués, 29 000 blessés et, selon l'OMS, au moins 150 000 victimes irakiennes, pour en arriver là.

La première raison est simple, les stratégies de Washington ne l'avaient pas envisagée. C'est un petit clan tribal sunnite de l'immense province sunnite d'Al-Anbar,

qui fut longtemps « la » place forte des djihadistes anti-occidentaux, qui approcha le premier, fin 2006, les commandants américains du cru. Le père et trois des frères du cheikh Abdoul Sattar Abou Richa, petit chef local qui, jusque-là, ne s'intéressait guère, dit-on, qu'à la meilleure manière de détrousser les véhicules qui traversaient « son » territoire tribal, avaient été égorgés par des fidèles d'Al-Qaida en Irak.

Pourquoi ? Refus de coopérer sans doute. On ne saura jamais combien de milliers de civils irakiens, notamment chiïtes, ont été massacrés dans des centaines d'attentats aveugles, y compris des dizaines de « résistants » opposés à l'occupation mais jugés par trop « mécréants », par les obscurantistes patentés du djihad. Du côté de Diyala et de Mossoul, où ils sont engagés depuis huit semaines dans « une offensive de longue haleine » contre « les dernières concentrations terroristes », les soldats américains et irakiens découvrent plus d'un charnier par semaine. 20, 30, 40 cadavres à chaque fois, presque toujours avec les mains liées dans le dos, une balle dans la nuque et parfois des traces d'horribles tortures sur le corps.

C'est, entre autres, à cause de ces tueries que le phénomène du Réveil (*Sahwa* en arabe) a commencé.

Assaillis par leurs ouailles qui n'en pouvaient plus du rigorisme moyenâgeux que les fanatiques salafistes imposaient dans leurs villages ou leurs quartiers à Bagdad, Fallouja, Ramadi ou Bakouba, des dizaines de cheikhs tribaux, souvent plus importants qu'Abou Richa, qui sera assassiné en septembre, dix jours après avoir imprudemment serré

la main du président Bush face aux télévisions, ont fini par imiter l'exemple et offert leurs services à l'Amérique.

La deuxième raison du retard avec lequel le haut commandement américain a engagé le plus formidable et le plus dangereux pari tactique du conflit irakien, c'est un lieutenant-colonel d'infanterie, anonyme lui aussi parce que, selon la formule consacrée, il « n'est pas autorisé à parler à la presse », qui l'explique : « Nous nous sommes aveuglés tout seuls. Nous avons cru en notre propre propagande qui faisait de tous ceux qui nous attaquaient soit des baassistes acharnés, soit des fanatiques islamistes aux ordres d'Al-Qaida. »

A la veille de son départ définitif d'Irak, le général Raymond Odierno, numéro deux du corps expéditionnaire, ne disait pas autre chose : après avoir admis que

l'Amérique avait commis des erreurs « en 2003 et 2004, avec le démantèlement de l'armée irakienne, l'éviction des baassistes de l'administration, etc. », il affirmait, en février à *Newsweek*, avoir tardivement « réalisé que beaucoup de ces gens qui nous combattaient n'étaient pas vraiment des insurgés. Ils n'étaient pas vraiment idéologi-

quement opposés au progrès. (...) Ils essayaient juste de survivre. »

En janvier 2007, les « citoyens locaux concernés » étaient moins de 1 500 quand le président Bush, jouant son va-tout, décida d'envoyer, à partir de juin et pour un an, 30 000 soldats supplémentaires pour renforcer un corps expéditionnaire alors estimé à 135 000 hommes. « Nos élus réclamaient des résultats rapides – et visibles – sur le terrain, se souvient Dexter. Il fallait changer de tactique. »

L'idée, développée alors par M. Bush, était d'ouvrir « une fenêtre d'opportunité » au gouvernement du chiïte Nouri Al-Maliki afin qu'il prenne rapidement toutes les mesures législatives et pratiques à une « nécessaire réconciliation nationale » entre les communautés du cru. Pour l'essentiel, l'Amérique attend toujours. Mais le fameux « surge », le sursaut, l'effort dont le succès ou l'insuccès occupe les débats politiques en cours dans la campagne des primaires américaines, a incontestablement fonctionné parce que le général Petraeus a su profiter de deux développements assez inattendus : la suspension, depuis août 2007, des activités armées des 60 000 miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi créée par le prêcheur chiïte radical Moqtada Al-Sadr, et la surprenante montée en puissance du phénomène « sahwa ».

Aujourd'hui, les supplétifs sont autour de 80 000, de confession sunnite à 82 %, et « anciens terroristes pour au moins la moitié d'entre eux », glisse un officier supérieur chiïte. Le général Petraeus résuma sa motivation dans *Time*, le 11 février : « On ne peut pas tuer toute une insurrection, on ne peut pas vaincre tout le monde. Il faut le retourner. » En apparence, c'est fait. La seule question qui angoisse la région est de savoir pour combien de temps...

Répartis dans près de 150 milices supplétives, « les Fils d'Irak » sont essentiellement basés dans la moitié nord du pays. Sauf au Kurdistan où les pouvoirs autonomes n'en veulent sous aucun prétexte et vitupèrent contre celles qui ont été créées autour de leur région, dans les environs de Mossoul et Kirkuk. Les Kurdes ne sont pas les seuls à se méfier du phénomène.

« Subrepticement, s'alarme un ministre adjoint chiïte qui dirige une grande administration à Bagdad, c'est une nouvelle armée, un gros cheval de Troie, une milice plus puissante et plus dangereuse que toutes celles qui existent déjà que les Américains ont créée. Que veut Washington au fond ? Répéter les erreurs commises en Afghanistan ? Multiplier les « seigneurs de guerre » qu'il sera impossible de désarmer ? Préparer la prochaine guerre civile peut-être ? Remettre la minorité sunnite au pouvoir pour faire pièce à l'Iran et satisfaire ses alliés sunnites du Golfe, les Saoudiens, les Jordaniens, les Egyptiens ? »

Alaa Abou Ahmed, un grand costaud

presque imberbe, âgé « d'environ 30 ans », mécanicien de son état et membre salarié de la milice créée l'an dernier dans le « chaud » district d'Al-Dora, dans le sud de la capitale, nous explique comment le « réveil » a sonné pour lui. Il avoue d'abord sans complexe avoir « participé » au nettoyage ethnique des chiïtes qui habitaient naguère son quartier. « Oui, j'en ai tué certains », reconnaît-il d'un pâle sourire en coin. « Des salauds de toute façon. (...) Mon frère habite maintenant une petite maison qui appartenait à un tueur de Jaish-Al-Madi », la milice d'Al-Sadr, accusée par de nombreux sunnites chassés des anciens quartiers mixtes de la capitale d'avoir été le fer de lance du carnage interconfessionnel en 2006 et une grande partie de 2007.

En avril 2007, reprend Abou Ahmed, « notre cheikh nous a réunis à la mosquée.

On était une cinquantaine. Il a dit que les gens d'Al-Dora, les honnêtes commerçants, les derniers médecins, les instituteurs disaient qu'ils en avaient assez des combats et des raids des apostats » (dans le langage codé en vigueur depuis le début de la guerre civile, les « apostats », pour les activistes sunnites, sont les chiïtes, et les « takfiris », « ex-communicateurs », pour leurs homologues chiïtes, ce sont les sunnites). « Il a dit qu'un officier infidèle avait proposé d'arrêter les combats, de mettre des murs anti-bombes autour de nos quartiers, de nous laisser protéger nous-mêmes nos rues et nos maisons. Il a dit que les "Amrikis" proposaient de nous organiser, de fournir des armes et des véhicules en cas de besoin. Et même de nous donner un salaire de 14 000 dinars par jour (environ 10 dollars ou 7 euros) ! Certains d'entre nous ont crié à la trahison. Les autres ont accepté. »

Comme beaucoup de ceux passés à la coopération avec « l'envahisseur », le chef du groupe d'Alaa, un certain Saleh Kashgul Saleh, était colonel dans les services de sécurité intérieure – les « moukhabarates » de triste mémoire – de Saddam Hussein. « Qu'avions-nous à perdre ?, poursuit notre interlocuteur. La plupart d'entre nous ont accepté que les infidèles prennent leur photo et leurs empreintes pour entrer leur identité dans leurs ordinateurs en échange du badge qui nous permet de sortir armés. Pas moi. Quand je sors, j'emprunte celui d'un de mes cousins. Je préfère rester anonyme. Un jour, les "Amrikis" partirent. »

Les listes peuvent tomber entre les mains des moudjahidin. Ou bien dans celles des « Iraniens » qui nous gouvernent et dont il faudra bien qu'on s'occupe, plus tard...

Depuis octobre, au moins deux cents miliciens des « comités sahwas », dont plusieurs dizaines de cheikhs claniques, ont été assassinés, parfois sur ordre d'Al-Qaida, souvent par des membres de leur propre petite armée ou de leur tribu. Pour certains, c'est une nouvelle guerre civile, intrasunnite désormais, qui démarre en Irak. « Les sahwas sont presque tous infiltrés ou complices des rebelles », répe-

« On ne peut pas tuer toute une insurrection, on ne peut pas vaincre tout le monde. Il faut les retourner »

Général David Petraeus

tent inlassablement les officiers irakiens de l'armée et de la police qui sont presque tous chiïtes et qui se méfient des « Fils d'Irak » comme de la peste.

Les militaires américains admettent qu'il « peut y avoir des traîtres » au sein de leurs nouveaux groupes de supplétifs. Plusieurs dizaines d'entre eux ont dû être arrêtés pour des exactions contre les civils, ou « meurtres extrajudiciaires ». Sur le terrain, beaucoup, comme Dexter, ne « tournent jamais le dos » aux nouveaux alliés. Mais les officiers insistent : « Notre processus de sélection est bon », affirme le contre-amiral Greg Smith, porte-parole de l'US Army.

Une chose est sûre, le processus qui avait consisté, dès avril 2003, à liquider l'armée et tous les services de sécurité nationale, de même qu'à interdire tout emploi public aux adhérents du parti Baas, est bel et bien renversé. A Adhamiyeh, l'un des derniers bastions sunnites de Bagdad, le nouvel homme fort était un ancien officier de police, le colonel Riyad Al-Samarraï. Tué le 7 janvier dans un attentat-suicide, il a été immédiatement remplacé par un solide gaillard en veste de cuir, naguère officier baasiste lui aussi, nommé Farouk Abdou Sattar Al-Obeidi.

A la satisfaction des généraux de l'US Army, l'« œuvre » du « martyr héroïque », comme disent les affiches de deuil collées sur les murs décrépits et troués de balles du quartier, se poursuit. Les centaines de miliciens qu'il avait recrutés pour « défendre » le lieu continuent le « travail ». On peut les voir à toute heure du jour et de la nuit, certains en civil avec keffieh rouge et blanc sur le chef, d'autres tête nue, en vareuse vaguement kaki, kalachnikov au poing, dresser des barrages autour des voies et des lieux stratégiques, fouiller les véhicules et les passants, vérifier les papiers de tous ceux qui entrent ou sortent du quartier.

A Fazl, autre quartier central de la capitale, Adel Al-Mashadani, ancien officier de la Garde républicaine spéciale de l'ancien dictateur, est désormais « le Lion de Bagdad ». Au service des Américains. Que les murs de ses rues soient couverts de graffitis à la gloire du « grand martyr Saddam » ou réclament « la mort pour

« Toute l'entreprise est un formidable pari sur l'avenir de l'Irak »

Labid Abbawi,
haut fonctionnaire irakien

Maliki ! », le premier ministre chiïte du pays, importe peu. Le « Lion » contrôle plusieurs centaines d'hommes en armes et il affirme à qui veut l'entendre que « jamais la police ou l'armée des "Perses" qui contrôlent l'Irak n'entrera » dans « sa » zone.

A Amriya, c'est un certain Abou Ahmed, ancien capitaine de l'armée baasiste et ancien chef d'une unité de l'Armée islamique en Irak, l'une des organisations majeures de la « résistance », qui dirige le « Réveil » local. Dans la partie ouest du Grand Bagdad, qui inclut notamment la localité d'Abou Ghraïb, Abou Marouf, naguère « émir » local d'un groupe de la résistance nationaliste dénommé Brigades de la révolution de 1920, contrôle aujourd'hui la zone avec 13 000 « salariés contractuels ».

Ramadi, Bakouba, Diyala, c'est à peu près partout la même chose désormais. Et les frictions qui tournent parfois à l'affrontement armé avec la police ou l'armée irakiennes se multiplient. La majorité chiïte qui domine le gouvernement depuis les élections de 2005 reste rétive à la volte-face américaine. Depuis un an que le général Petraeus réclame l'intégration d'au moins un quart de ses auxiliaires sunnites dans l'armée et la police, moins de 12 000 d'entre eux seraient « en passe » d'y être acceptés.

Initialement très critiques du phénomène, le premier ministre Maliki et son principal allié politique, Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim, chef du premier parti chiïte de l'Assemblée, ont tempéré leur position et saluent désormais, en public, « le sursaut patriotique des frères sunnites » qui a permis de diminuer l'intensité des carnages. Ce qu'ils en pensent vraiment transparait de leurs décisions.

Pas question par exemple d'accorder aux Américains – qui veulent aller jusqu'à 100 000 supplétifs –, tout ce qu'ils demandent pour leurs « nouveaux amis ». Pas de quartier général du « Réveil » à Bagdad, pas d'armements lourds, pas de véhicules blindés. Même le rétablissement des services publics – eau courante, électricité, reconstruction des écoles, transports, ramassages des ordures, etc. – promis par l'US Army à ses supplétifs dans les zones tribales, les villages et les quartiers urbains tarde à être mis en œuvre. « La mauvaise volonté et la corruption du gouvernement sont patentes », nous disait l'un des « pères » autoproclamés du phénomène, le cheikh Ali Hatem Al-Ali Suleiman, « prince » de la grande tribu des Douleym.

Le développement des sahwas a montré son efficacité sur le terrain. Dans la pro-

vince d'Al-Anbar, les attaques antiaméricaines ont diminué de 90 %. Les généraux s'interdisent pour autant de crier victoire et le contre-amiral Greg Smith ne cesse de mettre en garde « contre tout triomphalisme intempestif ».

Le général Petraeus et ses adjoints tiennent le même langage et réclament d'ailleurs qu'une fois la majorité des 30 000 renforts du « surge » rentrés chez eux – d'ici à juillet en principe – son contingent soit maintenu à « au moins » 135 000 hommes pour « toute l'année 2008, et sans doute plus longtemps ». A Bagdad, chacun ou presque en est persuadé, quelle que soit l'identité de celui ou celle qui occupera la Maison Blanche l'an prochain, les Américains ne sont pas prêts au départ.

Où en sera alors le phénomène sahwa ? Mystère. « Toute l'entreprise est un pari, lâche Labid Abbawi, sous-secrétaire d'Etat aux affaires étrangères, un formidable pari sur l'avenir de l'Irak. » Qu'ils aient changé de cheval pour des raisons mercantiles – outre les salaires des supplétifs, des « dons » de dizaines de milliers de dollars sont discrètement distribués aux cheikhs des tribus pacifiées –, par refus du fanatisme, par sursaut patriotique, ou simple tactique en attendant des jours meilleurs, les Fils d'Irak veulent à présent jouer un rôle politique.

Un « Parti du Réveil » est en cours de création. Certains réclament déjà des postes ministériels. La chance de la majorité chiïte, pour l'instant, est que la nouvelle armée supplétive n'obéit pas à un chef mais à 100, à 1 000. Elle est désunie, fractionnée, divisée. « Grâce à Dieu... », se rassure-t-on dans la « zone verte ». ■

Le Monde
Mercredi 12 mars 2008

Les réformateurs sont les grands perdants



Ali Khamenei (à droite) et le chef des gardiens de la révolution, Ali Jaafari

Iran : la révolution des képis...

Pour le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, le scrutin de ce vendredi devrait surtout permettre d'achever le transfert du pouvoir des mollahs aux pasdarans

C'est une révolution opaque, un coup d'Etat contre les mollahs au sein de la République des mollahs qui se trame dans le huis clos des bureaux de la garde rapprochée du Guide suprême. Entre la vieille garde des turbans et les pasdarans, « notabilisés » depuis leur participation à la guerre Iran-Irak, les couteaux sont tirés. Trente ans après la prise du pouvoir par les religieux en Iran, c'est le plus puissant d'entre eux, Ali Khamenei, le Guide suprême, qui a décidé de mettre un terme à une domination qui n'avait cessé de s'éroder pour mettre en avant les militaires du régime. Mais, pour achever cette militarisation de la République islamique, le Guide suprême n'a pas eu besoin d'évoquer les menaces américaines, d'instaurer un état d'urgence ou de proclamer la loi martiale. Il s'est contenté d'organiser soigneusement les élections législatives de ce vendredi 14 mars.

Pour les experts en décryptage des paradoxes de la République islamique, cette évolution n'est guère surprenante. « Voilà des années que le Guide suprême prépare cette substitution du réseau des gardiens de la révolution au réseau des mollahs. Sous son turban s'est toujours caché un képi. Le plus clair de son temps, il le passe à gérer les forces armées, explique un politologue iranien. Et il a compris que, face au dynamisme des jeunes générations qui ne se reconnaissent plus dans le substrat idéologique du régime, le pouvoir ne peut résister que s'il se militarise. » Alors le Conseil des Gardiens de la Révolution a fait le tri des candidatures. Pour la première fois, dans un pays qui prend un soin orgueilleux à se présenter comme une des seules démocraties de la région, plus de 2 000 candidats aux élections ont été écartés pour des raisons idéologiques et religieuses par les commissions du ministère de l'Intérieur. Mohammad Khatami, chef de file des réformateurs et président de la Répu-

blique islamique de 1997 à 2005, a évoqué cette disqualification massive comme une « catastrophe » qui pourrait « mettre en danger le système et la société ». Sans surprise, donc, le clan des réformateurs sera le grand perdant de ces élections, puisqu'ils ne seront en lice que pour 111 des 290 sièges du Parlement. Mais les proches de Rafsandjani aussi ont été affaiblis et ont été dissuadés de se présenter. Celui-ci – qui dirige encore l'Assemblée des Experts chargée, en théorie, de contrôler la nomination du Guide suprême – n'a cessé en fait de perdre du pouvoir.

« Aux premiers temps de la révolution islamique, le pouvoir était tricéphale. Il y avait le fils de Khomeini, qui dirigeait les services de renseignement, Rafsandjani, à la tête des mollahs et du Bazar, et Khamenei, qui contrôlait les organisations révolutionnaires. Ce dernier a évincé tous ses rivaux jusqu'à concentrer dans ses mains tous les pouvoirs régaliens, explique un ancien apparatchik. Dans ce contexte le président de la République Ahmadinejad, dont le mandat s'achève, n'a servi au Guide que pour lui permettre de se débarrasser de ses rivaux : il a joué la politique du pire parce qu'il avait besoin de cette phase de populisme pour évincer Rafsandjani. Or c'est chose presque faite. »

Car l'autre enjeu de ces élections est de montrer le caractère interchangeable du président Ahmadinejad. Ce scrutin est donc, en même temps, une primaire dans le clan conservateur, destinée à sélectionner les futurs candidats à l'élection présidentielle. Face aux « hommes de principe », comme se sont baptisés les hommes du président iranien, les « pragmatiques » comptent l'ex-négociateur du dossier nucléaire, Ali Larijani, qui a admis avoir eu des différends avec le président sur la stratégie à adopter vis-à-vis des puissances occidentales, Mohammed Qalibaf, le populaire maire de Téhéran, et un ex-commandant des gardiens de la révolution, Mohsen Rezaei. Tous les trois représentent des courants toujours conservateurs, mais qui pourraient empêcher les décisions du président au sein du Parlement. Quel courant sortira vainqueur des élections ? Ahmadinejad, et son populisme, peut-il l'emporter dans les campagnes malgré sa gestion désastreuse de l'économie qui a plongé le pays dans le marasme, alors que le prix du pétrole triplait ? Ce n'est pas le moindre des paradoxes d'une vie politique qui n'en manque pas. Cela dit, les élections ont beau être « arrangées » et se disputer entre des candidats triés sur le volet, la bataille électorale est âpre, et il est difficile de voir, à terme, qui l'emportera. Seule certitude : derrière ce paravent démocratique, le Guide suprême consolide son pouvoir, achève de boucler le régime et s'aliène un peu plus encore les mollahs et la société civile. **SARA DANIEL**

AVEC UN BARIL À 100 DOLLARS

L'Iran est riche, mais les Iraniens...

En campagne électorale permanente, Ahmadinejad redistribue la rente pétrolière à coups de subventions. Mais les prix flambent et le chômage demeure élevé

Monsieur le Président, je vous aime, donnez-moi un vélo. » Ce petit garçon de 8 ans soulève sa pancarte face aux caméras de la télévision d'Etat. Il s'adresse à Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, qui sourit, entouré d'une marée d'enfants. Aux garçons, il offre des bicyclettes par centaines ; aux petites filles, impeccablement voilées de blanc, il distribue des poupées. On lui répond par de jolis compliments, à peine écorchés. Il y a des sourires, des flashes, une joie assez sincère. Ahmadinejad en Père Noël ? Difficile de reconnaître la bête noire de l'Occident et d'Israël dans ce chef d'Etat qui se veut débinaire. Et pourtant cette image n'a rien d'extraordinaire en Iran. Le chef de l'Etat s'était rendu, à la fin de l'année 2007, dans la province très pauvre du Khorassan-Sud, à la frontière afghane. Il a reçu personnellement une centaine d'habitants, qui lui ont parlé de leurs dettes, du manque d'eau pour les cultures, d'un licenciement injuste à l'usine. Il leur a promis des routes, des prêts à faible taux pour les petits entrepreneurs, les jeunes mariés. Les caméras étaient là, bien sûr...

Depuis son élection, en juin 2005, le chef de l'Etat s'est lancé dans une campagne électorale permanente, qui s'est accélérée avant les législatives du 14 mars. Un véritable « Mahmoud Tour ». Ses ministres le suivent, ils tiennent symboliquement conseil dans les chefs-lieux de province. A chaque fois ils sont des milliers à l'attendre, à savourer de violentes envolées contre la corruption de leurs gouvernants, et à se défouler contre les superpuissances iniques en criant « Mort à l'Amérique ! » et « Mort à Israël ! ». Le chef de l'Etat distribue des subventions, annonce des investissements. Puis il revient plusieurs mois plus tard pour vérifier l'application des promesses. Et celles-ci ne manquent pas car, si les Iraniens sont encore pauvres, l'Iran est riche. Très riche. Le pays détient les deuxièmes réserves mondiales de pétrole (11,5%) et de gaz (14,9%). La marge de manœuvre d'Ahmadinejad est devenue considérable avec un baril à 100 dollars. Un véritable manne lorsqu'on est le quatrième producteur mondial. Dopé au pétrole, le

produit national brut du pays s'est envolé de 70% depuis 2004 (en prix courants), selon le FMI, et les recettes de l'Etat explosent.

Homme du peuple et révolutionnaire convaincu, le président entend redistribuer cette rente pétrolière. Fini l'ouverture tentée sous la présidence du réformateur Mohammad Khatami entre 1997 et 2005 : l'Iran avait commencé à expérimenter l'économie de marché, le pays s'ouvrait aux



Le président Ahmadinejad

« Que tu le veilles ou non, le système te force à partir. »

investissements étrangers. Changement de stratégie avec Ahmadinejad. Le président a commencé par dire ce qu'il pensait des économistes : il a comparé les intellectuels qui critiquent sa politique « populaire » à des « chèvres », et a déclaré prier le Seigneur pour ne jamais s'y connaître en économie. Puis il a pris une série de mesures – pour aider les plus pauvres – dont les intentions sont louables mais dont les conséquences, parfois redoutables, sont critiquées au sein de son propre camp. En 2006, après deux mois d'une tentative d'augmentation de 42% du salaire minimum, de 94 à 134 euros par mois, il a dû faire machine arrière devant la vague de licenciements qui commençait. Au

printemps 2007, il a ordonné une baisse des taux d'intérêt à 12%, au-dessous du taux d'inflation, évalué à 19% sur un an. Objectif : aider les Iraniens à emprunter. Cinquante éminents économistes ont crié au casse-cou et dénoncé les dangers d'un mécanisme inflationniste. Nouveau recul en janvier dernier. La banque centrale a mis en garde contre des taux de remboursement inquiétants des prêts accordés à tour de bras durant ses tournées provinciales. « Les gens ont l'impression qu'on leur redistribue l'argent du pétrole et qu'on leur accorde des dons », explique un ancien du Plan, dissout par le président.

La guerre des quartiers pauvres

Le bilan de cette politique généralisée de subventions ? La croissance iranienne affiche un solide 6% pour l'année en cours (voir infographie). Mais l'inflation a presque doublé et touche en premier lieu le dixième des Iraniens qui vivent sous le seuil de pauvreté. Dans les quartiers déshérités du sud de Téhéran, la grogne se fait sentir contre la hausse du prix des légumes, de la viande, de l'immobilier. Ahmadinejad a fait doubler les prêts aux jeunes ménages, contribuant à la hausse des prix de l'immobilier. Et même pour ces petites sommes, on vous répète à l'envi qu'il faut ses entrées dans l'administration pour y avoir droit.

L'afflux actuel de pétrodollars ne fait qu'accroître une tendance naturelle en Iran en vertu de quoi celui qui détient les clés du budget gère un colossal système de rentes. Selon le FMI, durant l'exercice 2005-2006, 25% du produit intérieur brut était dépensé en subventions, dont 17,5% pour les produits énergétiques ! L'Etat subventionne l'essence, mais ne peut raffiner qu'environ 60% de la consommation domestique. Faute d'avoir modernisé les capacités du pays, il a subi de plein fouet la hausse du pétrole. En juin dernier, le gouvernement a donc mis en place, à contrecœur, un plan de rationnement. A Téhéran, une vingtaine de stations-service ont été incendiées le soir même. Depuis, dans les grandes villes, on croise des centaines de voitures faisant la queue tôt le matin et jusqu'au beau milieu de la nuit près



Téhéran, juin 2007.
Au pays du pétrole, chaque iranien n'a droit qu'à 120 litres d'essence par mois à 7,4 centimes d'euro le litre.

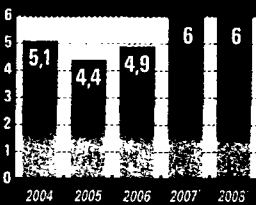
euros à l'approche de la retraite : pas de quoi faire rêver les jeunes diplômés. Ainsi Hossein, chercheur en ingénierie médicale, rencontré près de l'Université polytechnique de Téhéran, s'apprête à poursuivre ses études en neurosciences aux Etats-Unis : « *Que tu le veuilles ou non, le système te force à partir.* » Mais il reviendra au pays, il l'assure. Le taux de chômage est officiellement évalué à 10%, les économistes privés avancent facilement le double. A Shahr-e Rey, une petite main du régime, un *bas-sidj*, Moqtasser, chômeur de 25 ans, nous explique qu'il s'est inscrit dans la

Crédit photo 2007

une économie dopée au pétrole

Une croissance solide

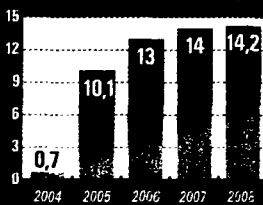
(en %)



(*) Estimations

Des échanges* en fort excédent

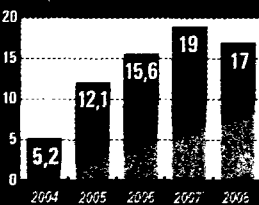
(en milliards d'euros)



* Balance des paiements courants

Mais une inflation forte

(en %)



Source: FMI

des stations-service. Un comble pour un pays producteur ! Chacun a droit à 120 litres d'essence par mois, à 7,4 centimes d'euro le litre. Les taxis, certains employés municipaux, les possesseurs de camionnettes ont droit à plus et revendent cartes de rationnement et bidons autour de 33 centimes le litre.

Pour les autres produits, une organisation de protection des consommateurs et des producteurs gère une liste de prix qui semble un inventaire à la Prévert : les céréales, le sucre, le riz, le lait premier âge, divers produits pharmaceutiques... « *L'Etat m'achète 1 kilo de blé 2 100 rials [15 centimes d'euro], explique Mirza Dankoubi, un paysan de Varamine, à l'extrême sud de la province de Téhéran. Il revend le kilo de farine au boulanger pour 500 rials.* » Quatre fois moins. « *L'Etat dépense chaque année 1,4 milliard d'euros dans le secteur, essentiellement en aides et subventions diverses aux paysans, et ne modernise rien,* estime Issa Kalantari, président de la Maison des Agriculteurs. *Ils sont au-*

jourd'hui 4,5 millions à travailler une terre qui ne peut en nourrir que la moitié. Mais le gouvernement refuse de les inciter à trouver d'autres jobs. » Ainsi, Mirza Dankoubi cultive comme tous ses voisins une terre d'à peine 3 hectares, qu'il confie à des travailleurs immigrés afghans, et tient à côté un petit restaurant. « *Ici, tout le monde a deux, voire trois jobs, sans quoi on ne s'en sort pas,* explique Morteza Soleimani, fonctionnaire au ministère de l'Industrie. L'un est taxi le soir, l'autre professeur de langues. « *Cela n'améliore pas la productivité, concède-t-il, mais l'administration ne peut pas nous payer plus. Regardez ces bureaux : on pourrait fonctionner avec moins des deux tiers des effectifs, mais ces emplois jouent un rôle d'assistance sociale. Et puis il faut bien que l'Etat nous reverse l'argent du pétrole d'une façon ou d'une autre.* »

Dans la fonction publique, un titulaire d'une licence peut espérer un salaire de 200 euros par mois, 30% de plus que le salaire minimal (136 euros). Il pourra atteindre 500

milice dans l'espoir qu'elle lui fournisse un travail. Chaque entreprise possède sa cellule.

Le mince secteur privé iranien semble actuellement atteint de frilosité aiguë. « *Vu le contexte international, personne n'ose se risquer dans les affaires,* explique un banquier étranger en poste à Téhéran. *Les investisseurs étrangers maintiennent leurs activités, mais les pressions américaines sur les banques internationales ont gelé tout nouveau projet.* » A la mi-décembre, la chambre de commerce irano-chinoise a dénoncé les banques d'Etat de Pékin, qui commençaient à refuser des lettres de crédit aux Iraniens peu après une visite du représentant du Trésor américain. Chez Renault, qui fabrique 60% de sa Logan localement (la Tondar, « tonnerre » en persan), on craint de voir les banques lâcher un projet déjà en place, étouffant ainsi cinq ans d'efforts politiques pour prendre pied en Iran. Surtout, l'Etat peine à trouver des partenaires étrangers pour développer des infrastructures pétrolières vieillissantes. Le pétrolier italien ENI a fait savoir en novembre qu'il ne comptait pas quitter le pays, malgré les pressions américaines. Il fait acte de présence en attendant des jours meilleurs. A cela, bien des Téhéranais ont du mal à croire. Mais en province on semble garder espoir en un président cousu de promesses. Tant que le prix du baril vole, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad tient les cœurs.

LOUIS IMBERT

Supreme leader ■ Ray Takeyh

Iran's orchestrated elections

As the results of Iran's parliamentary election on Friday unfold, there will be much speculation about its impact on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his tumultuous tenure. However, the underlying story has less to do with Ahmadinejad than with the triumph of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's long-term strategy of ensuring a conservative consolidation of power. Khamenei stands unchallenged at the top of the Islamic Republic, with a verdict that has only reinforced his claims of political hegemony.

It is customary to suggest that Khamenei has followed the lead of his illustrious predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in balancing Iran's various factions. The idea does have merit, as the participation of all political groups in the critical decision-making process would distribute the burden of any failed initiative on all the relevant national parties. To be sure, Khomeini was inclusive and was open to suggestions and dissent from all segments of the ruling elite.

The only problem with this narrative is that it does not adequately represent how Khamenei has comported himself. During the past two decades, the ayatollah has methodically undermined all contenders to his rule and all challengers to his preferred conservative allies.

By temperament and design, Khamenei has always been cautious and conservative, uneasy about radical solutions and self-defeating crusades. The Supreme Leader is one of the few Iranians that perceive the Islamic Republic as an attractive polity with no real need for reform or rejuvenation. Upon assumption of power in 1989, he moved to align himself with the reactionary elements in their quest to undermine President Hashemi Rafsanjani's attempt to usher in a more pragmatic approach to statecraft.

In a pattern that would often repeat itself, the hard-liners employed their institutional power to thwart reform measures. Under the auspices of Khamenei, the hard-liners systematically undermined Rafsanjani's initiatives to liberalize the economy and reach out to the international community.

It is no secret that Khamenei preferred the reliably reactionary Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri for the presidency in 1997. The election of Nateq-Nuri would have completed the conservatives' institutional dominance, as all the relevant national organs would be manned by Khamenei loyalists. Even Iran's circumscribed political process, however, can produce surprising

results, as the Iranian masses chose to empower the most serious challenge to Khamenei — Muhammad Khatami and the reform movement.

Alas, the reform interlude was not to last long. With the Supreme Leader's blessing, the conservatives cynically deployed the judiciary and the security services to close down newspapers and imprison key reform figures on contrived charges, while the Guardian Council systematically voided parliamentary legislation.

By the 2005 presidential election, Khamenei's long-term strategy of conservative predominance seemed complete, as Ahmadinejad triumphed over the aged and corrupt Rafsanjani. Although Ahmadinejad's electoral pledge of social justice has garnered much attention, he also promised to abide by the strictures and fiat of the Supreme Leader. De-

spite predictable ebbs and flows, the relationship between the two men has remained intimate. To be sure, Ahmadinejad's incendiary rhetoric and lack of coherent economic planning may disturb the Supreme Leader, but he remains loyal to the president.

Khamenei has not reached the pinnacle of power by remaining complacent about potential challenges. By encouraging younger rivals to Ahmadinejad, such as the former nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani and Tehran's mayor, Muhammad Qalibaf, he can maintain his options and keep the president on a short leash. Unlike the old guard — such as Rafsanjani and Khatami — the younger conservatives do not have an independent powerbase or sufficient stature to contest the Supreme Leader's prerogatives. Under Khamenei's direction, the Guardian Council has been careful to exclude reformers and pragmatists from serious contention for parliamentary seats, leaving assorted conservatives to battle it out among themselves. The ensuing Parliament is likely to be dominated by politicians who require Khamenei's approbation for their political viability.

Khamenei's nearly two-decade strategy of ensuring his political primacy has finally been realized. In a remarkable achievement, he has managed to marginalize the wily Rafsanjani and the still-popular Khatami. The future of Iran belongs to the Supreme Leader and dogmatic younger conservatives who outdo one another for his support and affection. Whatever the composition of the new Parliament, and whoever succeeds the office of the presidency next year, Iran has entered the age when a single mullah dominates all institutions and arbitrates all debates. Iran's Supreme Leader has never been more supreme.

Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

March 14, 2008



Revisiting Halabjah: Survivors Talk About Horror Of Attack, Continuing Ordeal

Radio Free Iraq correspondent Ahmad al-Zubaidi traveled to Halabjah recently to talk to survivors of the March 1988 attacks about the physical and psychological effects of the tragedy.

RFE/RL: There are no official statistics on the number of casualties from the 1988 chemical attack against Halabjah. But estimates by the media and nongovernmental organizations, such as the Halabjah Martyrs Organization, suggest that about 5,000 civilians were killed -- mostly women, children, and elderly who were unable to flee the town quickly enough. Kherwan, a native of Halabjah, still remembers the sound and smell of bombs and artillery shells that were packed with lethal chemical agents.

Kherwan: It was a beautiful spring day. As the clock approached 11:00 in the morning, I felt a strange sensation; my heart convulsed as if it were telling me that we were on the verge of a major calamity. Within minutes, artillery rounds began to explode in Halabjah and planes began dropping bombs on the town. The bombing was concentrated on the northern neighborhoods, so we ran and hid in our basement. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, as the intensity of the bombing wound down, I carefully sneaked out of the basement to the kitchen and carried food to my family. When the bombing stopped, we began to hear noises that sounded like metal pieces falling on the ground. But I didn't find an explanation.

I saw things that I won't forget for as long as I live. It started with a loud strange noise that sounded like bombs exploding, and a man came running into our house, shouting, "Gas! Gas!" We hurried into our car and closed its windows. I think the car was rolling over the bodies of innocent people. I saw people lying on the ground, vomiting a green-colored liquid, while others became hysterical and began laughing loudly before falling motionless onto the ground. Later, I smelled an aroma that reminded me of apples and I lost consciousness. When I awoke, there were hundreds of bodies scattered around me. After that I took shelter again in a nearby basement and the area was engulfed by an ugly smell. It was similar to rotting garbage, but then it changed to a sweet smell similar to that of apples. Then I smelled something that was like eggs. Some time later, I discovered that the Iraqi air force had bombed Halabjah with chemical weapons.

"Birds began falling from their nests, then other animals, then humans. It was total annihilation."

When you hear people shouting the words "gas" or "chemicals" -- and you hear those shouts spreading among the people -- that is when terror begins to take hold, especially among the children and the women. Your loved ones, your friends, you see them walking and then falling like leaves to the ground. It is a situation that cannot be described -- birds began falling from their nests; then other animals, then humans. It was total annihilation. Whoever was able to walk out of the town, left on foot. Whoever had a car, left by car. But whoever had too many children to carry on their shoulders, they stayed in the town and succumbed to the gas.

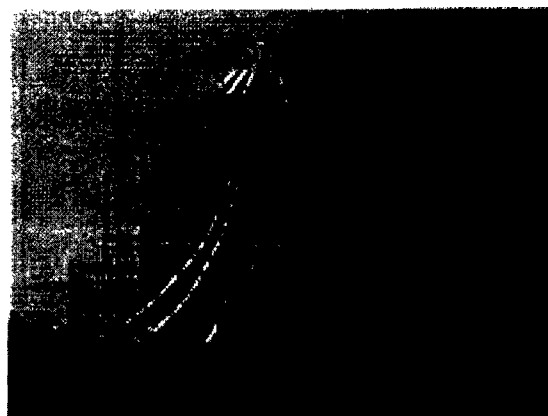
Hope Of Recovery?

RFE/RL: Walking through one of the neighborhoods of Halabjah that had been targeted, the destruction left by the attack 20 years ago can still be seen everywhere today. Many survivors who returned years later have never been able to obtain the money needed to repair what is left of their homes. On one -- an Iraqi Kurdish housewife who lost seven family members in the chemical attacks -- has used pieces of fabric and jagged wood to cover holes left in the building by shrapnel.

Iraqi Kurdish housewife: I lost seven family members who were martyred as a result of the chemical attacks. We were here three or four days before the massive bombardment. That was when the former regime [of Saddam Hussein] ordered intermittent shelling of the area. We thought that it was just [conventional artillery] shelling and that it would soon be over. But then, after that, they used chemical weapons. That resulted in the martyrdom of my father, my brother, my mother, and four other siblings.

RFE/RL: The woman, who asked not to be identified, also complained that political affiliations are playing a role in the way Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq disburse aid payments to widows and survivors -- with victims from one of the major political parties being allocated more money than those who were political independents.

Iraqi Kurdish housewife: We do have a complaint regarding the fact that a family with one martyr receives the same salary as another family with seven martyrs. We think that it should not be this way. There has to be equity, for



those families with seven martyrs are not the same as those with one martyr.

Government Pledge

RFE/RL: Continuing to walk through other parts of Halabjah, the correspondent met more witnesses of the chemical attacks. Several spoke about the arrival of a delegation from Baghdad headed by Rashid Majid Salih -- a representative of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Indeed, Salih was in Halabjah to meet the families of victims of the chemical attacks -- particularly those who are still suffering the physical and psychological effects of exposure to chemical agents. Catching up with Salih, the prime minister's representative told RFE/RL that his mission was to conduct a field study with the aim of bringing medical treatment to those injured by the chemical attacks and to clear up the remaining debris 20 years after the shelling and aerial bombardment of Halabjah.

Salih: All of those who were wounded and who are still suffering from their injuries as a result of the chemical compounds -- they lack both the medication and the specialized doctors that they need. So they go to other countries for help -- increasing the economic burden on Iraqi citizens [due to medical reimbursements]. Furthermore, there are a large number of patients suffering from



various forms of cancer and respiratory diseases. In addition to that, we have found 70 people who are suffering from sterility. These are all matters that we need to focus on. We need to resolve this with great care and precision so that we may remove the social and psychological effects. (A member of Salih's delegation told RFE/RL that Prime Minister al-Maliki intended to visit the town soon to see the situation there for himself. The Iraqi government delegate said al-Maliki was expected to announce the allocation of \$5 million for the reconstruction of Halabjah.)

TIME

Mar. 16, 2008

Ban Sought on Turkey Rulers

By Pelin Turgut/Istanbul

Turkey's militant secularists may have lost their battle against the Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP) at the ballot box, but they're hoping that what the electorate denied them might be granted by the judiciary. To popular disbelief, the country's secularist chief prosecutor has applied to ban the ruling party, reelected last July with 47% of the vote, on the grounds that it is supposedly seeking to destroy secularism. The move comes on the heels of a controversial government move to overturn a ban on wearing headscarves at universities.

"No way, what next" ran the banner headline on the left-leaning daily *Radikal*. "Close down parliament then" said the mainstream *Sabah*.

Islamist parties have been banned before in Turkey, where strict secularism is enshrined in as a founding constitutional principle. But this time is different: The AKP is far more popular than any of its predecessors; its landslide victory in the election last year — prompted by a stand-off with the powerful generals rejecting the party's nominee for president — was largely a response to economic boom times, but also a sign that Turks are tired of military interference in politics.

The constitutional court must now vote whether to dismiss or hear the prosecutor's bid to ban the ruling party. In the event of the latter, the AKP has one month to submit a defense and an ensuing case could take several months, losing Turkey much credibility abroad. "The constitutional court should reject the closure demand," wrote *Milliyet* commentator Hasan Cemal. "Otherwise, Turkey will lose." European governments and the U.S. have criticized the bid to ban the AKP.

The prosecutor's 152-page charge sheet refers to

moves enacted by AKP municipalities that appear motivated by Islamic belief, such as banning alcohol sales in certain neighborhoods and providing segregated buses for female students. It also lists many references to the Prime Minister's recent drive to lift the ban on headscarves in universities, including his controversial remark that "If the headscarf is a political symbol, then so be it". (Secularists' biggest concern is that the headscarf is in fact such a symbol, and that allowing it on campuses will foment an "us vs. them" mentality.)

If the case is heard, the court would have to decide whether these add up to a conspiracy to subvert the secular nature of the Turkish state. The prosecutor is also asking that if found guilty, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and 70 other party members be banned from politics for five years.

Ironically, the charges will likely strengthen the hand of the AKP at a time when it under pressure to deal with two pressing issues — the Kurdish conflict in the southeast, and wildly unpopular social security legislation sought by the IMF. Erdogan, a powerful orator, does well as the underdog. He raged publicly against the prosecutor's bid, citing a Koranic verse, "They have ears, but they cannot hear. They have eyes, but they cannot see." He appears less confident when trying to govern from a position of power.



Just a few days ago, he denounced millions of workers protesting social security changes as "liars," and told them demonstrating was illegal. He has also refused to talk to Kurdish MPs to seek a solution to years of unrest.

If there is a lesson to be drawn from this for the AKP, it is that Turkey's political balance is delicate and to enact change requires coalition-builders, not bulldozers — even with 47% of the vote. Erdogan might learn to rein in his famous temper and accommodate critics. For instance, he abandoned a much-needed reform to overhaul the constitution, a leftover from a 1980 military coup, in favor of a one-off amendment to lift the ban on headscarves in universities. "If Erdogan stuck to his original steps, like joining Europe and integrating with the global economy, he wouldn't have been faced with this court case," says *Hurriyet* commentator Enis Berberoglu.

The Washington Post March 16, 2008



Deborah Howell
Ombudsman

A Reporting Coup and Its Critics

A hard-to-get Page 1 story and photos from the mountains of northern Iraq, near the Turkish border, gave Post readers a rare and valuable inside look at the guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The March 8 package also brought strong criticism from the Turkish Embassy and angry e-mail from Turks and Turkish Americans, some of it driven by a Turkish newspaper.

Burak Akcapar, deputy chief of mission at the Turkish Embassy, said the story "was sympathetic and glorified an infamous and deadly terrorist organization. The PKK was portrayed as humane fighters in an epic struggle despite the fact they have been engaging in brutal terrorism. They are indiscriminate in who they kill, including anyone trying to bring services to the region — teachers, engineers, doctors. They are criminals, heavily involved in drug trafficking, arms, extortion

and money laundering." Akcapar and others criticized a picture of a guerrilla feeding an orphaned bear cub with a baby bottle. "I don't understand why a terrorist is carrying a baby milk bottle."

Some experts who study Turkey and the Kurds found the story interesting and useful; others thought it romanticized the PKK. One reader, Coralie Farlee of the District, called it "a wonderful sociological analysis."

Aliza Marcus, who wrote "Blood and Belief," a recent book about the Kurds and the PKK, said the Post story was "exactly the kind of story any journalist would like to have had." The portrayal of the guerrillas sounded spot on to Marcus, who has spent time with the PKK. "You get propaganda statements. That is the way they talk." She said the story would have been helped by reporting that the PKK has a "mixed reputation" among Kurds.

Mark Parris, U.S. ambassador to Turkey from 1997 to 2000 and now at the Brookings Institution, said the story "surprised me, to

tell you the truth. It was totally without context. It was awfully like the sort of stuff written about Fidel Castro in the hills" of Cuba during the revolution. "It tended to romanticize people who have done some pretty awful things."

When Turkish expert Henri Barkey, chairman of the International Relations Department at Lehigh University, first saw the story, he thought, "Wow. Good for you guys for doing it. The reporter was describing what he sees. I took it as such." Barkey, who has lived in Turkey and visits every year, also said that the story didn't explain the origins of the PKK or its place among the Kurds. "There was no context. But not every piece is going to go through a litany of charges. For someone like me who is well versed, we don't get to see much about how these guys operate, how they bury their dead, why they're so difficult to defeat. . . . Purely for information that I hadn't seen for a long, long time, it was a very useful piece."

