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TURKEY: A BLOODY CAMPAIGN FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION.

The campaign for the Turkish General Elections was far from being peaceful, punctuated as it was by bomb attacks, bloody demonstrations and clashes between the Army and the PKK.

Thus, on May 4, in the course the funerals of four guerrilla fighters in Diyarbakir, a procession of several thousands of Kurds clashed with the police who fired in the air to disperse them. A police vehicle was attacked by the crowd and three police offi-

cers were beaten and a fourth injured with a knife.

The next day, on 5 May, it was Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's own car that was targeted by an attack that was not claimed by any group. While in the middle of a campaign tour, the Prime Minister was subjected to fire from a submachine gun and a grenade. The ambush occurred soon after the vehicle had left the town of Kastamonu, (Black Sea region). The daily paper *Taraf* stated that, according to security sources, the attack was carried out

by a six-man PKK commando, a charge taken up by two other dailies, *Milliyet* and *Sabah*. However, the authorities did not make any specific charges, although usually prompt at accusing the PKK as responsible for any attacks, real or imaginary, that take place on Turkish soil. This time the Prime Minister merely mentioned vaguely “associated of a terrorist organisation”. It should be mentioned that the Black Sea region is not usually the theatre of PKK operations. Thus the Turkish police accused some extreme Left organisations of acting on behalf

of the Kurdish guerrilla outside its territory. However, the Black Sea region is also a stronghold of the Turkish extreme Right, and harbours many sympathisers of the Grey Wolves (MHP).

On the same day, the Kurdish party (BDP), in a campaign meeting at Diyarbakir, condemned the military operations of the previous few days, the arrests of several activists and threatened to boycott the elections. The Turkish Prime Minister immediately reacted by saying: *"The BDP is trying to attain its objectives with the support of terrorists"*.

Finally, on 6 May, the attack on the Prime Minister's cortège was claimed in a PKK communiqué: *"as a reprisal for the terror being exercised by the police of the Kurdish people"* (Firat News) stating, oddly enough, that the target was not the Prime Minister but the police.

At the same time, the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, threatened, from his prison cell: *"Either serious negotiations will begin after 15 June or a great war will begin"*. However, as this is not the first time that this kind of ultimatum is made prior to an extension of the cease-fire, the threat had little effect on the Turkish political scene. As against this, the editorial writer Mehmet Ali Birand,

considered that the BDP statement about a possible boycott of the elections should be taken seriously: *"This would throw doubts on the legitimacy of the elections"* and Mr Erdogan would be very embarrassed, since he wants to demonstrate a democratic election in which everyone takes part. However, two parties are getting some advantage from this tension on the Kurdish question. Erdogan wants to steal votes from the ultra-nationalist MHP, so he is conducting a nationalist campaign as attacks the Kurds, who are accused of threatening national unity. As for the pro-Kurdish BDP party, *"it is flexing its muscles to show that it is defending its community"* (AFP)

The clashes with the army are continuing, with two PKK members shot down in Mardin, one policeman killed and another seriously injured during an attack by the Kurdish movement at Silopi on 7 May.

On 13 May, twelve Kurdish guerrillas were killed while a commando was trying to cross the Iraqi Kurdistan border near Sirkak. On 14 May, a Turkish soldier was killed by a mine during a sweep in the Hakkari Mountains. On 16 May, there were demonstrations in several towns throughout Turkish Kurdistan to protest at the death of these twelve Kurds, while

hundreds of demonstrators crossed the border to collect the bodies of the fallen fighters and take them to their families for burial. The security forces intervened and succeeded in taking over four bodies being carried by the demonstrators. At Diyarbakir, Siirt, Istanbul and in Batman province, there were several clashes with the police.

On 23 May, another attack against the Prime Minister was foiled, this time while he was conducting a campaign tour in the Kurdish region. A remote controlled bomb containing 26 Kg of explosives was found and defused under a bridge, in Sirkak province, which the prime Minister was due to cross on his way to make an election speech. On 26 May a bomb attack took place, this time in Istanbul, causing 8 injured, two of the seriously. The bomb was placed on a two-wheeler and exploded at 9 am under a bridge, near a bus stop, in a posh quarter on the European bank. *"The explosion cost one woman her foot another is suffering from burns in the breathing system"* (Anatolia News Agency). According to the security services, *"the fact that the explosion occurred near a police school suggests that it probably was targeted at the police"*. Once again the Prime Minister implied that the PKK could have been behind this attack.

SYRIA:

THE KURDS DIVIDED BETWEEN HOPE FOR A CHANGE AND CAUTION

Still trying to put an end to the demonstrations taking place in Syria by alternating use of force and "political gestures", President Bashar al-Assad officially restored their citizenship to 300,000 "stateless" Kurds on 2 May. When this was announced, demonstrations stopped at Qamishlo and

Amude, but continued in other towns like Hassaké. Indeed, some people consider that this measure is insufficient. Thus the Kurdish singer, Omar San, born in Afrin, declared on the AKNews site that Syrian citizenship alone is meaningless: *"The Kurds need many other things, going from electricity to health care. What will this "hollow citizenship"*

bring them if they have no rights? The neglect by the UN Security Council and some Human Rights Organisations regarding the Kurdish people's rights is very regrettable".

Similarly the Kurdish activist, Aras Yussuf considered that the Kurds must see full recognition all their rights as citizens living

in Syria. He pointed out that the granting of Syrian nationality was only part of these rights. Regarding the ending of demonstrations in Qamishlo and Amude, Aras Yussuf also pointed out that as all the mobile telephone networks and other means of communications have been cut, this alone could have put a brake on street demonstrations.

However, even if Internet access is even more restricted than in other Arab countries, a form of resistance using Facebook and Twitter does exist, and the Web sites of free Kurdish organisations, be they from Iraqi Kurdistan or the diaspora, relay this. Thus Kurdish Rights.org gets round the censorship and supervision of the web to display regularly the latest news about demonstrations. Behind the pseudonym of KurdsFreeMan or else that of Reber there seems to be a Kurd from Aleppo, who cautiously refuses to give his age or civil activity. He describes the state of affairs and the centres of Kurdish agitation in the country.

According to Reber, the town with the least demonstrations, be they Kurdish or Arab, is Aleppo. Indeed, for the last thirty years this town has been controlled with an iron hand by the security forces and the population lives in terror of the State Militia. On the other hand the most turbulent is Qamishlo: 10,000 people took part in a demonstration organised on 20 May, for the so-called Azadi (Freedom) Friday. At Amude, about 8,000 took part in that Friday celebration and 5,000 at Koban, which in the small towns like Serê Kaniyê and Derbassieh there were about 3,000 demonstrators. About 150 tried to demonstrate at Afrin, but were immediately surrounded by the security forces.

As to the attitude of the Syrian Kurds towards the Syrian Arab revolts, Reber considers that opinions are divided as the Kurds are waiting to see the way things develop. Having been politically organised for decades in Syria, most of them are members of some organisation, either political or of in defence of human rights, they can easily mobilise several thousands in the course of a day to demonstrate in the towns. However the aims of the Syrian revolution raise Kurdish expectations as a minority that is suspicious of both the Arab world and the Islamic fundamentalists.

Questioned by AKnews about the fact that, for the first time ever, these Kurdish demonstrators were waving the Syrian flag and not that of Kurdistan, Reber replied that resolution of the Kurdish question in Syria *“lies in Damascus and must only be resolved in Damascus — the Constitution must arbitrate the issue. We are in Syria, not in Kurdistan and our problems have their sources in Syria. I want a democratic government, I want the Constitution to recognise that there are Kurds in Syria and give them their social, cultural and political rights. We want free and honest media. The protection of Syrian citizens must be a government priority”*.

As for the hitherto answers of the Syrian regime to the Kurds compared with the repression in the Arab towns, it has several reasons. Firstly, the regimes propaganda that the demonstrators are Islamic fundamentalist cannot be applied to the Kurds, the overwhelming majority of whom have never engaged in religious fundamentalism. Moreover, entangled as it is by its repression of the Arab towns, the government did not want to open a “second front” in the Kurdish towns. Finally,

Syria is facing heavy international pressure and the fact that many Kurds live on the other side of its borders, either in Iraqi Kurdistan or Turkey and dissuaded it from adding another flow of refugees who, in this case, would meet with support from compatriots as well as from Kurds living outside the Middle East.

Another sign of this *“Kurdish distancing”* with regard to the Arab opposition is the announcement of a boycott by Syrian Kurdish opposition groups of a meeting, that began on 31 May at Antalya, of the principal Syrian Arab opposition groups — “sponsored” by Turkey.

The declared aims of this meeting are *“unite the energies”* of all Syrians, whatever be their ethnic or religious affiliations or political opinions, to achieve a democratic change. Those expected to take part range from major public figures like signatories of the Damascus Declaration, former Members of Parliament, Moslem Brothers, and representatives of the independent association of industrialists and businessmen. Some Kurdish activists were expected as individuals but the representatives of the Syrian Kurdish political parties declined the invitation.

Indeed, the latter, in a statement to the daily paper Ashraq al-Awsat announced in the name of 12 Kurdish political parties, their intention of boycotting the meeting because of its location: *“Any meeting of this kind, held in Turkey, can only be detrimental to the Kurds of Syria, since Turkey is hostile to the aspirations of the Kurds, not only with regard to Northern Kurdistan but in all parts of Kurdistan, including that in Syria”*.

The representative of the Kurdish Left Party, Saleh Kado, confirmed this concern by say-

ing that Turkey had a “negative” attitude to the problems of 20 million Kurds in general and that Ankara must first resolve “the problems of 20 million Kurds living on its soil before seeking to get the Syrian Kurdish parties to agree to any united project to manage the present day events in Syria”.

Saleh Kado added that he Kurds in Syria had no confidence in Turkey or its policies and that, consequently, they had decided to boycott this summit. Another reason put forward was the presence of the Moslem Brothers at this meeting. The Kurds, indeed, have very little sympathy with the Arab religious movements, both because of their own religious culture, very distant to fundamentalism and because the Islamist movements advocate an “Arabisation” of Kurdish culture in the name of submission to the language of the Quran.

Yet another reason of this rejection is the indifference, of which the Kurds reproach the Arab movements, to their demands. Thus, two days before the meeting, the National Movement of the Kurdish Parties had put forward their own plan for democratic change and of reforms at all levels. However, this document was completely ignored by the non-Kurdish opposition.

Abdul Haq Youssef, one of the leaders of the Kurdish Yekiti Party also confided to the Web paper AKnews his doubts about this platform, declaring that he did not know any of its organisers who, indeed, had never contacted the Kurdish movement during the preparatory period.

Moreover, the Antalya summit had not invited all the Kurdish parties, but only five of them: the Democratic Party of Syria,

the Kurdish Left Party, the Azadi Party, the Movement for a Kurdish Future and the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party. In view of this the invited parties have preferred to decline so as not to “fragment” the Kurdish opposition.

Some Kurdish parties, however, disapprove of this boycott. Thus the representative of the Movement for a Kurdish Future, Mohammed Hako, considered this absence from the summit “an enormous mistake”: “As Kurds, we must take advantage of every opportunity for debating our people’s future and nation. I am opposed to the fact of boycotting a summit that could have so much weight, especially regarding the critical and sensitive situation of Syria today”. This is why Mohammed Hako stated that he wanted to attend, but only in his personal capacity not as a representative of his party.

IRAQI KURDISTAN: THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF KURDISH STUDIES TAKES PLACE IN DUHOK

From the 1st to the 3rd of May, the 2nd International Congress of Kurdish Studies took place in Duhok, jointly organised by the Paris Kurdish Institute and Dohuk University. This Congress brought together Kurdish specialist working on Kurdish history, language and literature from all continents.

The 1st Congress have taken place in Irbil in 2006, with the aim of assessing the situation of Kurdish Studies in Western countries — mainly France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands the Scandinavian countries and the United States. However, the last decade has seen a considerable development of Kurdish Studies in these countries, where many

theses and PhDs have been successfully produced on many different aspects of the Kurdish question or on various subjects regarding Kurdish history and society. These new theses and research works ranging from the forces population displacements to new forms of gender relations in society, the dynamics of urbanisation to the formation of municipal authorities aroused the interest of research workers, who were able to carry out their research both in archives and in the field.

Even it fit is impossible to give a full account of all the new research work, it seemed important that several spokespeople con and give evidence of the new trends in academic research in their respective countries.

This Congress’s second aim was to note and analyse the effect of several new high-level research programmes on Kurdish language and literature, in Europe and also in Turkey. Whereas for the last ten years, several institutions such as Exeter University’s Centre of Kurdish Studies (UK), Göttingen University (Germany) and the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations (INALCO, France) have continued and intensified their language teaching, three Turkish universities have opened Departments of Kurdish language and literature —for the first time in the Turkish Republic’s history. These are the universities of Mardin, Mush and Hakkari.

The Congress enabled the various specialists to discuss their

teaching methods, a necessity for consolidating these initiatives and to strengthen their academic quality. It also saw the beginning of cooperation and exchanges between the European and American universities and those of Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Present at the Congress's opening session were the Minister of Higher Education and Research, Professor Dilawer Ala'adin, the Minister of Education, Safeen Diyazee, the Minister of Culture as well as the President of Duhok University, Dr. Asmat M. Khalit and the President of the Paris Kurdish Institute, Mr Kendal Nezan all of whom addressed the Congress.

The first session covered the history of Kurdish Studies during the 20th Century, dealt with by Professor Joyce Blau (France) and Professor Abdul Fettah Botani, Director of the Centre for Kurdish Study and Archives (Iraqi Kurdistan. Followed by Professor Celîlê Celîl (Austria).

Then came an overview of Kurdish Studies in different Western countries. France was represented by Professor Hamit Bozarslan (Paris, EHESS), the philosopher Ephrem-Isa Youssif and Jean-Marie Pradier (Paris VIII University). Germany was represented by Drs. Birgit Ammann (Fachhochschule Potsdam, Berlin) and Khanna Omarkhali (Göttingen University), while Professor Mirella Galletti (University of Naples) represented Italy. There were also Dr. Michiel Leezenberg

(Amsterdam University) from the Netherlands and Resho Zilan (Uppsala University for the Scandinavian countries. Kurdish Studies outside Western Europe included Kayaz Mirzoev (Alma Ata University) for the countries of the former Soviet Union while the United States were represented by Dr. Michael Gunter (Tennessee Technological University) and Janet Klein (University of Akron, Cleveland).

An overview of Kurdish Studies in the Middle East covered Syria with Professor Abdi Haji Muhammad (Duhok University), Turkey with Professors Kadri Yildirim and Abdulrahman Adak (Mardin University) and last but not least Kurdish Studies in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region were presented by Dr. Kamiran Berwari (Duhok University).

The second day was devoted to workshops on language and literature, with three distinct working groups. The first was entitled "Language and Linguistics", in which Salih Akin (Rouen University) spoke on the use of Kurdish in the diaspora and Birgit Ammann on the Kurdish identity in the diaspora.

The second working group covered more specifically pure linguistics, in which Khosrow Abdollahi Madolkani (INALCO, Paris) discussed two types of infinitive in Kurdish and Baeiz Omer Ahmed the development of local dialects in Bahdinan. The third working group covered

Kurdish as a language used in the media, tracing and analysing the role of satellite television channels in the process of unifying the Kurdish language, with contributions by Ruken Keskin (Kurd1), Abdul Rehman Kakil (Kurdistan TV) and Hewar Ibrahim Hussain Shali (Kurdsat TV).

The second workshop covered questions of literature and history. In the first panel on "Studies in Literature", Sandrine Alexie (Kurdish Institute of Paris) treated the problems of translating classical Kurdish literature into French while Professor Muhammad Bakir Muhammad (University of Duhok) spoke about "Language logic in Kurdish poetry".

