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**KHANAQIN
CRYSTALLISES TENSION BETWEEN BAGHDAD AND IRBIL.**

The crisis in relations between the Baghdad government and the KRG over the Khanaqin issue is not calming down, going even as far as clashes between Kurds and Iraqi forces, despite several meetings between the two governments and a provisional agreement. On 1 September, a Kurdish delegation visited Baghdad to meet Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. The discussions were described as *“open and transparent”* by Yassin Majid, one

of the Prime Minister’s communication advisors, while the Member of Parliament for the Kurdish Islamic Party, Sami Atushi, expressed the hope that positive results would be secured by dialogue and by avoiding any *“military option”* in the issues over which Baghdad and Irbil were in dispute. For his part, the Kurdistan President, Massud Barzani, personally called on the Iraqi Prime Minister to ask him to avoid the crisis that was developing on the spot between the two security forces.

On 5 September, officials of the two governments announced the signing of an agreement. It was decided that the Army and the Peshmergas both withdraw in favour of the local police, apart from a checkpoint that would be shared by the police and Army forces. *“Things are returning to where they were before the Iraqi security forces entered the district”*, explained the Iraqi Army Chief of Staff, Babekir Zebari, a Kurd, during a press conference given jointly with the Peshmergas commander in Khanaqin, Mala Bakhtyar. The Kurdish General, from his position in the Iraqi Defence Forces, was speaking on

behalf of the Baghdad government while Mala Bakhtyar did so in the name of the KRG, which gives an idea of the political intermingling of the "Arab-Kurdish partnership" in the central government.

However, General Zebari's remarks sound somewhat ambiguous, because the situation "before the Iraqi security forces entered the district" was in fact complete Kurdish control of the region. As a result, applying this agreement in the field comes up against the real fact of the situation. The town of Khanaqin, whose population is 85% Kurdish, 97% of whom are Shiites, wants to remain under the control of the Peshmergas pending its re-integration into the Kurdistan Region, as Provincial Councillor Ibrahim Bajelani explained to the Guardian: "The Iraqi Army still wants to enter the town and the Peshmergas are still present. We are in a cleft stick. If the Iraqi army tries to enter without prior agreement we cannot be held responsible for the consequences".

Already, in June 2006, the town's municipal council had called for it to be attached to the KRG. Here the message of the Kurdish political committee as well as of the Mayor, Mala Hassan, is perfectly clear: Article 140 must be applied to allow, through a referendum, Khanaqin to return to being a Kurdish administered area. As Mala Bakhtyar, the Peshmerga commander, explained to the AFP "Our message to the Iraqi government is simple: Apply the Constitution and authorise the holding of a local self-determination referendum. If the government does nothing there will be political disturbances and violence".

The Shiite Kurds were particularly targeted by the former regime's persecutions and most of them were forcibly displaced in the period 1970-1980. Their return to

the town dates from 2003 and they have no wish to see Iraqi troops again patrolling the streets of the town that the Peshmergas had liberated. As Mala Bakhtyar explains: "When we arrived here, there were 36 American soldiers and no Iraqi troops. I came at the head of 4 to 5,000 men. There are no al-Qaida fighters here now and no violence. So why these Iraqi troops? The government should thank us rather than tell us to clear out". Ordered to leave the area of Northern Diyala, the Peshmergas, backed by the support of the local population, are refusing to leave it and only accept orders from the Kurdistan government, which is negotiating the issue with the Baghdad government.

The hostility and fears of the inhabitants are also attributable to the conditions of their recent return. Whereas the refugees from Kirkuk are still waiting, often in camps, to be rehoused or compensated, the Khanaqin Kurds moved back as a matter of course when the Kurdish troops arrived in the town and settled back in houses abandoned by the Arab settlers, who had fled. Mohammed Aziz, a maths teacher whose family had been driven out of the village in 1975 when he was only four, explained: "Our houses were taken over by the Arabs without any compensation being paid. When we returned, we took one of the empty houses. The Arabs had run away". Mohammed Aziz, who had been forced to live in the Shiite province of Babylon for 30 years, said he was now happy to be able to bring his three children up in Kurdish and to return "to his land", hoping that Khanaqin will be permanently incorporated into Kurdistan.

According to Mala Hassan, who also favours incorporation, 90% of the Kurds forcibly displaced from Khanaqin have now returned. The mayor of Khanaqin, who was a

member of the Kurdish delegation that signed the agreement states that his town will remain under Kurdish control even if their troops were to withdraw: "We are all Peshmergas now".

Indeed, throughout the town pictures of Massud Barzani and Kurdistan flags are displayed. Even a mixed population area where Arabs also live, like Jalawla, is entirely controlled by the Kurds. The KRG even makes a larger contribution to the districts annual budget than does the Baghdad government (15 million US dollars). For the towns Kurds, incorporation in the Kurdistan Region is, in any case, an already established fact. As Nihad Ali, who commands the Peshmerga detachment here, explained to the *Washington Post*: "Who can dispute the fact that we have already made this region a part of the KRG? Who has spent all this money here? What martyrs blood has been shed here? These people are totally dependent on the Kurds. We cannot abandon them".

Only the Sunni Arabs in the area, often linked to the old regime, look unfavourably on the perspective of being ruled from Irbil. Ahmed Saleh Henawi al-Naimi, a Jalawa tribal chief and former Army officer under Saddam, complains about what he calls a "Kurdification" process. "We are subjected to two occupations — one by the Americans and one by the Kurds. That by the Kurds is the worse and is leading the population to terrorism".

These accusations of "Kurdification" are rejected by the KRG that points out that it had no need to "Kurdify" the region any more than it was trying to "take control" of it, as it is accused by the Arab groups because, as retorted Fuad Hussein, Massud Barzani's chief of staff: "We already control the region. It is the on-site reality of

these disputed areas in Iraq that cannot be ignored". On the contrary, it is the al-Maliki that is being accused by the Kurds of having a "secret agenda" of driving them out of the area. "Some of them would even want to drive us out of Iraq".

In an official statement of the Kurdish Government's stand on the issue, Fuad Hussein reaffirms that they do not envisage any "unilateral annexation" of these areas and that the presence of the Peshmergas was solely in order to protect the population from terrorism. The presidential chief of staff added that applying Article 140 could alone settle these conflicts by constitutional means.

In any case, Baghdad is finding it hard to drive out of Jalawla even the few hundred Peshmergas who refuse to leave their quarters despite re-iterated demands of the Army, which has several times tried to enter but has each time

found its way barred by the PUK Peshmergas. On 20 September, Sarchil Adnan, who runs the PUK branch in the town, nevertheless announced that "the Kurdish parties in Jalawla, al-Saadiya, Khanaqin and Qara Tepe have accepted to evacuate the government buildings provided they are only used as offices", without, however, giving a precise date for starting this withdrawal. On 27 March the Iraqi police (recently formed in the district and exclusively composed of Arabs, according to the Kurds) had attacked a building occupied by the Kurdish Asayish (security forces), killing one of them before the curfew was decreed for the town.

The Kurdish forces are also targeted by terrorist attacks. Thus an explosion aimed at a patrol vehicle killed six of them and wounded three others about the middle of the month, while on 28 September it was the mayor of the

small town of Saadiyah, East of Khanaqin, who was wounded, with six of his men, in a bomb attack as he was going to his office.

Furthermore, the Kurds of Khanaqin are worried about the new police force set up in Diyala. According to them, the recruiting excludes Kurds in favour of Arabs, and it seems to them liable to be infiltrated by al-Qaida. This fear could only be strengthened following the arrest, on 30 September, of General Hassan Karawi, commander of the Jalawla police, by the multi-national force. He is suspected of being involved in terrorist activities along with three other officers: Brigadier General Abdullah Anu, Lieutenant Raed Sheikh Zaed and Ibrahim Abdullah, former director of the Khanaqin secret services centre under the Baathist regime. They were all arrested in the house of a local Arab tribal chief.

SYRIA: INIQUITOUS ARRESTS, CENSORSHIP AND TRIALS

Following the arrest of Mashaal Tamo, leader of an opposition platform "Kurdish Future" on 15 August, which was denounced by the Observatory of Human Rights in Syria, this organisation has again denounced that of Talal Mohammad of the Wifaq Party, a banned branch of the PKK in Syria. He was also placed in solitary confinement at the end of August. Both are accused of "major offences" against the State

Mashaal al-Tammo had declared, shortly before his arrest, that the attitude of the Syrian police towards the Kurds was in danger of provoking riots similar to those of 2004, which the Syrian courts have described as "incitement to civil war" — a

charge that incurs the death sentence, though this is rarely used against known political opponents. He is also charged with the classical offence, whenever Kurdish leaders are involved, of membership of an organisation "having the goal of changing the fundamentals of society and creating racial and sectarian tension".

The arrest took place shortly before the visit to that country of Nicolas Sarkozy, who argued in favour of the liberation of Syrian political prisoners and a liberalisation of Syrian political life. However, the French message does not seem to have registered, since at the same time the Centre for the Freedom of the Media and Freedom of Expression announced that Syria

has been blocking Internet access to 160 sites since the year 2000. These sites are those of Kurdish political parties, of political opponents, of news papers (especially Lebanese ones), movements for Human Rights and a variety of associations, Islamic or civil... According to Mazen Darwish, the President of the organisation, this repression is increasing: "Thus is but the beginning of political censorship of the press and an attempt to control all who use Internet", who, according to Mazen Darwish, are increasingly having resort to this media to express themselves and comment on the political life of their country.

Indeed, 15 September was the day on which 50 Kurds were tried before a Damascus court martial and received sentences of between 4 and 6 months imprisonment for having taken

part in the demonstrations that followed the kidnapping and death of the Sufi Sheikh Maashuk al-Khaznawi. At the time, the demonstrators were demanding the whole truth about this murder through the setting up of an independent enquiry. The 50 accused had been arrested on the spot, detained two months and then released. They are charged with *"incitement of religious and racial dissention and of conflict between the nation's different religions and groups"*.

In addition, on 18 September, there began the trial of Ahmad Tohme, Akram al-Bunni, Fida al-Hurani, Ali al-Abdullah, Walid al-Bunni, Yasser Tayser Aleiti, Fayez Sarah, Mohammed Haj Darwish, Riad Seif, Abu Dan and Marwan al-Esh. These twelve men are members of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration for a democratic change (NCDD), a movement that includes over 160 politicians, Human Rights activists, intellectuals and artists. Since it was founded in December 2007 (to replace the former National Council for a Democratic Change, created in 2005) forty of its members have already been arrested by the Syrian secret services. The twelve being tried at the moment are those who were kept in detention.

On 28 January 2008, they appeared before a judge and charged under Article 285 of the Syrian Criminal Code with *"weakening national feelings"*, Article 286 for having spread *"notoriously false rumours"* and with having sought *"to weaken national feelings"*, Article 306 for membership of an *"association having the aim of changing the economic or social structure of the State"* and Article 307 that bans *"all action, discourse or writings*

that incite sectarianism or encourage the conflict between sects". On 26 August the Public Prosecutor confirmed the charges. The defence lawyers, allowed to speak on 24 September, pleaded *"not guilty"* making the point that the Damascus Declaration only had the aim of initiating discussion on a process of peaceful and democratic reforms in Syria. The accused face up to 15 years imprisonment. The verdict is expected in October.

This trial has been sharply criticised by the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Human Rights, the Observatory for the protection of defenders of Human Rights (a joint working platform for the International Federation for Human Rights and the World Organisation Against Torture), Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First. These NGOs expressed their *"deep concern"* at what they describe as arbitrary detention and iniquitous trial in a common statement in which they insistently called on the Syrian authorities to cancel the trial as well as to release the accused immediately and unconditionally. They recalled that members of the Damascus Declaration were only *"peacefully exercising their fundamental rights"* as guaranteed by international laws and the Syrian Constitution itself, such as Article 38, which stipulates the *"all citizens have the right freely and openly to express their opinions, verbally or in writing and by any other means of expression"*.

The NGOs also fear that the accused might not have the right to a proper trial and criticise the *"vague and wide"* terms of the Penal Code, which allows the authorities to use them against peaceful dissidents and human rights activists. The lawyers

have also reported ill treatment suffered by their clients, who were all beaten during their interrogations and forced to sign false statements, which were then used by the Prosecutor during the trial.

Finally, the state of health of some dissidents seems worrying and in need of medical treatment: thus Riad Seif, the General Secretary of the NCDD, suffers from cancer of the prostate and is now receiving no treatment; Dr. Fidaa al-Hurani, the NCDD President, has also been refused medical attention although he has heart problems; Ali Abdallah, an independent journalist, has lost all hearing in his left ear as a result of blows received during his interrogation. On 28 January last, he was examined by a doctor who refused to make a report. This prevented the prisoner from receiving medical help. Moreover, Ali Abdallah was transferred, two months ago, to a punishment cell, where conditions of detention are even more severe, for having refused to rise during an argument with a guard.

The organisations remind Syria that it is signatory to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and several conventions, particularly ones on civil and political rights that cover, amongst other things, the right to free expression and freedom of association. It has also signed the 1998 United Nations' Declaration *"on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect Human Rights and universally recognised fundamental liberties"*. They also demand the lifting of the State of Emergency and the ensuring laws, calling on all the institutions of the European Union to join this protest and so inform Syria.

**IRAQ:
CHRISTIAN DISCONTENT FOLLOWING
THE PASSING OF THE ELECTORAL LAW**

On 24 September, the Iraqi, after much painful labour, finally gave birth to a new law on the local elections. These should take place no later than 31 January 2009 in 14 of the country's 18 provinces. The 191 members of parliament present voted by a show of hands, so the Bill was passed by a majority of those present.

Passed unanimously, the new election law was described by Mahmud al-Mashhadani, the Parliament's spokesman, as *"a great day for Iraq, and a day for democracy in which the Iraqis have proved that they could reach consensual solutions. Kirkuk is a source of problems but, today, it has become a symbol of Iraqi unity"*.

In fact, this *"symbol of Iraqi unity"* simply effects a postponement of the elections in accordance with the advice of the UN representatives, who advised that elections for Kirkuk be postponed and a commission be formed, that would have the task of preparing the elections in this region — which the Iraqi Parliament accepted. According to Khalid Shawani, a Kurdish M.P., this commission will consist of *"two representatives each from the Arab, Kurdish and Turcoman communities and one from the Christian community"*. Its objective is to *"prepare the ground"* for holding the elections, due to take place during 2009, to set up new *"mechanisms for power sharing"* in Kirkuk, to check the census of citizens and the registration of electors while correcting the *"excesses that occurred after April 2003"*, the date of the collapse of the Baathist regime. The commission's report is to be presented to Parliament before 31

March and the M.P.s will then chose the date of the poll.

In the mean time, the Kirkuk Provincial Council, which has a Kurdish majority, will continue to govern the region. Kurdish M.P. Khalid Shawani also stated on The Voice of Iraq radio that the parliament had unanimously approved the UN envoy's recommendation on the *"joint participation of the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government"* in the process and of the necessity of their support for its success.

Three other provinces will be subject to an independent election agenda: Duhok, Irbil and Suleimaniah, that is the present Kurdistan Region which must first pass its own election law, as was explained to AFP by Ali Qader, the President of the KRG election commission: *"Only the Kurdistan Parliament has the right to pass this Bill, so no date is yet set for the elections in Kurdistan"*.

The passing of this election law was welcomed by Washington that has been pushing for months for the holding of elections, originally due for October 2008 and that has tried to the very end to avoid postponement. *"We congratulate the Iraqi Parliament for having passed the law on holding the elections. We think that it is a positive sign that shows, without any doubt, that an Iraqi democracy is on the way to becoming mature"*, declared Robert Wood, the State Department spokesman. *"We hope that the provincial elections will take place as soon as possible, preferably by the end of the year"*.

However there have been discordant notes to this dithyrambic chorus. Thus the

Deputy Speaker of the Kurdistan national Assembly, Kamal Kirkuki, declared on the voice of Iraq radio that the law passed, especially the Articles 2 and 4 violated the Iraqi Constitution and, consequently, the *"democratic bases of the new Iraq"*. Kamal Kirkuki was, in fact, expressing the position generally adopted by the Kurds who have been opposed, since the beginning of summer, to a special treatment for Kirkuk, the sole aim of which being to prevent the Kurds again winning the Provincial Council election there seeing that the province's demography is so much in their favour. The view of the Kurds of the KRG, as of those of Kirkuk, was thus to hold the elections in this province under the same conditions and in the same way as in the rest of Iraq. The vote of the M.P.s of the Kurdish Alliance in the Baghdad Parliament was just a compromise to resolve the crisis.

In an official statement, the President of Kurdistan, Massud Barzani, although declaring he was *"very satisfied"* by this vote, in the hope that it will be *"a significant step towards a strengthening of the democratic process in Iraq"*, and although affirming *"active support the adoption of a law allowing all Iraqis to determine the final status of their community within the new Federal system"*, regretted that the law did not mention the rights of Christians, Yezidis and other religious minorities to be represented. Thus the Kurdistan presidency was anxious to reaffirm its support for all the religious and ethnic groups in Iraq, for a guarantee of their rights, which is fully in line with the KRG's own policy of tolerance and even of positive discrimination towards minorities, particularly religious ones. Thus places the Iraqi government in a somewhat embarrassing position

because of the agitation of the Christians that the new draft of this law has aroused.

Indeed, the silence of the final draft on the question of the representation of minorities in the Provincial councils did not pass unnoticed by those concerned. Thus on 29 September, some Christians from Qaraqosh, in Nineveh Province, that is sheltering a great number of refugees from other parts of Iraq as well as the local Christians, demonstrated against the repeal of Article 50 during the final vote. This article provides a certain number of seats be guaranteed for the provinces' ethnic and religious minorities, as has been the case in the Kurdish Parliament since 1992. The Assyro-Chaldeans consider this omission unconstitutional and an attack on their rights by "marginalising" them.

The Qaraqosh demonstrators, therefore, submitted a memorandum to the local mayor to be passed on to the President, Jalal Talabani, to the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, to the spokesman of the Iraqi Parliament, Mahmud Mashhadani and to UN representative Staffan de Mistura and the US Ambassador. They demand the restoration of Article 50 and the possibility of self-administration.

The Assyro-Chaldean People's Council has called on all Christians to organise "in the places where they reside", but this is, in fact, difficult as this

community is particularly targeted by terrorism and cannot march in areas where it does not enjoy protection by the Kurds. The head of the Mosul Section of the Iraqi Democratic Party, Menas al-Yusif, also considered this repeal "unfair" as it could only "throw oil on the fire" and "aggravate the crisis that the Iraqi people is experiencing".

Christian discontent has been relayed to those inside the KRG even to the highest government level, since George Mansour, the Minister for Social and Civic Affairs and himself a Christian has spoken out condemning this repeal, describing it as a "step back" in the country's democratic process and a "flagrant violation of the second Article of the Iraqi Constitution that forbids any law that harms democratic principles" as well as of Article 14 that affirms the equality of all Iraqis, whatever their sex, religion or ethnic origin. A Christian Member of Parliament, Yonadim Kanna, similarly considered that the disappearance of Article 50 was an attack on democratic principles of partnership and brotherhood in the country.

Faced with this salvo of criticism, Staffan de Mistura, the UN representative in Iraq has ended up by admitting that minorities were being marginalised in the new draft of the law but called on the malcontents to negotiate with the independent High Electoral Commission that is handling the local polls.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who recently met the Pope and had assured him of his support for the Christians in Iraq, has officially disavowed this repeal by declaring that he had, on the contrary hoped that Parliament would have retained the passage guaranteeing the representation of minorities. He also called for the Parliamentary leaders and the election commission to "find a solution and to remove the feelings of anxiety, of being alienated or repressed that is affecting communities that are proud to be Iraqis".

Finally, the Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholics of Iraq, Cardinal Emmanuel III Dely, appealed personally to the Presidential Council, that has not yet ratified the law, to veto it a second time — which will not suit either the Iraqi Government, Parliament or the USA. "I appeal to the Presidential Council not to approve the repeal of Article 50 in the provincial law, as this is an act of oppression against our presence and representation in Iraqi society", exclaimed in a televised interview.

Questioned on the subject, Hashim al-Tayy, the head of the Parliamentary Commission on Regions, revealed that the different parliamentary blocks had dropped Article 50 solely because they had not been able to agree on the number of seats to be allocated to each group. But he insisted that the guarantee of these reserved seats would later be added to the law.

IRAN: KURDISH POLITICAL PRISONERS ON HUNGER STRIKE

While the Kurdish political prisoners have been on hunger strike since 25 August, the shopkeepers of the Kurdish city of Mahabad observed a one day strike by refusing to open their

shops on 3 September, in solidarity with their imprisoned compatriots.

This demonstration did not go down too well with the State Security Forces or the Secret

Service agents who carried out a series of raids in the bazaars and streets of Mahabad to try and force the shop owners to get back to work. As for the demonstrators for acted openly, they were all photographed and filmed by the authorities.

The political prisoners who are on

hunger strike number about forty in Urmiah Prison, fifteen in Mahabad, thirteen in Sanandaj and eight in Teheran's Evin prison, while it has not been possible to locate four others. In their declaration, the hunger strikers, eight of whom have been sentenced to death and are awaiting execution, make an appeal to international public opinion, describing their inhuman conditions of detention. They demand the immediate suspension of executions and arrests and of "all forms of torture and degrading punishment". They also demand that Iranian prisons should be checked by an international commission.

In its latest report, dated July 2008, Amnesty International had already sounded the alarm over the increasing number of arbitrary detentions, of iniquitous trials and the upsurge of executions in Iranian prisons, pointing out that the Kurdish population was more particularly targeted, especially journalists, Human Rights defenders and feminist activists.

The Committee for the Protection of Journalists has also called on Iran to release two Kurdish journalists, arrested last August, Anvar Sa'j Muchashi and Massud Kurdpur.

Anvar Muchashia, law student at Teheran International University, worked for several Kurdish satellite television channels and also engaged in other political activities. He had also worked with a Kurdish weekly review, *Karaftu*, which has since been banned. The day before his arrest, he had confided to a fellow worker that he had received a telephone call from a secret

service agent warning him that he had "crossed the red line".

As for Massud Kurdpur, he worked as a free-lance journalist in the town of Bokan. A member of the editorial board of a since banned weekly, *Didga*, he used to regularly give interviews on Kurdish issues to foreign radios, including the Voice of America, Radio Farda, the BBC and Deutsche Welle. His family, that has been able to visit him, has reported that he has lost a lot of weight and has spoken of ill-treatment. The only information about the charges they been able to secure from the security services covered his contacts with international press agencies and his statements in international media. Thus on 12 July, the date of his last statement to the press, he had spoken in a Kurdish language broadcast on Voice of America on the subject of the strike in Iranian Kurdistan to in memory of the Kurdish leader, Abdulrahman Ghassemlou, assassinated in 1989 by the Iranian secret services.

Other publications have recently been closed by the Commission for the Supervision and Authorisation of the Press, an organ of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Orientation: e.g. the ecological magazine *Tarabestan Sabaz* and, surprisingly enough, a review of crosswords, *Sargami*. In its readers' letters column there sometimes appeared humorous remarks aimed at the country's leaders. It was criticised for publishing "inappropriate comments" and banned.

On 5 September, however, the NGOs, including *Reporters sans Frontières*, learned with relief that the death sentence passed on the

Kurdish journalist, Adnan Hassanpur, had been quashed for "a legal technicality". In fact, the Teheran Supreme Court finally considered that the accusation of "enemy of God" levelled against him (which carries the death penalty) turned out to have no solid basis. It therefore sent the case back to the Sanandaj court. *Reporters sans Frontières* expressed its satisfaction, while again demanding the immediate release of Adnan Hassanpur, "who has been suffering an ordeal for the last eighteen months" and who denies all the charges levelled against him. "The Prosecution has never been able to find any evidence of his guilt. Despite this, the judges in charge of his case have twice decided to sentence him to death. "This judicial relentlessness against independent journalists and those who work with the foreign press must cease".

Saleh Nibakht, the prisoner's lawyer, hopes that the Sanandaj court will not make "the same mistake" twice running, pointing out that one of the officiating judges has since been dismissed. A fresh trial against Adnan Hassanpur began on 6 September.

Adnan Hassanpur, 26 years of age, was arrested on 25 January 2007 and imprisoned in Mahabad before being transferred to Sanandaj. He had worked for the weekly review *Aso*, which deals with the Kurdish question, a "sensitive" issue in Iran. The weekly was banned in 2005 by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Orientation. The journalist also worked with foreign radios, such as the Voice of America and Farda. Since his arrest he has twice gone on hunger strike in protest at the conditions of his detention.



LEBANON: KURDISH COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION

A story in the *Daily Star* examined the strange situation of the Kurds living in the Lebanon, many of whom have never been able to acquire the country's nationality although the bulk of them arrived in the 1920s and 30s, fleeing successive waves of persecution by the Republic of Turkey. It was during the annual dinner given by the Philanthropic Association of Lebanese Kurds on the occasion of the Iftar (the feast that ends the Ramadan fast) that the journalists were able to meet the 250 members of the association as well as Sheikh Hamed Musamak. The last named, taking the floor at the Assembly recalled the difficulties faced by his community. *"The Kurdish community faces two major problems. Many of us do not have Lebanese citizenship and we are not represented either in Parliament or in the government"*.

Deprived of rights or assistance granted to Lebanese, these Kurds, who are amongst the most disadvantaged layers of society, are also discriminated against in access to higher education, health and employment. Despite promises by the Hariri government in 1994 to regularise their position, the hostility of the Christians to any mass granting of citizenship to Moslems as well as the indifference to the other Lebanese towards these non-Arabs means that today 40% of the

some 75,000 Kurds who have lived in the Lebanon for several generations still don't have Lebanese nationality and so suffer an insecure status as non-national residents.

"We have complained to many political men and religious leaders", explained Sheikh Hami, "but no one supports our cause. We would like to build a Kurdish centre, but we cannot. The annual Iftar dinner is the only occasion for our people to get together".

The Kurds began arriving in the Lebanon, which was under French mandate at the time, at the end of the First World War, and still more after Sheikh Saïd's revolt in 1925. This continued throughout the inter-war years fleeing successive waves of repression in Turkey. There was also, in the 1960, a wave of economic immigration. Socially and economically, this is one of the weakest, least educated and most disadvantaged communities in the country. They have been and are still cultivators, labourers of unskilled workers.

The question of their naturalisation did not arise for the Kurds prior to the Second World War. Then, the bulk of them saw no point in spending time and money on administrative procedures to obtain a citizenship that, at the time, gave no particular advantages. However, in 1941 they found themselves

without papers and so excluded from the national food rationing system, set up in French colonies and protectorates as in metropolitan France. Unfortunately, a law had just been passed the year before restricting access to citizenship, whereas it had been fairly wide before: all that was needed was five consecutive years in the country or to have married a Lebanese.

In 1960, Kemal Jumblat, the head of the Druze community, himself of Kurdish origin, became Minister of the Interior and granted them an "indeterminate" citizenship that allowed those who held it to obtain Lebanese nationality, at least for those of their children born in the Lebanon. However, this measure was annulled in 1962, under pressure from the Christians, who, while in favour of naturalising Armenians, were opposed to that of the Moslem Kurds for fear of altering the population balance between the country's different religious groups. There was then set up a system of "substitution cards" that gave the right to move freely inside or outside the Lebanon and gave access to state schools for the children. However, they did not give the right to vote or to any government employment.

On 21 June 1994, Rafik Hariri allowed a certain number of Kurds, estimated at between 10,000 and 18,000 to be naturalised despite fierce Christian opposition.

TURKEY: THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUBLISHERS AWARDS RAGIP ZARAKOLU

On 18 September, the journalist and publisher Ragip Zarakolu, was awarded the "Freedom of Publishing" Prize of the International Association of Publishers that hailed his

"exemplary courage" in his struggle for freedom of expression and publication.

It was in 1977 that Ragip Zarakolu and his wife founded their publishing house in Istanbul with

the aim of creating a *"wider area of democracy, of freedom of expression and publication in Turkey"*. Thus, for the last 40 years this publisher has brought out works on subjects that are taboo in Turkish society, such as the Armenian genocide, the Kurdish question and the situation of the Greek minority in the country.

One of the most controversial books in his catalogue was, in the 1990s an essay on Kurdistan. Although the Turkish authorities immediately banned it, they could not prevent its distribution. As Ragip Zarakolu tells the story: *"They came to our publishing house to seize all the copies. However, we had already distributed them before they arrived. We had printed 3,000 copies. They were very surprised, but there was nothing they could do. Later they accused us of started proceedings. The first trial took place at the "serious crimes" Court. We were accused of inciting the Kurds to rebellion. Thus my ex-wife spent six months in prison in 1994"*.

However, neither the sentences nor the severe harassment by the authorities got the better of this publisher's determination. Two years later he brought out a work on the Armenian genocide. *"When we were charged, we replied by publishing still more books on the same subject. We were accused of crimes. Therefore we tried to understand what was, in reality, the crime: publishing a book on the subject that it dealt with? If you publish a book on the Armenian genocide and are accused of it, you then have to show what the Armenian genocide was, who was responsible for it and who, in reality was the criminal"*. At the beginning of 2008, Ragip

Zarakolu was found guilty of translating and publishing another book on the Armenian genocide. But the awarding of the Prize seems to him an important support: *"You feel your struggle is recognised. I am proud to receive it because I love books. Therefore this prize gives me a feeling of happy tiredness. But I also feel a bit ashamed of the fact that it could sometimes be a crime to be a publisher in Turkey. This is disgrace for my country. I will continue publishing, finding new books, opening new doors, new windows. There will always be some potential danger. But I love this. They will never be able to impose limits to my work as a publisher"*.

AS WELL AS ...

• **KIRKUK: A PERMANENT HEALTH RISK.** Those in charge of health questions in Kirkuk are sounding the alarm. According to them, the city has been spared the cases of cholera this summer, but it has broken out here and there in Iraq. This is because the defective water and sewage distribution systems place the inhabitants in serious danger of such outbreaks.

In April 2007, Iraq experienced its greatest cholera scare, with 20 deaths. It was specifically from Kirkuk that the epidemic started before spreading to the rest of the country. Over 3,000 cases had been recorded in the province on that occasion. This year, the authorities' efforts, as well as national and international assistance, had enabled any resurgence of the disease to be avoided. Experts on the spot, however, do not exclude its reappearance, as Sabah Amin Ahmed, director of Public Health for Kirkuk Province explains: *"The poor level of the services and the inadequacy of public health provisions endanger the lives of the population. The majority of the inhabitants of Kirkuk do not have easy access to*

sources of proper drinking water or to a good sewage system".

According to the Iraqi Ministry of Health and the world Health Organisation, over 30 % of the samples of water taken in Kirkuk show signs of bacterial pollution as against 10% for Iraq as a whole. The reason cited by those in charge is the poor state of the pipes, some of which are seriously damaged, which damages the water quality. Pending a possible renovation of the infrastructures, the Public Health authorities have been reduced to distributing chlorine pills to the population so that they can themselves treat the water they use. *"We know that this can provoke diarrhoea in some people"*, explained Jaffar Rubay, one of the Health Service administrators. *"But it is the only solution to avoid an epidemic from breaking out"*. The governor has also arranged for isolation wards to be set up in the hospitals, provided them with rehydration pills and launched a campaign of public information and prevention. *"We are doing our best to educate the population with our health teams and the leaflets we*

distribute in the health centres and the schools. At the moment only a small number really follow our health directives, but when they fear an epidemic they stick to them more strictly".

Naturally the areas most liable to be contaminated are the poorest, particularly those where Kurdish families, displaced by the old regime, who have returned without yet having been rehoused and so live in refugee camps or shanty towns without any facilities. The population has thus increased by 35% since 2003 which has, obviously aggravated the problems of infrastructure. Thus, outside the city people live without sewage, without clean drinking water and without electricity and are obliged to dig their own water wells, which are far from meeting any health and safety standards.

• **IRAN: THE NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF STREET THEATRE WILL TAKE PLACE AT MARWAN.** This year, the Iranian National Festival of Street Theatre will take place in the town of Marwan, in Iranian

Kurdistan, from 3 to 6 October. The organisers have selected 34 of the 183 companies who had submitted plays. At a press conference, the Festival Secretary, Shahram Karami, announced that two of the companies would be from Iraqi Kurdistan. They will play respectively "The flowers of Treasure for the Theatre" by

Morad Aziz and "My "human" stories" by Kardo Aziz.

The Festival s also due to welcome 10 companies from Teheran and 24 others from all the towns of Iran. A polish company will also be organising a workshop.

Each of the plays (amongst

which are "Stone Soup" by Mahmud Farhang, "The Magical Cockroach" by Siamak Bamiani, "Betrothed to the rain" by Rajabali Fallah and "Circles and gallows" by Mohsen Purqasemi) will be played three times in the streets of Marwan. Fifteen of them will then be selected for the International Theatre Festival.



A TALK WITH KURDISH PRESIDENT, MASSOUD BARZANI

Interview by Ma'ad Fayad in Arbil

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you believe that the federal government in Baghdad considers you as its partners in government?

[Barzani] This is the main problem. During my recent visit to Baghdad, I emphasized this point. We asked them: Are we partners or not? If you consider us as your partners then this is one issue; if you do not then this is another issue. They stressed that we are partners. However, in real practice, I doubt this.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you yourselves feel that you are partners in the federal government?

[Barzani] This is a coalition government and we are partners in it. But the actions of this government are weird. We are partners but we do not have a role in the government. We are not partners in security, economic, and military issues and we do not know anything about these institutions.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you talk openly to them in Baghdad? What is happening is that during you meetings with the federal governments, optimistic reports are issued but later the opposite happens.

[Barzani] During our recent visit, we reached good agreements and mechanisms to implement these agreements. We have a program on which we are in agreement with the government in Baghdad. But when we returned to the Kurdistan region, everything we had agreed upon was ignored. The programs agreed upon are being marginalized. This state of affairs does not serve our coalition or Iraq or the future of Iraq. Performance should be based on the principle of partnership and agreement. This is the only way to build the new Iraq. The consequences of monopolizing authority are well known. This situation will not lead to any result in favor of Iraq.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] After five years in rule and prior to that many long years of joint political action in the opposition where the goals and mechanisms were agreed upon at the opposition's London conference in 2001, what does the federal government and where have you reached?

[Barzani] Indeed, this is a question that puzzles us. We do not wish for anything outside the constitution and we do not want anything more than what the constitution gives us. We do not want anything more than what we have agreed upon in the constitution. The constitution was agreed upon by the majority of the Iraqi people and it sets rights and duties. We in the Kurdistan district are accurately committed to the articles of the constitution. We are not asking for more than what the constitution gives us. This includes Article 140 (pertaining to the issue of Kirkuk and the disputed regions). Commitment to the constitution is the guarantee for safeguarding the unity of Iraq. It guarantees security and stability in Iraq and the building of a prosperous future for the Iraqi people. Thus, the constitution is the judge. No abiding by the constitution means potential disaster.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that the Kurds in Baghdad - I mean President Jalal Talabani, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, and even the Kurdish members of parliament - are capable of intervening in the political or security decision-making process?

[Barzani] President Talabani definitely plays a major role in the political process as Mr. Talabani. However, as president of the republic, he does not have many powers. We do not know how the



powers are distributed. He constitutes the gathering point of many political factions and entities in Iraq. Furthermore, the presidency of the republic, the prime ministry, the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (the Parliament), and the ministers have specific powers. However, these powers are very often ignored and sidestepped.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that the government in Baghdad continues to behave with the logic of the strong brother and the weak brother?

[Barzani] Unfortunately, we seem to be still under the influence of a totalitarian regime. The one that takes over power thinks he has the last word in everything and that it is his right to make decisions without consulting others. He forgets the coalitions, the commitments, and the constitution.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] There are critical media reports inside and outside Iraq against the Kurds in Iraq. Are you aware of such reports?

[Barzani] This is very true. This is what we feel and it constitutes a grave danger. This is part of the injustice that we have suffered and that we continue to suffer from. The media is trying to distort the image of the Kurds and the Kurdish people. However, we are fair. The role played by the Kurds in safeguarding Iraq, the unity of Iraq, and the Arab-Kurdish brotherhood is much bigger than the roles played by others in this regard. The Kurdish role is well known and cannot be denied. Unfortunately, however, they do not wish to recognize this role; they want to distort this role. After the fall of the regime, everyone knows that we could have proclaimed something else. However, Brother Talabani and I went to Baghdad and tried with the brothers to fill the vacuum that resulted. We helped in the electoral process and in the elections and in drafting the constitution. We protected vast regions in Iraq from terrorism and the terrorists. We protected and continue to protect many Arab families that fled from their regions as a result of the terrorist operations and came to the Kurdistan region. During the uprising (of 1991), two Iraqi army corps (the First Corps and the Fifth Corps) surrendered in our regions, but not a single Iraqi soldier was harmed. In fact, we gave them the options of returning to their families or immigrating to another state or staying in Kurdistan although we were still bleeding from the effects of the Operation Al-Anfal and the chemical shelling by the Iraqi army. I say yes, this is unfortunately an unjust [media] campaign. We call on those that are fair like yourselves and through your fair newspaper to

help us in conveying the true picture of what you see here. We do not ask anyone to polish or embellish our image. We ask the media to tell the truth about the Kurds and about Kurdistan for the sake of honesty.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] On the other hand, the Kurdish media is weak in conveying the true image of the Kurds and of the Kurdistan region and it ignores certain important issues that are taking place here.

[Barzani] This is true; I agree with you that the performance of the Kurdish media is unsuccessful. This is regrettable.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you expect a confrontation to take place between you and the federal government or, shall we say, a Kurdish Arab government confrontation rather than a popular confrontation?

[Barzani] We oppose any escalation and any confrontation. We have to abort the chances of those that are lying in wait for democratic Iraq and its democratic experiment. There are wicked and ill-intentioned hands that are pushing night and day toward escalation and confrontation. However, we are exerting all our efforts to avoid such a situation. Matters have not reached this stage of escalation between the [Kurdistan] region and the federal government. However, there are misunderstandings, differences in viewpoints, and differences on many issues. Through dialogue and meetings, we shall try to agree on the common points. The points that unite us are more than those that separate us from one another. But we have to admit that there are points of agreement. There may be differences on the concepts of democracy and federalism but we hope that matters would never reach the point of confrontation.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] But the situation almost reached the point of confrontation in Khanaqin.

[Barzani] Yes, it is true that it almost reached the point of confrontation, but this was the result of a big mistake. Everyone should understand that the Iraqi army is our army and it includes many Kurdish forces. There was the peshmerga and they later joined the Iraqi army. In fact, our Kurdish forces were the nucleus that formed the new Iraqi army. We want the Iraqi army to be educated well. It should be given a patriotic education based on the principle of protecting the homeland rather than on the principle of killing the citizens. The incidents that took place in Khanaqin constituted a big mistake. First of all, the Kurdish forces that were deployed in the region contributed to the consolidation of security and stability in Khanaqin. They purged the area of the terrorists and gangs that tampered with the security and safety of the citizens there. Secondly, these Kurdish forces went to Khanaqin at the invitation and request of the federal government. When the government asked the Kurdish forces to withdraw, they actually withdrew. However, the military forces that replaced the Kurdish forces arrived to raise provocative slogans and acted exactly like the former army that had committed crimes against the Kurdish people in the past, including the crimes that were committed during Operation Al-Anfal. Unfortunately, these forces arrived with the same slogans, the same mentality, and acted in the same manner. Naturally, we do not consider this to be the army of new Iraq. We consider it as an extension of the dictatorial Baathist army that destroyed Kurdistan and destroyed Iraq. I reiterate that we are

not opposed to the deployment of the Iraqi army. If we are subjected to any aggression we shall ask the Iraqi army for help and if the Iraqi army asks for our help we shall send our forces to wherever they wish. We did that on several important and dangerous occasions. We are the ones that founded the Iraqi army but the conduct of a specific commander in the region is raising problems and reminding us of the tragic past.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is it true that the government did not consult or take the opinion of Chief of Staff Babaker Zebari (a Kurd) and that the dispatching of the forces of the Iraqi army to Khanaqin was made without his knowledge?

[Barzani] I believe that everything during this period is taking place behind the back of the chief of staff. He was not consulted and his presence has become nominal. Perhaps there is no use anymore for his remaining in this position.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that the events will drive you to proclaim your independence from Iraq?

[Barzani] Independence is a natural right but it should be under reasonable and suitable conditions that can be implemented. We reserve this right and we consider it a natural right. It is not a crime to demand this right at all. Iraq belongs to us and to all the Iraqis. There are Kurds in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul just as there are Arabs in Irbil, Al-Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk. Irbil is for all the Iraqis just as Al-Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, Basra, Baghdad, and Al-Najaf. I am surprised at this chauvinist attitude. If they do not consider us as Iraqis, they should tell us so frankly. We refuse to be treated as second-class Iraqis. We should have equal rights and duties. We have equal rights and we have equal duties. Otherwise, let them have the courage and proclaim that we are not Iraqis. Let them proclaim this and then we shall have an answer. Our Iraqi identity was not given to us as a gift by anyone. We have been on this land before those that now claim that they are more Iraqi than we are. We do not accept such outbidding from anyone.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is it true that the restoration of Kirkuk of its "Kurdish identity" is one of the conditions for your independence or are you waiting to annex Kirkuk to the Kurdistan district in order for you to proclaim your independence, as some are saying?

[Barzani] This is a wrong notion. Kirkuk is the symbol of the suffering of the Iraqi Kurds. The past wrong policies in Kirkuk have turned it into a special and very sensitive issue. These policies have left a deep wound in the heart of every Kurd. We want to resolve the issue, not to exacerbate it. Not solving the issue of Kirkuk means keeping a problem that is subject to explosion at any minute. Why do we not learn from our experience and from our past? There is an article in the Iraqi constitution that set a mechanism to resolve the issue of Kirkuk and other similar problems related to it since the issue is not just Kirkuk alone. The issue of Kirkuk can be solved and the problem ended in accordance with this article in the Iraqi constitution. Kirkuk is an Iraqi town just as Baghdad, Al-Sulaymaniyah, and Basra. But the problem is the insistence that Kirkuk should not be restored to the district of Kurdistan. We do not wish to regain Kirkuk by force. In accordance with Article 140 in the constitution, if the people of Kirkuk decide to return to the district of Kurdistan, they should not be prevented from doing so by anyone. If the majority of the people of Kirkuk decide - based on the mechanisms of Article 140 and following normalization, the census, and the referendum - not to return to Kurdistan, we shall respect their wish and we will not annex Kirkuk to Kurdistan by force. I firmly say and I firmly reiterate that the issue of Kirkuk regaining its Kurdish identity has nothing to do with the independence of Kurdistan. I reiterate that the independence of Kurdistan is a natural and legitimate right

regardless of whether Kirkuk joins the Kurdistan district or not. It is a right that God has granted to every nation and every people.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What do the people of Kirkuk want? Do they want to return to the historic documents or do they want reality?

[Barzani] They do not want to read the historic documents that date back to the Ottoman Empire or to the 1957 census. They claim that perhaps these are forged. I went to Kirkuk and said that I bring the message of brotherhood, peace, and amity. Part of the Arabs and Turkomen boycotted the meeting while a large part of Arab and Turkomen personages attended the meeting and I met with them. I told them with a brotherly spirit that we wish to turn Kirkuk into a model for religious, ethnic, and denominational co-existence. We told them that we would be open to them in a manner they cannot imagine. But we should solve this problem on the basis of Article 140. I told them that we will respect their opinion and whatever they decide. I found that many of the Arabs and Turkomen understand this issue and that it is in their interest to resolve the problem of Kirkuk just as it is in the interest of Iraq. I told them: Believe me, not solving this problem and finding alternatives to Article 140 is not in anyone's interest and will make the problem get out of hand of everyone. Is this in the interest of Iraq? No, of course it is not. Furthermore, why did we exert efforts to draw up the constitution that we approved and that was approved by the majority of the Iraqi people? What use is the constitution if we do not respect it? We should respect our constitution.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Some are saying that the validity of Article 140 has expired.

[Barzani] How has it expired? This is an article in the constitution. If the validity of this article has expired it means that the validity of the whole constitution has expired. This is illogical.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are there any worries that Turkey may interfere in the issue of Kirkuk?

[Barzani] Kirkuk is an Iraqi town and its problem is an internal Iraqi affair. Neither Turkey nor any other country should interfere in this subject since it is an internal issue. Why should there be worries when Kirkuk is not a Turkish affair?

[Asharq Al-Awsat] You have described the vote on Article 24 of the provincial elections law that took place in the Iraqi parliament last July as a conspiracy. By whom and against whom was this conspiracy?

[Barzani] It was a conspiracy by countries in the region and some tools of these countries inside the Chamber of Deputies. But how were other deputies tricked and voted on the law? How did this conspiracy deceive those that we call partners who later felt the danger inherent in this issue? This is indeed what perplexed us.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Will you be forced to give up Kirkuk under certain circumstances?

[Barzani] Never, we will not relinquish Kirkuk whatever the circumstances are. At the same time, we emphasize that the solution to the issue of Kirkuk will be clear and constitutional. We do not wish to resort to other means and we emphasize our constitutional and legal right.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] If you discover that the door to negotiations is closed, will you resort to force to annex Kirkuk?

[Barzani] We are working hard not to resort to this solution. We are seeking to implement Article 140 so that the issue would be resolved on the basis of the constitution.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What is your opinion on the call made by the provincial council in Kirkuk to join the district of Kurdistan? Do you think it is serious?

[Barzani] Yes, it is a serious call and a subject of interest for Kurdistan. We are waiting for the federal parliament to resume its sessions. If they insist on finding an alternative to Article 140, we shall immediately respond to the request of the provincial council in Kirkuk.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think there is an Arab campaign against the Kurds?

[Barzani] The fact is that, yes, there is such a campaign. But how deep are the roots of this campaign and how is it conducted? We have to make certain of this. We have good relations with some Arab countries and leaders and I have personally visited several of them, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Syria. I have also recently responded to an invitation by brother Muammar al-Qadhafi where we were very warmly received in Libya. When we talk to the leaders of these countries, we discover that they understand the Kurdish position and the historic and geographic partnership between the Arabs and Kurds. At the same time, we feel that there is an Arab campaign that is targeting us and that aims at distorting the image of Kurdistan and the Kurds. All we need are friends to help us in conveying the facts.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are there many accusations against you in the [Arab] media?

[Barzani] They have accused us of welcoming half a million Iranian and Turkish Kurds in order to change the demographic structure in Kirkuk. For God's sake, brother, is it possible to hide half a million birds in Kirkuk, let alone half a million Kurds from Iran and Turkey? So far, we have not succeeded in returning half the Iraqi Kurds originally from Kirkuk that had been expelled by the former regime from their homes. How can we bring in Kurds from other countries and settle them in Kirkuk? I defy anyone to prove to me and to the world that there are Iraqi Kurds from Dohuk or Irbil or Al-Sulaymaniyah in Kirkuk in order to change the demographic structure. They have also accused us of assaulting the Arabs and Turkomen in Kirkuk. This is unacceptable. The Arabs and Turkomen are Iraqis and they are our brothers. We will not allow any Kurdish official to attack any Arab or Turkoman. Anyone that has any information about an attack by a Kurdish official let him bring it to us. Our record has to remain clean in this regard. Throughout the long years of the Kurdish revolt and after that, we did not kill a single captive of the Iraqi army or anyone else. The events of the resurgence [in 1991 against Saddam Hussein's regime] and our welcoming of thousands of members of the Iraqi army that surrendered is the best evidence that attests to this fact. We respected the captives and we respected the principles of brotherhood and good neighborliness. When we were subjected to chemical bombardment and to the Al-Anfal operations we did not commit any act that harms the brotherhood so how can we do it now? These are all false charges. We welcome any Arab or western international commissions to come to Kurdistan on fact-finding missions to investigate these charges or to search Kirkuk for any Kurds that are not the original residents of the town. If it is proven that we attacked any citizen, we shall apologize and correct the mistake. In return, we want the true pictures to be conveyed about the warm relationship between the Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomen in Kirkuk or in any other region of Kurdistan. These are false rumors that are made by people that do not wish stability for this country. There are people that are not mature. They know the facts that are known to the Arabs but they do not wish to listen.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] In your opinion, why were no Arab consulates opened here while western consulates have been opened in Irbil?

[Barzani] We should first ask whether the Arab

countries opened embassies or consulates in Baghdad before asking about Irbil. Last March, the conference of members of Arab parliaments was held in Irbil. This was a good omen, a good initiative, and a major step forward toward breaking the ice.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have you sent invitations to Arab officials to visit Kurdistan?

[Barzani] We do not wish to embarrass our Arab brethren. We send invitations only when we are almost certain that the invitation will be accepted. We understand the positions of the Arab officials in this regard.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The Iraqi flag is waving in Kurdistan and in front of the building of your headquarters. Were your positive responses to the requests of the Iraqi government met with similar responses by the federal government?

[Barzani] The federal government is delinquent in this regard. Unfortunately, however, the media and some Iraqi politicians are blaming us for this and accusing us of being delinquent in this regard. The federal government makes many promises to us but does not implement them. I personally was given many promises when I visited Baghdad but many of these promises were not met. This is something that we do not understand.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What is your opinion on the

demonstrations that recently erupted in Al-Najaf against annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan?

[Barzani] This was indeed odd and weird for us. It is one of the quirks of fate. Why were these demonstrations staged in Al-Najaf? We would understand if such demonstrations are staged in Kirkuk, but Kirkuk is distant from Al-Najaf.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How is your relationship with Turkey?

[Barzani] Our relationship is normal. There is a slight improvement. We look forward to better development of these relations.

GULF NEWS : September 01, 2008.

Syrian authorities arrest two Kurdish leaders

Damascus: Syrian authorities have arrested two Kurdish leaders, charging one with a capital offence, as part of a campaign to curb political dissidents. The National Organisation of Human Rights in Syria said Talal Mohammad of the banned Wifaq party, an offshoot of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which is also active in Turkey and Iraq, was arrested without warrant in northeastern Syria last week and not heard from since. Mashaal Tammo, an official in Future Movement, a banned opposition party which advocates democracy, was arrested earlier and charged on August 27 with committing aggression and arming Syrians to start civil war, a capital offence. Before his arrest, Tammo, who renounces violence, said Syrian policy towards Kurds risked a repeat of riots that killed 30 people in Syria in 2004.

Tammo has denied the charges and human rights lawyer Mohammad Al Hassani said it would require a great deal of evidence to prove that Tammo had wanted to start civil war. "The authorities cannot resort to such fearsome charges just because they disagree with someone's opinions," he said. A US State Department spokesman denounced Tammo's arrest: "We condemn the detention of Tammo and other Syrian prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate release." "We encourage the international community to join us in calling on the Syrian government to stop its policy of arresting critics of the regime and to comply with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

ASIA TIMES : September 03, 2008.

Iran tightens screws on Iraq's Kurds

By Sami Moubayed

DAMASCUS - On the eve of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan in 1959, Iraq's military head of state Abdul-Karim Qasim toured the streets of Baghdad by night, inspecting preparations. He stopped at a baker slaving at his oven, only to find a huge portrait of himself, surrounded by much smaller loafs of bread. Qasim was shocked.

He instructed the baker to take down the picture, saying, "It is inconceivable that my photograph would be larger than a loaf of Iraqi bread - the daily fuel of ordinary Iraqis. Remove it immediately; that is an order."

Many Iraqis still remember the days of Abdul-Karim Qasim, only too well, and find that such humbleness is non-existent in current

Iraqi leaders. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki did not roam the streets of Baghdad last night, as his countrymen were preparing to welcome Ramadan. One obvious reason is security; another is a lack of character, and interest in the affairs of day-to-day Iraqis. Had he taken the journey it is doubtful he would have found a portrait of himself larger than the size of a loaf of bread.

Under Qasim, survival was not the only pre-occupation of ordinary Iraqis. They used the festive month, known to Muslims as a month of

peace, to dine with friends at restaurants, meet with family, listen to Oriental music, and go out for family walks after breaking their fast at sunset. Maliki did however speak to his countrymen on the eve of this Ramadan, which started on September 1, saying, "Ramadan comes at a time when the Iraqis have earned the result of their patience and victory on terrorists, criminals and outlaws. The success of our forces to enforce the law is helping in the return of thousands of Iraqis to their country and homes. There is progress in security and peace."

Some people claimed this was not the best choice of words for someone trying to promote peace. The Human Rights Committee of the Iraqi parliament lashed out at Maliki, accusing him of failing to implement a general amnesty (which it had issued earlier this year) on the eve of Ramadan. There are over 100,000 prisoners in Maliki's jails, said one lawmaker, and another 20,000 in US jails within Iraq, a difficult reality that the premier cannot escape and which kills any hopes of rapprochement between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

Covering up for this flaw, Maliki starting retaking control of Anbar province (the largest in Iraq), one of the most violent, from the US military on Monday. Anbar is the 11th of 18 provinces to have been handed over

to the Maliki administration and, according to the US military, is an "important milestone with regard to security".

Kurds, Iranians and Talabani

On another note, an article ran on the first day of Ramadan in the Iraqi daily al-Zaman (which usually has credible reports), making the prime minister look silly.

It claimed that a senior meeting had recently been held in Tehran to discuss the deteriorating health of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. Attended by representatives of Iran's Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the meeting concentrated on whether Talabani, 75, who is undergoing surgery in the US, will return to his full capacities at the presidency. If Talabani departs the scene or becomes incapacitated, since his health is "critical", the Iranians will lose a strong ally in the Iraqi Kurdish community, which at present is at odds with Iraq's Shi'ites, led by Maliki.

Talabani, a veteran politician who worked in the Iraqi underground from the 1960s, was one of the few Kurdish leaders to have excellent relations with Iraq's Shi'ites. A credible statesman whose nationalism cuts across confessional lines, he was also one of the architects of a four-party alliance created in 2007

between two Kurdish parties (one headed by him personally), the Da'wa party of Maliki and the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), headed by Iran's ally Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.

That alliance was created, under Iranian urging, to legitimize the Maliki government when both the Iraqi Accordance Front (Sunni) and Sadrists (Shi'ites) walked out on the prime minister in 2007. Maliki (and Iran) lured the Kurds by promising them action on Kirkuk, a mixed city that they want to incorporate into Iraqi Kurdistan. He promised to implement Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, which calls for a referendum in Kirkuk, to see whether its population wants to remain part of Iraq, or join Kurdistan.

Before doing that he made sure that thousands of Iraqi Arabs were uprooted from Kirkuk (to increase its Kurdish population), claiming they had illegally been placed there under Saddam Hussein, for the exact opposite reason. The referendum was supposed to take place by December 31, 2007. It did not, resulting in Kurdish resentment against the prime minister and increased speculation that the four-party alliance that managed to keep Iran's Maliki in power since 2007, was falling apart.

Another reason for the Kurdish-Shi'ite dispute is a recent military crackdown, under orders from Maliki,

on Khanaqin, a town in northern Diyala province that is filled with Kurds loyal to Iraqi Kurdistan. Government troops want to evacuate the Kurdish militia, the Peshmerga, from Khanaqin and evacuate buildings currently occupied by two Kurdish parties, claiming they are the property of the central government in Baghdad.