Omer Taspinar, a Turk who teaches national security studies at the National War College, said, "I don't think the piece is biased. It obviously has some sympathy for the guerrillas but also gives background enough to balance." Taspinar wrote his doctoral dissertation on Turkey and the Kurds at Johns Hopkins University and is a visiting fellow at Brookings.

Svante Cornell is the research director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins. He thought that the story needed disclaimers about the PKK. "What does not come through is the PKK has a very nasty past of killing schoolteachers and tourists . . . and anyone who tries to leave the PKK."

Cornell, who went to school in Turkey, has done a study of the PKK's financing and said that there is no doubt that it is heavily involved in drug trafficking; it plays a "key role in heroin traffic into Europe."

Reporter Joshua Partlow and photographer Andrea Bruce, stationed in the Baghdad bu-

reau, undertook a brave, arduous and dangerous assignment to report on the PKK, going into the mountains with a guide and interpreters to spend five days with the guerrillas. Partlow's recent reporting has mostly drawn on Turkish sources, especially on Turkey's eight-day incursion into Iraq to strike the PKK. Turkey has been criticized for its treatment of the Kurds and for the damage caused by the recent incursion, which started after PKK attacks on Turkish soldiers and civilians.

Partlow's story and Bruce's pictures gave readers a glimpse into how PKK fighters look, talk and live. The story also said that the PKK is considered a terrorist organization; that "their tactics can be ruthless"; that PKK guerrillas "slip over the border to blow up Turkish soldiers"; and that the fighting has cost the lives of 35,000 people, mostly Kurds. As to the bear cub photo, Bruce and Partlow said they just happened on the scene and did not ask where the baby bottle came from.

But the story needed still more history and context. Many readers don't know who the Kurds are, how the PKK started or how it fits into the aspirations of 25 million Kurds spread across several countries. They may be unaware that the PKK kills civilians and earns money by drug trafficking.

Foreign Editor Scott Wilson disagreed: "I believe the story had the appropriate degree of historical perspective for what it was designed to do, as well as fresh context derived from our rare visit and firsthand look at this group. It's also important to remember that this piece was just one chapter in a running story about the PKK, Turkey and Iraqi Kurds that we had been covering extensively in the prior weeks and will be in the months ahead."

The story was shortened considerably; top editors wanted to hold the package to one inside page. A few more background paragraphs wouldn't have made a difference to the Turkish government, but Post readers would have had a fuller picture of the PKK.

Khaleej Times
ONLINE

17 March 2008

Kurdish dreams, Mideast realities

BY GÜNES MURAT TEZCÜR

IN AN increasingly globalised world, few places symbolise state power and security challenges more than the border zone between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. Whether this border will blossom with commerce and cultural exchange, or become a transit point for tanks and militants, has great implications for the future of the Middle East and the relationship between the Muslim world and the West.

Turkey's strong reactions to rising Kurdish nationalism thus far only aggravate the feelings of alienation among its Kurdish-speaking population. Turkey's recent offensive against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq prompted Kurdistan's Prime Minister Nechirvan Birzani to question whether the Turkish government was actually trying to target more than just the Kurdish rebels.

In order for the vision of a blossoming and peaceful border to become a reality, Turkey and other regional states with sizeable Kurdish populations need to extend full recognition to Kurdish demands for greater cultural and political rights. In turn, Kurdish nationalism needs to recognise the geo-political reality by eschewing the goal of rewriting the prevailing borders and denouncing armed struggle.

Tragedy has marked the history of Kurdish nationalism, which was too embryonic and feeble to challenge the political agreements, following World War I, which divided Kurdish-speaking people under the sovereignty of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

In Turkey, Kurdish nationalism seeks autonomy, not secession, as most Kurds there have stakes in the economic and political system and seek improvements in their civic and political rights rather than separation. Nonetheless, they still admire the symbolic achievements of Iraqi Kurdistan: the tri-colour Kurdish flag with a blazing golden sun at its centre, public rituals honouring Kurdish heroes, and the adoption of Kurdish as the official language. Such

expressions of cultural and political identity face legal persecution and administrative hurdles in Turkey, however, despite constitutional and legal reforms since the late 1990s.

Turkey is increasingly worried about the growing assertiveness of Iraqi Kurds and perceives Kurdish control over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as a threat to its national security. Turkish concerns are broadly shared by Iran and Syria, countries that are fearful of political activism among their own Kurdish citizens. Furthermore, Arab states are suspicious that the US-led war in Iraq will ultimately create an oil-rich, pro-Western and independent (in all but name) Kurdistan, threatening their claim to the area's oil supply.

Iraqi Kurds have actively collaborated with the United States since the invasion and brought much needed relief to military efforts in the northern zone. The United States also plays the ethnic card against Iran by providing support to Kurdish insurgents.

The United States now has a bigger responsibility to find a modus vivendi regarding the question of Kirkuk oil. It is an open secret that a referendum on the fate of Kirkuk mandated by the Iraqi constitution will make the city part of the Kurdish region. However, regional powers including Turkey and Syria will not accept the outcome unless they are given firm guarantees that Kirkuk oil will remain under the control of the Iraqi federal government.

The revival of Kurdish nationalism presents a unique challenge to the prevailing political order in the region as well as US policy towards the Middle East. It will require great political acumen and diplomatic skill on the part of US leaders to navigate between the opposing demands of the Iraqi Kurds and their neighbours without leaving another legacy of "neo-imperialism" in the region. To do this, they must develop a comprehensive policy that entails confidence-building measures, including a pledge from Turkey not to invade Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdish guarantees to cut support to Kurdish militants fighting Turkey and a settlement on Kirkuk oil.

March 17, 2008

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Kurdistan and the map-makers

I took my first flight on Iraqi Airways today.

Mark MacKinnon

I don't know what year the Boeing 727 that took us on our bumpy ride from Baghdad to Sulaymaniyah was built, but the flaking paint on the right wing (can you guess which window I was staring out for 90 minutes?) had me convinced that it was assembled sometime around the twilight of the Ottoman Empire.

Much more impressive was arriving back in Kurdistan via Sulaymaniyah International Airport. Though the Kurds are officially taking a wait-and-see attitude towards the rest of Iraq (largely because Iraq's president, foreign minister and one deputy prime minister are all Kurdish) - saying they'll remain in so long as they're granted broad autonomy in a federal Iraq, the reality is the Kurds are slowly but surely pulling away and setting up their own independent state.

For the first time in my traveling career - I've set foot in 52 countries and counting - I stepped off a domestic flight and had to go through passport control. The young woman who scanned my passport didn't even look at my Iraqi visa as she punched my data into her computer and snapped a digital photograph of me. The message was clear: who the Iraqis let into Iraq was their business, who the Kurds let into Kurdistan was a different matter entirely.

The map I picked up at the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Tourism desk at the airport is even more to the point. A thick red line marks the boundaries of Kurdistan, a light purple one represents the edges of Iraq. The borders between Kurdis-



tan and neighbouring Syria, Turkey and Iran are red, not purple. Iraq ends somewhere south of Kirkuk.

It's hard to blame the map-makers. Kurdistan remains the lone success story to emerge out of the past five years - in part because a line of Kurdish peshmerga soldiers mark the effective border between Kurdistan and the rest of the country, warily inspecting every car that tries to enter the region from the madness of the south.

Sulaymaniyah, in particular, is safe enough that you can walk the streets at night. Maybe I'll finally get that dinner out tonight.

18 March 2008

THE INDEPENDENT

NUMBER OF IRAQIS CLAIMING ASYLUM IN EUROPE DOUBLES

The number of Iraqis fleeing to Europe to claim asylum almost doubled in 2007, contradicting claims that the country is stabilising after five years of turmoil.

By Nigel Morris

Iraqis now account for the biggest national group of refugees, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) reports today, and the numbers fleeing the war-torn country have almost reached the peak seen in 2002 when record numbers escaped Saddam Hussein's regime.

The total of Iraqis applying for asylum in the European Union rose from 19,375 in 2006 to 38,286 last year, an increase of 98 per cent. The largest number (18,600) headed for Sweden, which has taken the most sympathetic approach to Iraqis, with 90 per cent of those claiming refuge allowed to stay, compared with about one in eight in Britain. Iraqis now represent the largest foreign-born population in the Scandinavian country.

Greece, meanwhile, received 5,500 Iraqi asylum applications, while 4,200 claimed refuge in

Germany and 2,100 in the United Kingdom. By contrast the United States reported just 734 applications.

An estimated 4.7 million Iraqis have lost their homes over the last five years, with 1.2 million living in exile in Syria and 560,000 in Jordan. UNHCR called for EU nations to do more to shoulder the burden by giving extra help to Iraq's neighbours and resettling more refugees. Peter Kessler, a UNHCR spokesman, said: "There's no law and order inside Iraq. People who have been displaced or gone to other countries can't be guaranteed their homes back or that the police will protect them. They are insecure."

For the second year the number of Iraqis topped the league table of asylum-seekers to the world's industrialised nations. They were followed by people from the Russian Federation, China, Serbia and Pakistan.

By far the largest number of asylum claims was received in the United States, with 49,200 applications last year. The next most popular destinations were Sweden (36,200), France (29,200), Canada (28,300) and the UK (27,900).

Britain's asylum applications are at their lowest level for 14 years. Iraqis are the fifth most numerous group claiming refuge in this country behind Afghans, Iranians, Zimbabweans and Chinese.

The UK Government has taken a robust approach to Iraqi claimants. Several plane-loads of rejected applicants have been returned to the Kurdish north of the country. The Home Office is also preparing to tell 1,400 Iraqis given temporary permission to stay that it is now safe to return to their home country. They will be warned they could be forcibly returned if they fail to go voluntarily.

Key move in Iraq still haunts U.S. military

Behind the scenes of a huge decision: Dissolving the army

By Michael R. Gordon

BAGHDAD: When President George W. Bush convened a meeting of his National Security Council on May 22, 2003, his special envoy in Iraq made a statement that caught many of the participants by surprise. In a video presentation from Baghdad, L. Paul (Jerry) Bremer informed the president and his aides that he was about to issue an order formally dissolving the Iraqi Army. The decree was issued the next day.

The broad outlines of the decision are now widely known, defended by proponents as necessary to ensure that Saddam Hussein's influence did not outlive his ouster from power.

But with the fifth anniversary of the start of the war approaching, some participants have now provided their first detailed, on-the-record accounts of a decision that is widely seen as one of the most momentous and contentious of the war, assailed by critics as all but ensuring that U.S. forces would face a growing insurgency led by embittered Sunnis who led much of the army.

An account that emerges from those interviews, and from access to previously unpublished documents, makes it clear that Bremer's decree reversed an earlier plan — one that would have relied on the Iraqi military to help secure and rebuild the country, and had been approved at a White House meeting that Bush convened just 10 weeks earlier.

The interviews show that while Bush endorsed Bremer's plan in the May 22 meeting, the decision was made without thorough consultations within the government and without the counsel of the secretary of state or the senior U.S. commander in Iraq, said the commander, Lieutenant General David McKiernan. The decree prompted bitter infighting, with recriminations continuing to this day.

Colin Powell, then the secretary of state and a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he was never asked for his advice and was in Paris when the May 22 meeting was held. Powell, who views the decree as a major blunder, later asked Condoleezza Rice, who was serving as Bush's nation-

al security adviser, for an explanation.

"I talked to Rice and said, 'What happened?'" he recalled. "Her reaction was 'I was surprised, too, but it is a decision that has been made and the president is standing behind Jerry's decision. Jerry is the guy on the ground.' And there was no further debate about it."

When Bush convened his top national security aides before the March 2003 invasion, he was presented with a clear plan on what to do with the Iraqi armed forces. American commanders and Jay Garner, the retired lieutenant general who served as the first U.S. administrator in Iraq, planned to use the military to help protect the country and as a national reconstruction force.

The plan was outlined in a slide show by Douglas Feith, a senior aide to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, at a National Security Council meeting

that Bush convened on March 12, eight days before the invasion began. Republican Guard units, the forces deemed most loyal to Saddam, were to be disarmed, detained and dismantled.

But the rest of the army would be retained. Three to five divisions would be used to form the "nucleus" of a new army, according to a copy of one of the Feith slides, which was obtained by The New York Times. Other Iraqi troops would be used as a reconstruction force to rebuild the nation.

The slide also carried a caution about the risks of dismissing the army in the early months of an occupation in a nation racked by high unemployment: "Cannot immediately demobilize 250K-300K personnel and put on the street." Colonel John Agoglia, who served as a war planner for General Tommy Franks at the U.S. Central Command, said that the idea of using the Iraqi Army had long been an element of the invasion strategy.

"Before the campaign started we already had it as a premise of our planning," said Agoglia, who serves as the director of the Army's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. "Starting in June 2002 we conducted a targeted psychological operation using pamphlet drops, broadcasts and all sort of means to get the message to the regular army troops that they should surrender or desert and that if they did we would bring them back as part of a new Iraq without Saddam."

Once the war got under way and much of the army began to desert their posts, a different vision on how to proceed began to emerge at the Defense Department.

Who proposed what?

After he was named in early May 2003 to replace Garner as the civilian administrator in Iraq, Bremer and his senior aide, Walter Slocombe, began to consult with senior Defense Department officials on how to build a new Iraq. Defense officials were working on a decree to rid the government of thousands of Baathists that Bremer planned to issue after he arrived in Iraq. Feith said the idea of following up this decree with an order formally dissolving the army came from Bremer.



D. Myles Cullen/Getty Images-AFP

Paul Bremer leaving Iraq for good in a U.S. Air Force plane on June 28, 2004.

"Bremer's original idea was a professional, downsized military," Feith said. "It would not have an internal security mission or be a major factor in domestic politics. Bremer and his colleagues

were thinking of how to create a military that would be suitable for a free and secure country. They were not thinking of using large numbers of Iraqis right away to play an immediate role in dealing with an insurgency, which had not yet fully developed."

Bremer said that he did not recall who first proposed the decree dissolving the army. But he acknowledged that he and Slocombe favored the move and that Rumsfeld was advised of the order while it was being prepared.

A draft proclamation to dissolve Saddam-era institutions, including the Ministry of Defense and all organizations that reported to it, was sent to Rumsfeld on May 9, noted Bremer, who added that Rumsfeld later approved the decree in a telephone conversation. Rumsfeld declined to be interviewed.

When Bremer left for Iraq the next day a separate memo was sent to senior Defense Department officials, as well as Franks and Gardner, along with a cover memo in which Bremer pointed to the sort of message he believed the decree would send.

"It is desirable that my arrival in Iraq be marked by clear, public and decisive steps," he wrote. "These should reinforce our overall policy messages and reassure Iraqis that we are determined to extirpate Saddamism."

While Bremer was the senior civilian official in Iraq, McKiernan, the senior U.S. military commander at the time, had a very different view on how to raise a new military.

U.S. commanders had hoped that Iraqi units would stay in their deployment areas and surrender en masse instead of running away. While Bremer argued that desertions meant that the army had disbanded, McKiernan believed it could be re-established by recalling the sol-

diars as well as some generals and senior officers that commanded them.

"We knew they had either gone home or come out of uniform," said McKiernan, who was in charge of the land forces during the invasion and was recently named to lead the NATO force in Afghanistan. "That was not the issue. The issue was reconstituting the regular army, bringing them back in and making them part of the solution. The idea was to bring in the Iraqi soldiers and their officers, put them on a roster and sort out the bad guys as we went."

McKiernan's plan was to start by fielding three brigades of Iraqi troops and expand the army from there.

At the Central Command, Lieutenant General John Abizaid, who served as the deputy commander, had a similar view. He told associates that Arab armies were traditionally large to keep angry young men off the street and under the supervision of the government. For Abizaid, a three-division force was a good starting point, but he wanted to grow the force to as close to 10 divisions as possible.

As it came time to issue the decree the scene shifted to Washington. In a May 22 note to Bush, Bremer discussed his impressions of Iraq and alluded to the impending order to dismantle the Iraqi Army in general terms, saying he intended to dissolve "Saddam's military and intelligence structures."

"I was trying to give him a sense of what it felt like out there," Bremer said in an interview. "So the purpose of the letter was not to say, here is a list of action items that need your approval. The purpose was to give him a sense of what

we were up to, how it felt, how people reacted and how it felt to travel around."

That same day, Bremer, through a videoconference, was part of a National Security Council meeting, which was held in the White House Situation Room, and noted that he was planning to issue the decree disbanding the army. Bush seemed satisfied and no officials spoke up to object, according to Bremer and other participants.

"I don't remember any particular response from that meeting," Bremer said. "If there had been an objection I would have made note of it then."

But some participants asserted that while the Defense Department leadership may have known in advance of the proposed order, they themselves had not. Bremer's handling of the issue appeared intended, they asserted, to keep much of the government in the dark until the last minute, making it difficult for critics to examine the details of the new policy and develop alternative courses of action for Bush to consider.

"Anyone who is experienced in the ways of Washington knows the difference between an open, transparent policy process and slamming something through the system," said Franklin Miller, senior director for Defense Policy and Arms Control, who played an important role on the National Security Council in overseeing plans for the post-war phase.

"The most portentous decision of the occupation was carried out stealthily and without giving the president's principal advisers an opportunity to consider

it and give the president their views."

Bremer insisted that he was not trying to avoid scrutiny. "I had clear instruction from the president to report through Rumsfeld," he said. "I was following the chain of command established by the president. It was not my responsibility to do inter-agency coordination."

Joint Chiefs' big surprise

There is a similar dispute over the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A memo from Feith's office to Slocombe notes that the staff, which serves as a secretariat for the Joint Chiefs, provided comments on a draft of the decree to abolish the Iraqi Army. But the disbanding of the army came as a surprise to the officers working on Iraqi reconstruction issues.

Richard Myers, the retired air force general who was chairman of the chiefs at the time, said the issue of dissolving the army was never debated by the chiefs. "I don't recall having a robust debate about this issue, and I would have recalled this," Myers said in an interview.

In a Sept. 6, 2007, Op-Ed article in The New York Times, Bremer defended the decree. He said there had been agreement "that recalling the army would be a political disaster because to the vast majority of Iraqis it was a symbol of the old Baathist-led Sunni ascendancy."

Powell offered a different view. He said the plan had been to "get rid of the officers who were Saddamites, and rebuild it from a structure that existed, not from ground zero all brand new."

An Iraq visit with political tint for McCain

BAGHDAD: Senator John McCain arrived in Iraq on Sunday on a trip that was billed as a visit by an official congressional delegation but that also served to promote his foreign policy credentials as he campaigns for the White House.

McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, was scheduled to meet with officials including the American ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, and the senior American military commander in the country, General David Petraeus.

He will also meet with the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, said Yaseen Majid, a media adviser to Maliki.

Many Iraqi politicians are keeping close tabs on the American presidential race, and some said the visit bolstered their belief that if McCain wins in November the American military will have a large presence in Iraq for a very long time.

"This visit confirms that the Republicans believe that the Iraqi war is very important in the fight against terrorism in the Middle East," said Wael Abdul Latif, an independent Shiite member of the Iraqi Parliament. "It's a message to Iran that the United States will never leave, even after Bush is gone."

Some Sunni Arabs were not so pleased by the visit.

"If the Republicans win the election, then nothing will really change in Iraq, and we need a big change to kick the occupiers out of the country," said Abu Muhammad, a 30-year-old barber shop owner in Samarra, north of Baghdad. "I would like to show him the schools and hospitals and how the children and women suffer."

McCain was joined on the trip by Senators Joseph Lieberman, independent of Connecticut, and Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina.

McCain drew considerable criticism on a trip to Iraq last April for providing an assessment of Iraq's security that at the time was more upbeat than many Iraqi officials believed was appropriate. He later said that he had misspoken.

■ Kurds mark chemical attack

Thousands of Kurds gathered Sunday in the town of Halabja, in the northern uplands of Iraq, to mark the day 20 years ago when clouds of poison gas swept through the town, killing as many as 5,000 people, Erica Goode reported from Baghdad.

The chemical bombings, part of Saddam Hussein's campaign against the



Kurds, began in the early evening of March 16, 1988, and continued through the night. On Sunday, ceremonies were held to commemorate the dead and to pay homage to the more than 200 living victims who suffer lingering effects from the poisons used in the bombings.

Conservatives keep hold in Iran

The Associated Press

TEHRAN: Iranian leaders said Sunday that their victory in parliamentary elections showed the defiance of voters toward the West because allies of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the largest share.

But a powerful bloc of Ahmadinejad's conservative opponents made a strong showing — a split that could mean frictions between the president and former supporters disillusioned by his fiery, populist rule and his handling of the economy.

Vote counting was complete everywhere in the country except for the capital, Tehran, showing conservatives who support the clerical leadership maintaining the hold they have had on Parliament since 2004.

The Interior Ministry reported turnout in the vote Friday at around 60 percent, up somewhat from 51 percent in 2004. But it fell short of the near 80 percent that turned out in the late 1990s and earlier this decade, when a full slate of reformist candidates was allowed to run and was swept into power.

The unelected cleric-led Guardian Council threw out most of the reform movements candidates when it disqualified about 1,700 of them for insufficient loyalty to Islam and the 1979 revolution.

Washington said Iran's leadership had "cooked" the election by barring reformists. The European Union said the vote was "neither fair nor free" because the disqualifications prevented Iranians "from being able to choose freely amongst the full range of political views." It said the barring of reformers was a "clear violation of international norms."

Iran's leaders, however, depicted the increased participation as a show of support for the clerical-led system. Ahmadinejad said the turnout "placed a sign of disgrace on the foreheads of our enemies," the state news agency IRNA reported Sunday.

The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had backed pro-Ahmadinejad candidates in the race, thanked Iranians for their participation. "Your epic and powerful presence overcame the enemy's tricks and turned

the enemy's high-profile psychological war aimed at encouraging a low turnout into a vain bubble," he said, IRNA reported.

With 190 of Parliament's 290 seats decided, 113 went to conservatives: around 70 to a list dominated by pro-Ahmadinejad hard-liners and the rest to a slate led by his conservative critics, according to individual results announced by state television and IRNA. The numbers are not firm because some winners ran on both lists.

Reformists won 31 seats, according to the results.

An additional 39 winners were independents whose political leanings were not immediately known. Five other seats dedicated to the Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian minorities have been decided.

Reformist leaders said Sunday that at least 14 winning independents are pro-reform, bringing their bloc to 45 seats so far. If correct, that would be around the size of the reformist presence in the outgoing parliament.

Races for more than 70 seats will go to a run-off vote set for April or May.

March 17, 2008

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Turkish army fund looks toward Europe

By Ben Holland

Bloomberg News

ISTANBUL: The pension fund of the Turkish Army is preparing to invest outside the country for the first time, and has \$3 billion to spend on purchases in Europe this year.

The \$25 billion Ordu Yardimlasma Kurumu fund, known as Oyak, might use some of the money for infrastructure investments like roads and bridges, its chief executive, Coskun Ulusoy, said in an interview. He said he also was interested in mines that could provide raw materials for Oyak's steel-making venture.



Bloomberg
Coskun Ulusoy,
chief of Oyak.

Oyak is the biggest pension fund in Turkey and oversees the savings of about 240,000 serving and retired officers. Until now most of its money has been invested in local companies. Oyak controls Ereğli Demir & Celik Fab-

rikalari, the biggest Turkish steel maker, and is a partner in a joint venture with the French automaker Renault.

"We're looking west," Ulusoy said late last month at his headquarters here. "I'm going to diversify."

The fund returned an average 46 percent a year from 2000 to 2006, compared with 14 percent for Istanbul's benchmark ISE-100 stock index. It raised \$2.7 billion from the sale of Oyak Bank last year to ING Groep. The fund is selling its insurance business to AXA, the French insurer, for \$525 million.

Oyak is considering spending some of the proceeds to expand its energy venture with the German company Evonik Industries, which produces about 7 percent of Turkey's electricity at a power plant in Iskenderun on the Mediterranean coast.

Ulusoy declined to give details of what he might buy. Oyak has a "successful profitability track record," Standard & Poor's said in a report last month that affirmed the fund's BB rating, one step above Turkey's sovereign rating. Its auto business is "solid and profitable," S&P said, and Oyak's power plant will generate "significant and very resilient dividend streams in the future."

The fund has grown during Turkey's boom. The ISE-100 index has quadrupled in value since November 2002, when Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan won elections with a pledge to promote Turkey's efforts to join the European Union and pursue economic

growth. The \$650 billion economy has grown at an annual average pace of more than 7 percent since then.

Turkey started EU membership talks in October 2005. But some EU leaders, like Nicolas Sarkozy of France and Angela Merkel of Germany, oppose the Muslim nation joining the bloc.

Ulusoy manages the fund under the scrutiny of a board that is mostly made up of retired generals. The army has ousted four governments in the past half century.

A 2004 draft report by the EU Parliament cited Oyak as an example of military influence "which is not consistent with EU values in respect of the rule of law, democracy and market organization." Parliament dropped the reference to Oyak in the final version of the report. Ulusoy said he persuaded EU officials that the fund was not a military front.

"This organization functions purely on returns," he said. "They don't tell you to manage it for some other, higher purposes. They say, 'Here's my money. I want it back in retirement.'"

Ulusoy cited his experience with Oyak Bank as an example of the fund's investing achievements.

The unit had 11 branches and just one automated teller machine when he took over as chief executive in 2000. For \$36,000 Ulusoy added a "hodgepodge"

of failed lenders acquired from Turkey's regulators, then sold the lot to ING.

Shares in Erdemir have risen 80 percent, almost triple the benchmark index, since October 2005, when Oyak beat off bids from Arcelor and Mittal Steel to win a government auction for the company.

The only overseas assets the fund held in the past were bank branches in Germany that were part of its larger Turkish business.

Ulusoy taught military strategy before starting his business career as a banker when he was recruited in the 1980s by then-President Turgut Ozal to run the state-owned lenders Turkiye Halk Bankasi and TC Ziraat Bankasi.

While his investment managers study the strategies of larger funds — such as the California Public Employees' Retirement System and the endowments of Harvard and Yale Universities — Ulusoy said his personal heroes

were more likely to manage armies than funds. Ulusoy named Hannibal, Napoleon and George Patton as men he admired and said the study of war has much to teach investors.

"You defend when you don't want to lose what you have," he said. "If you want to add to it, the only way to do it is to attack. These are all military rules, learned by blood and tears and centuries. We can't change them."

Iraqi bloc boycotts reconciliation talks

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD: The Shiite prime minister opened a national conference Tuesday aimed at reconciling the rival sects in Iraq, but the main Sunni bloc boycotted the proceedings — a sign of the deep schisms still facing this country.

The meeting began one day after a suicide bomber struck Shiite worshipers in the Shiite holy city of Karbala, killing at least 50 people. The blast was the deadliest in a series of attacks Monday that left at least 79 Iraqis dead.

In his opening statement Tuesday, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki said reconciliation was not intended to harm the interests of any group but was "a boat that saves us and takes us to safety."

"From the first day, we said national reconciliation is not a political slogan, but a complete strategic vision to reconstruct Iraq," Maliki said. He acknowledged in a later briefing for reporters that much work remained to bridge divides in the country.

But underscoring the challenge, Saleem Abdullah, a spokesman for the Sunni Iraqi Accordance Front, said the group would not participate in the meetings until Shiite lawmakers recognized the front's political aims.

"How we can attend a reconciliation meeting?" he said. "There are many points that are still not fulfilled."

The Sunni front maintains that Maliki is stonewalling them by failing to

meet demands that include the release of security detainees not charged with specific crimes, disbanding Shiite militias and wider inclusion in decision-making on security issues.

Iraqi leaders also have made little progress in resolving sectarian disagreements over the fate of three former officials under Saddam Hussein who have been sentenced to death for their roles in a campaign that left about 180,000 Iraqi Kurds dead in the 1980s.

Maliki has been demanding that the death sentence against the three be carried out, but President Jalal Talabani, a Sunni Kurd, and one of his two deputies, Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni Arab, disagree. They say that one of the three, former Defense Minister Sultan Hashim al-Taie, should not be executed because he was a military member carrying out orders.

Last month, the presidential council said it had ratified the death sentence on another one of the three, Saddam's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, also known as Chemical Ali.

Maliki stood his ground Tuesday. A statement by his office said all three, who are being held in a U.S.-run detention facility, must be handed over to have their sentences carried out.

In his address at the conference, Maliki noted that many in the government continued to doubt the success of reconciliation, but he urged lawmakers to

view differences in opinion as political progress, not disagreement that threatened to unravel national unity.

A heated debate over differences, Maliki said, could open the door to foreign influence and compromise constitutional principles.

American military officials and Iraqi officials have identified Iranian influence in the dozens of bombings that occur in Iraq each month, including providing bomb-making materials to Shiite militias across the country.

The suicide bomber in Karbala, a woman, struck after worshipers gathered at a sacred site about 800 meters, or half a mile, from the shrine of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad who was killed in a 7th-century battle.

The conference comes after Vice President Dick Cheney and Senator John McCain visited Iraq separately to put a spotlight on security gains and stress Washington's commitment to fighting insurgents in the country.

Cheney spent Monday night at a U.S. military base in Balad, 80 kilometers north of Baghdad.

The national conference coincided with a United Nations report that record numbers of Iraqis sought asylum in the European Union last year, despite a sharp reduction in violence that followed the so-called surge in the number of U.S. troops deployed in Iraq.

Asylum requests from Iraqis rose to 38,286 in 2007 from 19,375 the year before, according to the report, making Iraqis the single largest group seeking refuge in the European Union. Maliki said Tuesday that Iraqi officials were working to bring Iraqi refugees home.

In other violence Tuesday, the explosion of a roadside bomb near a gas station in northern Baghdad killed three people, including two police officers, security officials said. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the attack.

A suicide car bombing outside an electronics store in Mosul, 360 kilometers northwest of Baghdad, killed three people and wounded 40, the U.S. military said. And unidentified gunmen killed two Awakening Council members in Beiji, 145 kilometers south of Mosul, the local police said.

In a separate statement, the U.S. military said it had killed seven suspected members of a suicide bombing cell and captured eight others Tuesday in northern and central Iraq.

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A memorial Mass on Tuesday in Baghdad for Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, whose body was found after his kidnapping last month.

\$600 billion? \$5 trillion? Cost of Iraq war is hotly disputed

By David M. Herszenhorn

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon tags the cost of the Iraq war at about \$600 billion and counting. Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and critic of the war, pegs the long-term cost at \$3 trillion to \$5 trillion. The Congressional Budget Office and other analysts say that a more realistic total price estimate is \$1 trillion to \$2 trillion, depending on troop levels and on how long the American occupation continues.

Among economists and policy makers, the question of how to tally the cost of the war is a matter of hot dispute.

What is clear, five years in, is that even by the most conservative estimates the financial toll of the Iraq conflict wildly exceeds the Bush administration's prediction in 2002 that it would cost \$50 billion to \$60 billion to remove Saddam Hussein, restore order and install a new government.

And the costs continue to climb.

Congressional Democrats fiercely criticize the White House over war expenditures. But it is virtually certain that the Democrats will provide tens of billions more when they vote next month on a military spending bill whose approval is a foregone conclusion. Many Democratic lawmakers now even say that the speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, should not try to attach conditions, like a deadline for withdrawal, because the tactic is certain to fail as it has in the past.

All of the war-cost estimates include the cost of operations in the war zone, supporting deployed troops, repairing or replacing equipment, salaries for reservists, special combat pay for regular forces and some care for wounded veterans — expenses that typically fall outside the regular budgets of the Defense Department and Department of Veterans Affairs.

The highest estimates also include projections for future operations, long-term health care and disability costs for veterans — a portion of the regular, annual defense budget — as well as wider economic effects. The debate raging on

Capitol Hill, on the presidential campaign trail, in think tanks and in the paneled offices of academia touches on such esoteric factors as the right inflation index for the health care costs for veterans, and what, if any, impact the war has had on oil prices.

Some economists who track the war expenses say they worry that politicians are making mistakes similar to those made in 2002, by failing to fully come to grips with the short- and long-term cost of the war.

"The relevant question now is: What do we do now going forward? Because we can't do anything about the costs that have already happened," said Scott Wallsten, an economist and vice president of research with iGrowthGlobal, a Washington think tank. "We still don't hear people talking about that. What do we expect from now until we expect to get out and what do we expect to get out of that? That's all we can control."

On the presidential campaign trail, the Democratic candidates, Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton, often say that the money for the war would be better spent at home, as Clinton did Tuesday when she pegged the cost of the war at "well over \$1 trillion."

"That is enough," Clinton said, "to provide health care for all 47 million uninsured Americans and quality pre-kindergarten for every American child, solve the housing crisis once and for all, make college affordable for every American student and provide tax relief to tens of millions of middle-class families."

But what the candidates often fail to note is that the entire cost of the war has been put on the collective American credit card, increasing the national debt, and that the money being spent in Iraq would not necessarily be available for other programs. Nor do they dwell on the fact that anything short of a full and immediate withdrawal will inevitably entail billions more in ongoing costs.

Meanwhile, the five-year anniversary of the war has focused a spotlight on the costs so far and on future projections.

Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize-winning

economist, and a co-author, Linda Bilmes, a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, have published a book called "The \$3 Trillion War" that, despite its title, actually projects the total economic impact of the Iraq conflict at just shy of \$5 trillion. Even some economists who describe themselves as enormous fans of Stiglitz's work say they think that number is too high.

Lawrence Lindsey, who was ousted as President George W. Bush's first economic adviser partly because he went "off message" and predicted that the war might cost \$100 billion to \$200 billion, also has a new book out that serves in part as an I-told-you-so.

"Five years after the fact, I believe that one of the reasons the administration's efforts are so unpopular is that they chose not to engage in an open public discussion of what the consequences of the war might be, including its economic cost," Lindsey wrote in an excerpt in *Fortune* magazine.

"Suppose the president had gone out and said, 'The war might cost \$200 billion,'" Lindsey wrote. "If the lower estimates turned out to be correct, no one would mind. Government almost never comes in under-budget. On the other hand, if the costs turned out to be that much or even higher, the president would be spared the refrain we now hear from critics that he 'lied about the cost of the war.'"

Lindsey insists that his projections were partly right. "My hypothetical estimate got the annual cost about right," he wrote. "But I misjudged an important factor: how long we would be involved."

He was not alone. Congressional Democrats, for instance, had predicted that the Iraq war would cost roughly \$93 billion, not including reconstruction.

Virtually every forecast was off in this way.

"It's clear that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have gone on longer and have been more expensive than the projections initially suggested," Peter Orszag, director of the Congressional Budget Office, said in an interview.

(24)heures

16 mars 2008

Turquie: le parti au pouvoir sous de graves accusations, rejetées par Erdogan

Le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir en Turquie est confronté à de graves accusations d'un procureur qui demande sa dissolution pour activités anti-laïques mais son chef, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a de nouveau dénoncé dimanche le recours à son égard.

ANKARA (AFP) — Le procureur de la cour de cassation Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya a déposé vendredi devant la Cour constitutionnelle un texte de 162 pages demandant l'interdiction du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP).

Il accuse cette formation issue de la mouvance islamiste de vouloir transformer, à terme, le pays en un Etat islamique et de détruire le système démocratique, selon des extraits publiés dimanche par la presse.

"Le modèle d'Islam modéré préconisé pour la Turquie vise à établir un Etat gouverné par la charia et si nécessaire recourir à cette fin au terrorisme", souligne le procureur.

Le texte accuse le parti gouvernemental d'être devenu "le foyer d'activités allant à l'encontre de la laïcité", donnant pour exemple pas moins de 61 discours prononcés par M. Erdogan.

"Il n'est naturellement pas possible d'attendre jusqu'à ce que le parti établisse le modèle d'Etat qu'il préconise", indique le procureur pour soutenir son recours devant la Cour constitutionnelle, habilitée à fermer les partis politiques.

"En Turquie, il est évident que les mouvements d'Islam politique et le parti en question (AKP) aspirent à terme à un système fondé sur la charia plutôt qu'un Etat de droit", selon le procureur. Il estime que l'AKP se servira jusqu'au bout du "takiyye", consistant à dissimuler ses convictions, jusqu'à ce que les objectifs d'un Etat inspiré du

modèle islamique soient atteints.

Le procureur cite aussi la récente libéralisation du voile islamique à l'Université, dont l'application est toujours suspendue à une décision de justice, ou l'invocation des oulémas plutôt que des juges pour trancher des questions de société.

Le procureur réclame que 71 membres de l'AKP, dont 39 députés et 11 maires, soient interdits de faire de la politique pendant cinq ans.

Parmi ceux-ci figurent M. Erdogan et le président Abdullah Gül, ancien cadre de l'AKP.

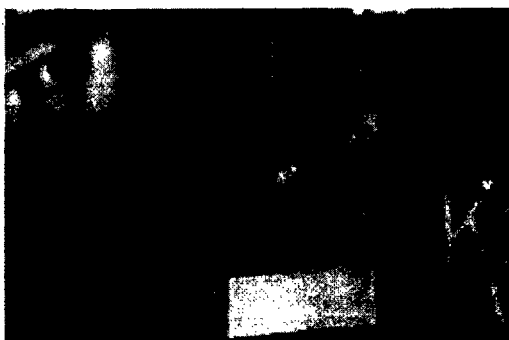
Le Premier ministre, en tournée dans des provinces du sud-est anatolien peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, s'en est vivement pris au procureur Yalçinkaya, l'accusant d'"ignorer la volonté du peuple" qui s'est prononcé massivement aux dernières élections législatives en faveur de l'AKP.

"Personne n'a le droit de donner l'image que la Turquie est un pays de troisième classe", a-t-il dit, fustigeant un recours "anti-démocratique".

"Personne ne pourra endosser la responsabilité qu'aura une telle procédure" sur l'avenir du pays, au moment où celui-ci aspire à intégrer l'Union européenne, a estimé M. Erdogan.

Son ministre des Affaires étrangères, Ali Babacan, s'est dit "très surpris" par le recours mais a opté pour un ton plus modéré, affirmant toutefois que la fermeture d'un parti politique "n'a plus de place dans la justice moderne".

"Dissoudre un parti est une punition collective" pour



les électeurs, a estimé M. Babacan sur la télévision privée Kanal 7, souhaitant que la procédure n'ait pas d'impact sur la stabilité politique et économique de la Turquie.

L'AKP, arrivé pour la première fois au pouvoir en 2002, a remporté haut la main les élections de juillet 2007 mais n'a pas su dissiper les inquiétudes d'une dérive islamiste des franges laïques de la population, dans ce pays très majoritairement musulman mais au régime laïque.

Si la Cour constitutionnelle accepte lundi le dossier du procureur, elle demandera à l'AKP de préparer sa défense dans un délai d'un mois, extensible, et il faudra sans doute des mois avant que l'AKP soit entendu.

LEXPRESS

16 mars 2008

Cinq ans après, la question irakienne reste sans réponse

Cinq ans après l'intervention des forces américaines et britanniques, cinq ans après le renversement du régime de Saddam Hussein, de nombreux Irakiens se demandent si l'objectif valait les violences et les bouleversements qui marquent aujourd'hui encore leurs existences.

Le coût humain de la guerre en Irak est effrayant. Les pertes civiles sont impossibles à estimer de manière précise, les différentes études ou enquêtes oscillent entre 90.000 et un million de morts. Quatre millions d'Irakiens ont été déplacés. Dans les rangs des forces américaines, le bilan frôle désormais les 4.000 décès.

Sur l'autre versant, les Irakiens en ont fini avec un régime dictatorial considéré comme l'un des pires du XXe siècle. Jugé coupable de crimes contre l'humanité, Saddam Hussein a été condamné à mort et exécuté le 30 décembre 2006. L'Irak est désormais dotée d'une nouvelle constitution, les élections y sont libres.

Cela valait-il une guerre? Lorsque, cinq ans après, les Irakiens abordent cette question, leur réponse dépend en partie de leur affiliation religieuse ou ethnique et de la région où ils vivent.

Saddam Hussein appartenait à la minorité sunnite. Sous son règne, les chiites, majo-



ritaires, et les Kurdes ont été persécutés. Aujourd'hui, la majorité chiite est au pouvoir; les Kurdes jouissent d'une quasi-autonomie dans le Nord; les sunnites,

eux, ont le sentiment d'être marginalisés.

SITUATIONS VARIABLES

A Bagdad, épice des affrontements

entre chiites et sunnites de 2006 et 2007 qui ont manqué de précipiter le pays dans la guerre civile, certains regrettent la sécurité qui régnait dans la capitale sous Saddam.

Dans le Sud chiite, la disparition des hommes de main de l'ex-dictateur est un soulagement, mais ce sont des factions chiites en quête d'influence qui s'affrontent désormais.

Dans le Nord, l'économie est florissante et les Kurdes ont rebaptisé leur région "l'autre Irak".

Hochiyar Zébari, ministre des Affaires étrangères, appartient à la communauté kurde. Pour lui, l'Irak progresse dans la bonne direction. A ceux qui souffrent des conséquences de l'intervention américaine, à ceux qui jugent que ce fut une erreur, il rappelle les atrocités commises sous Saddam.

"La brutalité du régime de Saddam a déformé notre société à bien des égards, nous devons donc être patients", dit-il dans une interview accordée à Reuters. "Si nous nous comparons aux expériences d'autres nations, je pense que nous nous en sommes bien sortis. Mais oui, bien sûr, cela a été très, très cher."

TUÉS POUR LA CONSONNANCE DE LEUR NOM

Oum Khalid, une coiffeuse de 40 ans vivant à Bagdad, ne peut accepter ce discours. "Non, non, non! Ce qui s'est passé n'en valait pas la peine. Ceux qui prétendent que les choses se sont améliorées sont des menteurs", dit-elle.

L'euphorie qui a suivi la chute de Saddam - on se souvient des scènes de liesse à Bagdad -, l'espoir que les Etats-Unis fe-

raient de l'Irak un riche pétro-Etat du Golfe, a rapidement fait place à l'horreur des attentats à la bombe et des fusillades.

Le 19 août 2003, cinq mois après l'entrée des forces américaines en Irak, un camion piégé explose devant le quartier général de l'Onu à Bagdad. Bilan: 22 morts, dont l'émissaire des Nations unies Sergio Vieira de Mello. Le 29 août, c'est une voiture piégée qui frappe la mosquée de l'imam Ali à Nadjaf, ville sainte chiite. Quarante-vingt-trois morts dont l'ayatollah Mohammed Baqer al Hakim, guide spirituel chiite. Les insurgés sunnites font des marchés et des mosquées des champs de bataille. L'Irak devient un terrain d'entraînement et une terre d'élection pour les "djihadistes" proches du réseau Al Qaïda.

A partir de février 2006 et la destruction du dôme de la Mosquée d'or de Samarra, autre lieu saint de la branche minoritaire de l'islam, chiites et sunnites s'affrontent au nom de leurs croyances religieuses. La seule consonance d'un nom peut être un passeport direct pour la mort.

"Avant 2003, nous vivions sous un régime sévère, nul ne peut le nier. Mais nous n'avions au moins jamais entendu parler de cadavres jetés sur des décharges pour la seule raison que leur nom était chiite ou sunnite", dit Abou Ouassane, ancien général et ex-responsable du parti Baas démantelé après la chute de Saddam.

LA LITANIE DES STATISTIQUES

Le pire de ce carnage confessionnel est passé, du moins pour l'instant. Il y a un an, la police retrouvait chaque jour jusqu'à 50 cadavres abandonnés de nuit dans les rues de Bagdad. Le déploiement des renforts américains et les cessez-le-feu

entre factions sunnites et chiites ont ramené ce nombre sous les dix. Autre explication: dans certains quartiers de Bagdad, il n'y a plus aucune mixité religieuse.

Les dernières estimations des pertes recensées par l'Iraq Body Count, organisme de défense des droits de l'homme à la réputation assise, font état de 89.000 civils tués depuis 2003. Des études britanniques basées sur des extrapolations avancent, elles, un bilan d'un million de morts.

D'autres statistiques dressent un état sinistre du "nouvel Irak année cinq". Selon l'Onu, quatre millions d'Irakiens souffrent de malnutrition et 40% des 27 millions d'habitants du pays n'ont pas d'eau potable.

Pour ce qui est de la santé publique, l'Irak est confronté à l'exil des médecins. Selon le syndicat professionnel, 70% des spécialistes ont fui à l'étranger.

L'alimentation électrique est une autre source de difficultés de la vie quotidienne. Les installations, dévastées par les années de guerre et les sanctions internationales sous Saddam, sont sous-dimensionnées et des millions de personnes sont régulièrement plongées dans le noir.

"La démocratie? Quelle démocratie? La prospérité? Quelle prospérité? Lorsque la statue de Saddam est tombée, nous avons cru que nous vivrions comme dans les Etats du Golfe, mais ce n'était que des mots", s'emporte Abdallah Ahmed, un chauffeur de taxi de 53 ans, rencontré dans une longue file d'attente à une station-services de Kirkouk, centre de la production pétrolière irakienne. **Reuters**

AFP

LES REBELLES KURDES DU PKK APPELLENT ANKARA AU DIALOGUE

ANKARA, 17 mars 2008 (AFP) -- Les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont appelé la Turquie au dialogue, promettant a contrario de poursuivre la lutte si Ankara persistait à choisir l'option militaire, pouvait-on lire lundi sur le site internet de l'agence de presse Firat News.

Le communiqué du PKK intervient après une opération terrestre d'une semaine lancée en février par l'armée turque contre les rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak et au cours de laquelle 240 rebelles ont été tués, selon Ankara.

"Nous appelons une nouvelle fois le gouvernement turc à la paix et au dialogue", a déclaré le PKK, cité par Firat News, considérée comme le porte-voix des rebelles.

"Si l'Etat turc répond positivement, nous déclarons ouvertement que notre mouvement fera preuve de la responsabilité nécessaire pour (assurer) le début d'un nouveau processus pour résoudre le problème kurde qui excluera totalement les armes", a-t-il poursuivi.

La Turquie considère le PKK comme une organisation terroriste et rejette

catégoriquement tout dialogue avec les rebelles.

Si Ankara continue de privilégier l'option militaire, le mouvement rebelle "prouvera qu'il a le pouvoir et la détermination pour organiser une résistance qui durera des décennies", a prévenue le PKK.

L'armée turque lutte depuis 1984 contre le PKK dans le sud-est anatolien. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

M. Erdogan est sous le feu des pressions dans son pays et des Etats-Unis pour accompagner les mesures militaires contre les rebelles kurdes par des initiatives politiques et économiques en faveur de la communauté kurde, afin d'éroder le soutien populaire au PKK.