The second panel dealt with oral literature, in which Professor Celîlê Celîl spoke about Kurdish folklore and Khanna Omarkhali discussed the Yezidi *qewls* (religious hymns). The third panel covered history and anthropology, with a contribution by Dr. Khalid Khayali on the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden, while panel 4 covered Kurdish language publishing houses, be they in Turkey or Iraqi Kurdistan like Avesta, Aras, Doz etc.

The Congress drew up a number of recommendations for the development of Kurdish Studies. A summary of these was presented to the Prime Minister of Kurdistan in the course of a welcoming reception he gave for the Congress participants on 4 May.

CULTURE:

A PROJECT FOR A "BEDIR KHAN" ENCYCLOPAEDIA IS LAUNCHED IN IRBIL

On 16 May the launching of a "Bedir Khan Encyclopaedia" was announced at the French Cultural Centre in Irbil. This project aimed at collecting and preserving the her-

itage left by the Bedir Khan family because of its historic role in the links forged between France and the Kurds, following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the major role of the Franco-Kurdish team, round the review

"Hawar", that cooperated in developing the Kurdish language and its writing using Latin characters, thus named the "Hawar alphabet".

Towards the end of the Ottoman

Empire, the Bedir Khan dynasty, Emirs of Botan, linked the political demands of their nation with the promotion and the development of Kurdish culture. The first issue of the first Kurdish newspaper, "Kurdistan" was published in Egypt on 22 April 1898, by a member of this family, Muqtad Mithat. It ran to 31 issues and several other works.

After the defeat, in 1840, of Emir Bedir Khan of Botan by the

Ottoman Armies, most of this princely family was sent into exile. This enabled them to benefit from an excellent education abroad to become committed to Kurdish cultural movements abroad.

The six-man High Commission charged with the carrying out this project includes Sinem Bedir Khan. The Commission's first meeting took place on 22 April this year, and has already made an inventory of 3,000 pages and

1,000 photos or pictures and 46 books regarding the Bedir Khan family. A group of writers and journalists living in Turkey has been charged with seeking, in the Ottoman archives, everything relating to the Bedir Khan family. A similar search is being conducted in Syria.

The Encyclopaedia is expected to run to between 16 and 20 volumes and to take about three years to produce.

Le Monde
Lundi 2 mai 2011

Face à la répression en Syrie, les Etats-Unis adoptent des sanctions économiques

L'intervention des forces de sécurité, lors du « vendredi de la colère », a fait au moins 62 morts

Beyrouth
Correspondance

Malgré le déploiement de l'armée, la détermination des contestataires syriens n'a pas été entamée. Vendredi 29 avril, baptisé « journée de la colère », plusieurs milliers de Syriens ont bravés les interdictions de manifester pour exprimer leur solidarité avec les habitants de Deraa assiégés par les militaires, pour réclamer un « *changement de Constitution* » ou la « *chute du régime* ». La répression par les forces de sécurité a fait au moins 62 morts civils, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Le « Comité des martyrs », qui collecte les noms des victimes, a indiqué que près d'un demi-millier de personnes ont été tuées en Syrie depuis le début de la révolte – le 15 mars – dont le quart dans la seule ville de Deraa.

C'est dans ce berceau de la contestation, à la frontière jordanienne, que les victimes ont été les plus nombreuses vendredi. Les terribles unités d'élite de la 4^e division blindée de Maher Al-Assad, frère du président Bachar Al-Assad, y sont chargées de mater la révolte. L'eau, le téléphone et l'électricité ont été coupés et les habitants manquent de vivres et de médicaments, selon les rares témoignages qui franchissent le blocus de l'information imposé par Damas.

Embargo sur les armes

Des villageois venus des alentours pour prêter main-forte aux insurgés de Deraa auraient été mitraillés par des snipers de la 4^e division. Quinze d'entre eux auraient ainsi été tués aux portes de la ville. Filmées au début de l'intervention militaire lancée le 25 avril, des vidéos amateurs ont montré des scènes effarantes de rues jonchées de morts et de blessés. Ces images, qui transitaient par



Manifestation dans la ville à majorité kurde de Kamechliyé, au nord de la Syrie, le 29 avril. AP

la frontière jordanienne, se font, elles aussi, de plus en plus rares.

L'armée a par ailleurs été déployée dans la banlieue de Damas, à Lattaquié, et à Homs, troisième ville du pays, où, selon des habitants, des chars auraient ouvert le feu dans la soirée. Des centaines de Syriens, pour la plupart des femmes et des enfants fuyant les violences, ont afflué

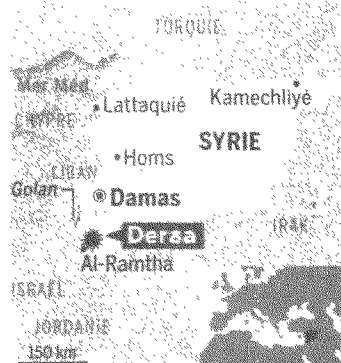
vers les pays voisins, en Jordanie, au nord du Liban et en Turquie pour y trouver refuge.

A l'issue de cette nouvelle journée meurtrière, les Etats-Unis ont décidé des sanctions économiques à l'encontre de trois dirigeants syriens : Maher Al-Assad, Atif Najib, cousin du rais et chef de la sûreté intérieure dans la province de Deraa, et Ali Mamlouk, autre cousin et chef des renseignements généraux, au cœur de l'appareil répressif.

Les 27 Etats membres de l'Union européenne ont, pour leur part, indiqué être parvenus à un « accord préliminaire » visant à imposer un embargo sur les ventes d'armes à la Syrie. Trois pays, le Portugal, l'Estonie et Chypre rechignent encore à accepter des sanctions ciblées contre les principaux dirigeants syriens, mais un gel de leurs avoirs et une interdiction de visas sont en préparation.

Après avoir promis des réformes et décrété la levée de l'état d'urgence, le 21 avril, le régime syrien semble s'être engagé dans la voie du tout répressif, justifié, selon lui, par l'existence d'un « *complot étranger* » et de « *groupes islamistes* ».

Le nombre de victimes des ONG syriennes a été démenti par les autorités, ainsi que les témoignages rapportés par les chaînes Al-Arabiya et Al-Jazira, accusées de « *sédition* » et de « *mensonges* ». Selon l'agence officielle SANA, citant un porte-parole militaire, 148 personnes auraient été tuées depuis le début des troubles, dont 78 policiers. Des Syriens présentés comme des « *éléments de cellules terroristes* » arrêtés par les forces de sécurité, défilent à la télévision nationale pour y délivrer leurs « *aveux* ». L'un d'entre eux a ainsi déclaré vendredi avoir été financé par des « *cheikhs d'Arabie saoudite et du Koweït* ». – (Intérim.)





Turquie: Incidents lors d'obsèques de rebelles kurdes abattus par l'armée

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 4 mai 2011 (AFP)

PLUSIEURS MILLIERS de Kurdes en colère ont assisté mercredi à Diyarbakir (sud-est) aux funérailles de quatre rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), émaillées d'incidents avec la police, a constaté un correspondant de l'AFP.

Quatre policiers ont été blessés lorsque leur véhicule a été pris d'assaut par une procession de quelque 5.000 personnes. Trois policiers ont été battus et le quatrième a été poignardé.

Lors des faits, un autre groupe de policiers a tiré en l'air pour disperser la foule et utilisé des canons à eau.

Deux manifestants et un journaliste ont également été blessés lors des incidents.

Le cortège a transporté sur les épaules des porteurs jusqu'au cimetière les quatre cercueils enveloppés dans des drapeaux aux couleurs rouge-vert-

jaune de la rébellion kurde du PKK.

"Vengeance, vengeance" ou "Biji Apo" (vive Apo, surnom d'Abdullah Öcalan, chef historique emprisonné du PKK) a scandé la foule lors de la marche.

Sept rebelles du PKK ont été tués la semaine dernière lors de heurts avec l'armée dans la province montagneuse de Tunceli (est).

De retour du cimetière, environ 250 jeunes cagoulés ont lancé des cocktails molotov sur des magasins et des bâtiments publics, provoquant d'importants dégâts matériels.

La police est de nouveau intervenue en faisant usage de gaz lacrymogène contre les jeunes manifestants qui avançaient vers le siège provincial du parti gouvernemental islamo-conservateur AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement), arrêtant une dizaine d'entre-eux.

Les enterrements de rebelles donnent généralement lieu à une poussée de fièvre contre les autorités turques dans le sud-est anatolien, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes et dont le chef-lieu est Diyarbakir.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe terroriste par de nombreux pays, a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé en mars d'y mettre fin, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes, alors que doivent avoir lieu en juin des élections législatives.



Des policiers turcs attaqués après un meeting d'Erdogan

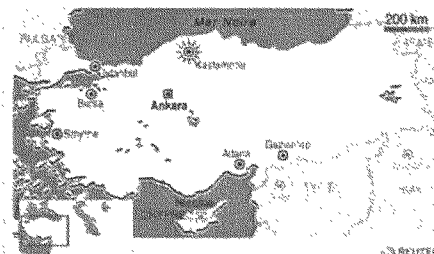
ISTANBUL (Reuters) -4 mai 2011 - Par Gilles Trequesser

DES SÉPARATISTES présumés ont attaqué mercredi en Turquie des véhicules de la police, tuant un agent, près d'une ville du Nord où le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait prononcé un discours un peu plus tôt, rapportent des chaînes de télévision turques.

Erdogan avait déjà quitté la ville de Kastamonu en hélicoptère lorsque l'attaque a été commise, et il s'est rendu sur les lieux d'un autre meeting, dans le cadre de la campagne pour les élections législatives du 12 juin.

Outre le policier tué, deux autres ont été blessés dans l'attaque, qui s'est produite alors qu'un autocar de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir, traversait une zone forestière à la sortie de Kastamonu. Une grenade a été lancée sur une voiture de police et des individus ont ouvert le feu, selon la chaîne NTV.

La province de Kastamonu, sur les bords de la mer Noire, ne



connaît pas d'activité de guérilla habituellement. Des militants kurdes, islamistes ou d'extrême gauche ont cependant commis fréquemment des attentats et des attaques en des points très différents de Turquie par le passé.

S'exprimant après ces événements dans la ville d'Asmaya, Erdogan a semblé imputer l'attaque à des séparatistes. "Ces esprits noirs, ces terroristes, ces séparatistes ne savent faire que cela, car ils croient qu'ils ne peuvent rien obtenir par la voie des urnes", a-t-il dit.



Les rebelles kurdes revendiquent une attaque meurtrière contre la police

ANKARA, May 6, 2011 (AFP)

LES REBELLES KURDES ont revendiqué vendredi une attaque au cours de laquelle un policier a été tué et un autre blessé, alors qu'ils escortaient un convoi du parti au pouvoir, après un meeting du Premier ministre.

L'attaque menée mercredi dans le nord "a été faite par nos militants en

représailles à la terreur exercée par la police sur le peuple" kurde, a déclaré le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), dans un communiqué transmis par l'agence de presse Firat.

Les autorités turques avaient accusé jeudi les rebelles du PKK d'être responsables de cette attaque.

Un commando avait attaqué à la grenade et au fusil d'assaut une voiture de police escortant un bus du parti au pouvoir, le Parti de la justice et de développement (AKP), près de Kastamonu (nord), où le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan venait de tenir un meeting pour les élections législatives du 12 juin.

Un policier avait été tué, et un autre blessé alors qu'il répliquait aux tirs.

Cette attaque "visait la police (...) non les civils ou le Premier ministre", a précisé le PKK.



Turquie: deux rebelles kurdes abattus par l'armée dans le Sud-Est

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 6 mai 2011 (AFP)

DEUX REBELLES kurdes ont été abattus tôt samedi dans des heurts avec l'armée dans une zone montagneuse de la province de Mardin (sud-est), a indiqué une source de sécurité locale.

Les accrochages avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan

(PKK) se sont produits non loin de la montagne de Bagok, a-t-on précisé de même source.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe "terroriste" par de nombreux pays, a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé en mars d'y mettre fin, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes, alors que doivent avoir lieu en juin des élections législatives.

Le PKK a revendiqué vendredi une attaque mercredi dans le nord de la Turquie au cours de laquelle un policier a été tué et un autre blessé, alors qu'ils escortaient un convoi du parti au pouvoir, après un meeting du Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK, en 1984, selon l'armée.



Pétrole: l'Irak a payé les entreprises opérant au Kurdistan (officiel)

BAGHDAD, 6 mai 2011 (AFP)

L'IRAK a pour la première fois payé les compagnies pétrolières opérant dans la région autonome du Kurdistan (nord), a annoncé le Premier ministre kurde, Barhem Saleh, dans un communiqué diffusé jeudi.

Le gouvernement central de Bagdad a transféré un total de 243 millions de dollars à ces sociétés opérant dans les trois provinces de la région kurde, a-t-il précisé.

Cette somme correspond à "50% des recettes nettes provenant de l'exportation de plus de cinq millions de barils de pétrole des régions du Kurdistan entre février 2011 et le 27 mars", selon le communiqué.

Bagdad avait jusqu'alors refusé de rémunérer les compagnies pétrolières opérant au Kurdistan en raison d'un conflit avec la région autonome sur la nature des accords pétroliers qu'elle a conclus avec les groupes étrangers, mais aussi sur la répartition des coûts et des bénéfices de ces opérations.

Le texte diffusé jeudi précise que les paiements s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'un "accord provisoire sur la répartition des recettes" conclu entre M. Saleh, le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki et les ministres irakiens du Pétrole et des Finances.

L'Irak produit environ 2,6 millions de barils par jour, dont environ 2,1 millions sont exportés. Le pays tire 90% de ses revenus de son secteur pétrolier.

Le Kurdistan a recommencé début février à pomper son pétrole pour l'exportation.

Les exportations de brut de la région autonome se situent actuellement autour de 135.000 bj, a indiqué dans le communiqué son ministre des Ressources naturelles, Ashti Hawrami, qui a précisé que le Kurdistan espérait porter sa production à 200.000 bj à la fin de l'année.



Irak: le départ américain redouté à Kirkouk, province minée par la violence

KIRKOUK (Irak), 6 mai 2011 (AFP)

LES TENSIONS ETHNIQUES entre kurdes et arabes et la persistance des violences à Kirkouk inquiètent les responsables de cette province dont certains souhaitent un maintien des forces américaines après fin 2011, date prévue pour le retrait total américain d'Irak.

Dans cette région riche en pétrole à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, l'insécurité prend la forme d'attentats, d'assassinats ciblés, d'enlèvements, ou même parfois d'accrochages entre militaires irakiens et forces de sécurité kurdes, comme celui qui avait fait deux morts et quatre blessés le 25 avril.

Comme dans la plupart des "territoires disputés" entre Bagdad et la région autonome du Kurdistan (nord), la lutte contre les groupes armés à Kirkouk est compliquée par les revendications du gouvernement central et des autorités kurdes sur cette zone stratégique.

"Al-Qaïda tente de déstabiliser la situation à Kirkouk en visant ses différentes composantes ethniques et en attisant le confessionnalisme", affirme à l'AFP l'adjoint au chef de la police provinciale, le général Tourhan Abdelrahman.

"Malgré leurs divergences, les dirigeants politiques locaux sont d'accord sur la nécessité du maintien de forces américaines à Kirkouk pour aider à régler les problèmes en suspens", assure-t-il.

Sous couvert de l'anonymat, un haut responsable des forces de sécurité locales affirme même que le retrait américain prévu fin 2011, plus de huit ans après l'invasion, constitue une "menace mortelle" pour Kirkouk.

"Les Américains sont une source de confiance", affirme-t-il. "Tout le monde va les voir pour résoudre leurs problèmes liés aux ingérences politiques dans les services de sécurité et aux conflits politiques".

L'armée américaine compte encore 45.000 hommes en Irak, dont environ 300 qui participent toujours à Kirkouk à la Force combinée de sécurité

(FCS), un dispositif tripartite mis en place sur les territoires disputés et incluant des troupes kurdes et arabes.