Many believe the crackdown is a message from Iran to the Kurdish parties in parliament, with Kurdish lawmaker Mahmud Othman saying, "With no doubt, the Iranians have a role in the Khanaqin crisis." He is critical of Iran's proxy in Iraq, the SIIC and its leader Hakim, adding that he never supported the four-party alliance between the Kurdish parties, the SIIC and Maliki's Da'wa Party. Speaking on behalf of the government, Maliki's advisor, Sami al-Askari, said, "The government insists on its

position: withdrawal of the Peshmerga from Khanaqin."

The Peshmerga, which runs Iraqi Kurdistan, was long tolerated by the Maliki government, at a time when relations were flowery between Maliki and the Kurds. Showing just how sour matters have become, Askari spoke about the Kurdish-Shi'ite four-party alliance, saying, "This alliance cannot survive at the expense of the unity of Iraq and its government." According to parliamentarian Humam Hamudi of the SIIC, Maliki escalated the crisis by threatening the Peshmerga with severe punishment if it was found within Iraqi territory.

Back to the Iranian meeting, al-Zaman claims that Tehran is interested in weakening the Kurdish bloc in parliament (in the absence of Talabani) and transforming it into a

dwarf so that it doesn't threaten the supremacy of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite bloc, the United Iraqi Alliance. Iran does not want to break the Kurdish bloc, however, nor does it want to eject it from parliament, unless rapprochement with Iraqi Sunnis is made, to serve as a substitute ally for Maliki.

Taming the Kurds will take place through direct measures, as the crackdown in Khanaqin, or indirect ones, such as getting the prime minister to further delay the issue of Kirkuk.

The Iranians are furious that talks with the Americans over a long-term military pact between Washington and Baghdad are being handled by Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, a Kurd. Tehran believes a lot of important information is being kept from them by the Kurds. They are

concerned that if such an agreement materializes, it will bring the Americans one step closer into Iran's backyard. Last week, Maliki dismissed the negotiating team with the Americans and appointed a new one from his private team (all of whom are strongly affiliated with Tehran).

It has been a difficult summer for Maliki and it looks as if it is going to be a difficult Ramadan as well. Fasting for Muslims starts at sunrise, and lasts until 7:30 pm. Electricity still goes off 10 to 12 hours a day (but probably not in the Green Zone), making fasting all the more difficult. The last thing Maliki needs is a feud with the Kurds.

Sami Moubayed is a Syrian writer and political analyst.

Guardian

September 3 2008

Iraq: Iraqi army readies for Showdown with Kurds

Jonathan Steele in Baghdad The Guardian

Iraqi troops and Kurdish peshmerga forces are bracing for conflict in the disputed city of Khanaqin in the most serious threat of clashes between Arabs and Kurds since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

A delegation flew from Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish regional government, to Baghdad at the weekend to try to resolve the crisis. The two main Kurdish parties are allied and form part of Iraq's coalition government.

However, Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan region, and leader of the Kurdish Democratic party, said Iraq was still living under the influence of Saddam's regime and the central government was not serious about sharing power with Kurds. He claimed many military decisions were made without consultations with

General Babakir Zebari, a Kurd who is the Iraqi army's chief of staff.

Gen Zebari, apparently torn between competing loyalties, visited Khanaqin on Monday and was quoted in the Baghdad media as saying Iraqi troops had the right to launch operations in the area.

The crisis has grown since July when the Iraqi government ordered peshmerga forces to withdraw to Kurdistan from Diyala. It also told the two main Kurdish parties to move out of the numerous government buildings in Diyala which they had taken over when Saddam's regime fell.

The Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, is a Kurd and the two Kurdish parties have been firm allies of the prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-led government since its inception. But on Sunday, the government in Baghdad shocked its Kurdish

partners by announcing it would send finance ministry auditors to check customs revenues levied by Kurdish officials on the Turkish border. Transit traffic and smuggling are the main sources of revenue for some Kurds.

Parts of northern Diyala are claimed by Kurds as part of their ancient homeland. An estimated 85% of the population of Khanaqin, which is situated on a dusty plateau close to Iran, are Kurds and Kurdish leaders insist that Khanaqin must remain under peshmerga control.

"The Iraqi army still wants to enter, and the peshmerga is present," said Ibrahim Bajelani, a Kurd who heads the provincial council. "Everyone is on edge. If the Iraqi army tries to enter without prior agreement, we can't be held responsible for the consequences."

Iraq Kurds and government end standoff over northern town

REUTERS

Wed Sep 3, 2008 By Wisam Mohammed and Sherko Raouf

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - The Iraqi government and minority Kurds resolved a dispute over control of an ethnically mixed town on Wednesday, Iraqi officials said, ending a standoff that had threatened to trigger violence.

Kurdish and Arab politicians ended the impasse by agreeing to withdraw both the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga security forces from the town of Khanaqin, home to Arabs and Kurds in northeastern Diyala province.

The Iraqi army had wanted to enter Khanaqin, which lies just outside the largely autonomous northern region of Kurdistan, to stamp government authority on the area. But Peshmerga forces patrolling the town had refused to withdraw.

It was unclear whether some Iraqi troops had already entered the town, or whether they were massed at its borders.

"It was agreed that the Iraqi army would withdraw...and the Peshmerga would withdraw to within Kurdistan. The Khanaqin police will control security and enforce the law in the town," said Ibrahim al-Bajilan, head of the Diyala provincial council.

The agreement was reached after negotiations between the Iraqi government's main Shi'ite and Kurdish parties. The Iraqi army or the Peshmerga would only enter Khanaqin if called upon by local authorities, Bajilan said.

Thousands of Kurds staged protests as the Iraqi army approached Khanaqin last month to try to replace the Peshmerga. Kurds are sensitive to moves they see as attempts to dilute their influence.

Haidar al-Ibadi, a senior member of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Dawa party, said the agreement did not specify whether police or the army would control the town, but that it was likely police would have responsibility and call on the army if required.

"There has been an agreement on the withdrawal of Peshmerga forces into Kurdistan and that Iraqi security forces would take responsibility for security," he said.

Diyala, with large populations of ethnic Kurds, Arabs and Turks divided into Sunni and Shi'ite religious groups, has remained a battleground for Sunni Islamist al-Qaeda, which is seeking to stoke tensions as the rest of Iraq grows more stable.

U.S. cedes control of Anbar to Iraq forces

Province's Sunnis rebelled against foreign militants

By Dexter Filkins

RAMADI, Iraq: Two years ago, Anbar Province was the most lethal place for American forces in Iraq. A U.S. marine or soldier died in the province nearly every day, and the provincial capital, Ramadi, was a moonscape of rubble and ruins. Islamic extremists controlled large pieces of territory, with some so ferocious in their views that they did not even allow the baking of bread.

On Monday, U.S. commanders formally returned responsibility for keeping order in Anbar Province, once the heartland of the Sunni insurgency, to the Iraqi Army and police. The ceremony, including a parade on a freshly paved street, capped one of the most significant turnabouts in the country since the war began five and a half years ago.

Over the past two years, the number of insurgent attacks against Iraqis and Americans has dropped by more than 90 percent. Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia has been severely degraded, if not crushed altogether, in large part because many local Sunnis, including former insurgents, have taken up arms against it.

Since February, as the security situation improved, U.S. commanders have cut the number of marines and soldiers operating in the province by 40 percent.

The transfer of authority codified a situation that Iraqi and American officers say has been in effect since April: The Iraqi Army and police operate independently and retain primary responsibility for battling the insurgency and crime in Anbar. The United States, which had long done the bulk of the fighting, has stepped into a backup role, going into the streets only when accompanied by Iraqi forces.

But the dynamic that has brought such calm to Anbar, welcome as it is, seems fragile. Many former insurgents now man the local police forces, or remain on the U.S. payroll as loosely su-

pervised gunmen working for the so-called Sunni Awakening Councils.

But with most of the Sunni population having abstained from voting in 2005, many are now claiming that the present arrangement leaves them unrepresented. Local Sunni leaders have warned that provincial elections must go forward if violence is to be averted.

Still, as the parade marched along Ramadi's Main Street on Monday, the signs were mostly good. The ceremony was a primarily Iraqi affair, with the U.S. marines wearing neither helmets nor body armor, nor carrying guns. The festive scene became an occasion for celebration by Iraqis and Americans, who at several moments wondered aloud in the sweltering heat how things had gone from so grim to so much better, so fast.

"Not in our wildest dreams could we have imagined this," said Mowaffak al-Rubaie, the Iraqi national security ad-

viser, who flew in from Baghdad. "Two or three years ago, had we suggested that the Iraqis could take responsibility, we would have been ridiculed, we would have been laughed at. This was the cradle of the Sunni insurgency."

Indeed it was. Anbar Province became the most intractable region after the toppling of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. More than 1,000 American marines and soldiers have died in the province, a quarter of the total U.S. toll.

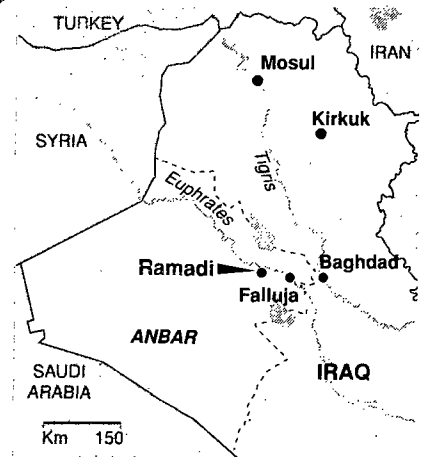
Anbar's second city, Falluja, was the scene of the biggest battle of the war, in which nearly 100 Americans died and more than 500 were wounded.

Bordering on three countries, Anbar was also considered the primary transit point for foreigners entering Iraq.

The fighting devastated much of Anbar. Falluja, a city of 250,000, was razed, and large parts of Ramadi, a city of 500,000, were reduced to ruins.

By the summer of 2006, insurgents had tried to kill Anbar's governor, Mamoon Sami al-Rashid, 29 times. They failed with Rashid, but that was an exception. Rashid's immediate predecessor, Raja Nawaf, was kidnapped and murdered. His deputy, Talib al-Dulaimi, was shot and killed. The chairman of the Anbar provincial council was also murdered. Rashid's personal secretary was beheaded and most of his ministers went into hiding.

What finally broke the stalemate, according to former insurgents and local leaders, was a local revolt against Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the radical insurgent group believed to be led primarily by foreigners. As the group began to expand its goals beyond killing Americans to include sectarian assassinations and imposing a fundamentalist Islam, local tribal leaders struck back and reached out for help to



U.S. forces. The "Sunni Awakening" was born, and it soon spread across the Sunni areas of Iraq.

Saadi al-Faraji used to be a gunman for a local group called the Islamic Movement of Holy Warriors, which focused mainly on attacking Americans. Then, in 2006, Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia tried to take over his group and force them to kill Iraqis who worked for the government, including police officers.

"Qaeda declared that we were apostates, and they demanded our heads, because we would not kill Iraqi soldiers or Iraqi police," Faraji said.

The Islamic Movement of Holy Warriors began attacking Qaeda fighters at about the same time that a local Sunni sheik named Abdul Sattar abu Risha struck a deal with the Americans and formed the first Awakening Council. The Islamic Movement formed its own Awakening Council, and today, Faraji is a colonel in the Iraqi police.

As for his view on Americans, Faraji said they had evolved.

"They made mistakes, and so did we," he said. "The past is past."

LE FIGARO mardi 2 septembre 2008

Al-Anbar passe sous le contrôle des Irakiens

MOYEN-ORIENT

Les Américains ont transféré hier au gouvernement de Bagdad la sécurité dans l'ex-bastion de la rébellion sunnite.

« AL-ANBAR, qui fut la région la plus difficile du pays, célèbre le transfert de la sécurité » aux Irakiens, s'est félicité Mouaffak al-Roubaïe, le conseiller pour la sécurité nationale, durant la cérémonie de passation des pouvoirs à Ramadi, en présence des chefs de tribu et des responsables militaires américains. Au premier jour du ramadan, les forces irakiennes ont repris

le contrôle de cette province occidentale, la première à s'être rebellée contre les soldats américains, quelques semaines après la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003. Al-Anbar est également la première province sunnite à repasser sous le giron des forces armées irakiennes et, au total, la onzième sur les dix-huit que compte le pays.

À Washington, le président George W. Bush a salué ce progrès : « Al-Anbar n'est plus livrée à al-Qaïda. C'est al-Qaïda qui a perdu al-Anbar. » À partir de 2004, la mouvance terroriste avait fait de cette région désertique limitrophe de la Syrie, de l'Arabie saoudite et

de la Jordanie son premier bastion. À Faloudja et Ramadi, les jihadistes irakiens et étrangers faisaient alors régner la terreur sur une population résignée, tandis que les Américains y subissaient leurs plus lourdes pertes (1 306 soldats morts).

Mais la violence a commencé à diminuer lorsque les chefs de tribu, exaspérés par les crimes d'al-Qaïda et encouragés par les Américains, se sont révoltés contre les terroristes, fin 2006. Ils ont formé des groupes tribaux qui sont parvenus à repousser al-Qaïda à la périphérie d'al-Anbar, et aujourd'hui, la province est devenue l'une des plus calmes d'Irak.

« Un nouvel acquis de l'Irak démocratique »

« Nous allons encore avoir besoin de ces groupes », reconnaît al-Roubaïe. Car les sicaires d'al-Qaïda n'ont pas complètement

disparu d'al-Anbar. Les chefs tribaux redoutent les infiltrations jihadistes dans les rangs des nouvelles forces de sécurité. « Ce transfert est un nouvel acquis de l'Irak démocratique », a déclaré pour sa part le général Lloyd Austin à Ramadi. Il démontre l'aptitude des forces irakiennes. Avec elles, nous empêcherons al-Qaïda et les autres insurgés de revenir », a poursuivi le numéro deux des forces américaines en Irak. Celles-ci resteront dans leurs bases et participeront à des opérations militaires, si le gouverneur les sollicite.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT avec AFP

Iraq poised to control Awakening Councils

Sunni force helps U.S. cut Baghdad violence

By Erica Goode

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi government will take over responsibility from Oct. 1 for paying and directing the Sunni-dominated citizen patrols known as Awakening Councils that operate in and around Baghdad, U.S. and Iraqi officials said.

The handover will involve 54,000 Awakening members who are paid by the U.S. military to guard neighborhoods or, in some cases, simply to refrain from attacking U.S. and Iraqi forces.

Once the transfer takes place, the Iraqi government will have "full administrative control" of the Awakening cadres, said a U.S. military official who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the subject.

It was not clear whether the Iraqi government, which is dominated by Shiites, had given the U.S. or Awakening forces assurances about how long, or even whether, it would keep the patrols intact.

Some senior Iraqi officials have expressed reservations about paying armed Sunni militias, which draw from

the ranks of former insurgents.

Awakening members have complained in turn that the Iraqi government has been far too slow in making good on promises to bring them into the Iraqi security ranks.

A senior U.S. military official said Monday that persuading the Iraqi government to absorb the Awakening forces had gone in "fits and starts" and had been far from smooth. But he noted that Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki had made a commitment to incorporate about 20 percent of the men into the Iraqi Army, national police or other security forces.

He conceded, however, that if the Iraqi government decided to disband the Awakening patrols, the U.S. government would have little leverage to dissuade it other than by diplomacy or by applying pressure at "senior levels."

Mowaffak al-Rubaie, the national security adviser, confirmed that the Iraqi government would issue its first paychecks to the Awakening members Oct. 1. He added that his government was still vetting the individuals to make sure they were not working with the insurgency.

"Once we finish and start paying them, we will do what's appropriate to do," Rubaie said. "Some will go to the police and some to the army and some to civilian jobs and some will stay at their regular stations."

General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, has said that the U.S. military pays approximately 99,000 Awakening members across Iraq a stipend of about \$300 a month. About 5,200 others have been absorbed into the Iraqi security forces. An additional 15,000 or so were given civilian jobs or accepted in training programs.

The U.S. military argues that the Awakening movement has been critically important in helping reduce violence

in the capital and around Iraq, including in Anbar Province, where on Monday control was returned to Iraq. Some U.S. officers contend that the patrols have done more to quiet the country than the U.S. troop increase known as the surge. They worry that any weakening of the movement could lead to instability.

On Monday, few Awakening leaders in Baghdad seemed aware of the impending shift in status. Some said they had only recently signed six-month contracts with the U.S. military. Many expressed concern that the Iraqi government would dissolve their units.

Some leaders also said they feared the transfer would give the Iraqi government further opportunity to drive out Awakening leaders whom the government considered active or former insurgents. In Diyala Province, the Iraqi military was ordered to arrest hundreds of Awakening members, Iraqi and U.S. military officials have said.

"The American forces put us in a dilemma," said Sheik Salah al-Egaidi, commander of an Awakening cadre in the Dora neighborhood of Baghdad. "The Awakening is the reason for the security improvement in Baghdad, after finishing Qaeda and the militias, but they have sold us now. Our choices now are either to be killed or to be arrested or to leave Iraq." His reference was to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the homegrown extremists that U.S. intelligence agencies say are led by foreigners.

Late last month, U.S. military officials said they hoped to shift as many as 58,000 Awakening members to the Iraqi payroll this year, but that important issues, including how to vet them and what kinds of jobs and training they would receive, would have to be resolved beforehand.

AFP

TURQUIE: DEUX SOLDATS, QUATRE REBELLES TUÉS DANS DES COMBATS DANS L'EST (SERVICES DE SÉCURITÉ)

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 3 sept 2008 (AFP) -

QUATRE rebelles kurdes et deux soldats turcs ont été tués dans des accrochages survenus tard mardi et mercredi matin dans l'est de la Turquie, a-t-on indiqué de sources de sécurité locale.

Dans un premier incident mardi soir, deux militaires ont été tués et neuf autres blessés dans une embuscade tendue par des rebelles séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) qui ont attaqué un véhicule transportant des conscrits à un poste de gendarmerie, corps d'armée en Turquie, à Kigi, dans la province de Bingöl, a-t-on souligné de mêmes sources.

Quatre rebelles ont été tués lors de l'opération qui a été lancée pour capturer les assaillants, a-t-on ajouté.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du Sud-Est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a multiplié ses actions contre le groupe séparatiste, notamment dans le sud-est du pays et dans le nord de l'Irak où elle mène des raids aériens contre des positions du PKK.

Ankara impute au PKK et à des groupes kurdes affiliés une série d'attentats à la bombe, dont ceux survenus le 27 juillet à Istanbul qui ont fait 17 morts et plus de 150 blessés.

REUTERS

Des élections provinciales en Irak avant la fin de l'année ?

3 sept 2008 Reuters

LE VICE-président irakien Adel Abdoul-Mahdi a assuré jeudi que des élections provinciales auraient bien lieu avant la fin de cette année, et ce même si le Parlement ne parvient pas à trouver un consensus sur le projet de nouvelle loi électorale.

Le vote des députés irakiens sur cette nouvelle loi a été repoussé à maintes reprises au début du mois d'août en raison de l'hostilité de la minorité kurde à ce projet.

Le principal enjeu du texte est le sort de Kirkouk, une ville du nord du pays que les Kurdes souhaitent inclure au sein de leur région autonome du Kurdistan.

Une grande partie des Arabes et des Turkmènes habitant ce centre pétrolier souhaitent que la ville reste sous le contrôle du gouvernement central, mais les Kurdes la considèrent comme un lieu indissociable de leur histoire.

Les élections provinciales, qui devaient initialement avoir lieu le 1er octobre, pourraient se dérouler finalement plus tard dans l'année, la Commission électorale estimant que même si une nouvelle loi était adoptée, il lui faudrait encore plusieurs mois afin d'organiser le scrutin.

"Les élections auront lieu à la fin de cette année", a toutefois déclaré Adel Abdoul-Mahdi, précisant que le gouvernement irakien ne pouvait pas "se permettre de prendre du retard".

"Si le Parlement n'approuve pas la nouvelle loi électorale, il y en a une ancienne", a-t-il ajouté lors d'une allocution diffusée à la télévision nationale.



Le président irakien Jalal Talabani (à droite) et son vice président Adel Abdoul Mahdi. Ce dernier assure que des élections provinciales auront bien lieu avant la fin de cette année, même si le Parlement ne parvient pas à trouver un consensus sur le projet de nouvelle loi électorale. /Photo prise le 23 juillet 2008/REUTERS/Gouvernement irakien

AFP

LES MILICES ANTI AL-QAÏDA SOUS AUTORITÉ IRAKIENNE À PARTIR DU 1ER OCTOBRE

BAGDAD, 4 sept 2008 (AFP)

- DEUX ans après leur création, l'armée américaine a annoncé jeudi que les membres des "Sahwas", ces anciens insurgés reconvertis avec succès dans la lutte contre Al-Qaïda, allaient passer sous l'autorité des forces irakiennes de sécurité dans un effort pour asseoir l'autorité de l'Etat.

"Le gouvernement et les forces de la coalition se sont mis d'accord sur le transfert de l'ensemble des 100.000 membres des groupes de Sahwa", a déclaré à l'AFP le commandant John Hall, l'un des porte-parole de l'armée américaine.

Le transfert débutera le 1er octobre dans la province de Bagdad et se poursuivra par la suite dans les autres provinces, a-t-il ajouté, en précisant que les Sahwas commenceront à être rémunérés par le gouvernement irakien le 1er novembre.

Créés en septembre 2006 par des chefs de tribus sunnites de la province occidentale d'Al-Anbar, les groupes de Sahwa étaient rémunérés et armés par les forces américaines.

Pour donner une idée des sommes déboursées par les Américains, et qui seront bientôt à la charge du gouvernement irakien, le commandant Hall a précisé que les salaires des 54.000 membres des Sahwas de la province de Bagdad représentent un coût total de 15 millions de dollars par mois.

Le retournement d'alliance, et les combats des membres des Sahwas contre les émules d'Oussama ben Laden, ont grandement contribué à faire diminuer la violence, principalement dans les provinces sunnites qui constituaient depuis 2003 les foyers de l'insurrection antiméricaine.

Cette baisse de la violence, actuellement au plus bas depuis quatre ans, a permis aux Américains de transférer, pour la première fois cette semaine, la responsabilité de la sécurité d'une province sunnite (Al-Anbar) au gouvernement irakien.

Sur les quelque 100.000 membres des Sahwas répertoriés, 54.000 se trouvent dans la province de Bagdad et 29.000 membres dans les provinces du

nord, dont Salaheddine, Diyala, Kirkouk et Ninive, selon l'armée américaine.

Le reste a déjà été intégré dans les forces irakiennes de sécurité, comme à Al-Anbar, où ils constituent la quasi-totalité des 24.000 policiers.

L'intégration des Sahwas au sein de l'Etat irakien risque toutefois de ne pas être simple, au regard de la méfiance qui subsiste entre ces anciens combattants en très grande majorité sunnite, et le gouvernement, dominé par les partis chiites.

Nombre de membres des Sahwas, qui lorsqu'ils étaient dans la rébellion ont combattu les milices chiites, craignent en effet d'être discriminés et de ne devenir qu'une force de sécurité secondaire et sans avenir garanti.

"Cela ne nous gêne pas de coopérer avec l'armée, si l'armée coopère avec nous", a ainsi prévenu Ali Abdel Jabar, l'un des leaders des Sahwas à Adamiyah, un quartier sunnite de Bagdad. Interrogé par l'AFP, il a ajouté : "Des membres des Sahwas vont refuser" de travailler pour le gouvernement, "mais nous allons faire de notre mieux pour les convaincre".

La méfiance est également de mise du côté des leaders chiites, qui décrivent les Sahwas comme une dangereuse nébuleuse de milices privées, et réclament leur démantèlement pur et simple.

"Nous n'allons pas autoriser la formation de nouvelles armées. Ils ont la possibilité de rejoindre l'armée, la police ou des emplois civils. Sinon, ce ne sera qu'une milice, et nous combattons les milices", a ainsi déclaré jeudi à l'AFP le général Mohammed al-Askari, porte-parole du ministre irakien de la Défense, Abdel Qader Jassim Mohammed.

"Les Sahwas ont peur" car "le gouvernement chiite les voit comme des ennemis politiques", a confirmé pour sa part Mahmoud Othman, un parlementaire kurde.

"Cela va poser un gros problème à l'avenir", explique-t-il, car "les Sahwas ne seront jamais satisfaits, et certains vont peut-être se remettre à combattre le gouvernement" alors que ce dernier "veut pouvoir les contrôler dès maintenant".

Diplomatie Visite à Damas du président français pour évoquer le Liban, le nucléaire iranien, la paix avec Israël

M. Sarkozy scelle les retrouvailles franco-syriennes

Comme il s'y était engagé lorsqu'il avait reçu solennellement, le 12 juillet à l'Élysée, le président syrien Bachar Al-Assad, Nicolas Sarkozy effectue, mercredi 3 et jeudi 4 septembre à Damas, la première visite d'un président français depuis celle de Jacques Chirac en octobre 2002.

Cette visite, accompagnée d'un mini-sommet régional jeudi avec la Turquie et le Qatar, parachève les retrouvailles franco-syriennes après une brouille de près de cinq ans. Présentée comme « très politique » par l'Élysée, elle ne devrait d'ailleurs pas s'accompagner, dans le domaine économique, de signatures de contrats importants compte tenu des effets persistants de ce gel et de la modestie des échanges entre les deux pays. Ces retrouvailles sont encore bien fraîches et, si elles permettent à la Syrie de sortir de son isolement régional, chacun s'efforce de les présenter selon ses intérêts.

Le régime syrien, qui s'est montré prompt à soutenir la Russie contre les Occidentaux dans la crise géorgienne, en nostalgique de la guerre froide et de ses blocs, assure ainsi que c'est sa capacité de résistance aux pressions internationales qui a convaincu le président français, sur les conseils du Qatar, de rouvrir le dialogue avec Damas pour tenter de se gagner les faveurs d'un pays stratégique mais marginalisé au sein de la famille arabe, comme l'ont encore montré les absences de nombreux chefs d'État lors du sommet annuel de la Ligue arabe organisé à Damas, en mars, à commencer par le roi Abdullah d'Arabie saoudite.

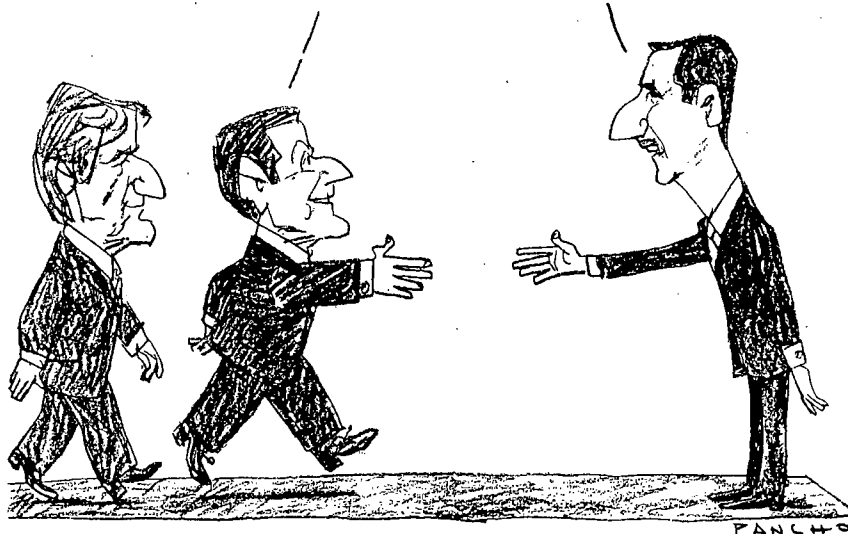
L'Élysée, au contraire, défend la thèse d'une évolution syrienne illustrée, selon la présidence française, par l'apaisement relatif enregistré depuis l'accord de Doha, en mai, au Liban, l'ancien pré carré syrien, après trois années de tensions et de violences entre majorité antisyrienne

et opposition libanaises.

Il est sans doute encore trop tôt pour mesurer si le pari français sur le réengagement de la Syrie a des chances de porter ses fruits. L'Élysée dresse avec soin, pour tenter de convaincre les sceptiques arabes ou occidentaux, la liste des gestes syriens jugés prometteurs : visite à Damas, en août, du président libanais Michel Sleimane ; engagement syrien, réitéré à cette occasion, d'ouvrir pour la première fois dans l'histoire des deux pays une représentation diplomatique à Beyrouth ; réactivation des commissions

BONJOUR!
JE SUIS LA FRANCE,
JE SUIS L'EUROPE!

BONJOUR!
... ON ATTEND
LES ÉTATS-UNIS.



syro-libanaises consacrées aux contentieux que constitue la démarcation de la frontière entre les deux pays, le sort des disparus libanais de la guerre civile pour lesquels la Syrie est mise en cause ou les modalités de leur normalisation diplomatique.

Contrarier l'axe Damas-Téhéran

L'attachement apporté par Nicolas Sarkozy à la piste syrienne ne se justifie pas seulement par la situation du Liban, où se tiendront d'ici un an des élections législatives dont la France attend beaucoup. Paris ne fait pas mystère de sa volonté de contrarier l'axe entre Damas et Téhéran, qui affaiblirait incontestablement le régime iranien dont les ambitions nucléaires, jugées suspectes par les Occidentaux, ont précipité l'isolement. Depuis que la Syrie a accepté l'idée d'un coparrainage franco-américain dans le cas de négociations directes avec Israël (les deux pays, pour l'instant, se contentent de contacts par le truchement de la Turquie), la France espère enfin retrouver une nouvelle influence dans la région, sur le modèle de celle obtenue lors de la crise de 1996 entre le Liban et Israël.

Les incertitudes politiques israéliennes mises à part, il est douteux, cependant, que la moindre avancée puisse être

enregistrée sur ce point, comme l'avait d'ailleurs déclaré M. Al-Assad lors de sa visite à Paris, avant la mise en place d'une administration américaine décidée à rompre avec l'intransigeance manifestée par George Bush, notamment avec l'adoption de sanctions unilatérales contre la Syrie depuis 2003 (étendues récemment aux intérêts économiques d'un membre influent de la famille Al-Assad, Rami Makhlouf).

Si les démocrates ont manifesté à plusieurs reprises une volonté de dialogue avec Damas, comme en a témoigné en 2007 la visite critiquée par la Maison Blanche du « speaker » de la Chambre des représentants, Nancy Pelosi, les républicains se sont bien gardés pour l'instant de la moindre ouverture. Pour le régime syrien, seuls les États-Unis sont pourtant à même d'apporter les garanties, politiques comme économiques, nécessaires à sa pérennité. ■

GILLES PARIS

AFP

TURQUIE: DEUX SOLDATS TUÉS PAR UNE MINE DANS LE SUD-EST (SERVICES DE SÉCURITÉ)

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 5 sept 2008 (AFP)

DEUX soldats turcs ont été tués vendredi par l'explosion d'une mine lors d'une patrouille dans le sud-est de la Turquie, théâtre de la rébellion séparatiste kurde, a-t-on indiqué de sources de sécurité locale.

Selon les autorités locales, la mine a été activée à distance par des rebelles séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) lors du passage d'une patrouille dans la province de Sirnak, située à la frontière irakienne, a-t-on souligné de mêmes sources.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les

Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du Sud-Est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait quelque 35.000 morts, dont 6.500 membres des services de sécurité (soldats, police).

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a multiplié ses actions contre le groupe séparatiste, notamment dans le sud-est du pays et dans le nord de l'Irak où elle mène des raids aériens contre des positions du PKK.

Ankara impute au PKK et à des groupes kurdes affiliés une série d'attentats à la bombe, dont ceux survenus le 27 juillet à Istanbul qui ont fait 17 morts et plus de 150 blessés.

Le Point 6 septembre 2008

Al Qaïda reste une menace en Irak, selon le général Petraeus

Al Qaïda reste un danger et un ennemi à combattre pour les troupes américaines en Irak malgré la diminution des violences, estime le général David Petraeus, commandant en chef des forces US en Irak.

Dans un entretien accordé à la chaîne de télévision Al Arabiya, le général Petraeus juge en outre que les victoires sur Al Qaïda et les milices chiïtes ont restauré l'image des Américains auprès d'une population qui les avait rapidement considérés comme des "envahisseurs ou des occupants".

Interrogé sur le fait de savoir si le réseau islamiste radical avait été vaincu, il répond : "Vous ne trouverez pas un responsable militaire pour vous dire cela (...) tout ce que nous pouvons dire est qu'Al Qaïda demeure dangereux." "Il est certain que d'autres crimes seront commis et il faut continuer à lutter contre ces attaques", ajoute-t-il dans cette interview enregistrée lundi et qui devait être diffusée vendredi.

Des responsables américains et irakiens jugent qu'Al Qaïda est aujourd'hui très affaibli.



Des opérations militaires sont encore toutefois menées par l'armée irakienne dans les provinces de Diyala et Ninive, dans le nord du pays.

La lutte entre Kurdes et Arabes pour le contrôle des villes de cette région et la rivalité entre mouvements chiïtes dans le sud pourraient également provoquer des affrontements à quelques semaines des élections provinciales.

La baisse spectaculaire des violences, qui sont au plus bas depuis quatre ans, est portée au crédit de Petraeus et de son ancien adjoint, le général Raymond Odierno, qui ont lancé la stratégie de renforcement des troupes en réponse à la guerre civile interconfessionnelle qui s'était déclenchée en 2006.

Le général Odierno devrait succéder à Petraeus en 2009 lorsque celui-ci prendra la tête du Commandement central américain, qui supervise toutes les opérations au Moyen-Orient.

Malgré l'amélioration de la situation, on rapporte au Pentagone que Petraeus a recommandé de procéder à une diminution lente des effectifs américains, en commençant par une brigade de combat - soit 3.000 à 5.000 soldats - début 2009.

La présence américaine en Irak est un des principaux thèmes de la campagne présidentielle aux Etats-Unis, d'autant que le mandat de l'Onu sous lequel agissent les forces US expire le 31 décembre. (Reuters)

AFP

ALLEMAGNE: 35.000 KURDES D'EUROPE RÉUNIS POUR UN FESTIVAL À GELSENKIRCHEN

BERLIN, 6 sept 2008 (AFP) -

QUELQUE 35.000 Kurdes d'Europe se sont réunis samedi à Gelsenkirchen, dans l'ouest de l'Allemagne, pour un festival culturel qui s'est déroulé sans le moindre incident, a indiqué à l'AFP un porte-parole de la police de la ville.

Pour cette 6e édition du "Festival des Kurdes", une rencontre organisée chaque année pendant la première semaine de septembre, des familles entières de Kurdes avaient fait le trajet depuis la France, l'Autriche, la Belgique ou encore les Pays-Bas, a souligné le porte-parole.

Quelques photos et pancartes réclamaient çà et là la libération de l'ancien chef

du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) Abdullah Öcalan, condamné à la prison à vie, mais aucune manifestation à caractère politique n'a été organisée à l'occasion de ce festival, selon le porte-parole.

Öcalan avait été condamné à mort pour "séparatisme" en juin 1999 mais sa peine a été commuée en 2002 en prison à vie après l'abolition de la peine capitale en Turquie.

Près d'un demi-million de Kurdes vivent en Allemagne, la plupart de nationalité turque.

AFP

TURQUIE: TROIS MILICIENS TUÉS DANS DES COMBATS AVEC LE PKK

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 7 sept 2008 (AFP)

TROIS membres d'une milice pro-gouvernementale ont été tués dimanche au cours d'affrontements avec des rebelles séparatistes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, près de la frontière irakienne, a annoncé une source de sécurité.

Les victimes faisaient partie d'un groupe de miliciens kurdes - supplétifs de l'armée turque - en charge de la protection d'un village, selon cette source qui a requis l'anonymat.

Les trois hommes ont été tués alors qu'ils participaient à une opération de l'armée, près de la ville de Semdinli, contre les rebelles du Parti des

travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), toujours selon cette source.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a multiplié ses actions contre le groupe séparatiste, notamment dans le sud-est du pays et dans le nord de l'Irak où elle mène des raids aériens contre des positions du PKK.

Europe. Un sondage exclusif réalisé par l'Ifop pour "Valeurs actuelles" • Par ÉRIC BRANCA

Turquie Le **NON** des Européens

Les opinions européennes rejettent plus que jamais l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'Union. Entre les peuples et la Commission de Bruxelles, l'incompréhension est totale.

Voici un sondage que le président de la Commission européenne, José Manuel Barroso, farouche partisan d'intégrer la Turquie à l'Union, aurait sans doute intérêt à regarder dans le détail : il annonce en effet une crise majeure si les institutions communautaires, sûres de leur bon droit, continuent à faire comme si elles avaient pour mandat de contourner, l'un après l'autre, les obstacles s'opposant à l'entrée de la Turquie en Europe...

« *Promesse de 1963* » ou pas (allusion à l'accord d'association signé cette année-là entre le jeune Marché commun et Ankara, incluant pour la première fois la perspective d'une adhésion turque), les choses ont bien changé depuis quarante-cinq ans. À commencer par la Turquie elle-même, désormais gouvernée par un parti islamiste.

Surtout, c'est l'opinion publique européenne qui évolue, elle qui, dès 2004, date à laquelle ont officiellement débuté les négociations d'adhésion, s'interrogeait déjà sur le bien-fondé d'une Asie mineure rat-

tachée politiquement au continent européen.

Un sondage réalisé par l'Ifop pour *le Figaro*, sur un échantillon représentatif de 5 000 citoyens européens, indiquait alors que 68 % des Français s'opposaient à un élargissement de l'Union vers la Turquie, imités par 63 % des Allemands. Mais 78 % des Espagnols y étaient favorables, de même que 67 % des Italiens et 58 % des Britanniques.

Quatre ans plus tard, *Valeurs actuelles* a voulu savoir comment la tendance avait évolué, et a demandé à l'Ifop de renouveler l'opération en mobilisant un échantillon encore plus représentatif, portant sur 7 007 personnes issues de sept pays (Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne, Belgique, Italie, Pays-Bas, Espagne) représentant cette fois les deux tiers de la population de l'Union.

Le résultat est sans appel : l'opposition à l'adhésion turque s'est accrue de manière significative, se retournant carrément chez ceux qui y étaient favorables. 51 % des Espagnols voient désormais des inconvénients à une Turquie européenne (+ 29 points en quatre ans !), ainsi que 56 % des Italiens (+ 23 points) et 57 % des Britanniques (+ 15 points). Ce sont les Français qui restent les plus hostiles à cette perspective (80 % des suffrages exprimés, soit 12 points de plus qu'en 2004), suivis des Allemands (76 %, + 13 points), des Belges (68 %) et des Néerlandais (67 %).

En France même, la radiographie de l'opinion est instructive. Si l'on raisonne non plus en suffrages exprimés (ceux qui ont émis un avis en répondant par oui ou par non) mais en résultats bruts, on s'aperçoit que 14 % seulement des personnes interrogées accepteraient de voir la Turquie rejoindre l'Union européenne, 55 % s'estimant contre, et 31 % se déclarant sans opinion.

L'opposition majoritaire à l'intégration turque est la règle, quels que soient la classe d'âge, la région d'origine, et même l'engagement politique. Deux curiosités : les 25-34 ans y sont encore moins favorables (11 %) que les plus de 50 ans (15 %), et l'extrême gauche davantage opposée encore que les électeurs socialistes !

Mais c'est, sans surprise, à droite qu'on rencontre l'opposition la plus farouche à l'entrée de la Turquie en Europe : 61 % de rejet chez les électeurs de François Bayrou, 68 % chez ceux de Nicolas Sarkozy, et 81 % chez ceux de Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Pour l'Élysée, le signal est limpide : il démontre *a posteriori* que le candidat Nicolas Sarkozy était en phase avec l'opinion quand il s'opposait à Jacques Chirac et à Dominique de Villepin, l'un et l'autre farouches partisans de l'adhésion d'Ankara. Et indique, pour l'avenir, le risque qu'il y aurait à rompre avec cet engagement, au prétexte que la France préside, jusqu'à la fin de l'année, les institutions européennes.

Pourtant internationaliste, la gauche refuse désormais l'intégration de la Turquie dans les structures européennes.

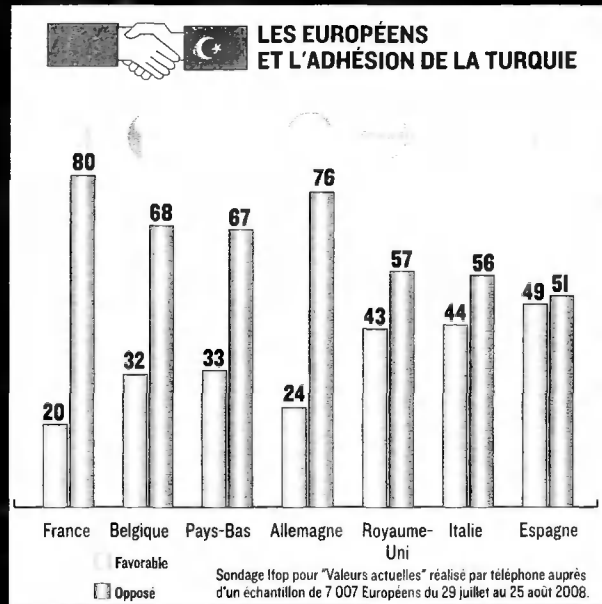
Conçu comme une alternative à l'intégration turque, le projet d'union méditerranéenne sera-t-il suffisant pour désarmer la volonté de la Commission de Bruxelles de faire avancer coûte que coûte les négociations ? En faisant part publiquement de ses hésitations à répondre à l'invitation qui lui était faite de se rendre à Paris, le 13 juillet, lors du lancement de l'Union pour la Méditerranée (UPM), le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a bien montré qu'il n'était pas dupe de la manœuvre. Et José Manuel Barroso a insisté pour que, dans la déclaration finale du sommet de Paris, il soit expressément stipulé que la mise en place de l'Union pour la Méditerranée est « indépendante de la politique d'élargissement de l'Union européenne, des négociations d'adhésion et du processus de pré-adhésion ».

Pour Bruxelles, l'Union pour la Méditerranée n'est pas une alternative

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, a d'ailleurs lui-même indiqué que l'opposition connue de Nicolas Sarkozy à l'adhésion d'Ankara n'entraverait en rien la poursuite des pourparlers entre le gouvernement turc et la Commission européenne.

Huit chapitres de négociations sur trente-cinq sont actuellement ouverts : science et recherche, politique industrielle et entreprises, statistique, contrôle financier, réseaux trans-européens, protection de la santé et du consommateur, droit des sociétés et droit de la propriété intellectuelle. Le Conseil européen des 11 et 12 décembre 2008 pourrait décider de l'ouverture de deux nouveaux chantiers afin de porter à dix le nombre de chapitres négociés. Il s'agirait de ceux relatifs à la société de l'information et à la libre circulation des capitaux. Une politique des petits pas qui illustre « l'effet d'engrenage » préconisé jadis par Jean Monnet.

Seule chose certaine : dès le 1^{er} janvier 2009, la France, dégagée de l'obligation de réserve que lui impose la présidence de l'Union européenne, sera de nouveau libre de ses mouvements...



Depuis 2004, date à laquelle le processus d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Europe, trois opinions publiques majeures se sont retournées contre cette perspective : celles de la Grande-Bretagne, de l'Italie et de l'Espagne.

Quels que soient leur âge et leur engagement politique, les Français s'opposent, comme les Allemands, les Britanniques, les Belges, les Néerlandais, les Italiens et les Espagnols, à une Turquie pesant de tout son poids dans la mécanique décisionnelle de l'Union.

L'OPINION DES FRANÇAIS

	Favorable (%)	Opposé (%)	Sans opinion (%)
ENSEMBLE	14	55	31
Hommes	16	60	24
Femmes	12	51	37
Moins de 35 ans	15	48	37
18 à 24 ans	20	46	34
25 à 34 ans	11	49	40
35 ans et plus	13	58	29
35 à 49 ans	10	60	30
50 ans et plus	15	57	28
VOTE À LA PRÉSIDENTIELLE 2007			
Olivier Besancenot	13	48	39
Ségolène Royal	25	44	31
François Bayrou	10	61	29
Nicolas Sarkozy	9	68	23
Jean-Marie Le Pen	4	81	15

Sondage Ifop pour "Valeurs actuelles".

Guardian

September 5 2008



Maliki drops the mask

With his tough stance on US withdrawal, Sunni militias and the Kurds Iraq's leader risks doom

Jonathan Steele in Baghdad. The Guardian.

What's up with Nouri al-Maliki? As security anxieties subside in this slowly calming city, political speculation has rarely been so intense. First, it was Maliki's demand that all US troops leave Iraq by the end of 2011. Then came signs that his government wants to undermine the Sunni tribal militias, known as the Awakening councils, on whom the Americans have relied to defeat al-Qaida in Iraq. Now there are moves to take on the powerful Kurdish peshmerga troops and push them out of disputed areas in the strategic central province of Diyala.

Why is the prime minister doing this? Is "the puppet breaking his strings", as one Arab newspaper put it? Or is the more appropriate metaphor "dropping the mask"? Those who knew Maliki in exile in Syria during Saddam Hussein's time now recall that he opposed the US-led invasion. His Daawa party did not attend the eve-of-invasion conference of US- and UK-supported exiles in London, and he opposed the party's decision six months later to join the hand-picked "governing council" set up by the first occupation overlord, Paul Bremer.

Maliki's new line has discomfited the Americans. Some officials put on a brave face, saying it is a sign of Iraqi confidence in their own sovereignty, a development that, of course, they support as proof that the Bush administration's strategy of rebuilding a proud country is succeeding. Others say it reflects overconfidence, even hubris, as Iraq is a long way from being able to survive without US military protection.

Either way, playing the nationalist card has huge potential consequences in Iraq. With

provincial and parliamentary elections expected next year, it will sharpen the struggle for dominance in the Shia community. It is designed to undercut the appeal of the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, a consistent opponent of the occupation who is re-profiling his movement on the lines of Lebanon's Hizbullah. Its Mahdi army militia will be slimmed into a group of experienced resistance fighters, kept in reserve for action against US troops rather than to fight Iraqi Sunnis, while the rest of the movement goes into communal politics.

Posing as the nationalist who managed to get the US to accept a timetable for withdrawal (the tense negotiations could yet founder) allows Maliki to distance himself from his main Shia allies in government, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), seen as keen backers of the occupation. It also diverts attention from the chronic power cuts and other economic troubles. Every government has to fight on its record in office, but, by turning himself into a patriotic Iraqi hero, Maliki may sidestep this. Some observers suggest he may even go to the elections on a "prime minister's list", to redefine himself as no longer a Shia or a political Islamist, so as to win support from Iraq's secular and non-sectarian urban middle class. But there are uncomfortable echoes here of the effort by Ayad Allawi, the prime minister appointed by the US in 2004, to project himself in the December 2005 elections as a strong man. His vote total fell a long way below his expectations.

But if Maliki wants to present a new image as a man who stands up to the Americans, why does he choose this moment to go after Sunnis and Kurds? The principle of disarming all

militias, and not just those of his Shia rivals, such as Sadr, may be laudable but the timing is highly risky and threatens to overload the circuits. Going after the Sunnis and Kurds may fail, dooming Maliki to defeat. Many Sunnis already believe he is a tool of the Iranians. Now they say his sudden anti-Americanism is no proof of Iraqi patriotism, but just shows he is a tool of Tehran. The Iranians want the US out of Iraq, not only in order to undermine US credibility in the region. They interpret Washington's support for the Awakening councils as a tilt towards the Sunnis and an effort to re-balance Iraqi politics from the Shia dominance of the early post-invasion period.

Maliki's tough stance towards the US could doom him personally. The US toppled his predecessor, Ibrahim Jaafari, and, even though US power in Iraq has declined since then, it may find a way to remove Maliki too. It would not demand that the prime minister go, as it did in 2006, but could undermine his parliamentary majority. The US has alternative candidates, including the ambitious vice-president, Adel Abdel Mahdi, and the Sunni defence minister, Abdul Qader al-Obeidi, who told the New York Times in January that US troops would be needed for another 10 years.

Whatever his motives, Maliki's move has certainly shaken up Iraqi politics and forced the issue of a clear US departure timetable on to the agenda. The Iraqi prime minister has put Bush and McCain on to the back foot, and given help to Obama. Whether Maliki or Bush blinks first remains to be seen.



Kurdistan Regional Government

September 5 2008

KRG officials promote Kurdistan at US Democrat and Republican conventions

Washington, US (KRG.org) -

A delegation from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) saw firsthand both Senators Barack Obama and John McCain accept their party's nomination for President of the United States. At the Democratic and Republican Party conventions the delegation, led by the KRG's Head of Foreign Relations, met key leaders of both parties to build on the bilateral ties between the Kurdistan Region and the United States.

The KRG's Head of Foreign Relations Minister Bakir said, "We in the KRG consider these conventions an important opportunity to observe American politics and share the Kurdistan Region's ambitions for a democratic, pluralistic and federal future in Iraq." He added, "It is important to see examples of democracy in progress and to witness the basic political mechanisms of a federal system in action. These conventions show how democracy requires the involvement of people from every community. It also shows how political parties can compete but still have the same ultimate goal of a better, stronger government."

Throughout both conventions the delegation informed party leaders and officials of the positive developments in the Kurdistan Region. They also strengthened participation and support among members of the newly formed Kurdish-American Caucus within the US House of Representatives. The American system of federalism and democracy is one of many successful examples around the world that the KRG is eager to observe and learn from.

The delegation attended various lectures, speeches, receptions and discussions on the next administration's potential policies in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The Democratic Party met in Denver, Colorado, from August 25 to 28 while the Republican Party met in St. Paul, Minnesota, from September 1 to 4. Elected officials from across the political spectrum joined business leaders, the media and community



activists to celebrate the nomination of each party's presidential and vice presidential candidate.

Mr Qubad Talabany, the KRG Representative to the US, said, "The atmosphere at the conventions creates an intimate and unique opportunity to meet a variety of US policy-makers and officials, to solidify and expand our friendships and alliances and to learn how we can improve cooperation while understanding what each party's policies and outlooks will be in the foreseeable future." Mr Talabany added that the conventions were all the more interesting and historic for their selection of candidates. "To witness the US democratic process is an invaluable lesson for our emerging democracy in Kurdistan," he said.



Voices of Iraq
September 5, 2008

Khanaqin agreement has come in place – Kurdish official

ARBIL, Sep. 5 (VOI) Head of Kurdistan region's presidency office unveiled that the Khanaqin agreement that has been signed by the Iraqi federal government and Kurdistan's regional cabinet has been in place since Friday.

The agreement stipulates distributing four checkpoints shared between mainstream government forces and local police in Khanaqin to achieve stability in the town".

"Three checkpoints will be controlled by the local police, while the forth will be controlled by both the Iraqi army and local police," Dr. Fouad Hussein told

Voices of Iraq

On Wednesday, the Iraqi government and Kurdish officials resolved a dispute over control of an ethnically mixed town of Khanaqin, ending a standoff that had threatened to trigger violence.

"The agreement stresses the mutual work to eliminate terror, and to protect Khanaqin from being a terror location, it ensures good security situation for the town," he said.

"Whether it is the Iraqi army or peshmerga (Kurdish local armed forces) that controls security in Khanaqin, they all are Iraqis," he added.

Earlier today, the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki called for convening a meeting tomorrow to discuss the Khanaqin crisis according to the semi-official al-Iraqiya TV station.

"I cannot comment about what it going on in Baghdad, but premier al-Maliki knows about the agreement," Hussein said.

Differences erupted between the Baghdad central government and the government of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region after Iraqi forces carrying out Operation Bashaer al-Kheir (Promise of Good) in Diala entered Khanaqin to track down gunmen.

The Iraqi forces, by virtue of orders from Maliki, gave the peshmerga, or the Kurdish region guards, 24 hours to evacuate their posts in the disputed district.

The peshmerga commanders in the area rejected the orders, affirming that they have received instructions from the leaders of the Iraqi Kurdistan region to remain in their positions.

The Iraqi Kurdistan region's cabinet secretary, Muhammad Qora Dahi, had told VOI earlier this week that a Kurdish delegation comprising the deputy secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Burham Saleh, a member of the PUK politburo, Fouad Maasoum, and two members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) politburo, Hoshyar Zebari and Roznouri Shawis, was in Baghdad to discuss the Khanaqin crisis with senior Iraqi officials.

Sami al-Atroushi, a member of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU),

which has five out of a total 275 seats in the Iraqi parliament, described the entry of an Iraqi army force in the Khanaqin district as "political blackmailing and pressures by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on the Kurdistan region to give up article 140 of the Iraqi constitution."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas like Khanaqin.

It calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s in a bid to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.

Kurds, however, seek to include the city in the autonomous Iraq's Kurdistan region, while Sunni Muslims, Turkmen and Shiites oppose the incorporation. The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

Kirkuk, 250 km (156 miles) north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, sits on the ruins of a 5,000-year-old settlement. Because of the strategic geographical location of the city, Kirkuk was the battle ground for three empires, Assyria, Babylonia and Media which controlled the city at various times.

Kirkuk is the centre of the northern Iraqi petroleum industry. It is a historically and ethnically mixed city populated by Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs and Iraqi Turkmen. The population was estimated at 1,200,000 in 2008.

In cooperation with the Multi-National Force (MNF), Iraqi security forces have been conducting a wide-scale security operation codenamed Bashaer al-Kheir (Promise of Good) since July 2008 in Diala with the aim of tracking down armed groups in the province.

The operation has recently extended to include disputed areas in the province, including Khanaqin district.

Following an agreement between Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad, peshmerga forces withdrew from the districts of Qara Taba and Jalawlalaa, which belong to disputed Khanaqin.



September 7, 2008 Associated Press

Suicide bomber kills six in northern Iraq

BAGHDAD -- A suicide car bomber struck at an outdoor market Saturday in a northern Iraqi city, killing six people and wounding 54, police and hospital authorities said. The attack, which took place in the mainly Turkmen city of Tall Afar at the same market where a suicide car bomber killed more than 20 people and injured 72 last month, raises questions about whether Iraqi police are capable of maintaining security in the north, where Al Qaeda in Iraq remains active.

Police said the bomber detonated his explosives-laden car near people gathered around a traffic accident. The market was crowded with shoppers buying food for the evening meal that breaks the daily fast during Ramadan.

"A woman was shouting about her missing child, who was blown from her hand by the blast," said Asghar Saeed, 52, who suffered shrapnel injuries and a broken leg. "Is it a humanitarian or Islamic thing to do during the holy month of Ramadan?"

Local police to protect Khanaqin

Erbil and Baghdad agree on withdrawing their forces from the town.

By By Ako Muhammed

The Kurdish Globe

A meeting in Khanaqin between KRG and Baghdad ends tensions built around protecting the town.

The head of the Kurdistan Presidency Office, Fu'ad Hussein, told the Globe that the Iraqi army, which controls checkpoints outside Khanaqin, would be leaving and Peshmarga forces would be withdrawing to their original positions before the crisis.

Rather than withdrawing the current forces in Khanaqin, the agreement contained two other issues: The town will be protected by its administrative side and local police forces. Also during the meeting, they decided to form a common committee from both sides to perform the content of the agreement and to address any unusual circumstances.

A delegation from the Kurdistan Regional Government consisting of Fu'ad Husein, Kurdistan president representative Mullah Bakhtiyar, and KRG deputy Minister of Peshmarga affairs, Anwer Haji Osman, on Wednesday reached an agreement with a delegation from the Iraqi Defense Ministry to end the Khanaqin crisis. The Iraqi delegation consisted of Babakir Zebari, the Iraqi army Chief of Staff, General Ali Ghaidan, commander of land forces, and



A Peshmerga soldier holds a Kurdish flag beside a fellow soldier while guarding a checkpoint in the town of Khanaqin in Diyala province August 31, 2008. REUTERS/Sherko Raouf (IRAQ)

Diala Governor Ra'ad Mullah Jawad, in addition to other high-ranking officers.