Il a annoncé la semaine dernière que son gouvernement envisageait d'investir jusqu'à 15 milliards de dollars (9,6 milliards d'euros) sur cinq ans dans des projets d'infrastructure dans le sud-est du pays, à majorité kurde, et de lancer une chaîne de télévision en kurde.

AFP

ARRESTATION DE CINQ KURDES EN SYRIE

DAMAS, 17 mars 2008 (AFP) - Les autorités syriennes ont arrêté ces derniers jours cinq Kurdes, dont l'écrivain Ahmad Moustapha Mohammad, ont indiqué lundi les Comités de défense des libertés démocratiques et des droits de l'Homme en Syrie.

"Les services de sécurité à Alep (nord) ont arrêté samedi l'écrivain Ahmad Moustapha Mohammad, alias Pierre Roustom et lui ont confisqué son portable, des livres, et des papiers personnels, ont affirmé les comités dans un communiqué.

L'écrivain est membre du Parti démocratique kurde (interdit).

En outre, les services de sécurité à Damas ont arrêté jeudi quatre Kurdes, des

frères travaillant dans un atelier de couture, a ajouté le communiqué.

"Les arrestations de Jomaa, d'Ahmad, de Mohammad Amine et d'Abdel Aziz Hamdo, s'expliquent probablement parce qu'ils cousaient des costumes folkloriques kurdes", selon le communiqué.

Les Comités "dénontent les arrestations arbitraires de Kurdes qui n'ont fait qu'exercer leur liberté d'expression garantie par la Constitution syrienne" et demandent au gouvernement syrien de "les libérer immédiatement".

Ils expriment leur "profonde inquiétude face à l'omniprésence des services de sécurité dans la vie publique en Syrie", ajoute le communiqué.

Peut-on interdire le parti au pouvoir ?

L'AKP, parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir en Turquie, est confronté à une procédure d'interdiction en raison "d'activités allant à l'encontre de la laïcité". Une situation insolite qui menace le pays d'une grave crise politique. L'analyse du quotidien *Milliyet*.

À la suite de la demande d'interdiction du parti lancée [le 14 mars] par le procureur de la Cour de cassation auprès de la Cour institutionnelle, l'AKP [Parti de la justice et du développement] s'insurge contre le fait que l'on "puisse envisager d'interdire un parti qui est actuellement au pouvoir". Pourtant, ce n'est pas parce qu'un parti politique est au gouvernement qu'il jouit automatiquement d'une immunité devant les lois. De la même façon, ce n'est pas parce qu'il a réuni presque la moitié des suffrages lors des dernières élections législatives qu'un parti ne doit pas se soumettre à ces mêmes lois. Affirmer le contraire risquerait de conduire le pays vers la dictature de la majorité.

"Un procès contre la volonté populaire" ? Les nazis aussi avaient le soutien du peuple. On a vu ce que cela a donné. "Que va dire l'Europe ?" entend-on souvent. La Cour européenne des droits de l'homme avait approuvé la décision [en 1998] d'interdire le Parti de la prospérité [Refah]. Les risques d'instabilité boursière ? Voilà bien un argument qui ne doit en aucun cas interférer sur le déroulement de la justice. Toutefois, il faut bien admettre que cette procédure d'interdiction de l'AKP porte en elle la marque de la faillite d'un système qui tente d'apporter des solutions juridiques à des problèmes politiques. L'"establishment" tente ainsi de mettre sur pied une "démocratie sans partis". Dès

lors que cela ne peut plus se faire par des élections ou par un coup d'Etat, ce sont apparemment les juges qui sont désormais chargés d'assumer cette tâche.

Cet entêtement se paie toujours très sévèrement sur le plan électoral. En effet, l'électeur a alors le sentiment qu'on a voulu l'empêcher d'exprimer sa volonté ; le parti interdit revient donc ensuite encore plus renforcé. Ce procès s'avère donc une aubaine pour l'AKP qui, sur le plan politique, était confronté à un important mouvement social des travailleurs turcs qui étaient descendus récemment en masse dans la rue pour défendre leurs droits. Si l'on ajoute à cela la fin du soutien apporté à l'AKP par certains intellectuels influents, ainsi que l'attitude hésitante de ce parti vis-à-vis de l'Europe, on comprend encore mieux en quoi ce procès va profiter à l'AKP qui pourra à nouveau se montrer en victime et "incarner la démocratie" lors des prochaines élections municipales [prévues pour 2009]. L'AKP, qui n'avait pipé mot lorsqu'une même procédure d'interdiction avait été lancée contre le DTP [Parti pour une société démocratique, prokurde] se rappelle maintenant les bienfaits de la démocratie. En applaudissant à ce procès, le parti d'opposition [kémaliste] CHP [Parti républicain du peuple] montre, quant à lui, qu'il ne parvient, décidément, à tirer aucune leçon du passé.

Ce sera bien entendu à la Cour constitu-



Le Premier ministre et chef de l'AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdogan dénonce "une atteinte à la volonté du peuple", 15 mars 2008

tionnelle de se prononcer sur le plan juridique. Mais sur le plan politique, l'Histoire a déjà bien montré que l'interdiction d'un parti ne suffisait pas pour en finir avec ses idées et que les branches taillées finissaient toujours par repousser encore plus fortes.

Can Dündar *Milliyet*

IRAK: DICK CHENEY AU KURDISTAN IRAKIEN POUR DEMANDER LE SOUTIEN DE BARZANI

AFP

ERBIL (Irak), 18 mars 2008 (AFP) –

- Le vice-président américain, Dick Cheney, a demandé mardi le soutien du président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, pour faire progresser la réconciliation nationale et parvenir à un accord sur les relations futures entre Bagdad et Washington.

En visite en Irak depuis lundi, M. Cheney a rencontré mardi Massoud Barzani à Erbil, dans le nord du pays.

Entité autonome mais de facto indépendante du gouvernement central de Bagdad, le Kurdistan est allié aux Etats-Unis et l'une des régions les plus sûres de l'Irak.

Louant "l'amitié spéciale liant les Etats Unis et le peuple du Kurdistan irakien", M. Cheney a dit "compter sur le président Barzani pour nous aider à conclure une nouvelle relation stratégique entre les Etats Unis et l'Irak".

Il a souhaité également le soutien de M. Barzani pour aider à l'adoption "dans les prochains mois de plusieurs projets de loi cruciaux" pour la réconciliation nationale actuellement bloqués au Parlement.

"Nous continuerons à jouer un rôle positif dans la construction du nouvel Irak" qui sera "fédéral, démocratique, pluraliste et libre", a assuré de son côté M. Barzani.



"Nous continuerons à être une partie de la solution, et non une partie du problème", et "à être un facteur de paix et de stabilité" dans toute la région, a-t-il ajouté.

Les Kurdes d'Irak sont au coeur de plusieurs enjeux politiques majeurs pour le pays, dont le sort de la ville de Kirkouk (nord) revendiquée par les Kurdes, le partage des richesses pétrolières en Irak et la présence des séparatistes kurdes du PKK qui ont entraîné plusieurs opérations militaires de la Turquie voisine.

L'adoption de plusieurs législations jugées vitales par Washington pour aider à la réconciliation nationale en Irak, dont la nouvelle loi sur le pétrole, est bloquée depuis de longs mois au Parlement en raison de divergences majeures entre les acteurs politiques irakiens.

Le vice-président américain a rencontré lundi à Bagdad responsables américains et officiels irakiens, avant de passer la nuit sur la base militaire américaine de Balad, à 70 km au nord-est de la capitale.

AFP

TIRS D'ARTILLERIE IRANIENS SUR DES VILLAGES DU KURDISTAN IRAKIEN

SOULEIMANIYAH (Irak), 19 mars 2008 (AFP) -

Sept villages du Kurdistan irakien, frontaliers de l'Iran dans le nord de l'Irak, ont été la cible mercredi de tirs de l'artillerie iranienne qui n'ont pas fait de victimes, a affirmé un responsable administratif local.

Ces bombardements visaient apparemment des bases du groupe séparatiste kurde du Pjak (PJAK), a déclaré Azad Wassu, le maire de Zarawah, l'une des localités touchées.

"Les troupes iraniennes ont bombardé des villages frontaliers à l'intérieur du territoire irakien", a affirmé M. Wassu.

Les bombardements ont duré près de 30 minutes et des obus sont tombés sur sept villages, a-t-il précisé. Ils n'ont fait ni victime, ni dégât, mais les villageois étaient terrifiés, selon M. Wassu.

Le village de Zarawah est situé près de la ville de Qalat Dishan, à environ 160 kilomètres au nord de la ville de Souleimaniyah, dans la région autonome du Kurdistan.

Le groupe séparatiste du Pjak est accusé par Téhéran de mener des opérations armées dans l'ouest de l'Iran. Il est lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), basé dans le nord de l'Irak.

AFP

Irak: une conférence de réconciliation nationale s'achève sans progrès

19 mars 2008 Par Salam FARAJ AFP -

BAGDAD (AFP) - Une conférence de réconciliation en Irak a lancé un appel mercredi à l'unité nationale, et le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, un chiite, a rendu une visite symbolique dans un bastion sunnite de la capitale irakienne.

La conférence, boycottée par des partis sunnites et une importante formation chiite, s'est achevée sans progrès tangibles, mais a condamné le terrorisme et l'extrémisme qui ont plongé le pays dans la violence après l'intervention américaine, il y a cinq ans.

Cette conférence, ouverte mardi à Bagdad a réuni 400 délégués sunnites, chiites et kurdes, représentants des forces politiques et de la société civile.

Elle a appelé dans un communiqué final destiné au gouvernement irakien "à l'unité de l'Irak et au maintien de ses principes fondamentaux".

"La conférence condamne le terrorisme et l'idéologie de l'extrémisme, et l'exil forcé qui a été imposé à des populations irakiennes", poursuit le texte.

Plus de quatre millions d'Irakiens sont déplacés dans leur propre pays par les violences confessionnelles, ou exilés dans les pays voisins.

Le principal groupe parlementaire sunnite, le Front de la Concorde, n'a pas participé à cette conférence. Les groupes sunnites se considèrent défavorisés dans la gestion des affaires du pays par un appareil d'Etat dominé par les chiites.

Et le mouvement du jeune chef radical chiite Moqtada Sadr, une des plus puissantes organisations en Irak, avec une milice de 60.000 combattants, s'est également retiré en accusant le gouvernement de faire de la propagande.

Peu après, M. Maliki s'est rendu dans un quartier sunnite de Bagdad, Adhamiyah, où il a promis des emplois à des habitants qui ont combattu le terrorisme et Al-Qaïda en Irak.

"Je suis fier de ce que les habitants de ce quartier ont réalisé. Nous allons accueillir nos enfants qui combattent l'injustice et le terrorisme. Ils auront des emplois honorables", a-t-il assuré.

M. Maliki a assuré que "les portes de toutes les institutions allaient leur être ouvertes".

Il s'agissait de la première visite dans ce quartier déshérité du Premier ministre depuis qu'il a pris ses fonctions en 2006.

M. Maliki est régulièrement accusé de favoriser sa communauté et soupçonné de mettre l'appareil de l'Etat au service des intérêts d'une fraction de cette même communauté.

Adhamiyah a été pendant longtemps un sanctuaire des extrémistes d'Al-Qaïda en Irak. Des habitants du quartier mobilisés au sein d'un groupe appelé "Réveil" les en ont chassés.

L'armée américaine a encouragé la formation de ces "Réveils" qui regroupent dorénavant quelque 80.000 combattants dans l'ensemble de l'Irak, en majorité d'anciens insurgés sunnites.

Ils sont payés par l'armée américaine pour assurer la sécurité dans leurs quartiers, et ils exigent leur intégration dans les forces de sécurité du gouvernement qui, de son côté, les considère comme de nouvelles milices.

D'importantes mesures de sécurité avaient été prises en vue de la visite du Premier ministre, qui a assisté à une cérémonie célébrant l'anniversaire de la naissance du prophète Mahomet organisée dans ce quartier du nord de Bagdad.

M. Maliki avait exhorté mardi les différentes forces politiques du pays à faire taire leurs différends.

"J'appelle les partis irakiens à soutenir la réconciliation nationale parce que c'est la seule voie qui peut aider les Irakiens", avait-il déclaré, en lançant les travaux de la conférence.

Washington considère que les progrès dans le domaine de la réconciliation politique sont trop lents et que cette paralysie met en péril les avancées dans le domaine de la sécurité, seules à même de justifier un début de retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak.

Enlevé en février, l'archevêque chaldéen de Mossoul a été retrouvé mort

ENLEVÉ le 29 février à la sortie d'une messe par des hommes en armes qui avaient tué son chauffeur et ses deux gardes du corps, l'archevêque chaldéen de Mossoul, Mgr Paulos Faraj Rahho, a été retrouvé mort, jeudi 13 mars, dans cette ville du nord, à 350 km de Bagdad. C'est un coup de téléphone à ses proches, donné par l'un des ravisseurs, qui a permis de découvrir le corps, enseveli sous une fine couche de terre.

Selon les autorités ecclésiastiques, la cause exacte de la mort est incertaine. Selon les premières indications de la police, le cadavre du prélat irakien qui était âgé de 65 ans et « très malade » d'après son entourage, ne portait pas de traces de balle ou de mauvais traitement.

On ignore même s'il avait été enlevé pour des raisons crapuleuses – à l'instar, depuis 5 ans, d'une bonne vingtaine d'ecclésiastiques chrétiens dont les familles avaient dû payer des rançons pour les faire libérer. En janvier 2005, l'archevêque de Karakoch, George Camoussa, enlevé près de Mos-

soul, avait été libéré deux jours plus tard, contre rançon.

Les motivations sectaires ne sont pas à écarter. Depuis l'invasion de mars 2003, des dizaines d'églises à travers l'Irak, de même que des milliers de commerces tenus par des chrétiens ont été attaqués et souvent détruits par des extrémistes islamistes. Ce qui a provoqué l'exode de plus de la moitié d'une communauté passée d'un million d'âmes en 2003 à environ 400 000

aujourd'hui. Apparentée au catholicisme romain, l'Eglise chaldéenne de rite oriental est l'une des plus anciennes du monde et réunit la majorité des chrétiens d'Irak qui comptent aussi des Assyriens, des Arméniens et des Syriens.

Informé de la nouvelle de la mort de l'archevêque de Mossoul jeudi, le pape Benoît XVI a fait part de son émotion et de sa « profonde tristesse ». Dans un télégramme adressé aux dignitaires de l'Eglise chaldéenne, il condamne « cet acte de violence qui est une offense à la dignité de l'être humain ».

Attentat à Bagdad

Les familles de quatre Américains et d'un Autrichien disparus dans le sud de l'Irak après avoir été arrêtés sur une route par de faux policiers, il y a plus d'un an, ont, elles, reçu des nouvelles concernant leurs proches. Jeudi, l'armée américaine a reconnu avoir reçu, fin janvier, cinq doigts coupés correspondant, après vérification de l'ADN et des empreintes, aux disparus. Employés comme gardes dans une société de sécurité basée au Koweït, les cinq hommes avaient été enlevés dans deux opérations distinctes en novembre 2006 et janvier 2007.

Observée depuis six semaines, la résurgence des violences se poursuit dans le pays. A Bagdad, un attentat-suicide réalisé à l'aide d'un véhicule piégé a tué au moins 18 personnes, en blessant une soixantaine. Le kamikaze a conduit son engin dans une impasse commerçante située entre la place Al-Tahrir et la célèbre rue Abou Nawas qui longe le fleuve Tigre et où quelques restaurants au bord de l'eau avaient rouvert leurs portes il y a trois mois.

Non loin, à Karrada, autre quartier commerçant, un journaliste irakien de 36 ans, Qassim Abdul Hussein Al-Ikabi, a été assassiné en pleine rue par des inconnus. Cent vingt-huit journalistes ont

été tués en cinq ans en Irak.

Plus au nord, près de Tikrit, la ville de Saddam Hussein, cinq supplétifs sunnites de l'armée américaine – les fameux « Fils de l'Irak » – ont été tués près des barrages routiers qu'ils tenaient. Neuf autres militaires ont été blessés dans ces deux attaques séparées, probablement lancées par des activistes d'Al-Qaïda en Irak, qui ont déjà tué plus de 200 de ces supplétifs sunnites. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Londres prêt à renvoyer chez eux 1 400 Irakiens

Selon le quotidien *The Guardian*, les autorités britanniques pensent que la situation s'est rétablie en Irak au point d'estimer « possible et raisonnable » de circuler aujourd'hui dans le pays. Le ministère britannique de l'intérieur s'apprêterait ainsi, écrit le quotidien dans son édition du 13 mars, à renvoyer chez eux, dans les trois semaines et « par la force si nécessaire », selon un porte-parole, 1 400 demandeurs d'asile irakiens. Présents dans le royaume depuis 2005, ces derniers ont été déboutés de leurs demandes d'asile politique mais, en raison de la situation en Irak, ils étaient autorisés à rester et à recevoir des aides publiques.

Turquie

Vers l'interdiction du parti au pouvoir ?

Le procureur de la Cour de cassation turque demande l'interdiction de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir issu du mouvement islamiste, pour « activités contraires à la laïcité ». Les onze membres de la Cour constitutionnelle ont commencé hier l'examen de l'acte d'accusation alors que les Européens appellent la justice turque « à ne pas se mêler de politique ».

Que signifie la procédure ?

« C'est un recours contre la volonté nationale », a dénoncé le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. C'est la première fois qu'une telle requête est lancée à l'encontre d'un parti au gouvernement. Dans les 162 pages de son réquisitoire, le procu-

reur Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya demande aussi cinq ans d'interdiction d'activités politiques pour 71 dirigeants de l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement), dont le Premier ministre et le chef de l'Etat, Abdullah Gül. La Cour constitutionnelle a déjà dissous depuis 1962 quelque 24 partis, notamment des petites formations d'extrême gauche ou prokurdes, ainsi que des partis islamistes, comme le Refah (en 1998), mais seulement après que le leader de ce parti Necmettin Erbakan – qui fut le mentor d'Erdogan – eût quitté le pouvoir sous la pression de l'armée. La Cour européenne

des droits de l'homme de Strasbourg avait en 2003 jugé cette dissolution légitime. Cette jurisprudence est rappelée dans l'acte d'accusation qui affirme : « L'AKP a été fondé par un groupe qui a tiré les leçons de la fermeture des partis islamistes antérieurs et qui cherche à utiliser la démocratie pour instaurer la charia – la loi islamique – en Turquie. » Le réquisitoire s'appuie sur des déclarations, y compris des phrases de discours extraits de leur contexte, et énumère les diverses mesures lancées par l'AKP pour islamiser peu à peu la société turque. **Pourquoi maintenant ?** Le port du foulard à l'université

a été légalisé le mois dernier par les députés de l'AKP avec le soutien de l'extrême droite nationaliste. La principale force de l'opposition laïque, le CHP (Parti républicain du peuple), a aussitôt saisi la Cour constitutionnelle sur ce point. Ce parti, comme l'armée et la magistrature, estime que les principes de la République jacobine fondée par Mustafa Kemal en 1923 sont aujourd'hui en danger alors que l'AKP, au pouvoir depuis 2002, s'est encore renforcé aux élections de juillet (47,3% des voix) et occupe les trois premières charges de l'Etat. « La dissolution d'un parti

peut être une nécessité pour la défense de la démocratie et cela est prévu dans les constitutions de nombreux Etats européens», assure Onur Oymen, numéro deux du CHP évoquant le cas Batasuna en Espagne. Mais l'initiative du juge Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya suscite une réprobation quasi générale, y compris de la part d'éditorialistes peu suspects de complaisance pour l'AKP comme Ertugrul Ozkök, du quotidien *Hürriyet* qui se dit «inquiet qu'au XXI^e siècle la pratique des interdictions de partis reste en vigueur

en Turquie». L'intelligentsia libérale est encore plus déchaînée et le quotidien *Radikal* titrait dimanche: «Y en a marre!»
Quelles conséquences?
«Cette procédure ressemble à un ultime baroud des laïcards auto-

Le procureur demande notamment cinq ans d'interdiction d'activités politiques pour le Premier ministre et le chef de l'Etat.

ritaires, qui en dormant de la laïcité cette image d'une idéologie d'Etat, font un grand cadeau à

l'AKP», souligne Ahmet Insel, professeur à l'université Galatasaray. De nombreux intellectuels libéraux commencent à prendre leurs distances avec l'AKP, dénonçant dans une pétition la lenteur des réformes et le manque d'engagement européen du gouvernement. Désormais, ils font à nouveau bloc derrière ce parti qui a beau jeu de se poser en défenseur de la démocratie et de la volonté populaire. Une fois admise la re-

cevabilité de la plainte, la procédure va durer plusieurs mois et cette épée de Damoclès de l'interdiction restera suspendue sur l'exécutif. Les tensions politiques entre laïcs et islamistes vont nécessairement s'aggraver. D'autant que l'AKP va tenter en catastrophe des changements constitutionnels afin d'éviter la dissolution. D'où la crainte d'une instabilité politique croissante, mais aussi économique, qui inquiète les experts et les marchés.

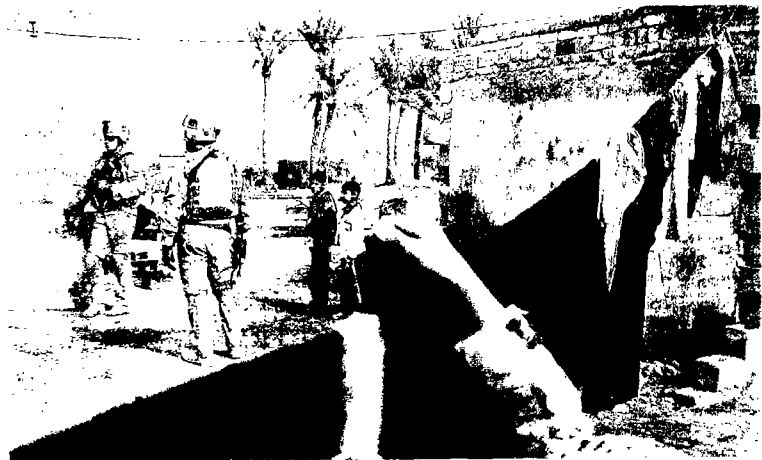
→ MARC SEMO

la Croix
19 MARS 2008

Les Irakiens luttent pour leur survie

Cinq ans après le déclenchement de l'offensive anglo-américaine contre Saddam Hussein, la violence pèse plus que jamais sur la vie quotidienne

Une grande partie des Irakiens luttent pour leur survie dans un pays encore largement livré à la violence, même si la situation est plus calme dans les régions kurdes et chiïtes



Des soldats américains patrouillent dans le village de Carbawi, au sud de Bagdad.

Cinq ans après le déclenchement de la guerre contre l'Irak par une coalition internationale dirigée par les États-Unis, le pays reste plongé dans la spirale de la violence. Dans de nombreuses régions, les habitants sont accaparés par la lutte pour la survie.

Dans un récent rapport intitulé *Carnage et désespoir*, Amnesty International souligne l'emprise de la violence: tout ce qui porte une arme représente un danger pour la population civile: milices confessionnelles ou tribales, sunnites ou chiïtes, branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda, sans oublier les forces de la coalition, les forces irakiennes, les groupes privés de sécurité... Selon le site Internet Iraq Body Count, plus de 81 000 civils ont été tués depuis mars 2003, ainsi que 12 000 membres des forces de sécurité irakiennes, et plus de 4 200 soldats de la coalition,

dont 3 987 Américains. D'autres sources estiment que le nombre de morts chez les civils est beaucoup plus élevé.

À Bassora, par exemple, dans le sud de l'Irak, où les forces britanniques ont passé le relais aux forces irakiennes depuis décembre 2007,

les groupes criminels redoublent d'intensité, selon les informations du bureau de la coordination des affaires humanitaires de l'ONU (Ocha). «Nous vivons en enfer. La situation s'aggrave de jour en jour. Si cela continue, les gens vont être tous tués, ou bien ils vont quitter la ville», raconte Abbas Mohammed Al Lami, professeur de mathématiques de 48 ans.

Particulièrement visés par cette criminalité sont les médecins, parce qu'ils sont considérés comme riches et que leurs familles peuvent verser une rançon. Résultat: sur les 34 000

médecins enregistrés en 1990, au moins 20 000 ont quitté le pays.

« Nous vivons en enfer. La situation s'aggrave de jour en jour. Si cela continue, les gens vont être tous tués, ou bien ils vont quitter la ville. »

Les femmes et les jeunes filles sont de plus en plus la cible des groupes extrémistes si elles n'adoptent pas la tenue et le comportement le plus rigoureux exigés par eux. Une jeune fille chiïte de 17 ans a été récemment tuée par lapidation parce qu'elle fréquentait un jeune homme d'origine sunnite. Son supplice a duré trente

minutes.

Comme souvent dans les situations de guerre, femmes et enfants sont les plus touchés. Selon un rapport du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (CICR) publié il y a deux jours, la situation humanitaire en Irak est « l'une des plus critiques au monde ».

« Mes enfants et moi avons quitté notre maison dans la province d'Anbar il y a presque deux ans, témoigne Ruba, une mère de famille de 38 ans. Mon mari avait été tué sous nos yeux. Nous avons fui la nuit même en n'emportant qu'un peu d'argent. Pour moi aujourd'hui, il n'y a ni passé ni futur, il n'y a qu'un horrible présent. Nous vivons dans la famille de mon cousin, à 12 dans une même pièce. »

La situation économique suit la dégradation générale. Fin 2007, la moitié de la population était au chômage et 43 % des Irakiens vivaient avec moins d'un dollar par jour (0,63 €). Selon les sources humanitaires, 70 % des gens n'ont pas accès à l'eau potable et 8 millions d'Irakiens nécessiteraient une aide d'urgence. L'eau potable n'est plus disponible par manque de personnel qualifié pour entretenir les structures. Soit parce que les techniciens ont été victimes des violences (600 tués depuis 2005 pendant qu'ils effectuaient des réparations), soit parce qu'ils se sont réfugiés dans les pays voisins. Tout comme deux autres millions d'Irakiens.

Le mauvais fonctionnement des stations de traitement de l'eau provoque un risque important de choléra. L'été dernier a déjà connu une flambée de cette maladie qui a frappé 4 500 personnes et en a tué 25. Alors que le salaire mensuel moyen est d'environ 95 €, chaque famille doit dépenser au moins 30 € par mois pour acheter de l'eau. Il faut déboursier cette même somme pour avoir six heures d'électricité par jour.

Toujours par manque de personnel qualifié, mais aussi d'équipement des hôpitaux publics, l'accès aux soins les plus élémentaires est devenu très difficile. L'Irak compte 172 hôpitaux publics disposant de 30 000 lits, quand 80 000 seraient nécessaires. Certes, il existe 65 hôpitaux privés. Mais la consultation y est payante.

Les enfants paient un lourd tribut à cette guerre. Sur les 1 200 000 Irakiens contraints de fuir leurs foyers depuis 2006, la moitié sont des enfants. Ils ont perdu un ou plusieurs membres de leur famille, sont obligés de vivre dans la peur et l'anxiété. Leur état de santé laisse à désirer. Selon le Programme alimentaire mondial (PAM), au moins deux millions d'entre eux ne reçoivent pas la nourriture nécessaire à leur croissance. La malnutrition chronique touche un enfant sur quatre, et un tiers seulement boivent de l'eau

potable.

Les médicaments manquent également. Ahmed Yehya, gérant des stocks de médicaments dans le gouvernorat d'Anbar, explique : « Nous n'avons plus de médicaments pour enfants, plus d'antibiotiques ni d'anesthésiants, nous devons dire aux gens de se faire soigner ailleurs ou alors de quitter le pays. » En plus de la difficulté d'accès aux soins médicaux, pèse sur les enfants l'absence de vaccination systématique. L'Unicef a réussi à lancer une campagne avec l'Organisation mondiale de la santé et le ministère irakien de la santé, permettant de vacciner 3,4 millions d'enfants.

Pour cause de violences et de déplacements forcés (2,2 millions d'Irakiens dans leur propre pays), l'accès à l'école devient précaire. Le nombre d'inscriptions à l'école primaire est passé de 86 % en 2004 à 46 % en 2006. Enfin, fait significatif s'il en était besoin : le nombre des Irakiens demandeurs d'asile a doublé en un an, passant 22 900 en 2006 à 45 200 en 2007.

CATHERINE REBUFFEL

VU DES ÉTATS-UNIS

la Croix 19 MARS 2008

L'Irak pèsera lourd lors du scrutin présidentiel

Alors que John McCain n'exclut pas de laisser les troupes « cent ans » en Irak, Hillary Clinton et Barack Obama promettent un retour gradué

Alors que le nombre des morts côté américain approche la barre des 4 000, l'Irak est revenu dans la campagne électorale américaine. Chacun des trois prétendants, John McCain, Hillary Clinton et Barack Obama, est persuadé qu'il a tout à gagner à enfourcher ce cheval de bataille.

Du côté du Parti républicain, John McCain, partisan de l'offensive sur Bagdad il y a cinq ans, pense que le costume du commandant en chef lui est taillé sur mesure et il croit en la victoire. Du côté du Parti démocrate, on mise sur l'opposition au conflit en promettant un retour rapide des « boys » – dans un délai d'un peu plus d'un an pour Barack Obama.

À huit mois du scrutin, le calcul de Barack Obama et, dans une moindre mesure, d'Hillary Clinton, plus prudente, comporte certains risques. Car si les Américains partagent l'analyse du Parti démocrate sur les origines de la guerre – elle n'est plus considérée comme la « bonne décision » que par un électeur sur trois –, ils ne sont pas persuadés qu'un retour rapide des « boys » arrangera la situation en Irak. Ces dernières semaines, la perception de la situation sur le terrain a d'ailleurs

Chaque candidat est persuadé qu'il a tout à gagner à enfourcher ce cheval de bataille.

changé : pour un Américain sur deux, l'effort militaire se déroule « bien » ou « très bien », contre 30 % il y a un an. Pour beaucoup, la victoire paraît au bout du chemin.

Dans ce nouveau contexte, la

question n'est plus de savoir qui avait raison il y a cinq ans, mais qui voit juste aujourd'hui, et qui peut conduire au succès. C'est le pari de John McCain, convaincu depuis le début du succès à venir du « surge » (« montée en puissance »), la stratégie mise en place il y a plus d'un an avec l'envoi de nouvelles troupes.

Pour lui, les troupes américaines resteront longtemps à Bagdad, « cent ans s'il le faut ». « Un retrait ? Ça voudrait dire la victoire d'Al-Qaida », a-t-il lancé avant-hier depuis Bagdad, dans un entretien avec la chaîne de télévision CNN. Les démocrates ont eu « entièrement tort » de dire l'an dernier que la guerre était perdue, a-t-il poursuivi, visant délibérément Hillary Clinton : « Visiblement, elle ne comprend pas ni n'apprécie les progrès réalisés sur le terrain. »

C'est avec ce discours notamment que John McCain a remporté l'investiture du Parti républicain : même ceux qui étaient opposés à la guerre ont voté massivement pour lui. Son passé dans l'armée américaine et son statut de héros de la guerre au

Vietnam, ainsi que sa compétence en politique étrangère, font de lui l'homme de la situation aux yeux de beaucoup. Selon une enquête CBS, près de la majorité des Américains voient en John McCain un probable « bon commandant en chef » – plus du double des chiffres de Barack Obama et Hillary Clinton.

L'ancienne première dame des États-Unis, prudente, avait refusé, au début de la campagne, de fixer tout calendrier – à l'inverse de Barack Obama, qui promet de faire rentrer les GI en seize mois. Confrontée au succès de son adversaire démocrate, elle assure désormais qu'elle commencera le rappel des troupes sous soixante jours, sans s'engager sur une fin de retrait.

Quoi qu'il arrive, le nouveau président sera dépendant de la situation sur le terrain. Les candidats aussi : la poursuite de la stabilisation contraindrait les démocrates à s'adapter. À moins qu'entre-temps les difficultés économiques n'aient éclipsé l'Irak dans la campagne.

GILLES BIASSETTE

la Croix
19 MARS 2008

La tactique militaire américaine atteint ses limites

Alors que l'armée américaine s'apprête à réduire ses effectifs, beaucoup redoutent une recrudescence des violences

Il y a un an, l'armée américaine changeait sa stratégie en Irak. Après la démission, en novembre 2006, du secrétaire à la défense Donald Rumsfeld, George W. Bush avait donné à sa nouvelle équipe (Robert Gates, le nouveau patron du Pentagone, et le général David Petraeus, commandant en chef des troupes américaines en Irak) l'occasion de changer de stratégie.

Trente mille soldats supplémentaires avaient été déployés pour renforcer un contingent alors estimé à 135 000 hommes. Dans le cadre d'un vaste plan de sécurisation de la capitale, 34 « postes de sécurité » mixtes américano-irakiens étaient mis sur pied à Bagdad. L'idée de la Maison-Blanche était simple: la réduction du niveau de violence obtenu grâce à cette augmentation temporaire des troupes américaines devait permettre au gouvernement du premier ministre chiite Nouri Al Maliki d'adopter des lois et de prendre les mesures nécessaires à la « réconciliation nationale » entre les différentes communautés et au maintien de l'unité du pays.

De fait, le gouvernement irakien a adopté des lois sur le budget, les élections provinciales, la réhabilitation d'une partie des anciens membres du parti Baas (au pouvoir du temps de Saddam Hussein) et une amnistie en faveur de certains détenus. Mais l'administration américaine attend toujours l'adoption d'une nouvelle réglementation sur l'exploitation et la répartition des ressources pétrolières.

La stratégie a néanmoins produit des résultats. La violence a diminué au cours des derniers mois, notamment à Bagdad. Selon les statistiques militaires américaines, le nombre des attaques quotidiennes est passé d'environ

160 en juin 2007 à 60 en novembre de la même année. Mais depuis le début de février, Bagdad connaît un regain d'attentats.

Outre l'envoi de renforts, deux facteurs expliquent ce relatif succès: la trêve unilatérale de la principale milice chiite, celle du jeune chef radical Moqtada Al Sadr, et la mobilisation, moyennant finances,

de groupes d'anciens insurgés sunnites. Depuis août 2007, Moqtada Al Sadr a suspendu les activités militaires des 60 000 miliciens de son Armée du Mahdi. Son objectif était alors d'éviter l'escalade dans un conflit avec une milice chiite rivale et de renforcer son contrôle sur ses propres troupes.

Le phénomène du « réveil » (*sahwa*) sunnite a, lui, commencé fin 2006, dans la province sunnite d'Al-Anbar. Des chefs de tribus, lassés de l'extrémisme, des extorsions, de la corruption et des tueries perpétrées par les salafistes, ont fait alliance avec les militaires américains contre Al-Qaida en Irak (*lire aussi ci-dessous*). La recette a ensuite été systématisée. L'armée américaine a augmenté le nombre de ses « bases opérationnelles avancées » chargées de « gagner et tenir » le terrain, tout en encourageant la création de groupes de supplétifs dans la région de Bagdad, dans le centre et dans le nord de l'Irak.

Les États-Unis financent aujourd'hui environ 88 000 « volontaires », payés 300 dollars par mois (200 €), pour participer à des patrouilles de quartier. Environ 80 % d'entre eux



À Bagdad, des sunnites secondent l'armée américaine. Les États-Unis financent environ 88 000 « volontaires » pour patrouiller dans les quartiers.

sont de confession sunnite (dont de nombreux anciens baasistes) et 20 % de confession chiite.

Pour compenser le manque de progrès dans la « bonne gouvernance » et dans la politique de développement du gouvernement central, les responsables américains ont aussi mis sur pied des équipes militaires de reconstruction dans les provinces et ont cherché à renforcer les structures gouvernementales au niveau local et provincial. Dans un entretien publié la semaine dernière dans le *Washington Post*, le général David Petraeus reconnaissait cependant que les progrès étaient insuffisants dans le domaine de la « réconciliation nationale », comme dans la fourniture des services publics de base.

Un an après le début de leur déploiement, les troupes additionnel-

les américaines ont commencé à rentrer et le contingent américain devrait se retrouver à hauteur de 130 000 hommes cet été. Devant le Congrès, le général Petraeus doit plaider le mois prochain en faveur d'un gel temporaire de toute nouvelle réduction de troupes pour permettre une « période de consolidation et d'évaluation ». Pour certains, la nouvelle donne risque même de déboucher sur une guerre civile généralisée, avec des affrontements intrasunnites et intrachiites. Le gouvernement irakien à majorité chiite se refuse en effet à intégrer une partie conséquente des auxiliaires sunnites dans l'armée et la police comme le souhaitent les Américains.

FRANÇOIS D'ALANÇON

A Falloudja, cheikh Tarek a pris les armes contre Al-Qaida

Dans la ville longtemps symbole de l'insurrection antiaméricaine, un chef de tribu a décidé de retourner les armes contre Al-Qaida

FALLOUDJA
De notre envoyé spécial

Falloudja est comme une prison à ciel ouvert. Impossible d'y entrer sans un badge biométrique dûment enregistré auprès de l'armée américaine. La majorité des rues est bouclée et les points de contrôle incessants.

Située en plein triangle sunnite, à 70 kilomètres à l'ouest de Bagdad, Falloudja a été durant de longues années le symbole de la résistance à l'occupation. Pourtant, pas une détonation ne vient entraver un calme inhabituel dans la « cité des mosquées ». Dans le souk, les

états sont abondamment fournis et les commerces ont rouvert leurs portes. Des boutiques de musique exposent les derniers CD à la mode et les cybercafés sont bondés. La vie reprend, tout simplement. C'est le nouveau visage de Falloudja.

Trois ans après l'assaut massif de l'armée américaine en novembre 2004, les vestiges de la guerre sont toujours visibles. Dans les faubourgs, pas un mur sans impacts de balles, des bâtiments complètement détruits et des minarets coupés en deux. « Notre ville est celle qui a subi le plus de dégâts et le plus de pertes en Irak. C'est une ville martyre. Et ça, nous ne l'oublierons jamais », commente un policier en patrouille.

Al-Qaida y a fait régner la terreur durant près de trois ans en exploitant cette haine des Américains. Jusqu'à ce que tout change à l'automne 2007, avec le revirement de cheikh Tarek Al-Halboussi, chef

d'une grande tribu de la ville. Cet homme d'affaires, riche et moderne, avait fait fortune dans le pétrole sous le régime de Saddam Hussein. Lui et ses hommes, pour la plupart d'anciens membres du parti Baas, ont décidé de combattre les membres d'Al-Qaida et de ramener le calme dans la ville, en collaboration avec le commandement américain.

Là où il n'y a plus d'État, les tribus font la loi. Là où le pouvoir judiciaire est inexistant, la justice tribale fonctionne.

« Depuis quelques mois, c'est une véritable chasse à l'homme, explique un proche du cheikh. Nos combattants traquent les membres

d'Al-Qaida avec le soutien et le financement de l'armée américaine, elle-même.» «Al-Qaida était venue ici pour tuer un maximum d'Irakiens. Nous avons décidé de reprendre les choses en main, commente Tarek Al-Halboussi en tirant sur son cigare importé de Cuba. C'est le réveil des tribus.»

«Al-Qaida est la goutte qui a fait déborder le vase, explique-t-il. Ils ont commencé à tuer des Irakiens pour n'importe quelle raison. C'est à cause d'eux que nous autorisons dorénavant les Américains à fouler nos rues, nous n'avions plus le choix. Il fallait se ressaisir et prendre en main notre destinée.»

L'armée américaine fait miroiter cette réussite. Mais le véritable triomphe est sans doute celui des tribus. En Irak, là où il n'y a plus d'État, les tribus font la loi. Là où le pouvoir judiciaire est inexistant, la justice tribale fonctionne.

Dans un salon d'une magnifique

villa, une cinquantaine de cheikhs sirotent un thé noir. À leur côté, un membre soupçonné d'appartenir à Al-Qaida est assis, menotté et les yeux rivés vers le sol. En face de lui, un chef de tribu l'interroge. S'il est jugé coupable de meurtre, la sentence sera la mort ou la liberté sous caution. L'efficacité est redoutable. Quelques mois ont ainsi suffi pour ramener l'ordre à Falloudja.

Autre rassemblement cette fois-ci au conseil municipal, des notables écoutent attentivement cheikh Tarek. Ce dernier ne cache pas ses ambitions. «Mon projet est national. Nous voulons redonner à l'Irak son identité et si nous avons réussi sur le plan militaire, il faut maintenant nous faire entendre sur la scène politique», lance-t-il. Les sunnites veulent réoccuper la place qu'ils avaient sous Saddam Hussein. Un parti du «réveil» est déjà en cours de création.

FEURAT ALANI

PAROLES

«Désapprouver ne suffit pas: il faut aussi agir»

Mgr Georges Casmoussa
Archevêque syrien-catholique de Mossoul

«La mort de Mgr Rahho résonne comme une fracture dans la société irakienne et risque de mettre en péril la présence chrétienne. Sa mort a soulevé en Irak un mouvement de solidarité inouï et une vague de protestations. Nous avons reçu des marques de soutien de nos confrères chrétiens et musulmans.

Sans compter les désapprobations officielles. Mais désapprouver ne suffit pas: il faut aussi agir. Je m'efforce de porter un regard d'espérance sur l'avenir. Le terrorisme ne peut pas vaincre l'esprit et la convivialité des Irakiens. En janvier 2005, j'ai moi-même été enlevé, puis relâché. Je relis aujourd'hui mon expérience à la lumière de ce martyre. Je le sais, je peux être repris à chaque instant. Pourtant, il me faut continuer ma mission, je n'ai pas le droit de me décourager! Nous avons des responsabilités pastorales, nous devons continuer à témoigner pour encourager le peuple et lui donner des raisons de vivre.»

RECUEILLI PAR
FRANÇOIS-XAVIER MAIGRE

Les chrétiens d'Irak trouvent refuge dans la ville kurde d'Ankawa

la Croix

19 MARS 2008



Des milliers de chrétiens ont trouvé refuge à Ankawa, à proximité d'Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan

ERBIL

De notre envoyée spéciale

Raid Michael est arrivé à Ankawa, dans la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, il y a deux ans et demi, avec sa femme et son fils âgé de 5 ans. À l'époque, ce chrétien chaldéen travaillait à Bagdad dans une association au service des enfants des rues. Jusqu'au jour où il a reçu des lettres de menace l'incitant à quitter Dora, l'un des principaux quartiers chrétiens de la ville. «Après avoir reçu la première lettre, nous sommes restés 15 jours. J'ai vraiment eu peur lorsqu'un ami musulman m'a signalé que l'on parlait de moi à

la mosquée. J'ai alors décidé de fuir. Quelques semaines plus tôt, une bombe avait explosé dans la maison voisine. Nous avons réalisé que notre voisin fabriquait des bombes!»

Raid Michael, 38 ans, a donc quitté sa ville natale pour rejoindre sa sœur à Erbil, la «capitale» du Kurdistan irakien, à 350 km de là. Pas question pour lui de choisir, comme de très nombreux chrétiens d'Irak, la voie de l'exil à l'étranger (lire ci-dessous). «Nous n'avons jamais pensé quitter l'Irak. Nous ne voulons pas abandonner notre pays, même si nous savons que Bagdad et les autres villes «chrétiennes» d'Irak sont perdues pour nous. Le Kurdistan, en revanche, est une terre sûre pour les chrétiens et le restera.»

Pour les réfugiés, la première difficulté reste de trouver un travail.

Comme Raid, plus de 2000 familles chaldéennes ont pris la direction d'Ankawa depuis avril 2003. Historiquement peuplée de chrétiens, la ville a vu bondir sa population de 25 000 à 35 000 personnes. Elle rogne désormais chaque jour davantage sur la campagne, avec la construction d'écoles et de villas cossues à chaque coin de rue. Cette bourgade est devenue active, avec de nombreux magasins, restaurants et cafés où fumer le narguilé.

Preuve de son renouveau, elle accueille depuis janvier 2007 le grand séminaire assyro-chaldéen et la faculté théologique (Babel College), contraints eux aussi de quitter Bagdad. Désormais installée dans un bâtiment flambant neuf, l'université compte 48 étudiants dont 24 séminaristes. «Le risque était très grand pour nous à Bagdad, explique le dominicain Nageeb Mekhail. Les Américains ont occupé notre bâtiment et nous ont exposés au danger.»

Le gouvernement kurde d'Irak fournit une aide importante aux Églises chrétiennes et aux réfugiés, grâce au ministre des finances Sarkis Aghajan Mamando, lui-même chrétien, qui a financé la construction de 10 000 maisons et de 110 villages chrétiens à travers l'ensemble de la province (lire La Croix du 22 février). Le ministre évoque même la possible création d'une zone autonome chrétienne. «Le soutien des chrétiens arrange les Kurdes, note le P. Nageeb. C'est aussi très positif pour leur image au niveau international. Toutefois, tout n'est pas qu'une seule question d'image. Les Kurdes donnent notamment la liberté de changer de religion sans contrainte. Il y a de nombreuses conversions, et personne ne risque la peine de mort pour cela, contrairement au reste de l'Irak.»

La première difficulté de ces réfugiés est sans conteste de trouver du travail. «La plupart de ces arrivants sont riches et diplômés, constate le

P. Sabri Al Magdacy qui officie à l'église Mor Jusuf (Saint-Joseph). Or ici, il est très difficile pour eux de trouver un emploi, notamment dans l'administration. Nous devons les aider à créer leur propre business. Mais en fin de compte, ils donnent un coup de fouet à cette terre et poussent la ville vers l'avenir.»

La paroisse est confrontée à des mouvements de population croisés. Tandis que de nouveaux arrivants s'installent quasi quotidiennement, en provenance de Bagdad, de Kirkouk, ou de Mossoul, dans le même temps, deux à trois familles originaires d'Erbil quittent quotidiennement Ankawa pour la Turquie, la Syrie ou la Jordanie avec l'espoir d'être admis aux États-Unis ou en Australie. «Les locaux sont fatigués par le quotidien, le prix du gaz, de l'électricité, par la lutte de pouvoir. Parler 24 heures sur 24 de politique en Irak est épuisant», explique l'un d'eux. Le P. Sabri regrette par ailleurs que l'administration kurde n'ait pas rendu aux chrétiens les terres saisies à l'époque de Saddam Hussein.