Interrogé par l'AFP, un porte-parole de l'armée américaine a réaffirmé que toute prolongation de la présence américaine en Irak -donc à Kirkouk- impliquerait une requête en ce sens du gouvernement irakien.

Or celui-ci compte plusieurs courants hostiles à cette présence qu'ils présentent comme une forme d'occupation. Et aucun dirigeant irakien ne s'est risqué à demander aux Américains de rester.

La dispute entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan trouve son origine dans l'arabisation au début des années 1990 de ces territoires par le président déchu Saddam Hussein, qui a forcé 120.000 Kurdes à fuir vers le nord, selon l'organisation des droits de l'Homme Human Rights Watch.

Les peshmergas ou combattants kurdes ont profité de l'invasion américaine de 2003 pour progresser vers le Sud et l'Ouest, revendiquant le caractère kurde de Kirkouk, et de zones dans les provinces de Salaheddine, Diyala (centre) et Ninive (nord).

Depuis, les deux camps s'accusent de vouloir modifier la balance démographique pour contrôler les richesses de ces régions.

A Kirkouk, la situation demeure "fragile" selon le chef du conseil provincial, Hassan Toran, un turcoman qui juge les effectifs de sa police "insuffisants".

De source proche des forces de sécurité, on affirme que la police provinciale compte 11.300 policiers, mais en aurait besoin de 3.500 de plus.

Les attentats sont quasi quotidiens dans la province. Jeudi encore, deux gardes du corps ont péri dans l'explosion d'une bombe contre un responsable des forces de sécurité kurdes de Touz Khormatou.

Dans ce contexte, le retrait des Américains constituera pour l'archevêque chaldéen de Kirkouk, Louis Sako, "un grand défi". "Il va laisser un vide qu'il nous faudra combler par la concorde et la réconciliation".

Another 'Friday of Rage' turns bloody

BEIRUT

As Syrians protest again, security forces kill at least 16 people in restive city

BY ANTHONY SHADID
AND STEPHEN CASTLE

Security forces in Syria fired on protesters seeking to break the military's siege of the restive town of Dara'a on Friday, killing at least 16 people.

The violence occurred as thousands of Syrians took to the streets throughout the country in what organizers had proclaimed a "Friday of Rage" against the government's crackdown of a six-week uprising, witnesses and activists said.

The bloodletting in Dara'a was the worst on what became another violent Friday, repeating a cycle that has emerged as a fixture of the greatest challenge to four decades of the Assad family's rule. After noon prayers each week, demonstrators have poured into the streets, only to face the determination of the government to disperse them, usually by force.

Residents painted a wrenching portrait of the scene in Dara'a, a poor town in southern Syria near the Jordanian border where protests in March helped galvanize nationwide demonstrations. The military stormed the town Monday, effectively occupying it, and the hardships — shortages of food and water, in addition to dozens of deaths that were reported — have become a rallying cry, unleashing solidarity protests in other towns and neighboring countries.

Residents said hundreds, perhaps thousands of Syrians from outside the town, tried to march there, either to break the siege or to bring in food and medicine. As they approached, security forces opened fire.

"There was a lot of screaming," said Wissam Tarif, executive director of In-san, a human rights group, citing the accounts of residents. "It was a massacre."

The Syrian military said in another incident, four soldiers were killed by what it called terrorists at a checkpoint there earlier in the day.

There were conflicting reports on the number of civilians killed. Mr. Tarif said a nearby hospital had received 16 bodies and many wounded. Razan Zeitouneh, an activist with the Syrian Human Rights Information Link in Damascus, put the toll at 19 and provided names.

She said four others were killed in a wave of protests that gathered in dozens of towns and villages, from the Kurdish east and the Mediterranean coast to the



An image from a YouTube video showed protesters tearing down a portrait of the late President Hafez al-Assad, right, and his son, President Bashar al-Assad, in Hama, Syria, on Friday.

capital Damascus, a symbol of President Bashar al-Assad's 11-year rule.

"With our blood, with our souls, we will sacrifice for you, Dara'a," demonstrators chanted in Homs, the site of some of the biggest protests.

Though the government still has vast resources to draw on — and bastions of support, particularly among religious minorities — it seems to be facing an evolving revolt that it has proven unable to crush. "There really isn't a coalesced movement yet or official organizers of the protests," an Obama administration official said by telephone from Washington. "It's almost an organic thing. The more violence happens, the more the cycle continues, the more people hit the street."

The international effort to censure Syria over the violence shifted to Europe on Friday.

In Brussels, the European Union was poised to threaten sanctions and cuts in aid unless the government in Damascus changes course. Senior diplomats from the 27 member states, meeting into Friday evening, discussed a list of possible measures including bans on arms sales and "smart sanctions" against senior officials in the regimes.

With Germany, France and Britain pressing for a strong message against the violence, most diplomats believe that some sanctions will, eventually, be imposed. However no formal decisions were to be taken at the meeting Friday since ministers, not diplomats, have the power to do that.

Instead the idea was to start prepara-

tions so that the measures could be imposed swiftly if there is no improvement in the situation, said one E.U. diplomat speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.

A paper circulated before the E.U. meeting by France, Germany and Britain accused the Syrian regime of refusing to respond to appeals from the international community.

"It has not engaged in a process of dialogue and credible reforms," said the paper, "instead it has opted for increasing repression."

Arguing that the European Union's credibility depended on "rapid action," the document outlined a series of possible measures including an arms embargo and restrictions on the sale of goods used for international repression and travel bans and assets freezes against Syrian officials.

In addition the European Union could kill off a draft agreement on closer economic ties which is already on hold, and

"It's almost an organic thing. The more violence happens, the more the cycle continues, the more people hit the street."

cut its financial assistance to Syria.

The current three-year aid program covering the period 2011-2013 amounts to €129 million, or \$190 million, though the Syrian government has also received €80 million since 2007 to deal

with the influx of Iraqi refugees. Also at risk is further investment in other projects managed by the European Investment Bank which had plans to lend around €1.3 billion for work in Syria.

Diplomats acknowledge, however, that punitive measures are largely intended to send a political signal and will not, of themselves, change the behavior of the Syrian government. "It's not a game-changer," said one E.U. diplomat.

In Geneva, a special session of the U.N. Human Rights Council passed a resolution condemning the government's violence, though the statement was diluted from one drafted by the United States.

The debate demonstrated the continued difficulty in coordinating tough international censure of Syria. In a vote, 26 countries supported the text, nine voted against it, including Russia and

China, while there were seven abstentions and a number of absentees.

In the end, the council decided against sending an international team with a mandate to conduct deep investigations into abuses in Syria and pass those along for judicial review, choosing instead to dispatch a more limited mission of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which would focus on fact-finding. Likewise, "deep concern" for the deaths in Syria, in the first draft, became "deep regret."

The United States was pleased with the final text after a tough day of negotiating. "It's a very good outcome," Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, the U.S. representative to the council, said after the session. The vote count was better than predicted, she said, while the principal of condemning Syria had been retained.

During the debate, a number of members of the 47-member council — including Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, South Africa, Cuba and Pakistan, which represented Organization of the Islamic Conference — distanced themselves from criticizing Syria and argued that the council was overstepping its mandate.

Syria's representative, Faisal al-Hamwi, criticized the "unbalanced text" and the "artificial motives" and "threats" behind-the-scenes that he passed. He said Syria had taken important steps in judicial reform, including lifting the state of emergency.

"We will continue with our determined steps to reform," he said. "We will not be lenient with anyone who threatens our national security."

Le Monde

Lundi 2 mai 2011

A Istanbul, la mémoire en images du génocide arménien

Le photographe Antoine Agoudjian expose « Les yeux brûlants », travail sur les communautés rescapées des massacres de 1915 et 1916

Istanbul
correspondance

Sur des murs immaculés sont disposées quatre-vingt-seize photographies en noir et blanc, une pour chaque année écoulée depuis le déclenchement du génocide des Arméniens de l'Empire ottoman, le 24 avril 1915.

Le parcours de l'exposition « Les Yeux brûlants », inaugurée à Istanbul le 26 avril, marque cinq étapes géographiques, symbolisant les cinq anciens vilayets créés arméniens par l'empire : Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, Diyarbakir et Harput, des provinces aujourd'hui situées dans l'est de la Turquie. Des régions marquées par le crime, que le photographe Antoine Agoudjian, petit-fils de rescapés de 1915, explore depuis une quinzaine d'années.

Ses voyages l'ont mené dans toutes les communautés arméniennes disséminées au Moyen-Orient, mais aussi sur les chemins de la déportation et des massacres, de l'ouest de la Turquie jusqu'aux déserts syriens de Deir es-Zor, à la recherche d'une mémoire niée, refoulée, mais pas totalement effacée. Cette mémoire du génocide, inscrite dans l'ADN des survivants, est gravée sur les négatifs d'Antoine Agoudjian. « La négation, c'est ce qui rend le génocide encore actuel, et la vérité de la photogra-

phie aide à faire parler les consciences », explique l'artiste, à Istanbul.

Antoine Agoudjian a réalisé lui-même chacun des tirages en grand format pour cette exposition, qui se tient à Istanbul jusqu'au 5 juin et sera présentée à Paris en septembre et en octobre, à la galerie Matignon. Son travail, tout en jeux de lumière et de contrastes, invite à une exploration des tourments de la culture et de l'âme arménienne.

Les fantômes des victimes du génocide hantent les villages d'Anatolie, les ruines d'églises et les communautés pétrifiées. Les ciels sont lourds. Il peint la déportation, l'exode, le martyre des Arméniens. Jusqu'aux funérailles du journaliste Hrant Dink, assassiné en 2007, auxquelles il assiste. La mort habite chaque survivant. Mais des vestiges surgit un halo d'espoir.

Surtout, en faisant découvrir « Les Yeux brûlants » au public turc, le photographe réalise bien plus qu'une exposition. Il apporte sa contribution artistique à un processus d'ouverture, en cours depuis quelques années. Le génocide reste un tabou historique pour l'Etat. Mais la société civile turque a entamé le travail de mémoire. « L'histoire s'accélère depuis la mort de Hrant Dink, estime l'intellectuel turc Ahmet Insel. Cette exposition s'inscrit dans ce contexte. Nous avons déjà pu voir en Turquie plusieurs manifestations

culturelles sur la question arménienne. Osman Köker avait organi-

Malgré les tabous, la société civile turque a commencé le travail de mémoire

se une exposition très importante avec les fonds d'un collectionneur de cartes postales anciennes, qui montrait la réalité de la présence des Arméniens avant 1915 et de leur disparition. »

Le journal de la communauté arménienne fondé par Hrant Dink, *Agos*, avait publié une série de photos d'Agoudjian. Quelques mois plus tard, une rencontre à Istanbul avec Osman Kavala, homme d'affaires et mécène, l'un des rouages clés du dialogue culturel entre Turcs et Arméniens, scelle l'idée d'une exposition, au Depo, un centre culturel à Istanbul. Pari tenu.

Le recueil des photographies d'Agoudjian, publié dans la collection Photo Poche (*Les Yeux brûlants*, ActesSud, 2006), sort lui aussi en Turquie, en édition bilingue, turc et arménien, dans la collection d'ouvrages historiques lancée par Osman Köker. Pour le photographe, exposer en Turquie est également le résultat d'un cheminement personnel. « Beaucoup trouvaient l'idée loufoque, voire inconsciente. Mais aujourd'hui, je prends

conscience que cette histoire n'est pas que l'affaire des Arméniens. C'est le sujet de tous les gens qui ont soif de vérité », note-t-il.

Les rencontres à Istanbul, autour des commémorations du génocide, organisées par quelques intellectuels et militants des droits de l'homme, le 24 avril, ont conforté le Français Antoine Agoudjian dans sa conviction. « J'espère que cela ouvrira la voie à d'autres Arméniens de la diaspora qui ont envie de venir travailler ici », ajoute-t-il. Mais le sujet reste extrêmement sensible en Turquie. Quelques militants ultranationalistes ont tenté de s'inviter au vernissage de l'exposition. Ils ont été tranquillement maintenus à distance par la police. ■

Guillaume Perrier

« Les Yeux brûlants », DEPO, Tütün Deposu Lüleci Hendek Caddesi n° 12, Tophane 34425 Istanbul. Ouvert tous les jours, sauf le lundi, de 11 heures à 19 heures. Entrée gratuite. depoistanbul.net/en

Kurdistan: Still a safe haven?

The Gulf/Dubai

By James Gavin

Kurds put out the welcome mat for investors, as Middle Eastern troubles afflict Iraq's stable north

Foreigners visiting Sulaymaniya and Erbil airports for the first time find an unusual welcome awaiting them. Unlike every other Middle Eastern country, the Kurdish region of Iraq does not charge a cent for obtaining a visa. And with a highly inviting investment climate, that welcome is extended to foreign businesses too.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) - the Kurds' semi-autonomous authority - is not shy of touting its security advantage over the other 15 provinces of the conflict-racked country, branding itself "the Other Iraq" in a largely successful bid to elicit foreign investment in a region that is primed to become a major hydrocarbons player. Some 40 oil companies are exploring for oil and gas in the three northern KRG-controlled provinces.

The Kurdistan region has solicited rising volumes of direct investment from neighbouring countries like Turkey, with whom trade is running at about \$7.5 billion a year. Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Gulf states like Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are also prominent investors in the KRG.

The Kurdistan Board of Investment reveals that in excess of \$17 billion has flooded into Kurdistan's economy in the past five years, \$3.9 billion of that from foreign sources. The board has licensed 324 investment projects since August 2006, more than half of which are in the capital Erbil, with housing the single largest target sector for foreign investors.

But Kurdistan may find it an increasingly hard sell, as violent street protests against the KRG political establishment enter their third month. Like much of the Middle East, traditionally stable Kurdistan is feeling the heat as demonstrators throng the streets of

Sulaymaniya and other urban centres, alleging that the region's senior political elite has become tainted with corruption.

In late April, the violence seeped from the street to parliament, with opposition MPs hurling water bottles at pro-government MPs.

The tension on the streets is tangible. In Sulaymaniya, a city that has doubled in size in the space of eight years, the main square has seen a daily game of cat and mouse played out between security forces and young protestors. Nine deaths have been reported

in Sulay alone, as clashes grow in intensity.

This street level noise jars somewhat with the investment pitch the Kurdish authorities have made over the past eight years, since Saddam's removal was heartily cheered on by Kurds.

The fear in Erbil, the KRG capital, is that the latest wave of protests will put investors off the only truly safe part of Iraq. The Kurdistan Investors Union, a lobby group, announced in Mid-April that the unrest had already affected investment projects that had created some 80,000 jobs for locals.

Fortunately, such investment jitters do not appear to have afflicted Kurdistan's burgeoning oil and gas sector, where foreign oil producers are now pumping 115,000 barrels a day (b/d) from two main fields. Norway's DNO is leading the way with more than 60,000 b/d from the Tawke field, the rest produced from a joint venture of China's Sinopec and Turkey's Genel Energy at the Taq Taq field.

The independent dominated hydrocarbons sector, encouraged by an investor friendly law that allows for production sharing contracts (PSCs) - affording international oil companies (IOCs) the increasingly rare opportunity to acquire equity oil positions - is proving a veritable Klondike.

Over the past month, the UK-based Gulf Keystone announced a "very significant upward revision" of volumes estimates at its Shaikan discovery in Kurdistan. The firm pre-



viously estimated that gross oil-in-place volumes at the field were between 1.9 billion barrels and 7.4 billion barrels. But in mid-April, it revealed that additional tests have boosted the estimates to between 4.9 billion and 10.8 billion barrels.

The UK's Heritage Oil signed a rig contract in April with China's Daqing International for a drilling rig to begin well exploration and appraisal drilling in the Miran block. The first well in the company's campaign, Miran West-3, is due to begin drilling in July.

Murphy Oil, a US firm, announced at the end of March it was adding a second block in Kurdistan, having finalised in November 2010 an agreement for 50 per cent of the Central Dohuk bloc.