On the outcome of the meeting, Hussein pointed out, "This was a victory for the people of Khanaqin and Kurdistan as the crisis ended through dialogue. And it became clear for them [the Iraqi government] that military movements do not serve the security of this area."

The agreement in Khanaqin followed negotiations that began earlier between the KRG and Baghdad delegations. Talks came after mounting differences between Kurdistan Peshmarga and Iraqi army forces over which should protect the security of Khanaqin, a Kurdish-populated town north of Diala province.

On Monday, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebbar announced that the tension over Khanaqin was over and talks were continuing on other disputes between the KRG and the Iraqi central government.

"Both sides agreed that the Iraqi army should stay outside Khanaqin, and when they need to enter the town, there must be [earlier] coordination between both sides," Zebbar told the Arabic Ashar Al-Awsat newspaper.

Zebbar along with three other high-ranking officials from the two main Kurdish parties is representing the KRG in the negotiations with Baghdad officials.

Thousands demonstrated in Khanaqin on August 26 to protest Iraqi military units in their town. On the same day, Iraqi forces went out and stayed in nearby checkpoints.

Diyari Hussein, chief of Kurdistan Democratic Party branch in Khanaqin, said Khanaqin's security can be protected without Peshmarga forces and the Iraqi army is unable to control that area. "The crisis was because of ill-intentioned attempts, maybe not from higher positions, but by some officers. It wouldn't happen if a high-ranking delegation came to directly observe the situation like they did in today's meeting."



Voices of Iraq

September 7, 2008

Iraqi paper lashes out at anti-Kurds

BAGHDAD, Sept. 7 (VOI) – A Baghdad-based newspaper on Sunday criticized politicians whom it described as anti-Kurds, while another called on Iraqi intellectuals abroad to return home.

Al-Itihad newspaper, the daily mouthpiece of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by President Jalal al-Talabani, published an article entitled 'The Kurdish cause and those who have a psychological complex' by Abdelhadi Mahdi.

The author of the article said that disputes among political blocs can be solved through meetings, but psychological complexes are a different issue.

The author claims that many politicians harbor hostile feelings towards the Kurds.

Mahdi criticized those who make groundless accusations against the Kurds, which he said are always refuted by non-Kurds.

Differences erupted between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) after Iraqi forces carrying out *Operation Bashaer al-Kheir* (Promise of Good) in Diala entered Khanaqin to track down gunmen.

The Iraqi forces, by virtue of orders from Maliki, gave the *peshmerga*, or armed Kurdish fighters, 24 hours to evacuate their posts in the disputed district.

The *peshmerga* commanders in the area rejected the orders, affirming that they have received instructions from the leaders of the Iraqi Kurdistan region to remain in their positions.

In cooperation with the Multi-National Force (MNF), Iraqi security forces have been conducting a wide-scale security operation called *Bashaer al-Kheir* since July 2008 in Diala with the aim of tracking down armed groups in the province. The operation has recently extended to include

areas affiliated with the province, including Khanaqin district.

Following an agreement between Kurdish authorities and the central government in Baghdad, Peshmerga forces withdrew from the districts of Qurat Taba and Jalawlaa, which are affiliated with Khanaqin.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, pertaining to the situation in Kirkuk, is expected to put an end to the controversy over disputed areas, including Khanaqin.

The article currently stipulates that all Arabs in Kirkuk be returned to their original locations in southern and central Iraqi areas, and formerly displaced residents returned to Kirkuk, 250 km northeast of Baghdad. The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

These stages were supposed to end on December 31, 2007, a deadline that was later extended to six months to end in July 2008.

Meanwhile, al-Umma al-Iraqiya newspaper, the daily mouthpiece of the Iraqi Umma Party led by MP Mathal al-Alousi, commented on the immigration of the Iraqi cultured elite.

The author of the article, Abdelmun'im al-Asam, reiterated calls made by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on Iraqis abroad to return home and help rebuild their country.

The author urged the government to take all necessary measures to ensure their return.

"It is true that hundreds of physicians, technicians and experts have come back and found their way to work and reconstruction. However, the issue is about hundreds of thousands of qualified people that the country needs," the author wrote.

Iraq's knotty Kirkuk problem: crucial, urgent, but no quick answer

By NICHOLAS SPANGLER, McClatchy Newspapers

The men line up by the hundreds every day at the blast wall on al Quds Street: Kurds who were forced out of the province of Kirkuk under Saddam Hussein's regime, Arabs who were brought in to replace them and others. They're all waiting for their checks.

If a man is lucky, he'll get a check for \$8,534 if he and his family are moving back into Kirkuk, double that if they're moving out.

Gingerly, ambivalently and amid Kafkaesque tangles of red tape, the government of Iraq is attempting to reverse Saddam's decades-long campaign of ethnic cleansing, Arabization and border gerrymandering in this oil-rich northern area.

Given time, it could work. But Iraqi politics has moved Kirkuk to center stage, and the demands of a host of interested actors - from Kurdish political parties to Sunni Muslim militants in Anbar province and the governments of Turkey and the United States - are colliding.

At stake are questions of parliamentary power, oil and revenue-sharing, the limits of Iraq's federalism and its relations with neighboring countries, especially Turkey, which has a sizable Kurdish minority and fears the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq's north fueled by oil from Kirkuk.

Already, the collision has forced the indefinite postponement of provincial elections that the Bush administration and Iraqi Prime

Minister Nouri al-Maliki see as crucial to channeling the country's overlapping and sometimes violent sectarian and tribal tensions into a democratic process.

Parliament gridlocked on the prerequisite election law in August. It probably will resume debate when it returns from summer recess this week, but it isn't clear that the situation is any more conducive to agreement now.

Arab groups in opposition to the government, such as the Sadrists and the Sons of Iraq, are eager for a law to pass so they can consolidate their popular support in Iraq's other provinces, but among the Arabs and Turkomen of Kirkuk, fear is widespread that the Kurd-led administration won't allow fair elections here.

The last attempt at a provisional solution - a bill forced through parliament by Arab opposition parties only to be vetoed by the Kurdish-led presidency council - would have treated Kirkuk as a special case. It would have postponed elections in the province and replaced its majority-Kurd council with one that gave equal representation to the three main ethnic groups: 32 percent apiece, a strategic hair short of the 33 percent approval that it would need to force a referendum on the province's final status, with 4 percent reserved for minorities.

Some Kurdish politicians say they're willing to postpone elections here, but they reject any solution

based on the power-sharing model. "If they've already distributed the percentages, what's the point of holding elections in the first place?" asked Safeen Dizayee of the Kurdish Democratic Party. "Everybody wants to use Kirkuk as a scapegoat for any kind of problem."

Kurds have long claimed Kirkuk as their own, and Saddam wasn't the first or last man to realize that the province could provide the economic base for a Kurdish state if it joined the three Kurdish provinces in northern Iraq.

Kurdish politicians say that isn't their intent, at least for now. But at some point, after Kirkuk's borders and demographics are returned to something similar to their pre-Saddam state - and the officials in charge warn that it will take at least several more years - Kirkuk will have its first legitimate census since 1957, followed by a referendum. It then may join the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan, remain under federal control or even form a region of its own.

Tensions on this broader issue are likely to remain, even if some short-term solution can be found to allow elections to proceed.

Officials in charge of the "normalization" that's under way in Kirkuk - which was difficult to start with, because of widespread fraud and the sheer volume of cases they must review - say that it's being slowed by inadequate staffing and

funding from the central government, as well as Kurdish interference.

"Frankly speaking, the main two Kurdish parties are pushing too hard to dominate the situation," said Ahmed al Barrack, the head of the Commission for the Resolution of Real Property Disputes. "For example, they closed two of our offices because they said we were not cooperating with them."

U.S. official in Baghdad said last month that Kurdish security forces were monitoring interviews conducted by teams that are working on border readjustment. Brig. Gen. Halkent Abdulla Aziz, the head of Kirkuk's Kurdish security force, denied that.

Kurds, for their part, deny any systematic interference and accuse their accusers. Nouri Talabany, an independent Kurd in the Kurdistan Region Parliament, warned in particular of former members of Saddam's Baath Party and Sunnis in Kirkuk who are nostalgic for their days in power:

"Fifty years ago, these people were 5,000; it was a small village. Now these people want to decide the destiny of all Kirkuk. It's the same thing for Arab Sunnis in Iraq, ruling this country for 70 years. It's difficult for them to accept that they are the minority, not the majority."

(Spangler reports for The Miami Herald.)

REUTERS

Kurd assembly speaker wary of Iraq arms purchases

Reuters - September 9, 2008 - By Shamal Agrawi

ARBIL, Iraq, -- Foreign governments must put conditions on the sale of weapons to Iraq that forbid their use to oppress minority Kurds or other Iraqis, the parliamentary speaker in Iraq's largely autonomous Kurdistan region said on Monday.

Adnan al-Mufti, speaking to Kurdish lawmakers at a session of the region's parliament, said he was not worried about the current central government of Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

But he said he was concerned by recent tensions between Kurdish Peshmerga security forces and the Iraqi army in the multi-ethnic town of Khanaqin, which lies near the northern Kurdistan region.

Many Iraqi Kurds have bitter memories of military attacks ordered by Saddam Hussein, especially in the 1980s, when chemical weapons were used and Kurdish villages razed. Tens of thousands of people were killed in those assaults.

"We are part of the government and we do not accuse it of any charge of oppression and we hope it succeeds, but what happened recently has raised in us a justified fear," Mufti said, in an apparent reference to the

tensions over Khanaqin.

"If the situation plays out in this way and there is a government or head of the government in the future who thinks of a military solution to impose their will and impose a solution and if they have F-16s, they may use them."

The Iraqi government has asked for information about buying 36 F-16 fighter aircraft built by Lockheed Martin Corp <LMT.N>, the U.S. Defense Department said on Friday.

The government in Baghdad, flush with cash from high oil prices, is also interested in buying other arms from U.S. manufacturers such as armoured vehicles and helicopters.

"As the Iraqi government works to be supplied with up-to-date weapons like F-16s and helicopters, it is important to ask the United States and other supplying countries to make these weapons deals conditional on not being used against the Kurdish people and generally against the Iraqi people," Mufti said.

Arab and Kurdish politicians last week resolved a dispute over control of

Khanaqin in northeastern Diyala province, ending a tense standoff that had threatened to trigger violence.

Thousands of Kurds staged protests as the Iraqi army approached Khanaqin last month to try to replace the Peshmerga.

The Iraqi army had wanted to enter Khanaqin to stamp government authority on the area. But Peshmerga forces patrolling the town, which is home to Arabs and Kurds, had refused to withdraw.

Under the deal to defuse the tensions, the Iraqi army and Kurdish forces

were to withdraw from the town.

Abdul-Karim al-Samarrai, deputy head of the defence and security committee in the national parliament, said conditions on the use of weapons could not be attached to a contract.

"It is not possible to put these conditions in an contract," Samarrai told Reuters, adding a political solution could be found to assuage such fears. (Additional reporting by Wisam Mohammed in Baghdad; Writing by Tim Cocks; Editing by Dean Yates and Caroline Drees)

THE DAILY STAR
REGIONAL

September 09, 2008

Iraq gets its first Christian militia - with a little help from the peshmerga

By Agence France Presse
Karim Talbi

TEL ASQUF, Iraq: With Kalashnikovs slung over their shoulders, members of Iraq's first Christian militia enforce one simple rule on the border of this little village: "Anyone not from Tel Asqf is banned." This village in northern Iraq's flashpoint Nineveh Province, frequently targeted by Sunni and Shiite fighters, has now taken security into its own hands with armed patrols and checkpoints at the village's four entrances.

The village borders are marked with a sand barrier built by residents in a bid to stop car bombs breaching the perimeter as they did in 2007 when two such attacks within six months rocked the village and spurred the local authorities into action.

"The terrorists want to kill us because we are Christian. If we don't defend ourselves, who will?" asked militia group leader Abu Nataq.

Associated with the "Crusader" invaders and regarded as well-off, Iraqi Christians are often victims of sectarian violence, killings and kidnappings at the hands of both Sunni and Shiite Islamists, as well as criminal gangs.

Iraq's Christians, with the Chaldean rite by far the largest community, were said to number as many as 800,000 before the 2003 US-led invasion, but this number is believed to have halved as people fled the brutal sectarian violence.

Neighborhood militias have become popular in Iraq, particularly with the rise of the Awakening groups - former Sunni insurgents who switched sides after being paid by US forces to battle Al-Qaeda.

But Iraq's Christian population, concentrated in Nineveh and its capital city Mosul, had not until now organized its own fighting force.

"We used to pay 'jezya' [protection money] and they would leave us alone," Nataq said in reference to a tax levied on the Christian community by Al-Qaeda in exchange for peace.

The term harks back to the seventh century, a period of great expansion in Islam when Christians and Jews were forced to pay additional taxes to the majority Muslims.

But Tel Asqf's villagers rebelled against the payments and called on the help of the Kurdish forces of Irbil, the nearby capital of Iraq's Kurdish region, after judging that its



own provincial capital, Mosul, had too large a Sunni Arab population.

"I prefer the help of Kurdistan, of the peshmerga," Nataq said. The Kurdish fighters now controlled the roads leading to the village and claimed large swathes of the region, much to the fury of Mosul's Arab population, he added.

The peshmerga provide Kalashnikov rifles and radios to the 200 Christian militiamen who receive around \$200 dollars a month from the Irbil administration to protect the 8,000 inhabitants of the village.

Since the arrangement was introduced around 10 months ago, the Christian militiamen have never had to use their weapons, "because the peshmerga form the first line of defense," Nataq said.

Christian fighters are stationed at the village's entry points and mobile teams patrol inside the inner cordon, especially around the Chaldean Catholic Church of St. George, which, like many of Iraq's churches, has paid a heavy price in this blood-soaked land.

On January 6, a series of bombs at outside churches and a monastery in Mosul, in an apparently coordinated attack that wounded four people and damaged buildings, as Christians celebrated Epiphany. In March, the body of Iraq's kidnapped Chaldean archbishop, Paulos Faraj Rahho, was found near Mosul, prompting the condemnation of Pope Benedict XVI and US President George W. Bush.

Along with thousands of other Christians, the archbishop used to pay the jezya but decided to stop. Some believe that this was the reason for his kidnapping and murder.

Hani Petrus, 45, fled to Tel Asqf seeking refuge from the bloodshed, like dozens of other Christians from Baghdad, Samarra and Basra.

"I am a school headmaster but I used to work in a petrol station in Mosul. The terrorists used to come and serve themselves petrol for free and take money from the cash register: \$200 to \$300 each time," he said.

"In Mosul, my children were not able to play in the street. I didn't want to let my 12-year-old daughter go to school. I was so worried about her," he said, adding that his family was one of four families into one house.

"We are virtually living on top of one another and everything is expensive because the shopkeepers know that we cannot make the trip into Mosul," he said.

Salem Samoon Jbo, 46, used to sell liquor in Basra but fled north, first to Baghdad and then Tel Asqf, after Shiite extremists ordered him to close the store in 2006. They had learned that he was working for the US forces. Now he stands guard outside one of the entrances to the St. George Church. He works seven days - alternating two hours on duty and two hours off - then takes two weeks off.

"There isn't any other work here. There is nothing else to do. I don't like guns but I have no other choice," he said. "In any case, it is better than the work in Basra. There, I worked for the Americans and was a target for the Shiite militias. I worked as a bomb-disposal expert."



La "diplomatie du football" au secours des relations turco-arméniennes

6 SEPTEMBRE 2008 Par Suzan Fraser, Associated Press

ANKARA - Un match de football suffira-t-il à surmonter des décennies d'antagonisme entre la Turquie et l'Arménie, conséquence du massacre d'Arméniens sous l'empire ottoman? Les deux parties l'espèrent alors que le président turc Abdullah Gul est reçu ce samedi soir à Erevan par son homologue Serge Sarkissian, avant d'assister à cette rencontre comptant pour les éliminatoires du Mondial 2010.

Grâce à la "diplomatie du football", M. Gul devrait être le premier dirigeant turc à se rendre en Arménie depuis que cette ex-république soviétique a déclaré son indépendance en 1991.

Bien que la Turquie ait été parmi les premiers pays à reconnaître l'indépendance de l'Arménie, les deux voisins n'entretiennent pas de relations diplomatiques et leur frontière commune a été fermée en 1993.

Ankara et Erevan divergent sur la nature et l'ampleur des massacres d'Arméniens perpétrés entre 1915 et 1917 par l'empire ottoman finissant et le régime des Jeunes-Turcs. Des historiens avancent le chiffre de 1,5 million de morts et évoquent le premier génocide du XXe siècle, ce que conteste farouchement la Turquie, qui parle de guerre civile et estime que le bilan a été exagérément gonflé.

Les liens entre les deux pays ont été gelés à la suite de l'opposition turque à l'occupation par l'Arménie de la région du Haut-Karabakh, enclave en Azerbaïdjan à forte majorité arménienne.

Peu de progrès sont attendus sur les épineuses questions du génocide et du Haut-Karabakh à l'occasion de la visite de M. Gul. Mais beaucoup voient dans ce déplacement les signes d'un dégel. "Cette visite contribuera -même petitement- à améliorer le niveau de confiance entre les deux pays", écrivait récemment Semih Idiz, spécialiste des questions diplomatiques, dans un éditorial du quotidien "Milliyet". "Prendre des mesures plus importantes ne viendra qu'ultérieurement".

En répondant favorablement mais à la dernière minute à l'invitation que lui avait lancée en juillet l'Arménie pour assister à ce match de football fort en symboles, M. Gul pensait peut-être au rôle de garant de la paix régionale que souhaite jouer son pays, dans un contexte alourdi par le conflit entre la Russie et la Géorgie voisine.

En tant que membre de l'OTAN, la Turquie peut raisonnablement s'inquiéter de la reconnaissance par la Russie de l'indépendance des régions séparatistes géorgiennes d'Ossétie du Sud et d'Abkhazie. Ce précédent pourrait en effet inspirer les séparatistes kurdes ou encore pousser l'Arménie à franchir un nouveau pas dans son soutien aux sécessionnistes du Haut-Karabakh.

A la suite du conflit russo-géorgien, la Turquie a du reste proposé que soit créé un groupe régional pour la stabilité du Caucase, qui réunirait autour d'elle la Russie, la Géorgie, l'Azerbaïdjan et... l'Arménie.

Pour la Turquie, ce petit pays est le seul de ses voisins avec lequel elle n'a pas renoué de liens depuis la fin de la Guerre froide. Ce qu'elle a fait en revanche avec d'anciens ennemis traditionnels comme la Grèce, la Bulgarie et la Syrie.

Si les deux principaux partis turcs d'opposition ont dénoncé sa visite en Arménie, jugeant qu'elle desservait les intérêts nationaux, Abdullah Gul a assuré qu'au contraire, elle "contribuera à la création d'un climat d'amitié dans la région". Des nationalistes arméniens prévoient de leur côté de manifester contre la venue du président turc.

Fatih Terim, l'entraîneur de la sélection turque, grande favorite de cette rencontre, a lui mis en garde son équipe contre les tensions politiques entourant la partie. "Nous allons à un match de football, pas à la guerre", a-t-il rappelé. "Nous ne pouvons pas porter le poids de l'histoire sur nos épaules. Cela perturberait notre jeu."



IRAK: L'ONU VEUT DES ÉLECTIONS PROVINCIALES AU PLUS TARD DÉBUT 2009

NAJAF (Irak), 6 sept 2008 (AFP) -

LE REPRESENTANT spécial du secrétaire général de l'ONU en Irak a plaidé samedi à Najaf (centre) pour que les élections provinciales irakiennes soient organisées avant la fin de l'année ou, au plus tard, début 2009, pour consolider la démocratisation du pays.

"Il est nécessaire d'organiser les élections provinciales à la fin de cette année ou, au plus tard, au début de l'année prochaine", a déclaré à la presse Staffan de Mistura à la sortie d'un entretien avec le chef spirituel de la communauté chiite en Irak, le grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein al-Sistani.

"Il n'y a pas de raisons de reporter ces élections", a-t-il ajouté, en soulignant les "risques" que cela comporte, "car les conseils provinciaux deviendront illégaux" une fois le mandat des élus achevé, début octobre.

"Tous les Irakiens veulent que ces élections se tiennent pour soutenir la démocratie dans leur pays", a conclu le représentant onusien.

Considérés par les Etats-Unis comme une étape cruciale du processus de réconciliation en Irak, les scrutins provinciaux étaient initialement prévus le 1er octobre.

Mais un différend sur la répartition du pouvoir entre les trois communautés (arabes sunnites et chiites, kurdes) de la région de Kirkouk, à 250 km au nord de Bagdad, a empêché l'adoption de la loi électorale et entraîné leur report à une date encore indéterminée.

Les députés irakiens sont partis en vacances jusqu'au 9 septembre et doivent à leur retour travailler sur le contenu du projet de loi controversé pour tenter de délayer un compromis et permettre la tenue de ces élections.

L'ayatollah Sistani avait de son côté appelé fin août les Irakiens à s'inscrire sur les listes électorales pour participer à ces élections.

Quelque 17,3 millions d'Irakiens sont inscrits cette année sur les listes électorales, contre 14,2 pour la dernière élection, tenue en 2004.-



ARMES VENDUES À L'IRAK: LES KURDES VEULENT "DES GARANTIES" SUR L'UTILISATION

ERBIL (Irak), 8 sept 2008 (AFP)

LE PRESIDENT du Parlement autonome kurde irakien a réclamé lundi des pays vendant des armes à l'Irak "des garanties" que ce matériel ne sera pas utilisé contre la population kurde.

"Les Kurdes demandent aux pays qui vendent des armes à l'Irak des garanties que celles-ci ne seront pas utilisées contre notre peuple ou d'autres Irakiens", a déclaré Adnan al-Moufti lors d'un discours devant les parlementaires kurdes dans la capitale provinciale Erbil.

M. Moufti faisait référence aux informations de presse publiées la semaine dernière, indiquant que Bagdad souhaite acheter 36 avions de combat F-16 aux Etats-Unis.

Le gouvernement irakien avait affiché au début de l'année sa volonté d'acheter pour près de 10 milliards de dollars de matériel militaire américain, dont des tanks, des véhicules blindés et des avions cargo.

"Nous voulons que le gouvernement irakien soit fort et capable de défendre la souveraineté du pays, mais nous avons des inquiétudes, liées à ce qui s'est

passé à Khanaqine", a ajouté M. Moufti, en référence à la crise qui a éclaté en août entre l'armée irakienne et les combattants kurdes (peshmergas) dans ce district du centre de la province de Diyala (nord).

Près de 175.000 personnes, en majorité des Kurdes chiites, vivent à Khanaqine.

Durant la politique d'arabisation de Saddam Hussein, dans les années 1980, un grand nombre de Kurdes chiites avaient été déplacés de Khanaqine par la force et ils ne sont revenus qu'à la chute du régime en 2003.

En juin 2006, le conseil municipal de Khanaqine avait demandé que la région soit intégrée au Kurdistan. Cette région compte des champs pétroliers qui produisent 16.000 barils par jour.

"Nous n'avons pas peur du gouvernement de M. Maliki (le Premier ministre irakien, ndr), mais des futurs gouvernements", a souligné M. Moufti.

"Les derniers événements ont suscité des craintes" sur l'avenir, a-t-il ajouté, car "si un nouveau Premier ministre arrive au pouvoir et pense que la solution militaire est nécessaire, il pourra imposer sa volonté".

AFP

TURQUIE: SIX TUÉS DANS DES COMBATS AVEC LE PKK

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 7 sept 2008 (AFP)

TROIS soldats turcs et trois membres d'une milice pro-gouvernementale ont été tués dimanche au cours d'affrontements avec des rebelles séparatistes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, près de la frontière irakienne, a indiqué le gouverneur local.

Les six hommes ont été tués alors qu'ils participaient à une opération de l'armée, près de la ville de Semdinli, contre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a précisé le gouverneur dans un communiqué.

Trois des victimes faisaient partie d'un groupe de miliciens kurdes -supplétifs

de l'armée- en charge de la protection d'un village.

Deux militaires turcs ont également été blessés, selon le communiqué.

Un premier bilan faisait état de trois tués, selon une source de sécurité anonyme.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a multiplié ses actions contre le groupe séparatiste, notamment dans le sud-est du pays et dans le nord de l'Irak où elle mène des raids aériens contre des positions du PKK.

AFP

IRAK: LE PARLEMENT DOIT VOTER AU PLUS VITE LA LOI ÉLECTORALE (COMMISSION)

AMMAN, 8 sept 2008 (AFP) -

LE CHEF de la commission électorale irakienne Faraj al-Haidari a exhorté lundi les députés à adopter au plus vite la loi qui doit permettre l'organisation d'un scrutin provincial jugé crucial pour la stabilité du pays.

"Nous appelons le Parlement irakien à accélérer l'adoption de la loi car il existe des dates butoir qui doivent être prises en compte pour organiser les élections (provinciales), en accord avec les exigences internationales de transparence", a déclaré M. Haidari lors d'une conférence de presse à Amman.

Considérés par les Etats-Unis comme une étape cruciale du processus de réconciliation en Irak, les scrutins provinciaux étaient initialement prévus le 1er octobre.

Mais un différend sur la répartition du pouvoir entre les trois communautés (arabes sunnites et chiites, kurdes) de la région de Kirkouk, à 250 km au nord

de Bagdad, a empêché l'adoption de la loi et entraîné le report du scrutin à une date indéterminée.

Les députés irakiens reprennent mardi leurs travaux après quatre semaines de vacances et doivent discuter du contenu du projet de loi controversé pour tenter de dégager un compromis et permettre la tenue des élections.

"Les difficultés rencontrées pour l'adoption de la loi au Parlement rendent difficile la publication d'une date", a souligné M. Haidari, notant que la commission avait de son côté fini d'établir les listes électorales.

Cette commission a indiqué qu'il lui fallait au moins quatre mois pour organiser le scrutin, à compter de l'adoption de la loi. En conséquence, la tenue des élections provinciales avant début 2009 paraît hypothétique.

Présent samedi à Najaf (centre), le représentant spécial du secrétaire général de l'ONU en Irak, Staffan de Mistura, avait plaidé pour que les élections provinciales soient organisées avant la fin de l'année ou, au plus tard, début 2009, afin de consolider la démocratisation du pays.

AFP

SIX COMBATTANTS KURDES TUÉS DANS UN ATTENTAT À LA BOMBE EN IRAK

BAQOUBA (Irak), 13 sept 2008 (AFP) -

AU MOINS six peshmergas, dont un commandant, ont été tués samedi en Irak dans un rare attentat contre les combattants kurdes toujours déployés dans la province de Diyala malgré un ordre de retrait du gouvernement.

Dans la capitale, trois policiers irakiens et un membre des milices luttant contre Al-Qaïda ont par ailleurs été tués dans un attentat à la bombe.

"Six peshmergas ont été tués, dont le colonel Zoufekar Mahmoud chargé de la sécurité à Khanaqine, et six blessés par l'explosion d'une bombe artisanale, placée au bord de la route, au passage de leur patrouille", a déclaré Mahmoud Singaoui, le représentant du président irakien Jalal Talabani auprès des peshmergas.

Cet attentat s'est produit à l'ouest de Khanaqine, une ville de la province de Diyala, frontalière de l'Irak et l'une des plus dangereuses d'Irak.

Les peshmergas sont rarement la cible d'attentats en Irak.

Ces combattants sont en majorité déployés dans les trois provinces de la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan (nord), mais ils sont aussi stationnés également plus au sud, dans les provinces de Ninive, de Kirkouk et de Diyala, une présence qui suscite parfois des crispations.

Une crise a éclaté en août à Khanaqine entre l'armée irakienne et les peshmergas sur la présence de ces derniers dans la région de Diyala.

Le 15 août, les dirigeants kurdes avaient finalement accepté de retirer, à la demande du gouvernement irakien leurs troupes de Diyala, où quelque 4.000 combattants kurdes étaient déployés depuis près de deux ans.

Mais depuis, les peshmergas ne sont toujours pas partis de la province.

L'armée irakienne avait aussi dit son intention de chasser les partis politiques kurdes des bâtiments publics qu'ils occupaient depuis 2003, ce qui avait déclenché la colère des Kurdes.

Située près de la province du Kurdistan, la zone septentrionale de Diyala est habitée en majorité par des Kurdes chiites, et les dirigeants kurdes affirment qu'elle faisait partie du Kurdistan.

Près de 175.000 personnes vivent dans la municipalité de Khanaqine.

Durant la politique d'arabisation de l'ancien président sunnite Saddam Hussein, dans les années 1980, un grand nombre de Kurdes chiites avaient été déplacés par la force et ils ne sont revenus qu'à la chute du régime en 2003.

En juin 2006, le conseil municipal de Khanaqine avait demandé que la région, qui compte des champs pétroliers, soit intégrée au Kurdistan.



Le Kurdistan, dans le nord de l'Irak, est une région autonome de facto depuis 1991. Les unités des peshmergas assurent sa défense et la région est régie par une présidence provinciale dirigée par le chef kurde Massoud Barzani, un gouvernement et un parlement.

Parallèlement, au moins trois policiers irakiens et un membre des milices luttant contre Al-Qaïda ont été tués dans l'explosion d'une bombe artisanale au bord d'une route à Bagdad, ont indiqué à l'AFP des sources aux ministères de l'Intérieur et de la Défense.

La bombe a explosé près d'un barrage de Kamssara, un quartier de l'est de Bagdad, tuant trois policiers et un membre des "Sahwa", milices composées d'anciens insurgés reconvertis dans la lutte contre Al-Qaïda, a-t-on précisé.

Washington refuse des armes à Israël pour attaquer l'Iran

PROCHE-ORIENT

Pour freiner le bellicisme israélien, les États-Unis ne livreront pas des matériels militaires susceptibles d'être utilisés contre Téhéran.

Jérusalem

FACE à la menace atomique irakienne, les responsables israéliens se sentent bridés par Washington. Les Américains ont en effet mis une nouvelle fois leur veto à toutes les demandes d'achat d'armes « offensives » susceptibles de permettre des raids aériens israéliens contre les installations nucléaires iraniennes. En d'autres termes, les États-Unis ne veulent pas être pris par surprise et mis devant un fait accompli, comme cela avait été le cas en 1981 lorsque l'aviation israélienne avait détruit une centrale atomique irakienne sous le régime de Saddam Hussein. À l'époque, l'État hébreu n'avait demandé d'autorisation à personne.

Mais cette fois-ci, une tactique aussi expéditive pourrait s'avérer beaucoup plus dangereuse pour les États-Unis. Des dizaines de milliers de soldats américains déployés en Irak pourraient en effet être la cible privilégiée de représailles de l'Iran en cas d'attaque israélienne. Résultat : les Américains tentent de refréner les ardeurs de leur allié. L'État hébreu s'est ainsi vu refuser, selon le quotidien *Haaretz*, la livraison de bom-

bes antibunkers d'un poids de 2,2 tonnes capables de percer des installations en béton renforcé à six mètres de profondeur. Ce type de matériel est indispensable, car les Iraniens ont pris la précaution non seulement de disperser au maximum la vingtaine de sites nucléaires recensés par les experts internationaux, mais aussi de les enfouir sous terre dans des régions montagneuses et reculées.

Station radio sophistiquée

Les États-Unis ne veulent pas non plus fournir des Boeing 767 spécialement conçus pour le ravitaillement en vol. Or, sans ces appareils, une bonne partie des chasseurs israéliens ne peuvent pas bombarder des sites situés à la frontière est de l'Iran et disposer de suffisamment de carburant pour retourner à leur base.

Autre précaution : les États-Unis se sont bien gardés d'accorder un couloir dans l'espace aérien irakien, indispensable aux avions israéliens pour atteindre l'Iran mais aussi pour être clairement identifiés et ainsi ne pas être pris pour cible par les avions et missiles américains déployés en Irak.

Pour compenser cette série de rebuffades, Israël a obtenu un beau lot de consolation. Les États-Unis vont installer une station radio ultrasophistiquée dans le Negev, au sud d'Israël, qui permettra de repérer un missile dès sa mise à feu et ce à 2 000 km de distance (le double par rapport



Les USA ont refusé de fournir des Boeing 767 conçus pour le ravitaillement en vol, ainsi que des bombes antibunkers capables de percer le béton des centrales iraniennes (ici Bushrah dans le golfe Persique). DR-Space Imaging

aux capacités actuelles du matériel israélien). Cette station aura l'avantage de faciliter la mise en alerte des batteries de missiles antimissiles israéliennes. Détail important : il s'agira de la première installation permanente de l'armée américaine sur le territoire israélien. Toute attaque contre cette station mettra en péril la vie de civils et de militaires américains chargés de son fonctionnement. Une donnée dont tout pays attaquant devra tenir compte avant de passer à l'action... Reste à savoir si ce « cadeau » suffira à calmer les ardeurs israéliennes. Pour le moment, les responsables politi-

ques et militaires prônent un durcissement des sanctions économiques imposées par la communauté internationale en vue de contraindre Téhéran à geler ses opérations d'enrichissement d'uranium.

En d'autres termes, Israël se réserve le droit d'agir seul au cas où la diplomatie échouerait. Comme le préconise Amos Gilad, un haut responsable du ministère de la Défense, « mieux vaut rester discret. Si l'on décide de tirer, il faut tirer et ne pas parler ». Mais jusqu'à quel point l'État hébreu peut se permettre de prendre le risque de défier le grand allié américain ?

MARC HENRY

Les plans de Téhéran en cas de frappes hostiles

GOLFE La marine iranienne prépare des attentats aux bateaux suicides contre la flotte américaine

Vedettes rapides de l'armée iranienne armées de lance-roquettes dans le détroit d'Ormuz. Selon un responsable du ministère de la Défense à Paris, ces embarcations, prêtes à des missions kamikazes, font partie de l'arsenal mis en place par Téhéran pour contrer la présence militaire américaine dans la région. DR



PAR GEORGES MALBRUNOT

Une « attaque en bande, comme des loups » contre les bateaux américains : c'est la tactique de guerre éclair mise au point par la marine iranienne dans les eaux du golfe Arabo-Persique, en riposte à d'éventuelles frappes contre les installations nucléaires de Téhéran. Pilotées par des gardiens de la révolution fanatisés, une vingtaine de petites embarcations donnent régulièrement l'impression de fondre sur des navires occidentaux croisant dans les eaux internationales. Des attentats aux bateaux suicides « ne laisseront aucune chance de s'enfuir aux ennemis », avertit Ali Shirazi, représentant du guide suprême auprès des gardiens, l'armée idéologique du régime, qui menace de mettre le feu à Tel-Aviv et à la flotte américaine dans le Golfe, en cas d'attaque contre l'Iran.

« Avec leurs patrouilleurs et leurs vedettes rapides armées de lance-roquettes, les Iraniens peuvent faire des dégâts aux gros bateaux occidentaux », reconnaît un haut responsable du ministère de la Défense à Paris, qui surveille les mouvements iraniens dans le Golfe.

Outre trois sous-marins soviétiques (de classe Kilo) et une petite dizaine de mini-sous-marins pouvant délivrer des commandos de forces spéciales, Téhéran dispose, au total, d'un millier d'embarcations armées, dont plusieurs centaines de vedettes rapides, prêtes à des missions kamikazes. « Leur furtivité et la détermination de leur

équipage les rendent particulièrement dangereuses », estime Hubert Britsch, ancien attaché militaire à Téhéran.

Une action de guérilla aéro-maritime est redoutée par les pays arabes, impuissants, sur l'autre rive du Golfe. Fin août, les marines de plusieurs monarchies ont repéré un « durcissement » de l'activité des pasdarans dans les eaux internationales. Signe de l'imminence d'une attaque, le départ de certains navires américains a même relancé les spéculations sur des bombardements. Bluff ou non de la part de Téhéran ? À chaque fois, comme en janvier, date du dernier incident connu, on redoute le faux pas, qui déclencherait les hostilités.

Signaux contradictoires

Sans donner l'impression de se préparer à des frappes, auxquelles Téhéran dit ne pas croire, les Iraniens viennent tout de même de procéder à un nouveau test du Raad, un missile antinavire, dont la portée dépasserait les 300 km. Ils auraient également mis au point un nouveau sous-marin de classe moyenne, le Ghaem, capable de lancer des torpilles. Même si Téhéran est passé maître dans l'art de dissimuler ou d'exagérer ses forces, dans le Golfe, sa « capacité de nuisance » doit être d'autant

moins sous-estimée que c'est dans le domaine naval que la coordination fonctionne le mieux entre les pasdarans et leur rival, l'artesh, l'armée régulière. Les premiers peuvent notamment s'appuyer sur des avions de détection sous-marine (des Orions américains notamment), capables de repérer des sous-marins adverses très silencieux, s'inquiète-t-on dans les états-majors occidentaux.

Les Iraniens iraient-ils jusqu'au mouillage de mines dans le détroit d'Ormuz, pouvant conduire à la fermeture de ce canal, qui leur permet d'exporter le pétrole, si précieux à leur économie ? Ces derniers mois, Téhéran a envoyé à ce sujet des signaux contradictoires.

Une chose paraît certaine : aucune installation militaire ou politique américaine dans le Golfe n'est à l'abri de frappes de rétorsion iraniennes. Mais dans les airs comme en mer, pour contrer la défense adverse, les Iraniens devront avoir recours à la même tactique de saturation de l'espace. Pendant un temps donné, leurs tirs de missiles devront être suffisamment nombreux pour passer au travers des mailles de la défense aérienne, et finalement toucher leurs cibles. Celles-ci ont déjà été définies. De la base américaine d'Al-Udeid au Qatar, en passant

par les installations pétrolières saoudiennes, les objectifs ne manquent pas. Et l'Iran a déjà transmis un message aux pays arabes, leur demandant de ne pas autoriser les Américains à utiliser leur territoire pour attaquer la République islamique.

Face aux Émirats arabes unis, les Iraniens ont prépositionné des missiles sol-sol tactiques CR8 Silwan sur les îles Tomb et Abou Moussa, que revendique Abu Dha-

bi. Au total, Téhéran disposerait d'un millier de missiles balistiques et tactiques, pouvant être tirés à partir de lanceurs mobiles, de tout point du pays. Si leur système de guidage laisse souvent à désirer, en revanche « leur mise en place dans des sites de desserrement pourrait ne pas être détectée, car les véhicu-

les peuvent être camouflés en semi-remorques civils », prévient Hubert Britsch, qui n'écarter pas l'installation de têtes chimiques.

D'une portée de 150 à 500 km, leurs 450 missiles sol-sol stratégiques (CSS-8, Shahab 1 et 2) peuvent tous atteindre les bases américaines dans le Golfe. Mais les plus dangereux sont les Shahab 3 – une vingtaine – seuls capables de frapper Israël, grâce à une portée entre 1 300 et 1 500 km. De récents tirs de missiles effectués au cours

de manœuvres étaient « un signal clair » de la détermination de Téhéran. Mais l'un des engins était manifestement « traficoté ». S'agissait-il d'un Shahab 3 modifié, ou d'un autre d'une plus longue portée, résultat d'un programme technologiquement crédible, capable de porter une charge nucléaire. Le mystère demeure.

Si Téhéran peut riposter directement, ce n'est certainement pas ce mode d'action, aux conséquences désastreuses, que l'Iran privilégiera, estime la plupart des experts. Grâce à ses relais en Irak, en Afghanistan, au Liban, dans le Golfe, voire en Afrique, la République islamique optera plutôt pour le non-conventionnel.

Alliances de circonstance

Chez son voisin irakien, les gardiens de la révolution accen-

tueraient la pression sur les milices chiïtes qu'ils soutiennent depuis 2003 (l'Armée du Mahdi de Moqadda al-Sadr et la Force Badr). Les 140 000 soldats américains seraient des cibles toutes désignées. En cas de frappes contre son territoire, Téhéran n'aurait plus aucune raison de restreindre sa capacité de nuisance, comme il se l'irapose jusqu'à présent en Irak.

En Afghanistan, l'Iran n'hésiterait pas, non plus, à nouer une alliance de circonstance avec ses ennemis sunnites talibans. Déjà, des armes et des engins explosifs improvisés y ont été livrés par Téhéran. Sur le dossier afghan, l'Iran estime avoir été fort mal récompensé de sa « neutralité positive » adoptée après les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 : George Bush plaça, juste après, le régime des mollahs sur « l'axe du mal ».

Au nom de ce même pragmatisme, un appui momentané à al-Qaïda n'est pas à exclure. Téhéran est fortement soupçonné d'abriter quelques cadres de la mouvance terroriste. Malgré la haine qu'ils se vouent mutuellement, al-Qaïda n'a jamais frappé l'Iran. Est-ce vraiment un hasard ?

Au Lihan, son allié, le Hezbollah, serait vraisemblablement autorisé à utiliser ses armes les plus sophistiquées contre Israël. Les experts estiment en effet que le réarmement de la milice chiïte, depuis la guerre de l'été 2006 contre Israël, a été conditionné par un engagement du Hezbollah à ne les utiliser que contre l'État hébreu. Il pourrait en être de même en Palestine avec le Hamas et le Djihad islamique, qui ont réussi à améliorer la portée de leurs missiles ces dernières

années.

Enfin, dans les monarchies du Golfe, l'Iran pourrait s'appuyer sur les minorités chiïtes, souvent victimes de discriminations de la part des régimes sunnites en place. Que ce soit en Arabie saoudite, au Koweït, et a fortiori à Bahreïn, où les chiïtes (majoritaires) commencent à manifester violemment. Certains membres du clergé pourraient y mobiliser des foules. Dans le passé, des attentats ont été commis par des chiïtes inspirés par Téhéran, notamment en 1996, contre le site pétrolier d'al-Khobar en Arabie saoudite.

Dans ces conditions, on comprend mieux pourquoi Nicolas Sarkozy a parlé de « catastrophe », lorsqu'il a évoqué la semaine dernière à Damas, les conséquences d'une frappe israélienne contre l'Iran.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune September 19, 2008

Ahmadinejad defends aide on Israel

Warm words a lie, Iranian explains

By Nazila Fathi and Alan Cowell

TEHRAN: President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took the unusual step Thursday of publicly defending a high official accused by legislators and senior clerics of saying that Iran was a friend of the Israeli people.

Nonetheless, Ahmadinejad repeated his opposition to Israel, saying that while "some say the idea of a Greater Israel has expired, I say the idea of a lesser Israel has expired, too." He also called the Holocaust a "fake" and accused Israel of perpetrating a holocaust on the Palestinian people, The Associated Press said.

In mid-July, the vice president for tourism, Esfandiar Rahim Mashai, was quoted as saying that Iran was "a friend of the Israeli people." He repeated the comment in August, being quoted as having said that there was "no hostility toward the Israeli people."

The rejection of Israel is a founding principle of Iran's Islamic revolution so any suggestion of recognition of Israel is heretical, and Mashai's remarks drew protests from about 200 legislators and from some senior clerics. But, despite their calls for his ouster, Mashai was not dismissed or disciplined.

On Thursday, Ahmadinejad, whose son is married to one of Mashai's daughters, came to his defense, saying that Mashai had "served the people and the government for 30 years."

"He has never used the term 'Israeli people' and never will," he said.

Instead, Ahmadinejad insisted that "what Mashai said is the message of the government," defining that as Iran wanted to help people who were "tricked" by the authorities into living in Israel.

"Our nation has no problem with other nations, but as far as the Zionist regime is concerned, we do not believe in an Israeli government or an Israeli nation," he said.

At a news conference, Ahmadinejad renewed his government's refusal to suspend uranium enrichment in a nuclear program that the United States and other Western countries contend is designed to build atomic weapons. Iran insists it has a right to develop nuclear power for civilian purposes.

The United States and other powers have offered concessions on trade and other incentives if Iran suspends uranium enrichment. But Ahmadinejad said Thursday that "the era of suspension has ended."

"Iran's position on the nuclear issue has not changed," he said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency issued a report this week saying that Iran had substantially improved the efficiency of its centrifuges that produce enriched uranium and acknowledging that it had failed "to make any substantial progress" in its investigation of Iran's nuclear program.

Last month, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme religious leader, responded to mounting domestic criticism of Ahmadinejad with a strong statement of support, praising his internal policies and his dogged defense of the country's nuclear program, Iranian news media reported.



Mehdi Ghasemi/AP

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad lashing out at Israel in a news conference Thursday.

Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005 on a mandate to distribute Iran's oil wealth among the poor. But prices have soared in the last three years and the unemployment rate has increased, inspiring criticism at home. His support for Mashai has also drawn questioning

about his choice of political allies.

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president and still an influential cleric, also criticized Ahmadinejad this month, in two speeches blaming him for mismanagement that has led to shortages of heating gas and electrical power.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL September 09, 2008

Opinion

Iraqi Leaders Opposed Biden's Partition Plan

By DAN SENOR

On Sunday's "Meet the Press," Sen. Joseph Biden made a series of stunning arguments in defense of his plan for segregation of Iraq along ethnic and sectarian lines. When Mr. Biden first announced his partition plan in May 2006, Iraqi leaders and U.S. officials understood it to mean the establishment of strong Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish regional administrations. The Biden plan would have also begun a phased redeployment of U.S. troops in 2006 and withdrawn most of them by the end of 2007.

Despite deep resistance from the Iraqi government, Mr. Biden tried to turn his plan into U.S. policy, introducing a nonbinding Senate resolution that called for its implementation. But his effort completely backfired in Baghdad. The proposal ended up unifying all the disparate Iraqi factions in opposition.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who called on the Iraqi parliament to meet and formally reject the Biden plan, immediately went on Iraqi television with a blistering statement: "[Biden] should stand by Iraq to solidify its unity and its sovereignty . . . [He] shouldn't be proposing its division. That could be a disaster not just for Iraq but for the region."

On "Meet the Press" Mr. Biden dismissed Mr. Maliki's objections because the Iraqi prime minister's "popularity is very much in question." Based on what? Most independent analysts who have recently traveled to Iraq point to his heightened popularity as a result

of the stabilization of Anbar province, the decimation of al Qaeda in Iraq, and his decision to successfully confront Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army in Basra.

The notion that a number of other Iraqi leaders supported the Biden plan is not correct either. Actually, it was just the opposite.

Abdul Mahdi al-Karbala'i, the representative of Iraq's most senior Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, called the Senate resolution "a step toward the breakup of Iraq. It is a mistake to imagine that such a plan will lead to a reduction in chaos in Iraq; rather, on the contrary, it will lead to an increase in the butchery and a deepening of the crisis of this country, and the spreading of increased chaos, even to neighboring states."

The Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars also denounced the plan. "This is a dangerous partitioning based on sectarianism and ethnicity," said Hashim Taie, a member of the Iraqi Accordance Front, the largest Sunni party in the parliament.

Qays al-Atwani, the moderator of the popular "Talk of the Hour" television show, interviewed Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis about the Biden resolution. He concluded: "For the first time in Iraq, all political blocs, decision makers and religious authorities agree on rejecting the [Biden] resolution that contradicts the will of the Iraqi people." The Senate resolution even managed to provoke radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's political supporters to momentarily join their rivals -- all in opposition to the Biden plan.

Secular Sunni parliamentarian Mithal al-Alusi held a news conference in Baghdad to call on the Iraqi government to formally declare Mr. Biden "a persona non grata" in Iraq. As for Iraq's neighbors, The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League both denounced the Biden resolution.

The uproar was unsurprising, as partition would have involved expelling Iraqis from their homes. How would a partition work, for example, in major cities like Kirkuk, which is majority Kurdish but also has a large Sunni population, and substantial Christian and Turkomen populations? The likely outcome would have been forced relocation. This could have sparked a wave of renewed sectarian violence, if not civil war.

On Sunday, when Mr. Biden was asked about the current progress in Iraq, he managed to take the lion's share of the credit: "I'm encouraged because they're doing the things I suggested . . . That's why it is moving toward some mild possibility of a resolution." But we should be grateful that Iraqis did *not* do as he suggested. Mr. Biden's frustration with the looming Iraqi civil war in 2006 and early 2007 was understandable. The U.S. was on the verge of total defeat and Iraq was at risk of collapse. But Mr. Biden's plan would have inflamed Iraq's already volatile situation.

Mr. Senor is an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a founder of Rosemont Capital. He served as a senior adviser to the Coalition in Iraq and was based in Baghdad in 2003 and 2004.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL September 12, 2008

(Letter to the Editor)

Biden's Iraq Plan May Have Helped

In his Sept. 9 op-ed "Iraqi Leaders Opposed Biden's Partition Plan" [see below] criticizing Sen. Joe Biden's plan for a decentralized Iraq, Dan Senor asserts that Sen. Biden's "proposal ended up unifying all the disparate Iraqi factions in opposition." This is untrue. Iraqi Kurdistan, which already has the strong regional administration proposed by Mr. Biden, strongly supports his plan. For the Kurds, the preferred alternative to decentralization is not greater unity but separation. In a January 2005 nonbinding referendum 98% of the Kurds voted for independence.

Mr. Senor is right to say that many Shiite and Sunni leaders have criticized the Biden plan. Their actions, however, tell a different story. Iraq's parliament has already passed a law enabling Shiites and Sunnis to form their own regions, and the largest Shiite party is moving ahead with its project to make Iraq's nine southern governorships into a single Shiite region. Under Iraq's constitution,

regions can override federal law and can even have their own militaries.

Mr. Biden's plan is nothing more than an expression of support for decisions the Iraqi people have already made. While asserting it is doing the opposite, the Bush administration has been pushing along the same lines as the Biden plan. In 2005, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad helped negotiate an Iraqi constitution that establishes powerful regions and an almost powerless central government. And, the Sunni Awakening -- so key to the success of the surge -- is basically a Sunni military comparable to the one the Kurds already have.

Peter W. Galbraith
Townshend, Vt.

(Mr. Galbraith is a former U.S. ambassador to Croatia.)

San Francisco Chronicle September 9, 2008

Iraqi parliament begins key session in Green Zone

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA, BAGHDAD. (AP) --

Iraqi lawmakers convened their fall session Tuesday, facing decisions on key issues like provincial elections, oil regulation and a security deal with the U.S., seen as vital for transforming improved security into a lasting peace.

American critics have long complained that Iraqi leaders and politicians have failed to seize the opportunity created by a reduction in violence this year to reach power-sharing agreements among the rival Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish communities.

Several of the bills before parliament are seen as crucial to reconciliation between the factions. U.S. officials hope that provincial elections in particular will encourage political participation by disaffected Sunni Arabs and make local administrations more responsive to the public.

The session got off to a slow start. Parliament speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani opened it two hours late because not enough members were there for a quorum by the announced start time. The session began with 160 of 275 legislators and adjourned about an hour later.

Much criticism has been heaped on the parliament, an unwieldy institution which often fails to muster a quorum and puts off decisions.

In his opening remarks, al-Mashhadani called for streamlining the decision-making process, acknowledging that the assembly had "shortcomings in the practice of democracy" and lacked "a spirit of accordance."

He asked leaders of the major parliament blocs to attend a meeting Wednesday on the election bill, which failed to win approval last

month because of Kurdish objections to a power-sharing arrangement for oil-rich Kirkuk, which they want to incorporate to their self-ruled northern region.

Besides the bill on elections, lawmakers must also tackle legislation to regulate the oil industry, and they will have to ratify a still-unfinished security pact governing the status of American troops in the country starting next year. U.S. and Iraqi negotiators have been working on the pact for months, but the talks have hogged down over a schedule for a U.S. withdrawal and legal jurisdiction over American military members.

Tuesday's session was held in Baghdad Convention Center inside the U.S.-protected Green Zone, despite an announcement last June that the fall session would be held in the former National Assembly building outside the zone for the first time since the legislature was elected in January 2005.

The decision to move to the new location was hailed as a sign of improved security and an affirmation of independence from the U.S.-led coalition. But security measures to protect the assembly building were not completed ahead of the fall opening.

Although security has improved dramatically since last year's U.S. troop-buildup in Iraq, American commanders warn that the gains are reversible without political progress. Sunni and Shiite militants have been hattered but not defeated, they say.

As a sign of continuing instability, a bomb concealed in a push cart exploded Tuesday at a

checkpoint near Tarmiyah north of Baghdad, killing a policeman and two members of a Sunni security group that has turned against al-Qaida.

In Baghdad, a bomb was discovered Tuesday on a car owned by the Al-Arabiya television network, in what appeared to have been an assassination attempt against its chief correspondent, station employees said.

The driver and a security guard discovered the device as they waited to pick up correspondent Juwad al-Hattab at his home in the central Baghdad district of Salhiya, station executive editor Nabil Khatib said.

Khatib said the bomb, about the size of a laptop computer, was hidden under the front seat on the passenger side. Police were called but the bomb exploded before they arrived, heavily damaging the car but causing no injuries, he said.

"It appears that it was timed to explode while al-Hattab was driving to the office," Khatib said. "We understand it as an attempt on his life and as an attack against the station."

No group claimed responsibility for the bomb, but Al-Arabiya correspondent Majid Hameed said the staff had received threats both directly and on Arabic language Web sites. Some hard-line Islamists consider Al-Arabiya too pro-Western in its views.

Another bomb exploded Tuesday near the home of an Iraqi major general in west Baghdad, injuring him and two civilians, police said.

Guardian

September 10 2008

French firm offers trip to Kurdistan, 'the other Iraq'

Angelique Chrisafis in Paris - The Guardian

With foreign occupation, violent resistance and sectarian bloodshed making it one of the world's most dangerous countries, Iraq might not seem like an obvious contender for up-and-coming tourist destination of the year. But the relative calm of the green, mountainous northern enclave of Kurdistan is attracting growing numbers of curious European travellers.

Following a British company which leads the market in tours to Iraq's autonomous northern region of Kurdistan, a Paris-based travel agent yesterday added Iraq to its brochure, saying French tourists had signed up wanting an "original experience" and to meet local people "behind the news".

Geoff Hann, of Surrey-based Hinterland Travel, the leading operator in the region who even ran a postwar tour of southern Iraq in October 2003, said he had led 150 people on tours to Iraqi Kurdistan over the past three to four years.

"It's not that easy to sell because of the media image of Iraq - people think they can't go there. And as a tour operator leading the group, it can be expensive and difficult to organise guides and transport because of a lack of infrastructure. But otherwise it's delightful. Mostly security is fine in Kurdistan," he said.

Terre Entière, the French firm seeking a share in the market, hailed a "renaissance" but said it would limit its holidays to Kurdistan and admitted that Iraq's biggest archaeological and historical sites remained out of bounds in the south.

Iraqi Kurdistan, about the size of Switzerland and home to nearly 3.8 million people, is heavily promoting investment and tourism, branding itself "The Other Iraq". The Kurdish government's website boasts that no foreigner has been killed or kidnapped in its territory since 2003, although a suicide attack on a Kurdish party office that left 109 people



Holiday drawcard: An ancient castle towers above a park in Kurdistan's capital, Erbil, 350 kilometres north of Baghdad. Photo: AP

dead in 2004 has prompted caution among would-be tour operators.

The biggest recent influx of tourists has been that of Iraqis heading to the rather more tranquil northern region for a break from violence of the south. This summer, more than 23,000 Iraqis headed north, up from 3,700 last year.