En attendant, l'église Saint-Joseph, la plus grande d'Ankawa, est en ébullition. En ce jour de semaine, un groupe d'une soixantaine d'enfants arrive pour répéter les chants de la chorale, sous le contrôle d'un jeune milicien chrétien, une mitraillette en bandoulière. Même si le quartier est calme, les chrétiens d'Ankawa ne lésinent pas sur la sécurité.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER

la Croix

19 MARS 2008

La communauté vit dans la peur des enlèvements

La situation des chrétiens d'Irak ne cesse d'empirer alors qu'ils sont souvent considérés comme des alliés de l'Occident

À QARAQOSH
De notre envoyé spécial

Sept jours après que l'on a retrouvé le corps de Mgr Farraj Rahho, archevêque chaldéen de Mossoul enlevé le 29 février, l'émotion est vive en Irak (*Lire La Croix du 14 mars*). Pour la première fois depuis le début de la guerre, il y a cinq ans, un évêque a été la victime d'un groupe terroriste. Cette perte a décapité la communauté chaldéenne de Mossoul et relance avec une plus grande vivacité la question de l'exil.

Les chrétiens restent une cible privilégiée des preneurs d'otages: minoritaires et dispersés, personne ne les protège; face à la radicalisation islamiste, ils ont le tort d'être des «*infidèles*», jugés tous collaborateurs des «*croisés américains*»; et, enfin, leur valeur augmente si, enlevés, leur sort est évoqué par la presse occidentale. En 2006, un enfant chrétien «*valait*» quelque 25 000 dollars (environ 16 000 €) sur le marché des rançons, un adulte 50 000 dollars (31 600 €), confiait un dominicain chargé de trouver les sommes pour libérer les otages. En 2008, le prix pour un adulte se situe entre 50 000 et 100 000 dollars (de 31 600 à 63 400 €), un prêtre entre 100 000 et un million de dollars (de 63 400 à 633 800 €), et la vie d'un évêque ne se négocie pas à moins

d'un million de dollars (633 800 €).

La vie à Mossoul est devenue impossible: intimidations, menaces, enlèvements, demandes de rançon, attentats, exécutions... La ville vit sous le régime de la charia: les jeunes chrétiennes portent le voile dès qu'elles sortent de chez elles, les transports ne sont plus mixtes...

À ce jour, on estime que la moitié des chrétiens d'Irak ont fui leur domicile. Ils choisissent deux destinations. Il y a d'abord ceux qui trouvent un refuge précaire dans les pays limitrophes: la Turquie, la Syrie, la Jordanie, le Liban. On estime leur nombre à 180 000. Leurs conditions de vie sont éprouvantes: logement, travail, scolarisation des enfants... tout est une course d'obstacles. La plupart ne veulent plus retourner en

Irak. Ils attendent un hypothétique visa pour l'étranger. À ce jour, seuls le Canada et l'Australie se montrent généreux. Les frontières des États-Unis et de l'Union européenne leur sont fermées. Le ministre des affaires étrangères français, Ber-

La création d'une région chrétienne autonome ne question.

nard Kouchner, qui avait annoncé, en décembre, la délivrance de visas pour les chrétiens irakiens à titre de réfugiés politiques, n'en a pas accordé plus d'une dizaine selon Mgr François Yakan, vicaire patriarcal des chaldéens de Turquie, chargé

de trouver des visas pour ceux qui se sont réfugiés dans ce pays. De tous les pays de l'Union européenne, seule la Suède a accueilli plus de 10 000 chrétiens irakiens.

L'autre option est de se réfugier dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien. Ils sont environ 90 000 à avoir fui dans cette région, la plus sécurisée d'Irak. Le ministre des finances et de l'économie, Sarkis Aghajan Mamando, est en charge de les accueillir. À ce jour, il leur a construit plus de 10 000 maisons, 150 villages, des centaines d'églises et même un séminaire à Qaraqosh. Son plan est simple: préparer les conditions d'une région chrétienne autonome autour de la plaine de Ninive. Si les réfugiés trouvent la paix et la sécurité au Kurdistan – toutefois, ceux installés à la frontière turque sont pris en tenaille entre l'armée turque et le PKK et ceux qui vivent dans la plaine de Ninive subissent les attaques de groupes terroristes –, leurs conditions de vie sont loin d'être faciles: ils parlent l'arabe et non le kurde, et la plupart n'ont pas de travail.

Le clergé de son côté tente de tenir les chrétiens. Les évêques et la plupart des prêtres ont choisi de ne pas céder aux violences. Ils veulent rester jusqu'à offrir leur vie comme Mgr Rahho. La majorité s'interroge sur l'opportunité de créer un territoire chrétien au Kurdistan. Si tel était le cas, cela en serait fini du rôle traditionnel des chrétiens orientaux: être un facteur de paix, de modération et de progrès en terre d'islam.

LAURENT LARCHER

« La France veut aider les chrétiens d'Irak »

Dans une lettre à Mgr Marc Stenger, président de Pax Christi-France, Nicolas Sarkozy l'assure de l'engagement de la France pour faciliter le sort des chrétiens irakiens. Extraits

« (...) J'ai bien reçu le courrier que vous m'avez fait parvenir au nom de toute la délégation qui vous a accompagné en Irak. Soyez assuré que j'en ai pris connaissance avec une grande attention. Mes collaborateurs m'ont également rendu compte de l'échange que vous avez eu avec eux. Je sais que l'Église de France a décidé de s'associer particulièrement aux chrétiens d'Irak à l'occasion des cérémonies religieuses de la Semaine sainte. (...)

La situation des chrétiens en Irak est douloureuse, comme vient de le rappeler si tragiquement la mort de Mgr Faraj Rahou, archevêque chaldéen de Mossoul (...). J'ai été profondément bouleversé par ce crime odieux, que la France

a condamné avec la plus grande vigueur. (...) Traditionnellement, notre pays entretient avec les chefs des Églises d'Orient, qui constituent un pont vers l'Europe et contribuent au dialogue des cultures au Moyen-Orient, des échanges réguliers, au plus haut niveau.

J'entends m'inscrire pleinement dans cette tradition et continuer à la faire vivre. C'est pourquoi l'un des premiers gestes du ministre des affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, en se rendant à Bagdad en août dernier, fut de rencontrer, à ma demande, Sa Béatissime Emmanuel III Delly, Patriarche de Babylone des Chaldéens.

Comme vous, je considère que la présence de chrétiens en Irak est fondamentale, aussi bien pour des raisons historiques que pour faire obstacle à la tentation suicidaire du repli sur soi et des communautarismes à l'œuvre dans cette région du monde. Pour cette raison, la France veut aider les chrétiens d'Irak d'abord à demeurer sur place, tout comme elle aidera ceux qui ont dû fuir leur pays.

Au-delà de la situation spécifique des chrétiens, la crise que connaît l'Irak depuis cinq ans est d'une extrême gravité. Une violence aveugle frappe chacun, sourde ou directe, toujours cruelle et sans distinction, qu'il soit musulman, chrétien, yézidi, mandéen, mazdéen...

Cette situation nous préoccupe profondément. J'ai donc souhaité, avec le ministre des affaires étrangères, que la France se réengage en Irak. Notre pays ne peut rester indifférent à un tel drame.

Devant la souffrance si grande qui frappe l'Irak, c'est à toutes les victimes irakiennes que je pense avec vous. Je souhaite que toutes les communautés puissent trouver leur place au sein d'un Irak uni, démocratique et pacifié, qui garantisse à chaque Irakienne et à chaque Irakien l'exercice des libertés civiles et de culte.

C'est l'objectif que la France soutient et à la réalisation duquel elle s'emploie, en lien avec ses partenaires européens et avec la communauté internationale tout entière. (...)»

AP Associated Press

Cheney urges Kurdish leader's support in Iraq

March 18, 2008

Deb Riechmann

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq - Vice President Dick Cheney, delving into internal Iraqi politics, pushed a Kurdish leader on Tuesday to play a helpful role in passing legislation to foster national reconciliation and forge a new agreement for U.S.-Iraq relations in years to come.

After a rally with troops, Cheney flew to Irbil in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq for a meeting with Massoud Barzani, head of the regional administration in the semiautonomous area.

"We are certainly counting on President Barzani's leadership to help us conclude a new strategic relationship between the United States and Iraq as well as crucial pieces of national legislation in the days ahead," Cheney said.

Barzani called Cheney's visit a "historic day" in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"We understand very well the importance of this visit," Barzani said. "Indeed, I would like to reinstate our commitment that we will continue to play a positive role in order to build a new Iraq - an Iraq with a foundation of a great federal, democratic, pluralistic free Iraq

"I would like also, Mr. Vice President, to assure you that we are committed to the constitution of Iraq and we will continue to be playing a positive role to be part of the solution, not part of the problem."

It was Cheney's first visit to the Kurdish region. "It's a visit that's long overdue," Cheney said.

He said he and Barzani talked about the overall situation in Iraq as well as what is happening specifically in the Kurdish region. But Cheney did not specifically mention the problems with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

The PKK wants autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey, and rebels have carried out attacks in Turkey from bases in Kurdish Iraq. The conflict started in 1984 and has killed up to 40,000 people. The United States has been sharing timely intelligence with Turkey, which recently launched an eight-day ground incursion to attack the rebels.

Cheney focused his remarks on a U.S.-Iraq agreement being negotiated to define the relationship between the two nations in years to come, efforts in Iraq to reconcile the political power among Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds and the need to pass legislation that will lead to a unified government.

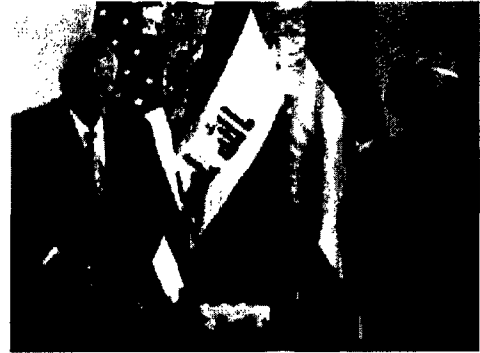
Rallying troops after an overnight stay at an air base, Cheney said earlier Tuesday that as long as freedom is suppressed in the Middle East, the region will remain a place of "stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export."

"You and I know what it means to be free," Cheney told the troops at an outdoor rally at Balad Air Base.

"We wouldn't give such freedoms away and neither would the people of Iraq or Afghanistan, but in both of those countries, they're facing attack from violent extremists who want to end all democratic progress and pull them once again in the direction of tyranny.

"We're helping them fight back because it's the right thing to do and because it's important to our own long-term security," Cheney said. "As President Bush has said, the war on terror is an ideological struggle and as long as this part of the world remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export."

After the rally, Cheney, the highest ranking U.S. official to overnight in Iraq,



flew to Irbil for his meeting with Barzani.

Later in the day, Cheney was flying to Oman, the next stop on a 10-day trip to the Middle East, which also will include visits to Saudi Arabia, Israel, the Palestinian territory and Turkey.

Cheney and his wife, Lynne, slept in a trailer set up for VIPs at the air base about 40 miles northwest of Baghdad, then had breakfast with some of the 20,000 U.S. troops on the base, which supplies food, fuel, bullets and other items - from toilet paper to military hardware - to all operations in Iraq. It was Cheney's second overnight in Iraq. He spent a night last May at Camp Speicher, a base near former leader Saddam Hussein's hometown and about 100 miles north of Baghdad.

Noise from mortar and artillery shells fired from the base interrupted sleep during the pre-dawn hours Monday, but base officials said later the shelling was routine - used to keep pressure on ground miles off base where insurgents have been active before.

Cheney said he was already up when he heard the explosions. "Nobody came running in to wake me up," he said as he loaded his plate with sausage, bacon and eggs, and hash browns. He and his wife and daughter, Liz, who also spent the night at the base, had breakfast with a dozen or more troops, and Cheney presented two bronze stars awarded for valor.

Hundreds of troops greeted Cheney at the rally where he reaffirmed America's commitment to Iraq and credited recent reductions in violence to Bush's decision last year to send 30,000 more troops to the fight.

"We made a surge in operations and the results are now clear: more effective raids to root out enemies, better and more accurate intelligence information from the locals and higher hopes for the future among the Iraqi people," Cheney said.

The vice president expressed hope that anti-American sentiment generated by the U.S.-led invasion five years ago this week, was waning - at least in Iraq where the U.S. death toll is nearing 4,000.

"Across this country, the more that Iraqis have gotten to know the Americans - the nature of our intentions and the character of our soldiers - the better they have felt about the United States of America," he said.

AP Associated Press

Report: Turkey Bombs Kurd Rebels in Iraq

March 20, 7 2008

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) -- Turkish warplanes bombed Kurdish rebel hideouts in northern Iraq Thursday, private news channel NTV reported.

The planes flew reconnaissance flights over the border area before bombing targets of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, the station said, citing Iraqi Kurdish officials.

There were no reports of civilian casualties, it said.

Last month Turkey launched a major ground operation into northern Iraq to hit Kurdish guerrilla camps there. The eight-day incursion ended on Feb. 29.

There was no immediate confirmation of the new attack from the Turkish military. But military chief Gen. Yasar Buyukanit has said Turkey will continue its attacks against rebels in northern Iraq.

The military has said it inflicted heavy losses on a large group of rebels in Iraq's Zap region, close to the Turkish border, during the ground incursion. The rebels have disputed that claim.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who visited Ankara earlier this month, said the rebels would not be tolerated inside Iraq's borders and that Baghdad was pressuring them to lay down their arms.

The PKK has said it wants political and cultural autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish region of southeastern Turkey. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people since it began in 1984.



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

18 March 2008

For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President

Remarks by Vice President Cheney and Kurdish Regional Government President Barzani After Meeting

KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani's Private Office

Irbil, Iraq

PRESIDENT BARZANI: (As translated.) On behalf of the people of Kurdistan, I would like to welcome very warmly Mr. Vice President, Dick Cheney, the Vice President of the United States for a very helpful visit in Kurdistan region.

Indeed, this is a historic day; it's a very historic day for our people. We, at this time very well -- this is a very important message for everybody. As far as we are concerned, this is another evidence for the confirmation of the support of the United States for Iraq, for the people of Iraq, and also for the support of the people of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan region, and another evidence of the support of the United States for the democracy process and building a free, federal, democratic Iraq.

We understand very well the importance of this visit. Indeed, I would like to reiterate our commitment that we will continue to play a positive role in order to build a new Iraq -- an Iraq with a foundation of a great federal, democratic, pluralistic, free Iraq.

I would like also, Mr. Vice President, to assure you that we have committed to the constitution of Iraq, and we will continue to be playing a positive role, to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. We will be part of the solution for all the efforts inside Iraq and out for the neighboring countries. We will also continue to be a factor for stability, a factor for peace and stability in all the area.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation for President Bush, for yourself, the people of the United States, and also the United States military, for the sacrifices that they have given, and also for the great decision that they have taken in order to liberate the people of Iraq from the dictatorial, tyrannical regime.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolences to the families of the victims, for all the sacrifices they have given. And we highly appreciate these sacrifices. I would also like to assure you that we will stay together, we will be with you in one trench, and without any hesitation or reservation, to fight terrorism and also to succeed in our efforts in the democratic process, and also in building a free and prosperous Iraq.

Once again, I would like to welcome you very warmly, and thank you very much for this visit.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Let me thank President Barzani for his most gracious hospitality today, for welcoming me on my first visit to Iraqi Kurdistan. It's a visit that's long overdue.

Just about 17 years ago this month, when I was Secretary of Defense, the United States launched Operation Provide Comfort, to save hundreds of thousands of Kurdish men, women and children under threat from Saddam Hussein's regime after the Gulf War.

That operation, of course, followed just by three years the nightmare of Saddam Hussein's brutal campaign against Iraqi Kurds, including the use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians at Halabja.

Provide Comfort was an extraordinary mission that led to the establishment of the American "no fly zone" over Northern Iraq. It also led to the establishment of a very special friendship be-



tween the United States and the people of Iraqi Kurdistan. The results have been quite remarkable for all to see, in terms of the development and the prosperity of this part of Iraq. The transformation that has occurred in less than two decades sets an extraordinary example, I believe, for the rest of Iraq and for what is possible, with patience and resolve, when the United States and the people of Iraq join together in a common effort and strategic partnership.

President Barzani and I, and his associates, have been talking today about the overall situation in Iraq, as well as what's happening here in Iraqi Kurdistan. We are certainly counting on President Barzani's leadership to help us conclude a new strategic relationship between the United States and Iraq, as well as to pass crucial pieces of national legislation in the months ahead.

We think it's important to lay the foundation for the kind of relationship that will bind our people together for the future as we build on the experiences and shared sacrifice that we've been -- that we've worked on together in the past.

So, Mr. President, let me thank you once again for your hospitality, and say that I look forward to having the opportunity to return the same when you visit Washington in the near future

Los Angeles Times March 19, 2008

Sunnis, Shiites stage boycott against Iraq reconciliation talks

Decision by two opposing sides is a symptom of the rifts among the country's political parties

By Said Rifai and Ned Parker LOS ANGELES TIMES

BAGHDAD -- Shiite and Sunni blocs in Parliament boycotted a conference on Iraqi reconciliation Tuesday, as U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney traveled north to meet with Kurdish leaders.

Members of the main Sunni Parliament coalition Tawafuq refused to attend the two-day conference because of complaints about the Shiite-dominated government.

Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr's bloc walked out of the conference, saying they did not want a ceremonial presence. The same went for Sheikh Ali Hatem Sulaiman, a representative of Sunni tribes that rose up against al-Qaida in Iraq.

The boycott was symptomatic of the rifts and enmity among Iraqi parties, which are organized along ethnic and religious lines and have delayed progress in sharing power among the country's Shiite majority and the formerly ruling Sunnis.

Shiite Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's government has dwindled since the summer to a core group of Shiite and Kurdish politicians. The prime minister's relationship, however, has become strained with the Kurds on matters such as the future of the country's oil law and the boundaries of northern Iraq.

Maliki's detractors describe him as hindered by an inner circle that does not like to share power and is fiercely sectarian. Maliki's supporters contend the prime minister is trying to build a strong national government and other parties are standing in the way for selfish reasons.

Saad Yusuf Muttalibi, a conference organizer, accused the Sunni bloc of deliberately trying to sabotage Maliki.

The organizer noted that Sunni tribes, who have revolted against al-Qaida in Iraq, attended the conference. One of their main leaders, Sheikh Sulaiman, decided to lead his delegation out of the conference.

"I didn't stay any longer than it took me to smoke my cigarette. It was a total failure, because the Iraqi politicians are a failure," Sulaiman said.

Followers of Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr quit the conference early in protest of what they called its lack of substance. "We don't want to attend some conference where just speeches are made; we want actual activities to be initiated between the political powers," said Sadr Parliament member Nassar Rubaie.

The Sadrist's Mahdi Army militia was accused of fomenting sectarian violence before Sadr called a cease-fire for his movement in August.

Maliki told reporters he was committed to reconciliation.

He heralded the decline of sectarian violence, which many others warn could erupt again. The conference organizers said that former military officers and ex-members of Saddam Hussein's ruling Baath party attended the talks, which will conclude today.

Cheney, on the second day of a visit, looked to push for a resolution to Iraq's political woes as he headed

to Kurdistan, where he met with the Kurdistan regional government's president, Massoud Barzani.

"We are certainly counting on President Barzani's leadership to help us conclude a new strategic relationship between the United States and Iraq as well as advance crucial pieces of national legislation in the months ahead," Cheney said before departing Iraq for Oman.

"We will continue to play our positive role, to be part of the solution and not part of the problem," Barzani said.

Cheney's aides had told reporters on the way to Iraq that the vice president wanted to see progress on passing Iraq's oil law. The legislation is in limbo amid a fight between Kurds and Arab nationalists about whether the law will allow regional governments to sign their own contracts with foreign oil companies to develop fields.

Cheney and Barzani met after Turkey mounted a ground and air assault last month against Turkish Kurds, known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, who had used Iraqi Kurdistan as a sanctuary.

At least eight Iraqis were killed and dozens injured Tuesday in bomb blasts in Baghdad and north of the capital. In the day's worst attack, a car bomb exploded outside an electronics store in the northern city of Mosul, described by the U.S. military as the last urban stronghold of Sunni Arab militants loyal to al-Qaida in Iraq and its affiliates. The blast destroyed the four-story building, killing three people and injuring 40, police and the U.S. military said.

Journalist among 11 detained in inquiry into Turkish nationalists

AP Associated Press

March 22 2008 Associated Press in Istanbul

Turkish police detained 11 people yesterday in an investigation into a gang of extreme nationalists who allegedly want to topple the Islamic-rooted government, local media said.

Detainees included a journalist, a former university president and the head of a small political party, according to the private NTV television station.

The website of Ulusal TV station confirmed the detention of Dogu Perincek, head of the Turkish Workers' party, which won a tiny fraction of votes in general elections last summer. It said the offices of the station, which often carries statements by the party, were being searched by police.

In 2007 a Swiss court convicted Perincek of racism for denying that the mass killing of Armenians in the early 20th century was genocide. He made the claim during trips to Switzerland.

The detained journalist, Ilhan Selcuk, writes a column for the secular Cumhuriyet newspaper and is a fierce critic of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's

government.

Military-backed circles of power, which include the state bureaucracy and judiciary, suspect Erdogan and his allies seek to inject Islam into political life, undermining the secular principles outlined in the constitution.

The government denies it wants to erode secularism, citing reforms it has made to try to gain EU membership.

Authorities had previously arrested several dozen alleged members of the gang, known as Ergenekon. A retired military commander and a lawyer were among those arrested earlier, and reports said they are suspected of plotting to murder Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, who was prosecuted under a law barring insults to Turkish identity. Kurdish leaders, seen by many as a threat to national sovereignty, were also reportedly on the hit list.

Officials have not commented publicly on the investigation. Most reports have emerged in local media and are based on anonymous sources.

TODAYS ZAMAN

March 19, 2008

AK Party ready for any eventuality

ERCAN YAVUZ ANKARA

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), currently facing the threat of closure, has decided on a course of action to defend itself after mulling over the developments of the past few days sparked by a Friday filing of charges by a state prosecutor against the party, accusing it of having become a center of anti-secular activity.

The prosecutor who filed the case, Supreme Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya, also demanded that 71 party members, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül (who served as foreign minister in the previous AK Party Cabinet), be banned from politics for five years.

AK Party leader Erdoğan has decided to change the Constitution and Turkey's laws on political parties within the next 10 days to disable the prosecutor's authority to file for the disbandment of political parties. Speaking to Today's Zaman on the issue, Nihat Ergün, deputy chairman of the AK Party's parliamentary group assured that the issue of closure would be off the Turkish agenda within the next two weeks at most. "We can't simply sit down and watch the flames burn the economy. Parliament will take this issue off Turkey's agenda within the next 10 or 15 days," he said.

The AK Party believes that a ruling in favor of its closure emerging from the Constitutional Court is highly unlikely. AK Party legal professionals who reviewed the indictment prepared by Yalçinkaya say the accusations are too hard to prove and the prosecution's evidence too shaky, making the case a weak one. One scenario is that the Constitutional Court may refuse to hear the case at all and dismiss the indictment. AK Party officials believe this is a viable option, pointing out to many

material mistakes that found their way into the indictment.

In the worst case scenario, according to AK Party officials, the court might go ahead with the case. However, even in that case they do not expect the party's closure as a result. The worst ruling would entail a warning issued to the 71 politicians facing disbarment from politics for the next five years in the current indictment and perhaps some financial measures that would block or restrict the AK Party's access to Treasury aid granted to political parties. However even that would be a farfetched scenario, AK Party legal staffers believe.

In the past, the Constitutional Court shut down the Welfare Party (RP) and its successor Virtue Party (FP) because these two parties were allegedly becoming centers of anti-secular activity in Turkey. AK

When the changes take effect, AK Party officials say the principle will be to hold responsible or convict only the leader or members of the executive branches of the party accused of criminal activity. In addition to that principle, nothing less than very serious evidence of a threat -- such as directly praising violence -- will be acceptable grounds for closing down a party. Also, the constitutional change will remove the law that contains a political ban on the senior members of a party that is closed down.

Ergün says, "Since the change will take place within the next 15 to 20 days and the Constitutional Court will take, they say, as long as six months to decide, the new Constitution will most certainly influence the ruling, although it will not serve to dismiss the case if the court decides to hear it."

Scenarios outside the AK Party

There are a number of possibilities that could occur in the next few days, according to legal experts outside the AK Party. One of these, which is very likely according to AK Party officials, is that the Constitutional Court will reject the indictment on technical grounds. In that case, however, the Chief Prosecutor's Office would still have the opportunity to correct the technical errors noted and reapply with a technically corrected document. So if at any time during the process the Constitutional Court finds the indictment to be "acceptable," the court case will have officially opened.

A change made to the Constitution in 2001 makes shutting down political parties considerably harder than it previously was. Earlier, the vote of six of the 11 Constitutional Court judges was sufficient. Currently, seven of the judges must vote for closure.

Another possibility is that the Constitutional Court will rule that the AK Party deserves punishment for its activities, but punishment other than closure. In this case, the AK Party's access to political party aid granted by the Treasury might be restricted.

If the worst-case scenario occurs and the AK Party is shut down, it would also mean the fall of the government. Hundreds of parliamentary deputies will become independents. In case of the resignation of these deputies, Turkey might have to hold early polls.

If the party is disbanded, Erdoğan will be banned from politics. He will, however, be able to continue serving in Parliament as an independent deputy.



Party's Ergün recalls that the FP was in the offing when it became obvious that the RP would be shut down. While the due process was under way for the closure of the FP, the party members had already rolled sleeves to start the Felicity Party (SP). AK Party officials say their party cannot be associated with any of these parties in anyway, adding that they will not be establishing a new party.

Instead, the AK Party will try to pass constitutional changes, which the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) has also said it would back, that make it harder for judicial organs to shut down political parties. The Constitution will be amended according to a proposal drafted after the AK Party reviews the constitutions and legal norms of Germany, Portugal, Spain and Italy, four countries that have rules on closing down parties inscribed in their constitutions. A hybrid average of the norms common to these four countries will be integrated into Turkey's Constitution, according to the AK Party plan.



Iraq: We visit an oasis of calm

From Martin Phillips In Erbil, Iraq

Smoke from the goatherds' fires drifted across the valley below as dust blew around the simple headstones in the hillside graveyard.

Rekan Abid was five years old, a child of Halabja.

The Iraq she briefly knew was neglected, persecuted and finally obliterated by Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons in a terrifying show of his brutality.

Now, all that is left of Rekan is the name on her grave.

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the Allied invasion of Iraq.

For much of the country the joy of liberation from the evil of Saddam's hated regime has turned into a nightmare. Brave British troops are among those who have paid with their lives - the cost of trying to bring peace.

But for Halabja, at least, the invasion has brought happiness and increasing prosperity.

Shaheen Faris was born five years ago. The bombs that rocked his cradle heralded the Allied invasion and the overthrow of Saddam.

Now, playing happily in a new city centre park, surrounded by laughter, he has a future.

Shaheen is growing up in 'The Other Iraq', the peaceful Iraq, far from the bombings and bloodshed of Basra and Baghdad. The Iraq that is rarely heard of in Britain.

This is the Iraq free of sectarian violence, slaughter and kidnappings, where every day new homes and facilities are being built; where women are treated as equals and Westerners are welcomed with open arms and a smile - not bullets.

Shaheen's father Shkwan said: "I remember March 20, 2003, with happiness. It makes me very glad." He and his family live in Erbil, capital of the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, a world away from the killing fields to the south.

Shkwan, a lieutenant in Kurdish army the Peshmerga (translation: "those who face death") was injured in the

resistance to Saddam's attempted ethnic cleansing of Kurds after the first Gulf War in 1990.

He still carries four pieces of shrapnel in his body.

When the West's Safe Haven status for the Kurds forced Saddam to withdraw in 1992, he took away all the bank deposits.

His sanctions against the Kurds, on top of the UN sanctions on Iraq, left the region in crisis.

Rival Kurdish factions the PDK and PUK tore each other apart, just as the Sunnis and Shi'ites are doing now to the south.

Shaheen's mother Layla still bears the scars where a bullet took away most of the bottom half of her leg in that conflict.

But the Kurds found a way to cooperate and the overthrow of Saddam in 2003 allowed them to become a self-governing region in a federal Iraq - this haven of peace.

Shkwan said: "For our people, it was like a new birth."

Fewer than 200 coalition forces remain in the Kurdish-governed region, which successfully polices itself.

In the capital's main hotel armed visitors hand in their weapons at reception in return for a cloakroom ticket, and retrieve them when they leave.

bowling alley for the capital, finished last year, have introduced the people of Erbil to pleasures they never knew under the old regime.

Bowling manager Sanger Perdwad, 26, said: "Saddam spent the country's money only on what he wanted - the military, his palaces and fancy cars and trips to Europe for him and his family.

"The Kurdish people, especially, he did not take care of. Now we take care of ourselves."

This week marked also the 20th anniversary of the chemical attack on Halabja, the most notorious and devastating deed by Saddam.

He killed some 180,000 of his own people and destroyed more than 3,000 Kurdish Iraqi villages near the border with Iran.

At least 5,000 men, women and children died in Halabja alone, including five-year-old Rekan Abid. And three brothers. And her six sisters. And her mother and father.

Only her brother Aras Abid Akram, now 40, survived from a family of 25.

The first wave of rocket attacks left his body lacerated by shrapnel.

Aras, now a representative of

shelter in the cellar of the house next door.

"When more rockets hit the house they were all killed."

A photo of his family's dead bodies, in a pile, is on his office wall as a grim reminder.

Sarkhel Ghafar was just nine at the time of the attack, which killed his brother, 13, and his father.

Now he is manager of the Halabja monument to the dead. He said: "It was like Doomsday as the sky went dark. I survived by an act of God. Many families, like me, did not know where their relatives died. This monument is our grave.

"All of the families were happy with news of the invasion five years ago because Saddam was our biggest enemy."

Meanwhile, they are seeing their town rebuilt like the rest of the thriving Kurdish region.

Halabja is getting two new schools, a health centre, a hotel and agriculture college.

Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan region, said: "Having emerged from the darkness of dictatorship into the light of democracy, we are determined not to squander this opportunity.

"We believe that Iraq can be a free, democratic, federal, secular, and pluralistic country if sufficient efforts are dedicated to this goal.

"The Kurdistan region can be an example to the rest of the country in achieving peace, stability, democracy and economic development. We are determined to avoid the problems that have bedeviled the rest of the country."

It is all a far cry from the devastation across the rest of Iraq. In Erbil, posters boast that the 5,000-year-old city is the longest inhabited place in the world.

Now they hope this cradle of civilisation can lead the way to the birth of a new, healed Iraq.

Everywhere there is new building - new apartments, tourist resorts, a new shopping centre in Erbil where AK47s have become fashion accessories. And there is new money.

An aqua-park and a tenpin

the Save The Children charity in Halabja, said: "I pleaded with my family to leave me. There was no need for us all to die, I told them.

"They covered me with a blanket and they went to take



L'Irak ne sait que faire de l'argent du pétrole

GOLFE

Cinq ans après l'invasion américaine, les revenus du pétrole affluent mais ils attisent surtout les tensions communautaires. La population, elle, continue à s'appauvrir.

L'IRAK est un pays sinistré mais... riche ! Cinq ans après la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein, le budget de l'État irakien affiche un excédent de plusieurs milliards de dollars. Mais les dirigeants du pays ne savent pas comment dépenser la manne pétrolière, en raison des violences qui se poursuivent et qui, sauf dans la région kurde du nord, entravent tout développement.

Le contraste est frappant avec l'état de la population qui, elle, continue de s'appauvrir. Le niveau de chômage s'établit entre 25 et 50 % des actifs, selon les estimations, pour une population

de quelque 27 millions d'habitants. Les Nations unies indiquent que 4 millions d'entre eux ont du mal à se nourrir. Environ 40 % de la population n'est pas approvisionnée en eau potable. Près des trois quarts des médecins seraient partis à l'étranger. L'électricité n'est toujours pas disponible dans des quartiers entiers.

Et pourtant, l'envolée des cours du pétrole sur le marché mondial a profité à l'État irakien. En 2007, les exportations d'or noir ont rapporté près de 40 milliards de dollars. Les dirigeants irakiens n'ont même pas pu dépenser l'intégralité de leur budget d'investissement. Et pour 2008, si le cours de l'or noir se maintient au-dessus de cent dollars le baril, les revenus pétroliers, qui constituent 80 % des recettes de l'État, devraient atteindre un pactole de 70 milliards de dollars.

LE FIGARO 19 mars 2008

« L'amélioration de la situation sécuritaire et une réduction de la contrebande ont permis au secteur pétrolier d'amorcer son redressement », explique un spécialiste de l'économie irakienne. Depuis août, l'objectif de production que s'était fixé le ministère du Pétrole – deux millions de barils par jour – a été rempli, voire dépassé en septembre et en décembre, avec des pics frôlant les 2,5 millions par jour, c'est-à-dire les niveaux d'avant l'intervention militaire américaine de 2003.

Sous la pression américaine, les responsables du ministère du Pétrole ont pu réinstaller sur les puits et les oléoducs les compteurs qui avaient été cannibalisés lorsque la guérilla lança ses premières attaques à l'été 2003. La contrebande atteignit jusqu'à 300 000 barils par jour, un trésor de guerre qui servit à financer la rébellion dévastatrice contre les forces américaines et leurs alliés irakiens. Aujourd'hui, le fléau a régressé sur les pipelines, mais il affecte toujours les ventes d'essence aux stations-service.

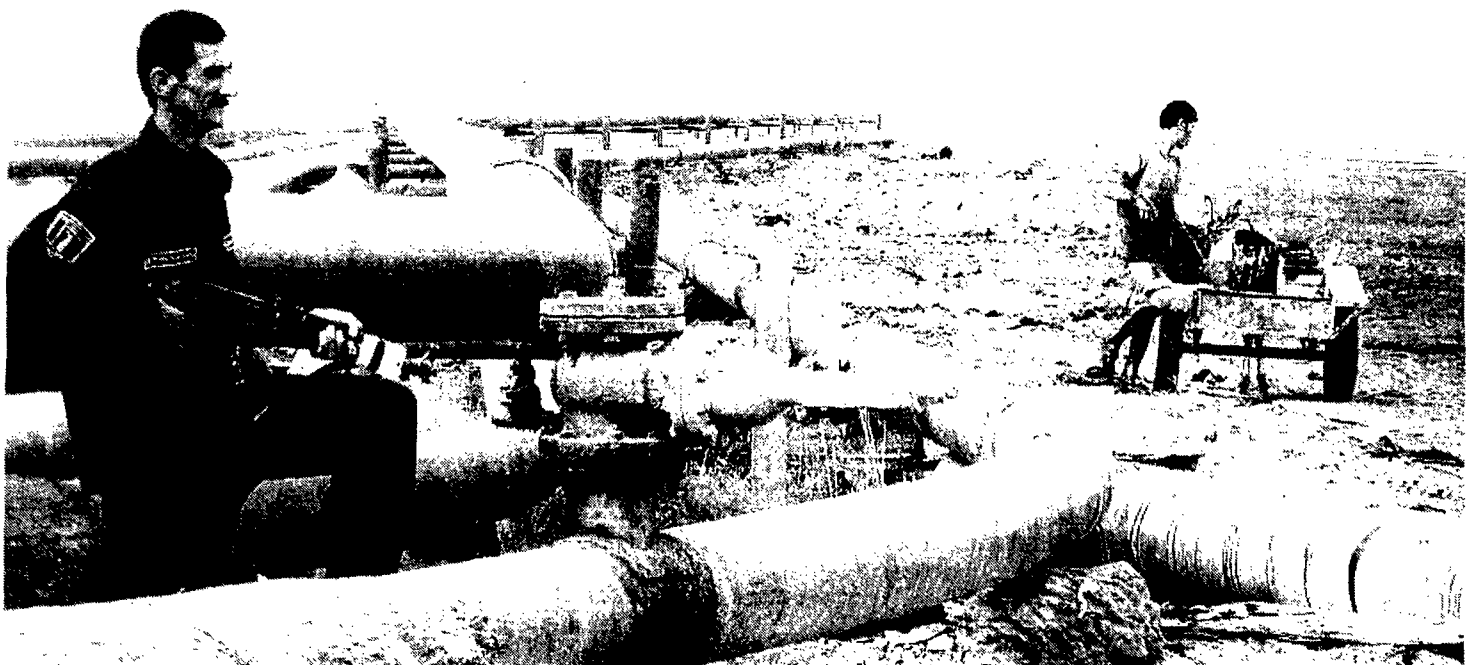
Retour au cercle vertueux

Au nord, la remise en service de l'oléoduc Kirkouk-Ceyhan (en Turquie) permet désormais l'exportation d'environ 400 000 barils par jour. Cet acquis est fragile : le règlement de la dispute autour de la ville de Kirkouk, arabisée sous Saddam Hussein et

revendiquée par les Kurdes, n'a été reporté qu'au moins de juin.

« Malgré les difficultés politiques, les autorités irakiennes ont réussi à tenir leurs engagements », se félicite le Fonds monétaire international (FMI). L'inflation a été ramenée à 20 % (au lieu de 60 %). La croissance du PIB atteint désormais 6 %, et la banque centrale dispose de six à sept mois de réserves d'importations, c'est-à-dire beaucoup plus que sa voisine jordanienne par exemple.

Mais pour les dirigeants irakiens, ce retour au cercle vertueux a un prix. Ils auront du mal à maintenir leurs demandes d'aides internationales pour financer la reconstruction de leur pays. « Vous avez l'argent nécessaire », insiste-t-on à Paris, où l'on pointe la « mauvaise exécution des projets de réhabilitation » engagés depuis 2003 pour un montant total dépassant les 20 milliards de dollars. Quelque 30 à 40 % de ces projets n'ont pas été menés à bien ou exécutés de façon inadéquate. Il reste encore six milliards de dollars en attente d'investissements dans les caisses de l'État. C'est particulièrement vrai dans le secteur électrique. Faute de pouvoir opérer sur place en raison de l'insécurité, les sociétés étrangères comme Schneider font réaliser leurs travaux de réhabilitation par du personnel local, souvent mal formé, d'où les retards... et quatre heures d'électricité seulement par



En 2003, la contrebande atteignait jusqu'à 300 000 barils par jour et servait à financer la rébellion contre les forces américaines et leurs alliés irakiens. Aujourd'hui, le fléau a régressé sur les oléoducs, mais il affecte toujours les ventes d'essence aux stations-service. Haider al-Assadeel/EPA

jour à Bagdad.

Le mois prochain va se tenir à Koweït une nouvelle réunion internationale pour le financement de l'Irak. Contrairement à ce que réclament Américains et Irakiens, « *ce n'est pas de davantage d'argent dont Bagdad a besoin, mais plutôt qu'on aide le gouvernement à dépenser son propre argent* », remarque un

cadre de l'ONU. Et pour cela, il faut moins de parasitage des milices, plus d'État central pour prendre rapidement des décisions, et moins de corruption.

La France, qui a versé via l'Union européenne 34 millions d'euros, conditionne désormais son aide à des progrès politiques en matière de réconciliation entre communautés. « *Si les chiïtes et les Kurdes ne cèdent pas*

d'avantage de pouvoir à la minorité sunnite, cela ne servira à rien de verser des milliards comme la communauté internationale l'a fait depuis 2003. » Sous l'effet de la corruption et des destructions (voir encadré), le coût global de la reconstruction de l'Irak n'a cessé en effet de s'alourdir. De 50 milliards de dollars en 2003, il est évalué aujourd'hui à 150 milliards. Une somme énorme. À

première vue seulement. « *Avec 20 milliards de budget d'investissements en 2008, un Irak libéré de la violence et de la corruption serait capable théoriquement d'autofinancer sa reconstruction sur sept à huit ans seulement* », conclut, optimiste, l'expert économique. Un autre paradoxe du drame irakien.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

Corruption et insécurité : dix milliards par an de manque à gagner

■ Dix milliards de dollars par an : c'est le coût gigantesque de l'insécurité et de la corruption pour l'économie irakienne, selon une estimation du ministère du Pétrole. Depuis l'installation du pouvoir proaméricain à Bagdad, le manque à gagner s'élèverait donc à 50 milliards de dollars. L'insécurité gonfle le coût des projets de reconstruction d'environ 30 à 40 %. Les transbordements de marchandises sont non seulement indis-

pensables aux frontières, mais également entre secteurs chiïtes et sunnites des villes comme Bagdad, où l'on compte parfois un agent de sécurité pour un employé travaillant sur le chantier.

Dans les ministères, 42 officiels sont actuellement recherchés pour être interrogés sur des pratiques liées à la corruption, indiquait récemment le responsable de la Commission sur l'intégrité, Moussa Faraj al-

Shuwayli, qui se déclare bien décidé à freiner ces dérives. Les anciens ministres de la Défense Hazim al-Shalan, de l'Électricité, Ayman al-Samaraï, et le dirigeant sunnite Mishan al-Jbouri sont en fuite hors du pays. En 2007, un rapport de l'ambassade américaine à Bagdad a fait état d'un haut niveau de corruption dans tous les ministères et mis en doute la volonté réelle du gouvernement irakien d'y mettre bon ordre.

Le ministère du Pétrole est l'un des premiers dans le collimateur. Comme s'en souvient ce diplomate qui fut en poste à Bagdad : « *Lorsque j'ai rencontré pour la première fois le ministre du Pétrole d'alors, Ibrahim Bar al-Ouloum, il m'a tout de suite dit que c'était avec lui qu'il fallait que les sociétés françaises négocient sa commission, si elles voulaient rapporter des marchés.* »

G. M.

Le Monde
20 mars 2008

IRAN ÉLECTIONS LÉGISLATIVES

Le futur Majlis iranien sera dominé par des conservateurs divisés

LE SECOND TOUR des élections législatives en Iran n'aura lieu que fin avril ou début mai. Mais l'attribution de la soixantaine de sièges qui reste à pourvoir ne devrait pas modifier la physionomie du futur Majlis (parlement), tel qu'il se présente d'ores et déjà, après les résultats du premier tour, le 14 mars.

Les conservateurs, toutes listes confondues, sont arrivés largement en tête, enlevant 139 sièges sur 290 (dont 19 sièges sur les 30 que compte la capitale, Téhéran). Une victoire quasi « programmée », puisque près de 2 000 candidats, en grande majorité des réformateurs, avaient été rayés des listes par le Conseil des gardiens, organisme chargé du contrôle des élections et composé de juristes et de religieux sous influence conservatrice.

Au final, dans ce premier tour des législatives, seuls une centaine de sièges ont fait l'objet d'une véritable compétition entre forces politiques. Les réformateurs, surtout ceux de la mouvance de l'ancien président Mohammad Khatami, ont emporté 34 sièges dès le premier tour. En outre, une quarantaine de candidats indépendants ont été élus.

Des chiffres qui auraient dû même être révisés à la hausse, selon certains stratèges réformateurs qui se plaignent « *d'irrégularités* » dans le comptage des voix à

Téhéran. En Iran, un candidat doit recueillir 25 % des suffrages exprimés pour être élu au premier tour. Or à Téhéran, 170 000 bulletins nuls ou blancs n'auraient pas été pris en compte, permettant à 19 candidats conservateurs de passer la barre, au lieu de onze en appliquant strictement la loi.

Le futur Parlement, largement dominé par les conservateurs, sera-t-il pour autant aligné sur les positions ultraconservatrices du président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ? Rien n'est moins sûr, estime la plupart des analystes. Laminée mais toujours présente, la « minorité » réformatrice s'appête à mener une dure opposition parlementaire à un an de l'élection présidentielle de 2009.

De plus, la grande coalition conservatrice des « défenseurs des principes » est loin d'être uniforme. La liste proche de M. Ahmadinejad (« *La bonne odeur de servir* »), qui en fait partie, n'a obtenu qu'environ 15 % des suffrages. Et le succès d'Ali Larijani, l'ex-négociateur du dossier nucléaire élu triomphalement à Qom, la ville sainte, dominée par un clergé chiïte qui n'a jamais vraiment adoubé le « *laïc* » Ahmadinejad et ses amis Gardiens de la révolution, laisse présager de futures batailles à la présidentielle.

Le Guide soutient M. Ahmadinejad

D'autant qu'il faudra aussi compter avec d'autres personnalités conservatrices comme le maire de Téhéran, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, ou l'ancien chef des Gardiens de la révolution, Mohsen Rezai. Tous deux sont, comme M. Larijani, plutôt critiques envers la politique économique inflationniste de M. Ahmadinejad et l'effet négatif de ses diatribes enflammées en politique étrangère. Ce qui pourrait les amener à conclure des alliances « tactiques » au coup par coup avec l'opposition réformatrice pour tenter de contrôler certaines dérives gouvernementales. « *Si le gouvernement continue à appliquer ses choix controversés, alors la majorité du Parlement sera contre lui* », a prévenu Amir Amiri, porte-parole d'un courant conservateur critique, selon l'agence ISNA.

M. Ahmadinejad n'aura sans doute pas les mains libres, mais il n'est pas pour autant sans ressource. En effet, sortant de façon inattendue de sa réserve et surtout de son rôle d'arbitre, le Guide suprême, l'ayatollah Khamenei, a pris directement parti pour lui dans cette élection, allant jusqu'à le féliciter publiquement pour sa « *gestion exemplaire* » du dossier nucléaire. « *Le sort du président est désormais lié au bon vouloir du Guide, commentait par téléphone un député indépendant. Si la situation économique s'aggrave et le mécontentement aussi, le Guide s'en séparera et trouvera un autre fusible.* » ■

MARIE-CLAUDE DECAMPS (AVEC AFP)

Cinq ans de guerre en Irak : l'impasse

David L. Petraeus, le généralissime des 155 000 soldats américains stationnés en Irak, n'est pas content du gouvernement de Bagdad. Celui-ci n'ayant « *pas fait, et de loin, les efforts politiques et législatifs* » attendus « *en matière de réconciliation nationale* », le nouveau champion des militaires, troublé par la recrudescence des violences depuis deux mois, recommande le maintien de son contingent à au moins 135 000 hommes et femmes jusqu'à la fin de l'année 2008. Et sans doute au-delà.