Canada's ShaMaran Petroleum Corporation meanwhile, also announced a major discovery at its Atrush project in mid-April, with oil encountered at a 726-metre potential gross oil column. Flow rates were over 6,000 b/d, suggesting Atrush is could become a significant producing asset for the company upon development.

Even more encouraging for the KRG's ambitious Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami - the architect of Kurdistan's oil production strategy - is the arrival of the largest IOC player, Marathon Oil, as a partner for ShaMaran at the Atrush block.

"Marathon is significant as it's a big fish, and we haven't had any of these IOCs yet," says one Kurdish oil consultant in Sulaymaniya.

Confidence in Kurdistan's hydrocarbons sector has been

buttressed by an agreement with Baghdad's Ministry of Oil to recompense foreign oil companies for their costs incurred in northern Iraqi oil exploration. In April 2011, oil companies sent out their first expenses bills to the KRG, which in turn sent them on to Baghdad to settle.

As part of a deal reached in February between Hawrami and his counterpart Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Iraq's new oil minister, the KRG will hand over oil to Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organisation which will then be exported along with other Iraqi crudes. Revenues will revert to the KRG under the nationally agreed formula whereby the three Kurdish provinces receive 17 per cent of the national budget.

In fact, the deal is not yet sealed. Baghdad still doesn't recognise PSCs signed between the KRG and IOCs, arguing that only the national government has the authority to grant such contracts. The two sides remain at loggerheads on this issue and Baghdad has recently reaffirmed position, rejecting attempts by other provinces in Iraq - such as Dhi Qar and Karbala in the South - to gain greater control of their oil sectors.

Despite the uncertain investment climate facing IOCs active in the north, the attractions of Kurdistan's oil and gas reserves remain substantial.

"Kurdistan has the world's largest remaining undeveloped petroleum reserves and has the lowest extraction lowest worldwide," says Kiwan Siwaily, a consultant engineer in the Kurdish oil sector and a

former oil adviser to the KRG. "Normally oil is found at depths in excess of 4,000 to 5,000 meters. But here they are encountering oil at 900 metres."

The 115,000 b/d being pumped out from just two fields suggests plentiful resources in the ground, justifying Hawrami's claims that Kurdistan is capable of pumping more than one million b/d.

"If that much oil is coming out of just two blocks out of 47, just think what the others may be capable of," says the Sulaymaniya-based oil consultant.

Such ambitions are frequently heard in Kurdistan, where unlike in the rest of Iraq, there has traditionally been little experience of oil and gas development - aside from Kirkuk, a massive one billion barrel field that is the fief of Baghdad's North Oil Company.

However, Kurdistan's efforts to transform itself into the Middle East's next oil titan will be constrained if Baghdad - which has a major say in the export capacity of Kurdish oil and gas - still wants to play

hardball.

Hawrami's bitter foe, former oil minister and now Iraq's deputy prime minister for energy, Hussein al Shahrastani, confirmed in April that oil companies with contracts with the KRG will not be paid any profit unless their contracts are ratified by Iraq's central government. This is unlikely to be a fait accompli.

The entry of Marathon, the US' fourth largest integrated oil company, has clearly raised expectation levels in the Kurdish north. But much more work needs to be done to build bridges with Baghdad and its other neighbours, before the Kurds join the ranks of the Gulf's major oil producers.

The welcome for outsiders remains hearty in Iraq's north; time will tell whether investors' risk appetite remains as robust as it has hitherto proved.

GULF INVESTORS AND TURKS BEAT A PATH TO ERBIL

Despite the riots afflicting Iraqi Kurdistan's second city Sulaymaniya, the KRG is ada-

mant that it remains a target for investors seeking a gateway into Iraq. Erbil has been named as the fifth most attractive foreign direct investment destination in the Middle East region, helping the Kurds to pull in an estimated \$17.4 billion in investment over the past five years.

On the ground in Sulaymaniya, it is the Turks building the major housing projects. But overall, it is Kuwait's \$1.5 billion, representing some 40 per cent of overseas investment estimated at \$3.9bn, that heads the pack in terms of capital invested.

Turkey's \$702.8 million of investment puts it behind Lebanon in third position, according to figures from the Kurdistan Board of Investment. However, Turks are becoming more aggressive investors in the KRG. In late March, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan opened the first Turkish consulate in Erbil amid much fanfare, promising a greater Turkish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan - though Erdogan is careful not to mention the "K" word in public, for fear of inflaming sensitive opi-

nion back home.

This year, more than 20 per cent of the total investments made in Iraqi Kurdistan by foreign investors were from Turkish companies. Turkish investors invested \$536.1 million throughout the KRG in 2010, with the UK taking second position with \$201.9 million in investments.

Construction is the biggest current driver of the Kurdish economy. The Board of Investment reports that \$2.14 billion was invested in the housing sector in 2010, representing 45 per cent of total investments in 2010. Low income housing is the main focus of activity, with 150,000 affordable homes needed over the next five to 10 years.

The Kurds are also looking to overhaul their public infrastructure, with plans for a 60-kilometre tramline in the capital Erbil, and 50-kilometre and 40-kilometre lines in Sulaymaniya and Dohuk respectively.



Ak news Agency of Kurdistan for News

Parliamentary committee to discuss controversial Kurdish oil contracts

Baghdad, May 2, 2011 - (AKnews) -

By Jaafar al-Wannan and Patrick Smith

THE OIL and Energy Parliamentary Committee will discuss the controversial oil contracts awarded by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq amid objections from the Federal Oil Ministry, it was announced today.

Taq Taq oil in Erbil, Kurdistan Oil

The contracts were awarded in 2009 by the KRG, but were never officially recognized by the central government in Iraq, who said that only they had the right to sign such deals. There is confusion about whose jurisdiction this falls under, with Prime Minister Noon al Maliki giving mixed messages and the law unclear.

Member of Parliament, Furat al Sharei, who sits on the Oil and Energy Committee, today accused the Oil Ministry of over reacting to the issue. He said that this situation highlights the legal and technical obstacles that hinder investment.

"All that needs to happen is, the contracts need simple reviews to make sure they are within the legal framework set by the Oil Ministry," he said.

The Federal Oil Ministry last week renewed its rejection of the contracts awarded by the KRG to 40 companies, including Norwegian oil firm DNO,



declaring them illegal. Oil exports resumed after nearly two years earlier this year after the KRG and the Iraqi Government reached a temporary agreement on exports.

The discussion of the contracts by the Oil and Energy Committee is seen as a positive move towards getting the contracts officially recognized, as relations between the autonomous region and the central government fray.

Much of the confusion stems from the failure of the last Iraqi Government to pass a new oil and gas law which would have seen the clearer demarcation of responsibilities of the different bodies. Currently the Oil Ministry and the Federal Oil Council have overlapping roles.

It Is All About Those Forces



Security forces around protesters in Sulaimani.
Photo Kawa Abdulla/Rudaw.

RUDAW

A senior opposition leader in Kurdistan airs his group's concern about the deployment of hundreds of security forces in the city of Sulaimani. This opposition figure says that these forces have entered the city at the order of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who also heads the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

The PUK dominates Sulaimani's administrative and security departments.

In response, the minister of Peshmarga at the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) says rather challengingly, that if the opposition does not accept the presence of those forces, "let them do what they can."

The forces were brought to Sulaimani around mid-April in an attempt to put an end to weeks of protests that had engulfed the province's center. There are accusations of widespread violations of human rights by the security forces in their clampdown on protests.

The main square where protesters gathered for weeks is now controlled by scores of security forces.

Qadir Haji Ali, a leading figure in the Gorran opposition movement, says that the responsibility to withdraw that large number of security and military forces rests with Talabani.

"There is no political authority within the PUK and Talabani has given absolute powers to the military wing of his party and they are the ones who now rule and make decisions," said Ali.

Ali believes that Sulaimani is an opposition stronghold and therefore those forces cannot stay there for long.

"The opposition's weight, especially Gorran's, is in Sulaimani. They

cannot digest the current situation, that is why I think this situation in Sulaimani won't last long," added Ali.

Ali says that his group will be closely watching those forces. "We want to know what their intention is. We don't believe they are here only to prevent demonstrations."

Some opposition figures fear that these forces may be planning to attack their offices. Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG)'s sources say they have received news twice that they might be attacked. The KIG has surrounded its main television station with civilians as a human shield to dissuade any such attack.

Ali did not rule out the possibility that the PUK's main ally, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) may be behind the deployment of those forces. He said that some PUK politicians hint that the deployment was under pressure from President Massoud Barzani, who is also the leader of the KDP.

"We don't know yet who is telling the truth. But there have been attempts to convince the people in Sulaimani that the decision to deploy the forces has been made by Barzani while Talabani has been the executor," said Ali who himself was until years ago a senior PUK official.

However, Faraydun Jwanroyi, the head of KDP's office in Sulaimani, rejected any connections between his party and the deployment of forces in the city.

"Neither the KDP nor President Barzani have anything to do with the deployment of those forces in Sulaimani. The forces have been brought to the city at the request of the security committee," said Jwanroyi.

KDP and PUK are the two main ruling parties in Iraqi Kurdistan.

For his part, KRG's Minister of

Peshmarga, Sheikh Jaafar Mustafa also rejected the idea that security forces had been dispatched to Sulaimani under KDP pressure.

"That is totally baseless and far from truth. Mr. Barzani is the president of the entire Kurdistan [region] and he is responsible for people's security and the protection of our achievements. The forces have his backing for coming here and supporting the security forces to protect and provide security for Sulaimani and eliminate violence in the city," said Mustafa.

After the arrival of these forces, U.S. officials in the Kurdistan Region met with the PUK and Gorran in Sulaimani. Some political observers speculate that the U.S. might have given the green light for the deployment of those forces and that has the opposition worried.

Commenting on that, Ali, the Gorran official, said, "I don't believe that the U.S. made the decision on the deployment of those forces. But there are some things that have created suspicion for us. The officers of the PUK forces have told their subordinates that they have got the green light from the U.S. to deploy the forces inside Sulaimani. And when the Americans visited us, we told them that if this is not true then they should make their stance on the issue clear. But so far they have not pronounced any positions."

Following the meeting with the U.S. delegation, PUK's media outlets reported that the Americans had congratulated the security forces for "restoring peace in Sulaimani city"

The two main Islamic parties in Iraqi Kurdistan played a substantial role during the protests. Mohammed Hakim, a politburo member of the Kurdistan Islamic Group said, "We do not accept the current situation in Sulaimani and we are talking about it with Baghdad, Iran and the U.S. Sulaimani has turned into a military garrison because of the deployment of these forces and the situation is going through a delicate phase."

Salahaddin Babakir, a senior official at the Kurdistan Islamic Union, one of the opposition parties, said that the presence of a large number of forces does not help calm the situation.

"It will only complicate the situation and deepen the crisis. The plan to deploy forces in Sulaimani will fail," said Babakir.

Some observers believe that the U.S. silence toward the involvement

of armed forces in Sulaimani was because of what was widely seen as an attempt by Islamic parties to dominate the protests at its last stages.

For this, officials from the Kurdistan Islamic Union say that attempts by the ruling parties to frighten the U.S. by showing them the mass Friday prayers at the site of protests and the chanting of Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest) have failed.

U.S. officials out of the picture,

local Kurdish authorities have their own concern about the involvement of Islamic parties in the demonstrations.

"We are against the footprints of terrorists left in Kurdistan and the Islamists are the footprints of terrorists," said the minister of Peshmarga.

The situation in Sulaimani still remains tense but there are signals about the resumption of negotiations between the ruling parties and the opposition very soon. One of the

opposition's conditions for talks in the past was the dissolution of the government, but now that doesn't appear to be the case anymore.

Their attention is focused on the presence of the security forces in Sulaimani and their withdrawal—something that Kurdistan authorities say they are ready to do once they feel the situation has calmed down.



Kurdish strife clouds election mood in Turkey

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey -May 5,2011 - By Daren Butler (Reuters)

MAYOR ABDULLAH DEMIRBAS' belief in a political solution to Turkey's Kurdish conflict wasn't shared by his son. He left home to fight.

With a national election a month away, there are thousands of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) supporters who trust Kalashnikov rifles more than a ballot box to win rights for Kurds, an ethnic group found in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

"It is because democratic rights are not given to Kurds, because parties are closed and politicians are punished, that Kurdish youths go to the mountains," the mayor said, pointing to a photo of his teenage son on his desk.

The mayor's son is one of a new generation of recruits for the PKK, the militant movement behind an insurgency in Turkey that began in 1984 and has wiped out more than 40,000 lives and ruined countless more.

The PKK was blamed for an attack on a ruling AK Party campaign convoy on May 4 after a rally addressed by Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan in the Black Sea province of Kastamonu.

One police officer was killed and one wounded in the attack. There was no claim of responsibility but security officials have said Kurdish rebels were planning attacks there.

FACING 178-YEAR SENTENCE

The abiding violence is fuelled by frustration at the slow pace of reform in EU-candidate Turkey and a court case against some 150 Kurdish politicians and activists, including Demirbas, accused of ties to the PKK.

Former teacher Demirbas said some 1,500 youths, including his son, joined several thousand PKK rebels already in the mountains of southeast Turkey and northern Iraq since the mass court case was launched two years ago.

Demirbas is mayor in the historic heart of Diyarbakir, on the banks of the Tigris river, the largest city in Turkey's economically backward southeast where the PKK insurgency is focused.

The mayor is defending himself in some 23 court cases related to the use of Kurdish in municipal services and links to the PKK, a rebel movement designated a terrorist group by the United States and European Union.

The cases carry a maximum jail sentence of 178 years. Such legal battles are commonplace for Kurdish politicians.

Prime Minister Erdogan launched a reform initiative to boost the rights of Turkey's estimated 15 million Kurds, but his room for manoeuvre has been constrained by nationalist anger and general bitterness over the soldiers and civilians killed.

Yet his government has pushed through cultural reforms allo-

wing Kurdish television broadcasts and university courses, countering a decades-old policy of denying Kurdish identity and boosting the popularity of Erdogan's party in the region.

A comment by Erdogan at a recent election rally that there was no longer a Kurdish problem fuelled doubts among Kurds over the prime minister's commitment to reforms.

Erdogan's AK Party is on course to win a third successive victory in the June 12 election, but its popularity in the southeast is eclipsed by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) which dismisses the reforms as cosmetic.

Visiting the southeast, Erdogan spoke of fraternal unity of Turks and Kurds, while trashing the BDP over militant links.

"BDP deputies stand beside masked terror group members, next to those with petrol bombs in their hands," Erdogan told a rally in Mus province.

PROTESTS

The BDP launched a campaign of civil disobedience in March, apparently supported by jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, held on an island prison south of Istanbul since his capture in 1999.

The campaign includes sit-down protests and Kurdish Muslim worshippers praying in the open air, refusing to pray behind state-appointed imams in mosques.

In a demonstration of support for the PKK on May 4 -- the same day as the attack on police in Kastamonu -- thousands marched in Diyarbakir in a funeral cortege for four rebels killed in clashes the previous week.

Masked youths held aloft PKK flags and chanted pro-PKK slogans on their way to the cemetery, and riot police were pelted with petrol bombs and stones.

The BDP says its goals are to secure education in Kurdish, the lowering of a threshold which prevents the main Kurdish party from entering parliament, the release of political prisoners and an end to military operations against the PKK.

Ultimately, the BDP wants autonomy for mainly Kurdish provinces. But the central issue for the BDP is the use of Kurdish language in public life.

Kurdish officials and politicians on trial in a specially built, spacious courtroom in Diyarbakir, have made the use of their mother tongue a point of principal in a case whose outcome is seen as crucial to the region's future.

The chief judge has refused to allow defendants to make their defence in Kurdish, and the case is bogged down, with defence lawyers boycotting the latest hearing.

"The verdict in this case will be seen as showing Kurds whether they have the right to conduct politics on a democratic basis," said Diyarbakir Bar chairman Emin Aktar.