Syria blocks 160 Kurdish websites

September 9, 2008 Damascus, (AFP) —

SYRIAN authorities have blocked access to 160 dissident websites since 2000 as part of a drive to censor the press and control Internet use, a free speech organisation said on Tuesday.

Security services have stopped access to "160 sites run by Kurdish political parties, opposition groups, newspapers -- particularly from Lebanon -- human rights, Islamic and civil society organisations," said the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression.

"The campaign ... is on the increase," SCMFE president Mazen Darwish said.

"It is the start of a policy of censoring the press and aims to control Internet users," who are increasingly using this forum to comment on Syrian politics."



Several sites have recently been blocked, said the group, mentioning Akhbar Suria, which published photos showing where Hezbollah military chief Imad Mughnieh was assassinated by a car bomb in Damascus in February.

Future Movement advocates democracy and equal rights for Syria's one million Kurdish minority. The Kurdish language is not allowed to be taught in schools and tens of thousands of Kurds were denied citizenship after a 1960s census.

Freedom of expression remains tightly controlled in Syria, and security forces have sweeping powers of arrest and detention.

A total 1,500 people were arrested for political reasons in 2007 and hundreds more who were arrested in previous years remained in detention, according to rights group Amnesty International's 2008 report.



For Immediate Release Office of the Press Secretary
September 10, 2008

President Bush Meets with President Talabani of Iraq

Oval Office

3:53 P.M. EDT

PRESIDENT BUSH: Mr. President, welcome. First of all, I am so pleased to see that you're looking good. The President's health is strong, and that's going to be very important for the people of Iraq. After all, there's been no stronger defender of a free Iraq than President Talabani. I've known him for a long time. He cares deeply about the Iraqi people, and he has been a strong defender of human liberty.

Mr. President, thanks for the good conversation we had about the election laws, about the need to get a strategic framework agreement signed. And thank you very much for bringing me up to date on your perspective about life inside of Iraq. It's -- things have changed a lot since we've known each other.

PRESIDENT TALABANI: Of course.

PRESIDENT BUSH: And attitudes are completely different now that people realize the security situation has changed and mothers can raise their children in a more normal life. It's still difficult, but there's no doubt that the surge has been effective, which has enabled us to take out troops. Iraqis want there to be fewer U.S. troops, the United States wants there to be fewer U.S. troops, but both of us want to realize that vision based upon success.

And so, Mr. President, welcome back. I'm glad you're feeling good. And thank you for the visit.

PRESIDENT TALABANI: Well, Mr. President, thank you very much for giving me the honor of meeting you again. I think it's clear that we are in Iraq looking to you as a hero of liberation of Iraq from worst kind of dictatorship. And now we are working with your -- with you, Mr. President, for finalizing the strategic framework agreement between United States and Iraq.

And also, we are always getting benefit from your views about how to secure Iraq. I think you know very well that you and we in Iraq achieved very good successes on terrorism. Now I can say all parts of Iraq liberated from terrorist control and activities. It's true that some groups remain hiding themselves from here or there, but there's no place, no inch of Iraqi land under the control of terrorist activities. There are some terrorist -- still groups working -- hiding themselves, and thanks to you and sacrifice of your brave army and to Iraqi people, now we can live in peace and security.

And Iraq government started to spend the money which we have for serving the Iraqi people and rebuilding the country, reconstructing the country. Not only we liberated our country from terrorist activities, but also from militias, outlawed militias who are also making troubles and danger for Iraqi people.

And as you have heard, the Basra city, Sadr City, (inaudible), Ninawa, Baqubah -- all these cities are now liberated. So we are thankful to you and to your people, your army. We hope that the agreement about this strategy formation will be signed soon.

And as usual, we are working, our parliament is working now for finalizing the draft of a new law for election provinces, and I hope that, as I heard the news yesterday, I hope that today it will be finalized, because the groups -- head of groups of parliament are now gathering in parliament to reach -- to finalize this.

In our country, we are now busy to reconstruct our country and to rebuild our country. And I am glad to tell you, Mr. President, that our position with our neighbors is improved very well -- with Turkey, with Syria, with Iran, with the Arab countries. The relation is notable now and we have no problem with any of these countries. In contrary, many, many new ambassadors are coming --

PRESIDENT BUSH: That's right.

PRESIDENT TALABANI: -- to our country from Arab countries. And our visit of Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr. Tayyip Recep Erdogan, and of the -- His Majesty, the King of Jordan, to Baghdad were very successful, and was encouraging to Iraqi people to understand that they have friends outside Iraq.

So I hope that friendship and relation between your great people and the Iraqi people will continue and will be strengthened. And we will never forget what you have done for our people.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you, President.

END 3:59 P.M. EDT





September 10, 2008

Displaced Iraqis live under stands in soccer stadium

Nicholas Spangler and Mohammed al Dulaimy | McClatchy Newspapers

KIRKUK, Iraq — Qader Abdullah Rasoul visited Kirkuk Stadium the day it opened and thought it beautiful. The lush turf was newly laid, and the stands were smooth concrete, steeply tiered to seat tens of thousands of soccer fans. Odai Hussein himself, son of Saddam, attended, and on that day in 1986 Iraq's national team thumped Saudi Arabia 2-1.

Now Rasoul lives in the stadium along with 2,500 others, mostly Kurds. They inhabit mud and cinder-block huts beneath the stands, in the parking lots and the luxury boxes, and it's no longer beautiful. It's a dirty, sewage-ridden slum and Rasoul is the unofficial mayor.

"We apologize to the youth of Kirkuk, because this is a place for sport," he said. "But where else can we go?"

The answer is nowhere, for the time being. Five years after the birth of a new Iraq, Kirkuk is under Kurdish control, at least for now, and at the center of national debate over whether it will join the semiautonomous Kurdistan region or remain under federal control.

The people who live in the stadium are the smallest players in this debate but are caught up in it nevertheless, painted by Kurdish politicians as victims of a central government that's insensitive to Kurdish concerns and by Arabs and Turkomen as pawns in a Kurdish strategy for demographic domination.

So far, Rasoul said, he and his neighbors have been the only losers. "I blame the provincial council. I blame the governor. I blame the central government," he said.

Saddam's government pushed Rasoul and his family from their Kirkuk home in 1997, part of a strategy to assert central government control over the province. In 2003, in the first weeks after Saddam fell, they left a rented house in Ramadi to return. The radio was full of talk of a new Iraq, and hundreds of

thousands of Kurds were doing the same.

But Rasoul returned to nothing.

"I imagined they would give us a piece of land and money," Rasoul said. "No one even said hello to us."

The home he and his family once lived in had been bulldozed. The 10-million dinar (\$8,534) resettlement check he thought would be waiting for him never materialized; that



Qader Abdullah Rasoul stands outside his home at the stadium in Kirkuk,

program, he was told, covers only Kirkuk residents who were counted in the province's last valid census, in 1957, and their descendants. At the time of the census, he said, his grandfather lived in nearby Sulaimaniyah. It didn't matter that he later returned, that Rasoul's father spent most of his life in Kirkuk or that Rasoul himself has as well.

He has a job as a phys-ed teacher but doesn't earn enough to buy a house in a country where mortgages are almost unheard-of. Housing prices have risen, and he can't even afford to rent.

So a room under the stadium is home for his wife, their six children and him — a temporary solution, he once thought.

There was room for a gas burner, a refrigerator and a television. He ripped up a piece of the rubber running track and laid it over the mud outside, built a cinderblock wall for privacy.

Years passed. His sons dropped out of school to work in a factory. His middle son has trouble seeing, maybe because of the dust. Rasoul squabbles with his wife. Every couple he knows is squabbling.

His neighbors elected him as their representative because he had at least a degree from a technical institute. He pestered the local government until it installed pipes for drinking water; water runs through them about for two hours every eight days. He pestered the Health Department until it provided water cans and purification pills.

But he hasn't found a home for anyone. "I failed," he said. "More than 10 times we went to the governor, parliament, the Kurdistan government, and they have never found a solution for residence. We are still in between. For me, personally, I wish I could go back to Ramadi."

Members of the Kirkuk provincial council say the people living in the stadium are the responsibility of the federal Ministry of Displaced People and Migrants. Ali Mosawi, the deputy minister, said this week that he knew nothing about the situation. "If they are displaced, of course we will have some ideas about helping them."

(Spangler reports for The Miami Herald. Dulaimy is a McClatchy special correspondent in Baghdad.)

INTERVIEW-Iraq gov't, Kurds to tackle strained ties-deputy PM

REUTERS

SEPTEMBER 10, 2008

By Missy Ryan, Reuters

BAGHDAD, Sept 10 (Reuters) - Officials from Iraq's central government and its autonomous Kurdistan region have set up a committee that aims to defuse mounting tensions over oil and territorial disputes, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih said the working group had begun meeting several weeks ago with a mission to ease strains over the disputed city of Kirkuk, a stalled oil law, the role of Kurdish Peshmerga troops and other divisive issues.

"We know what the problems are," Salih told Reuters, "a whole host of issues that are at the moment creating tension."

"There is no denying that there are problems, there are tensions, and there are differences of attitude. The question is: how we manage those differences," added



Salih, a Kurd.

The local government in Kurdistan has voiced frustration in recent months at what it sees as growing unilateralism by the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in Baghdad.

Kurds, who make up less than a fifth of Iraq's mainly Arab population, have had a complex and often bloody history with Baghdad.

Killed by the thousands under Saddam Hussein, they have enjoyed virtual autonomy in their northern enclave since the first Gulf War in 1991. After Saddam was toppled in 2003, they became partners in the U.S.-backed Baghdad government.

Relations have been especially strained over Kirkuk, an oil-rich city that lies outside of Kurdistan but which Kurds see as their ancestral home.

The struggle for control of Kirkuk, which is also home to Arabs and ethnic Turkmen, has delayed local elections because lawmakers in Baghdad have failed to agree how the city would be treated under a new law needed to hold the vote.

The feud has raised fears violence may again erupt in Iraq just as bloodshed has dropped to its lowest level in four years.

"This link between the elections and Kirkuk was unfortunate," Salih said.

Tensions also flared over Khanaqin, an ethnically mixed town in Diyala province where Peshmerga troops had been stationed.

Kurdish officials objected when Baghdad ordered Iraqi troops to replace the Peshmerga as part of a push to pacify the restive province. Salih said the row was largely resolved after police were given primary responsibility for the town's security.

LEGAL AMBIGUITY

In a recent interview with the London-based Asharq al-Awsat newspaper, Kurdish President Masoud Barzani complained that Kurds had been marginalized by Baghdad in key security, economic and military matters, and asserted Kurdish rights in disputed areas.

"We refuse to be treated as second-class Iraqis... We have been on this land

before those that now claim that they are more Iraqi than we are. We do not accept such outbidding."

Salih said the new group, meeting regularly with Maliki, would also seek to end an impasse over the national oil law, a draft of which was passed by the Iraqi cabinet in early 2007.

The law has been bogged down partly over whether Kurdistan will have the power to sign oil contracts on its own and who will control reserves there.

Also contentious is the status of oil contracts the Kurdish government has already signed, which Baghdad deems illegal.

Iraq, which has the world's third largest proven oil reserves, wants to cash in on its oil fields, and plans to sign a spate of lucrative contracts next year with foreign oil firms.

"This legal ambiguity is hurting all of us, all of Iraq, not just the (Kurdistan Regional Government)," Salih said. (Additional reporting by Wisam Mohammed; editing by Sami Aboudi)

Kurds and their Iraqi allies see differences

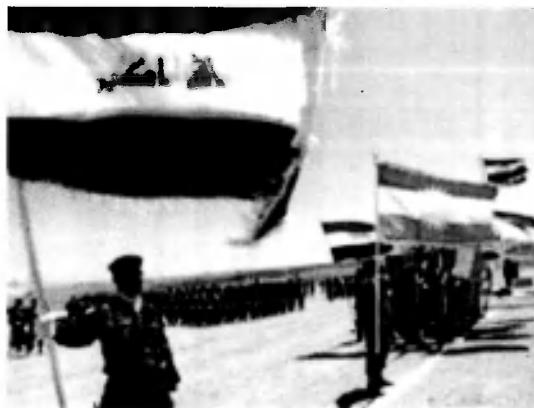
Cracks in the Kurdish/Iraqi partnership further hinder peace for either party.

By Ako Muhammed
The Kurdish Globe

"Kurdish negotiators in Baghdad have opened 99 gates for dialogue and one gate for war."- Khanaqin representative Mulla Bakhtiyar.

The head of the Kurdistan presidency office, Fu'ad Hussein, announced on Monday that differences are continuing to appear between the Kurdistan coalition list on one side and the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) list and the Islamic Party on the other side. These allies don't support Kurds in determining issues, he stated.

"There are strategic agreements and a memorandum of understanding between the Kurdistan coalition and the UIA and Islamic Party, but these sides aren't showing any support for the Kurdish attitude regarding issuing the provincial council law and Article 24, in addition to the latest Khanaqin issue," said Hussein. Iraqi army units came to disputed Khanaqin town where Kurdish Peshmarga forces have been patrolling for more than a year. An Iraqi army request that the Peshmarga forces leave created problems between Erbil and Baghdad.



Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga forces holding the flags of Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, on the junction of Iraq's borders with both Syria and Turkey. AFP/File/Safin Hamed

Hussein said because of issues like these, differences are occurring between the sides; but he pointed out that "there are attempts to exceed the differences, and if no solution can be reached then the Kurdistan coalition will make its position public."

Kurdistan Parliament member Adham Barzani told the Aswat al-Iraq (Voices of Iraq) independent news agency that the current crises between the central and region

governments are a conspiracy against the Kurdish nation and that neighboring countries are playing a part.

"We all must know that the Iraqi government-without going for the opinion of some neighboring countries-has no authority to grant Kurds any rights," said Barzani. "Most of the officials who now run Iraq and are parts in the political process have not been able to take themselves away from chauvinist

thinking and the Baath ideology." Barzani, who is from the Kurdistan Democratic Party, pointed out that Kurds have to expect further problems like Khanaqin and the ratification of Article 24 of the provincial council elections law.

But Kurds are becoming stronger in defending their rights than at any other previous time. "The position of the Kurdish political leadership is very clear; we defend our land, never attack, and always prefer peace," said Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani's Khanaqin representative, Mulla Bakhtiyar. Peshmarga troops remain deployed around Khanaqin only for protection and defense, he added. Bakhtiyar, who was speaking on Tuesday to local officials in Kifri town, added that Kurdish negotiators in Baghdad have opened 99 gates for dialogue and one gate for war. "If they [the Iraqi government] choose the gate to war, they have been told that if war happens in Khanaqin it will happen in Kirkuk, Mosul, and the other disputed areas." If war occurs, he warned, the Iraqi army will be defeated and the entire political process in Iraq will be destroyed.

The New York Times September 11, 2008

So, Should Iraq Get F-16 Fighter Aircraft?

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Iraq's increasingly confident military is shopping for some fancy new hardware — U.S.-made F-16 fighter aircraft, among the most technologically advanced weapons available today.

You can read about it here:

There's a clear upside. An Iraq that is armed with F-16s and able to control its own airspace could help speed the withdrawal of American troops — a goal we and most Americans endorse.

At the same time, this F-16 request is a decision that must be carefully thought through by the Bush administration and its successor, by the Pentagon, and by Congress.

While Iraq's post-Saddam Hussein military has become more competent in recent months, it is still a country tormented by ethnic and sectarian divisions. The central government, dominated by majority Shi'ites, provokes great suspicion in many quarters.

The government has yet to integrate many Sunnis — the ethnic group that ran the country under Saddam — into positions in the army and security forces. And it has yet to adopt laws detailing how Iraq's oil wealth will be distributed or how provincial elections will be conducted.

Without progress on critical issues like these — and perhaps even with it — there is a looming danger that a central Iraq government armed with advanced weaponry could end up using it on its own people — or recklessly against other countries in the region.

Although the F-16 is designed to shoot down enemy aircraft, it can carry precision guided bombs and missiles that can be used to support ground forces.

Earlier this week, Kurdish leaders warned that if Baghdad bought F-16s there would have to be guarantees that the aircraft will not be used against the semiautonomous Kurdish region in the north.

That's not surprising: Saddam's ruthless bombing of Kurds is seared into their memory.

REUTERS

FEAR AND MISTRUST PLAGUE IRAQ'S MOSUL

11 September 2008 By Tim Cocks

MOSUL, Iraq (Reuters) - Falah Mohammed peered over his shoulder as he spoke of how militants threatened to kill him and his family unless he quit his government job.

"It wasn't worth the risk after the third threatening letter, so I left," said the former guard in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. "Insurgents have created so much fear in this place."

Officials and security personnel die at the hands of gunmen nearly every day in Mosul, a city of 1.8 million people still struggling to shake off a determined insurgency while much of Iraq enjoys its best security in years.

Attacks in Mosul and surrounding Nineveh province have fallen since an Iraqi-led offensive against Sunni Islamist al Qaeda and other insurgents was stepped up in May. Markets are busier and traffic heavier.

But residents say a climate of fear persists in Mosul, an ancient melting pot of ethnic and sectarian groups.

"People here are very afraid," said Nisreen Mustafa, a housewife. "We always heard explosions before the operation and we still hear them a lot now. What's changed?"

U.S. military officials say attacks fell from around 130 per week just before the May offensive to 30 a week in Nineveh by July, before creeping up to 60-70 per week.

"It's things like targeted drive-bys on Iraqi police," said Major Adam Boyd, a U.S. military intelligence officer in Mosul.

"There's a campaign of intimidation (against) ... the Iraqi security forces ... to get the local populace to feel insecure."

Two weeks ago, insurgents tried to kill Major-General Riyadh Jalal Tawfiq, commander of military operations in Nineveh, with a roadside bomb. Two professors from Mosul University have been killed in the past three months.

ETHNIC PATCHWORK

A U.S. army patrol rumbles through Mosul, past a main street so devastated by fighting that barely a building stands. Bombed out concrete roofs droop over collapsed walls. Rubble litters streets. The vehicles cross a bridge over the Tigris River and the smell of raw sewage fills the air.

But as neighboring western Anbar province has shown, even the most violent, lawless places in Iraq can be turned around.

The desert region of Anbar was lost to insurgents in 2006, but this month the U.S. military handed control of security back to Iraqi forces after Sunni Arab tribes joined forces with the military to largely expel al Qaeda from the province.

U.S. officials do not expect Anbar's triumph to be repeated easily in northern Iraq, where communities are a complex patchwork of Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs, Kurds, ethnic Turkmen, pre-Islamic Yazidi Kurds and Assyrian Christians.

Anbar by comparison is overwhelmingly Sunni Arab.

"The dialogue in Anbar between sheikhs willing to put aside their differences is one reason ... they (succeeded)," said Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Molinari, U.S. army operations officer in Mosul.

"You don't see that here in Nineveh. The provincial government is not open to

that kind of dialogue."



U.S. soldiers of 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armoured Cavalry Regiment patrol a road in Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad September 5, 2008.

REUTERS/Tim Cocks

LACK OF TRUST

Mistrust between Arabs, who make up most of the police, and Kurds, who fill most army posts, hinders intelligence efforts.

In a hot, stuffy office with only one fan, U.S. Army Captain Adam Cannon greets two Iraqi army officers in their Kurdish tongue, chats, then hands them a list of suspected insurgents.

But there's a problem, says Major Jahir Bahoddin: few in the predominantly Sunni Arab neighborhoods will talk.

"They won't help us," he told Reuters. "They'd really rather not cooperate with Kurds. We are trying to tell them: 'we're here to rid your neighborhood of insurgents'. Even when they want to help, they are too afraid to speak."

Cannon said Kurdish army officers, mistrustful of Arabs, do not share information with the police. Many Kurds have bitter memories of Saddam Hussein's oppression of Kurds in the 1980s.

Ultimately, officials say, success will depend on reviving the economy of this battered metropolis, which sprawls around the crumbling walls of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh.

Jobless men are easily coaxed into militant groups and residents are losing patience with the pace of reconstruction.

"A lot of things need to be fixed and they're not doing it," said Saad Mohammed Rasheed, a former soldier in Saddam's army who now runs a shop. "There's no water, no electricity. We don't hate the Americans any more; our anger is for the government."

Iraq cancels 6 contracts with Western oil firms

By Andrew E. Kramer and Campbell Robertson

An Iraqi plan to award six no-bid contracts to Western oil companies, which drew sharp criticism from several U.S. senators this summer, has been withdrawn, participants in the negotiations said.

The companies confirmed Wednesday that the deals had been canceled. This was one day after the Iraq oil minister, Hussain al-Shahristani, said at an OPEC meeting in Vienna that the talks had dragged on for so long that the companies could not do the work on schedule. The contracts, with Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Royal Dutch Shell, Total, BP and several smaller companies for one-year deals, were announced in June and then delayed.

While not particularly lucrative by industry standards, the contracts were valued for providing a foothold in Iraq at a time when oil companies were being shut out of energy-rich countries around the world. The companies will still be eligible to compete for other contracts in Iraq.

The six no-bid deals were for work to increase Iraqi oil production from existing oil fields by half a million barrels

a day — the same amount by which the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries agreed to reduce output at its meeting Tuesday. After its cancellation of the deals, Iraq reduced by 200,000 barrels a day its goal of producing 2.9 million barrels a day by the end of the year.

The contracts would have been the first major oil agreements with the central government since the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, though the Kurdistan region has separately signed more than 20 contracts.

Recently, however, Iraq's central government has moved on with other energy deals.

The Oil Ministry in August signed its first major post-Saddam-era contract with China National Petroleum. On Sunday, the Iraqi cabinet approved a deal with Shell to process natural gas in southern Iraq.

The ministry informed the oil companies of the cancellation Sept. 3, according to a statement from Shell. In Vienna, Shahristani said the ministry would now invite bids on the contracts.

Shell said the Iraqi side had broken off negotiations.

This summer, a group of Democratic

senators led by Charles Schumer of New York appealed to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to block the deals, contending that they could undermine the efforts of Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites to reach an agreement on a hydrocarbon law and a revenue-sharing deal. This criticism was conveyed to Shahristani by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in June, and the deals were subsequently delayed.

"I'm glad the Iraqis heard our plea that to do this now would be bad for Iraq and bad for Iraqi-American relations," Schumer said by telephone Wednesday. "It's a good first step."

"Now let's make progress on the long-term" goal of passing an oil law, he said.

The State Department had responded that the contracts were an Iraqi affair, though American advisers had helped draft them. Meanwhile, the ministry has said it intends to go forward with new oil deals, whether or not Parliament passes a hydrocarbon law.

Schumer said he would propose an amendment to the military appropriation bill in Congress that would specify that should Iraq sign any petroleum contracts before passing the law, profits from those deals would be used to help defray U.S. reconstruction costs in Iraq.

Car bomb kills dozens in city north of Baghdad

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD: A car bomb ripped through a crowded commercial district in a mainly Shiite town north of Baghdad on Friday, killing at least 32 people and wounding 43, Iraqi officials said.

The explosion apparently was aimed at a police station but it also severely damaged a nearby medical clinic in a crowded area in Dujail, according to the police.

The blast was the latest in a series of attacks in areas north of Baghdad, where violence has been slower to decline than elsewhere in the country.

Earlier Friday, a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of a Shiite mosque farther north, in Sinjar, as worshipers left prayers at midday, killing 2 civilians and wounding 15, Colonel Awad Kahlil of the Iraqi police said. Sinjar is near Mosul, which is the target of an ongoing U.S.-Iraqi operation against Sunni insurgents.

In political developments, Shiite followers of the cleric Moktada al-Sadr demonstrated in Baghdad and in the southern city of Kufa against plans for a U.S.-Iraqi security agreement that will determine the status of the U.S. military in Iraq after the current UN mandate expires at the end of the year.

In the Sadr City neighborhood of Baghdad, Sheik Abdul Hadi al-Mohammadawi, an aide to Sadr, told worshipers during prayers that it was a "suspicious agreement" that would

bring "humiliation and degradation to the Iraqi people."

After the prayers, worshipers burned American and Israeli flags and chanted: "No, America, no! No, agreement, no!"

In Kufa, Sadr supporters carried banners, including one that said: "We won't accept Iraq being an American colony!" Another said: "The suspicious agreement means the permanent occupation of Iraq."

U.S.-Iraqi talks on the security agreement have slowed over Washington's insistence on retaining legal jurisdiction over American troops in Iraq and differences over a schedule for the departure of the U.S. military. Iraqi officials want foreign troops out by the end of 2011. President George W. Bush has resisted a firm timetable for withdrawing troops.

Iraqi Deputy Premier and al-Sistani Discuss Kurdish Crisis

By Mina Al-Oraibi - Asharq Alawsat

London, Asharq Al-Awsat - As relations between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish leaders witness tension against the background of developments in Khanaqin and Kirkuk, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, traveled to Al-Najaf on Thursday to brief the Shiite religious authority, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, on the Kurdish viewpoint of these developments.

At a two hours meeting at Al-Sistani's headquarters, Salih stressed "the Kurdish party's commitment to the plan of a federal democratic Iraq and to the Constitution for which the majority of the Iraqi people voted."

In a telephone interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, Salih explained the reasons for his visit to Al-Najaf, saying: "I explained the viewpoint of the Kurdish leadership on the latest political developments and on the security situation in Iraq. I also explained some of the developments in Khanaqin and Kirkuk." According to Kurdish sources, Barham's decision to visit Al-Sistani was prompted by the keenness of the Kurdish leadership to explain its viewpoint to Al-Najaf's Shiite religious authority because of the recent "tense stances" in the Iraqi arena. They noted that for the past two weeks the Iraqi government and the Kurdish leadership have been negotiating

to solve pending issues, like the future of Kirkuk and the disputed areas, but have not reached tangible results beyond agreement on calming the situation in Khanaqin. Salih said: "I briefed Al-Sayyid Al-Sistani on some of the developments in the situation in Khanaqin and Kirkuk which led to some frenzied stances and problems. I stressed the Kurdish view that these problems must be solved by resorting to the Constitution and by honoring the text and spirit of the Constitution."

Discussing Al-Sistani's response to the Kurdish position, Salih said: "Al-Sistani stressed the necessity for dialogue among Iraqis, national unity, and putting dialogue above any other means." He added: "Al-Sistani emphasized his deep concern for a cohesive Iraqi national position on such crises and for solving problems inline with the Constitution and law." On the possibility of the Shiite religious authority's mediating between Baghdad and Arbil, Salih said: "There is no doubt that throughout history the Shiite religious authorities have played a [positive] role in cementing the unity of the Iraqi people." He added: "We will never forget the [supportive] position of the Shiite religious authorities on the Kurdish people's national

demands. Al-Sistani adopts a moderate and wise stand on these issues. We thought it appropriate to explain to him some of our concerns and viewpoints while underlining that a solution to these problems must be made by Iraqis and according to the Constitution."

Both sides also discussed the local elections amid questions about the possibility of holding the elections in the absence of accord on the new election law. Salih said: "We stressed the importance of freedom for the Iraqi citizen to elect whomever he wants and underlined the need to abide by the Constitution which guarantees every citizen the freedom to take part in the provincial council elections and secures continuity of the constitutional process." Salih however declined to discuss the details of ayatollah Al-Sistani's stand on the forthcoming elections. He said: "I do not want to delve into details." Regarding Al-Sistani's views of the security agreement that Baghdad and Washington intend to sign, Salih said: "Al-Sistani said that this issue concerns the Iraqi government which is expected to safeguard Iraq's sovereignty and ensures Iraq's interest in any stand it takes

United Press International

Kurdish PJAK dissidents call for world support

September 13, 2008 - Erbil-Hewler, Kurdistan region "Iraq", — (UPI)

The Iranian militant Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan, PJAK, called on the international community to stand in solidarity against the torture of its members by Iran.

PJAK is a separatist group affiliated with the Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party active in autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq and the Kurdistan province of Kurdistan in western Iran.

In a statement posted by the Coordination Committee on the PJAK Web site, the group blames Iran for torturing jailed members who oppose the regime in Tehran.

"They have tracked down and persecuted all political and civil activists, along with liberal and democratic intellectuals, to create the atmosphere of extreme fear and terror among the people," the statement read.

The statement said dissent is a legitimate and natural right recognized by international law and expressed support for Kurdish prisoners who staged a hunger strike Aug. 25 in opposition to their detention.

"We call upon the international community, United Nations, human rights organizations and the democratic forces all over the world to stand up with the

Kurdish and Iranian people in their struggle for freedom, democracy and peace," PJAK said.

Since 2004 the PJAK took up arms for self-rule in the country's mainly Kurdistan province northwestern of Iran (Iranian Kurdistan, Eastern Kurdistan). Half the members of PJAK are women.

In a report released in July 2008, the human rights organisation, Amnesty International expressed concern about the increased repression of Kurdish Iranians, particularly human rights defenders.

The report cited examples of religious and cultural discrimination against the estimated 12 million Kurds who live in Iran.

"We urge the Iranian authorities to take concrete measures to end any discrimination and associated human rights violations that Kurds, indeed all minorities in Iran, face," Amnesty said in its report.

"Kurds and all other members of minority communities in Iran, men, women and children, are entitled to enjoy their full range of human rights."

StarTribune

September 13, 2008

Many of Iraq's big dilemmas are now colliding in Kirkuk

As the government tries to normalize the region, at stake are questions of parliamentary power, oil and revenue-sharing, the limits of federalism and relations with neighbors.

By NICHOLAS SPANGLER, McClatchy News Service

KIRKUK, IRAQ The men line up by the hundreds every day at the blast wall on Al-Quds Street: Kurds who were forced out of the province of Kirkuk under Saddam Hussein's regime, Arabs who were brought in to replace them and others. They're all waiting for their checks.

If a man is lucky, he'll get a check for \$8,534 if he and his family are moving back into Kirkuk, double that if they're moving out.

Gingerly, ambivalently and amid Kafkaesque tangles of red tape, the government of Iraq is attempting to reverse Saddam's decades-long campaign of

ethnic cleansing, Arabization and border gerrymandering in this oil-rich northern area.

Given time, it could work. But Iraqi politics has moved Kirkuk to center stage, and the demands of a host of interested actors -- from Kurdish political parties to Sunni Muslim militants in Anbar Province and the governments of Turkey and the United States -- are colliding.

At stake are questions of parliamentary power, oil and revenue-sharing, the limits of Iraq's federalism and its relations with neighboring countries, especially

Turkey, which has a sizable Kurdish minority and fears the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq's north fueled by oil from Kirkuk.

Already, the collision has forced the indefinite postponement of provincial elections that the Bush administration and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki see as crucial to channeling the country's overlapping and sometimes violent sectarian and tribal tensions into a democratic process.

Parliament gridlocked on the prerequisite election law in August. It probably will resume debate soon, but it isn't clear that the situation is any more conducive to agreement now.

The New York Times

September 14, 2008

Bomb Kills 8 Kurdish Soldiers, Inflaming an Iraqi Regional Dispute

By SAM DAGHER

BAGHDAD — Eight Kurdish pesh merga soldiers were killed in a roadside bombing in a disputed part of eastern Diyala Province on Saturday, adding to tensions with the Iraqi government and local Arabs over the Kurds' presence in the area.

Among the dead in the bombing, in the town of Khanaqin, was the senior pesh merga commander for the area, according to the local police chief, Col. Azad Issa. The bomb, which went off as the Kurdish force was patrolling, killed six people on the spot; the other two died after being taken to the hospital, Colonel Issa said.

The Kurdish presence in Khanaqin, and in other nearby areas, has been a growing source of tension. Kurdish forces have been moving beyond the borders of their semiautonomous region in northern Iraq, in what they say is an effort to improve security.

But the move has been viewed by many Iraqi and American officials as a threat to stability in areas that are already prone to violence.

Also on Saturday, four employees of the privately owned television station Al Sharqiya were kidnapped and killed in the northern city of Mosul as they set out to record video for a popular show, the station reported.

Among those killed were the station's Mosul bureau chief, Musaab al-Azzawi, who is also the son of a Sunni Arab member of Parliament. The station, which the government has accused of being sympathetic toward Sunni insurgents and the former regime of Saddam Hussein, issued a statement blaming "incitement" by its government-owned rival, Iraqiya TV, for the killings.



Tensions between Kurdish forces, above, and Iraq's army have stoked fear just as years of Shiite Sunni violence wane. (By Andrea Bruce The Washington Post)

"Those who did this are not human beings," said Farida Adel, a correspondent for Al Sharqiya who had accompanied the same crew the day before on assignment in Mosul.

In eastern Baghdad, a bomb concealed in a kiosk used to sell ice killed four security personnel and wounded nine people at a checkpoint, The Associated Press reported. The blast killed three Iraqi police commandos and a member of a Sunni Awakening security group recruited by the Americans to fight Islamic insurgents, the police and medics said. Seven Iraqi security officers and two bystanders were reported wounded.

The violence came a day after bombings in Dujail and in northern Nineveh Province. The Nineveh bombing involved another disputed area in which the Kurdish presence outside the autonomous zone has caused tensions with Arabs in the region.

The disputed areas have been a main

topic of investigation for the United Nations special envoy to Iraq, Staffan de Mistura. Mr. de Mistura has drawn increasing criticism from Sunni Arabs, particularly for his two-day visit to Iran to discuss security in those areas, some of which are near the border.

One hard-line Sunni group, the Association of Muslim Scholars, has called for Mr. de Mistura's expulsion.

"De Mistura sought from the moment he arrived to interfere in matters sensitive for Iraqis such as his promotion of the term 'disputed areas,'" the group said in a posting on its Web site on Thursday. "De Mistura challenged the feelings of the Iraqi nation further and ignored its will to solve its problems on its own when he went to Iran."

Iraqi employees of The New York Times contributed reporting from Diyala Province and Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Washington Post September 13, 2008

Strip of Iraq 'on the Verge of Exploding'

Kurds Extend Role Beyond Autonomous Borders, Angering Arabs

By Amit R. Paley Washington Post Foreign Service

JALAWLA, Iraq -- Kurdish leaders have expanded their authority over a roughly 300-mile-long swath of territory beyond the borders of their autonomous region in northern Iraq, stationing thousands of soldiers in ethnically mixed areas in what Iraqi Arabs see as an encroachment on their homelands.

The assertion of greater Kurdish control, which has taken hold gradually since the war began and caused tens of thousands of Arabs to flee their homes, is viewed by Iraqi Arab and U.S. officials as a provocative and potentially destabilizing action.

"Quickly moving into those areas to try and change the population and flying KRG flags in areas that are specifically not under the KRG control right now -- that is counterproductive and increases tensions," said Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, commander of U.S. forces in northern Iraq, referring to the Kurdistan Regional Government, which administers the autonomous region.

The long-cherished dream of many of the world's 25 million ethnic Kurds is an independent state that encompasses parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. All but Iraq adamantly oppose Kurdish autonomy, much less a Kurdish state. Iraqi Kurds continue to insist they are not seeking independence, even as they unilaterally expand the territory they control in Iraq.

The predominantly Arab-led government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in recent weeks has sent the Iraqi army to drive Kurdish forces out of some of the lands, ordering Kurdish troops, known as pesh merga, to retreat north of the boundary of the Kurdish autonomous region.

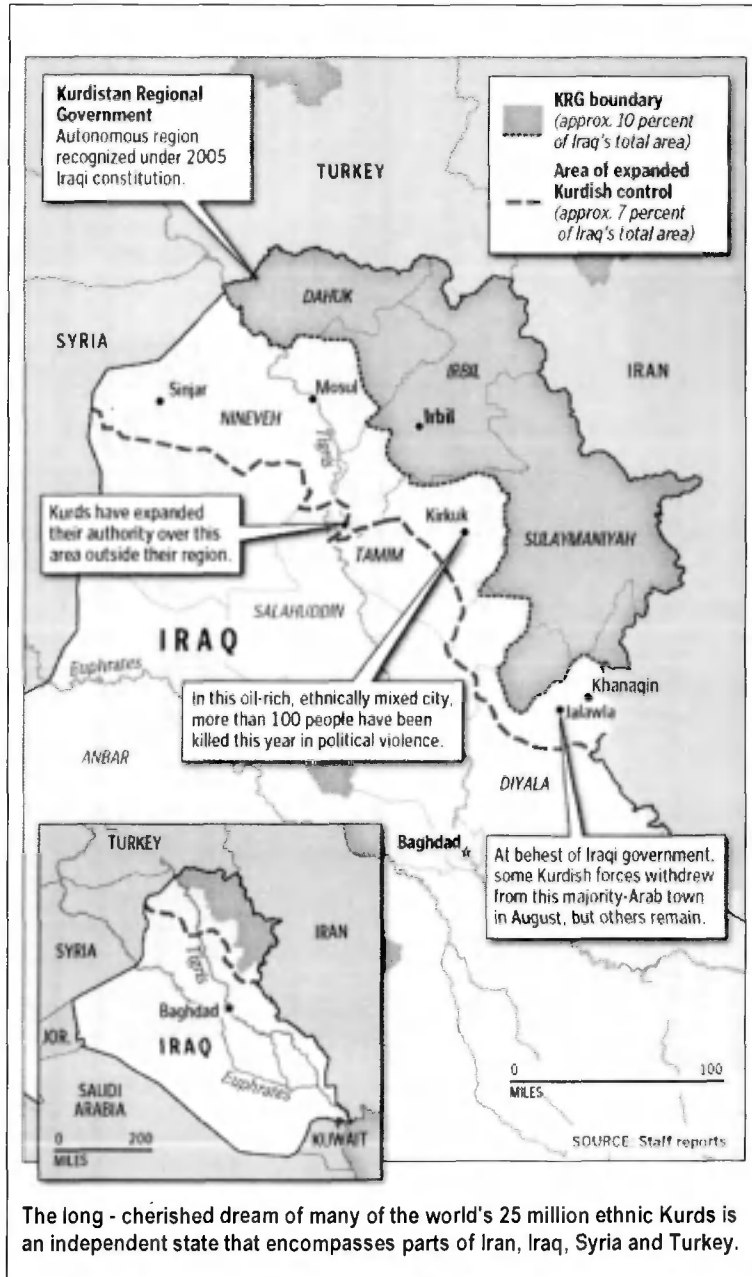
The face-off between the Iraqi army and pesh merga has stoked fears of Arab-Kurdish strife just as Iraqis begin to recover from years of sectarian violence between Shiites and Sunnis.

A week-long journey across four provinces that abut the southern boundary of the autonomous region illustrated just how pervasive the Kurdish presence has become. Pesh merga fighters were seen manning 34 checkpoints, most of them proudly flying the Kurdish flag, some as far as 75 miles south of the regional border. Kurds say they have historical claims to the territory, citing then-President Saddam Hussein's use of violence and coercion to drive Kurds from their lands in the 1970s.

Although officials in Washington and Baghdad have focused on the Arab-Kurd conflict in Kirkuk, the ethnically mixed, oil-rich city where more than 100 people have been killed in political violence this year, the animosities between the two ethnic groups fester throughout Nineveh, Tamim, Salahuddin and Diyala provinces. Arabs and Kurds in various areas often have unique grievances, confounding efforts to reach an all-encompassing solution.

Kurdish leaders have maintained warm relations with U.S. officials, who have seen the Kurds as allies in the effort to promote democracy and stability in Iraq. The Kurdish region, compared with other parts of the country, is a zone of relative peace and prosperity.

In Jalawla, a majority-Arab town in Diyala province eight miles south of the Kurdish regional boundary, Kurdish authorities have gradually expanded their role over the past year. The pesh merga, the Kurdish police and the Asayesh, the Kurdish intelligence agency, all patrol the region. The Kurdish government provides a larger share of the area's annual budget -- \$15 million -- than Iraq's government does, according to the town's Kurdish mayor, who lives north of the Kurdish regional boundary because it is safer.



The long-cherished dream of many of the world's 25 million ethnic Kurds is an independent state that encompasses parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

"Who could argue that we have not already made this area part of the Kurdish regional government?" asked Nihad Ali, acting commander of a 150-person Kurdish detachment now based in Jalawla, at a headquarters that flies the Kurdish flag next door to the fledgling local Arab police force. "Who spent all the money here? Whose martyrs spilled their blood here? These people are totally reliant on the Kurds. We cannot abandon them."

But Arab residents of this town of 70,000 began to chafe over what they described as a campaign to drive them out of their lands. Ahmed Saleh Hennawi al-Nuaimi, an Arab tribal leader in Jalawla and a former army officer under President Saddam Hussein, said the Kurds had imprisoned, kidnapped and killed more than 40 Arabs recently in an attempt to promote "Kurdification," accusations that Kurdish officials reject.

"We are now subject to two occupations -- one by the Americans and one by the Kurds," said Nuaimi,

who claimed the area is 85 to 90 percent Arab, although Kurds estimate the figure is closer to 50 or 60 percent. "The Kurdish one is much worse by far and is driving the people to become terrorists. This area is now on the verge of exploding."

With prodding from angry Arabs such as Nuaimi, the Iraqi army last month ordered the pesh merga's 34th Brigade to withdraw within 24 hours from Jalawla and the surrounding area.

The Kurds initially refused. Kurdish officials said they killed only insurgents and were in the area to protect civilians, not occupy territory. But after high-level political negotiations, the 4,000-member brigade pulled back to the mainly Kurdish city of Khanaqin, about 16 miles south of the Kurdish border. Two weeks later, a suicide bomber targeting Arab police recruits in Jalawla killed at least 28 people, an attack the Kurds blamed on Sunni insurgents, and Arabs blamed on Kurds.

Last week, Kurdish officials also agreed to withdraw the pesh merga from Khanaqin as long as the Iraqi army agreed not to enter.

"We cannot stand by with crossed hands and do nothing in the disputed areas while Kurds are being killed," said Jafar Mustafa Ali, the Kurdish regional government's minister of state for pesh merga affairs. "We will step in as soon as the Iraqi government leaves."

Khanaqin's mayor, Mohammed Mullah Hassan, said the city would remain under Kurdish control even if the troops all departed. "We are all pesh merga now," he said.

In Khanaqin, almost all the street signs and conversation are in Kurdish. Government buildings display the Kurdish flag instead of the Iraqi one and the picture of Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish regional government, instead of Maliki. Some Arabs have been required to obtain Kurdish-issued identification cards to enter the city.

"We are not trying to control the area -- we are already controlling the area," said Fuad Hussein, Barzani's chief of staff. "There is a reality on the ground now in disputed areas across Iraq that can't be ignored."

Hussein accused Maliki of trying to seize land that belongs to Kurds. "We have the feeling that there is a hidden agenda here," he said. "They want to drive us from the area. Some of them want to drive the Kurds out of all of Iraq."

Kurdish leaders have agreed to remove pesh merga forces from areas such as Jalawla and Khanaqin to prevent any erosion of their control over a Maryland-size swath of land that makes up about 7 percent of Iraq's territory.

Kurds and Arabs across that area say it is under the authority of Kurds, even in those places without a

large pesh merga presence. Even though the ultimate fate of Kirkuk is uncertain, both sides acknowledge that it is run by the Kurds: The governor is a Kurd, the majority of the provincial council is Kurdish, the military leaders of the Iraqi army units in the area are Kurdish, and the secretive Asayesh is said by both sides to have the best intelligence in town.

Many Arabs and Kurds in these areas begin conversations with recitations of their respective narratives of suffering and oppression. For the Kurds, the central villain in their recent history is Saddam Hussein, whose "Arabization" campaign drove tens of thousands of Kurds from their homelands and replaced them with Arabs. Iraqi Arabs in those areas now accuse the Kurds of employing similar tactics.

The question of where to draw the exact boundary of the Kurdish autonomous region is one of the most politically explosive issues in Iraq. The Iraqi constitution called for a reckoning of the competing claims, including a census and a referendum. But the mandated 2007 deadline for the referendum passed, and it is now unclear what will happen.

U.S. and other Western officials, fearing that the issue could imperil the security gains made over the past year, tried to persuade both sides to back a U.N. process to present reports on Kirkuk and other contested areas as part of a strategy to "defuse and deflect the referendum," said Stefan de Mistura, head of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Iraq. Kirkuk, which the Kurds refer to as "Our Jerusalem" because of their emotional and historical attachment to the city, presents a particular difficulty because it lies atop an estimated 7 percent of the world's oil reserves.

"I am going to be one of the wealthiest men in the world," said Ahmed Hameed al-Obaidi, secretary general of the Arab bloc in Kirkuk. "I would never let the

Kurds steal this money by making the city part of their region."

Western officials increasingly believe that a referendum in which residents of individual areas decide whether to join the Kurdish autonomous region will only spark greater conflict. De Mistura said the approach now is to have the leaders of each bloc reach a viable compromise, perhaps to be confirmed later through a straight yes-or-no referendum.

"At the end of the day, what we need is a grand deal, not a piecemeal approach," de Mistura said.

Yet far-reaching compromises seem remote from places such as Sinjar, a ramshackle city on the border with Syria that is ringed by Arab villages but controlled by Kurds. After a coordinated bombing there last year killed hundreds of Yazidis, a religious minority that some consider Kurdish, pesh merga forces tightened their control of the area, according to Arab and Christian residents.

Abdullah Ajeel al-Yawer, an Arab tribal leader near Sinjar, gathered dozens of Arabs from the area in his home on a recent morning. They described how Kurdish forces had driven them from their homes, detained and tortured them in prisons in the Kurdish region and prevented them from launching their own political party.

"They are like the Gestapo," Yawer said. "Their treatment is the same as what Saddam Hussein did."

Sarbest Terwaneshy, the head of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Sinjar and described by U.S. and U.N. officials as the most powerful figure in the region, denied the allegations against the pesh merga and said the fighters were in the area only to provide security.

"If the pesh merga leave, all the people will leave in a huge exodus," he said. "Without the Kurds, the massacre of last year would be repeated tens of times."

The Washington Post

September 18, 2008

The Kurds' Vision of Iraq

Regarding the Sept. 13 front-page story "Strip of Iraq 'on the Verge of Exploding'":

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its pesh merga forces are not seeking control of the city of Khanaqin. More than 90 percent of the residents of Khanaqin are Kurdish, and the city was peaceful until Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki sent Iraqi military forces there last month in an unwelcome and unnecessary provocation that sparked demonstrations by tens of thousands of residents.

This aggressive act caught the Kurdistan regional leadership by surprise, given that it occurred around the time that the KRG and other Iraqi parties had nearly reached agreement on a provincial election law, a key Iraqi benchmark. Since then, the election law has stalled, and the KRG has negotiated with Baghdad for the redeployment of some Kurdish pesh merga forces, as noted in the article.

The KRG is fully committed to a peaceful, democratic and federal Iraq, but we reject such intimidation from the prime minister.

Furthermore, we are becoming alarmed at the increasingly threatening

nationalist rhetoric that some Iraqi Arab parties have directed at the Kurds, which brings back memories of the approach of previous Iraqi governments to the Kurds.

All concerned parties, including U.S. and U.N. negotiators, should respect the Iraqi constitutional process. There has been political progress in Iraq, but it is fragile. The Kurds of Iraq have made vital contributions to Iraq's progress and will continue to do so. Undermining the constitution on the status of Kirkuk, one of the most contentious issues in Iraq, will only weaken Iraq's delicate political compact, which Americans and Kurds have worked hard to achieve.

FALAH MUSTAFA BAKIR

Minister, Department of Foreign Relations
Kurdistan Regional Government

Erbil, Iraq

FranceArménie
Du 16 au 30 septembre

L'Arménie reçoit le président turc

Invité à Erévan par son homologue arménien Serge Sarkisian à l'occasion du match de football Arménie-Turquie, le président turc Abdullah Gül s'est rendu de l'autre côté d'une frontière fermée par son pays, depuis 1993, pour asphyxier l'Arménie. La «diplomatie du football» a envoyé un ballon d'essai. Rebondira-t-il tôt ou tard sur les sentiers de la paix ?

Abdullah Gül à Erévan à l'occasion d'un match de football entre Arméniens et Turcs ! Qui aurait pu le prédire il y a encore dix mois, lorsque le destin eut l'idée saugrenue de placer Arméniens et Turcs dans le même groupe de qualification à la Coupe du Monde 2010 ? Blocus imposé depuis 1993 à l'Arménie dont la frontière avec la Turquie est toujours fermée, solidarité avec l'Azerbaïdjan sur la question du Haut-Karabagh, exclusion de l'Arménie de tous les grands projets régionaux, politique négationniste sur la question du Génocide arménien, assassinat de Hrant Dink en janvier 2007 à Istanbul, etc. : rien dans l'attitude d'Ankara ne laissait présager, jusqu'à ces derniers mois, qu'un tel renversement fût possible !

Rien, jusqu'au plus grave camouflet subi par le camp ultranationaliste en Turquie, avec le démantèlement du gang Ergenekon, jusqu'à la tenue de pourparlers secrets entre Arméniens et Turcs, jusqu'à l'invitation lancée par Serge Sarkisian à Abdullah Gül, jusqu'à l'échec de la procédure d'interdiction lancée contre l'AKP et jusqu'au cataclysme régional créé par la guerre en Géorgie, dont les retombées ont dû peser bien lourd dans le choix du président turc...

Dans ce climat de dégel, nouveau à bien des égards, Abdullah Gül n'avait d'autre choix que d'accepter l'invitation de Serge Sarkisian. Un refus l'aurait placé dans la position de celui qui snobe la main tendue par la partie arménienne. Qui plus est, la Turquie, contrainte de proposer en août le Pacte de Stabilité pour le Sud-Caucase, en réaction à la reprise en main de la Russie dans la région, ne pouvait que donner une suite favorable trois semaines plus tard à l'initiative arménienne, faute de quoi un repli aurait gravement nui à la cohérence de sa politique globale.

Le tour de force d'Erévan

Obliger celui qui donne dans la surenchère négationniste (voir éditorial) et qui fait tout pour vous étrangler à mettre les pieds chez vous, pour faire de vous un interlocuteur à part entière : cette perspective encore inconcevable il y a peu témoigne du tour

de force réalisé par l'Etat arménien, et ce, quand bien même la question du Génocide arménien n'était pas le sujet numéro un à l'ordre du jour. Mais fallait-il s'attendre à autre chose ? En prenant l'initiative, l'Arménie a envoyé la balle dans le camp de la Turquie, qui n'a pu faire autrement que d'inviter Serge Sarkisian, le 14 octobre 2009, pour le match retour Turquie-Arménie. Dans l'intervalle, les ministres des Affaires étrangères des deux pays poursuivront le processus engagé en mai et juillet derniers à Berne (cf. FA n° 323, p. 13).

Face à la communauté internationale, les autorités arméniennes font d'une pierre... trois coups, au moins ! Elles s'imposent d'abord, dans les relations arméno-turques, comme une force de dialogue que les grandes puissances ne sauraient ignorer. On retiendra aujourd'hui que la «diplomatie du football» prônée par Erévan a déjà produit plus de résultats en termes de dégel que la proposition faite par Ankara en 2005 d'établir une commission mixte d'historiens sur les «événements» de 1915. En deuxième lieu, l'initiative de Serge Sarkisian rehausse le crédit de l'Arménie après les événements sanglants du 1er mars dernier, qui avaient grandement fragilisé le pays sur la scène internationale. Erévan apparaît ainsi comme un facteur d'ouverture vis-à-vis d'Ankara, alors que les plaies, à l'intérieur, ne semblent pas près de se refermer. Enfin, sur le plan régional, l'Arménie redevient un vecteur de stabilité et d'intégration, en clair tout ce que la Géorgie et l'Azerbaïdjan va-t-en-guerre ne sont manifestement pas.

La main de Moscou

Mais la vigilance doit rester de mise, car ce premier pas ne préjuge pas automatiquement de la suite des événements. Quelles conséquences cette rencontre aura-t-elle sur les questions liées à l'ouverture de la frontière, à l'établissement des relations diplomatiques, au Karabagh et au Génocide arménien ? Difficile d'affirmer quoi que ce soit, à ce stade. Des deux côtés, il semble acquis, néanmoins, qu'une nouvelle page est en train de s'ouvrir dans les relations arméno-turques, et plus généralement dans une ré-



gion dont les équilibres instables ont littéralement imploré en quelques semaines.

Et au profit, en premier lieu, de Moscou, qui a fait s'effondrer un véritable château de cartes. Ankara s'est senti obligé de proposer un Pacte de Stabilité pour le Sud-Caucase qui suppose la réintégration progressive de l'Arménie dans le jeu régional (1), face à une Géorgie à genoux et un Azerbaïdjan dans ses petits souliers – deux pays qui avaient tout fait jusqu'à présent pour provoquer la Russie et aider la Turquie à étouffer l'Arménie ! En encadrant selon toute vraisemblance (compte tenu de la dépendance d'Erévan à l'égard de Moscou) le processus de rapprochement arméno-turc (2), Moscou surveille l'évolution du dialogue et verrouille les jeux d'influence en Arménie, en dégageant sensiblement Erévan de la pression exercée par les Etats-Unis depuis les événements du 1er mars dernier.

La Russie rappelle ainsi que c'est elle qui détient le sésame de la paix dans cette région du monde. Et que personne n'a intérêt à l'oublier...

Varoujan Mardikian

(1) La Turquie craint en outre actuellement pour ses approvisionnements en gaz et en pétrole de Russie, depuis que le Kremlin a compliqué les procédures douanières sur les importations, suite probablement à l'autorisation délivrée par Ankara aux navires de guerre américains de transporter de l'aide à la Géorgie via le détroit turc qui relie la Méditerranée à la mer Noire.

(2) C'est à Moscou, le 23 juin dernier, que Serge Sarkisian a évoqué publiquement, pour la première fois, la perspective d'un rapprochement arméno-turc sous conditions.



SYRIE: UN TRIBUNAL MILITAIRE CONDAMNE CINQUANTE KURDES À LA PRISON

DAMAS, 15 sept 2008 (AFP)

UN TRIBUNAL militaire de Damas a condamné cinquante Kurdes ayant participé à une manifestation en 2005 à des peines de quatre à six mois de prison, a déclaré lundi une ONG, l'Organisation nationale des droits de l'homme en Syrie (ONDHS).

Les cinquante Kurdes avaient été arrêtés pendant deux mois puis relaxés. Ils avaient participé, à Qamichli dans le nord du pays, à une manifestation le 5 juin 2005 pour connaître la vérité sur la mort dans des circonstances controversées d'un influent ouléma kurde, Mohammad Maachouk Khaznaoui.

Ils ont été condamnés dimanche par le tribunal militaire à des peines de prison allant de quatre à six mois pour avoir "incité à des dissensions confessionnelles et raciales et à des conflits entre les différentes confessions et catégories de la nation", selon un communiqué de l'ONDHS qui a publié une liste nominative des condamnés.

Le président de l'organisation, Ammar Qorabi, a espéré que "ces citoyens seront innocentés s'ils font appel de leur jugement" et a souligné que "la

constitution syrienne garantit les droits à manifester et à protester pacifiquement".

En 2005, les manifestants avaient réclamé la formation d'"une commission impartiale" composée notamment d'avocats kurdes pour enquêter sur la mort du cheikh Maachouk Khaznaoui, disparu le 10 mai 2005 à Damas et dont le gouvernement a ensuite annoncé la mort le 1er juin suivant.

Le gouvernement syrien avait dit avoir arrêté deux des cinq membres d'une "bande criminelle" qui aurait tué l'ouléma.

Agé de 46 ans, le religieux kurde était vice-président du Centre d'études islamiques à Damas et bénéficiait d'une grande popularité, y compris en dehors de sa communauté. Fervent défenseur des droits des Kurdes de Syrie, il avait critiqué avec virulence l'Etat syrien pour le traitement de la minorité kurde.