Cinq ans après avoir envahi l'Irak avec 190 000 GI et 60 000 Britanniques – qui ne sont plus que 5 000 –, cinq ans après avoir essayé de réaliser l'impossible rêve néoconservateur d'instaurer la démocratie par la force dans le monde arabe avec, entre autres, l'objectif de renforcer la sécurité d'Israël, cinq ans après avoir débarrassé la région d'une de ses plus brutales dictatures, l'Amérique est embourbée dans une impasse. La « *stratégie démocratique* » a été abandonnée en chemin, l'ambition n'est plus que de parvenir à stabiliser la situation.

L'Amérique a perdu 4 000 soldats, et 29 000 ont été blessés. Mais elle ne contrôle toujours pas le pays, pas même les 16 km d'autoroute qui séparent sa « zone verte » ultrafortifiée au cœur de la capitale de l'aéroport de Bagdad. Après avoir dissous toutes les forces de sécurité irakiennes – « *une grave erreur* », admet-on à présent –, elle a dépensé plus de 20 milliards de dollars pour entraîner et équiper 250 000 policiers et 160 000 soldats irakiens dont les chefs disent eux-mêmes qu'au mieux ils ne seront pas prêts à prendre seuls en charge la sécurité nationale « *avant 2012* », et celle des frontières « *avant 2018* ». L'armée américaine est épuisée,

« *incapable* », disait l'amiral William Fallon avant d'être contraint à la démission la semaine passée, de « *combattre sur un autre front* » qui ne serait pas, cette fois-ci, « *choisi* » comme en Irak, mais imposé.

Par ses mensonges, l'administration Bush a gâché, pour longtemps, l'image et le crédit des Etats-Unis à travers le monde. Le conflit d'Irak a contribué au quadruplement des prix du pétrole en cinq ans. Malgré les milliards de dollars injectés dans l'exploitation, la production irakienne, troisième du monde avant 2003, n'est même pas encore revenue à son niveau d'avant-guerre. Même chose pour la distribution d'eau potable – dont 40 % des populations sont désormais privées – et d'électricité, dont la majorité des Irakiens, à commencer par les 5 à 6 millions de Bagdad, ne reçoivent guère plus de quatre à six heures par jour.

En 2007, le Pentagone estimait que 70 % des 2 milliards de dollars (1,264 milliard d'euros) d'essence, kérosène et fioul produits par la raffinerie de Baiji, la principale du pays, « *disparaissaient* » dans la corruption généralisée qui sévit à présent partout en Irak. Bien sûr, une portion de ces détournements, estimée à « *au moins 200 millions de dollars par an* », participe au financement d'une insurrection, djihadiste et/ou nationaliste, qui trouve aussi des fonds privés à foison en Arabie saoudite, en

Analyse

Patrice Claude
Grand reporter

Iran et dans les Etats du Golfe. Aujourd'hui en récession, l'Amérique surendettée a emprunté l'essentiel des 500 milliards de dollars déjà dépensés dans une guerre qui a, directement et indirectement, causé la mort d'au moins 400 000 Irakiens, selon l'Organisation mondiale de la santé. Elle a aussi déclenché, d'après le Haut-Commissariat aux réfugiés de l'ONU, la plus « *vaste migration humaine* » depuis la partition entre l'Inde et le Pakistan en 1947. Environ 4,4 millions d'Irakiens sont aujourd'hui des « *déplacés* » qui ont fui leurs maisons, 2 millions tentent de survivre dans les pays voisins, avec tous les risques de déstabilisation politique que cela implique.

Que faire à présent ? Impossible de rester quand toutes les enquêtes d'opinion montrent que les trois quarts des 25 ou 26 millions d'Irakiens n'en peuvent plus de l'occupation. Que les enfants sont souvent les premiers à applaudir lorsque l'insurrection parvient à exploser un de leurs blindés ou à abattre un hélicoptère. Impossible de se retirer quand presque tous les analystes, les stratèges, les journalistes et la quasi-totalité des politiciens irakiens eux-mêmes prédisent qu'en pareille hypothèse un bain de sang est pratiquement assuré et l'extension de la guerre civile aux pays voisins, possible sinon probable.

« Génocide et chaos »

Confrontés à ce dilemme, que disent les successeurs potentiels de George W. Bush ? John McCain, le candidat républicain, estime qu'un retrait militaire complet déclencherait « *génocide et chaos dans toute la région* ». Pour lui, l'Amérique doit être prête à rester en Irak « *un siècle s'il le faut* ». Hillary Clinton annonce un « *retrait progressif* » qui commencerait dans les soixante jours suivant son élection. Mais, prudente, la candidate démocrate ne se prononce pas sur la date finale de l'opération. Barack Obama est le seul à promettre un retrait complet de « *toutes les brigades de combat* » dans les seize mois suivant son élection. Mais il ne dit pas ce qu'il adviendrait alors des 100 000 soldats et soldates – au moins – et des 60 000 « *contractuels* » civils étrangers qui s'occupent, sur le terrain, de logistique, de sécurité et des chantiers, pour l'essentiel en panne, de la reconstruction.

La guerre a réveillé des haines intercommunautaires entre chiïtes et sunnites dans tout le Moyen-Orient. Tandis que l'Iran pavoise et s'infiltré dans les structures étatiques de son voisin, « les » guerres d'Irak se succèdent, s'additionnent et s'amplifient. Depuis l'offensive turque du mois de février contre le PKK, le Nord essentiellement kurde est devenu une poudrière qui peut exploser à tout moment. Dans le Sud, les gangs et les milices chiïtes kidnappent, assassinent et s'affrontent à l'arme lourde pour le contrôle des trafics. Depuis le recrutement par les Américains de 91 000 supplétifs – à 82 % sunnites –, les affrontements intrasunnites et intertribaux se multiplient.

Le général Petraeus peut bien tancer le gouvernement irakien pour son manque de résolution. Celui-ci, chacun le sait, n'est qu'une addition de fiefs qui ne fonctionnent qu'avec la moitié de ses ministres depuis des mois parce que les autres l'ont quitté pour diverses raisons, politiques et/ou sectaires. Après cinq années de tragédie ininterrompue, ce ne sont pas les 6 000 « *soldats* » d'Al-Qaida – dernière estimation du renseignement militaire américain – qui maintiennent seuls l'Irak dans la guerre. Ce sont les rivières de sang versé qui polarisent toutes les communautés comme jamais. Que les Américains s'en aillent ou qu'ils demeurent, la stabilisation de la vieille Mésopotamie n'est pas pour demain. ■

Le Monde 21 mars 2008

SYRIE: 3 MORTS DANS DES HEURTS ENTRE DES KURDES ET LA POLICE

Trois Kurdes ont été tués jeudi soir à Qamichli, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, dans des heurts entre des manifestants kurdes et la police syrienne, a affirmé vendredi un dirigeant du Parti kurde Yakiti en Syrie.

"La police syrienne a ouvert le feu jeudi soir sur des Kurdes qui célébraient le Nowrouz (Nouvel an kurde) à la lumière des bougies et qui chantaient, faisant trois morts et quatre blessés", parmi les Kurdes, a déclaré à l'AFP ce dirigeant qui a requis l'anonymat.

Le responsable de ce parti kurde interdit, qui se trouve à Qamichli (680 km au nord-est de Damas), a été joint par téléphone.

L'Observatoire syrien pour les droits de l'Homme (basé à Londres) a indiqué pour sa part

dans un communiqué qu'"un groupe de jeunes kurdes fêtaient le Nowrouz (...) lorsqu'une dispute a dégénéré entre les manifestants et la police qui a tiré, faisant trois morts et cinq blessés".

Le communiqué, qui a identifié les victimes, appelle "le président Bachar el-Assad à intervenir rapidement pour faire cesser ce genre de tuerie de sang froid contre des fils sans défense du peuple syrien, afin d'éviter un massacre encore plus important que celui de Qamichli".

Il a aussi appelé à traduire en justice les membres des forces de sécurité responsables de cette "tuerie".

En mars 2004, des affrontements opposant des Kurdes aux forces de l'ordre ou à des tribus arabes avaient éclaté à Qamichli, avant de se répandre aux régions voisines. Ces heurts avaient fait 40 morts en six jours, selon des sources kurdes, et 25 selon un bilan officiel.

Un cortège de Kurdes, avec à sa tête des dirigeants du mouvement kurde en Syrie, s'est

dirigé vendredi matin vers le cimetière al-Hilalya pour les funérailles des victimes, selon le dirigeant de Yakiti.

Le représentant à Damas de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), Abdel Razzaq Taoufic, a affirmé à l'AFP que ces incidents avaient été "provoqués par des jeunes pour créer des troubles avant le sommet arabe", prévu les 29 et 30 mars à Damas. Selon lui, il y a eu quatre morts.

AFP

HEURTS IMPLIQUANT DES KURDES EN SYRIE: LE KURDISTAN IRAKIEN CONDAMNE

ERBIL (Irak), 23 mars 2008 (AFP) -- Les autorités du Kurdistan irakien ont exigé dimanche l'ouverture d'une enquête en Syrie après la mort de trois Kurdes dans le nord-est du pays dans des heurts entre manifestants kurdes et la police syrienne.

"Nous condamnons fermement ce crime contre des innocents qui fêtaient Nowrouz (le nouvel an kurde)", déclare un communiqué de Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

L'incident a eu lieu à Qamichli, à 680 km au nord-est de Damas. Selon l'Observatoire syrien pour les droits de l'homme

(basé à Londres), "un groupe de jeunes Kurdes fêtaient Nowrouz lorsqu'une dispute a dégénéré entre les manifestants et la police qui a tiré, faisant trois morts et cinq blessés".

"Nous ne pouvons pas rester les bras croisés devant cet acte brutal qui viole les droits de l'homme (...) et que nous considérons comme un meurtre", poursuit le communiqué.

M. Barzani "demande au président (syrien) Bachar Al-Assad d'intervenir pour qu'un tel acte ne se répète pas et ouvrir une enquête afin d'identifier et punir les criminels responsables" de l'incident.

Radio-Canada.

23 mars 2008

NOUVEL AN SANGLANT

Les célébrations entourant le Nouvel An kurde ont tourné au drame cette fin de semaine, dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

Radio-Canada.ca avec Agence France Presse, Associated Press, Reuters, BBC et Al-Djazira

Deux manifestants kurdes ont été tués, une douzaine de personnes, blessées, et près de 200, interpellées. Le feu aux poudres

Des centaines de protestataires kurdes sont descendus dans les rues, dans plusieurs villes du sud-est de la Turquie et ont scandé des slogans en faveur des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Ils ont pris à parti les représentants des forces de l'ordre turques et leur ont jeté des pierres. Les policiers ont répondu par des tirs de semonce, ainsi que par des jets de canons à eau et de gaz lacrymogène.

C'est la mort par balle d'un manifestant lors du rassemblement organisé dans la ville de Van, samedi, qui aurait relancé les hostilités, dimanche. Les manifestations ont été suspendues par les autorités locales dans plusieurs villes à la suite des violences mais certains kurdes ont bravé l'interdiction et ont confronté les policiers. Un autre manifestant est décédé dimanche, également par balle, dans un rassemblement à Yuksekova.

La police turque considère que les protestataires sont responsables des affrontements de dimanche, car ils n'étaient pas autorisés à manifester.

L'histoire se répète

« Newroz » est une fête qui marque le Nouvel An et le début du printemps en Iran, dans le nord de l'Irak et en Asie centrale, généralement le 21 mars, chaque année. Les célébrations ont déjà donné lieu à des débordements entre manifestants et policiers, notamment en 1992, avec près de 50 victimes des suites de violences.



L'EXPRESS

DU 20 AU 26 MARS 2008

Irak La reconstruction impossible

A Bagdad, la violence a baissé d'un cran. Mais, cinq ans après l'intervention américaine, le pays reste profondément divisé.

C'était il y a cinq ans et les Américains rêvaient d'un « nouveau Moyen-Orient ».

Lorsque, le 20 mars 2003, ils se lancent à l'assaut de l'Irak, le patron du Pentagone, Donald Rumsfeld, veut la tête de Saddam Hussein – ce qui ne prendra que quelques semaines – et ne se soucie guère du reste. Les néoconservateurs qui l'entourent sont persuadés qu'ils pourront construire une démocratie qui aura valeur d'exemple pour tous les peuples de la région. Les uns et les autres préfèrent ignorer les mises en garde des spécialistes du Département d'Etat qui savent, eux, que l'Irak, mosaïque de tribus et de communautés, est un pays compliqué...

Au lendemain de la chute du despote, les vainqueurs font le ménage. L'armée de Saddam est démantelée, les services de sécurité sont liquidés, les membres du parti Baas écartés des emplois publics. Cette politique dynamite les structures de l'Etat et précipite la mi-



Un chef de tribu sunnite participe à une patrouille de l'armée américaine dans la province de Diyala.

norité sunnite, longtemps privilégiée, dans l'opposition. Un mouvement insurrectionnel se développe, en partie instrumentalisé par Al-Qaeda, qui a trouvé là un nouveau terrain de bataille contre Washington. Le pays s'enfoncé dans la violence.

Un pays à la merci des seigneurs de la guerre

Les conflits se juxtaposent : les sunnites se battent contre les Américains et les chiïtes, puis entre eux ; les chiïtes contre les sunnites, tout en se déchirant également entre factions rivales. D'autres acteurs, extérieurs, interviennent : l'Iran parraine l'expansionnisme chiïte, l'Arabie saoudite cherche à le contrer. Les appels de

Washington à la « réconciliation nationale » restent lettre morte. « La tentative de reconstruction politique sous occupation était vouée à l'échec. Elle a enfermé le pays dans un cercle vicieux », résume Jean-Pierre Luizard, chercheur au CNRS.

La donne a-t-elle changé ces derniers mois ? Depuis novembre 2007, la violence a baissé d'un cran (voir l'encadré). Reste à savoir si cette accalmie relative sera durable. Trois facteurs sont à l'origine de cette amélioration : la trêve décrétée en août 2007 par Moqtada al-Sadr, patron de l'Armée du Mahdi, le groupe chiïte le plus radical, à la suite de sanglants affrontements interchiïtes ; le ras-le-bol d'une partie des sunnites face aux excès d'Al-Qaeda ; la nouvelle stratégie, enfin, mise en place par les Américains sous la houlette du général David Petraeus. Celui-ci a su retourner plusieurs grandes tribus sunnites, qui ont mis leurs milices au service de l'armée américaine. Ces supplétifs, payé 300 dollars par

mois, seraient aujourd'hui 80 000, implantés surtout dans la moitié nord du pays.

La situation demeure cependant fragile. La trêve voulue par Moqtada al-Sadr est contestée par la base du mouvement. Il est surtout difficile de savoir sur quoi débouchera à terme la politique tribale de David Petraeus. Pessimiste, Jean-Pierre Luizard estime que cette multiplication des allégeances risque de livrer le pays aux seigneurs de la guerre. Il ne croit pas non plus à la défaite d'Al-Qaeda. « Son objectif n'a jamais été, dit-il, de s'emparer du pouvoir. Mais d'enfermer durablement les Américains dans le piège irakien. »

Le général Petraeus plaide pour le maintien, jusqu'à la fin de l'année au moins et sans doute pour plus longtemps encore, d'un corps expéditionnaire de 135 000 hommes. « Après tout, rappelle Bruno Tertrais, chercheur à la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, les Américains sont bien restés cinquante ans en Allemagne... » ● **Dominique Lagarde**

Cinq ans de violence

Depuis mars 2003, 4 000 soldats américains ont été tués en Irak et 29 000 blessés. Le nombre des victimes irakiennes de la violence n'est pas connu avec précision. Il est estimé à plus de 150 000 par l'Organisation

mondiale de la santé. La violence a cependant diminué ces derniers mois. Selon de récentes statistiques américaines les attentats ont fait en moyenne 60 morts par jour en janvier. Contre 180 en juin 2007. ●

LE FIGARO

23 mars 2008

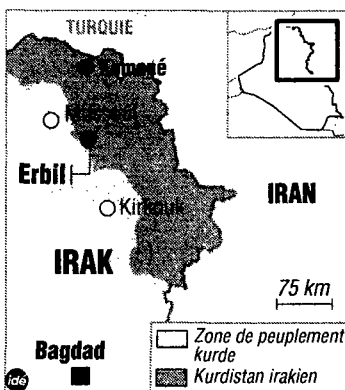
L'évêque qui veut sauver les chrétiens d'Irak



Mgr Rabban, évêque chaldéen d'Erbil, lutte corps et âme pour que sa communauté puisse continuer à vivre sur sa terre : « Notre avenir est ici, l'exil est une catastrophe: la troisième génération, aux États-Unis ou à Sarcelles, perd ses racines. » Laure Marchand

MOYEN-ORIENT

La communauté chrétienne de la région autonome kurde s'apprête à célébrer Pâques dans le deuil et l'incertitude. Mgr Rabban se bat pour endiguer les départs massifs.



De notre envoyée spéciale à Erbil

TOUT à son affaire d'organiser une veillée de condoléances dans son village de Komané, perdu dans les montagnes, Mgr Rabban al-Qas a affolé tout le Kurdistan. Mardi, une rumeur courait : sa voiture avait été attaquée, et il restait introuvable. Son téléphone rebranché, l'évêque passera la soirée à rassurer le ministre de l'Intérieur, les services de sécurité de la

région kurde d'Irak, ses amis musulmans et chrétiens... Un officier peshmerga, viendra constater de visu que l'évêque chaldéen est tranquillement assis dans son canapé, un neveu sur les genoux, devant un dessin animé. « Jamais, je n'accepterai de gardes, laissez-moi vivre ma vie », répète-t-il, en s'amusant de cette « blague ». Mais entre deux bons mots dans un français impeccable, il serre le poing, « je dois relever les défis, j'ai été très fatigué ces derniers jours ».

500 000 chrétiens

Vendredi 14 mars, Mgr Rabban a célébré les obsèques de l'archevêque de Mossoul, Faraj Rahho, kidnappé en février et dont le corps a été retrouvé, enterré par ses ravisseurs, jeudi dernier. Son prédécesseur avait déjà été enlevé et relâché contre une rançon. L'an dernier, ce sont trois diacres et un prêtre qui ont été abattus devant une église. Les chrétiens de cette ville, devenue l'un des principaux foyers d'al-Qaida, ont déjà payé un lourd tribut à la violence interreligieuse qui ravage l'Irak. Avant la guerre, on comptait encore un peu plus de 500 000 chrétiens dans le pays, à Bassora, à Bagdad... Deux cent mille auraient déjà fui, à l'étranger ou au Kurdistan, relativement

épargné. Responsable des deux diocèses, Mgr Rabban s'y bat corps et âme pour que sa communauté puisse continuer à vivre sur sa terre : « Notre avenir est ici, l'exil est une catastrophe: la troisième génération, aux États-Unis ou à Sarcelles, perd ses racines. »

Dans la région autonome kurde, le nombre de chrétiens a été multiplié par trois en cinq ans, passant à 80 000. Beaucoup en

Nouvel An très surveillé

■ Vendredi, les Kurdes du sud-est de la Turquie ont célébré Newroz, le Nouvel An kurde, encadrés par un imposant dispositif policier. À l'appel du parti prokurde (DTP), 60 000 personnes se sont rassemblées à Diyarbakir. Dans d'autres villes, quelques affrontements ont été signalés avec les forces de l'ordre et ont fait cinq blessés légers. Traditionnellement, cette fête est l'occasion de revendiquer davantage de droits culturels et d'afficher, souvent, un soutien à la guérilla du PKK. Cette année, les cérémonies se déroulaient moins d'un mois après l'opération de l'armée turque au Kurdistan.

L. MA.

avaient été chassés par la répression sanglante et la politique d'arabisation de Saddam Hussein. À quatre jours de Pâques, l'évêque reconforte les réfugiés du village de Salahadin, sous le choc de la mort de l'archevêque. Un « martyr » de plus qui assombrit encore l'avenir des chrétiens d'Irak. Sont-ils visés à cause de leur religion? Pour Behnam Petros, arrivé de Bagdad en 2006, la réponse ne fait aucun doute : « Avant mon départ, des voitures piégées ont explosé devant cinq églises simultanément, les enlèvements de commerçants chrétiens se multipliaient. »

« Citoyens inférieurs »

Plombier, Rafaël Yako menait une vie paisible dans la capitale. Son fils a réchappé de justesse d'un attentat. Dans son modeste salon, une photo sur le mur nu rappelle un passé révolu, quand les femmes portaient des robes légères : « Bagdad, c'est fini. Mais qui nous dit que le fanatisme ne va pas arriver ici? » La mosaïque communautaire, qui est en train de disparaître du reste de l'Irak, est encore une réalité dans la région kurde, fragile.

À trois heures et demi de route, les bancs de la grande église d'Erbil, pleine à craquer, sont

remplis d'histoires identiques. Au volant de son 4x4, une cassette de chants religieux dans l'autoradio, M^r Rabban file à 150 km/h pour la cérémonie du « lavage des pieds » du Jeudi saint. Comme à son habitude, il ne relâche l'accélérateur qu'aux check points tenus par les peshmergas. Un salut pour chacun, tout le monde connaît ce patriote en soutane qui sillonne sans relâche son « pays », avec son « amour de Dieu » en bandoulière. « Je suis kurdistanais, martèle-t-il comme une profession de foi. En Irak, on nous tue, on nous torture. La constitution nous a ravalé au rang de citoyens inférieurs parce que chrétiens. Alors comment se dire irakien ? » Lundi, il dînait avec le

gouverneur local et Jay Garner, ancien administrateur américain en Irak, membre de la délégation de Dick Cheney, le vice-président, en tournée au Moyen-Orient. Au menu: le développement économique du Kurdistan.

Depuis 1991, le gouvernement régional kurde, dont le ministre des Finances est chrétien, a mis un point d'honneur à choyer cette minorité. Désormais, un petit subside est alloué à chaque famille de réfugiés, des logements sont construits.

Un lycée pour « combattre le fondamentalisme »

M^r Rabban a obtenu des fonds pour bâtir une église dans son village. Sept cents places assi-

ses, trois niveaux, une croix de six mètres, une autre, lumineuse, posée sur un globe. « Ce sera magnifique ». Cet édifice, dont il a fait les plans, est à la mesure de l'avenir qu'il veut pour sa communauté. Parfois, le doute transparaît dans son regard bleu. Mais cet « ancien champion de volleyball », qui reconnaît avec une pointe de coquetterie « une bonne condition physique » pour ses 59 ans, le repousse. Sa grande affaire pour consolider ce sanctuaire précaire qu'est le Kurdistan, c'est son lycée mixte de Dohouk, ouvert en 2004. Les élèves kurdes, chrétiens et yezidis y sont mélangés : « La seule façon de combattre le fondamentalisme ». Aucun enseignement reli-

gieux n'est dispensé. L'évêque y assure les cours de français et l'apprentissage de l'araméen, option obligatoire, « pour que les Kurdes sachent que cette terre n'est pas qu'à eux. » Depuis quelques mois, les caisses sont vides pour assurer la scolarité gratuite de ses protégés. Alors, son église attendra : le budget du chantier passe dans l'école, « parce que la religion sans l'éducation, ça ne sert à rien ».

LAURE MARCHAND

L'EXPRESS DU 20 AU 26 MARS 2008

Turquie Coup d'Etat judiciaire ?

La Cour de cassation veut faire interdire le parti au pouvoir. Les juges cherchent à s'ériger en rempart de la laïcité.

De notre correspondante

Conforté dans son rôle de parti majoritaire au Parlement (47% des voix aux élections de juillet 2007), l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement, musulman-conservateur) du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan est menacé de dissolution par le procureur général

de la Cour de cassation, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya. Dans un réquisitoire déposé, le 14 mars, devant la Cour constitutionnelle, le magistrat réclame, en outre, que 71 dirigeants locaux et nationaux, dont le président de la République, le chef de gouvernement et des députés, soient interdits d'activité politique. Dans le passé, de nom-

breuses formations kurdes et islamistes ont été bannies par voie judiciaire. Mais c'est la première fois que l'appareil judiciaire – gardien autoproclamé des valeurs laïques – mène une attaque frontale d'une telle envergure envers un parti au pouvoir depuis maintenant six ans.

Dernier-né dans la lignée des mouvements d'origine islamique en Turquie, l'AKP n'est jamais parvenu à convaincre ses détracteurs de la sincérité de son ralliement à l'héritage d'Atatürk. Les dernières mesures adoptées par le Parlement visant à permettre aux étudiantes voilées d'entrer à l'université ont fini par déclencher cette violente riposte institu-

tionnelle. Le réquisitoire de 160 pages de la cour est une collection de citations tendant à prouver que l'AKP a pour but ultime d'installer un régime islamique. Le texte n'hésite pas à comparer la situation actuelle en Turquie avec la montée du nazisme en Allemagne dans les années 1930.

La majorité des médias et des commentateurs s'accorde pour dénoncer une entrave à la démocratie et estime que l'AKP, placé en position de victime, sortira renforcé de cette crise. Au nom de la séparation des pouvoirs, « ce principe de base européen », la Commission de Bruxelles a appelé la justice turque à « ne pas se mêler de politique démocratique ». ●

Nükte V. Ortaç

Ouest-France

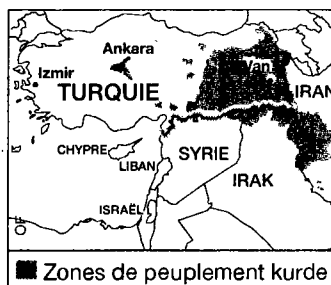
24 mars 2008

Violences au lendemain du Nouvel An kurde

Les séparatistes proches du PKK ont érigé des barricades à Van. Il y a eu plus de 300 arrestations dans différentes villes de Turquie.

Le lendemain du Nouvel an kurde a été marqué par de nombreuses manifestations violentes et des affrontements sévères avec la police, dans plusieurs villes de Turquie. Moins d'un mois après l'offensive de l'armée turque au Kurdistan irakien, les Kurdes de Turquie dénoncent le climat de répression et de régression des droits difficilement appliqués de leurs communautés.

Le soutien au PKK, le parti des séparatistes, a pris un tour violent à Van où les manifestants ont érigé des barricades, allumé des feux et



brisé des vitrines, provoquant l'intervention de la police antiémeute qui a fait usage de blindés équipés

de lances à eau et de gaz lacrymogènes.

On compte un mort, une cinquantaine de blessés, dont une quinzaine de policiers et 130 arrestations. Des scènes de violences se sont également produites à Yuksekova (un mort), Sanlurfa, Hakkari (près de la frontière irakienne), Viransehir mais aussi dans des villes de l'ouest turc, Mersin et Izmir, où vit une importante communauté kurde. Trois cents arrestations ont été opérées au cours de la journée et la soirée de samedi.

En Turquie, le patronat et les investisseurs s'inquiètent d'un risque de déstabilisation de l'économie

ISTANBUL

CORRESPONDANCE

Les acteurs économiques turcs ne cachent plus leur inquiétude. Les indicateurs nationaux montraient déjà quelques signes d'essoufflement depuis le début de l'année 2007. Mais la nouvelle crise politique et les accusations qui visent le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan fragilisent un peu plus l'économie turque, s'alarme Arzuhan Dogan Yalçindag, la présidente de la Tüsiad, l'influente organisation patronale.

Le 14 mars, le procureur de la Cour de cassation a saisi les juges constitutionnels et réclamé l'interdiction du parti au pouvoir (AKP), l'accusant de mener des activités antilaïques. Si la Cour constitutionnelle décide d'ouvrir une enquête, la Turquie entrera pour plusieurs mois dans des turbulences à l'issue incertaine, avertissent les milieux d'affaires.

Mardi 18 mars, l'association des investisseurs internationaux (Yased) a souligné, dans un rapport, que plus de la moitié des investisseurs étrangers s'inquiétaient de la crise politique turque et que leurs projets pourraient s'en trouver compromis. Déjà en 2007, avec une année électorale chargée, le ralentissement avait été sensible. « Une longue période d'instabilité politique affectera tous les

plans d'investissements », a prévenu Tahir Uysal, président de Yased. Or ce sont les investissements directs étrangers (IDE) qui ont jusqu'ici soutenu la croissance de l'économie turque et évité un choc monétaire, en injectant près de 20 milliards de dollars par an.

Le flux pourrait se ralentir en cas de crise plus profonde ou de rupture des négociations avec l'Union européenne. « Pour les investisseurs étrangers, les négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne sont essentielles », note Seyfettin Gürsel, professeur d'économie, qui craint une rupture si le parti au pouvoir est interdit.

Inflation et faible croissance

Dans le même temps, la Turquie subit le contrecoup de la crise financière mondiale et de la hausse des prix du pétrole. L'indice principal de la Bourse d'Istanbul a ainsi perdu plus de 25 % depuis le début de l'année, après il est vrai une année 2007 record. L'annonce du procureur de la Cour de cassation a fait plonger l'indice phare de la place turque de 7 %, lundi 17 mars.

Déjà en janvier, la Tüsiad s'était inquiétée de la persistance d'une inflation forte, environ 9,1 % sur les douze derniers mois, bien au-delà des prévisions de 4 %

affichées par le gouvernement. Une détérioration des indicateurs qui avait fait prédire une année 2008 « médiocre » à la dirigeante du patronat.

« La banque centrale est obligée de maintenir des taux élevés et, malgré cela, la monnaie s'est fortement appréciée, ce qui pénalise la croissance », explique M. Gürsel. Le taux de croissance reste relativement élevé, mais devrait rester inférieur aux 5 % prévus pour 2008. Et la croissance faible de l'Europe, vers laquelle la Turquie réalise 60 % de ses exportations, ne va pas améliorer la situation.

« Sans croissance, l'équilibre budgétaire va vite poser problème, estime Eser Karakas, professeur de finances publiques à l'université Bahçesehir d'Istanbul. Avec une crise mondiale, plus une crise politique, les déficits des comptes courants vont se creuser. » Or l'endettement est déjà le point faible de l'économie turque.

C'est pourquoi le ministre de l'économie, Mehmet Simesk, poursuit des discussions avec le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) pour obtenir le déblocage d'1 milliard de dollars, bien qu'il ait affirmé que la Turquie pouvait se passer de cette nouvelle tranche de crédit stand-by de 10 milliards de dollars accordé en 2001. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

La Turquie s'invite dans l'alliance américano-kurde

DIPLOMATIE

En visite au Moyen-Orient, le vice-président américain Dick Cheney ménage Ankara et la région autonome du Kurdistan.

Istanbul

DICK CHENEY a achevé sa tournée au Moyen-Orient par une visite en Turquie, lundi et mardi. À Ankara, le vice-président américain a assuré que son pays continuerait à fournir des renseignements à la Turquie pour l'aider à lutter contre le PKK, la guérilla kurde. Huit jours plus tôt, il effectuait une halte à Erbil, capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, pour

renouveler le soutien de la Maison-Blanche au gouvernement régional. Un calendrier, un mois après la fin de l'incursion de l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak, significatif du rééquilibrage diplomatique effectué par les Américains entre les Turcs et les Kurdes. Au détriment de ces derniers.

Sous-sols gorgés d'or noir

« Dick Cheney a transmis une invitation de George Bush à Masoud Barzani (président de la région kurde), se félicite Fouad Hussein, secrétaire général de la présidence. C'est un signal très important que les États-Unis nous adressent : les relations stratégiques entre les Kurdes et les Américains sont toujours très bonnes. » Cinq

ans après la chute de Saddam Hussein, les Kurdes restent leurs plus précieux partenaires en Irak. Et sous l'ombrelle protectrice américaine, le gouvernement régional kurde a pu renforcer son indépendance par rapport au pouvoir central à Bagdad. La région kurde et Washington mènent actuellement des négociations pour construire une base militaire américaine dans

le nord de l'Irak. Et en cas de retrait de leurs troupes, les États-Unis auront besoin de l'allié kurde. Mais le rapprochement entre Washington et Ankara vient rappeler la fragilité de l'État embryonnaire qu'est le Kurdistan : menacé au Nord par les militaires turcs et inquieté, au Sud, par un éventuel départ américain qui laisserait l'Irak aux rivalités entre factions sunnites et chiïtes.

En 2003, les parlementaires turcs avaient mis leur veto au passage des GI en Irak via la Turquie, inaugurant une période de tensions avec son allié au sein de l'Otan. Depuis l'automne dernier, un intense ballet diplomatique

entre les deux capitales a conduit à refermer cette parenthèse. Dans la foulée, en février, un feu vert outre-Atlantique a été donné à l'offensive turque dans les montagnes du Kurdistan. « Nous comprenons l'importance de la Turquie pour les États-Unis, relativise Fouad Hussein. Nous avons tout à fait conscience de son rôle en Afghanistan ou en Asie centrale. »

Au-delà de cette compréhension de la nécessité de ménager Ankara, « les autorités kurdes savent bien que les Américains peuvent les abandonner, même si actuellement les Kurdes leur sont utiles, car ils participent à la stabilisation des forces irakiennes », analyse un diplomate européen en Irak. En dernier ressort, les Kurdes comptent sur leurs sous-sols gorgés d'or noir pour conserver la protection de Washington. « Il est imaginable que les États-Unis quittent l'Irak, car ils ont déjà fait beaucoup de sacrifices pour son contrôle, estime Ferhad Pirbal, un écrivain kurde. Et s'ils cherchent à résoudre le problème du PKK, c'est bien parce qu'ils ont aussi des intérêts au Kurdistan. »

LAURE MARCHAND

AFP

TURQUIE : NOUVELLES VIOLENCES APRÈS LA MORT DE DEUX MANIFESTANTS PRO-KURDES

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 24 mars 2008 (AFP) De nouvelles violences se sont produites lundi dans le sud-est de la Turquie, majoritairement kurde, au lendemain du décès de deux personnes dans des heurts avec la police lors de manifestations pro-kurdes, ont indiqué des sources locales.

La police est intervenue à Van (est) pour disperser une foule qui tentait de marcher vers le centre-ville après avoir présenté ses condoléances à la famille d'un homme de 35 ans mort dimanche des suites de ses blessures reçues la veille dans une manifestation, selon des sources de sécurité et des témoins.

Plusieurs personnes ont été blessées lors des heurts et la police a procédé à des interpellations parmi les manifestants, réunis à l'appel du principal parti pro-kurde du pays, le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), pour dénoncer le décès d'un des leurs.

Dans la ville de Yüksekova (extrême sud-est), où un homme de 20 ans est mort dimanche après avoir reçu une balle, des heurts ont également éclaté entre la police anti-émeutes et des manifestants pro-kurdes qui protestaient contre les brutalités policières de la veille, blessant des journalistes.

Les manifestants ont lancé des pierres aux forces de l'ordre qui ont riposté par des tirs de grenades lacrymogène pour disperser la foule.

Depuis deux jours, des heurts surviennent dans plusieurs villes du sud-est



anatolien.

Ces violences sont intervenues au moment des festivités du Newroz, le Nouvel an kurde (21 mars), les célébrations s'étant transformées dans plusieurs endroits en manifestations de soutien aux séparatistes kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Les Kurdes de Turquie, une communauté d'une dizaine de millions de personnes (sur 70 millions d'habitants), profitent généralement du Newroz pour réclamer des droits accrus et afficher, pour nombre d'entre eux, leur soutien au PKK, qui combat depuis 1984 les forces turques et qui est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'UE.

24 mars 2008



Turquie / Etats-Unis

UNE ALLIANCE SOLIDE, MAIS AMBIGÜE

Le vice-président américain, Dick Cheney, termine sa tournée au Proche et Moyen-Orient par une visite de deux jours en Turquie. L'Irak, l'Afghanistan, l'Iran et le Proche-Orient sont au menu de ses entretiens avec le président Abdullah Gül, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et avec d'autres dirigeants turcs.

par Piotr Moszynski

Le contexte régional du voyage de Dick Cheney en Turquie est d'autant plus accentué que le vice-président américain a visité, avant de venir à Ankara, l'Irak, l'Afghanistan, le sultanat d'Oman, l'Arabie Saoudite et Israël. Toutefois, une autre perspective pèse aussi de façon considérable sur ses entretiens avec les dirigeants turcs : celle du sommet de l'Otan, prévu le 4 avril prochain à Bucarest. Les Américains s'y efforceront une nouvelle fois d'inciter leurs alliés à intensifier les efforts militaires communs en Afghanistan, notamment en y envoyant des troupes supplémentaires. La Pologne s'est déjà déclarée prête à mobiliser un millier de soldats (tout en retirant ses troupes de l'Irak), la France semble se préparer à faire de même, et la Turquie fait partie des pays qui sont également invités à envoyer des renforts.

La carte turque n'est pas facile à jouer pour Washington. Il s'agit d'une alliance longue et solide, mais parsemée de contradictions et d'ambiguïtés. La Turquie traverse actuellement une période de recrudescence de l'antiaméricanisme. En 2000, 52% des Turcs se déclaraient bien disposés envers les Etats-Unis. Début 2007, ce taux est tombé à 7%. Les Américains, de leur côté, étaient plutôt moyennement enchantés de voir l'AKP, un parti islamiste modéré, arriver au pouvoir à Ankara. Ils ont également peu apprécié l'offensive de l'armée turque au nord du Kurdistan irakien contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) il y a un mois. L'opération a suscité une forte irritation à Erbil, la capitale de la province. C'est sous la pression de Washington qu'Ankara a retiré ses troupes au bout de huit jours, considérant officiellement que les objectifs de l'opération aient été atteints.

Intérêts contradictoires

Là encore, les Etats-Unis sont imbriqués dans un jeu d'intérêts contradictoires. Comme la Turquie, ils considèrent le PKK comme une organisation terroriste et n'ont pas hésité à appuyer l'offensive turque sur le plan du renseignement militaire. En même temps, ils ne peuvent pas négliger un facteur politique majeur : les Kurdes du Kurdistan irakien constituent leur deuxième allié dans la région après les Turcs. C'est grâce à eux que le Kurdistan est devenu la partie la plus stable de l'Irak – et pour Washington, ce n'est pas rien. Bien sûr, le PKK ne fait pas partie des autorités régionales du Kurdistan irakien, mais celles-ci verraient d'un très mauvais œil les Américains accepter que l'armée turque profite du prétexte de la lutte antiterroriste pour s'installer durablement dans les territoires qui sont formellement sous le contrôle d'Erbil.

Il serait difficile aux Etats-Unis de tolérer un conflit ouvert entre leurs deux principaux alliés dans une région qui a une telle importance stratégique, et ceci pour une raison simple : les deux en sortiraient affaiblis, ce qui risquerait d'avoir des conséquences défavorables sur l'influence américaine dans la région. Cependant, la position de la Turquie semble se renforcer ces derniers temps et Washington aura probablement de plus en plus du mal à contenir les



ambitions d'Ankara. On peut percevoir une évolution du discours américain par rapport à la Turquie. Tout en restant opposés à une intervention turque au Kurdistan, les Etats-Unis ne semblent plus oser dire clairement « non » et préfèrent concéder un soutien implicite, ce qui amplifie encore l'ambiguïté de leur attitude et risque de la rendre encore moins lisible pour les autres acteurs du jeu régional.

Réticences et ambivalences

Il n'est pourtant pas difficile de comprendre les raisons de leur réticence à se montrer fermes avec Ankara. Il suffit de rappeler que 70% du ravitaillement aérien destiné à l'Irak, un tiers du carburant et 95% des blindés passent par la base d'Inçirlik en Turquie, devenue une plaque tournante du transit américain vers l'Irak et vers l'Afghanistan. La Turquie elle-même fournit actuellement 19% de l'alimentation et de l'eau en Irak. Bientôt, elle fournira également 25% de son électricité.

Bien évidemment, les relations américano-turques comportent plusieurs autres dimensions importantes, comme, par exemple, l'appui de Washington à la candidature de la Turquie à l'Union européenne, ou la reconnaissance, par le Congrès américain, du génocide arménien, qui a suscité la colère d'Ankara. Toutefois, la position du Congrès n'est pas soutenue par la Maison Blanche. Dick Cheney n'est certainement pas en mesure de résoudre, au cours de sa visite, le problème de l'ambivalence flagrante de la diplomatie américaine dans la région. Il ne semble pas facile de s'appuyer sur ses trois principaux alliés – la Turquie, le Kurdistan irakien et l'Irak – alors que ceux-ci ont toutes les difficultés du monde à bien s'entendre entre eux et, de plus, manifestent des attentes divergentes par rapport aux Etats-Unis eux-mêmes.

THE JERUSALEM POST Mar 23, 2008

10,000 Syrian Troops Deploy In Kurdish region

Jerusalem Post

The Syrian army has moved some 10,000 soldiers into five cities in the country's northern, Kurdish-dominated region, following violence over the weekend, which left three people dead. The killing occurred during celebration of the Kurdish New Year - Newroz - in the city Qamishli close to the border with Turkey, according to several local news sources.

Some 10 percent of the Syrian population is Kurdish but, despite this, they lack any political influence and the Kurdish language and flag are

both banned. Following a population census in 1962, the Syrian government stripped some 20% of the Kurds of their citizenship in an effort to Arabize the population, claiming that many of the local Kurds had infiltrated the country from neighboring Turkey and Iraq.

The effect of the census left the Kurds, who had lost their citizenship, stateless, despite the fact that many of them fulfilled the demands set out by the Syrian government such as being born in Syria. Residing in Syria also meant many lacked the possibil-

ity of gaining citizenship in another country. The Arabization policy was part of a larger movement that swept the Middle East during the 1960s and '70s that promoted regional cooperation based on a common cultural heritage.

Disturbances were also reported from Turkey, where police and Kurds clashed in several cities in the countries eastern, Kurdish-dominated region. Melees also took place between police and local Kurds in Mersin and Izmir, in western Turkey.

The NEW YORK Sun March 25, 2008

Three Kurds Are Killed In Syria

BY ELI LAKE -

Syria's Kurdish population may be facing a new crackdown, with news of the latest killing of Kurds in the northeastern border town of Qamishli. On March 20, three Kurds celebrating the new year holiday of Nowruz were killed by the Syrian intelligence service.

Three men were killed in Qamishli, the site of riots and clashes between Kurds and the intelligence service, or Mukhabarat, in 2004.

The latest incident has drawn criticism both from Human Rights Watch and the Syrian Reform Party, a group largely made up of exiles based in America and Europe.

A research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Tony Badran, said yesterday, "Ever since the American intervention in Iraq, the Kurds have become more demanding of their basic rights in Syria, which they are denied."

A Baathist law that initially stripped citizen's rights from 100,000 Kurds in the early 1960s now applies to some 300,000 Kurds in northeastern Syria, he said.

In 2005, President al-Assad promised to address the Kurdish issue in his country, Mr. Badran said.

"Since that promise, the presence of the Mukhabarat in the Kurdish region has only increased," he said.

AP Associated Press

Kurds Say Iran Shells Northern Iraq

March 23, 2008 , By Associated Press , BAGHDAD -

Iranian artillery shelled three border towns Sunday in northern Iraq where Iranian Kurdish rebels are believed to be operating, an Iraqi Kurdish official said. The shelling hit the towns of Marado, Razda and Dolakoka and lasted for about two hours, said Azad Watho, a top administrative official in Sulaimaniyah city. Watho, who is administratively in charge of the towns, said the shelling had targeted the fighters of the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan, or PEJAK, but had no more details.

Sulaimaniyah, one of three provinces that make up Iraq's semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan, is located about 160 miles northeast of Baghdad. Tehran had no immediate comment on the report and officials could not be reached because of the official Nowruz, or New Year, holiday in the Persian nation. The Iranian army frequently shells villages in the mountains of northern Iraq where it alleges that rebels from PEJAK are based. The PEJAK is a breakaway faction of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party, also known as PKK. A former chief of the elite Revolutionary Guard has said Tehran considers shelling the



guerrilla group its right in order to protect its security. Iran has said the PEJAK regularly launch attacks inside Iran from bases in Iraq in the Qandil Mountain area that borders Iran and Turkey

Two die in Turkey Kurdish clashes

Police in south-eastern Turkey have clashed again with Kurdish protesters marking the Newroz spring festival, resulting in the deaths of two people.

Doctors in the town of Yuksekova said a man had died of bullet wounds. A second man also died after suffering bullet wounds in Saturday's clashes in Van.

More than 130 people were arrested and scores injured in the battles in Van.

The clashes began after the protesters hurled stones and chanted slogans in support of the PKK Kurdish rebel group.

The unrest follows last month's incursion by Turkey's army into northern Iraq to target the PKK - the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

Flashpoint occasion

The violence in Yuksekova, Hakkari province, began after police tried to break up the Newroz celebrations, which officials described as unauthorised.

Demonstrators hurled stones at the police who responded with tear gas, media reports said.

A 20-year-old man died of a bullet wound, doctors said. In the city of Van, the victim was a 35-year-old man, identified as Zeki Erinc.

Doctors there said he had been taken to hospital with a bullet wound on Saturday.

There is no official confirmation of the cause of death of these demonstrators.

A large Newroz demonstration took place under tight security in Istanbul on Sunday.

Since Friday, there have been clashes, arrests and injuries in Diyarbakir, the main city in Turkey's mainly Kurdish south-east, and in cities of Hakkari and Siirt provinces.

Unrest was also reported among Kurdish communities in western



Turkey, including in Mersin and Izmir.

Turkey said its week-long offensive in northern Iraq last month targeted bases used by up to 3,000 Kurdish rebels as a springboard for attacks across the border.

The Turkish military said more than 200 PKK militants and about 30 members of the Turkish security forces had died.

Newroz is celebrated in Iran, northern Iraq and central Asia at the beginning of spring.

It is often a flashpoint for clashes between Turkish security forces and supporters of the PKK, which took up arms in 1984 to make a Kurdish ethnic homeland in south-eastern Turkey.

The PKK, which wants autonomy for Kurds in south-eastern Turkey, is designated as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the US and EU.

More than 30,000 people have been killed since the PKK began its armed campaign in 1984.

U.S. supports Turkey's fight against PKK-official

By Tabassum Zakaria ISTANBUL (Reuters)

Vice President Dick Cheney on Monday told Turkey that the United States supported its fight against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, but wanted to ensure it did not add to political tensions in Iraq, a senior U.S. administration official said.

Cheney also discussed Turkey's role as part of the NATO force in Afghanistan but received no firm commitment that Ankara would send more troops or increase support, the official told reporters traveling with Cheney to Istanbul.