Turkey's influence is challenged by unrest

BEIRUT

BY ANTHONY SHADID

With tumult sweeping the Arab world, Turkey faces a growing challenge to its booming economic stake in the region, its newfound political influence and its longstanding policy of permitting no problems to fester along its borders.

In a few short years, Turkey emerged

NEWS ANALYSIS

as the Middle East's most dynamic power. But weeks of Turkish diplomacy in Libya collapsed Monday, with Turkey's prime minister bluntly calling for Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi to step down.

A similar scenario may await in Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad has personally promised Turkish leaders to undertake reform while persisting with his crackdown.

In neighboring Iraq, Turkey fears the inability of the government to keep the country stable as the United States completes its military withdrawal. And Lebanon, where Turkey enjoys access to both Hezbollah and its foes, now enters a fifth month without a government.

Before the so-called Arab spring unleashed by revolution in Egypt and Tunisia, Turkey was a catalyst in an emerging realignment of the Middle East, charting a policy often independent of the United States in a region where Turkey had unmatched stature.

Now the unrest on its borders is undermining years of diplomatic and economic investment, forcing Turkey to take a more assertive role as its vision of economic integration runs up against the threat of growing instability.

"In the face of this unpredictable change around the Arab world, Turkish foreign policy is facing a major setback," said Sami Kohen, a columnist for *Milliyet*, a daily newspaper in Turkey. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan "has started losing the leaderships in the Arab world that he trusted and considered important, one after the other," Mr. Kohen said.

Syria, beset by a six-week uprising, may prove his greatest challenge, as it broadly echoes the experience of its Arab neighbors over past months.

In Tunisia, Egypt and now Libya and Yemen, leaders have resisted surrendering some power to stay in office, only to eventually face losing all power. Mr. Assad, too, is rebuffing calls for change.

"Outside actors possess little leverage," the International Crisis Group said in a statement Tuesday on Syria. "Even countries that have developed



OSMAN ORSAL/REUTERS

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, which in recent years has become the most dynamic power in Middle East.

close ties to Damascus, such as Turkey, are viewed with growing suspicion by officials who are increasingly paranoid and consider anything short of outright support an act of betrayal."

In past weeks, Turkish diplomacy has been especially intense with Syria, which it considers a linchpin in its regional strategy of greater economic integration.

Mr. Assad and Mr. Erdogan have spoken by phone at least three times, and the Turkish intelligence chief, an official with deep knowledge of Syria, has visited Damascus twice since the uprising began. The message, officials say, was that time for reform was running out.

In language that echoed Mr. Erdogan's statement to Colonel Qaddafi, he warned Syria's government against a repetition of Hama, where the Syrian military crushed an Islamist revolt in 1982, killing at least 10,000 people and perhaps far more.

From Iraq to North Africa, Turkey's growing profile in the Arab world has emerged as one of the region's most remarkable dynamics. Trade with Iraq was about \$6 billion in 2010, almost double what it was in 2008.

There and in Syria, visa restrictions were removed, facilitating trade across booming border regions that helped reconnect cities like Aleppo to their historic hinterland. About 25,000 Turkish workers flocked to Libya for sprawling construction jobs. Turkish pop culture is everywhere; the star of one television action series, "Valley of the Wolves," is

so famous that his name adorns Iraqi cales.

Since January, Turkey has sought to protect those gains, while negotiating the tumult. Although Turkey's ties with Egypt lacked the depth of other Arab countries, Mr. Erdogan called on President Hosni Mubarak to step down while an American envoy was still insisting that Mr. Mubarak serve out his term.

But Turkey has suffered setbacks elsewhere. In Iraq, a coalition it helped create — *Iraqiya*, led by Ayad Allawi — lost power to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, despite winning the largest bloc of seats in Parliament. (Mr. Allawi himself was almost completely marginalized in the negotiations that ensued.)

There remains skepticism in Ankara over Mr. Maliki's ability to hold Iraq together and defuse unrequited sectarian tensions after the bulk of the American military withdraws by year's end.

Turkish diplomats sought to reach a negotiated solution in Libya, but complain that Libyan officials lied to them about their willingness to impose a cease-fire. Mr. Erdogan's statement was as much exasperation as initiative, though Turkish officials said they would more aggressively and publicly court the Libyan opposition in coming weeks.

They have stopped short of that call in Syria, a country Turkey almost went to war with in 1998. Since then, particularly in recent years, Turkey has touted its relationship with Syria as a model for its ties with other Arab countries.

The two have held joint cabinet meet-

ings and even military exercises. Trade has tripled in three years, and Mr. Assad and Mr. Erdogan are said to share a personal fondness for each other.

"The two countries have intimate relations, and Turkey is immersed in the Syrian political game," said Burhan Ghalioun, director of the Center for Contemporary Oriental Studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. But, he added, "Turkey is warning Syria. Turkey is saying that it has strategic interests in Syria, and it cannot afford to let Syria explode."

Turkey has sought to hedge its bets, hosting leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and allowing a meeting of

the opposition in Istanbul. That has angered Syrian officials, who insist that the uprising is being plotted abroad. In a possible sign of tension, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official said no more delegations were planned.

"The Syrian government is furious at Turkish officials whom they considered friends only yesterday," said a Syrian analyst in Damascus, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

So far, Turkish officials have pushed for far broader reforms in Syria, including an attempt at national dialogue that would ostensibly bring in the banned

Brotherhood.

Officials say there is a sense in Ankara that Mr. Assad wants reform but is stymied by obstinate forces in the ruling elite, a point echoed by Mr. Erdogan.

"He says, 'I will do it,'" Mr. Erdogan said in a television interview. "But I am having a hard time understanding if he is being prevented from doing it or if he is hesitating."

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting from Istanbul, Hwaida Saad and Nada Bakri from Beirut, and an employee of the New York Times from Damascus.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune MAY 10, 2011

Syrian forces move house to house to quell uprising

BEIRUT

BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

A military crackdown meant to crush Syria's seven-week-old uprising intensified further Monday as armed forces arrested hundreds of protesters, going house to house in towns and cities across the country, human rights groups and activists said.

The scale and ferocity of the crackdown, which targeted activists in the Damascus suburbs and at least a dozen cities from the Mediterranean coast to the poor steppe of southern Syria, suggested that President Bashar al-Assad is more intent than ever on crushing an uprising that echoes the rebellions that have felled autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt.

Mr. Assad's government, which has barred most foreign journalists from reporting on the unrest, has repeatedly tried to portray the crackdown as a fight with militant Islamists, and state media carry detailed reports of battles between Islamists and the army almost daily.

Al Watan, a private pro-government newspaper, quoted Mr. Assad on Monday as saying that "the current crisis in Syria will be overcome and that the process of administrative, political and media reforms are continuing." His remarks, it said, came during a meeting with a local delegation on Sunday.

Wissam Tarif, executive director of Insan, a Syrian human rights group, described the government's actions Monday as part of what he called a cleanup operation to isolate anti-government sympathizers and render them incapable of organizing.

"They tried to rebuild the wall of fear and they failed," Mr. Tarif said. "So next, they will move to completely cut communications all over the country."

Nearly all communications to be-

sieged locales have been severed since the uprising started in March.

In Baniyas, one of Syria's most restive cities and home to two oil refineries, more than 300 people were arrested on Monday including women and children

and gunfire was heard throughout the day, according to Mr. Tarif. Phones, electricity and water have been cut since Saturday, when at least 30 tanks raided Baniyas, a northern coastal city of 50,000 people.

"They want to arrest everyone who can participate in the demonstrations," an activist in Baniyas said by phone.

He also said that among those who were detained were two leading organizers of demonstrations, Mostapha Yasseen and Anas al-Shughrai, and the imam of the city's biggest main mosque, Sheik Anas Irotah.

Al Baath, the Syrian newspaper that is the mouthpiece of the government, said in a report Monday that the operation in Baniyas would "end within a few hours" and that "cautious calm" had been restored to the city.

Army troops also raided the third largest city, Homs, where 14 protesters were killed on Sunday. The armed forces surrounded at least two neighborhoods and hundreds of people were reported arrested, residents said. Checkpoints were set up on major streets and intersections, and people were searched when leaving and entering the city, according to Abu Haydar, a witness reached by phone.

He said there were reports of dead and wounded in Baba Amr, a neighborhood that was bombed overnight, but troops prevented ambulances from entering the place.

"They want to finish everything this week," a human rights advocate in Homs said by phone. "No one in the re-

gime has a clear policy. They cannot keep this strategy for a long time. We need political solutions, not more tanks."

Maadamiyah, a town on the outskirts of Damascus, which has witnessed major demonstrations, was raided Monday, with tanks stationed near two mosques and hundreds detained, according to activists, who said an exact number was hard to quantify because communications had been cut.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, and other activists said the crackle of gunfire could be heard in Maadamiyah, The Associated Press reported.

Mr. Tarif said that residents of Maadamiyah reported seeing nine buses loaded with detainees, including women, leaving the town earlier Monday. He also said that nine other towns on the outskirts of Damascus were raided Monday.

Syrian state media reported Monday that Mr. Assad and local representatives from Maadamiyah and other Damascus suburbs held a meeting during which he discussed problems in their towns and cities.

Lina Mansour, an activist in Damascus, said that human rights activists tried on Saturday to enter Dara'a, a southern town near Jordan that has been under siege for more than two weeks. The activists were carrying food and water, she said, but an army officer in charge told them they would have to shoot him first if they wanted to pass.

"I think some army officers and troops are sympathizing with people," Ms. Mansour said. "But they can't do much."

In Tafas, a impoverished town near Dara'a, troops backed by at least eight tanks reportedly swept through hundreds of houses, arresting men aged 18 to 45. Activists said the town was now under siege, and residents reported hearing heavy gunfire throughout the day.

The uprising in Syria began in mid-March after the authorities arrested teenagers caught scrawling anti-regime graffiti on walls in Dara'a.

Syrie : les manifestants saisis par le doute

Face au rouleau compresseur de la répression, les protestataires se sentent abandonnés par l'étranger.

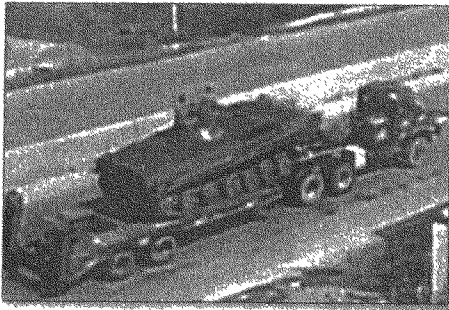
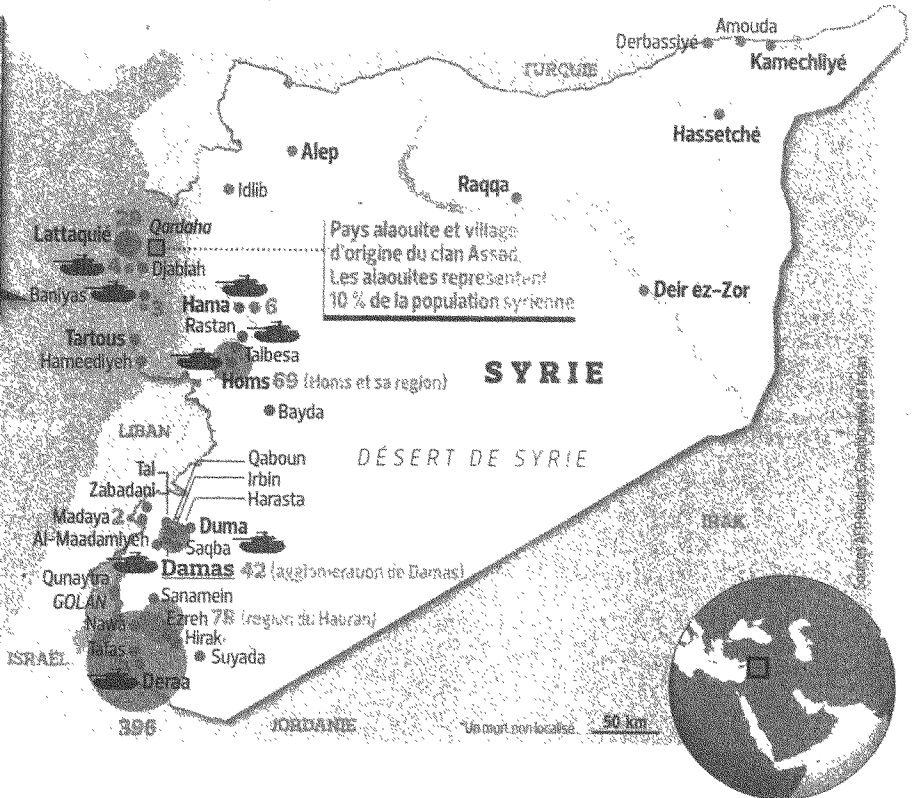


Photo: Reuters



53 jours de révolte et de répression

- Principales villes ayant participé à un moment donné à la contestation depuis le 18 mars
- Nombre de morts recensés* (632 au total selon l'Insan)
- Déploiement de troupes et de chars de l'armée syrienne

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT « Ne me citez plus », demande un intellectuel syrien vivant en France, après avoir reçu des menaces sur son téléphone portable. Pour faire taire les opposants, la police secrète de Damas n'hésite pas à intensifier ses manœuvres d'intimidation contre ses expatriés en Europe ou dans le Golfe. « On pousse nos parents restés en Syrie à dire à leurs enfants de rester tranquilles. Car de toute façon, le régime leur jure qu'il n'y a plus rien à faire et que, pour les manifestants, la partie est perdue », raconte une Syrienne, également mise en garde. Sur le terrain, pendant ce temps, le pouvoir poursuit sa stratégie d'asphyxie militaire des villes qui osent encore se rebeller contre le président Bachar el-Assad, tout en arrêtant à tour de bras des centaines de personnes, notamment lors d'un rassemblement à Damas hier soir. « Des arrestations inacceptables », a protesté hier le Quai d'Orsay.

Le déploiement militaire massif finit par décourager les plus téméraires

Après Deraa, berceau de la contestation, les chars sont déployés depuis dimanche sur la corniche et dans les quartiers sud de Baniyas, ville côtière de 50 000 habitants. Les perquisitions, maison par maison, s'y multiplient durant la nuit. Dimanche, les leaders de la révolte, cheikh Anas al-Ayrouf et Bassam Sahiouni, ont été arrêtés, et hier des centaines de femmes sont descendues dans les rues pour réclamer la libération de leurs proches.

Comme Deraa, il y a quinze jours, Baniyas est désormais isolée du reste de la Syrie. L'eau, l'électricité et les communications téléphoniques sont coupées. Après leur interpellation, de nombreux jeunes ont été entravés, puis contraints de marcher jusqu'aux villages alaouites voisins pour y être insultés par des membres de la minorité au pouvoir à Damas depuis quarante ans. Objectif de ces humiliations : « fomenter une guerre confessionnelle », selon un expert français de la Syrie. « Le régime espère que les jeunes vont finir par prendre les armes, et à ce moment-là, ajoute-t-il, il pourra les discréditer et passer encore plus fortement à l'ac-

tion. » Même si la ficelle est un peu grosse, la peur d'une dérive à l'irakienne amène de nombreux Syriens, issus de la minorité chrétienne mais aussi des laïcs sunnites, à s'interroger.

Un ton « alarmiste »

Face au rouleau compresseur de la répression, le découragement guette également les « révolutionnaires ». « On le constate sur Facebook, le ton n'est pas encore défaitiste, mais il est alarmiste », reconnaît Hala Kodmani, une journaliste indépendante de retour de Damas.