Estimés à plus de 1,5 million de personnes, les Kurdes de Syrie représentent environ 9% de la population du pays. Ils réclament la reconnaissance de leur langue et de leur culture.



TURQUIE: LE 1ER PARTI PRO-KURDE, MENACÉ D'INTERDICTION, PRÉSENTE SA DÉFENSE

ANKARA, 16 sept 2008 (AFP) -

LE PRINCIPAL parti pro-kurde de Turquie, menacé de dissolution pour collusion avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), a présenté mardi sa défense devant la Cour constitutionnelle qui le juge.

"Nous voulons que le DTP (Parti pour une société démocratique) ne soit pas interdit", a déclaré à la presse le président du parti, Ahmet Türk, au terme de la défense présentée devant la Cour habilitée à dissoudre les formations politiques.

L'interdiction d'un parti qui a recueilli 2 millions de votes aux dernières législatives "va sans doute créer une déception chez les gens qui ont voté pour lui", a estimé M. Türk.

Le procureur de la Cour de cassation avait réclamé en novembre 2007 l'interdiction du DTP au motif que, par ses liens supposés avec les séparatistes du PKK, il était un "foyer d'activités préjudiciables à l'indépendance de l'Etat et à son unité indivisible".

Le DTP, qui détient 21 des 550 sièges du Parlement, rejette ces accusations, tout en refusant de qualifier le PKK d'organisation terroriste.

"Le DTP n'a pas de liens organiques avec le PKK mais nous ne pouvons pas

ignorer les réalités" sur le terrain, c'est-à-dire dans le sud-est anatolien à majorité kurde, où le PKK continue de marquer les esprits.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie de cette région. Le conflit a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

La Turquie a entamé en 2005 de difficiles négociations d'adhésion à l'UE après avoir mené une série de réformes démocratiques, notamment en faveur de sa communauté kurde.

Le DTP succède à une lignée de partis pro-kurdes dissous, dont le plus connu à l'étranger est le Parti démocratique (DEP). Quatre députés, dont la lauréate du prix Sakharov des droits de l'Homme, Leyla Zana, ont purgé de 1994 à 2004 une peine de dix ans de prison pour liens présumés avec le PKK.

Le verdict de la Cour constitutionnelle sur le DTP devrait intervenir dans les semaines à venir.

La même cour a décidé en juillet de ne pas dissoudre le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, issu de la mouvance islamiste), au pouvoir et accusée d'activités anti-laïques.



LE GOUVERNEMENT TURC VEUT CONTINUER D'ATTAQUER LE PKK EN IRAK

ANKARA, 17 sept 2008 (AFP)

LE GOUVERNEMENT turc va demander au Parlement une prolongation d'un an d'une autorisation pour mener des incursions contre les bases des rebelles kurdes du parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en Irak, a déclaré mercredi un porte-parole, Cemil Cicek.

"Il a été décidé aujourd'hui (mercredi) lors d'un conseil des ministres d'envoyer une motion au Parlement afin que le mandat d'une autorisation précédente soit prolongé d'un an", a indiqué M. Cicek.

Le Parlement turc avait adopté le 17 octobre 2007 un texte autorisant pour un an le gouvernement turc à mener, si nécessaire, des incursions militaires dans le nord de l'Irak où sont retranchés des milliers de rebelles du PKK.

L'Assemblée nationale turque, actuellement en vacances, doit s'ouvrir le 1er octobre et son feu vert est acquis, la grande majorité des députés ayant soutenu le texte précédent.

En vertu de ce document qui autorise l'envoi de soldats turcs en territoire étranger, les avions turcs ont bombardé à plusieurs reprises depuis décembre 2007 les positions du PKK dans le Kurdistan irakien, provoquant de lourdes

pertes. La Turquie a effectué des raids aériens ainsi qu'une opération terrestre d'une semaine en février dans cette région où sont retranchés, selon Ankara, plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

Depuis le début des actions d'Ankara contre le PKK en Irak, les Etats-Unis, alliés de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan, l'assistent en lui fournissant en temps réel des informations sur les mouvements des rebelles kurdes en territoire irakien.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.

Selon un bilan fourni mardi à un groupe de journalistes par le nouveau chef d'état-major turc, le général Ilker Basbug, le conflit a fait 32.000 morts dans les rangs du PKK et près de 6.500 dans ceux des forces de sécurité (armée et police).

Quelque 5.500 civils ont également perdu la vie dans le conflit, selon le général.

«Ça va devenir normal d'aller faire du tourisme en Irak»

Julie Connan

L'agence de voyages Terre Entière propose des pèlerinages et des séjours culturels au Kurdistan irakien. Une première en France depuis le début du conflit.

Avec ses soldats de la coalition, ses tensions intercommunautaires et ses attentats quasi-quotidiens, l'Irak ne figure pas a priori parmi les destinations touristiques les plus courues.

Pourtant, l'agence de voyages Terre Entière a fait le pari de «montrer que ce n'est pas une destination maudite, mais bien un des berceaux de la civilisation mondiale», comme l'explique son PDG, Hubert Debbasch. Une première de la part d'un voyageur francophone. De quoi changer des traditionnels séjours au ski...

Le principe ? Vingt personnes, 8 jours, à partir de 2.150 euros. Mais Terre Entière ne s'aventure pas dans la totalité du pays : son tout premier voyage, un pèlerinage baptisé «Noël en Irak», ainsi que les deux séjours culturels organisés au printemps et

en septembre 2009, se dérouleront exclusivement au Kurdistan irakien. Une région extrêmement riche au niveau professionnel mais aussi plus calme que le reste du pays.

Depuis juin, le Quai d'Orsay la classe en orange, alors que le reste du pays est rouge. Pour autant, cette zone frontalière de l'Irak et de la Turquie reste «déconseillée sauf raisons professionnelles impératives». (Voir les conseils aux voyageurs du Quai d'Orsay)

«Nous ne demandons pas de caution ou d'autorisation au ministère des Affaires étrangères», répond le PDG de l'agence, créée il y a 30 ans. «Si nous décidons d'organiser un voyage au Kurdistan irakien, c'est en ayant tous les éléments qui nous permettent de dire que tous les endroits dans lesquels nous nous rendrons sont des endroits sûrs, dans lesquels nous pouvons assurer totalement la sécurité des voyageurs», assure Hubert Debbasch qui a pris la décision après s'y être lui-même rendu cet été.

«Dire stop à la rupture avec ce pays»

Afin de garantir cette sécurité, Terre Entière entretient à dessein un certain mystère. Et pour cause, même les participants ne connaissent pas l'ordre des visites et le programme précis du pèlerinage.

Pour monter ce projet, Terre Entière s'est associée au patriarcat chaldéen de Babylone, composé de chrétiens kurdes et de chrétiens arabes. Une manière de profiter de leur structure d'accueil, mais aussi de leur grande connaissance du terrain. «Si un jour, le patriarcat nous dit que les conditions de sécurité ne sont pas réunies pour se rendre à tel ou tel endroit, alors on annule et on s'adapte», explique le PDG qui sera du voyage à Noël.

Côté participants - 15 inscrits sur 20 places pour l'instant pour Noël - les têtes brûlées ne sont de toute façon pas les bienvenues. Pour s'en assurer, l'agence a soumis un questionnaire aux personnes

tentées par l'aventure, souvent familières de l'Irak d'avant-guerre.

Parmi les motivations exprimées, on retrouve deux constantes : «l'intérêt pour la culture du pays et le désir de dire stop à la rupture avec ce pays». C'est aussi l'un des objectifs de Terre Entière. Car même si le voyageur assume vouloir faire du «business», ce genre de voyage est aussi «une façon de manifester une normalisation progressive de la situation là-bas». Et Hubert Debbasch d'ajouter : «Ça va devenir normal d'aller en Irak. Peut-être que dans quatre ans, ce ne sera plus original».

En attendant, si le voyageur refuse catégoriquement de décliner l'expérience dans des pays comme l'Afghanistan (voir la vidéo ci-dessus), il rêverait de pouvoir à nouveau emmener des touristes à Bagdad, comme c'était le cas avant le conflit. Mais ça, c'est l'avenir du pays qui en décidera.

AFP

IRAK: LE MINISTRE DU PÉTROLE ACCUSE LES KURDES DE BLOQUER LA NOUVELLE LOI

BAGDAD, 19 sept 2008 (AFP) –

LES CONTRATS pétroliers signés par les leaders kurdes continuent d'empêcher l'adoption de la nouvelle loi irakienne sur le pétrole, qui reste donc régi par un texte voté sous Saddam Hussein, régresse dans un entretien à l'AFP le ministre du Pétrole, Hussein Chahristani.

Le gouvernement de la région autonome du Kurdistan (KRG) "a même signé des contrats de partage de production", considérés comme très avantageux pour les compagnies étrangères, souligne le ministre, un ancien physicien. "Cela a suscité des inquiétudes au sein du Parlement."

Du coup, la majorité des 275 députés du Parlement hésite à voter le projet de nouvelle loi sur le pétrole, souligne-t-il.

Certains veulent que le texte soit modifié pour "interdire les contrats de partage de production", dit-il.

"D'autres se demandent quelle peut bien être l'utilité" d'une nouvelle loi si le KRG signe des contrats avant même son adoption. "Ils se demandent donc s'il ne faut pas simplement continuer avec l'ancienne loi".

Le débat est surtout politique, le projet de nouvelle loi n'étant guère différent de l'ancienne, assez généreuse avec les compagnies étrangères, auxquelles elle permet de signer des contrats de partage de production.

Mais son adoption est considérée par les Etats-Unis comme un élément clé de l'unification du nouvel Irak qu'ils ont modelé depuis leur arrivée en 2003, mais qui reste secoué par les violences.

Dès le départ, les discussions sur le texte ont été perturbées par l'interminable dispute entre les communautés irakiennes (chiite, sunnite, kurde) sur le partage des revenus du pétrole entre les 18 provinces.

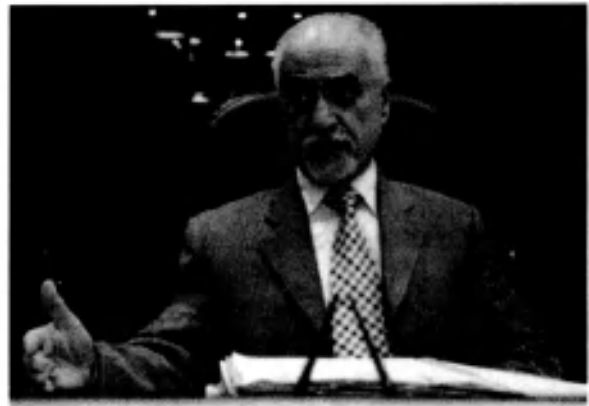
Et les débats se sont envenimés après que le KRG ait signé des contrats avec l'étranger pour doper la production de pétrole dans le nord, kurde, qui avec le sud chiite concentre la grande majorité des réserves de pétrole irakienne, les 3e plus importantes au monde (115 mds de barils estimés).

Opposé aux contrats signés par le KRG, le ministre chiite Chahristani estime que la loi ne sera pas adoptée à court terme.

"Si le KRG ne les annule pas et ne s'engage pas clairement à respecter la loi, les parlementaires ne la voteront pas", dit-il, et il faudra donc continuer à utiliser l'ancienne loi pour développer la production, comme le fait actuellement le gouvernement.

Ce dernier a récemment signé deux contrats avec des compagnies étrangères, la société publique chinoise China National Petroleum (CNPC) et Shell.

Le premier, qui porte sur l'exploration du champ pétrolier d'al-Adhab, à 180



km au sud-est de Bagdad, a ressuscité un contrat signé en 1997 entre la Chine et le gouvernement de Saddam Hussein, à la différence que la CNPC est désormais fournisseur de service, et non plus partenaire des Irakiens en coentreprise.

Le second va donner naissance à une coentreprise détenue à 51% par la société publique irakienne Southern Oil Company, et à 49% par Shell, pour la récupération de gaz dans la région de Bassorah (sud).

Ces deux accords ne violent pas les règles de la future loi, selon M. Chahristani, qui dit vouloir la "respecter même si elle n'est pas votée".

Le ministre souligne que son ministère a commencé à travailler sur un ambitieux plan de développement de l'industrie pétrolière dans les trois ou quatre ans à venir en utilisant l'ancienne loi, pour exploiter les 80 gisements de gaz et pétrole (dont 27 opérationnels) déjà découverts.

"L'idée est de les proposer progressivement par appels d'offres internationaux", tout comme 65 blocs d'exploration, selon lui.

"Nous avons décidé de développer notre production pétrolière aussi vite que possible en coopérant avec les compagnies étrangères", souligne-t-il. "Et nous parlons en milliards de dollars".

L'Irak prévoit également de doper ses capacités de raffinage, en construisant de nouvelles raffineries dans les provinces de Nassiriyah, Kerbala, Kirkouk et Misan, ou en ajoutant des unités aux existantes, a-t-il ajouté.

Iraq: Al-Qaida intensifies its stranglehold in the world's most dangerous city

Insurgents turn de facto northern capital into war zone by exploiting divisions between Arabs and Kurds

Jonathan Steele in Mosul The Guardian

It is the most dangerous city in the world's most dangerous country, a sad, half-empty relic whose rich and middle classes have long since fled. To reach it, one has to travel incognito in convoys of rundown small cars whose drivers conceal their walkie-talkies and weapons under the seats. Their bodyguards sometimes switch to dented taxis with shattered windshields as an extra disguise.

Mosul - the de facto capital of northern Iraq - should have been as safe as Basra and Baghdad if a massive military offensive by Iraqi and US forces, which was launched in May, had succeeded. But most al-Qaida insurgents slipped away before it began - and they are now slipping back. "They use car bombs and roadside bombs, and target areas which used to be very safe. Now they are assassinating people with pistols that have silencers. The offensive was not as successful as expected," said Doraid Kashmoula, the provincial governor.

In June, the Americans trumpeted the killing of Abu Khalaf, who they described as al-Qaida's local kingpin, and the "emir of Mosul". "Killing this man didn't help. When the security forces kill one emir, they have 10 others to replace him," the governor added.

Mosul's offensive, known as Operation Mother of Two Springs, began well, cutting insurgent attacks by 80% in the first few days. It didn't last. In the past month, dozens of people have been killed in violence ranging from roadside bombs to random shootings, car bombs and attacks targeted at specific individuals. On Saturday, four employees of a Dubai-based television station, including the head of its office in Mosul, were abducted and killed.

But if the statistics only tell half the story, the other half is apparent from the city centre, a virtual ghost town.

"For eight months I've not seen my parents, because their neighbourhood is in part of the city centre that is too dangerous," said Yabya Abed Mahjoub, an official of the



An Iraqi soldier looks at the damage caused by a suicide bomber in Mosul, 2008. Photograph: Marwan Ibrahim

Islamic party which represents urban Sunni businessmen and professionals.

That contrasts with Basra, where security is better than at any time since 2005, and Baghdad where, for the first time in three years, sunset brings families to parks along the Tigris as the 44C heat slowly subsides.

In Mosul, the same river flows by, unwatched. On the east bank where cafes and restaurants once thrived, hardly a pedestrian or a car can be seen. People flee three hours before the 10pm curfew. By day, traffic is light and the Iraqis buying fruit at roadside stalls look anxious and under pressure.

Al-Qaida's strength in Mosul has risen on the see-saw which has made it weak in Anbar, Iraq's largest Sunni province. Driven out of there, al-Qaida moved many supporters to Diyala, north of Baghdad, and to Mosul. Some Iraqi officials, including Mosul's governor, blame logistics, in particular al-Qaida's easy access from Mosul to northern Syria to bring in weaponry. He says Operation Mother of Two Springs needs "more equipment, troops, and weapons to counter them".

Al-Qaida also benefits from the absence in Mosul of al-Sahwa, the so-called Awakening movement of Sunni tribal leaders, who successfully confronted al-Qaida in Anbar and western suburbs of Baghdad. They oppose al-Qaida's targeting of Shias and the importing of a conservative Salafi ideology which was never strong in Iraq.

Al-Qaida is also exploiting one of the central struggles in Mosul, a tussle for influence between Arabs and Kurds, claiming to be at the forefront of resistance to what many Arabs say are Kurdish efforts to take over the city.

Mahjoub's Islamic party is targeted for "collaborating" with the government in Baghdad, but also with the Kurds on the provincial council. "Six of our party's leaders here have been assassinated since the May offensive started," Mahjoub said. The Communist party, whose Arab support comes from the secular middle-class, has gone virtually underground in Mosul after several leaders were killed.

The saddest part of Mosul's fate is that no one in the rest of Iraq, apart from the Kurds, seems to care. Unlike Basra, on the border with Iran and at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway to the Gulf, Mosul has little strategic value. Unlike Baghdad, it has no Sunni-Shia tension because there are few Shias.

Mosul's few optimists are in the Iraqi army. Colonel Rebwar Yunis Abdullah, chief of staff of the 2nd Division's 1st Infantry Brigade, says most of the east bank of the Tigris is safe. He shows photos of huge arms caches his men have found and produces statistics showing a 70% decrease in insurgent attacks since May. But he admits his area does not cover the city centre.

He sees another good sign in the fact that Sunni Arab officers from the old army are coming back to duty, including in the 2nd Division, which started as a grouping of peshmergas - the Kurdish guerrillas. "Thirty per cent of this brigade's 220 officers are Arabs, and many in top positions," he says. The lieutenant colonel, who serves as the brigade's operations officer is Fouad Mohammed Ali, an Arab from Baghdad.

The colonel admits there is still a long way to go. His wife and children live in Erbil. When he gets leave, he never goes to the centre of Mosul. He escapes to Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurds defend pro-Israeli lawmaker

September 20, 2008 - UPI

BAGHDAD, Central Iraq. — A Kurdish lawmaker Thursday expressed his support for a Sunni lawmaker who was barred from leaving Iraq for speaking at an Israeli policy center.

Iraq's Parliament revoked the immunity for Sunni lawmaker Mithal al-Alusi of the Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation, barred him from leaving the country and banned him from Parliament meetings for speaking at the Herzliya Institute for Policy and Strategy near Tel Aviv.

Mohsen Sadoun with the Kurdistan Coalition (KC), however, said parliamentary procedures used to issue the bans and revoke the immunity violated the Iraqi Constitution, the Kurdish Globe reported. Iraqi lawmakers

used a floor vote rather than a conventional request through the judicial branch of government to pass the decisions.

Sadoun said Mahmoud Mashhadani, the Iraqi Parliament speaker, should have convened a legal committee to examine the issue before putting the measure before lawmakers. Alusi defended his visit to Israel last week, saying he attended the conference for personal reasons and not as a representative of the Iraqi government.

"The conference that took place in Israel witnessed wide Arab participation, and Arab flags were flying there, but the Iraqi flag was not," he added.



Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan Say They Will Not Return to Baghdad

By Deborah Block Zakho, Iraq

In Mosul, in northern Iraq, Islamic militants continue to target Christians, forcing them from their homes. Several months ago, an archbishop in Mosul was kidnapped and killed. In Baghdad, after being threatened by insurgents in 2004, thousands of Christians left the Iraqi capital. Many fled to neighboring countries, but others have settled in Iraqi Kurdistan where it is safer. VOA's Deborah Block has the story.

People pray for peace at this Christian church in Zakho in Iraq's semi autonomous Kurdish region. Many came from Baghdad after Islamic insurgents set churches on fire, destroyed property and kidnapped and killed Christians.

Christians are a small minority in Iraq. Most are Chaldean Christians who are members of an autonomous Catholic Church.

Former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein largely tolerated Christians, but he did not allow them to build new churches. After Saddam's ouster, Islamic extremists targeted Christians in Baghdad, threatening to kill them if they did not leave their homes.

Many fled to a cluster of villages in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Yousef Toma lived in Baghdad most of his life, but in 2006 returned to the Kurdish village Enshke where he was born. He says it was too dangerous for his family to remain in the Iraqi capital, "We couldn't go to church," Toma said. "We couldn't stay at home or they would kill us."

Some Christians have gone to the village of Sharanish on the Iraq-Turkey border. This girl from Baghdad says she has seen enough suffering and is now in a safer place, but there are no opportunities for her in the village.

She says she has no money and no work, and she cannot continue her high school education because there are no schools.

Christians in the village of Qarola came back to their ancestral homeland to start a new life and they built a new church.

A Kurdistan government office helps build homes in Qarola and gives each family a small monthly stipend for living expenses.

Samir Yousif owned a home and a shop in Baghdad. He says his wife's brother was killed by Shi'ites in Baghdad in front of his own daughter. The child still shows sign of shock and cannot speak. Yousif says he had to leave his possessions behind after militants threatened to kill him. He says there are no jobs in the village, and he cannot take care of his family. Many Christians here rely on small plots of land to grow food. These men make a meager living selling fruits and vegetables. Years ago, after local Christians went to Baghdad seeking better opportunities, Kurds took over much of the land. Now they refuse to return it.

Salem Matti, also in Qarola, owns a car but says he cannot afford the gasoline to drive to work in the nearby city of Zakho. He says, nevertheless, he has no plans to go back to Baghdad.

He says if he can find a job in Qarola and the villagers can get their lands back, he will stay.



People pray for peace at this Christian church in Zakho, Iraq

With better security in Baghdad in recent months, Christian areas have also become safer. But after a priest was killed in a drive-by shooting in April, some Christians wonder if the security will last.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki wants the Christians to return to their homes in Baghdad and he has pledged more security for them. Humanitarian groups say it is not safe enough yet for them to return.



Kurdistan Region Presidency, KRP.org

16 September 2008

KRP Chief of Staff "Kurdish Guard Troops Not Moving Into New Areas"

Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (KRP.org) - In response to recent false reports, Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein of the Kurdistan Region Presidency today clarified the Kurdish position on recent events in Diyala, in eastern Iraq. Mr. Hussein unequivocally stated that, "It is not the policy of the Kurdistan Region to unilaterally annex any territory. Kurdish Guard troops have been in predominantly Kurdish areas of Diyala since they coordinated with American Special Forces to liberate the area from Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. They are there to fight terrorism and protect the population, nothing more."

He went on to say, "any resolution to this dispute must take place through the constitutionally established mechanisms of Article 140 [in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution]. Gone are the days of an Iraq governed by force, irresponsible to the desires and needs of its people. We know that, we are committed to that, and we will see the so-called 'disputed areas' given their just and legal say at the polls. The borders of the Kurdistan Region will only be set when Article 140 of the Constitution has been fully implemented. That is how a democracy works - by rule of law, not rule of fist."

Hussein also expressed surprise at comments issued from an American Major General on the matter, explaining that last year the central government and coalition forces requested more Kurdish troops be sent to the area in question to root out terrorism.

Kurdish Guard troops and Kurdish units in the Iraq Army have been critical in the

recent security gains in Iraq, with the 34th Brigade [Kurdistan Region forces] in particular playing a critical role in stabilizing the Diyala Province. As Mr. Hussein points out, "While the great service of these Kurdish troops to local communities in Baghdad is recognized and appreciated publicly and locally, the very same services rendered to the communities in Diyala are seen as inflammatory? This is a nonsensical position. We are in it for the good of all Iraq's people. That is why these troops are in Diyala - to fight terrorism and protect civilians. Their presence has nothing to do with the political outcome, which must be determined by the people concerned and in the interests of those most affected according to the Iraqi Constitution. We have nothing to fear from such an electoral process. We must ask, why do others seem so afraid of allowing the Iraqi people to exercise their democratic rights? Are we or are we not a democracy?"

"The sacrifices the Kurdish people and the Kurdistan Region guards have made for the new Iraq should not be forgotten. When the city of Mosul was on the verge of being overtaken by terrorists in November 2004, they [coalition forces and the central government] asked for our help and we responded without question. Our success in these endeavours has come at a heavy cost for the people of our region and has been fundamental to the



security gains that have saved American lives. We don't take these sacrifices lightly and we will not allow them to be in vain. The new Iraq will be based on the rule of law and democratic principles."

Many refer to areas such as Khanaqin, which is overwhelmingly Kurdish, in the Diyala province, and Kirkuk in Tamim province as 'disputed territories' in reference to the still unresolved matter of how they will be incorporated into the new federal structure of Iraq. Most citizens in these areas would like to see them join the Kurdistan Regional Government, an option promised to them by Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution which guarantees the Iraqi people electoral power to determine the final status of their communities within the new administration. However referring to these areas as 'disputed' is historically misleading, as Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani pointed out last week that even under Saddam Hussein areas like Khanaqin were not in fact disputed, but were to be incorporated into the Kurdistan Region once a final deal was brokered over Kirkuk.

The last electoral results in the areas of Diyala referred to in these statements reflect a strong political affiliation with the Kurdish Alliance List, which is the governing coalition in charge of running the Kurdistan Regional Government. In Khanaqin alone, 99% of the electorate in the most recent polls held in 2005 voted for Kurdish political parties. This data can be used to surmise the sympathies of the local population.

TODAYS ZAMAN

17 September, 2008

DTP presents verbal defense at top court against closure

AYŞE KARABAT

Ahmet Türk, the chairman of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), yesterday presented his party's verbal defense to the Constitutional Court, arguing that the existence of the DTP is a great opportunity for Turkish democracy and that it has an important mission in solving the problems of Turkey, especially the Kurdish question.

Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya had applied to the Constitutional Court to request the closure of the DTP in November 2007. He claimed that the DTP members' actions and statements run counter to the independence of the state and the indivisible integrity of its territory and nation and that the party has become the focal point of these acts.

In the party's defense statement, Türk stressed that the efforts of the DTP, especially in the Parliament, for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem were ignored and that they were not given a suitable platform in which to offer their solutions.

"The way in front of the DTP should be opened for the sake of keeping the problem in a democratic context. Such a historical development will be a magnificent contribution to Turkish democracy. You should not disappoint or harm the belief in democracy of the people who voted for us," Türk said in the three-hour defense statement.

Türk claimed that it is quite normal that his party is discussing the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the outlawed terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) since Öcalan is suggesting solutions to the Kurdish problem on the basis of maintaining a unitary state.

"While even the high state officials are following what Öcalan said, it is unfair to expect us to implement a policy of ignoring what Öcalan has to say," Türk said.



It was also underlined in the defense that some evidence presented to the court by the prosecutor is false or distorted. The DTP suggested that most of the actions in question are just the reflection of freedom of expression.

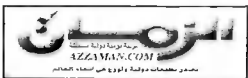
The DTP also highlighted the need for applying the criteria formulated by the Venice Commission to the closure case and recalled European Court of Human Rights decisions on freedom of expression.

According to procedure, following the verbal defense, the rapporteur of the Constitutional Court will collect documents and information related to the case and will prepare his report. In the meantime, the chief prosecutor and the DTP may submit additional evidence or defense items to the court. After the rapporteur's report is distributed to the 11 members of the court, Constitutional Court

President Haşım Kılıç will determine a day when the justices will convene to hear the case. Under the Constitution, for a political party to be closed down, at least seven of 11 members of the Constitutional Court must vote for closure.

Meanwhile, a group of supporters of the DTP, including DTP deputies Sebahat Tuncel and Aysel Tuğluk, demonstrated against the closure of their party in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul. The group shouted slogans such as "We want peace but we are ready for war" and "Don't try our patience, don't make us head to the mountains."

Hüsnü Öndül, the chairman of the Human Rights Association (İHD), in a written statement pointed out that not the DTP but the political system has to be judged in accordance with the principles of a pluralistic democracy.



Azzaman,

September 20, 2008

Iraq's 2009 budget to hit \$78 billion

By Mustafa al-Hashemi

Iraq's 2009 budget will hit more than \$78 billion, the Finance Ministry said.

A ministry statement sent to the newspaper said the figure relies on an average of \$80 for a barrel of oil and a daily export rate of two million barrels.

While oil prices have been generally higher than the projected price, output has generally been below the two million barrel a day.

Nonetheless, the budget will be unprecedented in the country's history, giving the government a rare chance to rehabilitate the country's rickety infrastructure.

But despite soaring oil revenues and massive influx of foreign aid

particularly from the United States, the country's economic woes have been worsening.

The ministry has allocated some \$60 billion for operational expenditures and \$18 billion for investment purposes, said the statement.

The oil sector will get \$2.5 billion to sustain and boost production.

The power sector, one of the most dilapidated in the country, will get \$2.4 billion.

Allocations have been made for each of the country's ministries and the Kurdish regional government in the north to which up to 17% of the country's hard cash revenues are earmarked.



Kurdistan Region Presidency, KRP.org
18 September 2008

US Ambassador Crocker, President Barzani: Iraq Must Never Again Persecute Any of its Citizens, Constitution Key to Resolving Outstanding Issues

Full transcript of the joint press conference for President Barzani and US Ambassador Crocker in Salahaddin, 17 September 2008:

President Barzani: Good morning. I would like to warmly welcome Ambassador Crocker and his accompanying delegation. We held important meetings last night and this morning and we discussed several important issues, including the strategic framework agreement, the provincial elections law, the tensions between the Kurdistan Region and Baghdad, Article 140 [Iraqi constitution], and several other topics. Fortunately, our points of view were very close and we will continue in our efforts to resolve these issues through the political process so that we reach our main goal: the establishment of a democratic and federal Iraq, free from violence and acting in the interests of the people. I once again welcome him. Please...

Ambassador Crocker: Thank you Mr. President. It is a real pleasure for me and my colleagues to be back in Kurdistan. The president and I were remembering last night my first visit here which was back in 2001. The first time I had the pleasure of sitting with President Barzani and talking about the future for the Kurdish region and the future for Iraq. We have come a very very long way since those days in 2001. There is clearly much work to be done in the building of a new Iraq. But it is also clear that the situation that people of Iraq face today after the end of regime of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of far better security, better situation today for all Iraqis and specially in the Kurdish region it is far better than it was in the past. As the president noted we talked about the negotiations underway to conclude a bilateral agreement between Iraq and the United States. We have made very good progress; there are still some issues outstanding. The president and I believe that concluding this agreement is very important to establish a sound basis for our future relationship after the end of 2008 and to enable the United States to continue to support the efforts to expand and to strengthen and consolidate security for all Iraqis. We talked about the elections law and agreed that it is important to conclude that law quickly to allow elections to proceed to further strengthen democracy in Iraq. We did talk about some of the current tensions and stressed how important it is that issues and problems when they arise be worked out among the leaders of the new Iraq in a way that guarantees security and stability and that supports democracy and supports the development of a strong democratic federal state because that state based on the Iraqi constitution is the best guarantee for the well being and the security of all Iraq's citizens. So again I appreciate Mr. President the opportunity to be up here with you again. I look forward to our continued close cooperation as we all work together to build a new Iraq that never again allows the problems of the old regime to emerge, that never again allows the persecution of any of its citizens.

Question: what is your view about the borders of the Kurdistan region? What is your policy regarding demands of the Kurdish people to implement article 140?

Ambassador Crocker: well, with respect to the internal border in Iraq including in Kurdistan region, that's what Article 140 is about. We support the implementation of article 140. We think this needs to be done as a political process in a way that takes into account the concerns and the rights of all the people involved. This has to be an Iraqi process; we and others such as the United Nations are prepared to help and support [this process] on request.

Question: The Iraqi constitution has defined the rights and responsibilities of all, and Iraqi unity depends on the implementation of this constitution. But it seems the central government does not keep its promises to the Kurds. What do you think are the reasons behind this?

President Barzani: No doubt, this is a constitution that was approved by more than 80% of the Iraqi people and this constitution must be respected. We repeat that we are committed to this constitution and we will do all we can to make sure it is implemented. If some people are not committed to this constitution, I think the people of Iraq will respect their choice and the Iraqi officials must respect the will of the majority of the people of Iraq. At the end of the day, the constitution must be implemented.

Question: What is the nature of the agreement between Iraq and the US?

Ambassador Crocker: The agreement we are negotiating is intended to establish the basis for our relationship with Iraq after the Security Council resolution expires at the end of the year. It has a number of aspects; it deals with our cooperation in the economic, scientific, cultural, and diplomatic fields as well as security. With respect to security, it is intended to give us the basis that will allow our forces to continue to support security in all of Iraq including in the Kurdish region.

Question: Two questions: Political consensus in Iraq seems to get worse. What will be the consequences of this? The other question to the Ambassador: we have several major outstanding problems with Baghdad including, implementation of Article 140, Kurdistan Region's share of the Iraqi budget, integration of Kurdish Guard forces with Iraqi army. But we do not hear any clear positions or policies from Washington over any of these issues?

President Barzani: In answer to your question, it is true that the government system in Iraq is based on political consensus. This consensus arrangement is essential for this stage and maybe for future stages. If there are differences, the constitution should be the guide. This is way we insist on the implementation of the constitution. It is natural to have political differences. But we are committed to the constitution and we will always resort to the constitution when we face problems.

Ambassador Crocker: I think the President just gave a very good answer. There is a constitution in Iraq, a constitution that Iraq's leaders including from the Kurdish region worked very hard to agree on. That constitution should be the guide as a constitution is a guide in any democratic state. There are differences and there difficulties surely but using the constitution as guide we believe that Iraq's leaders can find a way to work through these difficulties. It is important that they do because the success of the new Iraq is the guarantee of the well-being and prosperity for all of Iraq's people. As I noted at the outset, for most of the people of Iraq, certainly for this region, things have never been better than they are today. I think it is important that in dealing with difficulties, all of Iraq's leaders and all of Iraq's people, focus not only on the problems that have to be solved, but on the gains that have been achieved and move forward together in a way that protects those gains.



The streets of Baghdad, back from the dead

A fragile calm in a changed Iraq

By Dexter Filkins

BAGHDAD: At first, I didn't recognize the place.

On Karada Mariam, a street that runs over the Tigris River toward the Green Zone, the Serwan and the Zamboor, two kebab places blown up by suicide bombers in 2006, were crammed with customers. Farther up the street was Pizza Napoli, the Italian place shut down in 2006; it, too, was open for business. And I'd forgotten altogether about Abu Nashwan's Wine Shop, boarded up when the black-suited militiamen of the Mahdi army had threatened to kill its owners. But there it was, flung open to the world.

Two years ago, when I last stayed in Baghdad, Karada Mariam was like the whole of the city: shuttered, shattered, broken and dead.

Abu Nawas Park — I didn't recognize that, either. By the time I had left the country in August 2006, the three-kilometer, or two-mile, stretch of riverside park was a grim, spooky, deserted place, a symbol for the dying city that Baghdad had become.

These days, the same park is filled with people: families with children, women in jeans, women walking alone. Even the nighttime, when Iraqis used to cower inside their homes, no longer scares them. I can hear their laughter wafting from the park. At sundown the other day, I had to weave my way through perhaps 2,000 people. It was an astonishing, beautiful scene — impossible, incomprehensible, only months ago.

When I left Baghdad two years ago, the nation's social fabric seemed too shredded to ever come together again. The very worst had lost its power to shock. To return now is to be jarred in the oddest way possible: by the normal, by the pleasant, even by hope.

The questions are jarring, too. Is it really different now? Is this something like peace or victory? And, if so, for whom — the Americans or the Iraqis?

There are plenty of reasons why this peace may only amount to a cease-fire, why it's fragile and reversible. The "surge" of American troops is over. The Iraqis are moving to take their country back, yet they wonder what might happen when the Americans' restraining presence is gone. The Awakening, a poetic name for paying former Sunni insurgents not to kill Americans or Iraqis, could fall apart, just as the Shiite Mahdi army could reanimate itself as quickly as it disappeared.

Politics in Iraq remains frozen in sectarian stalemate; the country's leaders cannot even agree to set a date for provincial elections, which might hand power to groups that never had it be-



Members of the Awakening Council keeping the peace at a checkpoint in Baghdad.

fore. The mountain of oil money, piled ever higher by increased oil prices, may become another reason to spill blood.

But if this is not peace; it is not war, either — at least not the war I knew. When I left Iraq in the summer of 2006, after living three and a half years here following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, I believed that evil had triumphed, and that it would be many years before it might be stopped. Iraq, filled with so many people living so close together, nurturing dark grievances, seemed destined for a ghastly unraveling.

And now, in the late summer of 2008, comes the calm. Violence has dropped by as much as 90 percent. A handful of the five million Iraqis who fled their homes — one-sixth of all Iraqis — are beginning to return. The mornings, once punctuated by the sounds of exploding bombs, are still. Is it possible that the rage, the thirst for revenge, the sectarian furies, have begun to fade? That Iraqis have been exhausted and frightened by what they have seen?

"We are normal people, ordinary people, like people everywhere," Aziz al-Saiedi said to me the other day as we sat on a park bench in Sadr City, only recently freed from the grip of the Mahdi army. The park was just a small patch of bare ground with a couple of swing sets; it didn't even have a name, yet it was filled to the bursting point.

"We want what everyone else wants in this world," he said.

Everything here seems to be standing on its head. Propaganda posters, which used to celebrate the deaths of American soldiers, now call on Iraqis to turn over the triggermen of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and the Mahdi army. "THERE IS NOWHERE FOR YOU TO HIDE," a billboard warns in Arabic, displaying a set of peering, knowing eyes. I saw one such

poster in Adamiyah, a Sunni neighborhood that two years ago was under the complete control of Al Qaeda. Sunni insurgents are now on the American payroll, keeping the peace at ragtag little checkpoints for \$300 a month.

In Sadr City, the small brick building that served as the Mahdi army's headquarters still stands. But a freshly built Iraqi Army post towers above it now. Next to the post, perhaps to heighten the insult to the militia, the Iraqi government has begun installing a new sewer network, something this overcrowded ghetto sorely needs. "Wanted" posters adorn the blast walls there, too, imploring the locals to turn in the once-powerful militia leaders.

Inside the Sadr Bureau, as it is called, the ex-militia gunmen speak in chastened tones about moving on, maybe finding other work, maybe even transforming their once ferocious army into a social welfare organization. I didn't see any guns.

"Please don't print my name in your newspaper," one former Mahdi army commander said to me with a sheepish look. "I'm wanted by the government."

As for the Americans, they are still here, of course, but standing ever more in the background. Early this month, I joined a convoy carrying Tariq al-Hashemi, one of Iraq's vice presidents. Hurling through Baghdad at high speed, we came upon a caravan of American Humvees. I waited for Hashemi and his men to slow down, but the Iraqis — guns bristling, sirens wailing — barreled past. The Americans hurriedly pulled over and made way. Never in three and a half years in Iraq did I see anything like that.

The other day, I rode in a helicopter to Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, the big slice of desert west of Baghdad. Two years ago, 30 marines and soldiers were dying there every month. In 2005,

Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia declared Anbar the seat of its "caliphate." Since then, violence in Anbar has plummeted. Al Qaeda has been decimated. I was coming in for a ceremony, unimaginable until recently, to mark the handover of responsibility for security to the Iraqi Army and the police.

Standing in the middle of the city center, I found myself disoriented. I had been here before, I was certain, but still I couldn't recognize the place. Two summers ago, when I'd last been in Ramadi, the center of the city lay in ruins. Only one building stood then, the offices of the Anbar provincial government, and the Americans were holding onto it at all cost. For hundreds of meters in every direction, everything was destroyed: streets, buildings, cars, even the rubble had been ground to dust. Insurgents attacked every day.

And then, suddenly, I realized it: I was standing right in front of the government office building. It was sporting a fresh concrete facade. Over the entrance hung a giant official seal of Anbar Province. The road where I stood had been recently paved; it was black and smooth. American marines were walking about, without helmets or flak jackets or even guns.

In the crowd, I saw a face I recognized. It was Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Iraq's national security adviser. He is a warm, garrulous man, a neurologist who spent years in London before returning to Iraq. But he is also a Shi'ite, and a member of Iraq's Shi'ite-led government, which, in 2005 and 2006, was accused of carrying out widespread atrocities against Iraq's Sunnis. Anbar Province is almost entirely Sunni.

As Rubaie made his way through the crowd, I noticed he was holding hands with another Iraqi man, a traditional Arab gesture of friendship and trust. The man was Brigadier General Murdi

Iraqis are 'like people everywhere. We want what everyone else wants in this world.'

Moshhen al-Dulaimi, the Iraqi Army officer taking control of the province — a Sunni.

In Iraq, the calm is very fragile. The arrangements that keep the peace here are, by their nature, extremely tentative. You don't have to be a pessimist to recognize that.

I got a good sense of the fragility the other night in Adamiyah, the big Sunni neighborhood in northern Baghdad. I was standing on Al Camp Street as a wedding procession, made up of perhaps 25 cars, suddenly turned my way.

An Iraqi bride and groom sat in the back seat of the lead sedan, a black Mercedes-Benz, while a mass of revelers danced and tooted their horns. Two years ago, like the scene in Abu Nawas Park, such a sight was inconceivable.

Spotting me, an American in ordinary



In a scene that was unthinkable two years ago, customers shopped at a market in a mixed Sunni-Shi'ite area of Baghdad. Restaurants have reopened and parks are bustling.

clothes, the wedding train halted. The groom, dressed in a dark suit, climbed out of the Mercedes, leaving his bride, in flowing whites and heavy rouge, inside.

"It's wonderful, wonderful," said the groom, Yassin Razzaq, 25, shaking my hand. And then Razzaq pointed to a group of plainclothes Iraqi gunmen who had gathered at the roadside to watch. "It's all thanks to them."

Razzaq was referring to the members of the local Awakening Council, the name given to the Sunnis, many of them

former insurgents, who now keep the peace in Sunni neighborhoods.

"Did you hear that — did you hear what he said?" asked Abu Safa al-Tikriti, a mustachioed former officer in Saddam's army and a member of the tribe that dominates the executed dictator's hometown. "Without us, there would be chaos."

Chaos, indeed. Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki has expressed an intention to dismantle the Awakening Councils, which employ about 100,000 men, most of them Sunnis.

Maliki doesn't like the idea of paying people who used to be shooting at him. But many American and Iraqi officials worry that firing these men would drive them underground, and back to the gun. Tikriti, the Awakening leader, doesn't make much of a secret of that.

"I've come too far to turn back now," Tikriti said. "It's this or death."

For obvious reasons, almost no one in Baghdad seems willing to predict the future anymore. Ask anyone, and you are likely to get to the all-purpose Arabic expression, "Insha'Allah" — "God willing." Everyone, it seems, is trying to enjoy the calm while it lasts.

But if people here do not want to talk about the future, they still have to plan for it.

Sadiya Salman's four sons and their families, for instance, returned home to Adamiyah recently after two years away. I found them crowded into their small, dimly lit home in Zhrawayya, Adamiyah's only Shi'ite neighborhood.

Like so many of Baghdad's mixed neighborhoods, Zhrawayya was the scene of terrifying sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007. As Shi'ites in predominantly Sunni Adamiyah, the Salman brothers — Wajdi, Luay, Rushdi and Feraz — con-

sidered themselves likely targets.

Then came the men in black masks one day, who spray-painted a warning on the wall: "Rafida," Arabic for "rejectionist." It is a derogatory word that some militant Sunnis use for Shi'ites.

And so the brothers left, taking their wives and children with them, 13 in all. Sadiya Salman, an intense and energetic woman of 68 years, stayed behind with her four daughters; as a female, she thought, she would be safe.

"I never did get a look at them because they always wore masks," Salman, seated on the couch in her home, said of the gunmen who took over Zhrawayya. "But the accents were Iraqi."

Every other Shi'ite family also fled Zhrawayya, and it is still largely empty. To slow the death squads, the Americans built a cement wall stretching more than three kilometers around the outskirts of her neighborhood. It's six meters high, or 20 feet, and painted baby blue. It gives the neighborhood a bleak and claustrophobic feel.

In the two years that her sons were gone, Salman said, she rarely ventured outside. The exception, she said, was when she saw American soldiers.

"Oh, I love them," Salman said, brightening in her darkened house. "I always knew I was safe with them."

With life returning to normal in Adamiyah, the Salman brothers and their families recently returned.

"We are the first Shia to come back," Feraz Salman said. "The rest of the families are still too afraid."

Life is difficult; during the day, the temperature can soar above 49 degrees Celsius (120 Fahrenheit). For most of the day there is no electricity. When the sun goes down, the interior of the Salman house goes dark.

Yet for all the hardship endured by the Salmans, they appear to have lost neither their generosity nor their sense of grace. As I sat in their darkened apartment, Zaineb, one of Sadiya's daughters, served me tea. Her son Luay held a flashlight over my shoulder for well over an hour while I took notes. As I talked and scribbled, another son, Rushdi, stood behind me, waving a fan to keep me cool.

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Guerre sans victoire en Irak

N'en déplaise à George W. Bush et à John McCain, le candidat républicain à sa succession, il n'y aura pas de danse de la victoire autour de l'Irak avant l'élection américaine de novembre. En un peu plus de cinq années de sanglants combats et de cruelles désillusions, les commandants de l'US Army ont appris la prudence. Même à ce stade d'un conflit qui est loin d'être terminé, mais dont l'intensité a diminué, et même en dépit des incontestables succès que sa stratégie, doublée d'une bonne dose de chance, a pu produire sur le terrain, le général David L. Petraeus se refuse à prononcer le mot fatal : « *Je ne sais pas si l'on pourra jamais parler d'une victoire en Irak* », répétait-il ces derniers jours à tous ses interlocuteurs.

Après dix-neuf mois de commandement suprême en Irak, le général, dit « le réparateur », s'en va essayer de rafistoler l'autre mission guerrière en déshérence lancée par l'Amérique en Afghanistan. Nommé patron du CentCom, le quartier général de toutes les forces américaines au Moyen-Orient et en Asie, le « général intello », comme l'appellent les bureaucrates du Pentagone, a transmis le 16 septembre son bâton de commandement en Irak à son second, le général Raymond Odierno.

Robert Gates, le secrétaire à la défense, a évoqué « l'entrée » de l'Amérique « dans la fin de partie » en Irak, et présenté Petraeus comme « le héros du jour, qui a joué un rôle historique ». Pas sûr que l'intéressé, pas plus modeste qu'un autre pourtant, ait apprécié tout le discours. « *Nous avons fait beaucoup de progrès significatifs, oui, confiait-il à la BBC avant son départ, mais tout cela est encore fragile, réversible, d'autres dangers guettent l'Irak.* »

Les progrès, chacun les ressent sur le terrain. Entre la mi-2005 et le début 2007, de deux à trois mille civils irakiens étaient tués chaque mois dans les deux guerres, liées et concomitantes, qui ensanglantaient le pays. Moins de 500 victimes par mois cette année. Aujourd'hui, la première guerre – la révolte de la minorité arabe sunnite (20 % de la population) contre l'invasion étrangère – est pratiquement terminée. Les forces américaines et leurs alliés irakiens, qui enregistraient jusqu'à 3 000 attaques par semaine en 2005 et 2006, n'en comptaient plus « que » 800 à l'automne 2007, moins de 400 cette année. Plusieurs groupes armés constitués de soldats perdus de l'ancien régime, démobilisés et privés de ressources par le premier proconsul américain à Bagdad dès avril 2003, se sont dissous. Certains ont été réintégrés dans les nouvelles « forces nationales », qui comptent plus d'un demi-million d'hommes, armée et police incluses.

La seconde guerre, civile celle-là, que les quelques milliers d'obscurantistes affiliés à Al-Qaida en Irak se sont efforcés avec succès de déclencher à grands coups d'attentats meurtriers contre la majorité chiite (60 % de la population), n'est pas finie. Plus de soixante personnes ont récemment été tuées dans une série d'attentats-suicides. « *Leur capacité meurtrière a été grandement réduite, note Petraeus, mais ils peuvent encore frapper.* » D'autant que, contrairement à ce que la propagande de Washington prétendait, la quasi-totalité de ces djihadistes sont irakiens. L'offensive lancée il y a quelques mois dans le nord de l'Irak contre ce que le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, appelle « les dernières concentrations terroristes » continue, avec

des hauts et des bas.

Mais il ne fait pas de doute que la grande majorité des Arabes sunnites, qui ont également perdu ce qu'on a appelé la « bataille de Bagdad » pour le contrôle des quartiers de la capitale – à présent dominés aux trois quarts par les chiites –, ne les soutient plus. Parti de la province tribale d'Al-Anbar dès l'hiver 2006, le « réveil » des tribus sunnites, excédées par les crimes et les prétentions djihadistes à tout régenter, s'est progressivement étendu à toutes leurs zones d'habitation.

« Rien n'est encore acquis »

Le coup de génie de Petraeus fut d'« exploiter l'opportunité » constituée par cette révolte, de l'entretenir et de l'étendre. Aujourd'hui, 109 000 miliciens, baptisés « Les Fils de l'Irak », essentiellement sunnites, souvent ex-rebelles, sont rémunérés 300 dollars par mois par le Pentagone pour lutter contre Al-Qaida et maintenir l'ordre dans leurs districts, y compris à Bagdad. On épiloguera longtemps à Washington sur le point de savoir si c'est la *surge*, « l'effort » de l'armée, brusquement renforcée de 30 000 hommes à partir du printemps 2007 pour porter le contingent à 165 000 soldats, qui a amélioré la situation sécuritaire.

Disons, comme le général Odierno, que « sans les renforts » il n'est pas certain que le « réveil sunnite » se serait étendu aussi vite et puissamment. On peut aussi parier que sans ce « réveil », sans la nouvelle-tactique de Petraeus, qui a consisté à obliger ses soldats à vivre jour et nuit parmi les civils irakiens dans les zones troublées – avant lui, ils rentraient dans leurs bases à la nuit tombée –, les 30 000 renforts auraient changé quoi que ce soit. Révélée début septembre par Bob Woodward, du *Washington Post*, la très-secrète campagne d'assassinats et d'enlèvements ciblés, conduite depuis 2007 par des unités spéciales dotées de moyens techniques « sans précédent », aurait permis d'« éliminer des centaines d'activistes armés. »

Enfin, et le « général intello » l'admet volontiers, le cessez-le-feu surprise de la plus puissante milice chiite du pays, l'Armée du Mahdi, ordonné à l'été 2007 par son fondateur, le prêcheur radical antiaméricain, Moqtada Al-Sadr, a également joué un rôle « important » dans l'amélioration de la situation. En représailles aux barbaries antichiites d'Al-Qaida, l'Armée du Mahdi s'était à son tour livrée à des massacres quotidiens de civils sunnites. « *Pour la délégitimer auprès des chiites, a expliqué Nouri Al-Maliki, il fallait d'abord s'en prendre aux terroristes d'Al-Qaida.* » Ce qui fut fait. A présent, sur pression de Téhéran, qui soutient lui aussi le gouvernement en place à Bagdad, Moqtada Al-Sadr, réfugié à Qom, ordonne la transformation de sa milice en mouvement « social et culturel ».

La guerre en Irak vit un tournant. Celle d'Afghanistan aussi, mais dans l'autre sens. Ni Petraeus ni son successeur ne veulent trop dégarnir la première au bénéfice de la seconde. Huit mille soldats seulement seront rapatriés d'Irak d'ici à février 2009. Il en restera 146 000 en place jusqu'à nouvel ordre. Pourquoi ? « *Parce que rien n'est encore acquis, dit le général, parce que la réconciliation interirakienne n'est pas enracinée, parce que des décisions politiques doivent encore être prises qui peuvent rallumer des conflits.* » ■

Analyse

Patrice Claude
Grand reporter

Tension grows among Sunni allies

A worrisome trend just as U.S. plans to yield control in Iraq

By Erica Goode

BAGHDAD: In a neighborhood that only a year ago was among the most dangerous in Baghdad, the violence last week seemed almost negligible: A shootout near a checkpoint Sunday left two people dead. Another man was killed Monday by a small bomb placed under a car.

Some residents of Adhamiya hardly noticed.

But the deaths quickly drew the attention of the American officers stationed in the neighborhood. Both involved members of the Awakening Councils, the citizen patrols that have been paid by the Americans to fight the insurgency.

And both were seen as a worrisome sign of the tension and infighting that have rippled through the Sunni-dominated Awakening groups in recent weeks, just as the U.S. military planned to hand control of half the groups over to the Shiite-led Iraqi government.

American soldiers have built up the councils — comprising about 100,000 mostly Sunni Muslims, many of whom are former insurgents — and credit them with helping to reduce violence greatly around the country.

But now in Adhamiya and some other areas, members of the patrols, hailed by many as heroes for making the streets safer, have become increasingly unpredictable and problematic. Commanders quarrel and compete for money and territory. Finger-pointing and threats are common. There have been complaints that the men use their power to intimidate neighborhood residents. Sometimes violence erupts.

“What you have is essentially armed factions, like mini gangs that operate in a certain set of checkpoints in certain territories,” said Lieutenant Erick Kuyman, a patrol commander in the First Battalion, 68th Armor regiment, which operates in Adhamiya. The Awakening Councils, he said, “met their intent” when they started, but “they have outlived, I think, their service since then.”

The problems have worsened at a critical juncture for the Awakening movement and for American forces: On Oct. 1, 54,000 Awakening members in and around Baghdad, including those in Adhamiya, a Sunni stronghold, will be shifted to the payroll of an Iraqi government dominated by Shiite Muslims.

“It’s a very big deal to us to make sure that this goes off well,” Brigadier General Robin Swan, a deputy commander for the American forces in Baghdad, said recently. “We are taking it seriously, as is the government of Iraq.”

But some American officers have expressed concerns that should the transition go badly, the lure of working for the insurgency might prove too great for

some Awakening members, in particular top leaders, who stand to lose lucrative management fees and higher salaries. Such a result could threaten the fragile stability attained in much of the country in recent months.

Ghassan Mutar, an Awakening leader in Adhamiya, said on Monday that if the government does not deliver on its assurances, “People will be absolutely angry.”

“If anyone offers them money to plant bombs or attack Americans, some might go back to the insurgency,” Mutar said.

Other areas of Iraq, like Diyala and Salahadin Provinces, where local leaders say Awakening groups have carried out kidnappings and killings aimed at other rival councils, may also be fertile recruiting grounds for insurgent groups.

Some Awakening leaders say they have little faith in the promises of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki that about 20 percent of the Awakening members will be incorporated into the Iraqi Army or the police and the rest will be given civilian jobs or job training. More likely, they say, government officials will dissolve the patrols and arrest any former insurgents who are viewed as a threat.

Iraqi Army commanders have repeatedly said there would be no mass arrests after the transfer. But Awakening

‘If anyone offers them money to plant bombs or attack Americans, some might go back.’

members in some areas say that their leaders are being driven out.

Last week, lines of American Humvees moved from checkpoint to checkpoint, the patrol commanders answering Awakening guards’ questions and offering assurances: “We’re not going to abandon you. We’re still going to be here.”

The attention has not been a mere formality: Early last week, an already tense situation rapidly grew into a crisis.

As a dust storm settled over Baghdad, the son of a local council leader drove his Mercedes up to a checkpoint manned by Awakening guards in Adhamiya.

The guards, stationed near the line where the territories of two commanders meet, knew the council leader’s son, but they stopped his car anyway and searched it. An argument erupted. A few hours later there was a fistfight. Someone shot a Kalashnikov into the air and wild firing began on all sides. Two people were killed, one of them a cousin of a powerful Awakening commander.

News of the shootings spread quickly,

and American and Iraqi army officers rushed in to defuse the situation. At 3 a.m., a meeting was held at the house of a tribal leader, with representatives of all sides present. They watched a videotape of the shootings, recorded by a camera at an American base about 975 feet, or 300 meters, away. Soon afterward, 19 men were arrested for questioning, 16 of them Awakening members, according to American officers. The men have since been released.

The next day, a small car bomb went off near the house of a senior Awakening leader who attended the reconciliation session, killing one of his guards.