The United States is trying to smooth tensions between two key allies, Iraq and Turkey, over Turkey's incursions into northern Iraq to fight Kurdish rebels known as the PKK.

"The United States has certainly been supportive of Turkey in that fight against the PKK," the U.S. official said on condition of anonymity.

"We've worked hard with the Turks as well as with the Iraqis to try and figure out how to get at the PKK problem in as productive a way as possible," the official said.

That meant helping Turkey and Iraq fight the PKK while being sensitive to Iraq's delicate political and security situation, and "trying hard to avoid any problems that would add to the existing stresses on the Iraqi political balance," he said.

Cheney started a nine-day trip to the Middle East with a stop in Iraq that



included a trip to Arbil, where he met Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani last week and discussed the PKK among other issues.

Turkish-U.S. relations have been rocky in recent years but improved after Washington shared intelligence during a Turkish ground offensive against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq.

Turkey is a NATO ally for Washington and a key conduit for U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Several small protests greeted Cheney's Turkey visit to Ankara. In one, some 150 people chanted slogans against the Iraq war and U.S. imperialism, and called on Turkey to reject a U.S. request to send more Turkish troops to Afghanistan.

The United States is pressing NATO allies to provide more support for Afghanistan, and it will be a key issue next month at the NATO summit in Bucharest.

Cheney was told during his talks in Ankara that Turkey was going to stay engaged in Afghanistan, but he received no immediate commitments about doing more, the U.S. official said.

Turkey's Chief of General Staff General Yasar Buyukanit, who met Cheney on Monday, later reiterated Turkey's opposition to sending more troops to Afghanistan when the army was fighting the PKK elsewhere.

AP Associated Press

Kurds clash with Turkish police for 5th straight day

March 24, 2008

By Selcan Hacaoglu ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANKARA, Turkey – Police broke up a protest Monday by hundreds of demonstrators in a fifth straight day of clashes with Kurds in southeastern Turkey.

Riot police fired tear gas to disperse protesters in Yuksekova, in Hakkari province, a day after a demonstrator was shot to death in the eastern city, the private Dogan news agency said.

Authorities denied responsibility for the death but protesters called Monday for the governor's resignation. Footage showed demonstrators, their faces covered with red scarves, throwing stones at riot police as soldiers watched from a distance.

Clashes since last Thursday – during the Kurdish spring festival of Nowruz – have left two dead and dozens injured.

A demonstrator was killed in the eastern city of Van on Saturday, and Kurds also have protested in Sanliurfa and Diyarbakir provinces in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated southeast.

On Sunday, police detained dozens of Kurdish protesters who went through the Aegean port city of Izmir smashing windows. Clashes also occurred in several other western cities.



Kurdish rebels have been fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast since 1984, a conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.



Syria: Investigate Killing of Kurds - Hold Accountable Those Responsible for Unlawful Killings

March 24, 2008

SYRIAN authorities should seek an independent investigation into the March 20 shootings by security forces that left three Kurds dead and at least five wounded at a New Year's celebration, Human Rights Watch said today. The circumstances of the shootings raise concerns that state security forces used unnecessary lethal force in violation of international law.

On March 20 at about 7:00 p.m., Syrian internal security forces opened fire on Kurds celebrating the New Year ("Newroz") in the largely Kurdish town of Qamishli in northeastern Syria, eyewitnesses told Human Rights Watch. The shots killed Muhammad Yahya Khalil and Muhammad Zaki Ramadan immediately. A third man, Muhammad Mahmud Hussein, died later from his wounds. All three were between 18 and 25 years old. Those wounded include Muhieldin Hajj Jamil `Issa, Karam Ibrahim Yusif, Muhammad Kheir Khalaf `Issa, Riad Yussef Sheikhi, and Khalil Sulayman Hussein.

"Syrian officials have to justify why security forces opened fire at a Kurdish celebration," said Joe Stork, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Those responsible for using unnecessary lethal force should be brought to justice."

This is not the first time that Syrian forces have used force to break up a Kurdish celebration. In March 2006, security officers arrested dozens of Kurds and used teargas and batons to stop a candle-lit night procession in celebration of Newroz. Participants in this year's festivities told Human Rights Watch that about 200 people gathered around 6:30 p.m. on a road in the western part of Qamishli. They lit candles on the side of the road and a bonfire in the middle, around which some performed a Kurdish traditional dance. "This was a celebration of Newroz, not a political demonstration," one of the participants told Human Rights Watch.

Firefighters appeared on the scene to extinguish the bonfire while police and intelligence officers fired teargas canisters and live ammunition in the air to disperse the crowds. Two participants told Human Rights Watch that when the celebrants failed to disperse, individuals wearing civilian clothes and driving in a white pick-up truck of the type usually used by intelligence officials fired their assault rifles into the crowd. "Without any warning, they started firing to the ground and suddenly bullets started flying indiscriminately," an eyewitness told Human Rights Watch.

It is unclear what provoked the security forces to fire into the crowd. According to three participants in the celebrations, none of the Kurds were armed or resorted to violence. Reuters reported that one resident in Qamishli told them that some "youths burned tires and threw stones at the riot police," but Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm this claim.

Syrian authorities have not issued an official statement on the incident. "The Syrian authorities have little credibility when it comes to investigating their own prior misdeeds," Stork said. "To prove the skeptics wrong, they need to hold a transparent and independent investigation."

In policing demonstrations, security forces should abide by the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Human Rights Watch said. These international standards call on law enforcement officials to apply nonviolent means before resorting to the use of force, and then only use force in proportion to the seriousness of the offense. Security forces should use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable to protect life.

'Thank you, Mr. Bush'

By Marc Knutson

I have fielded varied replies over the past few months after my two-week trip to Iraq. People instantly imagine violence, mayhem and chants of "Death to America." Then they ask, "You went where?"

Yes, I went to Iraq — on my own initiative and at my own expense, unsponsored by anyone and responsible to no one by myself. It was my own response to the rumours of good news stories that have unfolded in Iraq, but weren't apparently being told in the mainstream media. I reached into my billfold and set out to find these stories. What I learned will improve our opinion of the US efforts in Iraq, and help us feel more proud of our soldiers and of our country.

In Iraq's northern region of Kurdistan, I saw that freedom and its twin sister, liberty, were being treated by Iraqis as precious gems. It was easy to be caught up in their excitement. It was a joy to experience their wide-eyed innocence as they enjoyed their inalienable rights and the fruits of freedom.

From Regional President Barzani to the regional prime minister and all the peoples of the region, one truth was for certain: These are indeed gratefully liberated people. The word "liberation" — as in "since the liberation," or "following the '03 liberation" — seasoned every conversation.

I asked Fawsi, a Saddam-era police officer who took early retirement to protest Saddam Hussein's edicts, "What do you think of American and coalition efforts in Iraq?"

Fawsi's eyes lit up. "Tell you what I think?" Fawsi exclaimed. I felt the intensity of his Iraqi stare. Neither his English nor his body language required any translation. "Tell you how I feel, what I think about since the American liberation?" There was a hint of incredulity that I had asked such an absurd question.

"Allow me to put it this way," he said. "Now I can go where I want to, see who I want to, speak openly about who or what I want to. I can even speak in a public place about the distaste I have for the government, and ..." he paused and looked directly into my eyes, wanting to emphasise his concluding point: "I no longer have to worry about whether I, or any members of my family, will be murdered by my president. We are freed from the weight of Saddam Hussein and his ghoulish henchmen, yes! I am free; free from Saddam telling me how to live ..." pausing again "... and free from him telling me how I am to die."

His eyes drifted toward the floor. "I no longer have to cry or grieve for my fellow countrymen who are being murdered by him. Americans can't relate. You want to berate your president for his actions; I wanted to kill mine for his!"

No one in the room spoke. His final words, as he left, were muted: "Thank you, America. Thank you, Mr. Bush, for getting us our lives back."

Freedom truly has a face. In this case, more than 3 million faces, smiling with new hope, and no longer distorted by fear of life, limb or torture.

What has happened in this part of Iraq? Quite simply, the Kurdish people have received the baton from the liberating forces and are carrying it with extreme seriousness. They are not taking their freedom for granted.

"We are a success story here," beamed an official with the regional government. We have been able to govern our own land, police it and secure it, which makes it a safe place to be."

My briefing occurred in the office of the Department of Foreign Relations. "What we have done is form a national agreement among the people of Kurdistan. We are tolerant of who lives among us; Shiite, Sunni, Jewish or Christian, it doesn't matter to us. However, they must pass a security check! What terrorist wants to go through a background check?" He chuckled as I left his rhetorical question unanswered. "See what I mean?"

That amounts to a neighbourhood watch program, on a national scale. Every man, woman and child has been self-deputised to monitor their neighbourhoods. They watch for suspicious activity and report it to the police, who have investigative power and prosecutorial authority.

The Swedish chief project manager of the new Erbil International Airport complex observed, "The amazing thing with the Kurdish people is that the whole population is security minded and watching out for bad guys."

My driver Hameed commented, "Since the first Gulf War, and the liberation, the entire Kurdish population has taken the torch from the Americans and is willing to self-police our country."

My natural response was, "So, are you telling me that if all of Iraq took this posture, including Baghdad, this war would be over?" I knew that was a stretch of logic.

"We are proud that Kurdistan is a glowing model of how all of Iraq can be. People living side by side in peace. It can happen: As more attention is

focused on our success, we then become the pattern for all of Iraq." He added, "Remember, the people that are causing the grief in the south aren't even Iraqi."

I tested the security claims on several occasions. I went into the heavily trafficked shopping centers and malls. I window-shopped, bought groceries and souvenirs and just wandered about. I wore a coat and tie, and looked quite American. Yet not a single person approached me or confronted me. I went about my window-shopping unthreatened. One side of me was of course grateful; the other side saw just how secure I really was.

Perhaps the most poignant example of the safety issue was made as I returned the 400 kilometers to Erbil from Halabja, the site where Saddam chemically gassed people of the village. We stopped for dinner in Dukan, an obscure resort town. As we were leaving, we discovered that our rear tire was leaking air. Hameed changed the tire as I shared in friendly banter with some local young men. Back on the road toward Erbil, I was commenting on the billions of stars that formed a canopy above.

Hameed then posed the most profound question of the entire trip: "So, Marc, here you are in the middle of nowhere, Iraq, considered by the world as the most terrorised place on Earth. It is midnight and there is no town in sight. We are driving on the spare, with no replacement. You know that people saw you back at that restaurant. So, what are you thinking about your security now?"

Frankly, I hadn't been. I was caught up watching the stars, and laughing about the quality of the road, which was about three notches above the Oregon Trail. Until that moment, I hadn't been concerned, but now that he'd mentioned it, I had to decide — is this a set-up because all this time he's been wanting to dump me in the desert? Or is he trying to prove a point? I elected the latter. That's when I discovered that the Kurds were fiercely prideful about their security achievements.

Wanting to know what the locals really thought of American actions, I asked one question so often that my driver would ask it before I did: "Do you see America, and the coalition forces, as invaders or liberators?" Overwhelmingly, the reply was "Liberators!" with extra exclamation.

Adnan, the Iraqi country manager for a British oil company in Erbil, was an elderly Iraqi man who earned my instant respect. He didn't want me to lose a single syllable of his answer:

"Liberators! That's who you are. That's what you've done. That's how we will always think of you, and don't let anyone tell you anything different."

I protested, "But many Americans believe that our efforts were inspired by oil profits and political gain."

Adnan hesitated, then added, "I only ask for half of America to live what we have lived, to experience the everyday fear of torture, family separation and harassment. I will say this as plainly as I can — George Bush is a hero. He is our hero! The sons and daughters of America who died to make it so we can be free are heroes and indeed liberators! We now enjoy freedom and liberty almost as the Americans do."

Once again, silence highlighted the moment. "The great people of America are charged with duties of helping the repressed peoples of the world. It's not something that I just believe, it is as a result of your own greatness and moral integrity. America is known around the world as a nation with a big heart and a heavy responsibility. ... It is more incumbent upon the most powerful nation in the world to help the repressed."

I thought of how people such as Adnan could now live lives of guilt-free liberty and determine their own society, culture and fate. There is a genuine ownership of their new freedom, evidence that they won't take it for granted.

It is one thing to secure an area by force. Drop a few bombs, roll in a couple of tanks, bivouac a battalion or two of soldiers — and the area is yours. However, not completely, not if you haven't won over the hearts of the people.

I visited Camp Zaytun, a Korean-operated military installation where a small cadre of American soldiers remains assigned to the camp. In fact, they are the only American soldiers stationed in Kurdish controlled territory. I was invited to have lunch with them in their mess hall. After I handed out Christmas cards and Oreos from home, we sat down to lunch. I was surrounded by four ranking Army officers. For over an hour, they recounted endless positive events that they had experienced. My favorite was told by a colonel from the Oregon National Guard:

"This past summer we decided to conduct a baseball camp for local children. They weren't very familiar with baseball, so we had to start with the very, very basics." He beamed as he relived the event. "We invited children from Erbil to participate, but we encountered some issues right away. The US

State Department required that the parents sign a waiver of liability. Most of the parents opted out because they didn't trust the papers. Previously, signing government papers in Iraq was usually for quite severe reasons; these parents were too gun shy and abused by the previous regime.

"This meant that we were short of kids to field teams. We went to a local orphanage and recruited kids from there. Another issue presented itself; these kids needed the proper shoes. We had some, but not all of them fit. So, we ran downtown and bought enough sneakers for all the kids. We had a blast teaching them the game." He was proud as he spoke. "Our primary mission was Iraqi Freedom. Today it is 'Iraq: Enjoy Your Freedom!'"

There are no explosions in the land that match the construction boom coming from Kurdistan. Not just reconstruction, but brand-new, ultra modern buildings.

The war itself barely touched the northern province. Ironically, Turkish investors are the primary source of investment monies rebuilding Kurdistan. After years of neglect and abuse from Saddam's government, which sought the demise of the Kurds, their freedom to build and expand is at a feverish pace.

Modern hotels, shopping centers, swim centers and even bowling alleys have sprung up. In Erbil alone there are four new shopping malls. The dollar is welcome if you run out of Iraqi dinars.

Erbil International Airport is constructing an ultra-modern terminal and a 4.8-kilometre runway — the world's fifth-longest, strong enough to handle the new Airbus A380. Major airlines are looking at Erbil as a hub for many air routes from Europe and the West to the Far East and India.

The oil industry in Kurdistan is 25 years behind the rest of the world. Saddam would not allow modern technology or related information into the region. Today the region is making up for lost time. New wells are being drilled in areas where looking for oil is a matter of taking a stroll, because there are places where oil lies in puddles on the surface. Kurdistan had been told for years that it had no oil resources. Yet the oil is there, and that is great economic news for the Kurds.

Northern Iraq was the antithesis of my expectations. I saw people who had been released into the field of life's opportunities, their freedom unencumbered by the yoke called Saddam Hussein.

As Americans, it is important to know

what has happened. Our work in Iraq has been well received and greatly appreciated — and not treated in a light or trivial fashion. These people grieve for the sacrifices many Americans have paid. They are ashamed and embarrassed by the renegade fanatics who have caused so much grief elsewhere in Iraq. Through her tears, one Iraqi mom whose son was killed in action so choked out these words: "Your sons are our sons."

There are plenty of good news stories in Iraq that need to be told to America, and indeed the entire world. I have been misled into believing that there can only be three things that we should expect from Iraq: despair, hopelessness and death.

There are stories brimming with hope, stories that fill our hearts and allow us to rise to the heights of pride. Americans, using our resources that we earned through liberty, helped to free others quashed by tyranny. Who better than Americans to realise the taste of freedom? Americans have been given much, and much is expected of us.

The liberated peoples of Iraq now enjoy the opportunity to release the pent-up ideas and expressions that only liberation from tyranny can offer. Only a few short years separate these people from the days of hiding in fear. Savouring the fresh taste of democracy, today, their worries consist of children's school grades, or oil prices, or other common things that the rest of the world wrestles with.

As one person in the government told me, "We love America. We love George Bush. We want to maintain a relationship with America like Israel has. In fact, we want to be America's 'second Israel' in the region!"

Such high hopes! Such trust in America! I heard my inner voice, dripping with cynicism, say, "I only hope that your trust in America is not shattered by American politicians and American politics."

The hope in democracy, the faith in freedom and the trust in liberty allow these people to have a say in their own destiny.

Their fate rests in their hands, and from what I observed, they are grateful and thankful. They know it came at a great cost, to them and to America. Because I have seen that look in their eyes, I believe that they are not going to squander the opportunity that has been given them. They don't take their freedom for granted — and they won't.

March 24, 2008



Turkey: Constitutional Crisis Pits 'Deep State' vs. 'Deep State'

By Gulnoza Saidzimova

With Turkey's Constitutional Court due to rule on whether to ban the ruling Islamist-rooted Justice and Development (AK) party, the country's political fault lines are growing deeper.

They pit the AK against Turkey's decades-old secular establishment, which includes the military and parts of the judiciary. Each side accuses the other of operating a "deep state," or shadow government activities. The secularists accuse the AK party of quietly seeking to overhaul Turkey's secular order, while the ruling party says the secular establishment will do anything to maintain that order -- even a coup d'etat or murder.

The crisis deepened when a dozen people accused of being members of the establishment's "deep state" were arrested on March 21, including 83-year-old Ilhan Selcuk, a well-known secularist journalist of the "Cumhuriyet" newspaper and a fierce government opponent, as well as Kemal Alemdaroglu, a former president of Istanbul University.

Most were later released, but not Dogu Perincek, the head of the tiny Turkish Workers' Party. He remains detained on charges of being in a terrorist group and "possessing classified documents."

Officials deny the arrests were linked to the crisis surrounding the AK, which the state prosecutor has requested be banned along with its leader, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey's highest legal body, the Constitutional Court, is due to decide soon whether to take on the case by the prosecutor, who accuses the AK of seeking to undermine the constitution's strict separation of religion and politics.

But Bernard Kennedy, an Ankara-based British writer on Turkey, says many Turks and the media view the arrests as a bid by the AK party to respond to its secular critics. He describes the arrests as "apparently a form of retaliation on the part of the government."

Underground Nationalists

Turkish police say the arrests were part of an ongoing investigation into Ergenekon, a shadowy ultranationalist group accused of inciting antidemocratic activities aimed at toppling Erdogan's Islamist-rooted government.

The probe was launched in June 2007 after the discovery of explosives in an Istanbul home. Prosecutors have charged 39 other people in the case, including retired soldiers, journalists, lawyers, and underworld figures.

Ergenekon is believed to be behind the assassination attempt of Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel literature laureate, and the killings of ethnic-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, Italian Catholic priest Andrea Santoro, as well as of several Kurdish politicians.

Ergenekon allegedly has links higher up in the state and military elite known as the "deep state". The term is widely used to describe renegade members of the security forces said to act outside the law in order to safeguard the Turkish state.

Reports say police are probing whether the suspects were involved in acts of political violence aimed at discrediting the AK.

People took to the streets to protest after police raided the home of the elderly Selcuk in the early hours of March 21.

"We have such worries: the Ergenekon probe is being manipulated by some elements in the government, which is a very worrisome development," says Yusuf Kanli, a columnist for the "Turkish Daily News." "We have some suspicions that are not substantiated. But an 83-year-old journalist [was] detained in his house. His detention at 4 a.m. in such a manner was a humiliation which we had difficulty to understand."

Meanwhile, the AK said on March 24 that it would seek to amend the constitution to make it impossible for the Constitutional Court to ban political parties.

Prosecutor Takes On Ruling Party

Turkey's political establishment remains deeply divided over the current crisis. Government opponents claim the AK is creating its own deep state that seeks to "Islamize" Turkish society.



Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya's March 14 indictment cites AK's efforts to ease the strict secular ban on the Islamic head scarf in universities. Other "evidence" is said to range from the AK-run Istanbul city council's censoring of bikini ads to an AK official's observation that "asking a pious girl to remove her head scarf is akin to telling an uncovered one to remove her underpants."

Kanli calls the prosecutor's view "farfetched and exaggerated." The journalist says the real problem is a pitched ideological battle between secularists and Islamists that shows no sign of letting up. "The problem is that secularists perceive secularism as some sort of religion. Islamists try to advance their aim. They try to infiltrate more and more into the state establishment. The head-scarf case and others are just symbols of this," he says. "And the two sides are not reconciling in any way."

Some analysts see the current turmoil as the old guard's attempts to cling to power amid the new guard's rise, which is supported by religious rural communities and the urban working class.

Role Of Turkey's Military

The Turkish military, judiciary, and intelligentsia have traditionally defended secularism, which is enshrined in the country's constitution.

The Turkish military's General Staff sees itself as the guardian of Turkish secularism, as laid down by the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in the 1920s. The General Staff has long opposed the AK's wide-ranging conservative agenda of social, economic, and political reforms, including the head-scarf initiative.

It is yet to be seen whether the General Staff will get involved in the crisis.

Reports say Turkish generals threatened a coup last year ahead of presidential elections that eventually brought Abdullah Gul, whose wife wears a head scarf, to the country's top post.

Turkey has seen four military coups in the last half-century with the most recent one in 1997, when the first Islamist-led government was ejected after it began investigating links between the army and organized crime.

British writer Kennedy does not rule out the possibility of a military coup. "I think the general public would feel it could potentially happen again," he says. "Even though it is less likely than in the past because now there are many more sources of power and authority, and it's been a long time since there was a military coup. [The] media can't be controlled as it was in the past. There is a strong business community that would not want any intervention by the military because it would spoil their business relations with the Western world amid [Turkey's] hopes to win [EU] membership."

Whose Side Is Business On?

The country's business elites have joined the military in denouncing the most recent arrests.

Arzuhan Yalcindag, the president of TUSIAD, Turkey's main business lobby, said last week that shutting down parties is "not compatible

with democracy." TUSIAD says the current polarization is causing social trauma and "reactions and counterreactions are making things worse."

Timur Kocaoglu, a professor at Michigan State University in the United States, tells RFE/RL that the statement represents a significant change for TUSIAD, which has previously praised the Erdogan government for its efforts to stabilize the economy.

"This demonstrates that Turkey's entrepreneurs and big industrialists sense a great risk because the two sides' fight could lead to a dangerous situation which may even include a civil war or a military coup," Kocaoglu says.

Some observers see another reason behind the TUSIAD's new position. "The Economist" wrote last week that a new and pious class of Anatolian entrepreneurs, who have thrived under the AK, have challenged the old elite. One such group, Calik, which employs Erdogan's son-in-law, has acquired a media conglomerate whose assets include a television channel, ATV, and the third-biggest daily, "Sabah."

"The Economist" quoted one Western banker, referring to Turkey's traditional secular elites, as saying that "the reign of the Bosphorus princes is over." Yet that may be a premature conclusion, as the pitched battle between Turkey's competing "deep states" is showing no sign of abating.

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SECULAR JIHAD

By MUSTAFA AKYOL *ISTANBUL*

Who would you expect to be zealous enemies of "moderate Islam"? Islamic fundamentalists? You bet. From Osama bin Laden & Co. to less violent but equally fanatic groups, Islamist militants abhor their co-religionists who reject tyranny and violence in the name of God. But they are not alone. In this part of the world, there is another group that holds a totally opposite worldview but shares a similar hatred of moderate Islam: Turkey's secular fundamentalists.

This secular hatred comes, most recently, in the form of a stunning attempt by judicial means to shut down the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and ban its top 71 members, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, from politics for five years. Even President Abdullah Gül, a former AKP minister, is on the to-ban list of the country's chief prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya, who submitted his indictment to the Constitutional Court in Ankara on March 14. The court is expected to decide this week whether to take up the case.

It is, needless to say, the first time that a ruling party, which won 47% of the vote less than a year ago, is threatened with judicial extermination. In the past, pro-Kurdish parties have been closed down due to their links with the outlawed PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Yet the AKP is under threat simply because of its political views. It's a judicial version of the military coup d'etats that Turkey has experienced four times in the past half century.

Yet what are those political views of the AKP which, according to the chief prosecutor, require its banning? The 53,000-word indictment gives a clear answer: The AKP folks are too religious, they speak about God and religion in the public square, and they want more religious freedom.

The major "crime" of the AKP that is emphasized in the indictment, and which provoked the whole process, is the recent constitutional amendment that opened the way for female students to wear Islamic head scarves in Turkish universities. This ban was enacted in 1989 by a Constitutional Court decision. Since then thousands of young girls have been forced to choose between their beliefs and a university education. Some have gone to European or American colleges. Others have tried to wear wigs on top of their scarves in order to enter Turkish campuses.

The indictment also presents lengthy quotes from Prime Minister Erdogan that demonstrate his "antisecular views and activities." These include his remarks in June 2005 to CNN's Wolf Blitzer: "My daughters can go to American universities with their

head scarf. There is religious freedom in your



fundamentalism is the official ideology, and it is eager to crush any alternative.

Besides their ideology, Turkish secularists also use a seemingly realist argument. If religion is given even a little bit of space in public, they argue, it will soon dominate the whole system. This doctrine of pre-emptive intolerance guides, and misleads, Ankara's establishment on virtually every issue. If we allow the Kurds to speak in their mother tongue, the establishment has argued for seven decades, we will have a Kurdish problem. But today they have a much bigger problem precisely because they have suppressed the Kurdish language and culture. Despite their presumptions, it is repression, not freedom, that feeds political radicalism.

country, and we want to bring the same thing to Turkey." In another "criminal" statement, made in London in September 2005, Mr. Erdogan said, "my dream is a Turkey in which veiled and unveiled girls will go to the campus hand in hand." During a February 2005 interview with Germany's Welt am Sonntag, his "crime" was to note, "We Turks prefer the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of secularism to the French one" -- for the former grants more religious freedom to its citizens. For the chief prosecutor, these all prove that Mr. Erdogan and his party aim to dilute and then overthrow secularism.

Actually there is some truth to this claim, because Turkey's official secularism is fiercely illiberal and shows limited respect for religious freedom. Any religious expression or symbol in the public square is considered an infringement of secular principles. For Ankara's old guard, the public square should be dominated by what former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer proudly defined as "the state ideology."

According to Princeton historian Sükrü Hanioğlu, this ideology is rooted in the "vulgar materialism" of late 19th-century Germany, which heralded a postreligious age of "science and reason." This philosophy, which was emulated by some of the Young Turks and inherited by most of their Kemalist successors, has been openly endorsed by the Constitutional Court. "The secularism principle," Turkey's top judicial body argued in a 1989 decision, "requires that the society should be kept away from thoughts and judgments that are not based on science and reason."

A similar secular fundamentalism is propagated in the West by popular thinkers such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens -- but there it is one of many competing ideas. In Turkey secular

Turkish secularists also portray the AKP as part of the radical Islamist movement. For them, there is no difference between the Gucci-wearing, headscarved woman in Istanbul who wants to study business and the chador-wearing woman in Tehran who cries, "Death to capitalism!"

But the Muslim-democrat AKP is quite different from the Islamists of the Middle East. That's simply because Turkish Islam is a unique interpretation of the global faith. Since the Ottoman reforms of the 19th century, Turkey's observant Muslims have been widely favorable toward democracy. And since the 1980s, thanks to their engagement in globalization and capitalism, they have become much more Western-oriented than much of the secular elite. That's why the secularists constantly accuse the AKP and the supporting "Muslim bourgeoisie" of serving "American imperialism" and "Zionism." The same paranoia is reflected in the chief prosecutor's indictment. In it he notes, apparently in all seriousness, that Colin Powell and other U.S. officials have praised "moderate Islam," and he connects Prime Minister Erdogan to "the American Broader Middle East Project which aims at ruling countries via moderate Islamic regimes."

The U.S. should indeed encourage Turkey not to enact a "moderate Islamic regime" -- a project that exists only in the fantasies of Turkish secularists -- but to achieve a real democracy in which the sovereignty of the people overrides the ideology of its bureaucrats and army officers. What the latter threatens these days is not only the most popular and successful political party of Turkey, but also this country's democracy.

Mr. Akyol is deputy editor of Turkish Daily News.

Shiite militia countering Iraqi Army offensive

Army's Basra assault makes little progress against Shiite forces

By James Glanz and Graham Bowley

BAGHDAD: Thousands of supporters of the powerful Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr and his Mahdi army militia took to the streets of Baghdad on Thursday to protest the Iraqi Army assault on the southern port city of Basra, as intense fighting continued there for a third day.

In Basra, there seemed to be no breakthrough in the fighting by either side. As much as half of the city remained under militia control, hospitals in some parts of the city were reported full and the violence continued to spread. Clashes were reported all over the city and in locations about eight kilometers, or 12 miles, south of Basra.

Militants also attacked the U.S.-protected Green Zone in central Baghdad on Thursday, and the U.S. Embassy said one American government employee was killed, The Associated Press reported. It was the second death inside the Green Zone since frequent attacks against the area began Sunday, when an American financial analyst was killed. The State Department ordered all personnel at the U.S. Embassy to remain inside reinforced structures.

Sadr called Thursday for a political solution to the crisis and an end to the "shedding of Iraqi blood," The AP reported. But the statement, released by a close aide, stopped short of ordering his Mahdi army militia to halt attacks on the Green Zone or stop fighting in Basra.

The Iraqi military on Thursday ordered vehicles and pedestrians off the streets of the capital until Sunday morning in an effort to curb the violence.

The Iraqi Army's offensive in Basra is an important political test for the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and for American strategy in Iraq. President George W. Bush sought to portray the fighting in a positive light on Thursday, declaring the offensive by Maliki's government a "bold decision."

But if the assault in Basra leads the Mahdi army to break completely with its current cease-fire, which has helped to tamp down attacks during the past year, there is a risk of escalating violence and of a replaying of what happened in 2004, when the militia fought intense battles with U.S. forces that destabilized the entire country.

In a further sign of the rising instability in the region, saboteurs blew up one of two main oil export pipelines from Basra, Reuters reported. The pipelines were regular targets for insurgents earlier in the Iraqi conflict, but the sabotage Thursday was the first time in years that the southern oil supply route had been disrupted, and oil prices rose briefly after the attack.



Supporters of the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr and his Mahdi army demonstrating in the Sadr City district of Baghdad on Thursday against the Iraqi Army's assault on Basra.

At least five rounds also struck near the Green Zone on Thursday, killing one Iraqi civilian and wounding another 14, the U.S. military said, according to The AP. Three other rounds hit U.S. military bases on the predominantly Shiite eastern side of the Tigris River, wounding four U.S. soldiers, it added. The attacks on the Green Zone sent huge plumes of billowing smoke above the heavily fortified compound that houses the U.S. and British embassies as well as the Iraqi government.

Gunmen seized a high profile government spokesman from his home in a Shiite neighborhood of Baghdad, killing three of his bodyguards and torching his house, The AP reported.

In a speech at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, Bush said Maliki's decision to wage the offensive "shows his leadership and his commitment to enforce the law in an evenhanded manner."

"Iraqi forces planned this operation, and they deployed substantial extra forces for it," Bush said. He said the offensive "builds on the security gains of the surge and demonstrates to the Iraqi people that their government is committed to protecting them."

Bush predicted that the operation would last for some time.

In Baghdad, as many as 5,000 people demonstrated in close-packed crowds in Sadr City, the focal point of the capital's protests, taking over the main street, chanting, dancing, holding up banners and declaring their readiness to continue to oppose the army's attempt to wrest control of Basra from Sadr's Shiite militiamen, a major onslaught that began Tuesday.

"It is unfair," said one of the protesters, Jabbar Azem Hassan. "They are killing our sons and they are harming innocent people. We need to reform the national government from all parts of

the Iraqi populace."

Some of the protesters criticized the United States — Sadr considers the Americans occupiers — but most of their criticism was aimed at Maliki and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Hakim leads the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which has emerged as a rival political force to Sadr's Mahdi army and also commands a rival militia, the Badr Organization.

The protesters criticized what they said was a strengthening alliance between Hakim's political group and the government to squeeze Sadr from power. Maliki's government depends on support from Hakim's party, reducing the need for alliances with the Mahdi army and making it easier for Maliki to move against it. "Moktada is above our heads and Maliki is under our shoes," said one slogan.

There were other, smaller demonstrations in Baghdad. Many people had come from all over Iraq to take part, according to witnesses.

Some of the signs and chants called for Hakim's execution, a measure of the animosity that has grown between the Mahdi army and Hakim's loyalists.

American officials have presented the attempts by the Iraqi Army to secure Basra as an example of its ability to carry out a major operation on its own. But a failure there would be a serious embarrassment for the Iraqi government and for the army, as well as for American forces eager to demonstrate that the units they have trained can fight effectively on their own.

During a briefing in Baghdad on Wednesday, a British military official said that of the nearly 30,000 Iraqi security forces involved in the assault, almost 16,000 were Basra police forces, which have long been suspected of being infiltrated by the same militias the assault was intended to root out.

In a sign of the significance of the

political test for Maliki, he traveled to Basra to oversee the beginning of the assault and, in a speech broadcast Thursday on Iraqi television, said the assault would continue "to the end."

"We entered this battle with determination, and we will continue to the end," Reuters reported him as saying. "No retreat. No talks. No negotiations."

Any break by the Mahdi army with its current cease-fire would make it harder to begin sending home large numbers of American troops.

Mahdi army commanders said Thursday that the cease-fire was still intact, but that if the Basra assault continued and their grievances were not addressed, they would follow the protests with a period of civil disobedi-

ence and after that would take "appropriate next steps," without saying what those steps would be.

Maliki issued an ultimatum Wednesday for Shiite militias in Basra to put down their weapons within 72 hours. Yet battles have continued, killing at least 40 people by Wednesday and wounding 200 others, hospital officials said.

Although American and Iraqi officials have insisted that the operation is not singling out a particular group, fighting has appeared to focus on Mahdi-controlled neighborhoods. In fact, some witnesses said Wednesday, neighborhoods controlled by rival political groups seemed to be giving government forces safe passage, as if they were helping them to strike at the Mahdi army.

Even so, the Mahdi fighters seemed to hold their ground Wednesday. Witnesses said that from the worn, closely packed brick buildings of one Mahdi stronghold, the Hayaniya neighborhood, Mahdi fighters fired mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, automatic weapons and sniper rifles at seemingly helpless Iraqi Army units pinned on a main road outside, their armored vehicles unable to enter the narrow streets.

Graham Bowley contributed reporting from New York and David Stout contributed from Washington. Employees of The New York Times contributed from Basra.

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"While the pragmatic conservatives drive a hard bargain on the nuclear issue, they drive a bargain nevertheless."—TRITA PARSI

Briefing



A Gentler Iran.

THE MARCH 14 ELECTION FOR Iran's parliament left conservatives with over 70% of the 290 seats. That was a foregone conclusion; most reformist candidates were banned from taking part in the vote. Yet the election may yet prove a turning point in Iran's domestic politics and in Tehran's long cold war with Washington.

A key result was the respectable showing of pragmatic conservatives opposed to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and their emerging alliance with reformists. Tehran's Mayor

Mohammed Qalibaf, a likely challenger in next year's presidential election, says a centrist bloc is taking shape. "Our people are tired of extremism," he told TIME. Many are tired of Ahmadinejad, too; the economy is a shambles and his abrasive foreign policy has choked off foreign investment.

The parliamentary elections were something of a warm-up for the presidential election. Another potential presidential candidate, Ali Larijani, Iran's former negotiator on its nuclear program, won a landslide victory in the

city of Qom. A pragmatic conservative, he resigned from the nuclear brief last year after clashing with Ahmadinejad. Larijani had reportedly agreed to a temporary freeze of Iran's uranium-enrichment program as a good-faith gesture in talks with the West. Ahmadinejad publicly rejected

The election may be a turning point in Tehran's cold war with Washington

the move, and the U.N. Security Council imposed three rounds of sanctions on Iran.

Nobody should assume that the defeat of Ahmadinejad would solve all issues between Iran and the West.

But it might change the climate. "While the pragmatic conservatives drive a hard bargain on the nuclear issue, they drive a bargain nevertheless," says Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian-American Council in Washington. With a new Administration coming to Washington, too, there is a chance of a more conciliatory mood between the two rivals. "Iran and the U.S. have many common interests in the region. Our position should not be one of opposition but friendly competition," says Qalibaf. Translated from words into policy, that sort of sentiment would mark a sea change in the world's most dangerous interstate contest.

—BY SCOTT MACLEOD AND NAHID SIAMDOUST

Sadr offers to take his fighters off Iraq streets

Cleric demands halt to raids on followers in Baghdad and Basra

By Erica Goode

BAGHDAD: The Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr on Sunday took a step toward ending six days of intense combat between his militia and Iraqi and U.S. forces in Basra and Baghdad, saying in a statement that his followers would lay down their arms if the government met a series of demands.

The substance of the nine-point statement was hammered out in elaborate negotiations over the past few days with senior Iraqi officials, some of whom traveled to Iran to meet with Sadr, according to several involved in the negotiations.

Just minutes after the statement was released, however, two mortar shells fired by militia fighters hit the presidential palace in Basra, which is an active government office complex but has been at least partly deserted since the violence started.

And in Baghdad, the Green Zone continued to be a target for mortar and rocket attacks. Street clashes also persisted in Basra and other cities, witnesses said.

Iraqi forces in Basra, backed by U.S. warplanes and ground troops, have been in a stalemate with Shiite militias affiliated with Sadr for six days, in a military operation that has stirred harsh criticism of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

The prime minister's campaign to take back militia-controlled parts of the southern city has met with far more resistance than was expected, Defense Minister Abdul Kadir al-Obaidi conceded last week.

Many Iraqi politicians say that Maliki's political capital has been severely depleted by the campaign and that he is now in the curious position of having to turn to Sadr, a longtime rival and now his opponent in battle, for a solution to the crisis.

In the statement, Sadr told militia members "to end all military actions in Basra and in all the provinces" and "to cooperate with the government to achieve security."

But he also made demands, including an amnesty for fighters in his Mahdi army militia and the release of



Iraqi fighters loyal to the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr on patrol Sunday in a Mahdi army stronghold in the southern city of Basra.

all imprisoned members of the Sadrist movement who have not been convicted of crimes.

While the government has occasionally made small-scale releases of Sadrists, it has resisted earlier demands for more sweeping action.

The move by Sadr stood in stark contrast to his actions in 2004, when he ordered his militia to fight to the death in the old city of Najaf, suggesting that Sadr's political sophistication and skill at military strategizing has grown in the past few years.

"With this statement, Moktada al-Sadr proved that he is a good politician, working for the sake of Iraq," said Mahmoud al-Mashadani, the speaker of Parliament who is a senior Sunni politician.

Ali al-Dabbagh, a spokesman for Maliki, appeared on the television station Iraqia and said that the government welcomed the action and that Sadr's gesture demonstrated his "concern for Iraq and Iraqis."

Still, it was not immediately clear which, if any, of the concessions the government had agreed to.

Sadr's statement did not appear to have an immediate effect on the violence that has rippled throughout the country and paralyzed Basra and the capital for the last week.

In the Sadr City neighborhood, there were reports that two U.S. Stryker personnel carriers had been blown up by roadside bombs.

A spokesman for the U.S. military, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Stover, would not confirm or deny the attacks, saying, "We don't discuss damages to our vehicles as that provides information to the enemy on the effectiveness of their attacks."

But Stover did confirm that U.S. heli-

copters had made strikes in two other neighborhoods, New Baghdad, just south of Sadr City, and Ghazaliya in eastern Baghdad, killing at least five people.

■ Baghdad curfew to be lifted

The Iraqi authorities said a citywide curfew aimed at stopping Shiite militia violence would be lifted Monday morning, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

The office of the chief military spokesman for Baghdad said the around-the-clock curfew would end at 6 a.m. A vehicle ban will stay in place in three Shiite militia strongholds in the capital.

Officials ordered unauthorized vehicles and pedestrians off the streets three days ago as fighting between the government and Sadr's movement escalated.

Separately, the police said 3 militants were killed and 21 were detained amid fighting Sunday in Suwayra, a Shiite militia stronghold 40 kilometers, or 25 miles, south of Baghdad.

In other violence, a suicide car bomber killed five U.S.-backed Sunni fighters and wounded eight other people near the oil hub of Beiji, 250 kilometers north of Baghdad.

Gunmen also killed five policemen in Duluiya, a Sunni-dominated area kilometers north of Baghdad.

The U.S. military said separately that U.S. and Iraqi troops unearthed 14 badly decomposed bodies in a mass grave on Saturday in Muqdadiyah, northeast of Baghdad.

It was the second such discovery since Thursday, when 37 bodies were found.

L'armée irakienne affronte les miliciens sadristes à Bassora

MOYEN-ORIENT

Le gouvernement veut reprendre le contrôle de la cité pétrolière du Sud, où les partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr défient son autorité.

PARTIE de Bassora, la fronde sadriste menaçait hier soir Hilla, Kut, Samawa et Nassiriyah où le couvre-feu a été décrété, ainsi que certains quartiers chiïtes de Bagdad, où une grève générale a été observée. Opposés à l'occupation américaine de leur pays, les partisans du leader chiïte Moqtada al-Sadr accusent les autorités irakiennes d'avoir profité de la prolongation de la trêve de la violence, décidée par Sadr il y a un mois, pour arrêter de nombreux activistes de l'Armée du Mahdi, leur puissante milice.

Les affrontements à l'arme lourde ont commencé vers 4 heures hier matin à Bassora, peu après l'instauration d'un couvre-feu nocturne. Ils opposaient les sadristes à l'armée irakienne appuyée par la police. Quatre civils auraient été tués. « Personne ne s'aventure dans les rues, raconte un habitant joint par téléphone, l'armée et la police qui disposent de listes d'activistes recherchés, ratissent maison après maison. » À l'écart des combats, les militaires britanniques contrôlaient la frontière voisine avec l'Iran.



Les forces de sécurité se sont déployées tôt hier matin dans la ville, après l'instauration d'un couvre-feu. Nabil al-Jurani/AP

Entouré de ses ministres de la Défense et de l'Intérieur, Nouri al-Maliki, le premier ministre, dirigeait lui-même les opérations de reconquête d'une ville clé pour l'économie irakienne. Les trois quarts des exportations de pétrole se font à partir de Bassora ; mais depuis le redéploiement militaire britannique fin 2007, la deuxième ville d'Irak est livrée aux exactions des milices chiïtes rivales. D'un côté, les hommes de Sadr. De l'autre, la Force Badr du Conseil islamique suprême de son grand

rival, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim. Entre les deux, les miliciens du petit parti Fadila, proche du gouverneur de Bassora qui tire les ficelles du juteux trafic de pétrole.

Ces dernières semaines, la violence est encore montée d'un cran, avec une recrudescence des assassinats ciblés de femmes et de médecins, auxquels se sont ajoutés des kidnappings, un journaliste britannique est détenu à Bassora depuis un mois. « Les gens en ont assez », ajoute cet habitant de la ville. Il y a dix jours, la population a manifesté pour réclamer un retour à la sécurité.

L'Iran accusé de fournir les armes

À sept mois d'élections provinciales cruciales pour le partage du pouvoir dans un Irak fédéral, le gouvernement Maliki compte profiter d'une conjoncture relativement favorable. La prolonga-

tion de la trêve décrétée par Sadr a semé en effet la confusion parmi ses hommes. Les plus radicaux refusent de suivre les ordres du jeune trublion qui va et vient entre l'Iran et l'Irak pour des raisons de sécurité. L'opération d'hier à Bassora visait à éliminer les renégats de la mouvance sadriste. Mais des déshérités de Sadr city à Bagdad aux victimes des récentes opérations coups de poing à Nassiriyah, ceux-ci restent nombreux. Les responsables américains accusent l'Iran de les approvisionner en armes. Hier, les jusqu'au-boutistes avaient pris le contrôle de cinq quartiers de Kut, tandis que, dans plusieurs quartiers de la capitale, des combats éclataient entre sadristes et partisans de la Force Badr.

Pour Joost Hiltermann, spécialiste de l'Irak au centre d'études, International Crisis Group, « Maliki aura du mal à reprendre le contrôle de la situation, étant donné le grand nombre de groupuscules qui tiennent à garder leurs positions héritées du trafic de pétrole ». De plus, la mouvance sadriste, qui conteste la légitimité du gouvernement Maliki, reste populaire.

Hier soir, alors que les combats avaient baissé d'intensité à Bassora, ses leaders faisaient alterner le chaud et le froid. Le bureau de Sadr appelait au calme et à l'ouverture de négociations dans la cité méridionale. Tandis qu'à Bagdad, un de ses porte-parole menaçait d'appeler à la « désobéissance civile à travers le pays si le gouvernement ne cessait pas ses attaques ».

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

TURQUIE PRÉPARATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

En Turquie, l'AKP veut attirer le vote kurde

DIYARBAKIR (sud-est de la Turquie)
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

Dans les montagnes qui marquent la frontière avec l'Irak, les armes se sont tuées depuis trois semaines. Dans les villes, c'est une autre bataille que le parti au pouvoir, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), a lancé pour le contrôle des régions kurdes. A un an des élections municipales, le parti conservateur du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a décidé de s'attaquer aux bastions du parti kurde DTP (Parti de la Turquie démocratique).

Diyarbakir, la capitale de la région, figure en tête de liste. Dans

les faubourgs de la ville, les ONG islamiques et les représentants de l'AKP quadrillent le terrain, Coran dans une main, sac de charbon dans l'autre. Turgut a reçu 300 kg de combustible, comme chaque famille de son quartier, un bidonville coincé contre les murailles basaltiques qui enserrent la vieille ville.

Dans les ruelles, trois jeunes militants de l'AKP font la tournée des maisons et distribuent huile, sucre, livres scolaires... Dans cet arrondissement jadis acquis au parti kurde, l'AKP a raflé 80 % des votes lors des élections législatives de juillet 2007. Dans toute la région, les ex-islamistes ont réalisé

des scores record. En convertissant la région à sa politique, l'AKP espère régler la question kurde et couper le soutien aux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste).

Le leader local du parti au pouvoir reçoit sous un immense portrait du premier ministre. « Diyarbakir est la ville qui a reçu le plus d'argent du gouvernement depuis 2003, affirme Abdurrahim Hattapoglu. Nous servons les gens et, si Dieu le veut, nous aurons de bons résultats. » Celui qui veut conquérir la mairie sait que sa victoire dépendra des réformes économiques et sociales que son parti aura,

ou non, mises en œuvre. A Diyarbakir, le taux de chômage dépasse les 35 %. « Nous allons inciter nos hommes d'affaires à investir », annonce-t-il, tout en reconnaissant que les investissements « dépendent surtout de la stabilité de la région ».