Certes, vendredi encore, des milliers de Syriens ont de nouveau bravé les interdits pour manifester en plusieurs points du pays. Mais les « révolutionnaires » ont du mal à faire sortir la population un autre jour que celui de la prière hebdomadaire. Le déploiement militaire massif finit par décourager les plus téméraires. Et là où le pouvoir jure que l'armée s'est retirée, il ne s'agit en fait que d'un simple redéploiement des chars, à la périphérie de Deraa par exemple. Pour sortir de la « ville martyre » en voiture, il faut une autorisation spéciale du gouverneur. « De quel retrait s'agit-il ? », proteste un observa-

teur. Après bientôt deux mois de manifestations qui ont fait plus de 620 morts, « la révolte est à un moment charnière », reconnaissent plusieurs Syriens interrogés. « Aujourd'hui, les jeunes se sentent abandonnés par la communauté internationale », déplore l'un d'entre eux. « Les manifestants ne réclament pas une interven-

tion armée de l'Otan comme en Libye, mais au moins un soutien moral à leur combat qui permettrait de tenir bon. Mais à part la France, qui a réclamé que Bachar el-Assad soit visé par des sanctions, quel autre pays dénonce avec vigueur la sauvagerie de ce régime ? », s'indigne cet expatrié.

La semaine dernière, l'Union européenne a voté des sanctions limitées à treize responsables syriens, mais en a

écarté le président. « C'était pourtant très important que Bachar soit, lui aussi, frappé par ces mesures », insiste un diplomate français. Aujourd'hui, « le régime a compris que la communauté internationale n'avait pas la volonté de le renverser, il a les mains libres pour faire le ménage chez lui », regrette-t-il. ■

Le Monde

Vendredi 13 mai 2011

Les révoltes arabes détournent l'attention des Occidentaux du nucléaire iranien

Téhéran estime que les bouleversements régionaux lui donnent des marges de manœuvre, mais la situation de son allié syrien l'inquiète

Les révoltes arabes ont détourné l'attention de la communauté internationale du programme nucléaire de l'Iran, placé depuis 2002-2003 au centre des inquiétudes liées à la prolifération. La République islamique vient de rappeler qu'elle entendait poursuivre cette activité malgré les demandes qui lui sont faites (suspension de l'enrichissement d'uranium, mesures de transparence), se sentant apparemment confortée par le nouvel environnement régional.

Dans une lettre envoyée le 8 mai par le négociateur iranien Saïd Jalili à la haute représentante européenne, Catherine Ashton, chargée de représenter le groupe des six pays (Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Russie, Chine, Allemagne) traitant le dossier nucléaire, Téhéran a formulé une nouvelle fin de non-recevoir. L'Iran se dit prêt à discuter de presque tout, sauf de ses travaux sur l'atome, accusés par les Occidentaux d'avoir pour finalité la maîtrise de la technologie pour fabriquer l'arme suprême.

Cette missive, dont *Le Monde* a pris connaissance, énonce les « importants sujets régionaux » dont l'Iran est prêt à parler : « les racines du terrorisme, le trafic de drogue, la piraterie en haute mer, les fournitures d'énergie ». Pas un mot sur ses activités nucléaires.

Fin janvier, une rencontre à Istanbul entre M. Jalili et les représentants des Six s'était soldée par un échec. La diplomatie a continué ainsi de faire du surplace, malgré la « main tendue » de l'administration Obama en 2009, suivie par

l'imposition de lourdes sanctions internationales en 2010. La télévision iranienne a affirmé, mardi, qu'il était question d'une nouvelle réunion avec les Six, ce qu'ont aussitôt démenti des responsables européens.

Le régime iranien avait, dans un premier temps, applaudi aux révoltes arabes, présentées comme un succès pour l'islamisme. Téhéran a analysé que ces événements amélioreraient sa position stratégique, lui donnant plus de marge de manœuvre. La chute du président égyptien Hosni Moubarak, un vieil allié de Washington, a été vécue comme un gain majeur pour la puissance chiïte régionale.

Recettes en devises

La hausse des cours du pétrole engendrée par les bouleversements régionaux apporte de nouvelles recettes en devises à un pouvoir aux prises avec de nombreux problèmes sociaux. Le contexte à Téhéran semble pourtant marqué par un regain de rivalité entre factions conservatrices. Une dispute a récemment opposé le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, qui refusait le limogeage du ministre des renseignements. Le président iranien, qui voulait écarter ce responsable, a réagi en disparaissant de la scène pendant dix jours.

Le pouvoir iranien est de plus en plus convaincu, selon des sources occidentales, qu'aucune attaque militaire israélienne ne menace ses installations nucléaires. Les propos de l'ancien chef du Mossad

Meir Dagan, estimant, le 6 mai, qu'une telle attaque serait une « idiotie », ainsi que ceux du ministre israélien de la défense, Ehoud Barak, relativisant le danger que l'Iran puisse utiliser un jour – s'il devait l'acquiescer – une arme atomique contre Israël, auront sans doute conforté cette impression.

L'Iran sait aussi qu'il est à l'abri de nouvelles sanctions à l'ONU, en raison de l'agacement de la Russie et de la Chine face à l'intervention en Libye. Comme le dit un diplomate occidental, « il faudrait une découverte majeure », comme une nouvelle révélation de site nucléaire iranien secret, pour que Moscou et Pékin envisagent de nouvelles mesures coercitives.

Mais Téhéran s'inquiète maintenant de la contestation qui menace son seul allié dans la région, la Syrie, incité à la plus grande intransigeance. Selon Washington, le pouvoir syrien a demandé l'aide de l'Iran concernant sa politique de répression. La nouvelle diplomatie égyptienne érode l'influence iranienne auprès du Hamas. Et la réaction musclée des Etats sunnites du Golfe face au soulèvement chiïte à Bahrein – où des troupes saoudiennes ont été déployées en mars – a témoigné d'un nouvel effort d'endiguement des ambitions régionales de Téhéran.

Guettant un sursaut de l'opposition en Iran, écrasée par la force en 2009-2010, les Etats-Unis viennent d'annoncer de nouvelles aides pour surmonter la censure sur Internet. ■

Natalie Nougayrède

Que veulent les Kurdes syriens ?

Ignace Leverrier

Deux mois après le début du mouvement de contestation dans la rue de la légitimité du régime syrien, les observateurs relèvent avec perplexité le silence et l'absence de la communauté kurde de Syrie. Quelques manifestations se sont déroulées à Hassakeh, Qamichli, Al Malikiyeh, Aïn Arab et dans d'autres bourgades de la Jazireh. Mais la communauté en tant que telle, qui a plusieurs fois démontré par le passé sa capacité de mobilisation, paraît davantage camper sur une position d'attente que prendre une part active au mouvement.

Les protestataires et les partis de l'opposition, qui se félicitaient naguère de cette réserve, commencent à s'interroger. Ils trouvaient judicieux que les Kurdes ne se soient pas lancés tête baissée dans la confrontation : ils auraient offert au régime le prétexte de faire un exemple, en s'en prenant avec toute la férocité qu'il a ensuite manifestée ailleurs, à une communauté systématiquement suspectée par les autorités, parce que non arabe, d'être animée par des visées séparatistes. Mais, alors que la répression bat son plein et que la poursuite du mouvement suppose l'adhésion de nouvelles régions et de nouvelles villes à la contestation, ils s'inquiètent aujourd'hui de la retenue des Kurdes et ils lui cherchent une explication.

L'entrée en masse des Kurdes dans le mouvement serait en effet pour le régime syrien une mauvaise nouvelle. On considère en Syrie que la communauté kurde est de loin la plus aisément mobilisable. Mal traitée durant l'union avec l'Égypte (1958-1961), elle a vu sa situation se dégrader encore dans la République Arabe Syrienne

dont le nom seul suggère qu'elle n'y a pas sa place. Marginalisés dans une vie politique dominée par l'idéologie nationaliste arabe du Parti Baath, les Kurdes constituent une population de seconde zone. Les heurts entre cette communauté et le pouvoir ont été fréquents, et la répression qui s'est abattue sur elle a généralement été sanglante. Le martyrologe des Kurdes syriens comporte une longue liste de victimes des crimes et méfaits attribués aux services de sécurité ou à l'armée. En février 2004, un match de football entre l'équipe de la ville kurde de Qamichli et celle de la ville arabe de Deir al Zor a dégénéré en bataille rangée, puis en émeute. Si près d'une vingtaine de personnes ont perdu la vie à cette occasion, près d'une quarantaine de jeunes conscrits kurdes ont péri depuis lors dans des circonstances douteuses, au sein des unités de l'armée où ils accomplissaient leur service militaire, sans doute victimes de l'hostilité de leurs camarades ou de leurs supérieurs hiérarchiques.

Pour dissuader les Kurdes de se joindre en masse aux manifestations, le régime a donc multiplié les initiatives et les gestes à leur égard. Le plus remarquable remonte au 7 avril, lorsque le président Bachar Al Assad a promulgué, au profit des "étrangers de Hassakeh", un décret législatif, le décret 49/2011, stipu-



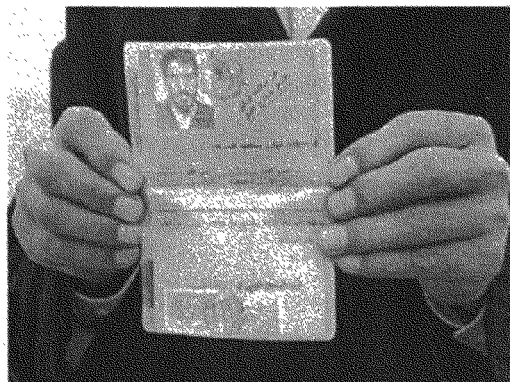
Manifestation à Qamichli / France 24

lant que "la nationalité syrienne leur était octroyée".

L'expression "étrangers de Hassakeh" désigne une partie des Kurdes résidant en Syrie, déclarés du jour au lendemain non-syriens, suite au recensement exceptionnel de la seule population kurde de la Jazireh (nord-est du pays) organisé sur un seul jour en octobre 1962. Au terme de ce décompte, les Kurdes de la région ont été classés en 3 catégories. Les uns ont été déclarés syriens. Les autres, les non-syriens, ont été divisés en deux groupes : les "étrangers", ainsi appelés parce qu'ils ont été inscrits dans les registres de l'état-civil réservés aux étrangers résidant en Syrie, et les "oubliés de l'état-civil", qui n'ont été inscrits nulle part. La logique de la répartition échappe à toute compréhension, puisque les enfants d'une même famille ont parfois été inscrits dans deux catégories différentes et que l'accomplissement du service militaire n'a pas été pris en compte pour la reconnaissance de la nationalité. En devenant soudain "étrangers" ou "oubliés de l'état-civil", des

dizaines de milliers de Kurdes ont perdu les droits dont ils jouissaient jusqu'alors. Leur vie quotidienne est devenue pour les premiers difficiles, pour les seconds un enfer : pas de carte d'identité, pas de passeport, pas le droit d'être inscrit à l'école, pas le droit de travailler dans une administration ou une entreprise d'Etat, exclusion des aides fournies par le gouvernement à certaines catégories sociales... Aujourd'hui, les premiers sont évalués à près de 250 000, les seconds à quelques dizaines de milliers.

Les Kurdes concernés par la décision présidentielle, les seuls "étrangers" donc, se sont réjouis de cette mesure qu'ils appelaient de leurs vœux depuis près d'un demi-siècle. Mais, lorsqu'ils se sont présentés aux bureaux de l'état-civil, à partir du 24 avril, et qu'ils ont eu connaissance de la liste des pièces justificatives qu'ils devaient fournir pour déposer leur demande, ils ont déchanté. Ils ont constaté que, si le retrait de la nationalité syrienne avait jadis été immédiat, sa restitution allait prendre beaucoup de temps, puisque les services de sécurité devaient tous être au préalable consultés. Ceux d'entre eux qui s'étaient fait remarquer par leur engagement politique ou social risquaient de ne jamais quitter la case départ. Or, se fiant aux déclarations de certains responsables, ils avaient compris que les procédures seraient facilitées et que, en échange de la remise du carnet individuel qu'ils portaient avec eux, ils recevraient sur le champ la nationalité syrienne, sans la moindre difficulté.



Carte d'étranger d'un Kurde syrien

Intervenant à un moment où la Syrie est le théâtre d'une vague de protestations sans précédent, cette affaire montre que, même aux pires moments, les autorités syriennes ne peuvent s'empêcher de tergiverser et de mesurer au plus près leurs concessions. On sait qu'il n'est pas dans leurs habitudes de lâcher facilement quoi que ce soit, surtout en faveur d'une minorité ethnique dont elles sont convaincues que les aspirations à l'autonomie n'ont pu qu'être renforcées par la situation inespérée de leurs frères irakiens. Il n'était pas malhabile de leur part d'accorder enfin aux Kurdes, précisément en ce moment, ce que les individus concernés attendaient depuis si longtemps. Mais un tel cadeau a pu paraître prématuré à ceux qui redoutent de se priver trop vite d'un moyen de pression ou de chantage dont ils pourraient avoir besoin à brève échéance.

La décision présidentielle de restituer la nationalité syrienne venait en réalité couronner une période de manoeuvres appuyées du pouvoir en direction des Kurdes. Préoccupé par les velléités d'une partie de la population syrienne de marcher sur les traces des Egyptiens et des Tunisiens, le régime avait entrepris, dès le mois de février, de convaincre les Kurdes de Syrie qu'ils n'avaient aucun intérêt à adhérer et à apporter leur soutien au mouvement. Divers intermédiaires leur avaient affirmé que le pouvoir était désormais sincèrement résolu à reconnaître leurs droits et leurs revendications nationales. Et pour démontrer que, cette fois-ci, il ne

s'agissait pas de promesses en l'air comme celles qu'ils avaient jadis entendues des plus hautes personnalités de l'Etat, y compris du Président de la République et de la vice-présidente Najah Al Attar, le gouvernement s'était fait représenter, le 21 mars, à la célébration du nawruz, le nouvel an kurde. Installées aux places réservées aux invités d'honneur, les plus hautes personnalités officielles, le gouverneur de Hassakeh, le secrétaire de la branche locale du Parti Baath, le chef de la Police, le chef de la Sécurité militaire... avaient assisté sans broncher à des festivités que, les années précédentes, les forces de sécurité avaient l'ordre d'empêcher éventuellement par la force, ce qui s'était soldé, en 2008, par plusieurs morts.

Un mois plus tard, le 20 avril, dans un nouveau geste de bonne volonté, les autorités syriennes ont fermé les yeux sur le retour en Syrie d'un responsable politique kurde de premier plan, Saleh Mouslim Mohammed. Président du Parti de l'Union Démocratique (PYD), il dirige la branche syrienne rebaptisée de l'ancien Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) d'Abdallah Ocalan. Détenu en Syrie à de multiples reprises, il était en fuite, réfugié dans le Jebel Qandil, au nord de l'Irak, depuis plusieurs années. Le lendemain de son retour, qu'il avait pris soin d'annoncer par voie de presse, il a tenu un meeting que la Sécurité politique s'est abstenue d'interdire et de perturber, alors même que l'intéressé figurait sur ses listes de personnalités recherchées.

Une telle passivité ne s'explique que par une décision



Officiels au Nawruz
Personnalités syriennes au nawruz 2011

politique prise au sommet de l'Etat. Elle a plusieurs raisons.

D'une part, elle s'inscrit dans la ligne des efforts déployés par le pouvoir pour retenir les Kurdes et, si ce n'est pour les gagner définitivement, du moins pour s'assurer de leur neutralité dans la Jazireh, le temps pour lui de réduire ailleurs par la force le mouvement de mécontentement. Si elle est convaincue de l'utilité de la chose, une personnalité aussi influente en Syrie que le chef du PYD, une formation dont le poids est sans équivalent sur la population kurde syrienne, se révélerait un auxiliaire précieux.