Last Tuesday, as Awakening leaders met with officers from the Iraqi and American armies to discuss the details of the transfer of the councils, the discussion quickly dissolved into angry complaints and recriminations about the shootings and the arrests.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Pappal, commander of Kuyman’s regiment, began the meeting by explaining the details of the transfer. It was still unknown, he said, whether the commanders would continue to receive higher salaries than the \$300 paid to rank and file members. If the Iraqi government would not pay the salaries, he said, the American military was considering topping off the base pay with stipends, but no decision had yet been reached.

“We’re trying to make the transfer as transparent as possible, meaning you would never know there was a change,” Pappal said. He patiently answered questions and listened to several different accounts of how the shootings had occurred and who was responsible. But his voice sharpened when one Awakening leader badgered him for details of the investigation into the shooting.

“I’m not discussing that,” he said. “Everybody was shooting that day.”

Pappal pleaded with the assembled leaders for information about who was planting a series of small car bombs in the neighborhood.

He said later that at first he had thought the bombs had been planted by other Awakening members. But new intelligence, he said, indicated they had come from “outside,” presumably Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the homegrown Sunni extremist group that American intelligence agencies say is foreign-led. In an e-mail message, he added that the frictions among the Awakening leaders made things easier for the insurgents.

Mudahfer al-Husaini, Riyadh Mohammed and Atheer Kakan contributed reporting from Baghdad; employees of The New York Times contributed from Baghdad, and from the Provinces of Diyala and Salahadin.

Thomas L. Friedman

Dear Iraqi friends

*From: President George W. Bush
To: President Jalal Talabani of Iraq, Prime Minister Nuri
Kamal al-Maliki, Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashadani*

Dear Sirs,
I am writing you on a matter of grave importance. It's hard for me to express to you how deep the economic crisis in America is today. We Americans are discussing a \$1 trillion bailout for our troubled banking system. This is a financial 9/11. As Americans lose their homes and sink into debt, they no longer understand why we are spending \$1 billion a day to make Iraqis feel more secure in their homes.

For the past two years, there has been a debate in America over whether to set a deadline for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. It seemed as if the resolution of that debate depended on who won the coming election. That is no longer the case. A deadline is coming. American taxpayers who would not let their money be used to subsidize their own companies — Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch — will not have their tax dollars used to subsidize your endless dithering over which Iraqi community dominates Kirkuk.

Don't misunderstand me. Many Americans and I are relieved by the way you, the Iraqi people and army have pulled back from your own brink of self-destruction. I originally launched this war in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. I was wrong. But it quickly became apparent that Al Qaeda and its allies in Iraq were determined to make America fail in any attempt to build a decent Iraq and tilt the Middle East toward a more democratic track, no matter how many Iraqis had to be killed in the process. This was not the war we came for, but it was the one we found.

Al Qaeda understood that if it could defeat America in the heart of the Arab-Muslim world, that it would resonate throughout the region and put Al Qaeda and its allies in the ascendant. Conversely, we understood that if we could defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq, in collaboration with other Arabs

**Iraqis are now going
to have to step up
and finish the job.**

and Muslims, that it would resonate throughout the region and pay dividends. Something very big was at stake here. We have gone a long way toward winning that war.

At the same time, I also came to realize that in helping Iraqis organize elections, we were facilitating the first ever attempt by the people of a modern Arab state to write their own social contract — rather than have one imposed on them by kings, dictators or colonial powers. If Iraqi Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds can forge your own social contract, then some form of a consensual government is possible in the Arab world. If you can't, it is kings and dictators forever — with all the pathologies that come with that. Something very big is at stake there, too.

It's not the stakes that have changed. It is the fact that you are now going to have to step up and finish this job. You have presumed an endless American safety net to permit you to endlessly bargain and dicker over who gets what. I've been way, way too patient with you. That is over. We bought you time with the surge to reach a formal political settlement and you better use it fast, because it is a rapidly diminishing asset.

You Shiites have got to bring the Sunni tribes and Awakening groups, who fought the war against Al Qaeda of Iraq, into the government and army. You Kurds have got to find a solution for Kirkuk and accept greater integration into the Iraqi state system, while maintaining your autonomy. You Sunnis in government have got to agree to elections so the newly emergent Sunni tribal and Awakening groups are able to run for office and become "institutionalized" into the Iraqi system.

So pass your election and oil laws, spend some of your oil profits to get Iraqi refugees resettled and institutionalize the recent security gains while you still have a substantial U.S. presence. Read my lips: It will not be there indefinitely — even if McCain wins.

Our ambassador, Ryan Crocker, has told me your problem: Iraqi Shiites are still afraid of the past, Iraqi Sunnis are still afraid of the future and Iraqi Kurds are still afraid of both.

Well, you want to see fear. Look in the eyes of Americans who are seeing their savings wiped out, their companies disappear, their homes foreclosed: We are a different country today. After a decade of the world being afraid of too much American power, it is now going to be treated to a world of too little American power, as we turn inward to get our house back in order.

I still believe a decent outcome in Iraq, if you achieve it, will have long-lasting, positive implications for you and the entire Arab world, although the price has been way too high. I will wait for history for my redemption, but the American people will not. They want nation-building in America now. They will not walk away from Iraq overnight, but they will not stay there in numbers over time. I repeat: Do not misread this moment. God be with you.

George W. Bush.

New disclosures cloud Saddam's execution

Western lawyers reveal trial pressure

By John F. Burns

Nearly two years after an Iraqi court sentenced Saddam Hussein to death, disclosures by Western lawyers who helped guide the court have given new ammunition to critics who contend that the Iraqi ruler was railroaded to the gallows by vengeful officials in Iraq's government.

The lawyers say the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, forced the resignation of one of five judges in the trial only days before the court sentenced Saddam and other high-ranking officials of his government. The purpose, the lawyers said, was to avert the possibility that the judges who were wavering would spare Saddam from the death penalty and sentence him to life imprisonment instead.

The disclosures, coming at a time when levels of violence in Iraq have subsided dramatically, seem likely to raise new questions about the degree to which the administration of President George W. Bush has succeeded in promoting democratic principles, including respect for the rule of law, among Iraq's new rulers. Inevitably, they will also lend new momentum to diehard Baathists in Iraq who regard Saddam as a martyr.

Long before he was hanged on Dec. 30, 2006, with supporters of Iraq's new Shiite-led government taunting him as the noose was tightened around his neck, a pattern of intervention by powerful Iraqi officials had been established.

The court's first chief judge was dismissed under government pressure for giving Saddam too much leeway for his courtroom outbursts and the associate judge named to succeed him was removed under government threats before he could take over.

But until now, only officials involved with the court's inner workings have known that a third judge, Munthur Hadi, was forced from the judges' panel less than a week before the court delivered its verdicts, on Nov. 5, 2006.

He was replaced by Ali al-Kahaji, who had heard none of the evidence in the nine-month trial but was favored by Maliki, the Western lawyers said, because of his links with Maliki's Dawa Party — a religious grouping that had lost thousands of its members to Saddam's repression — and because of his readiness to approve the hanging.

On Wednesday a spokesman for Maliki flatly denied any involvement by the Iraqi government in the judicial proceedings: "This is a judicial issue and it's up to the judges," Yassin Majeed said. "I refuse to comment about it because

the government has nothing to do with it. And whoever accuses the judicial system should talk to them.

"The government did not interfere and we refuse to comment about it. The Americans know this is not our business, it's the judicial system's business."

Hadi, the judge who was forced to resign, could not be reached for comment. Three other judges who served on the court at that time declined to comment, as did Haider Abadi, a member of Parliament and a political ally of Maliki's.

One of the lawyers now speaking out, William Wiley, worked in the Regime Crimes Liaison Office, the U.S. agency that set up, financed and acted as a behind-the-scenes organizer for the Iraqi High Tribunal, the special court constituted to hear cases against senior Saddam-era officials.

Wiley, a 44-year-old Canadian who worked as an adviser to the Iraqi defense lawyers at the trial, accused the Maliki government, not the liaison office or officials in Washington who monitored the trial, of subverting due process in the case.

"The prime minister's office was perpetually banging on the door, until they finally got control of the whole process," Wiley said in a telephone interview from Brussels, where he heads a legal consulting firm.

He linked the Iraqi government's manipulation of the Saddam trial to the war's most discouraging moments.

The last-minute replacement of a judge, the appeals process that was rushed to completion barely a month after the court's verdict and Maliki's

decision to sign an order for Saddam's execution despite insistent American objections that legal requirements for the hanging were still incomplete — all that came when the U.S. war effort was at its lowest ebb.

In January 2007, many U.S. commanders in Iraq were convinced that the war was being lost, even as Bush was ordering the troop surge that has helped reduce violence across Iraq in the last year.

By then, Wiley said, many at the liaison office, mostly Americans, had concluded that the proclaimed ideals of due process for Saddam-era officials were unrealizable in the face of powerful Iraqi officials who thirsted for vengeance and intervened repeatedly in the trial to get the outcome they wanted.

"Fatigue had set in," Wiley said, "and the American presence as a whole had been worn down by the violence, by the heat and by the Iraqis."

He added: "Whenever the Americans pushed them, they pushed back twice as hard. Basically, the Iraqis outlasted them."

Similar accounts of the replacement of Hadi were given by a second Western lawyer who worked on the trial and by a Western legal expert familiar with what happened. Both asked for anonymity because of the political sensitivities involved.

Wiley first referred to the removal of Hadi, without naming him, in an interview for a television documentary, "The Trial of Saddam Hussein," that will be broadcast as part of the "America at a Crossroads" series on PBS stations across the United States on Oct. 12. The documentary's producer, Elyse Steinberg, made a copy of the documentary available to The New York Times.

This correspondent, who is interviewed in the documentary, covered Saddam's trial in Iraq. He was not aware that the judge had been forced to resign until he watched the documentary.

The case that sent Saddam to his execution was rooted in a failed assassination attempt against the Iraqi leader in July 1982, in the mainly Shiite town of Dujail north of Baghdad. He was convicted of crimes against humanity for ordering the reprisal deaths by torture and execution of 143 men and boys from the town, though the trial left unclear the extent of his personal involvement in the killings.

The secrecy surrounding the replacement of Hadi was made possible by the court's ruling that the identities of all but the chief judge on the five-judge panels at the trials should be withheld from public disclosure, to protect the judges and their families.

In the PBS documentary, Wiley said that "other members of the chamber," apparently another judge, had told Maliki's office that one of the judges was "relatively soft" during deliberations on the verdicts and sentences for the eight Dujail defendants and was leaning against a death sentence for Saddam.

At the time, court officials attributed Hadi's departure to ill health. A lawyer interviewed for this article dismissed that as a pretext and said that officials in Maliki's office had threatened the judge with the loss of his job and his pension, and said that he and his family could be ousted from housing in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, which was tantamount to a death sentence for anybody involved in Saddam's prosecution.

"The prime minister's office had identified what they perceived to be the weak link, and he was removed and replaced by a hard-liner," Wiley said.

Wiley said he was speaking up not because he sympathized with Saddam, but because what happened was antithetical to the "rule of law project" that he and others at the liaison office believed their work to be.

He said the Iraqi government's moves

to ensure that Saddam went to the gallows were followed by even more blatant manipulation when Maliki's office pressured the Dujail appellate court to overrule the life sentence given to Taha Yassin Ramadan, a Saddam associate,

and order that he too be given a death sentence. He was hanged last year.

Alissa J. Rubin contributed reporting.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune September 25, 2008

Iraqi Parliament passes provincial election law

By Erica Goode

BAGHDAD: After months of bitter negotiation, Parliament passed a provincial election law Wednesday, clearing the way for elections to be held in most areas of the country by the end of January.

Passed by a majority of Parliament's 275 members, the law is seen as crucial to shoring up the fragile security gains of recent months and as an important step toward healing Iraq's deep political and religious fissures.

But in passing the bill, the lawmakers set aside for future debate the two most divisive issues they faced: How to resolve a quarrel among ethnic groups over the control of the oil city of Kirkuk in the north and how best to achieve political representation for Christians and other minorities.

Under the new law, a committee made up of representatives of the major groups that have made claims in Kirkuk — Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and Christians — will take up the issue and present recommendations for resolving the dispute to Parliament by March 31.

Provincial elections in Kirkuk will be postponed and the current provincial council will remain in place until a separate election law for the province can

be passed.

The law also delegates to a committee the thorny issue of how to achieve representation for Christians and other minorities on the provincial councils. According to the bill, the committee will work with the United Nations to reach a solution.

The law specifies that 25 percent of the council representatives elected must be women — the same quota that applies to Parliament.

The law must still be approved by the country's three-member presidential panel led by President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd who just this summer vetoed an election bill that Parliament had struggled to produce.

The election law is seen as a vital step toward reintegrating groups that had been underrepresented in Iraq's political process. Many of them boycotted the vote in 2005. But the new law was stalled by bitter disputes in the last session of Parliament.

Lawmakers had envisioned holding elections this autumn, but the date had been steadily pushed back, though now they look set to go ahead in most parts of the country in January.

But the status of Kirkuk remains a controversial issue. Kurdish officials insist that Kirkuk rightfully belongs to

Kurdistan. Sunni Arab and Turkmen lawmakers had proposed a power-sharing agreement to govern the city.

Graham Bowley contributed reporting from New York.

■ Deadly ambush in Diyala

Gunmen ambushed Iraqi forces who were raiding a Sunni village northeast of Baghdad on Wednesday, killing 22 policemen and U.S.-allied fighters, U.S. and Iraqi officials said, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

Amir Rafat, a member of the Diyala provincial council, attributed the attack in the insurgent stronghold of Othman-ya to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and

said it appeared the group knew of the raid because the ambush was carefully planned.

The U.S. military said 14 national police officers and 8 members of a Sunni militia that has joined forces with the U.S. Army against Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia had been killed.

The attackers also suffered casualties, Rafat said, but he gave no numbers.

The Iraqi forces were struck by a roadside bomb and then by a hail of gunfire as they entered the village to search for insurgents and weapons, a police officer in Baquba said on condition of anonymity.

He gave a slightly lower death toll of 12 policemen and 8 Awakening Council members.

The rural territory around Baquba

has been one of the hardest areas to control despite numerous U.S.-Iraqi military operations aimed at routing insurgents there.

Also Wednesday, the purported leader of the Islamic State in Iraq, an insurgent umbrella group, warned pro-government Sunnis that the Shiite government and American forces will one day turn on them.

Abu Omar al-Baghdadi issued a 37 minute audio message on militant Web sites to mark the second anniversary of his organization's founding and to call on former insurgents to rejoin the fight.

The U.S. military has described Baghdadi as a fictitious character used to give an Iraqi face to an organization that is actually dominated by foreign fighters.



Hadi Mizban/The Associated Press

An American soldier stood guard Wednesday in Baghdad as an Iraqi soldier handed out leaflets of wanted men during a search for insurgent suspects.

Kurdish political trial moves into key chapter

Thomas Seibert, Foreign Correspondent

ISTANBUL // A trial that could result in a ban of Turkey's main Kurdish party by the country's Constitutional Court before the end of the year has entered its final phase with the party presenting its defence before a panel of 11 judges, while intellectuals and EU officials have been calling on the court not to dissolve the party.

Although Turkey's judiciary has banned Kurdish parties before, the trial against the Party for a Democratic Society, or DTP, is the first such effort against a Kurdish group represented in parliament since Turkey started negotiations in 2005 to join the European Union. The EU is watching the trial. France's ambassador in Turkey, Bernard Ernie, speaking as representative of the current EU presidency, criticised the procedure. Trials like the one against the DTP were "developments contrary to the wishes of the people" the ambassador said.

For Turkey, the broader question behind the case against the DTP is if and at what point the peaceful exercise of political rights in a democracy can become a threat to national unity, a core value of the Turkish republic. Bans of three Kurdish parties in the 15 years since 1993 show that the Turkish judiciary has traditionally taken the view that parties demanding more rights for Kurds can constitute a danger for the country. But Turkey's EU reform programme has strengthened individual and political rights, fanning a debate about the legitimacy and effectiveness of party bans.

"Let's say they have banned the DTP. Will the Kurdish problem then dissolve?" wrote Ahmet Altan, a well-known intellectual and editor of Taraf, a daily newspaper. "No, it will be worse than

before. Kurds will rightly think that they are being treated as second-class citizens." More than 30,000 people have died in clashes between the Turkish army and members of the Kurdish rebel group Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has been fighting Ankara since 1984 and is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the European Union and the United States. The PKK originally said it was fighting for a separate Kurdish state but has since said it wants more autonomy for Turkey's estimated 12 million Kurds, a general amnesty and a withdrawal of the Turkish army from Kurdish regions. Ankara rejects those demands.

DTP officials as well as members of Turkey's pro-European reform camp argue that disbanding the DTP would deal a blow to Turkish democracy and probably exacerbate the Kurdish conflict. "A ban of the DTP would dry out hopes for a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem," Zeynep Tanbay, a spokeswoman of an informal alliance of pro-democracy groups said at a meeting in Istanbul. A verdict in the DTP trial is expected soon.

In court last week, DTP leaders stressed that the party had no organic links with the PKK. "Our party is a chance for Turkish democracy," DTP's leader, Ahmet Turk, told the court in his defence speech, according to newspaper reports. In his presentation, Mr Turk said the existence of the PKK was not the cause of the Kurdish conflict but a consequence of it. Turkey is under pressure to solve the Kurdish conflict peacefully. The DTP's success in last year's parliamentary elections, when it entered parliament with 21 deputies and formed the first Kurdish parliamentary group in

Turkish history, was hailed as a breakthrough. But in November, Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya, the chief prosecutor, asked the Constitutional Court to ban the DTP on the grounds that it had been founded on the orders of the PKK's jailed leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

The move was met with criticism by the EU. "We prefer to have the DTP in parliament instead of in the mountains" fighting the Turkish state, Olli Rehn, the EU enlargement commissioner, said at the time. The widening of political rights through Turkey's EU reforms in recent years offers some hope for the DTP. In January, the Constitutional Court rejected a demand by the prosecution to ban a smaller Kurdish party, the Party for Right and Freedom, or Hak-Par. Five judges voted against a ban, saying the party's ideas for a solution of the Kurdish problems were within the limits of free speech. Six judges voted in favour of a ban, but the votes of at least seven judges of the Constitutional Court are necessary to ban a party.

In a separate trial, the court also declined to ban the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, of the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Mr Turk told the court that Turkey had still not developed into a democracy despite the 10 reform packages that have gone through parliament in the past few years and called on judges to reject the demand of the prosecution to close down the DTP. Mr Turk did not sound optimistic after his day in court. There had not been a single question by any of the 11 judges after his defence speech, he told Hurriyet, a daily newspaper. "In their eyes we carry some mortal disease

Kurds complain of discrimination during annual iftar

By Raphael Thelen
Special to The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Kurdish Philanthropic Association (LKPA) marked its annual iftar dinner at Al-Sayad restaurant on Friday with a discussion on the difficulties faced by the Kurdish community in Lebanon. More than 250 people gathered to enjoy the traditional dinner, which breaks the day's Ramadan fasting. As the daylight faded away, the well-known fish restaurant on the Corniche in Ain al-Mreisseh filled up with members of the Lebanese Kurdish community.

Against the backdrop of the setting sun and waves crashing against the shore, men of all ages celebrated the end of the day and listened to the speeches from several members of the LKPA and Sunni Sheikh Hamed Mousamak.

First to speak was Mousamak, who talked about the religious meaning of iftar and of Ramadan in general. He asked for five seconds of silence for all those who had died in Lebanon, before Youssef Hami, vice president of the association, gave a speech about the difficulties facing the Kurdish community in Lebanon.

"The Kurdish community faces two major problems: Many of us do not have any



citizenship and we are neither represented in the Parliament, nor in the government," Hami told The Daily Star.

The Kurds, who are predominantly Sunni, mostly immigrated to Lebanon after World War I, fleeing persecution in their homelands. Many came with hopes of participating in the fledgling Lebanese economy, but they quickly learned that they would be denied the right to citizenship, so as not to endanger Lebanon's fragile

sectarian balance. As a result, they were not allowed to go to school or work in public sector jobs, leading to a vicious cycle of social and economic deprivation.

The situation improved gradually after 1994, when late former Premier Rafik Hariri issued a decree theoretically allowing Kurds to naturalize their status, but high costs and other obstacles prevented many from taking advantage of the offer.

Today more than 40 percent of the 75,000 Kurds in Lebanon still have no ID, or hold an "ID under construction," which states no date and place of birth.

Ongoing efforts by Kurdish associations to improve the situation have not achieved their goals. "We complained to many politicians and religious leaders, but no one supports our cause," said Hami. "We do not even have a place where our community can meet. We want to build a Kurdish center, but we can't. The annual iftar is the only occasion where our people gather."

The dinner ended around 8 p.m. after Mona Youssef, also a member of the LKPA, recited a classical Arabic poem and thanked people for coming.

September 23, 2008

WORLDmag COVER

A different place

IN IRAQ: After terrorists were chased out, the northern Iraq town of Shekhan has returned to a more serene way of life | *Mindy Belz*

SHEKHAN, IRAQ—On the road into Shekhan a year ago were checkpoints and potholes. Terrorists were a threat; the main road, in fact, was blocked with concrete barriers. Only a week before, a triple suicide bombing had killed more than 500 Yezidis who were living in villages not far from here. It was the largest death toll of any single terrorist attack of the Iraq War and the insurgency. In Shekhan you could feel the tension along the main streets and at the several checkpoints leading into the town. To get to the home of Rebka and Louis, Catholic friends who live up the hill at the top of the town, the driver had to snake through dirt back roads.

Shekhan is an unusual mix of Sunni Muslims, traditional Kurds, Catholics, Assyrians, and Yezidis, all packed tightly together in the town's narrow and hilly streets. Historically these groups get along; but terrorists chased out of their enclaves closer to Mosul and Kirkuk showed up last year in Shekhan and other towns bordering Nineveh Plain, trying to regroup and openly operating cells inside the town. They shook up the fragile ethnic balance and tried to set religion against religion. Iraqi police and military forces took the new threat seriously, even though Shekhan is not a big city. They closed in around the area and arrested terrorists door-to-door. It's probably true that some got away to other parts of Iraq, but Shekhan in September 2008 is a different place, and it happened, according to locals, without U.S. intervention: The checkpoints are gone, stores are busy selling outdoor furniture, even outdoor



baby cribs, and new sidewalks have been laid. Even the potholes are gone.

Louis has found a job driving a school bus. The bus is new, and so is the school. His brother and family have been living here after bombs made it impossible for them to stay in Baghdad. The brother is an electrician but he cannot find work. He hopes to emigrate to Sweden, where other family members have relocated already. But Louis and his family intend to stay.

Sundown each day this month marks the end of Ramadan fasting, so the streets swell with shoppers. Stalls are overflowing with cucumbers,

tomatoes, roasted corn, and squash, all despite an extremely dry season for the northern provinces that kicks sand into thick red clouds with the slightest wind. Ramadan here is strictly observed: Shops sell no food during the day. And Christians and other non-Muslims avoid eating in public until after sundown. Many also observe a form of the Ramadan fast, going without meat and cheese, or avoiding food altogether during the daylight hours. It makes life easier, said one, to stay in step with the majority culture.



Voices of Iraq
September 25, 2008

Kirkuk's elections to be held before end of 2009 - MP

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: A lawmaker from the Kurdish bloc on Wednesday said Parliament decided to set up a committee that will work to prepare the groundwork for the organization of elections in Kirkuk.

"A committee consisting of two representatives each from the Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen communities and one from the Christian community will work to prepare the groundwork for the organization of elections in Kirkuk provided that the voting be held before the end of 2009," MP Khalid al-Shawani from the Kurdish Alliance(KA) told Aswat al-Iraq.

MPs have now agreed to postpone the polls in Kirkuk and three northern provinces that already form part of the autonomous Kurdish region so that elections can be held in the other 14 provinces by January 31.

Elections in Kirkuk will not now be held until after March 2009 and the existing multi-communal council will continue to administer the province.

The Lawmaker pointed out the Parliament streamlined the committee work as it "would start the mechanism of dividing up authority in Kirkuk, reviewing citizenship records and voters registry along with checking the excesses that took place before and after April 2003," adding "it must be done through the mechanisms adopted in lifting excesses in other provinces."

The MP stressed all MPs agreed on the UN envoy's recommendations which stated "participation of federal government and Kurdistan's regional government in supplying the support to make the political process in Kirkuk succeed."

"When the Parliament fails to enact the law, it will seek help of the premiership, Presidential Board, along with international bodies to help enact the law," he added.

Deputies passed the provincial election law last July, but Kurdish MPs boycotted the session partly because the bill delayed voting in Kirkuk.

President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, then rejected the law as unconstitutional and sent it back. Iraq's three-member Presidential Board, which includes Talabani, must ratify all legislation.

Iraq's political blocs have met in recent days to try to reach a compromise on the law, but they failed to reach any breakthroughs.

The law had been held up by a dispute over what to do about voting in multi-ethnic Kirkuk, where a dispute is simmering between Kurds who say the city should belong to the largely autonomous Kurdistan region and Arabs who want it to stay under central government authority.

Arabs and Turkmen believe Kurds have stacked the city with Kurds since the downfall of Saddam in 2003 to try to tip the demographic balance in their favour in any vote.

Arabs encouraged to move there under Saddam Hussein's rule fear the vote will consolidate Kurdish power and they sought to postpone it, a proposal Kurdish politicians have rejected.

Parliament decided to postpone the vote and add another article that the Kurds found unacceptable: that each ethnic or sectarian group gets a set allocation of seats and voting is between individual candidates from those groups. Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen get 10 seats each. Minority Christians get two.

Washington has been urging a speedy provincial election, which it sees as a pillar of national reconciliation, but the poll is also proving a potential flashpoint for tensions.

United Press International

Kurds reject provincial elections measure

September 23, 2008 (UPI)

BAGHDAD, — Kurdish lawmakers in the Iraqi Parliament Monday rejected amendments to the provincial elections law regarding Kirkuk province.

Parliament stalled last week over passing legislation to move forward with provincial elections originally scheduled for October. U.N. officials had suggested moving ahead with the vote in all provinces but Kirkuk until a committee could examine any potential status of the oil-rich region.

Lawmakers are divided over Kirkuk, with some favoring annexation by the Kurdistan Regional Government and others favoring joining up with greater Iraq.

Members of the Kurdistan Alliance Monday said they were not informed by U.N. officials of any provisions and therefore will refuse any amendments to the provincial elections law, Voices of Iraq reported.

"There is no reason for any amendment," said Kurdish lawmaker Abdul Mohsen al-Saadon.

Parliament had been discussing proposals submitted by the U.N. envoy to Iraq, Staffan de Mistura.

Arab and Turkomen lawmakers stormed out of a parliamentary session Sunday over similar issues.

The Kurdistan Alliance had protested secret balloting over the provincial elections in July. A measure had passed July 22, but Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, vetoed the bill.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. It lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to "Arabize" the city and the region's oil industry.



Voice of America®

September 24, 2008

Anthropologist Lolan Sipan Documents, Preserves Traditional Life

By Suzanne Presto - Voice of America - Iraqi Kurdistan



"I try to gather and collect data on the number of tribes," Sipan said. "How many tribes are they, how many families are they, the illiteracy rate among the nomadic children, the women's position, and, their struggle for survival." Each summer, Sipan travels to the shepherds' mountain pastures. Life is not as serene as it appears because of Turkish and Iranian military threats. "I found an unexploded bomb that big near the creek down there," he said.

A shepherdess explained of the danger and high costs of sheepherding. While making traditional cheese, she tells Sipan the price it fetches is too low.

"The revenue of cheese is not a lot," she said. "And plus, we sell sheep and we get some money but then we have to spend it on the livestock." Sipan has lobbied United Nations agencies and government officials to assist the nomads.

"If we do not do something immediately, or intervene immediately, the nomadism culture would disappear within years in Kurdistan," Sipan said. In the past 10 years, Sipan says, 50-percent of Kurdistan's nomads have permanently settled in villages, abandoning their traditional livelihoods and mountain dwellings. "We are here in a traditional nomadic home, a black tent, which is made out of goats' hair," Sipan said.

This nomadic tent is not in the mountains. Sipan reconstructed it in Kurdistan's capital city, Erbil, on the roof of the museum he founded four years ago to showcase traditional art and weaving.

Sipan says more people come here each year. There were nearly 50,000 visitors in 2007. "They like the black



MODERNITY has a way of eclipsing, and sometimes even wiping out, tradition. There is a Kurdish anthropologist in northern Iraq who devotes his time and career to saving the traditions of Kurdistan's nomadic shepherds. In another in our series, *Making a Difference*, VOA's Suzanne Presto traveled to Mount Halgurd near the Iranian border to tell Lolan Sipan's story.

Nomadic tribes still roam the rugged mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, as they have for thousands of years. For months at a time, the nomads live in tents in the highlands, grazing their livestock in remote pastures. The nomads' lives are largely undocumented; their numbers on the decline.

Kurdish anthropologist Lolan Sipan is working to change those facts.

tent because it is very decorative and very impressive, but on the other hand they are not touched very much," Sipan said. Sipan adds, it makes him feel bad.

Earlier this year, Sipan lobbied for, and received, U.S. funding to help revive vanishing traditional arts. Elderly nomadic tribeswomen are now passing their embroidery and weaving skills on to younger generations of women

Kurdistan government welcomes Iraqi provincial elections law

September 27, 2008 Erbil-Hewler, Kurdistan region "Iraq", (UPI)

THE KURDISTAN Regional Government (KRG) welcomed the passage of the provincial elections law but called for broader representation of minority groups.

The Iraqi Parliament Wednesday passed the provincial elections law, setting the stage for elections in January. The matter was delayed in part due to

ongoing issues surrounding the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

Though earlier drafts contained provisions for representations of Christian, Kurdish Yazidi and other minority religious groups, the current measure has no such amendment.

A statement featured on the Web site for the Kurdistan Region Presidency praised the unanimous passage of the law, saying it marked a significant milestone in the democratic process.

The Kurdistan Region Presidency (KRP) is very pleased that the Iraqi Council of Representatives has unanimously approved an Iraqi provincial council elections law. The KRP believes that the passing of this law is a significant step toward strengthening the democratic process in Iraq.

Kurdish officials actively supported the representation of all Iraqis in an effort to define the status of their communities under a new federal system, but lamented the measure did not include provisions for religious minorities.

"We call on the Iraqi parliament and all Iraqi political factions to take serious

steps to find a solution for a fair representation of these groups," the statement said, adding national reconciliation requires harmonious relations with all representative groups in Iraq.

Although the law fails to mention the rightful representation of Christians, Yezidis and other religious minorities, the KRP reaffirms its support for the rights of all religious and ethnic groups in Iraq.

We call on the Iraqi parliament and all Iraqi political factions to take serious steps to find a solution for a fair representation of these groups. Peaceful co-existence of religious and ethnic groups can only be assured when all components are respected and have a fair representation at all levels of government.

Mother Jones

September 25, 2008

Opinion

On Iraq's Northern Front, Echoes of Georgia?

By Douglas Macgregor, an independent military strategist, retired Army colonel

The following post is from occasional contributor Douglas Macgregor, an independent military strategist, retired Army colonel, and author of *Breaking the Phalanx: A New Design for Landpower in the 21st Century*.

Evidence is piling up that the Turkish government will commit its armed forces against the de facto Kurdish state in Northern Iraq sooner rather than later. During his trip to Ankara last week, Admiral Mike Mullen, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was assaulted with questions from Turkish authorities about Kurdish activities in Kirkuk designed to drive out the remaining Arabs and establish Kurdish control over Iraq's northern oil and gas resources.

What most Americans don't know is that the Turkish government has tried to negotiate a settlement with the Kurds through its new Special Envoy for Iraq, Murat Ozelik. People

who know Ozelik insist he is the best person to negotiate Turkey's peace with the Kurds. Unfortunately, his Kurdish counterpart, Massoud Barzani, has turned out to be a fool who thinks he leads a pan-Kurdish movement inside Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey.

Convinced that Kurdistan's oil and gas wealth empowers it to act as though it were a sovereign state, Barzani has reportedly missed his chance to secure real peace for the Kurds. Increasingly, he looks more and more like the Kurdish equivalent of Arafat—except that Barzani and the Kurds are likely to meet a far more bitter end. The Turks won't exercise the restraint the Israelis have vis-à-vis the Palestinian Arabs. Much of the violence that is picking up between the Kurds and the Sunnis may well be the first sign of a Turkish counter-offensive to punish the Kurds for their continued support of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a militant group that seeks to establish a Kurdish state in the region. Barzani reportedly considers it his sacred duty to harbor the PKK, while Jalal

Talibani, Iraq's Kurdish president, views the PKK as some sort of strategic hedge against Turkish military intervention.

"The Kurds have overplayed their hand thanks to lots of American encouragement," one of the most astute observers of the Turkish scene told me. "This isn't so unlike Georgia. But the resulting violence will be far worse; Iraq will grow more unstable and the US will lose what little credibility it has left in the Middle East." We can only hope that United States withdraws our ground forces soon. Army and Marine ground forces already depend heavily on fixed bases for operational capability, and the prospect of facing a Turkish Army and Air Force full of young, energetic Turks only too happy to kill Americans is something this country should seek to avoid. Nothing good will come of it.



Kurdistan Regional Government

26 Sep. 2008

Prime Minister Barzani signs historic oil agreements with South Korea

Seoul, Korea (KRG.org) - KURDISTAN Regional Government Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani yesterday signed a series of ground-breaking agreements with the Korean National Oil Company (KNOC). These finalise a set of earlier preliminary agreements under which KNOC will be granted rights to explore and drill on several sites in the Kurdistan Region in exchange for valuable support on a range of infrastructure projects.

Prime Minister Barzani said, "This is an exceptional agreement which serves the needs of the people of the Kurdistan Region in the areas of power, sewage and water treatment and other infrastructure elements. We are finding ways to put our valuable natural resources directly to work for the good of the people, and this is the strongest obligation of our government."

Under the agreement's initial stage, KNOC will support power plant construction and sewage and water treatment facilities worth 600 million US dollars. In later stages, once certain conditions are met, the value of the projects will increase by another 1.5 billion dollars.

Speaking on the overall oil and gas situation in Iraq, the Prime Minister said, "This agreement is a perfect example of what the rest of Iraq should be doing. We are trying to address the needs of our people, and the federal government in Baghdad should be doing the same thing. Oil is a gift to all the peoples of Iraq, not just its leadership, and it is time to begin putting this gift to work for all the people of the country."

Prime Minister Barzani added, "I again call on the federal government in Baghdad to move ahead rapidly in completing, as required in the Constitution, the previously drafted oil law which provides for equity, fairness, transparency, and a modern approach to development of our national resources."

"We are grateful to our Korean friends for their support and friendship, and for working with us to fashion an agreement which meets the needs of all involved. We look forward to implementing this agreement, and to deepening the friendship and economic cooperation which has developed between the people of the Kurdistan Region and Korea."



LeMatin 25 septembre 2008

Irak: 35 morts dans une embuscade près de Bagdad, loi électorale adoptée sauf à Kirkouk

BAGDAD (AFP)

Trente-cinq personnes, dont 27 policiers, ont été tuées dans une embuscade tendue mercredi par des assaillants non identifiés dans un village au nord-est de Bagdad, selon un nouveau bilan fourni jeudi par une source administrative locale.

Les 35 personnes tuées mercredi, parmi lesquelles des policiers et des Sahwas, ont été victimes d'une embuscade vers 15H30 (12H30 GMT) à al-Duleimat, un village situé dans la province de Diyala, dont Baqouba est la capitale.

Les Sahwas sont d'anciens rebelles ralliés à la lutte contre Al-Qaïda, qu'ils combattent désormais aux côtés des forces irakiennes et américaines.

Selon une source proche des services de sécurité, les policiers et les Sahwas ont été attaqués alors qu'ils pénétraient dans le village, réputé contrôlé par les rebelles proches d'Al-Qaïda.

Une source hospitalière a confirmé avoir reçu les corps de 20 personnes, précisant qu'elles avaient été tuées par balles.

Par ailleurs, les députés irakiens ont enfin adopté mercredi une nouvelle loi électorale qui prévoit la tenue d'importantes élections provinciales au plus tard le 31 janvier 2009 mais laisse en suspens la question controversée de la province de Kirkouk.

La majorité des 191 députés présents ont adopté à main levée la nouvelle

législation, bloquée depuis des mois par les profondes divisions entre factions



© afp | Les députés irakiens ont enfin adopté mercredi une nouvelle loi électorale qui prévoit la tenue d'importantes élections provinciales au plus tard le 31 janvier 2009 mais laisse en suspens la question controversée de la province de Kirkouk.

irakiennes.

La loi prévoit que les élections provinciales se dérouleront au plus tard le 31 janvier 2009 dans 14 des 18 provinces d'Irak.

Elles seront en revanche organisés plus tard dans les provinces formant la région kurde (Dohouk, Erbil et Souleimaniyeh) et dans la très contestée province de Kirkouk (nord).

Initialement prévu le 1er octobre 2008, le scrutin est considéré comme crucial pour

la stabilité du pays, notamment par Washington, qui y voit une étape incontournable du processus de réconciliation en Irak.

"C'est un jour important", s'est félicité au cours d'une conférence de presse le représentant spécial de l'ONU pour l'Irak Staffan de Mistura, qui souhaitait l'organisation du scrutin au plus vite et au plus tard début 2009.

"Cette loi traduit notre volonté d'aboutir à un accord, elle montre que nous sommes capables d'aplanir nos différends par des moyens démocratiques", a commenté le président du parlement Mahmoud al-Machhadani.

Au Kurdistan autonome, région de facto indépendante qui dispose de son propre gouvernement et parlement, aucune date n'a été fixée pour les élections provinciales.

L'organisation du scrutin au Kurdistan ne fait pas débat entre Bagdad et les autorités kurdes, mais elle nécessite au préalable l'adoption d'une loi électorale par le parlement régional kurde.

Le président américain George W. Bush a salué mercredi l'adoption par le parlement de cette nouvelle loi électorale, qualifiant ce vote d'étape cruciale dans le processus de réconciliation du pays.

"Cet acte aujourd'hui montre la capacité des dirigeants irakiens à travailler ensemble pour le bien du peuple irakien et représente un nouveau progrès dans la réconciliation politique", a-t-il dit dans un communiqué.

TURQUIE: AMENDES POUR DES JOURNALISTES AYANT INTERVIEWÉ DES REBELLES KURDES

AFP

ISTANBUL, 25 sept 2008 (AFP) -

TROIS journalistes du quotidien turc Hurriyet ont été condamnés jeudi à des amendes pour avoir "servi la propagande d'une organisation terroriste" en publiant il y a quatre ans une interview avec des séparatistes kurdes, a indiqué l'agence de presse Anatolia.

Sebati Karakurt, qui a réalisé l'interview dans un camp du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak, voisin de la Turquie, a été condamné à une amende de 40.000 liras (22.000 euros), de même que Hasan Kilic. Un autre journaliste du même quotidien à gros tirage, Necdet Tatlican, a été condamné à payer une amende de 20.000 liras.

Le tribunal a estimé que les journalistes s'étaient rendus coupables de "servir

la propagande d'une organisation terroriste" en violation de la législation antiterroriste.

L'interview, publiée en octobre 2004, était centrée sur un groupe de jeunes femmes engagées dans le PKK et montrait une image inhabituelle des rebelles, souriant ou jouant de la guitare, en contradiction avec l'image violente généralement véhiculée par les médias turcs.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait, selon l'armée turque, 32.000 morts dans les rangs du PKK, près de 6.500 dans ceux des forces de sécurité (armée et police) et 5.500 chez les civils.

AFP

RAIDS AÉRIENS TURCS CONTRE DES POSITIONS DU PKK DANS LE NORD IRAKIEN (RESPONSABLE)

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 26 sept 2008 (AFP) -

DES AVIONS militaires turcs ont lancé plusieurs raids contre des positions des rebelles kurdes du parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak, a indiqué vendredi à l'AFP un responsable local.

Les bombardements ont visé jeudi soir les positions du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, à Zarawah et Senkser près de la chaîne montagneuse de Qandil, le long de la frontière avec la Turquie et l'Iran, a précisé un responsable kurde irakien de la localité de Zarawah, Azad

Wasso.

"L'aviation turque a bombardé plusieurs secteurs de Zarawah et de Senkser", a-t-il dit, soulignant que le bombardement avait duré plusieurs heures.

Le porte-parole du PKK, Ahmed Danis, a confirmé à l'AFP les raids qui ont fait selon lui un blessé parmi les rebelles.



"Nous savions qu'ils planifiaient une attaque", a-t-il ajouté.

La semaine dernière, le gouvernement turc a indiqué qu'il allait demander au Parlement une prolongation d'un an d'une autorisation pour mener des incursions contre les bases du PKK dont des milliers de membres sont retranchés dans le Kurdistan irakien (nord).

Le Parlement turc avait adopté le 17 octobre 2007 un texte autorisant pour un an le gouvernement turc à mener, si nécessaire, des incursions militaires dans le nord irakien. Depuis, la Turquie y a mené de nombreux raids aériens ainsi qu'une opération terrestre. Les Etats-Unis assistent Ankara en lui

fournissant en temps réel des informations sur les mouvements du PKK.

L'Assemblée nationale turque, actuellement en vacances, doit s'ouvrir le 1er octobre et son feu vert est acquis.

Le PKK se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Selon un récent bilan fourni par le nouveau chef d'état-major turc, le général Ilker Basbug, le conflit a fait 32.000 morts dans les rangs du PKK et près de 6.500 dans ceux des forces de sécurité (armée et police). Quelque 5.500 civils ont également perdu la vie dans le conflit.



REVENDIQUÉE PAR LES KURDES, KHANAQINE EST DÉJÀ SUR LE SENTIER DE LA GUERRE

KHANAQINE (Irak), 26 sept 2008 (AFP) -

A KHANAQINE, ville kurde de la province de Diyala dans l'est de l'Irak, les responsables locaux sont sur le sentier de guerre et préviennent qu'il y aura une explosion des violences si le pouvoir central n'accepte pas leur rattachement au Kurdistan.

"Notre message au gouvernement (irakien) est simple. Appliquer la Constitution et autoriser la tenue d'un référendum local d'auto-détermination", explique à l'AFP Mala Bakhtyar, membre du bureau politique de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), le parti du chef de l'Etat irakien Jalal Talabani.

"Si le gouvernement ne fait rien, il y aura des troubles politiques et des violences", avertit-il.

Le chef kurde appelle à couper tout lien avec le gouvernement central de Bagdad et souhaite que Khanaqine intègre la région autonome du Kurdistan (nord). Khanaqine "fait partie du Kurdistan historique".

Située à 170 km à l'est de Bagdad, la ville a des allures de ville du bout du monde, avec ses ruelles poussiéreuses aux immeubles délabrés des années 1970. Elle est située au nord de la province mixte de Diyala, bastion d'Al-Qaïda et l'une des régions les plus dangereuses d'Irak.

La route de Bagdad, désertée à partir de la mi-journée, y est parsemée de carcasses de véhicules calcinés, y compris de ceux de la police.

Mais la ville d'environ 200.000 habitants, à 97% Kurdes chiites selon ces derniers, échappe à cette insécurité. Elle est gardée par les peshmergas, les combattants du gouvernement autonome kurde.

Le drapeau rouge, vert et blanc du Kurdistan flotte partout sur la ville, sur les barrages, les bâtiments publics et de nombreuses habitations.

Durant la politique d'arabisation de l'ancien président sunnite Saddam Hussein, dans les années 1980, un grand nombre de Kurdes chiites avaient été déplacés par la force. Ils sont revenus en force en 2003 à la chute du régime.

Lui-même commandant des peshmergas, Mala Bakhtyar a dirigé la prise de la ville en mars 2003. "Quand nous sommes arrivés ici, il y avait 36 militaires américains et pas de troupes irakiennes. Je suis venu à la tête de 4.000 à 5.000 hommes", assure le chef militaire kurde, carrure d'athlète et moustache en croc, assis à son bureau flambant neuf face à une télévision dernier cri.

Selon lui, les peshmergas assurent une meilleure sécurité à Khanaqine, les forces irakiennes et leurs alliés américains dans le reste de Diyala.

"Il n'y a pas de combattants d'Al-Qaïda ici, pas de violence. Pourquoi alors des troupes irakiennes?" demande-t-il. Le gouvernement central "devrait nous remercier plutôt que nous demander de déguerpir!"

En juin 2006, le conseil municipal de Khanaqine avait demandé que la région soit intégrée au Kurdistan. Or en août 2008, l'armée irakienne a exigé le départ des peshmergas des bâtiments publics.

L'ultimatum a provoqué la colère des Kurdes dont les combattants n'ont pas bougé d'un pouce, et a déclenché une crise.

Depuis, des négociations sont en cours entre l'UPK et le gouvernement central. Mais elles ne progressent guère, selon le patron local de l'UPK, qui ne voit qu'une solution au problème: "l'intégration au Kurdistan".

Derrière le conflit se cache la question des réserves de pétrole de Khanaqine, qui attirent les convoitises.

Pour le maire de la ville, le Kurde Mohammed Mala Hassan, 52 ans, "nous sommes assis sur un océan de pétrole mais, faute d'argent pour commencer l'exploitation, nous n'en tirons aucun profit".

Holster à l'épaule, escorté d'une imposante cohorte de gardes du corps armés, le maire rappelle que le premier puits d'or noir en Irak a été découvert en 1927 dans sa ville. "Mais nous n'avons pas de raffinerie ici, alors que dans les années 1970, nous avions près de 35 puits, qui ont été fermés par Saddam".

Pour lui, il n'y a qu'"un seul moyen de résoudre pacifiquement la crise" et commencer à exploiter le pétrole: "En organisant un référendum".



IRAK: RAID DE LA POLICE CONTRE UN BÂTIMENT DES PESHMERGAS, UN TUÉ

BAQOUBA (Irak), 27 sept 2008 (AFP) -

UN COMBATTANT kurde a été tué samedi au cours d'une opération de la police irakienne contre un bâtiment des forces kurdes dans la province de Diyala (est de l'Irak), a-t-on appris de sources concordantes.

Une unité récemment formée de la police irakienne a attaqué le quartier général des "Asaysh" (services de renseignements des peshmergas, les combattants du Kurdistan autonome) à Jalawla, à 150 km au nord-est de Bagdad, a indiqué à l'AFP Salah Koikhe, un responsable local de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK).

Des affrontements ont éclaté et un membre des Asaysh a été tué, selon M. Koikhe.

La situation restait très tendue en début d'après-midi à Jalawla, sous contrôle des forces de sécurité irakiennes qui y ont imposé un couvre-feu, a précisé ce

même responsable.

Ces informations ont été confirmées par une source militaire irakienne qui a requis l'anonymat.

La localité de Jalawla est située une vingtaine de kilomètres à l'ouest de Khanaqin, ville tenue par les peshmergas et dont les Kurdes réclament le rattachement au Kurdistan autonome.

Les peshmergas sont en majorité déployés dans les trois provinces de la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan (nord), mais ils sont stationnés également plus au sud, dans les provinces de Ninive, de Kirkouk et de Diyala.

Leur présence à Khanaqin suscite depuis la mi-août de vives tensions avec le gouvernement central, qui exige leur départ immédiat.

Bastion d'Al-Qaïda, la province est aussi l'une des régions les plus dangereuses d'Irak.



IRAK: UN MAIRE KURDE ET SIX HOMMES BLESSÉS DANS UN ATTENTAT DANS L'EST

BAQOUBA (Irak), 28 sept 2008 (AFP) -

LE MAIRE KURDE d'une petite ville de l'est irakien et six de ses hommes ont été blessés dimanche matin dans un attentat à la bombe contre leur convoi, a-

t-on appris de source policière.

La bombe a explosé au passage du convoi d'Ahmad al-Zarqoushi, maire de Saadiyah, une petite ville située dans les environs de Khanaqine (est), alors que

celui-ci se rendait à son bureau, a précisé le commandant Shirko Baajilan, un officier de la police de Saadiyah.

La région de Khanaqine, située dans la province de Diyala (nord), peuplée en majorité d'arabes sunnites, provoque actuellement de vives tensions entre le gouvernement irakien et les partis politiques kurdes.

Le premier, qui veut asseoir son autorité sur la zone, a ordonné cet été aux combattants kurdes des peshmergas, qui contrôlent la ville, de quitter les bâtiments officiels de Khanaqine pour laisser le champ libre aux soldats

irakiens.

Près de 175.000 personnes vivent dans la municipalité de Khanaqine, où un grand nombre de kurdes chiites, chassés de la région par la politique d'arabisation de Saddam Hussein dans les années 1980, sont revenus après la chute du régime en 2003.

Les formations kurdes réclament aujourd'hui le rattachement de Khanaqine à la région autonome du Kurdistan (nord).



"OEIL POUR OEIL, DENT POUR DENT": LES KURDES DE RETOUR À KHANAQINE

KHANAQINE (Irak), 28 sept 2008 (AFP) -

"OEIL POUR OEIL, dent pour dent": plus de 30 ans après avoir été expulsé de sa maison de Khanaqin par la politique d'arabisation forcée de Saddam Hussein, le Kurde Mohammed Aziz est revenu et s'est vengé en s'installant dans la maison d'un Arabe.

Aziz n'avait que quatre ans en 1975, lorsque sa famille a été expulsée du village de Bawaplawi, près de cette ville de la province de Diyala, dans l'est de l'Irak, et que des nouveaux venus arabes ont pris leur maison.

"Nos maisons ont été prises par les Arabes sans qu'on nous ait versé aucune compensation", raconte ce professeur de mathématiques de 37 ans, dans la modeste maison de briques à un étage. "Nous sommes revenus et avons pris une des maisons vides. Les Arabes d'ici avaient fui".

La politique d'"arabisation" de Saddam Hussein entendait changer la démographie de Khanaqine, initialement peuplée d'une majorité de Kurdes chiites et de minorités arabe, turcomane et juive.

Mais après la chute du régime, à la suite de l'invasion américaine de mars 2003, les Kurdes sont revenus et les Arabes semblent avoir déserté l'endroit.

"90% des gens qui avaient été expulsés de Khanaqine sont revenus", affirme le maire de la ville, Mohammed Mala Hassan, 52 ans. "Je veux que les autres reviennent aussi, mais je n'ai pas d'argent pour leur fournir les services de base".

Les Kurdes comme Aziz se sont emparés de la terre abandonnée précipitamment par les Arabes, "sans soutien des autorités", affirme-t-il. Pour Aziz, une juste punition, et une justice qui arrive enfin, 30 ans après.

"Ce qu'ils avaient fait était injuste. Nous avons nous aussi pris des maisons vides, mais seulement parce que nos maisons avaient été prises de la même manière en 1975", justifie-t-il.

Dans sa nouvelle habitation trône le drapeau rouge, blanc et vert des peshmergas, les combattants kurdes. La plupart des maisons du village sont des huttes de torchis, seules quelques unes sont faites de briques.

Khanaqine, proche de la frontière iranienne, a émergé sur le devant de la scène en raison de ses ressources pétrolières encore inexploitées et de sa proximité avec le gouvernement régional kurde (KRG) installé plus au nord.

Le maire de la ville voudrait voir sa région, qui compte quelque 175 villages, rattachée au Kurdistan, et non plus à la très instable province de Diyala, peuplée en majorité d'Arabes sunnites.

Le professeur de mathématique Aziz raconte qu'il a été forcé d'enseigner cette matière dans une école de la province de Babylone, en majorité chiite, où le régime de Saddam Hussein les avait contraints à s'installer.

"Je suis content d'être de retour car je peux élever mes trois enfants en kurde", dit-il en désignant deux garçons âgés de 7 et 10 ans et une petite fille d'un an. "Et je suis content de revoir ma terre".

Les Kurdes n'ont pas mis longtemps à défaire ce que Saddam avait fait. Cela a avivé les tensions avec le gouvernement central de Bagdad. Tensions qui se sont focalisées sur la présence des peshmergas dans la région.

Les combattants kurdes se targuent d'avoir restauré la sécurité à Khanaqine, et d'avoir repoussé Al-Qaïda aux zones de peuplement arabe de Diyala.

Khanaqine, qui compte entre 200 et 250.000 habitants, est l'une des 40 villes et régions irakiennes tourmentées par les tensions communautaires qui sont réapparues après l'invasion américaine.

Les enjeux ont été démultipliés à Khanaqine par la flambée des prix du pétrole, mais aussi la fertilité de sa terre, qui avait permis le développement d'une agriculture florissante au début des années 1970, lorsque la ville était connue pour ses tomates et grenades.

Aziz y voit de son côté un avenir meilleur pour ses enfants, et estime que les événements de ces cinq dernières années renforcent la vocation de Khanaqine à faire partie du Kurdistan. "C'est également ce que mes ancêtres voulaient".



LE PKK ANNONCE UNE TRÊVE LE TEMPS DES FÊTES DE LA FIN DU RAMADAN

ANKARA, 29 sept 2008 (AFP) -

LES REBELLES KURDES de Turquie ont annoncé lundi qu'ils renonceraient à leurs opérations armées durant les fêtes célébrant la fin du ramadan, a rapporté l'agence de presse Fırat News, porte-voix des rebelles.

"Dans le but de montrer nos bonnes intentions, nous respecterons une trêve pour que le sang ne soit pas versé et que le coeur d'aucune mère ne soit brisé durant les fêtes de la fin du ramadan", a affirmé la direction du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), citée par l'agence sur son site internet.

Les musulmans turcs et kurdes célébreront cette année entre mardi et jeudi la fin du mois de jeûne de ramadan.

Le PKK a également appelé les forces de sécurité turques à respecter cette

trêve.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.

Selon un récent bilan fourni par l'armée turque, le conflit a fait 32.000 morts dans les rangs du PKK et près de 6.500 dans ceux des forces de sécurité (armée et police). Quelque 5.500 civils ont également perdu la vie dans le conflit.

Entre le 1er et le 26 septembre, 45 rebelles, 14 soldats et trois miliciens kurdes supplétifs de l'armée turque sont morts dans des combats, selon l'état-major de l'armée turque.

Syrie ➤ Une voiture piégée a explosé samedi matin à Damas, tuant 17 personnes.

Un attentat aux pistes multiples

SYRIE



C'est l'attentat le plus meurtrier depuis vingt-cinq ans qu'a connu la Syrie samedi matin, au sud de Damas. PHOTO HUSSEIN MALLA. AP

Une seule chose est sûre dans l'attentat de samedi matin à Damas: c'est qu'il a tué 17 personnes et blessé 14 autres, le plus grave bilan depuis un quart de siècle. Cette attaque terroriste à la voiture piégée, commise dans un quartier sud de la capitale syrienne, ressemble beaucoup à celles commises ces dernières années en Irak. Or, l'endroit où a explosé le véhicule se situe non loin du tombeau de Sayeda Zeinab, haut lieu de culte chiïte où se pressent pèlerins libanais, iraniens ou irakiens. Revue des différentes hypothèses.