Les patrons commencent à s'intéresser à la zone kurde. Notamment, les organisations proches du mouvement Fetullahci, une confrérie religieuse influente dans les cercles de l'AKP. « Nous avons fait venir ici plus de 3 000 entrepreneurs de toute la Turquie, explique Aziz Nart, à la tête d'une association locale d'hommes d'affaires : c'est un premier pas. » Deux usines sont en cours d'installation. Ces mis-

Le Monde

Vendredi 28 mars 2008

sionnaires du « capital vert » font aussi du porte-à-porte dans les quartiers les plus déshérités.

Dans celui de Baglar, les businessmen ont joué les Père Noël, distri-

buant des tonnes de viande, des téléviseurs et des machines à laver à plusieurs centaines de familles. Une ONG islamique a ouvert une école du soir où des professeurs

bénévoles dispensent des cours gratuits aux enfants les plus défavorisés. Le gouvernement AKP se fait le chantre d'une amitié turco-kurde

avec l'islam comme trait d'union. Et à Diyarbakir, les mosquées n'ont jamais été aussi fréquentées pour la prière du vendredi. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le Monde

Vendredi 28 mars 2008

Jeu de dupes entre la France et la Syrie

Damas brouille les cartes à la perfection, notamment avec Paris, pour mieux préserver sa mainmise revendiquée sur le Liban

Bernard Kouchner déclarait dernièrement dans un journal allemand qu'il ne savait honnêtement pas quelle était la bonne stratégie à adopter face à la Syrie. La politique du régime syrien et son rapport à la France sont pourtant limpides : le Liban ne cesse de focaliser les tensions franco-syriennes. Damas tient à dissocier sa relation avec Paris de sa politique libanaise, car Bachar Al-Assad ne veut pas que l'ancienne puissance mandataire au Levant contrarie ses ambitions hégémoniques au Liban. La Syrie veut vassaliser le Liban, avec la bénédiction de la France et la consolidation des fonds d'aide européens.

La constante de la politique syrienne se résume en quelques phrases : refus de la reconnaissance diplomatique du Liban, pourtant membre fondateur de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe ; refus d'ouvrir une ambassade à Beyrouth – le Liban étant considéré comme la « province maritime de Damas » – et rejet de tout bornage des frontières, comme l'exige le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU.

Avec de telles constantes, il serait illusoire de croire que le régime répressif de Damas ait pu changer d'attitude le jour où le peuple français a changé de président, et qu'il puisse avoir été touché par la visite d'émissaires français finalement rentrés bredouilles. La Syrie cherche à démanteler la République libanaise. Année après année, elle a joué les pyromanes et entretenu les guerres intestines pour pouvoir jouer les pompiers, poussant

les élites libanaises à l'exil pour les remplacer par des naturalisés, dont beaucoup étaient syriens. Elle a modifié le tissu social libanais, créé et armé de multiples formations politiques, dont la plus aboutie est celle coparrainée avec l'Iran, le Hezbollah.

Aujourd'hui, le parti de Dieu,

Antoine Basbous

Directeur de l'Observatoire des pays arabes

qui a vu le jour en 1983 par un décret signé de la main de l'ayatollah Khomeyni et qui se place depuis sous l'autorité directe du Wali El-Faghih, le Guide de la révolution iranienne, constitue un Etat dans l'Etat libanais, décide de la guerre et de la paix sans en référer à aucune autorité du pays du Cèdre. Il est le bras armé des pasdars iraniens, désormais implantés sur les rives de la Méditerranée et à la frontière israélienne. Les slogans du Hezbollah, les tenues civile et militaire de ses partisans, les mots d'ordre, les points fermés levés vers le ciel, les portraits omniprésents des dirigeants iraniens et

les appels répétés à leur succès, au début de chaque discours, attestent de cette filiation.

L'investissement irano-syrien a payé : le Hezbollah a été la seule force arabe – et non régulière – à infliger à Tsalal une défaite, en 2006. Téhéran s'en sert également pour faire diversion dans son programme nucléaire, et Damas, pour torpiller le Tribunal international créé par le Conseil de sécurité pour juger les assassins de Rafic Hariri et démanteler les institutions libanaises : le pays est privé de président de la République depuis novembre 2007, le Parlement est confisqué, les forces de l'ordre sont presque neutralisées, afin d'instaurer le chaos et de plonger le pays dans une guerre civile. Malgré leur traumatisme de trente-cinq années de guerres et d'occupations, les Libanais ne peuvent s'exonérer de leurs responsabilités. Ils doivent réapprendre à reconstruire un Etat de droit.

Le Hezbollah ne pourra être démantelé du jour au lendemain. Il devient un acteur incontournable et surtout un précieux relais du régime minoritaire alaouite de Damas, auquel il est désormais lié. La chute de l'un ne manquera pas d'entraîner celle de l'autre. D'où une alliance stratégique entre ces deux acteurs régionaux majeurs du « croissant chiite » dirigé par Téhéran.

Deux cas de figure seulement pourraient pousser la Syrie à accepter l'élection d'un président au Liban. Le premier serait que la France, en représentante de l'Occident, et les pays arabes admettent que le Liban constitue « une province syrienne ». Damas lui désignerait alors un « président de la République » avec le statut et les pouvoirs d'un sous-préfet. Le second cas serait d'engager un rapport de force avec la dictature héréditaire de Bachar Al-Assad pour le rappeler à la raison et le forcer à s'amender.

Il est vrai que ce régime excelle dans l'art de la dissimulation et de la dissuasion, et qu'il est redouté pour avoir créé, parrainé et soutenu nombre d'organisations terroristes, du PKK kurde à l'Asala arménienne, en passant par des mouvements djihadistes et des organisations palestiniennes, irakiennes ou libanaises. Seuls les généraux d'Ankara l'ont obligé à plier, le jour où ils ont envoyé les chars à sa frontière (1998). Abdallah Öcalan a aussitôt été expulsé de Syrie et ses bases ont été démantelées.

Certes, le régime syrien continue de faire peur et ses adversaires connaissent le coût exorbitant de leur opposition. Mais il est temps d'apporter une réponse à l'interrogation de Bernard Kouchner en profitant de la conjoncture : l'isolement de Damas au sein de la communauté arabe et l'agacement occidental face à l'irréductibilité syrienne.

Sans nécessairement recourir aux méthodes employées par la Syrie, la communauté internationale peut contenir Damas et stopper son rôle néfaste en se répartissant

les tâches. Aux Arabes de placer le seul allié de Téhéran en quarantaine, à la veille du premier sommet arabe que doit abriter Damas fin mars ; aux Européens de parler d'une seule voix en bannissant les contacts bilatéraux contre-productifs, une spécialité de plusieurs Etats européens qui fréquentent Damas dans l'espoir de protéger leurs soldats participant à la Finul.

La présidence française de l'Union européenne – qui coïncide avec la tenue à Paris du sommet de l'Union pour la Méditerranée – devrait s'efforcer d'arrêter une stratégie commune et de confier le dossier à un seul interlocuteur, en la personne de Javier Solana. Sans

La communauté internationale peut contenir Damas et stopper son rôle néfaste

oublier l'indispensable coordination entre Arabes, Européens et Américains, et la nécessité de convaincre Israël d'abandonner sa politique du statu quo avec Damas, de peur de voir les Frères musulmans lui succéder.

De François Mitterrand à Jacques Chirac, les dirigeants français ont tout essayé pour élaborer un partenariat avec les Assad, en vain. Nicolas Sarkozy devrait tirer les conclusions de cette expérience et de sa propre tentative pour emprunter des voies qui puissent ramener la Syrie à la raison. Avec en tête cette évidence : plus la détérioration de la situation du Liban sera grave, plus le coût de sa restauration sera élevé. ■

TURQUIE

Courrier

DU 27 MARS AU 2 AVRIL 2008

L'islamisation rampante de la vie quotidienne

De nombreux indices – le style de vie, la façon de parler, de se saluer – montrent que la société turque, naguère laïque, change, explique le célèbre éditorialiste Mehmet Ali Birand.

MILLIYET (extraits)

Istanbul

Chaque société est influencée par le mode de vie et le comportement de ceux qui occupent le pouvoir. Chez nous, cela va plus loin. En effet, une partie de la société turque, juste pour plaire à ceux qui sont au pouvoir, a décidé de se mettre à leur ressembler. A la suite des élections législatives du 22 juillet 2007, c'est-à-dire lorsque l'AKP [parti islamique au pouvoir] est devenu encore un peu plus un parti de gouvernement, son influence a commencé à se faire sentir nettement sur la société. On constate ainsi l'apparition d'un style nouveau, qui se manifeste tant à la tête du gouvernement que dans l'attitude des ministres et des fonctionnaires, sans oublier les maires AKP et tous ceux qui, de manière générale, gravitent autour de ce parti et profitent des avantages que celui-ci peut leur procurer.

Ce style différent tend en outre à s'étendre à d'autres composantes de la société. Un style de vie qui existait déjà auparavant apparaît donc de façon plus visible en Turquie. Cette évolution n'est pas le fruit des directives venues d'en haut : il s'agit simplement des conséquences sur la société de la manière d'être des membres de l'AKP, depuis le Premier ministre Erdogan jusqu'au simple maire de bourgade AKP.

Même la façon de parler le turc a changé. On constate aujourd'hui une tendance à utiliser davantage de termes arabes repris du Coran dans la conversation. Lorsqu'on écoute parler le Premier ministre, on entend tout de suite chez lui le ton particulier de ceux qui sont passés par les cours de lecture coranique des lycées confessionnels Imam-Hatip [initialement créés pour former des imams et fréquentés surtout par les franges traditionalistes de la société turque].

Le langage du corps n'échappe pas non plus à cette évolution. Ainsi, si par le passé on se serrait la main, ces dernières années la mode était plutôt passée à l'embrassade. Aujourd'hui, en revanche, on marque davantage la distance. Le chic, c'est de saluer la main sur le cœur. Quant aux femmes, on préfère désormais les saluer en inclinant légèrement la tête.

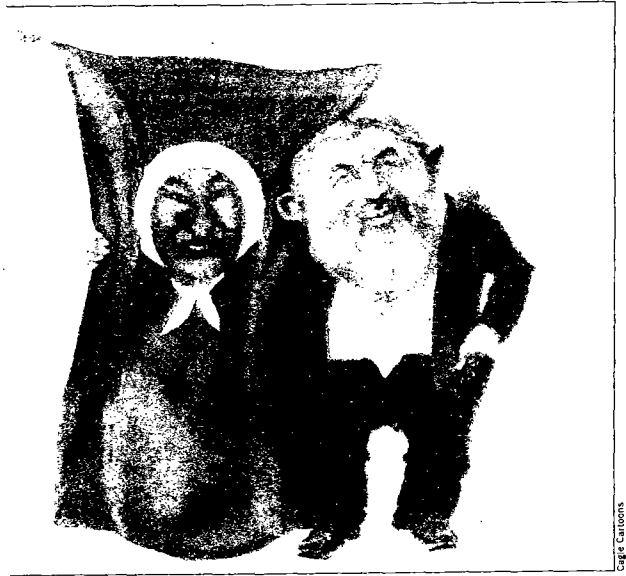
L'alcool, qui disparaît peu à peu, est parfois présent sur un coin de table, histoire d'afficher une certaine tolérance. Si quelqu'un en demande, on

le sert, mais cela ne va pas plus loin. Il faut d'ailleurs du courage pour oser en réclamer. Dans ce contexte, offrir de l'ayran [yoghourt mêlé d'eau], du jus d'orange et d'autres sortes de jus de fruits a tendance à se généraliser.

Le port du voile noir, de type tchador, est plutôt en recul. Par contre, la mode du foulard islamique et de la robe longue descendant jusqu'aux talons se répand rapidement. La plupart des femmes habillées ainsi ont l'air d'être empaquetées dans des rideaux. La publicité faite pour ce type de vêtement accentue la généralisation d'un modèle unique d'habillement.

Est-ce parce que nous y prêtons plus attention aujourd'hui ou parce que ce phénomène a réellement pris de l'ampleur ? En tout cas, on constate que la séparation entre hommes et femmes est de plus en plus visible. Il y a ainsi davantage de plages et de piscines réservées aux femmes, et d'hôtels où l'on ne sert pas d'alcool. La fréquentation de la prière du vendredi a littéralement explosé. Les médias qui mettent en avant les valeurs religieuses et l'islam sont en pleine expansion et s'adressent à un public de plus en plus large. Cette frange religieuse de la société turque a également commencé à produire ses propres riches. Des religieux fondent ainsi leurs entreprises. Ceux qui hier n'attiraient pas l'attention participent désormais à d'importants appels d'offres et gagnent beaucoup d'argent. Ils engagent donc un nombre croissant de salariés, qui se retrouvent, eux et leurs familles, baignés dans cette ambiance religieuse.

Cette façon d'être trouve bien entendu des défenseurs zélés, qui se comportent en missionnaires. Bien qu'ils soient minoritaires, ces partisans de l'application de la charia, très visibles ces derniers temps, contribuent à accentuer la pression sociale en importunant ceux qui boivent de l'alcool ou qui ne jeûnent pas pendant le ramadan. Toutefois, une partie plus importante de ceux qui contribuent à répandre ce mode de vie est constituée par des gens qui, ces dernières années, ont eu l'impression d'avoir été, en tant que pratiquants, marginalisés au nom de la laïcité de l'Etat. L'arrivée de l'AKP a donné du courage à cette frange de la population, dont le nombre n'a pas nécessairement augmenté mais qui ne se cache plus et pourrait même donner l'impression de vouloir prendre sa revanche sur le passé. Néanmoins,



◀ Le président Gül.
Dessin de Riber
paru dans Svenska
Dagbladet,
Stockholm.

■ L'AKP interdit ?

Le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) parti Islamique au pouvoir en Turquie, "est un important exemple des affinités qui peuvent exister entre l'islam et la démocratie", souligne le quotidien Zaman. Toutefois, ce parti est sous le coup d'une procédure d'interdiction lancée le 14 mars par le procureur de la Cour de cassation turque en raison d'"activités allant à l'encontre de la laïcité". "Si jamais cette procédure aboutit à l'interdiction du parti, ce sera là une défaite de la démocratie dans le monde musulman et il en découlera une intensification du radicalisme", poursuit le titre, proche de l'AKP.

le gros des troupes de ceux qui contribuent à l'expansion de ce style nouveau est constitué par des individus que l'on pourrait qualifier d'opportunistes, parce qu'ils veulent paraître sympathiques aux yeux du pouvoir et tirer profit de leur fréquentation des cadres de l'AKP. Il s'agit principalement de fonctionnaires. Qu'il s'agisse de diplomates – qui, chez eux, boivent du raki, mais à table avec des responsables de l'AKP ne jurent que par le jus d'orange – ou de simples employés municipaux, un large pan de l'administration turque est tout doucement en train de s'intégrer à cette ambiance générale suscitée par le parti au pouvoir. Il convient également de ne pas oublier toute une catégorie de businessmen, qui vont dans le même sens dans le seul but de remporter des appels d'offres.

Il est donc indéniable que la société turque est en train de changer. Certains interprètent ce changement comme une évolution vers l'application de la charia. D'autres voient cela comme un processus de "moyen-orientalisation" du pays. Quel que soit le qualificatif employé, observons ces changements et agissons en conséquence.

Mehmet Ali Birand

AFP

MANIFESTATIONS KURDES EN TURQUIE: LE PKK MENACE ANKARA

MONTS QANDIL (Irak), 28 mars 2008 (AFP)

Les séparatistes Kurdes du PKK ont mis en garde Ankara contre des "développements incontrôlés" et ont menacé de "riposter" après les violences ayant marqué les récentes célébrations du Newroz (nouvel an kurde) dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

"L'Etat turc doit entendre le message de liberté du peuple kurde, et cesser immédiatement ses violences contre les civils", a déclaré le numéro deux du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), Bozan Tekine, dans un entretien exclusif avec l'AFP.

"Dans le cas contraire, nous ne pourrions pas être tenus pour responsables de ce qui se passera", a mis en garde M. Tekine.

L'interview a été réalisée jeudi dans un petit village anonyme des Monts Qandil, hautes montagnes sous contrôle du PKK au Kurdistan irakien (nord-est de l'Irak), aux confins des frontières irakiennes, turques et iraniennes.

"Il y aura des réactions incontrôlées, l'Etat turc et le parti au pouvoir porteront la responsabilité de ces nouveaux développements", souligne-t-il. Et si "l'Etat turc ne cesse pas ses violences contre des civils, le PKK ripostera", a menacé le chef rebelle.

Deux personnes ont été tuées et des dizaines blessées depuis une semaine lors de la répression de manifestations pro-kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, à l'occasion des festivités du Newroz (21 mars).

"Le peuple kurde a une nouvelle fois démontré son soutien au PKK et à son leader Abdullah Ocalan (fondateur du PKK, emprisonné en Turquie)", a estimé ce leader du mouvement séparatiste, l'un des vice-présidents du PKK et adjoint de Mourad Qarilan.

Le PKK, qui combat depuis 1984 les forces turques et affirme disposer de 8 à 10.000 combattants, est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne.

"Le PKK a annoncé à cinq reprises un cessez-le-feu unilatéral. Mi-mars, nous

avons déclaré être prêts à résoudre la question kurde par le dialogue", a rappelé M. Tekine: "A chaque fois, la Turquie a répondu à ces initiatives par la violence. Qui sont les terroristes?"

"La répression des manifestations de Newroz prouvent que l'Etat turc pratique toujours sa politique d'assimilation forcée et de négations de nos droits", a-t-il dénoncé.

Les récentes incursions de l'armée turque au Kurdistan irakien, "malgré le soutien des Etats-Unis, se sont soldées par des échecs cuisants", a assuré par ailleurs le responsable rebelle.

L'armée turque a ainsi "reçu une sévère leçon", selon lui, lors de sa dernière incursion du 21 au 29 février dans la zone de Zap. 127 soldats turcs ont été tués, pour 9 membres de la guérilla, selon le bilan du PKK. Ankara affirme de son côté avoir tué 240 rebelles lors de cette dernière offensive.

"Si les militaires turcs avaient pu pénétrer plus profondément en territoire kurde irakien, ils l'auraient fait, ce qui est la démonstration de leur échec", d'après M. Tekine, qui précise que l'armée turque "conserve aujourd'hui neuf positions en territoire kurde irakien".

Le soutien américain à Ankara, en particulier en renseignements, n'a eu que peu d'impact sur les opérations de la guérilla, affirme-t-il. "Nous prenons ces menaces en considération et nous avons pris les mesures nécessaires".

Le responsable du PKK a critiqué également "l'embargo imposé sous la pression internationale" aux zones de la guérilla dans l'extrême nord de l'Irak, où les autorités kurdes irakiennes ont renforcé leur contrôle, a-t-on constaté.

Mais là encore, "le PKK a une grande capacité de réaction. Il n'est pas vraiment gêné et s'est adapté à cette situation", assure M. Tekine, qui souhaite que les Kurdes irakiens "voient leur véritable intérêt et adoptent une meilleure approche politique".

"Avec le printemps, nous nous attendons à une intensification des opérations de l'armée turque", prévoit M. Tekine. "Mais nous y sommes préparés, et nous sommes aujourd'hui plus forts que jamais".

AFP

KURDISTAN: SUR LES TERRES DU PKK, DANS LES MONTS QANDIL

MONTS QANDIL (Irak), 28 mars 2008 (AFP) -

"Nous sommes le peuple. Le PKK est partout chez lui au Kurdistan", affirme un chef de ce mouvement séparatiste. Au Kurdistan peut-être, mais "chez lui", dans les montagnes de Qandil, aux confins des frontières irakiennes, turques et iraniennes, sans aucun doute.

Les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) se fondent totalement au sein de la population rurale des hameaux miséreux et paysages majestueux de cette forteresse naturelle, haute chaîne de montagnes pelées et rocailleuses dans l'extrême nord de l'Irak.

A une vingtaine de kilomètres de la localité de Sangasar, voisine de l'Iran, une casemate en brique peinte aux couleurs du PKK au détour d'un virage marque l'entrée des territoires séparatistes.

Assis nonchalamment sur des chaises de jardins en plastique, deux combattants rebelles contrôlent le nouveau venu. A flanc de montagne, dessiné à même la roche, un immense portrait du chef rebelle vénéré Abdullah Ocalan (emprisonné à vie en Turquie) domine la vallée.

Pour arriver jusque-là, il faut désormais éviter à pied plusieurs barrages des peshmergas, militaires de la région voisine du Kurdistan autonome (nord de l'Irak), qui quadrillent les routes et ont nettement renforcé leur contrôle.

Un guide local aux allures de contrebandiers, solide gaillard en babouche qui file dans la pente comme un bouquetin, aide à contourner les check-points. Au passage, entre deux chants patriotiques kurdes, il apprend avec surprise que Jacques Chirac n'est plus le président français et, beaucoup plus dramatique, que Zinédine Zidane a pris sa retraite.

Avant de pénétrer sur les terres de la guérilla, téléphones mobiles et satellitaires sont confisqués: "les Américains!", s'excuse la sentinelle, un doigt pointé vers le ciel pour résumer la menace que font désormais planer les satellites espions de Washington, allié de la Turquie.

Interdiction également de filmer. Tout ce qui peut permettre à l'ennemi turc d'identifier les lieux est prohibé.

Au détour d'un chemin de terre, comme une brève apparition, trois combattants du mouvement séparatiste, recoiffant d'un geste élégant de longs cheveux bruns, s'éloignent en riant à la vue d'un étranger.

A l'entrée d'un petit bourg anonyme, des enfants se chamaillent dans des jardins boueux où du bétail broute paisiblement le long d'un torrent d'eau claire. L'ambiance est champêtre, le spectacle enchanteur, avec en arrière plan des hautes cimes enneigées.

Les rebelles sont invisibles. Aucun signe de la guerre sans merci que se livrent, à quelques dizaines de kilomètres plus au nord, le PKK et ses voisins turcs.

Seul un dispensaire de santé, "qui servait surtout aux habitants de la vallée" selon le PKK, a été détruit il y a trois mois dans un bombardement de l'aviation turque.

Bozan Tekine, numéro deux du PKK, rencontre l'étranger en toute simplicité, chez l'habitant, sympathisant de la cause.

Pas d'escorte, ni signe distinctif si ce n'est sa kalachnikov en bandoulière. Cet avenant cinquantenaire à l'allure de simple soldat, vêtu comme tous les guérilleros kurdes et paysans locaux du traditionnel pantalon bouffant serré à la taille par une large ceinture de flanelle, plaide naturellement la cause du peuple kurde, sous le regard amical de son hôte.

L'épouse du maître des lieux s'emploie à mettre à l'aise ses invités en servant thé et confiseries. Deux garçonnetts, un temps intimidés, ont vite fait de venir chahuter dans les jambes du chef rebelle qui demande avec amabilité de baisser le son de la télévision dans la pièce voisine.

L'entretien terminé, Bozan Tekine se fait déposer par son hôte en voiture à quelques kilomètres de là. Seul, sifflotant comme un banal randonneur, il repart tranquillement par un chemin de terre vers la montagne.

Là encore, aucune trace des combattants du PKK. "Pourtant, ils sont là, tout autour, et ils nous regardent", s'amuse notre guide, désignant du regard les sommets environnants.

AFP

LES ETATS-UNIS CONDAMNENT LA SYRIE POUR LA MORT DE TROIS KURDES

WASHINGTON, 28 mars 2008 (AFP) -- Les Etats-Unis ont condamné vendredi la Syrie pour la mort de trois Kurdes syriens il y a huit jours et ont appelé Damas à ouvrir une enquête indépendante.

"Les Etats-Unis condamnent l'attaque contre la population kurde syrienne par les forces de sécurité syriennes qui ont provoqué la mort de trois civils et fait plusieurs blessés graves", a déclaré le porte-parole du département d'Etat Sean McCormack dans un communiqué.

Les heurts entre des manifestants kurdes et la police syrienne se sont produits le 20 mars à Qamichli, dans le nord-est de la Syrie. Un dirigeant du Parti

kurde Yakiti en Syrie a affirmé à l'AFP que la police syrienne avait tué trois Kurdes lors de ces heurts ayant éclaté pendant le Nowrouz (Nouvel an kurde).

"Nous appelons le gouvernement syrien à s'abstenir d'utiliser des mesures violentes pour réprimer les civils kurdes et à ouvrir une enquête totalement indépendante", ajoute le communiqué.

En mars 2004, des affrontements opposant des Kurdes aux forces de l'ordre ou à des tribus arabes avaient éclaté à Qamichli, avant de se propager aux régions voisines. Ces heurts avaient fait 40 morts en six jours, selon des sources kurdes, et 25 selon un bilan officiel.

AFP

AU MOINS 15 REBELLES KURDES TUÉS DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK (ARMÉE TURQUE)

ANKARA, 29 mars 2008 (AFP) - - Au moins 15 rebelles kurdes ont été tués en deux jours dans les bombardements de l'armée turque cette semaine dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé samedi l'armée turque.

L'artillerie turque a pilonné un groupe de rebelles du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) dans la région de Avasin-Basyan dans le nord de l'Irak jeudi pour les empêcher de pénétrer dans le territoire turc, précise l'état-major turc dans un communiqué publié sur le site internet de l'armée.

"Nous avons constaté que 15 terroristes ont été tués à la suite de ces pilonnages" indique le communiqué.

Des avions ont bombardé "avec une grande précision" des cibles rebelles dans la même région vendredi, souligne le communiqué qui ajoute qu'il n'était pas clair s'il y avait eu ou non des morts à la suite de ces frappes aériennes.

L'état-major turc affirme dans son communiqué qu'il continuera à surveiller de près les mouvements du PKK dans la région kurde autonome du nord de l'Irak et qu'il prendra toutes les mesures de nature à éliminer sur place et au moment opportun toute menace pesant sur la Turquie.

Aidée en temps réel par les services de renseignement américain, la Turquie a mené plusieurs frappes aériennes dans le nord de l'Irak depuis le 16 décembre dernier. Son armée a également effectué une incursion terrestre d'une semaine en février contre une base du PKK dans la région de Zap.

L'Irak avait alors dénoncé l'offensive, considérant qu'elle constituait une violation de sa souveraineté nationale tandis que les Etats-Unis, craignant une déstabilisation de la seule région relativement calme de l'Irak, poussaient à un retrait en douceur des forces turques.

Début mars, le chef de l'armée turque Yasar Buyukanit a déclaré que son pays n'hésiterait à effectuer de nouvelles frappes si le besoin s'en faisait sentir.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde. Ce conflit a déjà fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Selon l'armée turque, plus de 2.000 combattants du PKK sont installés dans des cachettes dans le nord de l'Irak où ils sont tolérés par l'administration locale kurde.

REUTERS

31 avril 2008

Heurts entre armée turque et PKK, trois militaires tués

Seyhmus Cakan , Reuters

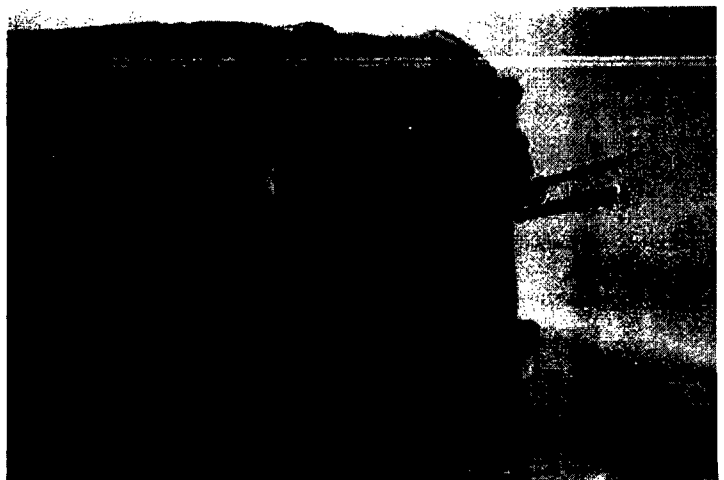
Trois membres des forces de sécurité turques ont été tués lundi dans un accrochage avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans les montagnes à la frontière irakienne, ont annoncé des responsables de la sécurité.

Les heurts se sont produits dans la province de Sirnak où les forces de sécurité combattent le PKK depuis une semaine dans le cadre d'une offensive annuelle de printemps.

Les affrontements, qui ont fait plusieurs blessés parmi les forces de sécurité, se poursuivent et des renforts ont été dépêchés sur place, appuyés par des chasseurs F-16, ont précisé les responsables.

Le mois dernier, l'armée turque, utilisant des renseignements fournis par Washington, a lancé une offensive d'une semaine dans le nord de l'Irak contre les rebelles qui se servent de cette région comme base arrière d'où ils lancent des attaques en Turquie.

L'état-major a annoncé que 240 rebelles et 27 soldats avaient été tués au cours de cette opération.



Un soldat turc à bord d'un véhicule de l'armée dans le sud est de la Turquie, à la frontière avec l'Irak. Trois membres des forces de sécurité turques ont été tués lundi dans un accrochage avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans les montagnes à la frontière irakienne. /Photo d'archives/REUTERS/Osman Orsal

Le Monde
30 - 31 mars 2008

L'Armée du Mahdi résiste en Irak à l'assaut des forces du gouvernement

Les combats menés depuis le 25 mars par l'armée irakienne avec le soutien croissant de ses alliés américains et britanniques contre les activistes chiites de l'Armée du Mahdi, la plus puissante milice du pays, se sont poursuivis et même, dans certaines villes, intensifiés, vendredi 28 mars, à travers le sud de l'Irak.

A Washington, le président Bush a estimé que le pays vivait désormais « un moment crucial de son histoire ». Selon lui, « tout gouvernement prétendant représenter la majorité de sa population doit affronter les éléments criminels hors la loi, et c'est ce qui se passe en ce moment à Bassora ». Sur les trois grandes milices chiites d'Irak, deux, alliées au pouvoir, ne sont pas visées. Cependant, le conflit ne concerne plus seulement la deuxième ville du pays mais également la capitale.

Défiant le couvre-feu imposé depuis jeudi soir et jusqu'à dimanche au moins à

Bagdad, les miliciens, qui qualifient désormais le premier ministre chiite, Nouri Al-Maliki, de « traître à la solde de Bush », ont poursuivi leurs tirs de mortiers contre la « zone verte » ultra-fortifiée du centre-ville où sont retranchés l'essentiel des organes du pouvoir, la mission des Nations unies, ainsi que les ambassades britannique et américaine. Les milliers de diplomates et employés des Etats-Unis dans cette zone urbaine d'environ 10 km² ont été invités, depuis jeudi, à ne plus sortir de leurs bureaux fortifiés. Un obus est tombé, vendredi, sur les bureaux d'un des deux vice-présidents de la République – qui était absent –, tuant deux de ses gardes et en blessant quatre autres.

Des affrontements au sol, sporadiques mais sérieux, mettant aux prises des troupes américaines et des miliciens ont eu lieu à Sadr City et dans d'autres quartiers chiites de la capitale. Quatre combattants chiites et cinq civils ont été tués dans l'explosion d'un missile Hellfire tiré par un hélicoptère américain. Un autre missile a tué deux miliciens dans le quartier central chiite de Khazamiya tandis qu'un blindé américain était attaqué sans succès. Au total, selon les chiffres officiels, au moins 14 miliciens de Sadr City ont été tués vendredi, contre 26 la veille.

A Bassora, le grand port pétrolier où les affrontements ont commencé avant de s'étendre comme un feu de brousse à plusieurs autres grandes villes dominées par la majorité chiite du pays, des bom-

bardiers américains ont tiré sur des concentrations de miliciens, faisant un nombre inconnu de morts. Selon le commandement irakien, au moins 120 personnes ont déjà été tuées et 450 blessées, rien que dans cette ville.

A Nassiriya, capitale de la province de

Des accrochages mettant aux prises des troupes américaines et des miliciens ont eu lieu à Sadr City et dans d'autres quartiers chiites de Bagdad

Dhi Qar où l'armée irakienne est absente, un reporter irakien de l'agence Reuters estimait, vendredi, que l'Armée du Mahdi semblait « contrôler la ville », la plupart des forces de police s'étant retranchées dans leurs postes. A Kout, les SWAT irakiens, une unité de forces spéciales formée par l'armée américaine, ont annoncé avoir tué 14 miliciens, après en avoir blessé une vingtaine d'autres la veille.

L'unité spéciale a annoncé avoir elle-même perdu neuf de ses combattants. Des combats ont également eu lieu à

Mahmoudiya, juste au sud de Bagdad ainsi qu'à Hilla. Nouri Al-Maliki, qui avait lancé aux miliciens rebelles de Bassora un ultimatum qui a pris fin vendredi, a invité tous ceux qui possèdent « des armes lourdes et moyennes » à les remettre aux forces de sécurité contre des sommes d'argent non spécifiées, « d'ici au 8 avril ». Le premier ministre, qui s'est installé depuis mardi à Bassora, à 550 km au sud de Bagdad, pour lancer lui-même son offensive « anti-criminels » a réaffirmé qu'il n'y aurait « ni dialogue, ni négociation, ni arrêt » des opérations jusqu'à la reddition complète des insurgés.

Une session spéciale convoquée au Parlement pour tenter de trouver une issue politique à la crise n'a réuni vendredi que 56 députés sur 250, les élus chiites et kurdes de la majorité ayant boycotté la réunion. Pour éviter que des armes nouvelles parviennent aux rebelles, la frontière sud-est avec l'Iran a été fermée. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

REPÈRES

Moqtada Al-Sadr : il est le fils d'un ayatollah irakien respecté, Mohammad Sadeq Al-Sadr, assassiné en 1999. Il a fait irruption sur la scène irakienne après l'invasion américaine de 2003. Il est âgé de 34 ans.

Le courant sadriste : il s'oppose à la fois aux Etats-Unis et à l'establishment religieux chiite incarné par l'ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, auquel il reproche de se cantonner dans une tradition quiétiste. Les sadristes défendent, au contraire, un islam chiite politique, engagé et volontiers nationaliste. Ce positionnement explique le soutien dont bénéficie Moqtada Al-Sadr dans les quartiers populaires, à commencer par le grand faubourg de Sadr City, à Bagdad. Le courant sadriste dispose d'une trentaine de députés. L'Armée du Mahdi, sa milice, compte, selon les estimations, entre 40 000 et 50 000 hommes.



Des miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi, de Moqtada Al-Sadr, à Bassora, dans le sud de l'Irak, jeudi 27 mars. ATEF HASSAN/REUTERS

EchoGéo , Numéro 4 , mars / mai 2008

GEOPOLITIQUE ACTUELLE DES KURDES EN TURQUIE, EN IRAK ET EN IRAN

L'idée d'un Kurdistan est-elle complètement illusoire ?

Saywan Barzani

Le Kurdistan historique ou la zone de peuplement kurde s'étend sur environ 520 000 Km² mais reste dispersé entre principalement quatre pays voisins : la Turquie au Nord, la Syrie à l'Ouest, l'Irak au Sud et l'Iran à l'Est. La population kurde y est estimée à plus de 35 millions d'habitants. Une partie de cette population a quitté la région suite à une instabilité et à un sous-développement chroniques, et suite aux longues guerres qui durent depuis des décennies. Mais ces zones périphériques et négligées par les pouvoirs centraux, et sans grand intérêt pour la communauté internationale, commencent à prendre de l'importance, notamment depuis le départ de centaines de milliers de Kurdes vers l'Europe, et la modernisation des moyens d'informations. La guerre du Golfe, en 1991, et l'intervention militaire américaine qui s'est terminée par une occupation de l'Irak en 2003 ont sensiblement changé la donne régionale.

Le Kurdistan d'Irak indépendant *de facto* de Bagdad depuis 1991, de son côté, joue un rôle important et s'est imposé comme l'allié indispensable des Etats-Unis en Irak et dans la région. Le gouvernement du Kurdistan participe activement à la reconstruction des institutions politiques irakiennes et il est devenu la clé de voûte du nouveau système politique irakien : les Kurdes sont les arbitres entre les différents protagonistes irakiens notamment chiites et sunnites mais aussi entre ces deux derniers et les Américains.

Le Gouvernement Régional du Kurdistan, reconnu désormais officiellement depuis 2003, profite du chaos sécuritaire et politique en Irak pour se renforcer. Les institutions politiques du Kurdistan sont placées sous l'égide d'un président, Massoud Barzani. Celui-ci a été élu suite à la nomination de son ancien rival kurde Jalal Talabani à la présidence de l'Irak. Leurs deux partis, le Parti Démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et le L'Union Patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), ont des structures administratives unifiées, parlent désormais d'une seule voix et forment une alliance électorale à Bagdad et à Erbil. Ces deux partis kurdes décrochent la reconnaissance du statut semi indépendant du Kurdistan en adoptant une constitution qui encadre cette réalité dans un système fédéral sur mesure qui accorde, selon les Arabes, trop de droits aux Kurdes. En outre le Kurdistan tente de disposer d'une forte présence à Bagdad en contrôlant des postes-clé comme certains postes ministériels, militaires (comme l'Etat major des armées et ceux des services secrets et dans l'administration). Finalement le Kurdistan commence à se développer, déjà se dessine une avance importante dans les

domaines de l'enseignement, de la construction et des services par rapport au reste de l'Irak.

Il reste l'épineux dossier des Zones arabisées, c'est-à-dire les 41 000 Km² à la lisière du Kurdistan officiel de 42000Km². Ce sont, entre autres, les villes de Sindjar, Kirkuk et Khanaqin riche en pétrole, où les Kurdes, malgré le nettoyage ethnique opéré par le régime de Saddam Hussein, constituent toujours la majorité des habitants. Il fallait, selon la constitution irakienne, qu'un référendum eût lieu avant la fin 2007. Mais sur proposition de l'Onu un nouveau délai de six mois a été accepté par l'Assemblée Nationale du Kurdistan. Si ce dossier est mené à son terme, la question kurde pourrait en être considérée comme résolue en Irak. Mais il reste toujours la possibilité sérieuse d'une rechute, d'un regain de tension. Si le règlement de la question kurde en Irak est considéré comme définitif, quelles en seraient les conséquences sur la situation dans les trois autres pays ?

La Syrie, où quelques deux millions de kurdes vivent, est toujours gouvernée par un régime baasiste (Parti de la Résurrection Nationale Socialiste) et autoritaire. Sous la justification de la lutte contre Israël, la minorité Alawite, dirige depuis plus de quatre décennies le pays d'une main de fer et les Kurdes y sont, en partie, considérés comme des apatrides et ne jouissent d'aucun droit culturel ou politique. Les régions kurdes restent dans une situation de sous-développement par rapport au reste du pays, les partis politiques kurdes sont interdits et mènent des actions pacifiques clandestines.

En Iran, les Kurdes subissent une discrimination religieuse car ils n'appartiennent pas à la majorité chiite, le chiisme étant religion d'Etat, dont l'appartenance est nécessaire pour accéder aux hauts postes politiques et même administratifs. Mais d'un autre côté, le statut de l'Iran, héritier des empires orientaux multi ethnique et multi religieux, donne une certaine facilité aux kurdes pour affirmer leur différence culturelle et profiter du fait d'être proches linguistiquement et culturellement des perses, peuple culturellement dominant en Iran. D'un autre côté, la répression de la République Islamique n'a pas atteint le niveau d'extrême violence atteint en Irak et en Turquie, c'est-à-dire les déportations massives de million de Kurdes et la destruction de plus de 4 000 villages dans chacun de ces deux dernier pays et un génocide en Irak. La répression iranienne était plus classique : des exécutions et des arrestations ciblées, même si le déploiement des militaires omniprésents est comparable à celui que l'on observe en zone kurde de Turquie. Mais la guerre que les deux partis traditionnels, le PDK d'Iran

et le Komala, avaient cessé en 1995, vient d'être repris par le PKK contre Téhéran qui ne soutient plus le PKK (Partis des Travailleurs du Kurdistan - Turquie) qui a à son tour commencé une lutte armée contre l'Iran sous la nomination de Pejak depuis 2004.

Par contre, en Turquie qui contrôle la plus grande partie du Kurdistan historique et où habite le plus grand nombre de Kurdes, (environ 17 millions de personnes), la situation est différente. Ce n'est plus l'empire ottoman ou les *milliyet* (peuples) étaient reconnus ; de gré ou de force, la république de Mustapha Kemal de 1924 doit assimiler les différentes ethnies et les intégrer dans un Etat nation centralisateur dont l'armée est garante du mythe de la Turquie européenne et laïque. Ainsi la spécificité même des Kurdes est niée, et un sous-développement économique flagrant sépare les zones kurdes du reste de la Turquie. Le PKK est la principale formation politico-militaire kurde d'extrême gauche qui mène depuis 1984 une guerre contre Ankara qui a réussi à convaincre l'Europe et les Etats-Unis de considérer ce parti comme une organisation terroriste. Cette définition aide la Turquie à éviter des pressions fortes pour résoudre le problème kurde qui existe depuis la création de la république turque. Les Quelques 5 000 guérilleros du PKK, dispersés entre la Turquie, l'Irak et l'Iran, continuent à mener la guerre contre l'armée turque qui tente justifier son échec d'exterminer les membres du PKK en accusant le Kurdistan irakien de les abriter. La Turquie est intervenue (février 2008) militairement en Irak du nord pour y déloger les combattants du PKK, mais il semble que ceci est destiné à satisfaire l'opinion public nationaliste en Turquie, car même une occupation complète du Kurdistan irakien ne fera qu'exacerber le problème kurde qui existe sous sa forme violente depuis 1923. Une invasion durable, par l'armée turque, du nord de l'Irak impliquerait une forte déstabilisation de toute la région.

Le Kurdistan partagé n'est libéré en partie qu'en Irak pour reprendre la terminologie officielle kurde. Ce rôle de leader pris par le Kurdistan irakien, peut-il aider à la création d'un grand Kurdistan qui engloberait des parties de quatre pays ? Un tel scénario semble loin de se réaliser, non pas parce que les kurdes irakiens sont devenus riches (budget gouvernemental estimé à plus de 8 milliards de dollars pour environ quatre millions d'habitants) et ne voudraient peut-être pas partager leur richesse avec des millions d'autres Kurdes, mais parce que le Kurdistan montagneux est un territoire enclavé sans accès à la mer. En suite défaire les frontières de quatre pays puissants militairement et soutenus par les différentes puis-

sances étrangères semble difficile, sauf au cas où l'hyper puissance, que sont les Etats-Unis, décident de créer ce pays et de bouleverser les équilibres actuels dans le Moyen-Orient. Un tel Etat kurde serait forcément pro-américain ou pro-occidental car un tel scénario affaiblirait tous les pays de la zone, y compris les alliés de l'Occident. Le Kurdistan, avec sa position stratégique entre les trois continents du vieux monde, ses richesses naturelles, notamment le pétrole, et sa position de château d'eau du Moyen Orient (qui pourra éventuellement fournir les Arabes et les Israéliens en eau) pourrait combattre le

terrorisme et les divers trafics, cela profiterait davantage aux grandes puissances que des pays instables et fermés comme c'est le cas actuellement. Mais une modification de la carte de la région semble extrêmement difficile pour le moment et nécessiterait une guerre, hypothèse non envisageable à court terme.

En attendant le Kurdistan irakien continue d'influencer les kurdes dans les pays voisins par le désormais puissant appareil médiatique du Kurdistan, le commerce (qui a atteint plus de 7 milliards de dollars avec les pays voisins) et la coopération à

développer les zones kurdes en Turquie et en Iran. Les étudiants et les ouvriers kurdes se rendant au Kurdistan irakien, d'une part, et le soutien politique de l'Irak aident à transformer la situation des Kurdes dans les pays limitrophes. Il semble aujourd'hui que l'ensemble des forces politiques kurdes soient d'accord sur le fait suivant : il faut régler le problème kurde dans le cadre des Etats existants, à condition d'obtenir une autonomie politique dans le cadre des frontières actuelles. Mais cela n'est possible qu'avec une démocratisation et une stabilisation politiques et économiques des quatre pays concernés.



31 mars 2008

Turquie : UN JUGE CONTRE LE PARTI DE L'ISLAM

Envoyé spécial à Ankara MARC SEMO

Turquie. Un magistrat traîne devant la Cour constitutionnelle l'AKP au pouvoir.

C'est un juge sous haute protection. Plusieurs dizaines d'hommes seraient chargés de sa sécurité selon les médias turcs, qui soulignent le caractère sans précédent de telles mesures. Mais la situation est pour le moins inédite dans un pays qui a entamé, en octobre 2005, des négociations d'adhésion avec l'Union européenne.

En toute légalité, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya exige rien moins que la mise hors la loi du parti au pouvoir reconduit triomphalement dans les urnes en juillet, avec 47 % des suffrages, qu'il accuse d'être «un foyer d'activités antilaisiques». La Cour constitutionnelle doit statuer à partir d'aujourd'hui de la recevabilité de cette plainte déposée le 14 mars. Bruxelles s'inquiète et appelle les juges «à prendre en compte l'intérêt à long terme du pays».

Coup de poker. «Le modèle d'islam modéré préconisé pour la Turquie vise en fait à établir un Etat gouverné par la charia», martèle le procureur général de la Cour de cassation, 58 ans, qui demande l'interdiction de l'AKP, issu du mouvement islamiste, ainsi que la mise au ban pour cinq ans de la politique de soixante et onze de ses dirigeants, dont le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et le chef de l'Etat, Abdullah Gül. Les 162 pages de l'acte d'accusation se nourrissent surtout de déclarations ou de bribes de discours. On y accuse

par exemple le Premier ministre d'être un des fourriers «du projet de Grand Moyen-Orient voulu par les Etats-Unis, en installant dans les pays concernés des régimes islamiques modérés».

Ce magistrat, lui-même de père kurde, avait déjà ouvert une procédure similaire quelques semaines auparavant contre le parti pro-kurde DTP, pour «séparatisme». Les deux tiers du Parlement pourraient ainsi se retrouver hors la loi. La quasi-totalité des éditorialistes s'indignent, y compris les moins suspects de sympathies islamistes. Recep Tayyip Erdogan dénonce «une action contre la volonté du peuple». La tension est encore montée d'un cran lors des funérailles d'un député, quand Bülent Arinc, ancien président du Parlement et chef de file de l'aile dure de l'AKP, a lancé : «Il n'y a d'ultime réalité que la mort et les procureurs doivent le savoir aussi.»