D'autre part, elle fait savoir sans ambiguïté au gouvernement turc de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, que les responsables syriens goutent peu les marges de liberté qu'il laisse en Turquie, non seulement à certains mouvements de l'opposition syrienne, mais surtout à l'Association des Frères Musulmans. Interdits et condamnés à mort en Syrie, ils sont autorisés, depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du Parti de la Justice et du Développement (AKP), à tenir à Istanbul réunions et congrès. C'est là qu'ils ont procédé, à la fin du mois de juillet 2010, au renouvellement de leur direction et à l'élection au poste de contrôleur général de l'ingénieur Mohammed Riyad Al Chaqfeh. Le message syrien est donc clair. Si les Turcs entendent "jouer" avec les Frères, les Syriens sont en mesure, en fermant les yeux sur la présence de Saleh Mouslim Mohammed, d'utiliser de nouveau à leur profit la carte kurde. Et ce en dépit des Accords d'Adana de 1998 et des accord de défense et de sécurité conclus depuis lors entre les deux pays, qui fixent

comme premier objectif à la lutte commune contre les "organisations terroristes" l'élimination, des deux côtés de la frontière et si possible au Kurdistan irakien, de l'ancien parti d'Abdallah Ocalan.

Que vont donc décider les Kurdes ? Vont-ils faire encore une fois confiance à un régime qui leur a souvent fait miroiter des concessions sans les mettre jamais en œuvre ? Vont-ils considérer, malgré les hésitations du régime sur la question des "étrangers de Hassakeh", qu'il est cette fois-ci sérieux et disposé à tenir ses engagements ? Vont-ils voir un indice de sa bonne volonté à leur égard dans le fait que les manifestations organisées par eux ont été traitées par les services de sécurité et par l'armée avec une délicatesse qui tranche avec la brutalité constatée ailleurs ? Certains en Syrie le redoutent.

D'autres estiment que les Kurdes, trop souvent menés en bateau, ne sont plus en mesure d'accorder la moindre confiance au pouvoir. S'ils s'abstiennent jusqu'à ce jour de participer massivement au mouvement de protestation, c'est dans l'espoir de récupérer, auprès d'un pouvoir en difficulté et prêt à des concessions, tout ce que celui-ci serait prêt ou contraint à leur reconnaître « en tant que Kurdes ». Ceci fait, ou lorsqu'ils constateront que rien ne vient, ils se rangeront du côté des contestataires pour réclamer avec eux leurs droits à la liberté et à la démocratie « en tant que Syriens ».



"Nous ne demandons pas la nationalité. Nous voulons la liberté et la démocratie"

Imprisoned Kurdish rebel chief threatens war if no negotiations after Turkish elections

by: SELCAN HACA OGLU ,
Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey – The imprisoned leader of Turkey's main Kurdish rebel group has warned his forces will unleash a "big war" after national elections if Turkey refuses to negotiate to end the decades-old conflict.

Guerrillas claimed responsibility Friday for a deadly attack on a convoy that had just left a campaign rally held by the prime minister.

Ocalan's threat is expected to escalate tensions in the Kurdish-dominated southeast, where frequent clashes and violent protests have undercut reconciliation efforts.

"Either after June 15, a meaningful negotiation begins, or a big war starts, doomsday comes," the pro-Kurdish

Firat agency website cited Ocalan as saying in a message delivered by his lawyers. Turkey holds elections on June 12 and final results are expected to take several days.

Ocalan remains a powerful symbol for his fighters, who revere him with a personality cult. Turkish leaders have confirmed communication between some state officials and Ocalan to seek a solution to end the fight by autonomy-seeking Kurdish rebels. But they refuse to negotiate with the rebels, who are branded as terrorists by Turkey and the West.

Aysel Tugluk, a former Kurdish lawmaker, had issued a similar ultimatum to the government, saying: "I hesitate to put it into words, but bad things will happen."

The comment angered

Turkish leaders, who accused the Kurdish politicians of seeking to incite violence.

On Friday, pro-Kurdish politicians announced their election program, including autonomy in the largely Kurdish southeast and education in schools in their mother tongue. Those demands have been denied by Turkey on grounds that they would divide the country along ethnic lines.

Meanwhile, the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, known as PKK, claimed responsibility for a deadly attack on a police vehicle that was escorting an election convoy of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's party in northern Turkey. The statement, distributed to media in an email, said the attack was "aimed against the police vehicle only" and was not targeting Erdogan or civilians

Wednesday's attack in Kastamonu province left one policeman dead and another wounded.

Erdogan had left an election rally in Kastamonu by helicopter but journalists and party officials were returning to the capital Ankara in the convoy.

The attack came hours after clashes at funerals for seven Kurdish rebels on Wednesday in the southeast where tensions still run high.

Police on Friday raided homes of dozens of Kurds and detained them for attacking the police with firebombs and stones in demonstrations in the cities of Hakkari and Diyarbakir in recent days, the Anatolia news agency said.

dpa..... Deutsche Presse-Agentur

Human rights violations cost Turkey 25 million euros last year

Brussels -May 5, 2011

BREACHES of the European Convention on Human Rights last year cost Turkey just under 25 million euros (37 million dollars), officials from Europe's top human rights watchdog said on Thursday.

Respect of the convention is policed by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, France, which takes up individual complaints and orders compensation when breaches are found.

In 2010, Turkey paid out 24,542,000 euros to comply with the ECHR's judgements - the highest amount among members of the Council of Europe, the organization of which the convention and the ECHR are a part.

The compensation paid out by Romania and Russia were joint second-highest at 7.4 million euros, followed by Italy, with 6 million

euros, and 5 million from Portugal.

Speaking at a news briefing in Brussels, Frederik Sundberg, a Council of Europe official who monitors compliance with ECHR rulings, said Turkey's cases were most often related to ill-treatment of suspected Kurdish separatists.

Russia was most often in the dock for police brutality in the North Caucasus, another separatist area; Italy for the slowness of its justice system; Romania for disputes related to Communist-era expropriations, Sundberg said.

The figures were disclosed as most EU governments were struggling with austerity measures to curb burgeoning deficits. Sundberg said countries usually pay ECHR fines, albeit not on time.

'It is extremely rare that there is a total refusal of payment,' he said.

A report he presented showed that compensation last year was paid within the statutory three-month deadline only in 28 per cent of cases, down from 37 per cent in 2009.

In another 13 per cent of cases, money was paid late, while the Council of Europe was still waiting for member states to report on what they had done with the remaining 60 per cent of cases.

In Iraq, fingers of blame quickly point to Al Qaeda

BAGHDAD

With deadly reputation, group now a catchall for the persistent violence

BY MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT
AND YASIR GHAZI

Under pressure to respond to a public unnerved by a wave of assassinations, one of the top security officials in Baghdad held an unusual news conference to play video confessions from three suspects from what he said was a cell of Al Qaeda.

The videos and statements played on Wednesday by the security official, Maj. Gen. Qassim Atta, the military spokesman for the Baghdad Operations Command, provided a rare view of the almost businesslike violence that persists here, though at drastically lower levels than in the years of sectarian conflict before 2007. But they also raise questions, not at all unusual for news conferences of this sort in Baghdad, about how much credence to place in the confessions.

The target of the assassination highlighted on Wednesday, the manager of a television station, was a ranking member of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's Dawa Party. Another high-ranking government official and Dawa Party member, who was driving the station manager to a party meeting, was also killed in the attack.

On the videos, the suspects described a chain of command that delivered the assassination order through four people, preserving deniability for whoever issued it. One of the men said he did not even know the target's name.

General Atta said that a woman had delivered guns equipped with silencers to the men days before the attack and that she returned a day after the shooting to pick them up.

"These people in the cells know nobody else but this one person," General Atta said. "They are told, 'This is the time, place to do the killing, and given their photo.'"

In this instance, he added, the supposed assassins were told where the targeted men would be at the time of the killing, meaning "there has been a security breach in part of our government."

Whether the killers were members of Al Qaeda was a far murkier issue.

When the insurgency was at its strongest, from 2005 to 2007, the largest insurgent group went by the name Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, though its ranks were filled with homegrown militants, with a small foreign leadership. It was responsible for many of the major attacks of that era, like the bombing of the

golden-domed mosque in Samarra. Since then, Iraqi officials have taken to calling almost all insurgents Al Qaeda, without regard to their actual affiliation.

After declaring that the men had admitted a tie to Al Qaeda, General Atta did not provide any evidence to verify the claim.

"The Iraqis like to pin everything on Al Qaeda because it's much easier that way and a convenient scapegoat," said Ken Pollack, a national security expert for the Brookings Institution.

"They can just blame it on Al Qaeda, and even then they use Al Qaeda as a blanket term for any Sunni extremist group, so they don't have to explain who may really be behind the attacks," he said. "Al Qaeda is out there and responsible for many of them, but they are not responsible for every attack."

Whatever his intentions, General Atta was highlighting a growing danger for Baghdad residents. In recent months, insurgents seem to have shifted tactics, now preferring quiet assassinations to the car bombs that killed scores of civilians but incurred the wrath of all Iraqis.

There were 44 assassinations in Baghdad in April, compared with 31 in March and 12 in February. There were three more Wednesday.

On Thursday, a suicide bomber attacked a police training center in the predominantly Shiite city of Hilla, south of Baghdad, killing 25 people and wounding at least 75 others, according

"The Iraqis like to pin everything on Al Qaeda because it's much easier that way."

to the provincial police. Of those killed, 24 were policemen, as were many of those wounded.

Once again, the attack was blamed on Al Qaeda.

"This was a breach of our security by Al Qaeda," said Haider Zanbor, the head of the security committee in the surrounding province of Babil. "We were expecting that Babil would be the target of revenge for the killing of Bin Laden. We will increase the security procedure to prevent this from happening again."

Around 7 a.m., the bomber drove a car packed with explosives up to a check point outside the training center in central Hilla, detonating the explosives while a bus drove by, a security official said.

At the time, there was a shift change at the training center, which increased the number of officers in the area, the official said.

Omar al-Jawshy contributed reporting.

16 die in jail as inmates stage revolt in Baghdad

BAGHDAD

BY JACK HEALY

An insurgent leader accused of plotting the deadly siege against an Iraqi church last year led a revolt over the weekend in a Baghdad prison, the security authorities said. The prison holds some of Iraq's most violent terrorism suspects.

Several inmates seized a cache of grenades and weapons and killed six security officers, including a high-ranking counterterrorism official. The inmates overran part of the prison until they were beaten back by a police assault team about 4:30 a.m. Sunday. Eleven inmates were killed, the officials said. They provided few details.

"These terrorists took the benefit of carelessness," said Hakim al-Zamili, who sits on Parliament's security committee and is a critic of the government. "The Iraqis are using the wrong strategy with prisoners and terrorists."

The violence came amid warnings of heightened attacks after the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. Iraqi officials said that the inmates were members of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, a Sunni extremist group, and that the authorities had been interrogating them about possible reprisals for Bin Laden's death.

The battle began around 10 p.m. Saturday when Huthaifa al-Batawi, who is accused of being the mastermind of the church attack, seized a police lieutenant's pistol, shot him in the head and led other inmates on a rampage through the prison, the officials said.

They killed five other officers, including Brig. Gen. Moayed al-Saleh, who oversaw counterterrorism operations in Karada, an upper-middle class neighborhood in Baghdad. As reinforcements arrived, five inmates were killed trying to escape in a stolen police vehicle and five others were killed later by the police.

The prison, security officials said, holds about 220 inmates, 38 of whom are said to have been involved in the Oct. 31 assault on the Our Lady of Salvation church, where at least 50 people died.

Duraid Adnan and Khalid D. Ali contributed reporting.

Pro-PKK Party Supports Opposition in Kurdistan



Former head of PCDK Fayaq Gulpi. Photo courtesy of PCDK.

By WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan – Members of the pro-PKK Democratic Solution Party (PCDK) have recently been arrested in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for supporting demonstrations. The PCDK called on the KRG to release demonstrators and the security forces to leave the streets.

On April 21st, Fayaq Gulpi, a member of the KNK, and former head of PCDK was arrested in a security checkpoint in the province of Sulaimani and allegedly tortured. Also PCDK-members Ebubekir Mecit and Kemal Said Sadik Kadir were arrested for supporting demonstrations. The detentions came after the KRG decided to ban the demonstrations.

The next day, the Kurdistan National Congress asked the Kurdish authorities to release the arrested PCDK members. Most of them were released after 8-10 hours, but Kadir was jailed for 10 days for supporting protests in the border town of Penjwin, said PCDK-member Emir Star. On May 5th yet another PCDK member named Sivan Muhammed was arrested in Sulaimani by the security forces and beaten, but later released.

Although the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) are fighting the Turkish state for more cultural rights for the Kurds in that country, they supported the demonstrations against the Kurdish government in Iraq. It is said that mem-

bers of the PCDK had participated in the protests and supported calls by Kurdish opposition parties for early elections.

Offices of the PCDK were closed in the Kurdistan region and the party was banned from participating in both the Iraqi and local Kurdish elections in the last two years after pressure from Turkey and the U.S.

The PKK and its Iranian offshoot, the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) called on the Kurdish government to respect the will of the people and show more democracy and that unwanted interference upset the Kurdish authorities.

PKK spokesperson Roj Welat told Rudaw that the PKK leader had called on the government of the Kurdistan region to listen to the demands of the people.

In early March, just days after the start of protests in Kurdistan, pro-PKK slogans could be heard in the streets of Sulaimani, with some protestors shouting 'long live leader Apo', the nickname of the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Turkey. The pro-PKK TV-station Roj TV also took airtime to cover the demonstrations.

"Although there are three opposition parties here, we are not allowed to be in parliament," said PCDK-member Najida Omar, speaking from the Sara Square, Sulaimani's central square during the protests, which is now under the control of Kurdish security forces. "Otherwise we would support the opposition parties here. We need a new system in place to support democracy," she said.

The PCDK had a list of 6 demands including calls for early elections, return of all party-occupied property to the government, a new constitution, more services (water, roads, electricity) and a project to attach the disputed territories to the Kurdistan region.

The PKK-leader Abdullah Ocalan, says Najidi Omar, thinks that no system can survive without full support of the people and without democracy.

"Therefore this current system here is not democratic nor does it listen to the people's demands. It needs to be changed and he [Ocalan] fully supports the protestors."

PKK spokesperson Roj Welat confirmed by telephone that the PKK thinks the Kurdish government should listen to the people, but denied that the PKK was directly involved in demonstrations.

"There are a lot of problems here in Iraqi Kurdistan and the government needs to tackle them and develop some level of democracy to solve these issues," he said.

Kurdish journalist Rebwar Karim Wali believes that instability in the Kurdistan region benefits the PKK.

"They can do what they want. They have more liberty, freedom of movement for everything. Because the government and [ruling] political parties are busy with this internal issue, they forget the PKK," said Wali.

Cengiz Candar, a Turkish writer and former government adviser, who has recently traveled to Syria, Iraq and Iran with Turkey's top leaders, told Rudaw that the PCDK has its own policy.

"They [PKK] don't have much a foothold in Kurdistan. Through this they might broaden their popular support."

Candar added that it could also be because of the growing relationship between Turkey and Erbil that they try to use as a counterbalance.

Demonstrations against the Kurdish authorities started in Sulaimani on February 17th and lasted more than two months until they were quelled by the deployment of hundreds of heavily armed troops. The PCDK called on the authorities to normalize the situation, release demonstrators and withdraw the security forces from the streets.

Why Kirkuk is so important to Kurds and Kurdistan

The Kurdish Globe

By A. Daudy

Through the years, Kirkuk has been a focal point in the struggle of Kurds in Iraq. It witnessed many revolts and opportunities to settle the Kurdish question, but Kirkuk was always an obstacle to permanent settlement.

No single Kurdish leader ever dared to think about giving it up for broader Kurdish rights inside Iraq. It is also deeply rooted in the Kurdish political mind and struggle for a Kurdish homeland. Regional and Western powers have denied this Kurdish wish for political strategy and because of its oil. The lack of knowledge about the issue by the Kurds themselves made them impressively weak in explaining their justification for Kirkuk and the struggle for it, let alone non-Kurds who cannot understand the "pathetic" clinging to the city. So, why is Kirkuk so important to the Kurds?