L'hypothèse Al-Qaeda

Les autorités syriennes se plaignaient, notamment après l'attaque de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis en septembre 2006 (six morts dont les quatre assaillants, un garde et un passant), d'être victimes, elles aussi, du «terrorisme». Sans toujours convaincre. Aujourd'hui, la piste Al-Qaeda semble réellement crédible. Damas, pressée par les Etats-Unis, et désireuse d'améliorer sa réputation diplomatique, lutte avec beaucoup plus d'efficacité contre le passage par son territoire de candidats jihadistes en route pour l'Irak. Il y a un an, jour pour jour, le cheikh syrien Mahmoud Abou al-Qaqa, connu pour son rôle dans le recrutement de combattants jihadistes pour l'Irak, était mystérieusement assassiné en sortant de la prière du vendredi à Alep, dans le nord de la Syrie. Cet été, la mutinerie de prisonniers condamnés pour crimes de «terrorisme» et d'«extrémisme» a été sévèrement réprimée, causant 25 morts. Dernier indice: ces derniers jours, l'armée sy-

rienne a massé 10000 hommes issus de ses troupes d'élite à la frontière du Liban. Explication officielle: des groupes fondamentalistes sunnites présents dans le nord du Liban, à Tripoli, où ils affrontent la communauté alaouïte, dont Damas s'est instaurée la protectrice, pourraient tenter de s'infiltrer en Syrie. En revanche, la piste des Frères musulmans syriens, qui avaient tenté d'ébranler le régime baassiste par une vague d'attentats au tournant des années 70-80 paraît peu crédible.

Un pays de la région

La presse officielle syrienne a pointé du doigt les «menaces venues de l'extérieur», une expression visant en général Israël. Selon elle, l'attentat serait un avertissement à Damas, qui cherche en ce moment à rassurer Téhéran sur la solidité de l'alliance stratégique syro-iranienne, alors que le régime syrien est parallèlement engagé dans une opération de séduction envers les Occidentaux, à commencer par la France, mais aussi les Etats-Unis. En fait, Israël est coutumier des assassinats ciblés, pas des attentats de masse: on lui attribue l'assassi-

nat d'Imad Moughnieh, le chef militaire du Hezbollah, à Damas le 12 février. A la suite de ce coup dur, les relations entre la milice chiïte libanaise, proche de Téhéran, et son allié syrien s'étaient refroidies. Plus récemment, deux cadres du Hamas palestinien vivant en Syrie ont été tués dans des circonstances troubles.

Mais les accusations syriennes visent tout autant, sinon plus encore, l'Arabie Saoudite. Depuis l'assassinat, en février 2005, de l'ex-Premier ministre libanais Rafic Hariri, imputé aux Syriens par les Saoudiens, dont il était le protégé, les relations entre Damas et Ryad sont exécrables. Le roi

Abdallah s'est juré d'avoir la tête du jeune Bachar Al-Assad depuis que ce dernier l'a traité de «demi-homme» après la guerre d'Israël contre le Liban et le Hezbollah de l'été 2006. En outre, l'Arabie Saoudite est influente chez les groupes sunnites fondamentalistes en Irak et au Liban.

Des tensions internes

Nombre de spécialistes, surtout israéliens, privilégient l'hypothèse d'un règlement de

comptes interne au régime. Ce type d'explication est courant dans un régime aussi verrouillé et opaque. Sans entrer dans des spéculations difficilement vérifiables, il faut

noter l'échec que représentent pour les hommes des renseignements le transport et l'explosion de 200 kg d'explosifs à Damas, tout près d'un poste des services de sécurité. Les attentats se sont d'ailleurs multipliés en Syrie, créant un sentiment d'incertitude dans la population: celui contre un bâtiment de l'ONU en avril 2004; celui contre l'ambassade américaine en 2006; celui contre le chef militaire du Hezbollah en février 2008. Mais aussi le mystérieux assassinat, le 2 août à Tartous, du général Mohammed Souleiman, un proche du président Assad qui était chargé du dossier du Hezbollah, mais aussi des relations avec l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique, qui soupçonne Damas d'avoir un programme nucléaire clandestin. Un homme qui en savait beaucoup, peut-être trop.

➤ CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Is This a 'Victory'?

By Peter W. Galbraith

1. We hear again and again from Washington that we have turned a corner in Iraq and are on the path to victory. If so, it is a strange victory. Shiite religious parties that are Iran's closest allies in the Middle East control Iraq's central government and the country's oil-rich south. A Sunni militia, known as the Awakening, dominates Iraq's Sunni center. It is led by Baathists, the very people we invaded Iraq in 2003 to remove from power. While the US sees the Awakening as key to defeating al-Qaeda in Iraq, Iraq's Shiite government views it as a mortal enemy and has issued arrest warrants for many of its members. Meanwhile the Shiite-Kurdish alliance that brought stability to parts of Iraq is crumbling. The two sides confronted each other militarily after the Iraqi army entered the Kurdish-administered town of Khanaqin in early September.

John McCain has staked his presidential candidacy on his early advocacy of sending more troops to Iraq. He says he is for victory while Barack Obama is for surrender; and polls suggest that voters trust McCain more on Iraq than they do Obama. In 2006, dissatisfaction with the Iraq war ended Republican control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This year, in spite of being burdened with the gravest financial crisis since 1929 and the most unpopular president since the advent of polling, the Republican presidential nominee is running a competitive race.

The US sent more troops into Iraq in 2007 and violence has declined sharply in Anbar, Baghdad, and many other parts of the country. Sectarian killings in Baghdad are a fraction of what they were in 2006, although that city remains one of the world's most dangerous places. In recent months, US casualties have been at their lowest level of the entire war. While it is debatable how much of this is the result of the "surge" in US troop strength, as opposed to other factors, the decline in violence is obviously a welcome development.

Less violence, however, is not the same thing as success. The United States did not go to war in Iraq for the purpose of ending violence between contending sectarian forces. Success has to be measured against US objectives. John McCain proclaims his goal to be victory and says we are now winning in Iraq (a victory that will, of course, be lost if his allegedly pro-surrender opponent wins). He considers victory to be an Iraq that is "a democratic ally." George W. Bush has defined victory as a unified, democratic, and stable Iraq. Neither man has explained how he will transform Iraq's ruling theocrats into democrats, diminish Iran's vast influence in Baghdad, or reconcile Kurds and Sunnis to Iraq's new order. Remarkably, neither the Democrats nor the press has challenged them to do so.

2. In January 2007, President Bush announced that he was sending 25,000 additional troops to Baghdad and Anbar province. Under a military strategy devised by the newly appointed Iraq commander, General David Petraeus, US troops moved out of their secure bases and embedded themselves among the population. The forces of the surge were intended to provide sufficient protection to the local population so that they would cooperate

with the Iraqi army and police and US troops fighting insurgents and subversive Shiite militias. By living with their Iraqi counterparts, the US troops could provide training, advice, and confidence, making the Iraqi forces more capable.

Politically, the surge was intended to provide a breathing space for Iraq's diverse factions to come together on a program of national reconciliation. This was to include revision of a law excluding Baathists from public service, new provincial elections so that Sunnis might be fully represented on the local level, a law for the equitable sharing of oil revenues, and revisions of the Iraqi constitution to create a more powerful central government. Except for a flawed law on de-Baathification, these goals have not been achieved, although the parliament recently passed a law to allow elections in parts of the country. Militarily, however, the surge worked as General Petraeus intended. In Baghdad and other places wracked by sectarian violence, Sunnis and Shiites welcomed the increased presence of US troops.

The surge, however, has not been the main reason for the decline in violence. In 2006, Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar decided that al-Qaeda and like-minded Islamic fundamentalist fighters were a greater threat than the Americans. The fundamentalists were a direct challenge to the local establishment, assassinating sheikhs and raping their daughters (sometimes under the pretext of forced marriage to jihadis). More importantly, the tribal leaders came to realize that the Americans would sooner or later want to leave while the fundamentalists intended to stay and rule. The tribal leaders obtained American money to create their own militias and, in a brief period of time, forced al-Qaeda and its allies out of most of Sunni Iraq. Denied their base in Sunni areas, the fundamentalists have been less able to stage the spectacular attacks on Shiites that helped fuel Iraq's Sunni-Shiite civil war.

Meanwhile, the radical Shiite Moqtada al-Sadr responded to the increased US military deployments by ordering his militia, the Mahdi Army, to stand down. At the time, this seemed like a sensible tactical approach. He, too, realized that the US presence—in particular the surge in troop numbers—was a temporary phenomenon. By not fighting the Americans, he could wait out the surge, recall his troops, and eventually resume battle with the Sunnis and rival Shiite factions.

Al-Sadr's Shiite rivals, however, outfoxed him. In 2006, the support of al-Sadr's parliamentarians enabled Nouri al-Maliki to win the nomination of the Shiite caucus to be prime minister by one vote over Adel Abdul Mehdi, the candidate of Iraq's largest Shiite party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). In 2008, however, al-Maliki broke his connection to al-Sadr and aligned himself with SCIRI (since renamed the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, or SIIC). In March, he used the Iraqi army, a Shiite-dominated institution built around the SIIC's militia, the Badr Corps, to oust the Mahdi Army from much of Basra. Subsequently, the Iraqi army and police have made inroads against the Mahdi Army in its stronghold in Sadr City, Baghdad's sprawling Shiite slum.

Al-Maliki launched the Basra operation

without first telling the Americans, and when the Iraqi forces ran into difficulty, he had to ask for American support. Once it became clear that the government and the Americans were bringing substantial resources to both the Basra and Baghdad campaigns, the Mahdi Army chose to negotiate a halt in the fighting rather than engage in full-scale combat.

Thus in 2007 and 2008, both the Sunnis and the Shiites fought civil wars within their communities. Among the Sunnis, the Awakening emerged as the decisive victor over al-Qaeda and the other fundamentalists. Among the Shiites, the ruling Shiite political parties have undercut Moqtada al-Sadr politically and diminished the Mahdi Army militarily. But al-Sadr has not been defeated and has significant residual support.

In both the Shiite and Sunni communities, relative "moderates" have emerged from the intracommunal fighting. This is one key factor in the reduced violence. The Sunni Awakening does not use car bombs against Shiite pilgrims and it has diminished al-Qaeda's ability to do so. The SCIRI-controlled Iraqi Interior Ministry had run its own death squads targeting Sunnis, but they were not as murderous and cruel as the death squads of al-Sadr. The surge had little to do with Sunnis turning against al-Qaeda (although US funds were critical) but it did have a part in undermining the Mahdi Army.

Although the Bush administration would never say so, it has in effect adopted the decentralization strategy long advocated by Senator Joseph Biden and now also supported by Senator Obama. Biden's plan would devolve almost all central government functions—including security—to Sunni or Shiite regions with powers similar to those now exercised by Kurdistan. Until late 2006, the Bush administration tried to defeat al-Qaeda with a US-backed Shiite-dominated Iraqi army. The approach failed and the US Marines even concluded that Anbar, Iraq's largest Sunni province, was lost to al-Qaeda. While the Sunnis have yet to set up a region (as allowed by Iraq's constitution), they now have, in the Awakening, a Sunni-commanded army. And it has defeated al-Qaeda.

3. In July, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki interjected himself into the US presidential campaign, telling the German magazine *Der Spiegel* that "US presidential candidate Barack Obama talks about sixteen months. That, we think, would be the right time frame for a withdrawal, with the possibility of slight changes." Al-Maliki's endorsement of the main plank of Obama's Iraq plan undercut both President Bush and Senator McCain. The US embassy prevailed on al-Maliki's spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, to say that *Der Spiegel* had mistranslated his boss. Al-Dabbagh, however, wouldn't issue the statement himself, so it was put out by CENTCOM in his name. A few days later, al-Maliki met the visiting Senator Obama and again endorsed his deadline. This time al-Dabbagh explained that al-Maliki meant it.

Some conservative commentators suggested that al-Maliki had decided Obama was going to win and wanted to have good relations with the next US president. Others suggested that al-Maliki was playing to Iraqi public opinion and didn't mean what he said. Bush loyalists grumbled that al-Maliki was an ingrate.

Few grasped the most obvious explanation: Nouri al-Maliki wants US troops out of Iraq. He leads a Shiite coalition comprised of religious parties, including his own Dawa party, which is committed to making Iraq into a Shiite Islamic state. Like his coalition partners, al-Maliki views Iraq's Sunnis with deep—and justifiable—suspicion. For four years after Saddam's fall, Iraqi Sunnis supported an insurgency that branded Shiites as apostates deserving death. Now the Sunnis have thrown their support behind the Awakening, which is portrayed by American politicians, including Senator McCain, as a group of patriotic Iraqis engaged in the fight against al-Qaeda. Iraq's Shiite leaders see the Awakening as a Baathist-led organization that rejects Iraq's new Shiite-led order—an accurate description.

Until 2007, the Americans fought alongside the Shiite-led Iraqi army against the Sunni fundamentalists. The Shiites were more than happy to have the Americans do much of their fighting for them. When the US created and began to finance the Sunni Awakening in 2007, the Shiite perspective on the American presence shifted. Now the United States was backing a military force deeply hostile to Shiite rule. Al-Qaeda could—and did—kill thousands of Shiites but it was no threat to Shiite rule per se. It was a shadowy terrorist organization operating with small cells and unable to mobilize or concentrate large forces. Further, both the US and Iran, the two most important external powers in the Iraqi equation, were certain to support the Shiites against al-Qaeda.

With some 100,000 men under arms, the Awakening is, at least potentially, a strong military force in its own right. Its leaders are not only ideologically linked to Saddam's anti-Shiite Baath regime, but many served in Saddam's army. And most importantly from a Shiite perspective, the Awakening has powerful outside support—from the United States. Al-Qaeda could never take over Iraq, but the Awakening might—or at least so Iraq's Shiite government fears.

Since the US created the Awakening, its goal has been to integrate the Sunni militiamen into Iraq's armed forces. Al-Maliki's government has repeatedly promised the Bush administration that it would do so, and then reneged. (Iraqis learned in the early days of the occupation that President Bush and his team were readily satisfied with promises, regardless of whether any actions followed.) At the end of 2007, General Jim Huggins, who oversaw the Iraqi police in the Sunni belt south of Baghdad, submitted three thousand names—most from the Awakening but also including a few hundred Shiites—to the Iraqi government for incorporation into the security forces. Four hundred were accepted. All were Shiites. As of October 1, the Iraqi government is supposed to take over responsibility for the 54,000 Awakening militiamen in Baghdad, including paying their salaries. By all accounts, the militiamen are deeply skeptical that this will happen, as apparently are their American sponsors. US commanders have been reassuring the Awakening that the US will not abandon them.

As many as one half the members of the Awakening have been insurgents or insurgent sympathizers. While the Sunni militiamen can gain tactical advantage by joining the Iraqi army and police, they are no less hostile to the Shiite-led Iraqi government than when they were planting roadside bombs, ambushing government forces, and executing kidnapped Iraqi army recruits and police. The Shiites understand this and so, apparently, do some of the Americans. As General Huggins told *USA Today*, if the Sunnis "aren't pulled into the Iraqi

security forces, then we have to wonder if we're just arming the next Sunni resistance."

From 2003 until 2007, the Bush administration helped Iraq's most pro-Iranian Shiite religious parties take and consolidate power. Naturally, the Shiites—and their Iranian backers—welcomed the US involvement, at least temporarily. Now the United States is putting heavier pressure on al-Maliki to include the Sunni enemy in Iraq's security forces. It has created a Sunni army that, as long as the US remains in Iraq, can only grow in strength. Al-Maliki and his allies want the US out of Iraq because the American presence has become dangerous.

Without American troops, the Iraqi army and police would be able to move against the Awakening. Should Sunni forces prove too powerful, Iran is always available to help.

4. In early September, al-Maliki sent Iraqi troops into Khanaqin, a dusty Kurdish town on the Iranian border northeast of Baghdad. While technically not part of the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdistan Regional Government has administered Khanaqin since 2003. The forces of the Kurdish Peshmerga army, who liberated the town from Saddam that April, have provided security. It is widely expected that Khanaqin will formally be incorporated into the Kurdistan Region as part of the process specified in Article 140 of Iraq's constitution for determining Kurdistan's borders. By sending Arab troops to Khanaqin, al-Maliki deliberately picked a fight with the Kurds, who have been the Shiites' partner in governing Iraq since 2003.

Iraq's Kurds have had a very large part in post-Saddam Iraq. Iraq's president, deputy prime minister, foreign minister, and army chief are all Kurds. The Peshmerga fought on the US side in the 2003 war and is the one indigenous Iraqi force that is reliably pro-American. Iraqi Kurds are secular, democratic, and pro-Western. Both militarily and politically, they have supported US policy, even when they have had reservations about its wisdom.

In recent months, al-Maliki has tried to marginalize the Kurds. In ordering troops to Khanaqin, he did not consult Jalal Talabani, Iraq's Kurdish president, and he did not involve General Babakir Zebari, the Kurd who supposedly heads Iraq's army. In order to bypass Hoshiyar Zebari, Iraq's Kurdish foreign minister, al-Maliki has appointed his own "special envoys."

President Talabani, who was in the US for medical treatment at the time, helped defuse the Khanaqin crisis by persuading both the Peshmerga and the Iraqi army to withdraw. But the incident has been seen by the Kurds as a danger sign. When Iraq's defense minister proposed acquiring American F-16s for the Iraqi air force, Iraq's neighbors—including Iran and Kuwait—said nothing. But the Kurdish deputy speaker of the Iraqi parliament strongly protested, expressing fear that the planes' most likely target would be Kurdistan. As a condition of the proposed US–Iraq security agreement, the Kurds want assurances that the Iraqi army will not be used in Kurdistan.

5. The surge was intended to buy time for political reconciliation. In January, Iraq's parliament revised the country's de-Baathification law, thus meeting a long-standing US demand. While the new law restored the rights of some former Baathists, however, it imposed an entirely new set of exclusions on Baathists in so-called sensitive ministries. Iraq's Sunni parliamentarians mostly opposed the law, which was supposed to help them. The Sunnis

had demanded early provincial elections since they had boycotted the previous local elections in 2005 and were largely unrepresented on the provincial councils, even in Sunni areas. The Shiite-dominated parliament inserted a poison pill into the election law, a provision that would invalidate the "one man, one vote" principle in the Kirkuk Governorate—the administrative unit that includes the major city of Kirkuk on the Kurdistan border—in favor of a system of equal representation for each of Kirkuk's three communities: Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen. Naturally, the Kurds, who are a majority both in the Governorate and on the Governorate Council, opposed a system that would give their foes two thirds of council seats.

Talabani vetoed the entire bill and as a result the Kurds were blamed for blocking national elections that the Shiites and some Sunnis also did not want to hold. (The SIIC was afraid it might lose some Governorates it now controls, including Baghdad, to Moqtada al-Sadr, while some Sunni parliamentarians feared the Awakening's electoral strength would underscore the fact that they do not represent the Sunni community.) Recently, the parliament passed a law to allow elections in 2009 in Sunni and Shiite Iraq, but not in Kirkuk or Kurdistan. The maneuverings left the Kurds politically isolated while, as a bonus to the Shiite ruling parties, providing more time for them to deal with al-Sadr. The Shiites are also pursuing changes in Iraq's constitution that would strengthen the central government at the expense of Kurdistan, knowing full well that these changes will be rejected by the Kurds.

Al-Maliki's agenda is transparent. The Kurds and Sunnis are obstacles to the ruling coalition's ambitions for a Shiite Islamic state. Al-Maliki wants to eliminate the Sunni militia and contain the Kurds politically and geographically. America's interest in defeating al-Qaeda is far less important to him than the Shiite interest in not having a powerful Sunni military that could overthrow Iraq's new Shiite order. The Kurds are too secular, too Western, and too pro-American for the Shiites to share power comfortably with them.

This should not be a surprise. Iran, not the US, is the most important ally of Iraq's ruling Shiite political parties. The largest party in al-Maliki's coalition is the SIIC, which was founded by the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1982. By all accounts, Iran wields enormous influence within Iraq's ruling Shiite coalition and has an effective veto over Iraqi security policies. In 2005, Iran intervened in Iraq's constitutional deliberations to undo a Shiite–Kurdish agreement on Kurdistan's powers, only to relent after Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani made clear that there would be no constitution without the deal; many Iraqis have told me that one reason that the US and Iraq have been unable to agree on a new security arrangement is that Iran opposes anything of the kind.

Nor is al-Maliki a Western-style democrat, in spite of President Bush's attempts to portray him as just that. Rather, he is a Shiite militant from the hard-line Dawa Party. Before returning to Iraq in 2003, he had spent more than twenty years in exile in Iran and Syria. As late as 2002, State Department officials sought to exclude Dawa from a US-sponsored Iraqi opposition conference because of Dawa's historical links to terrorism, including a 1983 suicide bomb attack on the US embassy in Kuwait. (There is no basis for linking al-Maliki or other mainstream Dawa leaders to that attack.)

Al-Maliki is an accidental prime minister, having secured the job only after internecine Shiite rivalries (and Kurdish opposition) derailed more prominent candidates. The Bush

administration knew so little about him that it initially had his first name wrong. He had never been considered important enough to meet the many senior US officials traipsing to Baghdad. But President Bush has embraced him as the embodiment of American values and goals in Iraq.

John McCain says that partly because of his persistent support of the surge, we are now winning the Iraq war. He defines victory as an

Iraq that is a democratic ally. Yet he advocates continued US military support to an Iraqi government led by Shiite religious parties committed to the establishment of an Islamic republic. He takes a harder line on Iran than President Bush, but supports Iraqi factions that are Iran's closest allies in the Middle East. He praises the Awakening and but seems not to have realized that the Iraqi government is intent on crushing it. He has denounced the Obama-

Biden plan for a decentralized state but has said nothing about how he would protect Iraq's Kurds, the only committed American allies in the country.

George W. Bush has put the United States on the side of undemocratic Iraqis who are Iran's allies. John McCain would continue the same approach. It is hard to understand how this can be called a success—or a path to victory.

—September 25, 2008

AP Associated Press

Kurdish rebels say Turkish airstrikes hit N. Iraq

By YAHYA BARZANJI - Associated Press Writer

SULAIMANIYAH, IRAQ --Turkish warplanes bombed Kurdish rebel territory in northern Iraq, damaging a school and wounding three people, a rebel spokesman said Friday.

The attack began at 10 p.m. Thursday and lasted some two hours, according to Ahmed Deniz, a spokesman for the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

The areas bombed included the Qandil mountain villages of Kutak, Surage and Kozala, and a school was damaged and two civilian houses destroyed, Deniz said.

One rebel and two civilians were wounded in the bombardment, he said.

Turkey has repeatedly sent warplanes to attack suspected rebel positions in northern Iraq but has not commented about the latest report.

Deniz said the rebels had evacuated the bases beforehand after

spotting Turkish planes apparently conducting reconnaissance missions earlier this week.

The villages struck were sparsely populated after many residents fled separate attacks from Iran, Deniz said, adding that some villagers had recently returned from their displacement but were uprooted again ahead of Thursday's strikes.

"I think that they are preparing themselves for an invasion against our sites, but we are fully prepared to defend ourselves," Deniz said.

Last year, the Turkish parliament authorized the military to send troops into northern Iraq to root out Kurdish rebels there. Since then, Turkish war planes have carried out several air strikes against suspected rebel bases in northern Iraq. Troops also launched a cross-border ground operation in February.

Kurdish rebels in Turkey took up arms against the government in 1984 to fight for self-rule in parts of the country's southeast and east. Tens of thousands have been killed in the fighting.

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The Importance of Iraq's Provincial Elections

By Nazar Janabi

On September 22, the Iraqi parliament passed a belated provincial elections law, ending a long and costly deadlock. The initial version of the law was ratified by parliament on July 22, but was vetoed by two members of Iraq's presidency council. This time, however, it is likely that the bill will survive council scrutiny because of the compromises and concessions made in the long negotiation process. Nevertheless, passing the law only marks the beginning of a vital transition that could lead either to a unified democratic country or to a fractured sectarian one that is prone to foreign influence.

Broadening Political Participation

As Iraq's fragile security gains grow more sustainable, provincial elections become essential for integrating important social groups into the political process. This is true especially for those groups that did not participate -- or participated only minimally -- in the 2005 elections, notably the Sunnis in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, and Ninawa provinces, and some Shiite groups in the south (especially the Sadrists). It is also important to institutionalize the role of local leaders who emerged

from these communities through different means such as the Awakening, the Sons of Iraq, or the tribal councils -- who already are de facto community leaders.

The new law states that provincial elections be held no later than January 31, 2009, but excludes four out of Iraq's eighteen provinces: the three governorates composing the Kurdish [Kurdistan] Regional Government -- Irbil, Dahuk, and Sulimanya -- and Kirkuk, an important oil-rich province. Although it seems at first glance that the law delays a resolution to the chronic problem of Kirkuk, to the Kurdish leaders' credit, they made an important compromise by consenting to the UN-sponsored proposal suggesting a three-way split of the provincial council between Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen (32 percent for each and 4 percent for Christians). The deal also states that senior leadership positions in the province (governor, deputy governor, and head of the provincial council) would be shared -- with Kurdish factions getting the first pick.

At the same time, the Iraqi parliament is forming a commission to examine the situation in Kirkuk and determine the extent of demographic changes

and the use government-owned lands both before and after 2003. This commission is scheduled to report back to Iraqi lawmakers no later than March 31, 2009. Elections will be held in Kirkuk according to a separate law that takes into consideration the aforementioned report. Until then, the status of Kirkuk will remain unchanged.

Invigorating Local Politics

Provincial elections are significant, since they bolster faith in the political process by demonstrating that people actually have a say in their leadership at the local level. It should also give pause to political parties and leaders who have dominated local politics for the past four years by showing that they will be voted out if they fail to provide for their constituents.

This election will be different from the one in 2005 in many aspects. Most notable are the willingness of the Sunni Arabs to participate and their preparation for local polls through the consolidation of the Awakening councils in many of Iraq's Sunni Arab provinces. Furthermore, key Shiite clerics in Najaf have announced that they will not support any political party, and

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has urged Iraqis to vote their conscience and elect those they believe capable of serving them, regardless of affiliation. This is a major shift from 2005 when he gave his blessing to the United Iraqi Alliance -- a Shiite coalition -- leading it to an overwhelming win in the national elections.

Challenges for the Elections

Although the election law provides reason for encouragement, many challenges remain in order to hold credible elections and bolster Iraqi faith in the democratic process. Some secular and nationalist parties believe that nonsecular parties will use religious figures, such as al-Sistani and others, for political ends. Others have expressed concern about campaign financing from government and foreign sources.

The first concern was addressed when al-Sistani and other clerics announced that they would not support any particular party, and by the election law itself, which states in Article 35 that religious places -- mosques, shrines, churches, etc -- can be used for promoting the "electoral process" but not for campaigning. The second concern, however, was

not addressed, and some political entities -- particularly national movements or candidates who do not have access to external support from Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states, or the United States -- believe they will be at an enormous disadvantage to candidates who are not required to disclose their campaign finances.

This highlights the dire need for legislation regulating political parties, including the disclosure of financial sources. Such legislation would be one step in the process of capping foreign political influence on individual politicians and political parties. Proposing this kind of legislation, however, is extremely difficult, since individuals with legislative power have a vested interest in the status quo.

These elections will also witness a spike in the rivalry between the two main Shiite parties, the prime minister's Dawa party and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) led by Abdulaziz al-Hakim. Some ISCI officials had already accused Dawa of using government resources to establish unnecessary pro-Dawa tribal councils in some southern provinces. Although Dawa denies the accusations, the party is clearly gaining ground as the popularity of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki grew after this year's military offensives in Basra, Sadr City, Amara, Diyala, and Mosul.

The dynamics in the Sunni provinces are different, since Sunnis did not participate in the 2005 elections. Their participation will likely cast out many incumbent Sunni politicians. The

most affected party will be the Iraqi Islamic Party -- headed by Iraqi vice president Tareq al-Hashimi -- which will lose ground to the Awakening movement in Anbar and elsewhere, allowing for its leadership to be integrated into the political process.

Conclusion

Although Iraqis are still waiting for a means to share the country's natural wealth through a hydrocarbon law, the new provincial elections law injects new hope in the Iraqi political process by demonstrating the capacity of Iraqi lawmakers to reach difficult compromises. It reflects especially favorably on Kurdish leaders, who took a brave stance despite the likely opposition of their constituencies in the north. If these elections are held in a free, fair, and transparent

manner, it will pave the way for the next national elections by offering everyone concerned a chance to voice their concerns in a nonviolent, political environment. To assist in this end, the United States and the UN need to supervise and monitor this process, while remaining neutral in Iraq's charged political environment.

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Voices of Iraq

September 27, 2008

Kurdistan's Christian minister slams provincial polls law

Arbil/Aswat al-Iraq: A Christian minister in Kurdistan's regional government on Friday lashed out the provincial elections law lately endorsed by the parliament for marginalising his religious denomination. "The version of the law reached by the parliament's legal committee along with regions and provinces committee was a setback for democracy progress in the country and a flagrant violation for the constitution article second forbidding the legislation of any law breaking democracy principles," George Mansoor, minister of civil society affairs in Kurdistan's regional government, told Aswat al-Iraq. Iraq's parliament passed a provincial elections law Wednesday after months of arguing between Arabs and Kurds, and called for the vote to be held before January 31 next year. MPs agreed to postpone the polls in Kirkuk and three northern provinces that already form part of the autonomous Kurdish

region. The law was criticised by minorities including Christians for cancelling an item ensuring seats for their representatives. "The current version of the law contravenes article 14 of the constitution stipulating Iraqis are equal regardless of gender, ethnicity, colour or religion," Mansoor emphasized. On Wednesday, Christian MP Yonadim Kanna said enacting this law is considered a retreat from the democratic principles, and the principles of partnership and brotherhood in this country. While UN envoy Staffan Di Mistura conceded minorities were marginalised in the law, but he vowed to support their demands representation through negotiations with the independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) administering the local polls.



Voices of Iraq

September 27, 2008

2 killed in clashes between policemen, Kurdish party supporters in Jalawlaa

DIALA / Aswat al-Iraq: A policeman and a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party were killed and two policemen others wounded in armed clashes between the Emergency Police personnel and gunmen from the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barazani's KDP, a security source said.

"An Emergency Police Force raided a KDP headquarters in Jalawlaa city on Saturday and arrested two of its members," the source told Aswat al-Iraq on customary condition of anonymity most likely because he was not authorized to speak to the media. "Later on, a delegation from the KDP headed to the Emergency Police HQ to liberate the two arrested men, but clashes erupted, leaving a KDP member and a policeman killed and two policemen others wounded," the source added. Aswat al-Iraq contacted Amer Rifaat, the official in charge of the KDP in the area, who vouched for the reported news. "The party has sent a delegation to see why their colleagues were arrested but the matter has developed into clashes," said Rifaat. The area has been witnessing

a lot of tension for a month now due to the Kurdish leaders' rejection to have Iraqi army units deployed there on the grounds that these areas were safe Kurdish territories that enjoy the protection of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Jalawlaa belongs to the disputed district of Khanaqin. Diala province, a mix of Sunnis and Shiites, extends to the northeast of Baghdad as far as the Iranian border. Its capital is Baaquba, 57 km northeast of Baghdad. It covers an area of 17,685 square kilometers (6,828 sq mi). In January 2008 Operation Phantom Phoenix was launched in an attempt to eradicate the remnants of al-Qaeda network following the Diala province campaign between 2006 and 2007. Later on, the Iraqi security forces had launched a wide-scale security campaign in Diala province. The operation, codenamed *Bashaer al-Kheir* (Promise of Good), is aimed at tracking down members of al-Qaeda network in Diala, Iraq's most restive city, after the armed group lost its strongholds in the western Iraq predominantly Sunni province of al-Anbar, where tribesmen fought its members and flushed them out of the city.



Kurdish, Iraqi forces clash in disputed area

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq, Sept 27, 2008 (Reuters) –

Kurdish security forces and Iraqi police clashed in Iraq's northeastern Diyala province on Saturday, killing one member of each group, officials on both sides said.

Towns on the border between Diyala and the largely autonomous northern

Kurdistan region are disputed by Kurds and the central government and have emerged as a flashpoint in their tense relationship in recent months.

Jabbar Yawar, spokesman for the Kurdish Peshmerga security forces, said one Kurdish security forces member and one member of the national Iraqi

police had died in clashes after a dispute at a Kurdish party's headquarters in the town of Jalawla.

The account was confirmed by a senior Diyala provincial police source.

Tensions have been rising between Iraqi security forces and Kurds in the area in recent weeks. In August, most of a brigade of 2,000 Kurdish troops, known as Peshmerga, who had patrolled ethnically mixed parts of Diyala withdrew to the edge of the Kurdish region under pressure from the central government.

Iraq and the Kurdish regional government this month resolved a standoff over the control of the town of Khanaqin, also home to Arabs and Kurds, and close to Jalawla.

The Iraqi army had wanted to enter Khanaqin to stamp government authority

on the area in August. But Peshmerga forces patrolling the town had refused to withdraw and thousands of Kurds staged protests as the army approached.

Kurdish and Arab politicians ended the impasse by agreeing to withdraw both the Iraqi army and the Peshmerga.

Diyala, with large populations of ethnic Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen divided into Sunni and Shi'ite religious groups, has also remained a battleground for Sunni Islamist al Qaeda.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government wants the Peshmerga out of parts of Iraq not under Kurdish control.

That angers the Kurds who say their role in combating al Qaeda in Diyala has gone unnoticed. (Reporting by Sherko Raouf; Writing by Tim Cocks)



Voices of Iraq
September 29, 2008

4 border checkpoints set up in Iraq's Kurdistan

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Four model border checkpoints were set up in the Iraqi Kurdistan region within the Border Guards Command's 1st Zone in Arbil, Iraq's Border Guard Forces Commander, Mohsen Abdelhassan, said on Monday.

"The Border Forces also embarked on setting up seven floating border checkpoints in the marsh areas in Missan province within the Border Guards Command's 4th Zone," Abdelhassan told Aswat al-Iraq.

The command personnel are working hard with the aim of securing the border road that links the areas of Jallat, al-Tayyib and Akhzina, he said.

Arbil, also written Erbil or Irbil, is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited in the world and is one of the largest cities in Iraq. The city lies eighty kilometers (fifty miles) east of Mosul. In 2005, its estimated population was

990,000 inhabitants. The city is the capital of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). It hosts the headquarters of the Kurdistan region ministers and parliament.

Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, only isolated, sporadic violence has hit Arbil, unlike many other areas of Iraq. Parallel bomb attacks against the Eid celebrations arranged by the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and KRG President Massoud Barazani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) killed 109 people on February 1, 2004. Responsibility was claimed by the Islamist group Ansar al-Sunnah, and stated to be in solidarity with the Kurdish Islamist faction Ansar al-Islam. Another bombing on May 4, 2005 killed 60 civilians. Despite these bombings the population generally feels safe.

September 30 2008

FINANCIAL TIMES

A piece of England booms in Iraq

By Anna Fifield in Irbil

As the British housing market sputters, one English village is experiencing a phenomenal housing boom, in which prices have almost doubled in the past two years and are still climbing.

This English village - complete with cul-de-sacs lined with identical two-storey houses, garden gnomes on front lawns and Range Rovers in driveways - is not in the leafy home counties that border London or in a suddenly-trendy seaside setting. It is in Irbil, capital of the northern Iraqi region of Kurdistan.

Those looking for some respite from western housing markets could do worse than investing their money in Irbil. Prices are soaring and it is completely untouched by the global credit crunch, thanks to its cash-only economy.

"There is an enormous amount of free money here being kept under people's mattresses," says Russell Jones, a British property investor who is one of the partners in the development of the English Village, a residential complex on the outskirts of the city.

Some people don't want to live here, they just want a safe place to put their money," he says. The semi-autonomous Kurdistan province is one of the safest and most stable

areas in the country.

Iraqis from other regions have been flocking here, while a growing number of Kurdish expats are buying houses at home, encouraged by the number of European airlines flying to Irbil's swish new airport.

Some families have bought several houses - one even bought 13 - as investments. Purchased from site plans two years ago, each five bedroom house cost \$125,000 (£86,700, £69,145). Now the going rate is \$200,000, with some prime places fetching \$230,000.

Those who actually live in their houses are revelling in the relative luxuries of the complex - such as a steady power supply and reliable sanitation system.

"It's so new, it's quiet and it has electricity 24 hours a day," says Dier Abdullah, an accountant, whose family moved into the English Village two months ago, having paid \$142,000 for the house early in the development. "You can't get that in Irbil city," he says in his new living room, decorated in pink.

"We moved from the city to a village," added his wife Gular, a Turkish-language teacher, laughing that their family appears to be going against the urban tide. Between them, four of their siblings also bought properties in the village.

While the village, populated by foreign business people, aid workers and well-heeled Kurds, offers British-style living, some trends do not translate, says Azzam Kasra, the project manager.

"These are English-style houses with roof tiles and open kitchens," Mr Kasra says. "But they are not completely English - they have both eastern and western toilets and they don't have fireplaces. Winter here is like spring in England."

The \$76m village, with 410 houses almost complete and the construction of a school and a five-storey shopping mall under way, is just one of an increasing number of huge construction projects in Irbil.

Nearby there is an Italian village in the making, complete with pastel pink, blue and yellow houses more commonly seen on the Italian Riviera, and further afield there are German and American villages.

Near the English village, the \$300m Dream City development is taking shape. It will include about 1,200 houses, a mosque, schools, a shopping mall, tennis courts and a casino.

Unlike the foreign-themed villages, this development is Arab in style. "The idea is that this should be a cross between Beirut and Dubai," says Amer Ibraheem, sales manager

at Dream City, driving through the construction site, which features traditional Iraqi-style houses made of marble and granite, many sporting elaborate facades with columns. One, a villa with six bedrooms and a swimming pool, recently sold for \$700,000.

But is there demand for so many new houses?

"I think so," says Faez Hanoudi, the project manager, not entirely convincingly. "There is so much competition so the market has slowed down a little bit," he adds.

Ordinary Kurds, who earn an average of about \$1,500 a year, are struggling to keep up with the housing boom.

The cost of rented accommodation in Irbil has risen tenfold since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and now a house in even one of the more rundown areas of Irbil commands as much as \$75,000.

Many Kurds are suspicious of those who can afford such palatial \$700,000 residences.

"Everyone knows that these guys are in the pay of either Mossad or the CIA or MI6," says one Irbil resident, referring to the Israeli, US and British spy agencies.

A Talk with Kurdistan Security Chief, Masrur Barzani

By Ma'ad Fayad

Arbil, Asharq Al-Awsat- Masrur Barzani, Chief of the Kurdistan Region Protection Agency gives his first ever interview to Asharq Al-Awsat. The following is the full text:

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Could you speak to us about the nature of your work in this apparatus?

[Barzani] Like other security and intelligence organs, we try to preserve the region's and our people's security and be a factor in Iraq's stability. We fight terrorism, foreign espionage, and the drug trade. In general our task is to maintain security. This is not a party organ. It is like any other regional apparatus. We have been building it for a long time. So far we have not succeeded in unifying all the security organs in the region. Through parliament we succeeded in passing Law Number 46 to create a legal framework for the region's security organs. Our work continues to place the security organs within a legal regional framework.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Does the region have other security organs? Does the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK] have a similar apparatus?

[Barzani] When the region had two separate administrations, the PUK had a security apparatus of its own. Now that the two administrations have been unified, our aim is to unite the security organs.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is there any rivalry or contradiction between the different security organs in the region?

[Barzani] There is cooperation and coordination between the two organs. There is no negative rivalry because our goals are the same.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you coordinate with the security organs in Baghdad and the US forces?

[Barzani] Yes, we coordinate and cooperate with the federal government's security organs. Indeed, we have been helpful to Baghdad's security organs all over Iraq. Because of the presence of the coalition forces in the region and Iraq, we coordinate and cooperate with them.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you coordinate and cooperate with some of the region's security organs?

[Barzani] Iraq has a constitutional and legal frame work that organizes its relations with the other countries in the region. We obey the Iraqi Constitution and therefore we do not coordinate with the other countries in the region.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is there a terrorist threat to the Kurdistan region?

[Barzani] Yes, there is. However, it is much smaller than the threat to the other parts of Iraq. The threat would be greater if we did not fight the terrorist groups inside and outside the region. We recently foiled a planned suicide attack in Irbil.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you hold non-Arab detainees in Kurdistan?

[Barzani] All the detainees are members of the terrorist groups and they are all Iraqis.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are your activities confined to Iraqi Kurdistan or do you operate in other Iraqi areas as well?

[Barzani] By law we are concerned with

Kurdistan's security but because of the security vacuum in other parts of Iraq we cooperate and help to maintain stability and security all over Iraq. We are always ready to offer any assistance asked of us.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Did you take part in uncovering or combating terrorist groups outside Iraqi Kurdistan?

[Barzani] Yes, we did. We took part in combating terrorist groups in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Mosul. We carry out these operations in coordination with Baghdad, not on our own initiative.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] You mentioned that one of your apparatus' tasks is counter-espionage. Is there espionage within the region of Kurdistan?

[Barzani] Yes, there is.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Who are the spies working for?

[Barzani] They work for neighboring countries.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Does this mean that there is no internal espionage on Baghdad's behalf?

[Barzani] No, not at all.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How far does your apparatus' work affect freedom of expression in the region?

[Barzani] The nature of our work does not conflict with freedom of expression. On the contrary, we create a favorable atmosphere to encourage freedom of expression to allow the people to speak their minds freely on political and economic matters.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you hold political prisoners?

[Barzani] Of course not. We do not have a single political prisoner, a prisoner of conscience, or anyone detained because of his political beliefs.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What efforts does your apparatus carry out to promote economic stability?

[Barzani] The extent of economic investments in the region is a sign of security. Any area that has no security and stability cannot have any economic investment in it whether external or domestic. The credit does not go to us but to our people who cooperate with the region's security organs.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you coordinate with the regional government?

[Barzani] We are part of the regional government.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Does your apparatus fall under the jurisdiction of the region's government?

[Barzani] We have not yet finalized this issue legally. However, the region's prime minister plays a major role in our work and in regional stability.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The name of the security apparatus has been changed to the Kurdish term "Asayesh." Has the essence of the apparatus been changed?

[Barzani] Asayesh is the Kurdish term for security. We intentionally used this name because the security apparatus under the former



regime left a negative and frightening effect on the people. We do not know how we will get rid of that terrible legacy. Our current security apparatus is a service organ that we try to make the people trust. Our citizens are very cooperative with our security services for the sake of their own safety.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] It is said that your security services require any Iraqi citizen who wishes to reside in the Kurdistan region to have an entry visa, a sponsor, and a residence permit. What is your response to these reports? Are you trying to place obstacles before Iraqi citizens who wish to come and reside here?

[Barzani] We are not a separate country. We do not require a visa from Iraqi citizens. Our cities are Iraqi cities like any others. The reports about visas are rumors that seek to distort the region's reputation. Nevertheless, certain security procedures are taken when someone enters the region whether he is an Arab or a Kurd. These procedures apply also to Kurds who come from other parts of Iraq. This is because of the poor security situation in the other parts of Iraq. We wish to protect the citizens of the region. Thousands of Iraqi families have settled here because of the stability in our region. We do not wish to risk this stability and open the doors to terrorists, booby-trapped vehicles, and suicide attackers.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What are these procedures?

[Barzani] They are very simple. Every person who wishes to reside in the region should visit an Asayesh center, register his address, and obtain a permit to reside in the region. This makes it easier for us to know who the inhabitants are. There is another procedure which we do not strictly require. If the newcomer knows a longtime resident, we would like him to sponsor him but we do not apply this procedure strictly. The media exaggerate its importance and some of our security personnel apply it too strictly but this is individual behavior that we are trying to eliminate. We hope soon to eliminate all these procedures when the security situation improves everywhere in Iraq. The important thing is that everyone should know that the aim of these procedures is to defend their security and the region's security rather than place obstacles in the face of newcomers. On the contrary, the region's presidency has given instructions to facilitate the entry of new arrivals on condition that this should not take place at the expense of the region's security. We have long borders with the neighboring countries and many persons try to infiltrate into Iraqi territory across these borders. It is difficult to control all the

possible entry points, especially as the security situation in neighboring provinces is unstable. This does not allow us to act with great confidence at the entry points that we share with these provinces. Therefore, we are forced to adopt these measures for the safety of the region's citizens. We sincerely hope that security will improve all over Iraq so that we can remove the checkpoints and open the gates of our cities to all visitors, Arabs and Kurds alike.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] There is a lot of talk on the streets and in the media about financial corruption in the region. Does your apparatus intervene in combating this corruption?

[Barzani] Some corruption cases reach us and we handle them. We report the other cases to other government departments. At any rate, this issue does not lie at the heart of our work.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] There is talk that foreign intelligence services are training your cadres, including the CIA and Israel's Mosad. Could you give us direct clarification on this point?

[Barzani] Frankly, if you want the whole truth from me, this news is totally untrue. The problem is that those who spread these rumors know nothing about what is really happening in the region. I do not know how effective my answer is to the people who spread these rumors.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do your security services use any form of torture to extract confessions from detainees? [Barzani] No, absolutely not. This practice is absolutely unacceptable in the Kurdistan region. When we took over this apparatus, we decided that it would be a merely service organ. The region's president issued strict instructions not to use torture to extract confessions and not to put undue pressure on any detainee or suspect. If this happens, the confession is considered invalid and any official who practices torture or any form of pressure is investigated and punished. This is a matter of principle to us.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What groups pose a real threat to the region of Kurdistan?

[Barzani] In the first place Al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Islam, Ansar al-Sunnah, and other terrorist groups.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do your security centers and jails take human rights standards into account?

[Barzani] All our instructions stress the importance of human rights. We monitor these matters very carefully. We run courses to train our cadres to observe human rights standards when they deal with suspects.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Some Kurdish journalists and writers have been murdered in the region. Several Kurdish newspapers accused the security services and some party organs of being behind the murders. What is your comment?

[Barzani] We strongly regret the death of any journalist, writer, politician, or citizen. This is a very sad thing. People usually make accusations without ascertaining the facts. It is easy to make accusations. At any rate, not only journalists but also military persons, politicians, merchants, and ordinary citizens have been murdered here in the region and in other parts of Iraq. Were the security services and party organs behind those incidents? If anyone has proof of any party being involved in a murder, let him bring us this proof and we will be grateful to him. We will investigate these regrettable incidents. However, making hasty and gratuitous accusations is another matter. There are hostile circles that try

to slander the reputation of this or that party by making false accusations.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What procedures are you taking versus these accusations by the Kurdish press?

[Barzani] Just as in any other sphere in the region including culture, the economy, and political activity, the press needs to become more mature and professional in accordance with the requirements of journalistic work. It was we who encouraged freedom of expression and freedom of the press. There are writers and journalists who can tell the difference between freedom of expression and assaults on others. There are some who cannot tell the difference and think that whatever they write falls under the heading of freedom of the press even if it slanders others. We are working together to reach an equation where we preserve freedom of expression while protecting people from being slandered. A bill has been referred to parliament that organizes journalistic work while protecting the citizens from being slandered. Parliament decided that the proposed law was too harsh and the presidency asked that it be reviewed. Slander is indeed not part of journalistic work. In my view a journalist wins respect through the credibility of what he writes or loses it when he has no credibility.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The Kurdish armed forces go by several names including the Peshmerga and the Regional Guard. Which ones are the official forces that defend the region?

[Barzani] According to the constitution, the forces that defend the region are the Regional Guard forces.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What is the connection between the Peshmerga or the Regional Guard forces and the Iraqi Defense Ministry?

[Barzani] The Regional Guard forces are part of the overall Iraqi defense system. Since the region of Kurdistan is part of Iraq, these forces defend this part of Iraq's territory.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have you reached a solution regarding placing the Peshmerga or the Regional Guard forces under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi Defense Ministry?

[Barzani] In principle there is no problem. All that remains to be done are tactical steps. However, the federal government is not cooperating properly with us to include the Regional Guard forces and pay their salaries. Now the region of Kurdistan is part of Iraq but when we demand our rights or certain services on the grounds that we are part of Iraq, our demands and requests are ignored. The region of Kurdistan's budget is well-known to be 17% of Iraq's total revenue. Large sums are deducted from this sum, however, and only 14% of Iraq's revenue reaches the region. Part of our budget is deducted under the name of sovereign allocations for the Iraqi Army. The Regional Guard forces and the Peshmerga are identified as part of Iraq's defense system, that is, they are part of the Iraqi armed forces. When we demand appropriations for these forces, however, the federal government says no and claims that these forces are part of the region of Kurdistan and their appropriations should come from its budget. The federal government uses a double standard with us. In obligations we are part of Iraq but when it comes to rights, we are sidelined. When we are asked to carry out certain tasks, we do so and are always prepared to help but when we demand our rights, we are ignored.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have the Peshmerga forces

taken part alongside the Iraqi forces in battles in Basra, Baghdad, or Mosul?

[Barzani] The Peshmerga operate on the Iraqi Government's orders. They participated in operations in Baghdad and other places on the federal government's request. According to the region's president, the Peshmerga will fulfill any security request demanded by the federal government for the sake of stability. As I noted, they are part of Iraq's defense system. Anyone who does not view them in this light does not believe in the new Iraq. Iraq is no longer a totalitarian state or governed by decisions from the center. According to the constitution, Iraq today is a federal, pluralistic, democratic Iraq based on power participation and on participation in rights and obligations. The Kurds are basic partners in government. They are not a marginal force.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] On the level of your security apparatus, are you partners to the security decisions made in Baghdad?

[Barzani] In principle, we are members of a joint security commission with the federal government. The important thing is the principle. The important thing is for Baghdad to believe that we are its partners. If this is accepted, there will be much cooperation and many problems will be solved. However, when there are committees of which we are members but the decisions we make are not implemented, this is not proper partnership.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The situation in Khanaqin almost reached the point of armed confrontation between the Peshmerga and the Iraqi Army. How do you describe this from a security point of view?

[Barzani] What happened in Khanaqin was something bad. The Iraqi Army's entry was not for the purpose of combating terrorism, for Khanaqin is very secure. The army entered for political reasons. Some circles in the federal government believe that disputed territories should be under the federal government's control. However, the idea of disputed territories means that no final decision has been made on their ownership. Why else would they be called disputed territories? Agreement should be worked out between the two sides over their ownership. Khanaqin is the most secure area in the Diyala Governorate. Saddam Hussein's regime tried for many years to seize these areas by force but failed. Now, attempts are being made to take these areas from us by other means.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What is the reason for your failure to appear in the media?

[Barzani] I do not appear in the media because of the nature of my work. I also do not like publicity.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Were you chosen to lead this apparatus because you are President Barzani's eldest son?

[Barzani] I was selected on merit. I pay a price for being Masud Barzani's son and a security official.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are there disagreements or a power struggle between you and your cousin, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani as is rumored?

[Barzani] On the contrary, I like him very much. We grew up together. Our relationship has always been fraternal. I respect him on a personal level and because he is the prime minister. There is no rivalry between us but some of our enemies would like us to quarrel. God willing, this will not happen.

The Middle East

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2008

Strategic fight for a confederal Iran



Born in 1941 in a village near Mahabad, in the Kurdish area of Iran, **Rahman Hajji Ahmadi** (above) has been a militant Kurd all his life. Taking an active part in the renovation of the KDPI (Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran) in the late 1960s with Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, he became an adviser of the central committee of KDPI during the early 1980s before leaving the party in 1986.

After nearly 20 years in exile in Germany, today he is back in Kurdistan, struggling again for Kurdish rights against the central government in Tehran. Elected secretary general of the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) at its first congress in April 2004, in this rare interview Rahman Hajji Ahmadi talked to **Chris Kutschera** exclusively for *The Middle East*.



Isn't PJAK just another Kurdish political organisation?

We are different to the others. We were founded by Kurdish intellectuals and students living in Iran and in Europe after long preparation. With a strong participation of women; we are a party of young people, mostly under 40.

What are the strategic aims of PJAK?

We are fighting for a confederal and democratic Iran allowing all the different ethnic groups their rights and for a secular nonfederal Kurdistan with gender equality and freedom of religion and culture.

How do you plan to achieve these goals?

We achieve them in three ways: political and ideological struggle, whilst mobilising all the potential forces of the opposition around a common platform. We do not believe in the classical armed struggle of national liberation movements. Our main activity is to mobilise people politically. But since there is no possibility of acting freely, we are obliged to resort to self-defence. Our guerillas talk to the people in the villages; if they are attacked, obviously they have to defend themselves, but this is not to achieve military gains. We are not in a position of attack. To make it clear, we do not believe in changing our situation by armed struggle.

Do you have liberated areas?

We have already a liberated area, in Qandil, on both the Iraqi and Iranian sides of the border. But it is not our

Unlike other Kurdish peshmerga groups, the PJAK uses a policy of intellectual persuasion to further the aims of its ultimate cause



aim to have liberated areas with cities. We are part of the people, and we want to live among the people.

Do you have friends, allies?

We are a new and young organisation... We have a platform to get friends, but it is not so easy. Those forces which are against the regime are our allies.

What about KDPI and Komala?

There is not KDPI and Komala (Autonomy for Kurds in Iran) as there was before. These parties have split; there are several organisations with the same name. One branch of KDPI wants to have contacts with us. Komala has also split into several organisations, we have contacts with them.

What about other forces?

During our second congress (10-20 May 2006) we decided we wanted to establish good relations with all forces of the Iranian opposition, with the Arabs, the Belouchs, the Assyrians, etc

What are your relations with PKK?

We are two sister organisations, but we are active in different areas, Turkey (PKK: The Kurdistan Workers Party) and Iran (PJAK). But the governments of Turkey and Iran carry out joint operations against us.

Some people claim PJAK is just another name for PKK...

We are an independent organisation, we have our programme; we decide on our tactics and our strategy. And our strategy is different from PKK's.

We do not believe in the classical armed struggle of national liberation movements; our main activity is to mobilise people politically

The PKK wants Kurdish identity to be recognised in the constitution, we want a democratic Iran, with a confederal and free Kurdistan.

We are leading a struggle to change the political structure in Iran.

How is your military activity organised? Do you refer to your fighters as peshmergas?

PJAK is led by a *majlis* of 21 members, a 'coordination' of 11 members, and a secretary general. We have divided Iranian Kurdistan in three parts, North, Central and South, each one has its own small groups of commandos. We call our forces guerillas, not peshmergas. They are 100% professional soldiers, who do not take any salary or have a civil life with wives and children. They live in the mountain, carrying out different activities, conducting propaganda exercises in the villages. The number of our guerillas is secret, we are an underground organisation; about 35% of our guerillas are women and we have eight women in our 21 member majlis.

How are your relations with PUK and KDP (the two main Iraqi Kurdish political parties)?

What was achieved in Iraqi Kurdistan – a Kurdish parliament, a Kurdish government – does not belong to KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), but to the Kurdish national movement. We have no contacts with PUK and KDP, although we don't want to create problems for them. They have their political and economic relations with Turkey and Iran.

And what about your relations with the Americans? There are a lot of rumours about your travel to the US...

I went to the US to get in touch with the various organisations of the Iranian opposition there. I had no contact with the American government. The rumours are simply propaganda by the Iranian government as part of an attempt to isolate PJAK from the other forces of the opposition.

But if the Americans wanted to contact you?

We are in favour of all relations based on the interest of the Kurdish people and the Iranian opposition.

But the Americans have no programme for Iran. They do not know what to do. One day, they want to attack, the next day, they don't want to attack, they have no relations with the Iranian opposition. But whatever relations we have with the US, we will not change our position towards the regime, we will continue to oppose it. Our aim is to achieve our people's political and cultural rights.

Why have PKK relations with Iran deteriorated?