Avec cette procédure, le camp laïc, qui se proclame gardien des valeurs de la République fondée par Mustafa Kemal sur les décombres de l'empire ottoman, tente un nouveau coup de poker. Au printemps, il n'avait réussi à bloquer l'AKP ni avec les manifestations de masse pour la laïcité ni avec la mise en garde de l'état-major au travers d'un memorandum publié sur son site Internet.

«Le pouvoir judiciaire a le devoir de protéger le système laïc républicain et d'éviter ainsi un coup d'Etat militaire ou la guerre civile», clame Vural Savaş, ancien procureur général de la Cour de cassation et kémaliste pur et dur qui obtint,

il y a dix ans, la fermeture du parti islamiste Refah et l'interdiction d'activités politiques de l'ex-Premier ministre Necmettin Erbakan, contraint de démissionner sous la pression de l'armée. La légitimité de cet arrêt fut ensuite confirmée par la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme de Strasbourg, qui reconnut en 2001 puis en 2003 que la dissolution de ce parti représentait «une nécessité pour la défense de la démocratie». D'autant qu'avec 22 % des voix, il était devenu la première force politique du pays. Les durs du camp laïc appellent à la dissolution de l'AKP, convaincus que ce parti représente «un nouvel avatar du Refah avec les mêmes objectifs, même s'ils sont dissimulés».

Il faudra le prouver. L'AKP se pose en partisan de l'intégration européenne. «Ses leaders n'ont pas fait les déclarations appelant à la violence qui ont fondé la décision des juges de Strasbourg sur le Refah», souligne le juriste Mithat Sancar. La principale accusation concrète reste la levée de l'interdiction du foulard dans les universités, soutenue d'ailleurs par une écrasante majorité de l'opinion. Ce fut le détonateur de la crise. Après son triomphe électoral de juillet, l'AKP, plutôt que de relancer les réformes, s'est concentré sur cette revendication symbolique, qui représente un chiffon rouge pour le camp laïc. «Il faut se demander aussi comment ce parti a pu à ce point s'enfermer», écrit Cengiz Çandar qui, comme nombre d'intellectuels libéraux ne cache pas sa déception concer-

nant l'AKP.

«Avertissement». La décision est maintenant entre les mains des onze juges de la Cour constitutionnelle, dont huit sont considérés comme des laïcs durs. Ils disposent donc de la majorité qualifiée requise pour prendre une décision de dissolution, mais le président, Hasim Kiliç, est un libéral, ainsi que le juge qu'il a nommé comme rapporteur du dossier.

Certains veulent croire aux effets positifs d'une dissolution de l'AKP, qui se reconstituera aussitôt sous un nouveau nom. «Le nouveau parti et ses nouveaux leaders ne pourront pas ne pas tenir compte de cet avertissement et ils respectent les règles constitutionnelles», souligne Onur Oymen, secrétaire général du CHP (Parti républicain du peuple), principale force de l'opposition et pilier de la gauche souverainiste. La plupart s'inquiètent. «La Cour est dans une situation difficile : une interdiction de l'AKP serait une décision illégitime aux yeux de l'écrasante majorité de l'opinion, mais refuser la plainte signifierait entériner tout ce qu'a fait ce parti jusqu'ici», souligne Baskin Oran, intellectuel de la gauche libérale. En attendant, l'AKP tente de changer la loi afin de rendre plus difficile la dissolution des partis.



Turkish military says it hit Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, rebels deny fatalities

March 29, 2008

By C. ONUR ANT, Associated Press

ISTANBUL, Turkey - Turkey's military hit Kurdish rebel targets in northern Iraq with artillery and air strikes in a two-day operation that killed at least 15 rebels, the military said Saturday.

Turkish military shelled areas in northern Iraq on Thursday after it detected a group of Kurdish rebels preparing to attack Turkish targets from their bases in Iraq, the military said in a written statement. It said 15 rebels were killed in the shelling.

Turkish warplanes hit rebel targets in a cross-border campaign the following day, but casualty figures in that assault were unclear, the statement said.

"Some targets in the same area were hit by the air force's warplanes," it said. "The number of terrorists killed in this air attack could not be determined."

A spokesman for the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, denied any rebels had been killed, saying it was a "baseless claim."

"Turkish jet fighters launched airstrikes against sites at the al-Zab border area (for three hours) with no casualties reported," Haval Danas said. "The fighter jets have bombed old sites that witnessed fierce clashes before with the Turkish army and nobody was there."

Turkey, like the European Union and the United States, considers the PKK a terrorist organization.

The Turkish statement confirmed the first cross-border action by the military since it waged an eight-day ground incursion in late February. It said it only hit confirmed rebel targets and that it did not harm civilians.

The U.S. has been sharing intelligence on the rebels with Turkey, a NATO-ally, since November.

Turkey has carried out several cross-border operations against the PKK since the parliament authorized the government last October to send troops into Iraq to fight the rebels.

Last month's operation was the only confirmed ground incursion during this period. It was also the first of its kind since the U.S.-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003.

The PKK took up arms against the government in 1984, and tens of thousands of people have been killed in the fighting.



TODAYS ZAMAN

31 March 2008 |

The Kurdish question and current political crisis

It is certainly interesting to note the coincidence between the emergence of the current crisis in Turkish politics and high hopes for a final solution to the Kurdish question.

IHSAN DAGI

I tend to think that the case for closure of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), and the activities of the Turkish Gladio (Ergenekon) to prepare the ground for a possible anti-Western military coup have something to do with the increased possibility of a grand solution to the Kurdish question. In November I noted that a new state policy on the Kurdish issue was being developed. There were some positive signs coming from various circles from within the "state." Some retired generals admitted they had made mistakes by not recognizing the Kurds' identity and imposing unreasonable restrictions on Kurdish language usage. They also started to confess that military measures alone would not be successful against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and that people in the regions had to be won over. In the criticism of traditional policy on the Kurdish issue, the emergence of a regional Kurdish government in Iraq with US support played a central role. In this context the AK Party's electoral victory in southeastern Turkey was eye-opening. For the first time in a long time, a political party from the center had emerged as a significant challenge in the region to the Kurdish nationalist party. Thus the AK Party's ability to resolve the Kurdish question was taken seriously by the security establishment. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's claim that in the coming local election they would take over Diyarbakir from the Democratic Society Party (DTP) turned the AK Party into an opportunity to restrain Kurdish nationalism in the region. Some in Ankara came to believe that the AK

Party could be the last chance to resolve the Kurdish question within a unitary, yet democratic Turkey.

As a result, we witnessed a great harmony between the military and the government after Parliament passed an authorization for a cross-border operation into northern Iraq. In cooperation with the Americans the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) conducted air and land operations into northern Iraq against the PKK camps there. Interestingly, the land operation in northern Iraq took less time than expected, which created friction between the military and opposition parties, including the pro-military Republican People's Party (CHP).

Meanwhile the Turkish government made it known that it was in preparation for a grand package to resolve the Kurdish question, going beyond mere economic measures to embrace social and political steps.

It seemed that the cross-border operation had been planned as a final offensive ahead of a step to be taken for a comprehensive solution to the Kurdish question. The understanding of the Bush administration and the Kurdish regional government was secured by such expectations. The visit to Turkey by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and the meeting of DTP leaders with the parliament speaker and the president just days before the opening of the closure case against the AK Party indicate a sea change concerning the Kurdish issue in state circles.

In these circumstances it appeared that a "grand peace" between the military and the

AK Party was being forged giving a free hand to the AK Party to bring its priorities to the Turkish political agenda. Thus we had the constitutional change to lift the ban on the headscarf on campuses.

This last move provided a perfect ground to launch an attack on the AK Party by the judiciary under the influence of some pro-status quo circles. The closure case was expected to disable the AK Party from pursuing a comprehensive solution to the Kurdish question, which was proved right, as the AK Party seems to have already shelved the Kurdish package.

Why do some nationalists circles want to prevent solution of the Kurdish question? The fear is that any political solution would damage their understanding of "unitary-nation state" that imagines the nation as homogeneous denying all ethnic identities in Turkey.

They rightly calculate that once the Kurdish question is settled and a full democracy is established, the state model based on centralism, authoritarianism and elitism that they advocate will be terminated.

So they do not want to see the Kurdish question settled. The authoritarian elements in the state and outside need a Kurdish question to justify a militaristic regime and culture. Thus the recent developments over the Kurdish issue have provoked these circles to make a move to stop the process. The closure of the AK Party is part and parcel of this project.



March 31, 2008

Iraq: Fighting Over, But Shi'ite Power Struggle Continues

When Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki ordered the Iraqi Army to clean out what he called criminal elements in Al-Basrah a week ago, he offered no compromise.

By Charles Recknagel Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty

Saying that the central government was duty-bound to bring security to Iraq's main port and oil-export center, he said that "we will continue until the end. No retreat, no talks, no negotiations." He also went to Al-Basrah, vowing not to leave again until the security operation was completed.

But after six days of fighting that spread rapidly from Al-Basrah to other cities in the south of Iraq and to Baghdad, al-Maliki welcomed a cease-fire offer from radical Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on March 30. The street fighting now appears over.

Joost Hiltermann, an Iraq expert with the International Crisis Group, says the fighting was a test of strength between Iraq's two major Shi'ite political factions. Its inconclusive end underlines anew the difficulties Washington will have with leaving Iraq, despite progress against Al-Qaeda and Sunni insurgents and hopes this progress might be sustained by the Shi'ite-dominated central government.

"I think it was a dual campaign, on the one hand, by the Iraqi government, which wanted to impose its sovereignty over Al-Basrah, which has been lawless, and secondly, it's a campaign based on the desire by one of the ruling parties, which has its own militia, [the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, led by Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim] with its Badr Corps, to push back the Sadr movement and its militia, the Mahdi Army, especially since provincial council elections have been planned for the fall in which the Sadr movement is likely to do much better than the Supreme Council."

Hiltermann says the political nature of the power struggle quickly became apparent as the fighting began. The national army units involved were units from southern Iraq, where the recruiting has been heavily from the Supreme Council's Badr Organization.

He says that the other major component of the Iraqi Army, recruits from the Kurdish militias in northern Iraq, "would not go down to the south to fight this kind of fight."

As the clashes intensified, the 28,000 soldiers involved in the operation proved unable to quickly drive al-Sadr's Imam Al-Mahdi Army from the streets, despite U.S. air support. In the interim, Sadrists in other towns in the south, as well as in Baghdad's sprawling Al-Sadr City slum, tactically spread the fighting there. That escalated the stakes for al-Maliki's government to unacceptable levels as it raised fears of a general insurrection by al-Sadr's forces.

Hiltermann says the sudden end to the showdown on March 30 seems to have come with Iran brokering a cease-fire between the two sides. Tehran has close ties with both the Supreme Council and al-Sadr's movement and wants to see a strong Shi'ite-dominated government survive against Sunni and Kurdish rivals following any U.S. drawdown in Iraq.

Shi'ite Standoff Continues

That leaves the situation in Al-Basrah very much where it was before the week of fighting, which claimed some 359 lives across Iraq.

Hiltermann says Al-Basrah remains divided among three groups. One, the



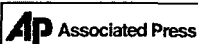
Shi'ite Al-Fadilah (Virtue) Party, is associated with provincial Governor Muhammad Wa'ili. It stayed out of the fray while the troops and the Sadrists battled.

Hiltermann says that Al-Fadilah "has done very well for itself, and they have the governor position and they control the oil company there, so they have a very good share of the oil trade and the oil smuggling that is going on there. The other groups are trying to get a cut of that and, of course, have shared power to some extent, with Supreme Council dominating security institutions and the Sadrists being involved in the police and being very strong on the street."

So, what happens next? One player to watch is al-Maliki. The prime minister, who is from a Shi'ite religious party, Al-Da'wah, has no strong militia, has had to ally himself at various times with al-Sadr or the Supreme Council. Al-Sadr's party helped him win his post as prime minister, but since then the Sadrists have distanced themselves from him as he has worked closely with the United States, which al-Sadr wants out of Iraq.

Al-Maliki has worked hard to portray himself as a national figure able to restore security and suppress corruption in Iraq. His strong identification with the Supreme Council in leading a fight against al-Sadr, however, now may damage that image, handicapping him as a leader.

The other thing to watch will be the governorate-council elections later this year. In the aftermath of last week's fighting, the question is whether the rival Shi'ite parties will now accept the ballot box as the way to balance power between them or will continue to try force. What they decide will go a long way toward defining the stability of Iraq.



Iraq objects to Arab summit declaration

March 31, 2008

DAMASCUS, SYRIA -- Iraq refused to endorse the final declaration of the Arab summit Sunday because it did not condemn terrorism in the country, a divisive end to a gathering marred by disputes and boycotts.

Iraq's Shiite-dominated government has long accused Sunni Arab-led governments of not taking a strong enough stance against Sunni fighters who made up the backbone of Iraq's insurgency.

The Iraqi objections came when Arab League chief Amr Moussa read out the "Damascus Declaration" for the delegations to approve. The document called for "Iraqi brothers to stop bloodshed immediately and preserve the lives of innocent citizens" and for hastening the "end of the foreign presence" in Iraq.

"I express reservations on the text because this is not what we have agreed upon," Shiite Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi said. "It does not include the efforts of the Iraqi government for national reconciliation and it does not condemn terrorism and violence."



Boomtown, Iraq

by Denis Johnson

Imagine a country where Americans are beloved, mini-mansions are springing up, and oil bubbles forth unaided. Denis Johnson reports from the new wheeler-dealer capital of the Middle East and asks, Is this the future of Iraq or just a desert mirage?



When Ward VanLerberg left Kansas and headed off to the Middle Eastern city of Erbil to build 50 schools, he was careful to tell his family that he was going to the capital of “Kurdistan,” and all was well until his daughter googled his destination and announced to the family that Kurdistan is in Iraq. His wife wept, bidding him goodbye, and commenced waiting for him to return home in a coffin.

Three days following Mrs. Van’s last farewell, I run into Ward on the elevator at the International Hotel in Erbil, and he asks me if I’d care to join him at the buffet, and what I say is no. Did I fly 7,000 miles from Chicago to talk to a guy from Kansas City? I’m here to get a look at the 1,000-kilometer oil pipeline running from Kirkuk, in northern Iraq, to Ceyhan, Turkey, and this friendly construction contractor is not a pipeline. But then I feel sorry and ask if I can join him after all, and I tell him that when I left home, I bet my wife cried more than his.

This morning, the two deceased husbands sit in the Atrium Coffee Shop at the Erbil International Hotel (known locally as the Sheraton though it isn’t one), a 10-story establishment with three additional restaurants, a nightclub, and a buffet to rival any on earth. We eat cornflakes with yogurt and omelets to order. Fresh-squeezed O.J. on request. “My family just didn’t get it,” Ward says. “This place is happening. There’s no war here in Kurdistan. No war whatsoever.”

To be sure, security at the “Sheraton” is tight—first a baggage search at the checkpoint before the gated parking lot, next a metal detector and pat-down at the lobby’s entrance, where patrons absolutely have to check their weapons. Since a number of private security contractors stop in for the buffet or take meetings here or even live here in posh quarters—with 24-hour room service and a view, perhaps, of the excavation site from which will rise the future Nishtiman Shopping Mall, one of the largest in the Middle East, or of the American or Italian Villages (little-box, lawnless developments for future foreign residents) or a distant view of the yet-unnamed airport’s colossal terminal, also under construction—at any given time the desk drawer at the security station rattles with loaded handguns, and here and there in the lobby bulky, physically formidable young Euros sport empty holsters on their hips.

Bloody insurgency and sectarian strife tear at the country of Iraq, but Iraqi Kurdistan—three northern “governorates” under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government, with its own language, flag, and national anthem, its own Parliament and its own army—prosperes relatively free of violence. The Kurdistan region is open for business. With the buzz of dealmaking and the ringing cell phones and the smell of oil literally in the air, you get a sense, sitting in the Atrium, of being caught up in this planet’s biggest game, of touching the skirts of power and intrigue and life-changing wealth. (Read more about what lies beyond the Iraqi oil boom.)

The Kurdistan region is Paul Wolfowitz’s wet dream: maybe not a beacon of democracy, but certainly a red-hot ember—peaceful, orderly, secular, democ-



atic, wildly capitalist, and sentimentally pro-American—afloat on an ocean of oil.

Very well: We tend to overlook good news because it’s generally followed by bad news, and another month from my happy breakfast with Ward VanLerberg, Turkish bombers will run forays in this region’s empty northeast corner against the P.K.K., fugitive Kurd rebels who are at war with neighboring Turkey—little damage, but much booming. And before it gets better, the news will get even worse: by the end of January, the northern Iraqi city of Mosul will see plenty of violence, and U.S. commanders will declare it “Al Qaeda’s last urban stronghold.” Good news, bad news.

They call it “The Other Iraq,” and all of them—the Kurdish representative Qubad Talabany in Washington; Kurdish Regional Government president Masoud Barzani and his nephew, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani; head of Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa Bakir; oil minister Ashti Hawrami; the man in a shop who won’t accept money from Americans in exchange for a kilo of apricots—want the news out: This is what Cheney-Bush wanted. That’s the news from here. This is free enterprise blooming—not “booming,” our driver Hameed insists carefully—in the mountains and desert of northern Iraq.

Hameed is a mustachioed Kurd with a bandit’s face who presents himself each morning in well-pressed sports apparel and drives us around in his Land Cruiser, listening to Persian pop tunes on his tape deck. His business card identifies him as a freelance “fixer,” but he may also get a paycheck from the Ministry of Foreign Relations and may have some connection with Intelligence. Or maybe not. Susan Meiselas thinks he does. Susan is my photographer on this assignment. Usually I’m half-broke and deliriously off-course from the first day of these journalistic ventures, but this time I get an expense account and a world-class “shooter”—that’s what I get to call her. I requested Susan specifically. My impression was that she’d seen a bit of Kurdistan and might know a few folks who could point us to a pipeline.

Luxury houses are being built on the main road of Shaqlawa. Less than three hours from Baghdad, business is blooming—not “booming,” the fixer/driver Hameed carefully insists.

Photograph by: Susan Meiselas

Our purpose in engaging fixer Hameed is to get us out to look at oil operations of one kind or another. Whichever way we go, we’ll find them.

And that’s what we do every other day or so, passing first through the relentless checkpoints manned by camo-garbed recruits and then along nicely paved highways among a lot of vehicles going as fast as their drivers can push them, which varies from 30 k.p.h. to, let’s guess, 150 or maybe more. This calls for some fancy maneuvering on the part of Hameed, who keeps us well in the higher end of that range, leaving behind Erbil, believed by some historians to be the longest continuously inhabited city on earth, then entering the massive plain irrigated from the Tigris River and known as “Iraq’s Breadbasket,” the very farmland where, archaeologists believe, mankind first practiced agriculture.

On off days we get around Erbil meeting friendly folks and shooting them, and Susan asks about the “situation on the ground” and “future prospects” and shoots the whole city, while I take notes and wonder what happened to the war.

“It’s safe here, you can go anywhere”—by which they mean wherever you find yourself in this region the size of Maryland, you’ll be safe. But whether you can actually get through the checkpoints without papers from the Ministry of Security, that’s quite another matter. With its zealous and largely successful antiterrorist measures and its capitalist fever and as-yet-incomplete system of laws, the country serves up a blend of Orwellian, penitentiary-style security and Wild West laissez-faire: no speed limits, no driver’s insurance, no D.U.I. traps—there’s very little drinking and apparently zero drug abuse—loose regulations for firearms, and homesteaders’ rights to

rural land; also—at least while the parliament wrestles with the question of government revenue—no taxes. Of any kind. But to board a plane leaving Erbil, passengers must pass two vehicle checkpoints, four electronic screenings and pat-downs, and a final bag-and-body search planeside. Among the ads on the airport terminal's walls:

Khanzad American Village

"Welcome to Luxury"

American Village

The Most Exclusive Villas in Kurdistan

You can go anywhere if you have the right credentials. Stafford Clarry, a dapper American from Hawaii, formerly a United Nations worker and now the humanitarian-affairs adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government, spends his every free moment exploring the countryside in his Land Cruiser, sometimes with his 30-year-old son, Arjun. "In Kurdistan, the American effort is a success," he says, then adds, "All right, yes, at least 50,000 have died in central Iraq. Yes, untold destruction, unbelievable mistakes, yes, all of that is true. But what you see around you in Kurdistan is also true. It doesn't justify the destruction, but it has to be recognized as a fact."

And the Kurds love Americans. Love, love. Investors swarm in from all over the globe, and foreigners are common in Erbil, but if you mention tentatively and apologetically that you're American, a shopkeeper or café owner is likely to take you aside and grip your arm and address you with the passionate sincerity of a drunken uncle: "I speak not just for me but all of Kurdish people. Please bring your United States Army here forever. You are welcome, welcome. No, I will not accept your money today, please take these goods as my gift to America."

On Monday, we talk to business folks and some of the government's innumerable ministers. (Actually, the ministers number 43, and five of them are women.) The Kurdish Regional Government is secular, and neither the Kurdish Democratic Party nor its counterpart, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, pledge formal allegiance to Islam. The Kurds themselves are overwhelmingly Muslim, however. Younger Kurdish women dress like Europeans, but in smaller towns they retain their scarves, often only covering their shoulders, but also handy for ducking under when a bare head might seem disrespectful to the Prophet. At Erbil's public recreation center, women use the pool at separate hours from men, and unmarried females have nowhere to go to amuse themselves, but that's only until a private 90,000-square-foot women's center that's now under construction opens with its steam bath, Turkish bath, aerobics room, yoga room, workout room, and internet center.

At Zagros TV, one of Erbil's five television stations, a news producer tells us that he's free to be critical, but only of the government. "If we stray too far politically, we get a phone call. If we decided to criticize the Prophet Muhammad, we'd get a rocket through the roof."

The Board of Investment offers free lots to investors who are ready to build for their businesses. Get it while you can. "I offer it now," says Herish Muhamad, the board chairman, "but in a while, no more."

Twenty miles from town stands a power plant that's expected to be sending 500 megawatts to Erbil by early spring. The project's assistant director, Dliwer Arif, stands atop a 4.5-million-liter diesel tank, 55 feet in the air, and looks over the generators and turbines. A year ago, this was empty desert. Dliwer smiles with one tooth missing and says, "Yes. Because we are in a hurry. All of Kurdistan is in a hurry." The diesel tank is being tested for leaks, the whole thing trembling. Susan points her camera over the 20 acres of buildings and men and machines, I

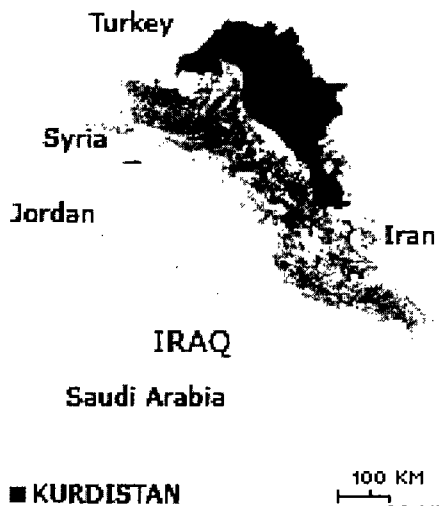
embrace the railing, and Dliwer tests his cell phone. He's very impressed with the reception this high up.

On Tuesday, we head southeast to the town of Taq Taq to watch men grinding and welding 10-meter-deep tanks for Topco, a Turkish oil company, at a field from which they expect to pump 70,000 barrels a day. Afterward, we drive three miles to the site of a future refining facility owned by the Kurdish government and a British oil concern: a stretch of ground leveled and graded in the midst of a vast natural expanse, with a handful of guards who live in trailers and keep it safe and who don't know who the hell these Land Cruising visitors are supposed to be.

The commissioner in charge of the outpost makes it his business to pin down the source of our authority. We tell him the mayor is behind us. He flips his cell

There Will Be Oil

The northern Iraq region of Kurdistan, in red, is roughly the size of Maryland, sitting on at least one-fifth (and maybe a lot more) of Iraq's total oil reserves, estimated to be 115 billion.



phone open, and a round of calls consumes the next hour or so. Between every two calls, the commissioner takes time to address his squad of 13 men, his eyes on fire. Susan prods Hameed to eavesdrop and translate: We've wandered into some kind of political drama here among the mayor, the police chief, and the local head of security, and its climax has arrived. Its climax, in fact, is us.

The commissioner grows so wildly exasperated that he can ultimately find no expression for his disgust other than to gather up his squad and their equipment, and they resign en masse, quitting their windswept, lonely, pointless outpost—nothing's built here yet anyway—and trudging together toward the town around 15 kilometers across the desert, their faces toward the wind.

We watch them shrink into the distance, and I think, Yes, the magazine will want plenty of that, or a couple of paragraphs anyway, the entertaining Kurds with their fiery eyes—and they're very entertaining—but I don't think I like it. I think I've stumbled onto some news, not entertainment. The war in Iraq is an hour's drive away, and for four years these comical

Kurds have actually managed to keep it from coming any closer. Isn't that news?

While Turks and Europeans hopped up on petroleum roll into Erbil to build a new city and become rich, the American Village waits to be filled with teachers, executives, and engineers. The U.S. is waiting for the word from somebody that it's safe, maybe from the same people who told us Saddam Hussein was dangerous. There are Americans around but "fewer than 200 U.S. troops," according to a K.R.G. fact sheet, and if that number is a fact, their whereabouts are only a guess. A few in Mosul, a few in Erbil. Not a one in sight.

Most Americans in Erbil work for the U.S. government, and most governments keep their people here under Baghdad-level security, behind high walls and concertina wire. The U.N. compound looks like a prison, as does both the Blackwater compound on Sabhat Street and the tiny enclosure, not many blocks away, where workers from the U.S. Agency for International Development live. The British diplomats hole up at the high-security Khanzad Hotel with a fleet of armored S.U.V.'s, and all these people venture out only under guard.

Even Ross Milosevic, an Australian, one of this city's ample population of high-paid bodyguards, has to sign an insurance waiver just to get out of his hotel and sneak over to the Deutscher Hof Barbecue, which serves really terrible food but also imported beer, for dinner with a friend in the same line. Ross works for Tacforce International, a private outfit, and looks like an ad for bodyguards, clean-cut and earnest, while his friend runs security for the prime minister of Kurdistan and looks like a homeless Rambo with stringy hair to his shoulders but the same sleeve-busting musculature, and he's American—17 years in the Green Berets, a stint training SWAT teams in New Jersey, and a résumé that grows vague as it approaches the present and from which he himself sort of disappears for a while before materializing at the right hand of the prime minister of Kurdistan with 500 troops to do his bidding. At the public level, he prefers to use an alias and doesn't mind at all if it's Rambo. He's here on an open-ended contract with the K.R.G. to train the prime minister's bodyguards.

This evening, Rambo orders beef Stroganoff, therefore so do I, to my considerable regret, and he sips a German beer I should get the name of, but I'm more interested in clocking his consumption, because I wonder if it's possible for this specimen to chug down the calories and still look capable of pinning an elephant in four moves at the age of 47. He drinks only two of them while he and Ross—just one beer for Ross—discuss the world situation. "According to my contacts," Rambo says, "the Israelis have six nuclear-tipped missiles raised from the silos and pointed at Iran and Syria. They launch before Bush leaves office." Who are his contacts? "My brother-in-law."

Ross and Rambo check out a table full of similar-looking men across the candlelit room. "Special ops team," Rambo guesses. "They sound like Yanks, and their hair is short." Ross isn't so sure. You get the feeling that these guys are in their own movie and will suddenly challenge you to some humiliating physical contest. In his spare time, Rambo has been working to track down a young American girl kidnapped six years ago from a cruise liner off the coast of Venezuela. He's trying to get Ross involved. Ross has spent time in Venezuela, and his wife is Venezuelan, but he says he can't go back there because he's been accused—falsely, he says—of working for the C.I.A.

Rambo himself seems just the sort to have some connection to the paratrooper-ninja wing of that very organization. "If a guy like me still worked for the U.S., like, for the C.I.A., he'd only be doing a little kite work now and then," he says.

Kite work? "That's where they can cut the string, and you float away and disappear."

Rambo loves his job. He loves the Kurds as much as the Kurds love Americans, and he feels at home among them in what he calls the Wild West of the Middle East, but he thinks they're pushing too hard to get rich while letting the basics—agriculture, infrastructure, education—fall behind. Here in Erbil, even the head of the prime minister's bodyguards gets electric power from the city only four hours out of 24, and Rambo is missing his daily allotment while he eliminates every morsel from his plate. The rationing should end when the new power plant comes on line, but he still thinks the country's leaping ahead with both feet in the air and no feet on the ground. The shopping center downtown represents three times the investment in the power plant. With their labor force heavily subsidized by make-work government jobs and their agricultural base and infrastructure wiped away by years of Saddam, the Kurds have plenty to do if they want a truly self-sufficient nation.

It's a land definitely on its way, but to what? "Basically," Rambo says, "the model is Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates: oil-rich, almost entirely dependent on imported expertise, imported goods, imported workers. I wish I had a hand clicker to count the number of times each day I heard someone mention that place. That's all you hear about. Dubai, Dubai, Dubai."

Today, mainly security and government workers constitute the American presence in Erbil, but the others will get here. Hunt Oil of Dallas now conducts seismic tests around Kurdistan, and it won't be long before other U.S. oil interests turn up. The oil is here, and we've known it for a long time. Britain knew it in the 1920s, when they drew boundaries on a map that created a British-administered Iraq, making sure it included this region and its petroleum. Kurdistan had actually been promised independence, but no way. "Oil," a Kurdish saying runs, "made Kurdistan Iraqi."

How much oil? Depending on who's counting, Iraq as a whole has anywhere from 115 billion barrels of "proven" reserves down to half that much, which would indicate nothing's really proven. A fifth of that or more lies in the Kurdish region. That puts Kurdistan's reserves well ahead of the U.S.'s total reserves and equal to all of Asia's. George Yacu, a Chaldean Christian Kurd who served as a technical adviser for Iraq's national oil company for nearly 30 years, seems to find the question "how much" technically interesting but scientifically unanswerable, beyond his saying, "But nobody knows until they drill."

On Wednesday, Susan and I have dinner with George. Since his retirement, he has run his own corporation, Sumer Petroleum Services. His family lives in Chicago these days, and he's applying for U.S. citizenship. They all lived in Baghdad until life there became impossible, and he still has a house in the city, with a library of rare books and manuscripts, "if it still exists." When things calm down, he'll move the collection to his childhood village of Fishkabour, which is here in Kurdistan, just across the Tigris River from Syria.

It's hard to imagine George as some kind of villager. He's in his seventies now, tall and well-dressed, with a large, sad, historic face; formal and gracious in his manner, generous in his conversation, not to say voluble; and with a true kindness emanating from his depths. In 1975, Saddam gave the largely Christian population of George's village 12 hours to clear out and then let his pilots use it "for bombing practice," George says.

Who are these people? Who goes through this madness and comes out—not exactly laughing; George is certainly no rib-poking joker—but kindly, open, unafraid? And I actually ask him the question, but he only shrugs as if the answer's obvious, or so utterly beyond the experience of anyone who has to ask that

he wouldn't even try to respond. His village has been rebuilt, and George keeps a new home there now, but he speaks of its former days as of a paradise: the orchards and the vineyards and the Tigris River going by, all of it gone now but the river and the ruins and the new buildings, and it's hard, without risking rudeness, to steer him back to the subject of petroleum, which is, after all, what makes Kurdistan interesting to America.

We've been involved in the Middle East since 1945, exclusively because it's where the oil is. Although the rhetoric, starting with Truman's in 1946 down to Bush's in today's paper, has been rendered in apocalyptic terms—war between good and evil, the clash of civilizations—if the oil were to move miraculously someday to another point on the globe, so would our involvement. But the oil's under Iraq, and according to George Yacu, 38 percent of it lies in the Kurdish region in natural reservoirs less than 3,000 meters below the surface, some as shallow as 600 meters down—easy to get to and easy to refine, compared with, say, the recent strike off the Brazilian coastline, which is under a mile of ocean and another mile of rock, or most of Canada's reserves, which are mixed with sand.

The Norwegian company DNO recently started three rigs drilling in its new fields near the Turkish border and has been pumping out great gobs of the stuff. DNO and Adox/Genel (a one-rig consortium of Swedes, Turks, and Canadians) have been the first to draw petroleum from Kurdish ground. Plenty of others expect to follow. When I arrived on Sunday, the K.R.G. had so far signed seven foreign companies, Hunt Oil included, to exploration contracts. By the middle of the week, another five had signed on, and by the end of the month, the total was up to 20.

Whatever they've found or expect to find, they're not telling. Before DNO's drill shafts went down, the company listed a public relations person on its website; by November the name had disappeared, and Magne Normann, DNO's vice president, made it clear they weren't entertaining visitors without a lot of vetting first.

So how much oil? For 17 years under Saddam and through one uprising and war after another, Iraq has pumped out only a quarter of its proven petroleum capacity while Saudi Arabia, at full capacity, is now suspected to have peaked and entered the declining phase of its oil-producing history. In any case, commentators as disparate as leftist Noam Chomsky and defense-and-resource expert Michael Klare have called what's under the ground in the Middle East—including Kurdistan—the biggest material prize in human history.

On Thursday, we pay four bucks a gallon for gasoline. Although service stations in recent months started pumping again, the streetside vendors still sell gas and pink diesel from 20-liter jugs stacked by the highways in barricades they can scarcely see over. Hameed prefers to fill his Land Cruiser's tank from a legitimate pump. Whoever you buy it from, it's cash only. The Kurds accept Iraqi money, but they deeply cherish those U.S. Ben Franklin hundreds.

We go north and approach the city of Mosul under a linty-looking haze from its cement plants and brick factories, but we drive around it. "Too many Arabs there," Hameed explains. "They kill you just for fun." We're making excellent time. Susan's a little irked that we didn't give Mosul an even wider berth. "We were told not to go through the Mosul checkpoint," she says.

"No," Hameed answers, "in the morning it's safe."

"But we agreed we'd take the other one. Why did you take this one?"

"Susan, don't you trust me? I'm never going to endanger you, because I'm never going to endanger myself."

"But, Hameed, when we discuss these things, let's stick to the plan."

"Susan, please, I'm sticking to the plan. The plan is to get you to the pipeline." Their delivery is very amiable.

Today, we'll actually reach the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. There's a metering station in the northwest corner of Kurdish territory, near the Turkish and Syrian borders and also near DNO's new drilling site.

On Friday, a gallon of gas is down 40 cents from the day before. Hameed is philosophical: good news, bad news. Tomorrow could see a rise.

In our two days up near the Turkish border, we hear only two explosions. A Kurdish army recruit says it's just Americans blowing up dud ordnance from previous campaigns. He hasn't actually seen any U.S. soldiers; he's only heard they're around somewhere.

At this metering facility two miles from the Turkish border and three miles from Syria, engineers keep track of the oil flowing north through the 1,000-kilometer Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. In my uninformed imagination, I'd conjured one monstrous, mythic steel artery dominating the desert and shrinking in its journey toward the horizon, but this is all that's visible: a chain-link-fenced enclosure no more colossal than your average Texaco service station, and inside it a 40-inch pipe and a second one 46 inches in diameter, coming up from underground for a distance of 80 feet at a height of maybe six inches, and then diving back under the dirt. There's a checkpoint, a barracks for the guards, and a distant view of Turkish mountains.

Two hundred yards from the facility, DNO supervises two 4.5-million-liter tanks, to which it pumps oil from its strike a few kilometers east. A half-million barrels a day coming from farther south, outside the Kurdish region, pass through the pipelines just a shout across the road, but DNO is forced to send its oil into Turkey on tanker trucks. The pipeline is administered by the central Iraqi government, and they're not ready to recognize the legitimacy of DNO's Kurdish-sanctioned operation. Its pipes are off-limits to DNO and all Kurdish oil. A DNO electrical engineer who won't give his name, a young Frenchman here to look after the big tanks, says the bickering parties will work it all out; the parties always do when there's money to be made. He speaks about the richness of the strike as if it's something to inspire worship; there's that kind of tone in his voice: "I've been around, and I've only seen one bigger." He can't let us visit the drilling site. "You want to see Kurdish oil? Just go a few kilometers to the village of Tawke. You'll see oil."

Safar Mohammed Omer, son of the former mayor and cousin of the current mayor of Tawke, takes us to a region of dun-colored crags and flats to show us black petroleum seeping out of the rocks and trickling down the hillside, and even a small creek that bubbles out of a black spring, two feet across at its widest, but it amounts to an actual slowly trickling black creek of oil. He points to another, and another, and those over there—for a thousand years, Safar says, villagers have been using this oil to start their fires.

He shows us a hand-dug well—a pond, really—about a dozen feet across, bubbling in a desultory fashion. When he was a boy, the villagers had a small distillery set up here and manufactured their own diesel. Thirteen such hand-dug wells, he says, surround the neighborhood, going between 12 and 40 meters into the earth, and on hot summer days an aqua-blue smoke rises from these reservoirs. This morning, the breeze carries a stench like that of an urban roofing operation.

Safar Mohammed dresses in the traditional style known as Kurmançî, in a loose oversuit, turban, and wide sash, exactly as he might have if he'd lived hundreds of years ago. The village in which his

family is prominent consists of a few dirt streets and concrete buildings, skinny chickens wandering around. Sewage trickling along hand-gouged gutters. Oil bubbling up 100 yards from the place.

What does Safar see coming from all this? Is he going to live in a mansion with his chickens and mess with the heads of all the cultured folks, like the Clampetts on *The Beverly Hillbillies*?

Hameed seems to have trouble translating the question. "These villagers," Hameed says, "they don't think like that. He just thinks about today."

But come on, this man is the Jed Clampett of Kurdistan. How does he think the DNO oil strike will change his future?

"It won't."

Safar may be the Jed Clampett of Kurdistan, but the fortunes of the village don't quite compare. Safar says that the farmers hereabouts agreed to rent their land to DNO for roughly \$300 an acre annually, but the tenant is casual about payment, and when all is said and done, the locals get about \$13 a month. This oil may buy a mansion, but somebody else will live in it.

On the way back to Erbil, we pass the Harir Flats and the runway built for Saddam's air force—the first runway used by the coalition forces in the latest war. Money from the new Kurdish construction projects has found its way out into the desert. Already the heights overlooking the old runway bristle with the castles of the newly rich, the tender beginnings of a Middle Eastern Beverly Hills.

Susan has kept it something of a secret, but here in Kurdistan she's famous, thanks to her book *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*, a compendium of documents and photos weighing in at five pounds, and we've been invited to rendezvous with some of her admiring friends. We're going to be "guested," is the term Susan uses, and I detect a kind of apology in the way she says it, and a tiny hint of hopelessness I don't understand any more than a child understands when the nurse says it's time for "a little hypodermic."

In the town of Zakhu, on the Turkish border, at a compound of impressive stone buildings called K.D.P. location No. 8, the Kurdish Democratic Party is giving away 80 red-and-black wheelchairs manufactured in Port Washington, New York, brand-new and shining in the afternoon sun. These gifts from Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish president, are conveyed one at a time by the president's second cousin Karwan Barzani, who sits in the courtyard in an easy chair behind a big desk, among a number of officials seated on couches. A man with a microphone calls out names, and through the course of the afternoon recipients with every manner of paralysis, incompleteness, or demobilizing disfiguration of their frames come forward with great ceremony: little children and old ladies and legless war veterans, each carried by two or three relatives toward the shiny new conveyances and each putting an ink thumbprint on a registry page and another on a large certificate, which is theirs to keep as proof of ownership.

Zakhu is a Turkish border crossing. Beside its main highway, cargo trucks wait in a line four kilometers long to pass back empty into Turkey, having unloaded everything from chicken feed, fresh produce, and canned goods to appliances, construction materials, and machines—all most everything, in fact, that the Kurds spend their money on. With \$5 billion a year in goods and construction contracts coming south into Kurdistan, nobody's worried that the Turkish army massed on the other side will actually invade this country and put a glitch in all that commerce just to spank a few rebels. Even when the

bombing raids against the P.K.K. begin, the pilots steer clear of the highways and the pipeline.

After the ceremony, we adjourn with a couple dozen of Karwan Barzani's friends and relatives to a big hall, where we sit in chairs against the walls and sip chai, a double shot glass of tea with an inch of sugar at the bottom, and I'm introduced to the smooth young Karwan and his jolly uncle Dara, both of them great friends of Susan's and now, I gather, great friends of mine too. We have the tea and some fruit and some talk, and mainly we talk about dinner, where it's going to be, what are the alternatives—these guys are Barzanis, members of the family currently in power, and dinner can be whatever we want wherever in Kurdistan we want it—and that takes a while, and no decision is made, but we're all starving, so let's go, man, and we and an entourage of a dozen or more people form our vehicles into a convoy, and we go.

These, I repeat, are Barzanis, family to the legendary leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who fought for Kurdish independence for decades against the British and then against Saddam and whose portrait hangs on the wall of every Kurdish government office. These are the cousins of the current Kurdish president, Masoud Barzani, who in 1991 held off a division of Saddam's troops, helicopters, and tanks in the Kore Valley with just 150 of his bodyguards, known as peshmerga ("those who face death"). Three days ago, Rambo, the prime minister's security man, asked me, "Have you ever dealt with the Barzanis?" and did not expect an answer. In the 1980s, in order to deal with these Barzanis once and for all, Saddam Hussein began construction of a power dam intended to flood the entire Barzan Valley and all its villages, submerging and erasing, in a biblical style of retribution, the very origins of his enemies.

We are dealing with the Barzanis, which right now means traveling at homicidal speed behind their big, black Hummer (pronounced "Hammer" hereabouts) from Zakhu to the mountain city of Dahuk, still discussing the dinner possibilities by cell phone. I can hear Karwan's stereo through Susan's earpiece playing something with a lot of bass. "The Hammer will never lose me," Hameed promises, and in his voice I hear the tribal Kurd beneath the city Kurd, and I know he means not even death, not all our bloody deaths, will separate him from the Hummer.

We have dinner at the Shandakha Hotel in Dahuk, in a private room with a 23-inch TV playing. As we enter, we find the owner and entire staff lined up to greet us. The place has an opulent five-star atmosphere. The Johns have automatic-sensor towel dispensers.

I'm too busy with dinner to take notes, chomping resolutely, anxious to make a good showing in what feels more than a little like a pie-eating contest because I'm sitting next to portly, ravenous Uncle Dara, who preaches gluttony: more of these olives, more hummus and baba ghanoush, one more hubcap-size piece of the best flat bread in all of Kurdistan, and now some beef kebab—never pork—and turkey and chicken in a large bowl of broth with an equally large bowl of rice. Dara cries, "Free-range turkey! And the chicken is free-range!" I've seen chickens ranging free in some alarmingly squalid corners the past few days, but this is delicious. Meanwhile, there's a lot of discussion about what to watch on the satellite TV. Hameed wants Tom and Jerry cartoons, but he's only a fixer, so we watch the news in Arabic. For these Kurds, the news is good. The times are good.

Today's a lucky day, and these Kurds know what to do with it. We go to Dream City, once the site of a military barracks under Saddam, now a 25-acre amusement park with all the usual attractions: the Crazy Disco tilt-a-whirl and the bumper cars and the

Ferris wheel, but also billiards and bowling, a swimming pool, an arcade, and a "4-D" movie theater.

That means a 3-D establishment with extra effects, a floor that tilts and lurches and a wind that blows past as the film rushes you along tracks through a spooky labyrinth called *The Tomb of the Mummy* and a mist that wets your face as you come out beside a cataract, never actually moving except as the platform shifts the seats. Our hosts and their friends and bodyguards, in their expensive suits, with their holstered sidearms and yellow 3-D glasses, can't get enough of this one. Karwan buys everyone tickets to a second show, *The Death Mine of Solomon*.

Followed by billiards, followed by bowling. The billiards don't quite amuse: The balls won't go in the holes. It turns out we're mainly here for the bowling anyway; it's catching on all over the Kurdish region, and in this early phase, if you care to, you can witness its practitioners using familiar equipment in the development of an entirely new sport, keeping no score, nobody caring whose turn it is, whirling and grabbing the very next ball on the server—no need to wait for your own, any ball will do—and then an approach best called "the charge of the Kurds" and a kind of almost baseball-mound-worthy windup and a delivery somewhere between that of discus and shot put, the evident objective being to keep the ball airborne for as far as possible in its journey, its lonely flight, downlane.

And then to the Dream City "supermarket," the first department store in Kurdistan, erected in 2003, about half the size of a Wal-Mart and offering a little of everything. The two escalators are running tonight, both the up and the down. In the daytime they're switched off, to save power. The Barzanis and friends move around the place languidly, handling and discussing every item for sale and buying presents for everyone they've ever known. Then we all gather out front for the loading of the many purchases and for a small conference. They've had us now for about 10 hours, but the discussion seems to center on our plans for tomorrow, the people we must meet, the beautiful mountains we must visit, our breakfast, our lunch, our dinner.

And I'm thinking, Yes, this is the climax of the piece right here, affluent Kurds clowning around, the magazine's going to love this entertaining stuff, so why does that make me feel like a pimp in a burgundy velvet suit? Who are these people who keep Al Qaeda from infiltrating their homeland while the U.S. Army scratches its head and watches the rest of Iraq fall to pieces? And why haven't the New York Times and CNN taken notice? Here's a guess, just one possibility: because journalists are pimps for war, my friends, in burgundy velvet suits. And that's the news from here.

We all stay at the Dilshad Palace Hotel, the most wonderful hotel in Dahuk, surely five-star, with plastic trees out front covered with plastic blossoms; newly built, and open tonight for the first time in history. We sit together in the lobby for chai and chai and animated small talk and chai before I resolve to commit the rudeness of saying good night. Good night takes a while. You have to circle in slowly on the concept—about 30 minutes.

The bellboy assures me that we're the first customers of the Dilshad Palace. I have to teach him how to operate my door's card lock. The next day, Dara tells me that after I left, I missed some fun: An elevator jammed and caught him between floors. "I was just about to fire my pistol a few times when it started to move again. They have to work these things out!" He seems disappointed, but I can't tell whether it's because the hotel's equipment failed him or because he didn't get to fire his gun in an elevator.