Currently, relations between Iran and Turkey are good, and it has had an impact on the so-called "Kurdish problem". Their joint cooperation is built on the Kurdish issue. Why? The fact that there is a Kurdish government in Iraqi Kurdistan raises big fears in Syria, Turkey and Iran and explains their new alliance. ■

Irak

Du fédéralisme aux tentations de partition

Contrairement aux plans des stratèges américains pressés de retirer leurs troupes et aux projets de certains alliés irakiens de Washington, le pays ne peut être découpé en entités homogènes.

Il s'aime tellement l'Irak qu'ils en voudraient trois. Un kurde au nord, un sunnite au centre et un chiite au sud. Pour certains stratèges américains, la réalité irakienne est simple : le pays est divisé en grandes communautés qui ont chacune depuis des siècles un territoire spécifique. D'ailleurs, ajoutent-ils à l'appui de leur démonstration, l'Irak est très récent puisque la Grande-Bretagne l'a créé de toutes pièces en 1920 en accolant de façon arbitraire trois provinces (*vilayets*) de l'Empire ottoman qui correspondaient précisément à ces territoires communaux. Découper aujourd'hui le pays en trois entités séparées ne ferait donc que prendre acte de la géographie humaine et de l'histoire. Pour les plus radicaux de ces stratèges en chambre, trois Etats souverains doivent naître sur les décombres de l'Irak. Pour les plus modérés, avocats d'une partition implicite, tel le vétéran démocrate Joe Biden, colistier de Barack Obama pour l'élection présidentielle et qui cherche une solution politique expéditive pour permettre un retrait américain, l'institution d'un Etat fédéral divisé en trois grandes régions, dominées chacune par une communauté et dotées d'une autonomie très poussée, garantirait la stabilité de l'Irak. Outre qu'ils font bon marché du refus

de nombreux Irakiens de voir leur pays démembré selon des clivages ethno-confessionnels, les présupposés de ces projets sont faux. Sur le plan géographique d'abord. Comme le montre la carte page 11, les trois principales communautés irakiennes ne vivent pas sur des territoires homogènes. Au contraire, de vastes régions du pays sont mixtes : Kurdes sunnites et Arabes sunnites dans le Nord, Arabes sunnites et Arabes chiites dans le Sud-

En 1920, les frontières du pays n'ont pas été dessinées arbitrairement

Ouest. Par ailleurs, des groupes minoritaires (Turkmènes, chrétiens assyro-chaldéens, yezidis, Kurdes chiites...) habitent des zones peuplées en majorité par l'une des trois principales communautés, dans le nord du pays notamment. Ainsi, la région de Kirkouk, qui renferme une part importante des ressources pétrolières du pays, est l'objet de vives rivalités entre les Kurdes et les autres groupes. Bagdad, elle-même située dans une région mixte, incarne à elle seule la diversité du peuplement irakien puisque les diverses communautés du pays y sont présentes. D'autres grandes villes irakiennes, telle que Bassora, située sur les rives du golfe Persique, ont aussi depuis toujours une population très hétérogène. L'argument historique de ceux qui veulent pousser aussi loin que possible le démembrement de l'Irak est tout aussi faux que celui du peuplement.

Contrairement à un cliché très répandu, les Britanniques n'ont pas dessiné arbitrairement les frontières du pays en 1920. En réalité, la majeure partie de l'actuel territoire irakien, soit les deux tiers du pays situés au sud de la ville de Tikrit, a souvent appartenu à une même entité politique depuis le Moyen Age (voir les cartes page 12).

BIEN AVANT LES BRITANNIQUES

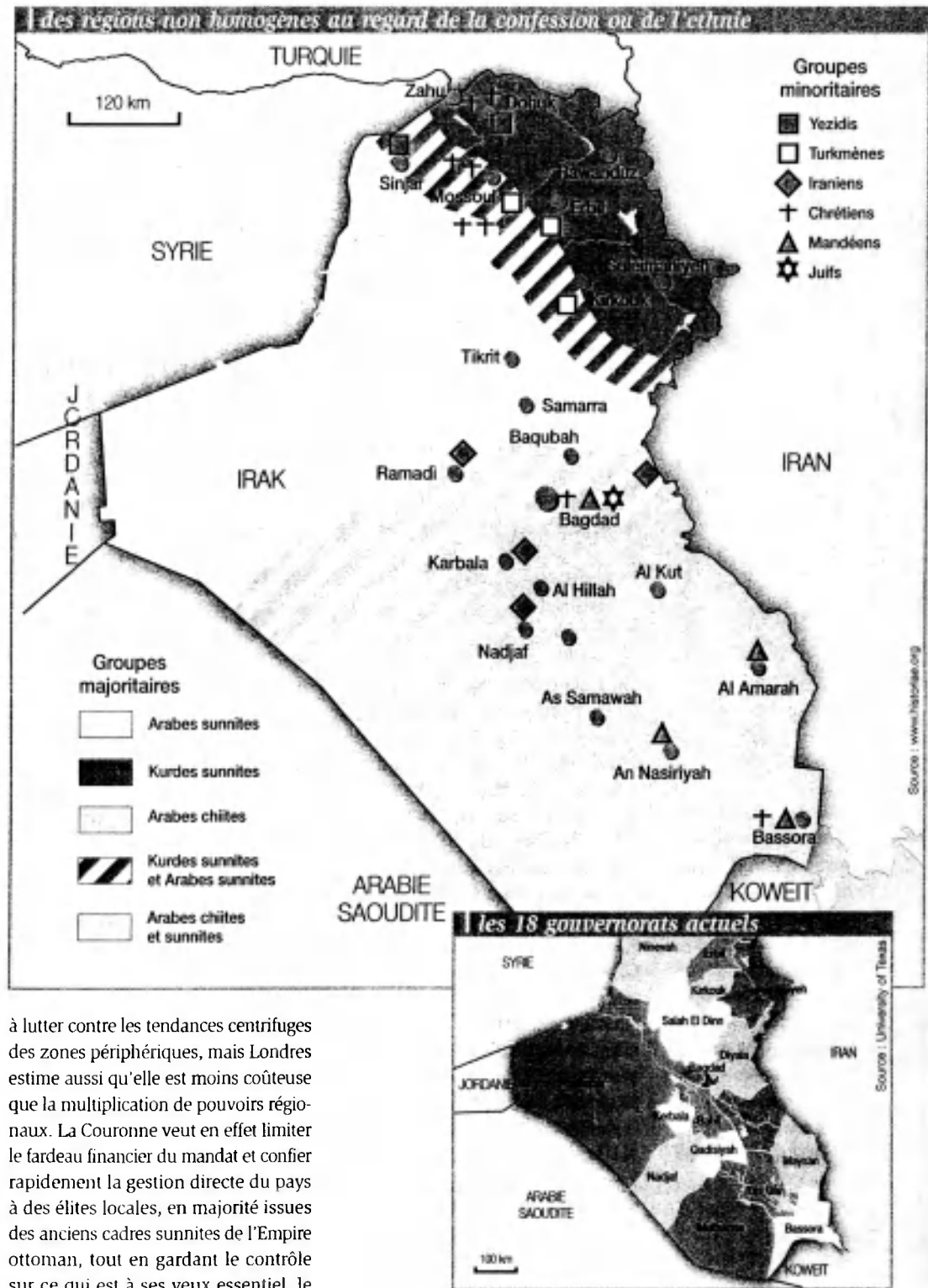
Sous l'Empire ottoman contrôlé par des gouvernants sunnites, la région forme le *vilayet* de Bagdad. Mais elle est couramment désignée sous le nom d'«Irak» dès le XVIII^e siècle, bien avant l'arrivée des Britanniques. La région regroupe des populations appartenant à de multiples communautés. Ainsi, pour chiite que soit progressivement devenue une large part de leur population, les grandes villes du centre (Nadjaf, Kerbala) et du sud (Bassora) ne sont pas regroupées sous le long règne des Ottomans dans une entité séparée à caractère confessionnel. Certes, Bassora dispose d'un *vilayet* spécifique à certaines époques, au XIX^e siècle notamment (1850-1862, 1884-1914), mais même dans ce cas, les villes saintes chiites de Nadjaf et de Kerbala restent rattachées à Bagdad. Les revendications autonomistes de Bassora ne sont d'ailleurs pas fondées sur l'identité religieuse, mais reflètent la volonté de ses élites pluriconfessionnelles d'arracher la ville à la mainmise de Bagdad. Le découpage interne du tiers septentrional de l'Irak actuel varie davantage au fil des siècles que celui du sud. Mais là encore, on observe une relative stabilité des frontières entre le *vilayet* de Mossoul et celui de Shahrizor. Ce dernier, dont les zones rurales sont en bonne partie

kurdes, est longtemps marqué par les affrontements entre chefs tribaux de ce groupe ethnique. L'expression d'une identité commune n'apparaît que très lentement, dans la deuxième moitié du XIX^e siècle, en réaction aux tentatives de centralisation de l'Empire ottoman (1), et le nationalisme kurde ne se consolide vraiment qu'au XX^e siècle.

Contrairement aux idées reçues donc, la principale décision des Britanniques en 1920 consiste à rattacher le *vilayet* de Mossoul (qui depuis 1884 recouvrait l'ensemble du Nord) à un vaste territoire qui est déjà communément appelé « Irak ». Les responsables britanniques estiment notamment que sans les zones céréalières de Mossoul, les régions situées au sud de Bagdad ne pourront être économiquement viables. La confirmation quelques années plus tard que la région renferme des gisements pétroliers renforce l'intérêt du Royaume-Uni pour Mossoul.

DÉJÀ L'ESPOIR D'UN ÉTAT KURDE

La formation de l'Irak en 1920 ne va pas pour autant sans heurts, ni revendications régionales. Bassora essaie de profiter de l'éclatement de l'Empire ottoman à la fin de la première guerre mondiale, pour s'émanciper, mais les Britanniques la reprennent vite en main. Les régions kurdes d'Irak et de Turquie, auxquelles les puissances occidentales avaient fait miroiter par le traité de Sèvres (1920) la création d'un État spécifique, voient de même leurs espoirs s'effondrer lorsque, dès 1923, ces mêmes puissances cèdent aux pressions de la Turquie kémaliste qui refuse absolument de se séparer d'une partie de l'Anatolie. Des rébellions éclatent dans le nord-est de l'Irak, mais Londres envoie ses avions bombardier la région. Les Britanniques, qui ont obtenu de la Société des Nations (SDN) le mandat de conduire l'Irak vers l'indépendance, choisissent le prince Fayçal, héritier de la dynastie hachémite, gardienne des lieux saints de La Mecque et de Médine, comme monarque du futur pays. Ils donnent à l'État en gestation une structure très centralisée. Elle vise



à lutter contre les tendances centrifuges des zones périphériques, mais Londres estime aussi qu'elle est moins coûteuse que la multiplication de pouvoirs régionaux. La Couronne veut en effet limiter le fardeau financier du mandat et confier rapidement la gestion directe du pays à des élites locales, en majorité issues des anciens cadres sunnites de l'Empire ottoman, tout en gardant le contrôle sur ce qui est à ses yeux essentiel, le pétrole et la diplomatie. Dès 1932, l'Irak devient donc formellement indépendant. Les jeunes gouvernants irakiens ne remettent pas en cause le modèle d'État unitaire et centraliste instauré par la puissance mandataire. Ce choix va être confirmé par les différents régimes qui se succèdent au fil des coups d'État militaires. Celui de 1958 reverse Fayçal II pour instaurer la République,

rompt avec Londres et reçoit le soutien du puissant Parti communiste irakien. Certes, les élites chiites du sud du pays, et notamment de Bassora, se plaignent régulièrement d'être sous-représentées dans les institutions qui sont dominées par des sunnites. Mais pour autant, ils ne remettent pas en cause le modèle unitaire et centralisé de l'État. Au ■■■■

Les multiples groupes ethniques et confessionnels sont dispersés sur l'ensemble du territoire. De nombreuses régions, ainsi que les grandes villes, sont caractérisées par une forte mixité qui rend impossible la création de grandes régions homogènes sur le plan communautaire.

■ ■ ■ contraire : dans les années 1940, le premier ministre Salih Jabr, originaire du sud, est l'un des principaux artisans de la gestion centralisée des ressources pétrolières. La principale opposition à la structure du jeune Etat irakien vient des régions à majorité kurde où, ces mêmes années, un chef de tribu, Mustafa Barzani, lance plusieurs révoltes armées contre Bagdad et ses parrains britanniques.

Hors cette exception, l'Etat centralisé dispose donc d'un fort soutien dans l'ensemble des forces politiques, dès avant la première arrivée au pouvoir du parti Baas (nationaliste arabe), en 1963.

Bien que ce nouveau régime se rapproche des régimes du Proche-Orient - l'Egypte notamment -, dominés par des sunnites,

l'opposition chiite irakienne continue pour l'essentiel à ne pas remettre en cause les structures de l'Etat. En 1965, un intellectuel chiite, tel que Muhammad Ridha Al-Shabibi, évoque bien la nécessité d'amorcer un mouvement de décentralisation, mais dans son esprit cela vise exclusivement les régions à majorité kurde. Des régions où le PDK (Parti démocratique du Kurdistan) de Mustafa Barzani, et l'UPK (Union patriotique du Kurdistan) de Jalal Talabani, créée en 1975, contestent la domination de Bagdad, tantôt les armes à la main, tantôt en essayant de négocier avec Bagdad. Même après l'arrivée au pouvoir de Saddam Hussein en 1979, l'opposition islamiste chiite, contrainte à la clandestinité, continue à prôner un Irak unitaire et centralisé. Cette ligne est défendue par le vieux parti Dawa, mais aussi par l'Assemblée suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (ASRII), créée

en 1982 à l'instigation de Téhéran par des opposants irakiens exilés en Iran. L'invasion du Koweït en août 1990, et la défaite subie par le régime de Saddam Hussein face à la coalition occidentale en février 1991, modifient la donne sur le terrain, mais pas encore les positions politiques des différentes forces d'opposition. Grâce à la protection des forces occidentales qui interdisent à l'aviation irakienne le survol du nord-est de l'Irak, les deux partis kurdes créent sur les gouvernorats de Dohuk, Erbil et Suleimaniyeh, et quelques zones adjacentes, une région autonome de fait, qu'ils gèrent ensemble. En revanche, les Etats-Unis et

leurs alliés laissent le régime réprimer dans le sang l'insurrection qui éclate dans le sud à majorité chiite (Nadjaf, Kerbala,

Bassora) en mars 1991. Cette répression n'infléchit pas les positions de Dawa et de l'ASRII qui continuent à défendre l'Etat unitaire et centralisé. Ce qui les éloigne alors des partis kurdes.

LES NOUVEAUX ALLIÉS DE WASHINGTON

En 2002, l'administration Bush se prépare à attaquer le régime de Saddam Hussein et cherche des alliés irakiens susceptibles de remplacer le dictateur. Elle coalesce donc à la hâte les opposants irakiens. Certains, tels les partis kurdes PDK et UPK, ou des personnalités indépendantes, comme le chiite Ahmad Chalabi, ont déjà des relations étroites avec Washington. D'autres sont de nouveaux alliés, tels les partis chiites, et surtout l'ASRII, sous le contrôle de Téhéran. La coalition compte aussi des dissidents du Baas en exil, comme le chiite Iyad Allaoui, et des personnalités indépendantes, tel le sunnite Adnan Pachachi.

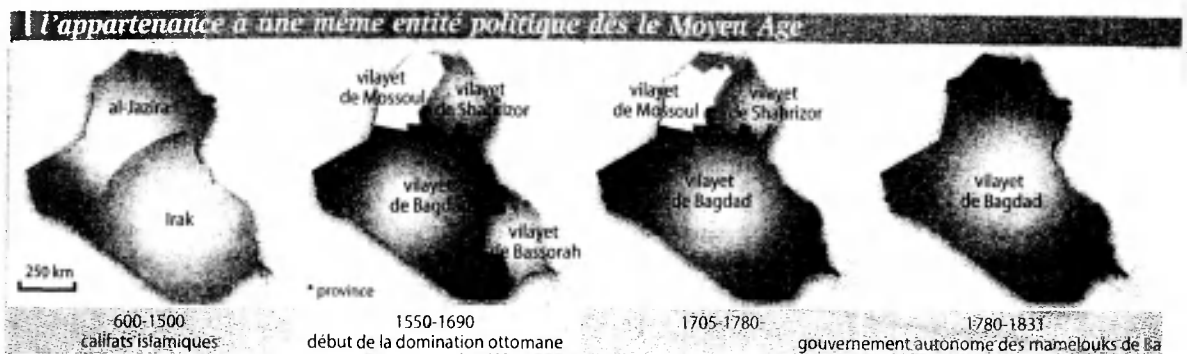
L'administration américaine provisoire qui se met en place à Bagdad sous la houlette de Paul Bremer après la guerre de mars 2003 a deux convictions. La première, c'est que le nouveau système politique doit être fondé sur l'appartenance communautaire, soit ethnique dans le cas des Kurdes ou des Turkmènes, soit confessionnelle pour les Arabes (chiïtes, sunnites, chrétiens...).

D'où l'application *de facto* de quotas communautaires dans la vie politique. La seconde, c'est que le fédéralisme est l'avenir de l'Irak. Si les partis kurdes partagent ce dernier postulat, ce n'est pas (encore) le cas de nombreux autres groupes. Dans le Nord-Est, les populations arabes et turques redoutent que le fédéralisme les place sous la coupe des deux formations kurdes. La région de Kirkouk notamment, en bordure des régions à majorité kurde, est l'objet de toutes les rivalités en raison de ses ressources pétrolières. Le contrôle des hydrocarbures est d'ailleurs au cœur de nombreuses polémiques sur la décentralisation (*voir carte page 13*). Les formations politiques chiïtes se disputent ainsi le contrôle de Bassora qui renferme les principales ressources pétrolières du pays.

Les deux partis chiïtes eux-mêmes (ASRII et Dawa) qui, avec les formations kurdes, forment l'ossature du nouveau système politique, n'acceptent d'abord l'idée du fédéralisme que du bout des lèvres. La Constitution, adoptée en octobre 2005 par référendum, en instaure le principe, mais sans préciser la liste et la taille des subdivisions territoriales pour la majeure partie du pays. La mise en œuvre concrète du fédéralisme est laissée au soin d'une loi à venir. Seules les régions à majorité kurde (Suleimaniyeh, Erbil, Dohuk) et les quelques territoires adjacents que les deux partis kurdes contrôlaient en mars 2003 et qui ont été reconnues

A terme, la structure de l'Irak risque d'être un patchwork instable

L'Irak n'a pas été créé de toutes pièces par les Britanniques en 1920. La majeure partie de l'actuel territoire du pays a souvent appartenu à une même entité politique depuis le Moyen Age, formant le *vilayet* de Bagdad sous l'Empire ottoman. Et dans le Nord, les frontières entre le *vilayet* de Mossoul et celui de Shahrizor ont été assez stables.



par la Loi administrative transitoire en 2004, se voient d'ores et déjà accorder par la Constitution un statut de région fédérée. Le statut définitif de Kirkouk et de son pétrole – toujours revendiqué par les partis kurdes, qui réclament également d'autres zones – sont en revanche laissés en suspens. Le PDK et l'UPK souhaitent qu'un référendum régional tranche la question, mais les partis arabes et turkmènes s'y opposent.

DES ENTITÉS DE TAILLE VARIABLE

Les partis chiites avaient insisté pour que le fédéralisme ne soit pas fondé sur un découpage confessionnel du pays. Mais à l'été 2005, l'ASRII effectue un virage spectaculaire et présente un projet de grande région chiite qui couvrirait les neuf gouvernorats du sud du pays, marginalisant ainsi Bagdad. Ce projet soulève de vives oppositions chez les autres formations chiites. Des partis implantés à Bassora ont en effet depuis 2004 un autre projet de région fédérée, pour l'extrême sud du pays uniquement (lire page 14). Mais surtout, l'Armée du Mahdi, dirigée par le jeune Moqtada Al-Sadr et mieux implantée que l'ASRII dans les quartiers populaires, continue de défendre le modèle d'Etat unitaire et centralisé. Au moins tant que les troupes américaines seront présentes en Irak. En octobre 2006, les députés irakiens adoptent la loi sur le fédéralisme. Bien que les partis kurdes et l'ASRII n'aient pas ensemble la majorité au Parlement, ce texte ouvre la voie à la constitution d'entités ethno-confessionnelles. En vertu de la nouvelle loi, l'un des quinze gouvernorats situés hors de la zone kurde peut décider de rester dans un cadre unitaire rattaché au pouvoir central. Mais il peut aussi opter pour un statut de région fédérée, soit seul, soit avec d'autres gouvernorats (hors

celui de Bagdad qui ne peut former une région fédérée que seul). Dans le cas d'un regroupement, la loi n'indique pas de limite de nombre maximum de gouvernorats, et n'exige pas davantage de contiguïté territoriale de la nouvelle entité. Le choix du statut de chaque relève de sa population qui doit statuer par référendum à la majorité simple, avec un quorum de 50 % des inscrits. Pour qu'une telle consultation soit organisée, il suffit que 10 % des électeurs ou un tiers des élus du Conseil du gouvernorat le demandent. Si deux propositions différentes de regroupement sont soumises dans un même gouvernorat, un premier vote populaire décide laquelle sera soumise à référendum. Une multiplication de consultations sans issue pourrait s'ensuivre, d'autant que la loi prévoit que de nouvelles propositions de regroupement peuvent être déposées tous les ans. Une fois constituée cependant, une région fédérée peut s'accroître, mais pas diminuer de taille. A terme, la structure de l'Irak risque donc d'être un patchwork instable d'entités politiques de taille très variable et aux pouvoirs vraisemblablement disparates. La loi d'octobre 2006 prévoit en effet que les régions fédérées peuvent créer des forces paramilitaires et conclure des accords pétroliers avec des compagnies étrangères. En revanche, une autre loi, adoptée en février pour les gouvernorats non fédérés, reste des plus floues sur leurs attributions. Les référendums sur la création de régions fédérées auraient pu en théorie débiter dès avril dernier, mais les partis irakiens se sont depuis lors concentrés sur la tenue des prochaines élections dans les 18 gouvernorats. Le scrutin, initialement prévu pour ce mois d'octobre, a été reporté sine die après des polémiques entre les principales for-



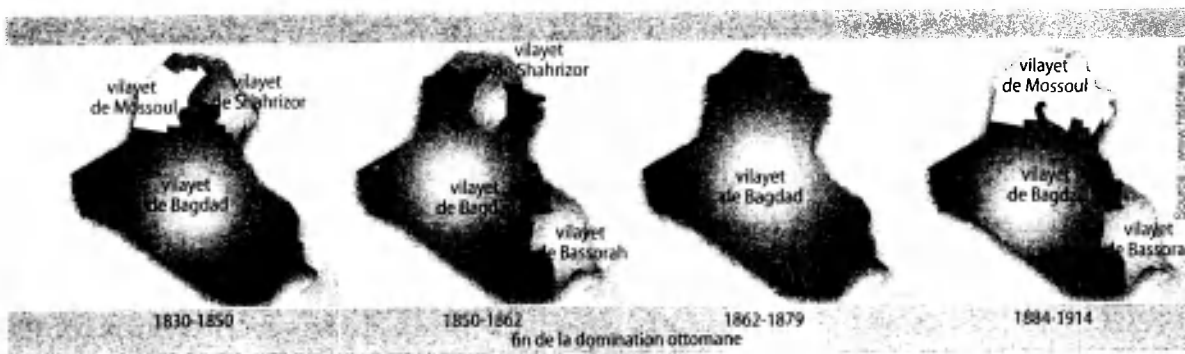
mations politiques sur la loi électorale et sur le statut de Kirkouk. En toute hypothèse, les deux partis kurdes et l'ASRII ne sont pas pressés de retourner aux urnes. En effet, le précédent scrutin local, en 2005, avait été boycotté par les autres formations et leur avait ainsi assuré le contrôle des assemblées locales. Un atout dont les meilleurs amis de Washington entendent bénéficier aussi longtemps que possible. ■

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(1) Lire «Kurdish or Kurdistan? Conceptualising Regionalism in the North of Iraq», par Gareth Stansfield et Hashem Ahmadzadeh, in *An Iraq of Its Regions. Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?*, sous la direction de Reidar Visser et Gareth Stansfield, Columbia University Press, 2007.

Les ressources pétrolières de l'Irak sont concentrées dans le Nord et dans le Sud du pays. Kirkouk est l'objet d'un intense contentieux entre les Kurdes et les autres communautés. Les premiers voudraient que la ville dépende du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, qui contrôle déjà les gouvernorats de Suleymaniyeh, Erbil et Dohuk, ainsi que des territoires adjacents.



ALTERNATIVES INTERNATIONALES
Septembre 2008

Des atouts dans le jeu de la Turquie

Au-delà de ses fortes tensions politiques internes, dont a témoigné la crise qui, en juillet, a opposé la formation au pouvoir, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), à la Cour constitutionnelle, la Turquie s'affiche comme un pays majeur de la zone économique européenne. La détente qui s'amorce pourrait avoir une conséquence salutaire : un retour aux réformes démocratiques et économiques.

Polarisation et détente

PAR
ANDREW FINKEL *

DANS son édition du 13 juin dernier, *Taraf*, un quotidien indépendant d'Istanbul, consacrait un article à une rencontre clandestine entre le chef d'état-major des armées et un juge de la Cour constitutionnelle connu pour ses convictions laïques. Le simple fait que la presse s'intéresse à cette affaire était un événement en soi.

La décision rendue le 30 juillet par les hauts magistrats, contre l'avis de nombreux hauts dignitaires, de ne pas interdire le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), actuellement au pouvoir, sous prétexte qu'il serait trop islamique, a constitué un autre signe qu'en Turquie les règles du jeu politique sont en passe de changer.

La rencontre entre le général Ilker Basbug, récemment promu chef d'état-major des armées, et M. Osman Paksüt, vice-président de la Cour, n'avait rien de fortuit. Après avoir nié, le juge Paksüt a admis s'être entretenu avec l'officier à plusieurs reprises mais dans des circonstances différentes de

celles décrites par le journal. Ces allégations firent grand bruit car elles dataient la première rencon-

tre au 4 mars et la seconde à la mi-mai, soit au moment précis où la Cour constitutionnelle s'apprêtait, d'une part, à faire annuler l'amendement constitutionnel autorisant les femmes à porter le foulard islamique à l'université et, d'autre part, à poursuivre l'AKP.

Finalement, le juge Paksüt et dix de ses onze pairs ont prononcé un verdict de culpabilité à l'encontre de l'AKP. Cette décision semblait dans la droite ligne d'une institution qui a déjà fait interdire deux dizaines de partis politiques, au motif qu'ils étaient trop kurdes, trop radicaux ou encore parce qu'ils utilisaient le fait religieux à des fins politiques.

Néanmoins, quatre des juges décidèrent d'imposer des sanctions au parti sans toutefois le frapper d'interdiction. L'AKP continuerait d'exister, et soixante et onze de ses membres figurant sur la liste des prévenus, y compris le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et le président Abdullah Gül, ne seraient pas exclus de la vie politique. En contrepartie, l'AKP verrait ses subventions publiques amputées de moitié.

Président de la Cour et seule voix à s'élever pour demander l'acquittement, le juge Hasim Kilic estima de son devoir de mettre en garde le gouvernement et de lui signifier qu'il se trouvait en sursis. On en déduisit que l'AKP s'en tirait avec une tape sur la main.

Les alliés de la Turquie considérèrent que le pire avait été évité de justesse. Ceux qui, parmi les Européens, croient à la nécessité d'ancrer la Turquie dans une démarche d'accession à l'Union poussèrent un soupir de soulagement. Ils n'auraient pas à expliquer aux turcosceptiques comment un tribunal avait pu, un an à peine après les élections, désavouer les 47 % d'électeurs qui s'étaient prononcés en faveur de l'AKP.

La Bourse d'Istanbul et les marchés des changes reprirent confiance. Pour les plus optimistes, chacun avait compris la leçon : le gouvernement abandonnerait ses tentatives d'islamisation de la vie publique, et la haute société « jacobine » ne tenterait plus de coup d'Etat judiciaire contre un gouvernement élu.

POURTANT, alors même que la Cour constitutionnelle statuait sur le sort de l'exécutif, un tribunal pénal d'Istanbul procédait à l'examen des pièces à

conviction dans le cadre d'un procès qui pourrait s'avérer retentissant. Un complot susceptible de déboucher sur un coup d'Etat – nom de code : Ergenekon – aurait été inspiré par des ultranationalistes inquiets de voir le gouvernement turc se préparer à plier devant Bruxelles et Washington en échange du droit d'instaurer une certaine forme de loi islamique (1).

Bien que séparés, ces deux procès ont donné lieu à toutes sortes de spéculations sur les liens présumés entre les deux affaires. Les arrestations opérées dans le cadre de l'affaire Ergenekon ne seraient-elles pas une réponse à la volonté de faire tomber le gouvernement ? La tentative de destitution de ce dernier faisait-elle partie du coup d'Etat ? Ce procès ne permettait-il pas à l'armée de faire le ménage dans ses propres rangs ?

Les plus fervents supporters du procès contre l'AKP, tant au sein du principal parti d'opposition que dans la presse, n'ont pas tardé à tourner le procès Ergenekon en dérision. Pour les partisans de l'exécutif, il est la preuve que des milices et des officines secrètes sont à l'œuvre pour expédier les sales besognes et saper la souveraineté populaire.

Ce débat met en évidence la forte polarisation de la société turque. On trouve, d'un côté, ceux qui pensent que l'AKP est à la tête d'un mouvement visant à transformer la nature même de l'Etat ; de l'autre côté, ceux qui affirment que les tenants de la laïcité crient au péril islamiste pour mieux se raccrocher à leurs privilèges. Après l'annonce de non-interdiction de son parti, M. Erdogan a immédiatement appelé à la fin des clivages.

La tâche ne sera pas aisée. Le fossé est inhérent à l'histoire de la Turquie. Dans une vidéo diffusée au lendemain du 11-Septembre, M. Oussama Ben Laden reconnaissait la situation unique de ce pays dans le monde musulman et annonçait qu'il voulait venger « huit décennies de souffrances, d'humiliations et de honte ». Les Turcs comprirent immédiatement qu'il faisait référence à la création de leur république, en 1923, et à la décision de son fondateur, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, de détruire l'Etat théocratique. L'abolition du califat,

* Journaliste, Istanbul.

en 1924, fut l'une des réformes les plus radicales en ce sens. Elle affaiblissait le pouvoir du clergé et investissait le peuple d'un pouvoir souverain.

L'anticléricalisme militant des fondateurs commença à s'émousser après la seconde guerre mondiale. La Turquie était alors la seule nation à majorité musulmane, mais aussi l'un des seuls pays en voie de développement à prendre au sérieux la notion de démocratie multipartite (2). Dans les années 1950, on observa une plus grande tolérance à l'égard de l'islam, et les écoles religieuses rouvrirent leurs portes. Durant la loi martiale (1980-1983), les militaires, qui envisageaient la religion comme un élément de cohésion sociale, rendirent l'instruction religieuse obligatoire à l'école.

Islam et nationalisme

C'ÉFURENT les émeutes urbaines entre jeunes gauchistes et nationalistes, et non pas le radicalisme religieux, alors perçu comme marginal et désuet, qui servirent de prétexte au coup d'Etat militaire de 1980. Quant au nationalisme kurde, qui s'exprimait, dans les années 1920, sous la forme de soulèvements religieux, il fut dominé à partir des années 1980 par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dirigé par M. Abdullah Öcalan, anticlérical et admirateur de Joseph Staline. C'est aussi à cette époque que naquit la notion de «synthèse turco-islamique», une doctrine forgée par les militaires qui espéraient ainsi rallier l'islam sunnite au nationalisme.

Episode emblématique

S'IL EST VRAI que le gouvernement consacre, aujourd'hui, des sommes importantes à la formation de religieux censés délivrer un message patriotique, il n'en demeure pas moins que, depuis les années 1990, les militaires ont mis un frein à l'expansion des écoles coraniques (*imam hatip*) qui formaient religieux et imams, de crainte de voir émerger un système d'éducation parallèle produisant une génération d'opposants aux valeurs prônées par l'Etat.

Il peut paraître absurde de suggérer que la laïcité de la Turquie n'est que superficielle et que le pays, actuellement en négociation pour accéder à l'Union européenne, pourrait redevenir un Etat islamique. Cependant, les Turcs parlent du «processus du 28 février», en référence au jour de 1997 au cours duquel leur Conseil national de sécurité, alors dominé par les militaires, obligea un gouvernement ouvertement pro-islamique dirigé par le Parti de la prospérité, parent de l'AKP, à signer son propre arrêt de mort en s'engageant à purger la vie publique de ses *irtica* (la réaction [religieuse]) (3).

Les élites turques, civiles et militaires, craignent les conséquences d'une plus grande ouverture de l'espace public à un islam qu'elles ne pourraient pas contrôler. Elles jugent condescendants les gouvernements occidentaux qui citent la Turquie comme une nation islamique «modérée» et voient en elle un modèle pour la région.

L'exclusion des écoles, des

universités et des administrations, des femmes qui persistaient à vouloir porter le foulard fut sans conteste l'épisode le plus emblématique du conflit qui oppose l'Etat à une partie de la société turque. De telles actions mirent à l'épreuve les libéraux. En effet, si ces derniers n'entretiennent en général aucune sympathie particulière à l'égard du message politique de l'islam, ils s'accordèrent alors à penser que la réaction de l'Etat ne faisait qu'attiser les braises.

Leur inquiétude grandit au cours du second mandat de l'AKP, lorsque le gouvernement sembla vouloir ajourner ses projets de réforme constitutionnelle et récompenser le cœur de son électorat en offrant des concessions aux tenants du foulard. On craignit alors de voir les droits de l'homme réservés à ceux qui avaient voté pour le bon camp. La Constitution de 1982 dote le gouvernement et le président de pouvoirs considérables, et les plus durs parmi les laïques s'inquiétaient de voir l'épouse d'un homme muni de tels pouvoirs porter le foulard.

L'AKP est moins une nouvelle force politique qu'une formation qui a su prendre le contrôle d'un puissant appareil d'Etat. Là, sans doute, réside la peur réelle des élites. Des sources proches du gouvernement donnent leur explication sur l'ambivalence dont a fait preuve la Cour constitutionnelle : M. Erdogan aurait averti le haut commandement de l'armée qu'en l'absence d'un verdict favorable il n'assisterait pas au conseil militaire suprême prévu pour le mois d'août. Or la signature du premier ministre est nécessaire à la ratification de tout changement au sein du commandement militaire. Si le gouvernement avait été destitué et M. Erdogan exclu du Parlement, personne n'aurait pu reconduire les plus hauts gradés de l'armée

dans leurs fonctions. Tous auraient été contraints de partir à la retraite.

Nombreux sont ceux, en Turquie, à conclure que la seule manière de mettre fin à cette polarisation est de réécrire les règles du jeu politique. La solution la plus souvent envisagée prévoit de réviser la Constitution de 1982, afin de réduire le pouvoir des institutions non issues des urnes et de revoir le texte des articles relatifs aux droits fondamentaux. Etant entendu par ailleurs que l'avenir européen, ou non, du pays aura une influence sur son évolution.

(1) Quatre-vingt-six suspects ont déjà été mis en accusation. Parmi eux, plusieurs anciens généraux, des journalistes et des membres du crime organisé.

(2) Les premières élections multipartites se tinrent en 1946. Les premières élections qui donnèrent lieu à un changement de gouvernement se déroulèrent en 1950.

(3) La destitution puis l'interdiction du Parti de la prospérité survinrent après ce que d'aucuns considèrent comme une erreur tactique. Le gouvernement avait alors préféré signer le décret du Conseil national de sécurité contre les réactions religieuses plutôt que démissionner et mener campagne sur ce thème dans le cadre d'élections générales. Cette erreur lui fut fatale car les militaires firent alors pression sur leur nouveau partenaire pour le pousser à quitter la coalition. L'AKP sut tirer les leçons de cet épisode lorsque, dix ans plus tard, les militaires tentèrent par la voie des tribunaux de déposer le président choisi par le parti.

Forte croissance en période troublée

Après plusieurs années de croissance élevée, l'économie turque occupe le dix-septième rang mondial. Des progrès auxquels la crise financière internationale fait courir le risque d'un ralentissement.

PAR NICOLE POPE *

LES GRATTE-CIEL qui ont transformé le quartier commercial de Maslak, à Istanbul, en un mini-Manhattan et les centres commerciaux luxueux qui se multiplient rapidement dans les grandes villes de Turquie en témoignent : ce pays, qui, en 2001, avait subi une crise financière désastreuse, suivie par une contraction de 9 % de son économie, a connu une expansion spectaculaire depuis.

Au cours des dernières années, son paysage économique et financier s'est transformé, mais également, dans une certaine mesure, son panorama social et politique. Entre 2002 et 2006, la Turquie a enregistré une croissance annuelle moyenne de plus de 7 %. Devenue la dix-septième économie mondiale, elle affiche un produit national brut (PNB) de 658 milliards de dollars en 2007, soit 9 300 dollars par habitant. « C'est une économie nettement consolidée par rapport aux années 1990 », explique M. Ahmet Insel, professeur d'économie à l'université Galatasaray d'Istanbul. Le secteur bancaire, autrefois la partie la plus fragile de l'économie, est maintenant sain et solide. »

Malgré ce succès, des déséquilibres subsistent. Le déficit courant se creuse rapidement, en raison notamment du coût élevé du pétrole : avec 38 milliards de dollars (5,8 % du PNB) fin 2007, il demeure le talon d'Achille de la

Turquie. Pour financer ce déficit, Ankara compte sur les flux de capitaux étrangers. Toutefois, l'incertitude qui plane sur la santé de l'économie mondiale risque de pousser les investisseurs à prendre moins de risques dans les pays émergents.

La croissance s'est déjà ralentie l'an dernier. Le PNB n'a augmenté que d'un décevant 4,5 % en 2007, alors que l'inflation, à plus de 9 % en mars, dépasse la limite fixée par les autorités. Le taux officiel de chômage, lui, continue de flirter avec les 10 %. « Plusieurs années de croissance élevée aboutissent évidemment à un certain ralentissement », déclare M. Ayse Bugra, professeur d'économie politique à l'université du Bosphore. Et les emplois créés dans l'industrie ne suffisent pas pour compenser ceux qui sont perdus dans l'agriculture. »

Aux problèmes économiques s'ajoute désormais l'incertitude politique. La Turquie, qui paraissait stable depuis l'arrivée au gouvernement, en 2002, du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), musulman modéré, est une fois de plus en proie à des convulsions existentielles. Bien que le parti au pouvoir ait obtenu un second mandat avec 47 % des voix lors des élections législatives de juillet 2007, la Cour constitutionnelle a accepté de statuer sur une demande d'interdiction du parti, accusé de menacer la laïcité de l'Etat. Le procureur a également demandé que soixante-dix membres éminents de l'AKP, dont le premier ministre et le président de la République, soient bannis de la vie politique.

Finalement, le 30 juillet 2008, six des onze juges de la Cour constitutionnelle se sont prononcés pour l'interdiction, mais il en fallait sept pour que celle-ci l'emporte. S'il a échappé au pire, le parti au pouvoir n'en a pas moins reçu un avertissement sérieux, la moitié de son financement public ayant été suspendu.

Ce duel entre institutions judiciaire et gouvernementale a plongé le pays dans une période d'incertitude, particulièrement malvenue compte tenu de la

conjoncture mondiale. L'agence de notation financière Standard & Poor's a récemment modifié de « stable » à « négative » l'évaluation de la Turquie, pour cause de risque accru d'instabilité politique.

Le procès de l'AKP pourrait avoir néanmoins une conséquence salutaire : un retour aux réformes démocratiques et économiques. L'enthousiasme populaire pour l'entrée dans l'Union européenne a chuté depuis le début officiel des négociations d'adhésion, en raison de l'opposition exprimée publiquement dans certaines capitales européennes, et notamment à Paris, et du différend entre Bruxelles et Ankara sur la question de Chypre (lire page 9).

Au désenchantement européen s'ajoutent aussi les conséquences de la transition rapide, et parfois difficile, vers une économie libérale. Salué par les marchés, l'afflux de capitaux étrangers est perçu comme une invasion, ce qui alimente la montée du nationalisme et retarde l'introduction de certaines réformes.

Evolution du style de vie

EXIGÉE par le Fonds monétaire international (FMI), avant qu'il ne libère une tranche de prêt de 3,6 milliards de dollars, la restructuration de la sécurité sociale a donné lieu à de nombreuses manifestations. De ce fait, elle a été retardée à plusieurs reprises. Jusqu'à récemment, il était possible pour certains employés de prendre leur retraite à 40 ans. L'Etat veut désormais augmenter le nombre de jours de contribution et élever l'âge de la retraite à 65 ans, une démarche à laquelle les syndicats s'opposent.

Après avoir adopté une série de réformes politiques et économiques importantes après son

arrivée au pouvoir en 2002, le gouvernement avait quelque peu négligé le processus d'adhésion à l'Union européenne au cours des deux dernières années. Il semble désormais tenté de retourner à la formule qui lui avait valu son succès électoral initial : un cap fermement fixé sur l'Union, avec poursuite des réformes légales et structurelles.

L'objectif de l'adhésion à l'Union, avec laquelle Ankara a déjà signé un accord d'union douanière en 1996, continue d'ancre la Turquie à l'Europe et aux marchés occidentaux. Aux yeux des investisseurs étrangers, malgré les nombreux obstacles qui restent à surmonter, la procédure d'intégration définit toujours la trajectoire à suivre pour le pays. Les résultats économiques des nouveaux pays membres en Europe centrale et orientale semblent offrir un exemple attrayant de potentiel de croissance pour la Turquie. « Jusqu'en 2002, les investissements directs étrangers tournaient autour de 1 milliard de dollars par an. Maintenant, les flux annuels ont atteint 15 ou 20 milliards. C'est directement lié à la candidature à l'Union européenne », estime M. Insel.

La Turquie dispose également d'atouts démographiques importants. Une promenade dans les rues bondées du centre d'Istanbul révèle une foule jeune et variée : près de la moitié des soixante-dix millions de Turcs ont moins de 25 ans, cible rêvée de la société de consommation. Pour les grandes compagnies, étrangères ou locales, les possibilités d'expansion sur ce marché encore sous-exploité demeurent importantes. Des succursales de Starbucks remplacent nombre de petits cafés de quartier ; Carrefour et d'autres grandes surfaces avalent les épiceries du coin. C'est tout un style de vie qui change avec l'intégration de la Turquie à l'économie mondiale et l'élargissement de la classe moyenne.

Pour les banques, par exemple, cette transformation se traduit par des prêts personnels, prêts hypothécaires et autres crédits à la consommation. En l'espace de cinq ans, l'usage des cartes

* Journaliste, Istanbul.

de crédit a quintuplé. La plupart des magasins offrent désormais la possibilité d'échelonner les paiements, sans frais supplémentaires, sur une période allant de six à douze mois. Au cours des cinq dernières années, le secteur bancaire a ainsi enregistré un profit total de 35 milliards de dollars, ce qui explique en partie l'engouement des investisseurs étrangers pour les institutions financières du pays.

Sous l'œil vigilant du FMI, intervenu avec un prêt de 10 milliards de dollars, des réformes structurelles importantes, introduites depuis la crise de 2001, ont assaini le secteur et instauré des mécanismes de régulation et de supervision. Des quatre-vingt-une banques qui occupaient le marché à l'époque, il n'en reste plus que quarante-six, plus solides et surtout plus « transparentes ». En l'espace de quelques années, la plupart des banques privées turques ont acquis des partenaires étrangers : Garanti s'est alliée à General Electric, Akbank à Citigroup, Yapı Kredi à Unicredito. Les capitaux étrangers, qui ne contrôlaient que 3 % du secteur financier au moment de la crise, en détiennent maintenant 30 %.

Durant la même période, la privatisation des entreprises étatiques, lancée dans les années 1980 mais fréquemment interrompue par les procès qu'ont intentés les opposants à la vente des biens publics, a pris son essor et attiré d'autres capitaux étrangers. Entre 1986 et 2007, les privatisations ont rapporté au total 29 milliards de dollars à l'Etat turc (dont les deux tiers ont été récoltés entre 2005 et 2007). Dans l'industrie, la productivité a considérablement augmenté. Le secteur privé a profité de la disponibilité de capitaux sur les marchés internationaux pour emprunter et investir, ce qui rend certaines compagnies quelque peu vulnérables en cas de correction sévère de la valeur de la livre turque.

Malgré la surévaluation de la monnaie nationale jusqu'à très récemment, les exportations ont progressé à un rythme plus rapide que la croissance de l'économie au cours des dernières années. En 2007, les ventes à l'étranger atteignaient 107 mil-

liards de dollars, dont 56 % vers l'Union européenne. La Russie ainsi que les pays du Golfe figurent également parmi les marchés importants. L'année 2008

s'annonce prometteuse, d'autant plus que la valeur de la monnaie locale a décliné de 10 % durant le premier trimestre : en mars, les ventes à l'étranger atteignaient plus de 11 milliards, battant ainsi tous les records et, au cours des trois premiers mois de l'année, les exportations ont marqué une augmentation de 36,2 % par rapport à la même période de l'année précédente.

Le secteur automobile, notamment, a le vent en poupe. En 2007, par exemple, le pays a produit plus d'un million de voitures privées, camionnettes ou autres véhicules commerciaux, et les exportations du secteur ont augmenté de 34 % par rapport à 2006, pour atteindre plus de 19 milliards de dollars. Malgré la concurrence des pays d'Asie, les textiles et le prêt-à-porter contribuent toujours pour une part importante aux ventes à l'étranger, de même que l'électroménager, les produits agricoles et l'aciérie.

Confiance des investisseurs

MAIS, pour continuer à produire, la Turquie doit d'abord importer – du pétrole, des biens d'équipement ainsi que des matériaux intermédiaires. Cette faiblesse structurelle explique le déficit de la balance commerciale, qui n'est attribué qu'en moindre partie à la consommation. « Nous exportons beaucoup d'automobiles, mais nous importons énormément de pièces détachées. La composante de production locale n'est pas très élevée », explique M. Insel. La facture de l'énergie pèse aussi lourdement dans la balance : elle

constitue environ 20 % des importations.

Le tourisme demeure dès lors très important pour garantir l'entrée des devises, sur laquelle

la Turquie se fonde pour équilibrer ses comptes. Déjà réputé pour ses plages et ses lieux de villégiature balnéaire, le pays veut maintenant attirer une clientèle plus large grâce à ses ressources thermales, à ses stations de sports d'hiver et à de nombreux sites historiques encore mal connus.

Les Turcs se demandent désormais dans quelle mesure la crise mondiale va affecter les équilibres de leur économie. Ils ont traversé plusieurs périodes de troubles. La nouveauté, cette fois-ci, est que le pays est intégré à la mondialisation et que la réponse à cette question est plus liée à des facteurs externes, et dès lors incontrôlables, qu'à des événements locaux, même si les tensions politiques peuvent amplifier les turbulences.

Le président de la Banque centrale de Turquie a admis que la crise internationale constituait un défi important. « Les marchés financiers subissent actuellement leur crise la plus sérieuse depuis la mondialisation », a expliqué M. Durmus Yilmaz. *Nous devons admettre que nous sommes confrontés à un fléau.* Mais la plupart des économistes paraissent convaincus que le potentiel du marché turc demeure trop important pour être ignoré par les compagnies étrangères, même si tous sont conscients que les mois à venir pourraient être turbulents.

Les placements étrangers à la Bourse d'Istanbul, qui a perdu un tiers de sa valeur depuis janvier, ont également diminué depuis le début de l'année, mais les investissements directs semblent tenir bon. Plusieurs accords commerciaux importants ont déjà été signés au cours des trois premiers mois, témoignant de la confiance à long terme des investisseurs envers la Turquie. Les analystes attendent entre 16 et 18 milliards de dollars cette année, une baisse relativement modeste par rapport aux 22 milliards de dollars enregistrés en 2007.

Si la poursuite des réformes démocratiques dans le cadre du processus d'adhésion à l'Union européenne constitue un des piliers de la confiance internationale, le FMI s'en veut un autre soutien important. L'accord de

stand-by (1) assorti de 10 milliards de dollars de prêts qu'avait conclu Ankara est arrivé à son terme en mai 2008. Aux yeux des investisseurs, les visites régulières de la délégation du FMI garantissent cependant le maintien d'une certaine discipline fiscale et monétaire. « Je ne crois pas que la Turquie ait besoin d'un autre accord de stand-by », déclarait récemment le ministre de l'économie Mehmet Simsek.

Bien que l'appui financier du FMI ne soit plus une nécessité, il semble probable qu'Ankara signera un nouvel accord, moins contraignant et probablement sans financement : pour envoyer des « signaux positifs » aux investisseurs, lesquels comptent sur le FMI afin de surveiller de près les développements économiques du pays. Avec ces deux points d'ancrage internationaux – l'Union européenne d'une part, et le FMI de l'autre – et une économie consolidée, la Turquie espère limiter les retombées possibles de la crise financière internationale et ainsi poursuivre sa croissance.

NICOLE POPE.

(1) Accord de confirmation, qui permet à un pays d'obtenir des tranches de crédit du FMI jusqu'à concurrence d'un montant déterminé pour autant que les modalités énoncées dans l'accord soient respectées.

Une répartition très inégale des revenus

TOUT un monde sépare la jeunesse dorée qui fréquente les boîtes de nuit à la mode sur les rives du Bosphore, à Istanbul, des enfants mal vêtus courant pieds nus dans les ruelles étroites de la vieille ville de Diyarbakır. Ce contraste, que de nombreux citadins ne perçoivent pas, rappelle que la croissance économique impressionnante de la Turquie ces dernières années (*lire l'article ci-dessus*) n'a pas profité de façon équitable à l'ensemble de la population.

Si, dans l'ouest du pays, les revenus et les attentes de la classe moyenne se sont rapprochés des modèles européens, dans certaines provinces anatoliennes le revenu par habitant représente un faible pourcentage de celui des grandes métropoles. Alors que trente-cinq Turcs figurent sur la liste mondiale des milliardaires publiée par *Forbes*, un récent rapport de la Banque mondiale indique un taux national de pauvreté de 18 %, en net recul cependant par rapport aux 27 % de la période de récession de 2002.

Malgré cette tendance positive, de nombreux Turcs continuent de vivre dans des conditions précaires. « *La répartition des revenus s'était détériorée durant les années 1990, pendant la période de haute inflation, explique M. Ahmet Insel, professeur d'économie à l'université Galatasaray, à Istanbul. La pauvreté a diminué un peu. La croissance ne creuse pas les inégalités, mais elle n'a pas un effet correcteur très important.* »

La pauvreté prend diverses formes. Officiellement, l'agriculture continue d'employer près d'un tiers de la main-d'œuvre turque. En réalité, dans de nombreux cas, il s'agit d'un sous-emploi, puisque l'agriculture ne représente plus que 10,3 % du produit national brut (PNB) en janvier 2007. « *Même si la pauvreté urbaine a décliné quelque peu, elle demeure constante dans les régions rurales, estime M. Ayse Bugra, professeur d'économie politique à l'université du Bosphore. De 32 % à 32,5 % des gens dans ces régions vivent au-dessous du seuil de pauvreté.* »

Dans les grandes métropoles, le manque d'emplois est exacerbé par le fait que l'urbanisation a érodé le soutien familial qui liait les nouveaux immigrants et leur parenté à la campagne. Le taux officiel de chômage, qui se situe autour de 10 %, ne reflète qu'une partie du problème. Même avec un emploi, de nombreuses familles arrivent à peine à joindre les deux bouts.

LE FAIBLE taux de présence des femmes dans la main-d'œuvre représente un autre

élément crucial de déséquilibre social. Même si, dans les régions rurales, de nombreuses paysannes participent aux travaux agricoles, elles sont rarement salariées. En zone urbaine, leur taux d'emploi atteint à peine 17 % et, selon les chiffres publiés par le directorat pour le statut de la femme, 66 % des travailleuses ne bénéficient pas de la sécurité sociale.

Dans des secteurs tels que l'habillement ou la petite industrie, de nombreux employés travaillent ainsi de façon informelle. « *Les politiques néolibérales ne profitent pas aux pauvres, souligne M^{me} Sule Necef, qui enseigne l'économie du travail à l'université de Marmara. Il y avait un Etat-providence qui équilibrait la situation, mais l'économie de marché a détruit ces mécanismes de rééquilibrage.* » Le salaire minimum net, ajusté périodiquement, se situe à 481 nouvelles livres turques (272 euros) par mois.

L'Est et le Sud-Est anatolien demeurent les régions les plus déshéritées du pays. Des milliers de familles, forcées de quitter leurs villages, leurs troupeaux et leurs champs durant la période de conflit avec les militants kurdes dans les années 1990, sont venues s'installer dans les centres urbains de la région. Ces déplacés, au niveau d'éducation souvent limité, survivent grâce à des travaux occasionnels et à une activité agricole saisonnière.

« *Non seulement la croissance ne s'est pas répercutée ici, mais nos recherches montrent que la situation a en fait empiré. Il n'y a eu aucune amélioration de l'emploi et du développement économique* », affirme pour sa part M. Serif Camci, secrétaire général de l'association Sarmasik, qui lutte contre la pauvreté à Diyarbakır. Une enquête effectuée par cette dernière en 2007 dans deux quartiers pauvres de la ville révèle un revenu mensuel moyen de 272,90 nouvelles livres turques (soit 154 euros) par ménage. Or les familles sont nombreuses, constituées en moyenne de six ou sept membres.

La politique sociale du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), durant son premier mandat, a contribué à son succès électoral en 2007. Pour tenter d'enrayer le cycle des inégalités sociales, elle a fourni des microcrédits sans intérêts. Elle a aussi introduit des transferts de fonds conditionnels pour encourager les parents à soumettre leurs bébés à des examens de santé réguliers ou à envoyer leurs enfants à l'école – le but étant d'obtenir 100 % d'inscription pour les enfants en âge scolaire d'ici à 2010.

« *Malheureusement, certains programmes basés sur la notion de droit social sont en train de disparaître et il y a maintenant une dépendance croissante envers la bienfaisance, explique M. Bugra. C'est une approche très américaine, qui s'appuie sur la philanthropie.* »

MALGRÉ les progrès enregistrés, des dizaines de milliers d'enfants, surtout des filles, ne terminent toujours pas leur scolarité en primaire. Un récent rapport du Programme des Nations unies pour le développement (PNUD) sur la jeunesse en Turquie a rappelé que les insuffisances du système éducatif, de qualité très variable selon les établissements et les régions, perpétuent les inégalités sociales. De plus, 40 % des jeunes âgés de 15 à 24 ans restent inactifs, ne participant ni au marché de l'emploi ni à l'éducation. Voilà pourquoi, bien qu'elle figure désormais parmi les vingt plus puissantes économies mondiales, la Turquie a encore du chemin à faire en matière de développement humain : elle se situe au 84^e rang seulement sur la liste annuelle récemment publiée par le PNUD.

De l'avis des experts, une politique sociale active de lutte contre la pauvreté et des subsides, régionaux ou sectoriels, pour canaliser les investissements là où ils sont le plus nécessaires permettraient de réduire le fossé qui sépare les nantis des plus démunis. La jeunesse de sa population est un atout de poids pour la Turquie. Pour que cette ressource humaine puisse contribuer au développement du pays tout entier, encore faut-il que le système d'éducation soit mieux adapté aux besoins du marché du travail et accessible à tous.

N. P.