Kirkuk's history

The Hurrians, the main ancestors of Kurds, established Nuzi and Arappa, modern-day Kirkuk. Historians agree Kurds are an autochthonous race which is the result of mainly the Caucasian race (Hurrians that populated large parts of Middle East), which was Aryanized by different Indo-European tribes, the last one being the Medes. Many tribal names designated to different kingdoms in ancient Kurdistan were part of the Hurrian race, including Lulus, Subartus, Gutians, Urartus, Manneans and Khaldis. In addition to the Indo-European tribes that Aryanized ancient Kurdistan, many ancient kingdoms ruled under their tribal names like Mitannis, Kassites, Hittites,

Scythians, Sagartians, and the last, most well-known group, the Medes. The Median tribes united Kurdistan culturally and geographically, and the Median Kurdish Empire was the last state that united all parts of Kurdistan and went far beyond to the east to Bactria (Afghanistan) and west Aegean Sea (western Turkey). After that, ancient Kurds had different kingdoms and vassal states in different parts of Kurdistan, under various empires.

The Kurdish tribes around Kirkuk still hold their ancient Hurrian names, like Zangna, Talabani and Jabbari, which are mentioned in the tablets of ancient Hurrian city of Arappa (Kirkuk). Later, many empires and states invaded Kirkuk and the rest of Kurdistan. The sources of Aramaic Christian priests mention the region of Beth Garma (Garmian region) which is part of Ba-Qerdi (House of Kurds or land of Kurds). Arab and Turkish Ottoman sources reiterate this. Mosul Wilayet of the Ottoman state was a Kurdish state under the British occupation of Iraq, and incorporated it into the country to make it a viable state using Kirkuk's oil, to link it to the rest of its territory in the Middle East. The British conducted a census between 1918 and the early 1920s in Kirkuk province, and it clearly indicates a Kurdish majority in the province.

Britain, Kirkuk demography and oil

Kirkuk's oil has been a curse on the Kurdish nation since its discovery at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, the British Empire was at war with the Ottoman Empire and competing with the Russians and Germans for territories and, of course, the Middle East's oil, which was needed



for the machinery of war. This was essential in gaining an advantage on the competing powers, and to secure the oil supply for the rest of British troops around the world. This became especially apparent after losing Baku (Azerbaijan) to the Russians. For Britain, the Kurds were just a hurdle to integrate Kirkuk and Mosul to a larger Hashemite Arab Kingdom of Jordan and Iraq, connecting Kirkuk's oil to Palestine's Haifa. Besides, the Kurdish tribes were a factor of instability, especially because the Ottomans were using religion to sway the tribes' allegiance. This could have jeopardized the integration.

In the 1990s, the demographics changed again. Arab, Turkoman and even Western politicians and organizations make exaggerated accusations that Kurds repatriated 450,000 Kurds, but those deported in the 1990s were fewer than 200,000. Still, many Kirkuki Kurds do not want to go back to Kirkuk. The city is in an appalling state, and the ones who have lived in Erbil and Suleimaniya are not motivated to go back, despite calls and pressure from Kurdistan Regional Government. It seems the figures are inaccurate, even from some respected think tanks like International Crisis Group. Or, is it simply propaganda against the Kurdish reclamation?

Another accusation is that Kurds want Kirkuk merely for its oil to secure their future independent state. Kurds already secured their position in the region and in the world, by the proven oil and gas reserves, which are around 70 billion barrels of oil and a 112-200 trillion cm of gas, according to Ashti Hawrami's figures. When taking current reserves into account, the oil is seven times more and the gas 45 times more than that of Kirkuk. The gas reserves, which will supply Europe through the Nabucco pipeline, are already a declaration of

independence, given Azerbaijan's unstable supply. Kurdistan is already on the map as a player in the global oil market. Even the stance of Kurds greatest opponent, Turkey, has weakened following these discoveries and the enormous benefits for the economy. More discoveries are being made. Besides, Kirkuk's oil is of a lesser quality because it is mixed with water. If Kurds want Kirkuk for its oil, they firmly believe they have the right to own it and use it to benefit the people and the city. Saddam Hussein traded the income of Kirkuk's oil for weapons to exterminate the Iraqi population, including the Kurds.

Gradually, neighboring states

and opposition communities are realizing the inevitable emergence of a Kurdish entity with rich resources, which may eventually declare independence -- with or without Kirkuk.

Turkmen and political irrationalism

The Turkmen history starts in the region in the 12th and 13th centuries with the Mongol invasion of the Islamic state of the Abbasids. The allied Turkic tribes established kingdoms in several parts of Mesopotamia, as well as Anatolia. Modern Turkmen don't share much with those invaders. The most common theory is they assimilated with the local population. The modern Turkmen, linguistically and tribally, show a common background with Turkic Azeris of Iran and Azerbaijan and have a lesser similarity with Turks of Turkey. These Turkmen came to the region at the height of the struggle between the Ottoman and Safavid empires and were settled in different areas of the empire to secure its stability; this is not only visible in Iraq, but also in Syria.

Today's Turkmen are bitter following the fall of Saddam. They had been the ruling class from the Ottoman occupation until the end of Sunni dominance in 2003 in those designated pockets. They have always allied themselves with the ruling Sunni powers of the Iraqi state. Since 2003, the Turkmen are still unable to come to grips with the power shift after accepting Arab supremacy for a century. Today, the Turkmen political parties take an irrational political course and set unrealistic demands.

The Turkmen are represented by Iraqi Turkmen Front, which was set up by Turkish intelligence services (MIT). This process started in 1994 at the time of the Republican People's Party (CHP) rule, which was a proponent of the military elite, and before the rise of Justice and

Development Party of Turkey (AKP) and its new course, simply to thwart Kurdish demands. Turkmen had also their share from Saddam's Arabization policy, but Turkey never mentioned or addressed this with Saddam until Kurds had their own protectorate in 1991. After AKP came to power, things started to change, and Turkey's foreign policy started to take a more pragmatic approach, which led MIT to withdraw the Turkmen card. This is also due to the quarrels and the weakening support of ITF among the Turkmen themselves. ITF went even further, asking for help from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. In Turkmenistan, they were welcomed but could not find any logic for their demands to establish a Turkmen entity in Iraq. Moreover, the former head of Azerbaijan's intelligence agency, who is now the president of the country, did not respond to their demands or provide assistance. In addition, Shiite Iran, which is mainly dominated by Azeri Turkish clerics, provides no support. Turkey plays the Turkmen card once in a while, just to pressure the Kurds. A recent shift in Turkmen politics occurred when Hassan Torhan was elected president of Kirkuk's provincial council. This was a gesture by Kurdish politicians, as well as Turkey's pressure to cooperate more with the Kurds, taking the future economic benefits into consideration.

Arabs of Kirkuk

As previously mentioned, the British rule in Iraq suggested incorporating Kurdistan, including Kirkuk, into Iraq to make Iraq a viable state through its oil and secure the supply to Haifa. Since then, waves of Arab migrants and tribes settled in Kirkuk and its surrounding areas. The largest deportations of Kurds and settlement of Arabs were during the 1970s and 1980s under Saddam's Baathist regime. Arabs were encouraged to occupy the area and loot Kurdish properties in

the infamous campaign of Anfal. Many poor Arabs from the south moved to Kirkuk during this time.

In a recent survey, Arabs of Kirkuk admitted their role in looting Kurdish properties in the 1980s and acknowledged that Kurds could have done the same in 2003, but were restrained by their leadership to ensure a peaceful long-term coexistence. When asked whether they want to incorporate their region with Salahaddin governorate, most Kirkuk Arabs are against it, and want to stay part of Kirkuk due to disputes and a difficult relationship with the Arabs of Tikrit and Samara. Despite this, they do not want to be part of Kurdistan Region.

While the Kurds are accused of wanting Kirkuk for its oil, the same holds true for Sunni Arabs. Recently, some Sunni and Arab nationalists made it clear they want to incorporate Kirkuk and its oil into a Sunni region, to include Anbar, Nineveh and Salahaddin. This region is relatively poor in resources compared to the Shiite south and the Kurdistan Region. They also fear the Kurds will break away from Iraq, motivating the Shia to do the same in the south, leaving the Sunnis with the desert.

Arabs, as well as Turkmen, are aiming for a power-sharing structure and to make Kirkuk a region of its own. Still, many Kurds feel reversing Saddam's policy is the least the new Iraqi government can do. Neighboring countries have no legitimacy to intervene or meddle in the question of Kirkuk. Kurds and Shia find it almost impossible to share a country with the Arab Sunnis, due to the differences in perspective and language of dialogue. Many prominent Sunni politicians still hail Saddam, the Arab glory and use the same offensive language against the other communities, refusing to accept the new realities on the ground.

Kirkuk symbols and

identity

Why is Kirkuk of such importance to Kurds? The Kurdish tribes were living until the outskirts of Modern Baghdad (Ctesiphon), further than the shores of Tigris, before the arrival of Arab conquerors, armed by Islam, in the seventh century. The Arabs began converting the local population to Islam under the threat of the sword and unbeliever taxes (jeziah). This also assimilated neighboring nations into the new religion and its language, including Aramaics in Iraq; Phoenicians, Hebrews and Canaanites in the Levant; Copts in Egypt; the Amazigh Berbers of North Africa, from Libya to Morocco; and the inhabitants of the Horn of Africa.

For the Kurds, this process Arabized the Kurdish lowlanders of Diyala province, Kut province, Baghdad's Pahlavi Kurds and Jazeera region, especially Mosul and Aleppo.

The Kurdish people struggle to preserve their identity, language and culture amid three larger nations: Arabs, Turks and Persians. The Kurdish heritage has lost many of its historical and cultural areas to the occupying nations. So, "Kirkuk symbolizes 13 centuries of ongoing struggle to preserve Kurds from Arab ambitions to assimilate them." The struggle for Kirkuk is the struggle for Kurdish identity. Kirkuk is an emotional issue for the Kurds; no single generation will give up on the city's identity, and no major power can convince the Kurds to give it up. Any scenario to strip that right will ignite violent retaliation by the Kurdish population, even against Western powers. Still, Kurds are willing to have a reasonable and peaceful solution for the settled Arabs, and include them in the Kurdistan Region minorities and assure their place in the decision-making process.





Debate rages among Syria's opposition Kurds

After years of Kurdish exclusion in Syria by the ruling Baath regime, there is hope for unity and justice once again.

Al Jazeera

Hugh Macleod and a special correspondent

For 24-year-old Azad, a poet and political activist from Amouda in northeast Syria, it was a single word, cried from streets at the other end of the country that cut through the tangle of ethnic and political division that has defined Kurdish identity in Syria for generations.

"When people from Deraa shouted for freedom, not for pan-Arab unity, not for liberating Palestine or for unity with Egypt and Lebanon as in the past, it pushed young Kurds in Syria to feel the same as them," he said.

Stateless and suppressed under four decades of Baath party rule, and unconvinced by recent concessions to them by president Bashar al-Assad, a debate is raging among Syria's Kurds - the country's largest ethnic minority - over whether to throw their full weight behind the campaign to topple the regime, a weight opposition organisers hope could prove a tipping point.

Foreigners at home

Numbering around 1.7million, or around eight per cent of the population, Kurds in Syria have long suffered marginalisation under the Baath party. Founded on autocratic rule, and an ideology that recognises only Arabs as citizens, the Baath regime is fearful of Kurdish demands for greater autonomy, given the successful self-rule of Kurds in neighbouring Iraq.

In 1962, a year before the Baath party seized power in a military coup, 120,000 Kurds in Syria's north-eastern Hassake governorate, bordering Turkey and Iraq, had their citizenship taken away from them - on the grounds that they had not been born in Syria.

"I did two years national service in the army and then my elder brother told me that I had no Syrian nationality," said Firharad, a grandfather of 20 from a remote village near Malkiah, 60km north-east of the regional capital Hassake.

The old man broke into tears when recalling the hardships of a life spent without official papers and limited access to state-run health and education, desperate that his grandchildren would not have to repeat the experience.

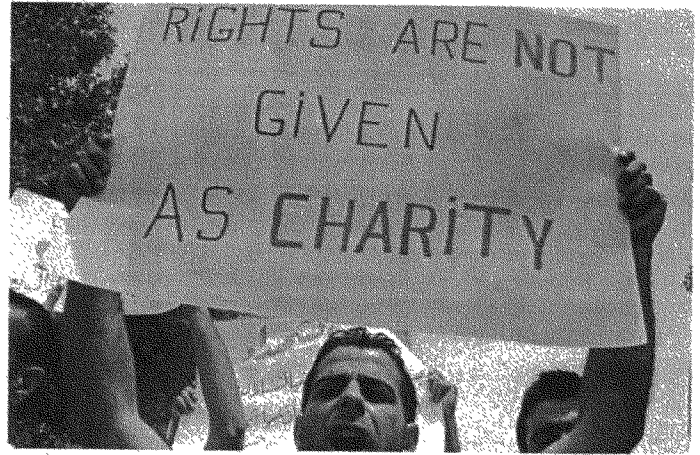
"I spent my life without education, without a proper job," he recalled. "Sometimes I got temporary work in the state sector, but I would always have to move to another job. I tried to go to Europe and the Gulf to work, but I couldn't get a passport," said Firharad.

His wife died two years ago - after she was refused heart surgery in the state-run Assad University Hospital in Damascus on the grounds she was not a Syrian citizen.

After attempting to create an "Arab belt" in northern Syria by expropriating Kurdish land and gifting it to Arabs in the 1970s, the regime initiated a policy of repressing Kurdish identity.

The Kurdish language and Kurdish books were banned from schools, celebrations such as Nowrouz, the traditional Kurdish New Year, were prohibited, and Kurdish political leaders were routinely imprisoned.

The long-term policy of dispossession and discrimination against



"What happened in Deraa has increased my national pride. Now, I feel more Syrian than ever" [EPA]

Kurds in Syria has left them among the poorest communities in the country, with poverty levels doubling from 40 per cent to 80 per cent in just three years from 2005, according to a 2008 human rights report by the British Foreign Office.

Much of that drastic decline was the result a sustained drought in northeast Syria which has decimating local Kurdish communities, driving tens of thousands off their land and into urban centres.

For Azad the poet, the uprising against the repression of the Assad regime represents an opportunity to regain a heritage threatened with extinction.

"I want to sing in the Kurdish language at a Kurdish wedding party," he said. "Why should I be afraid to do that? Why should I expect security will arrest me on charges of 'splitting Syria and joining a foreign state'? I want to write in my mother tongue, so I can express my feelings and what is in my heart."

Political machinations

But Azad's revolutionary zeal has yet to be embraced by leaders of Syria's 16 notoriously fractious Kurdish political parties.

Though with plenty of good reasons to protest, the Kurdish street, which remains controlled by its political rather than tribal leaders, has yet to turn out en masse.

Every Friday, several thousand Kurds protest in Qamishli, Amouda, Hassake and surrounding towns and villages, but the crowds have yet to swell to the mass rallies witnessed in Sunni Arab majority cities such as Baniyas, Homs and Deraa.

"For now we have made no decision to demonstrate in large numbers," said the leader of one Kurdish party, considered the most radical in Syria, who asked not to give his or the party's name.

"If we are seen to lead big demonstrations the regime will say: 'Look, the Kurds are demanding to split from Syria and establish their own state.' Then the Arab tribes will confront us."

But the reluctance of Kurds to throw their full weight behind the protest movement can also be explained by the regime's apparently successful combination of swift but minor concessions made against the backdrop of years of increased repression, a dark harbinger of what might lie ahead, should the national uprising fail to topple the existing power.

For the Kurds of Syria have already had their Intifada: Days of rioting and mass anti-regime protests in and around Qamishli in March 2004, following a brawl between Arab and Kurdish football fans, that led to security forces killing at least 36 people - mainly Kurdish residents.

What followed that unrest was five years of systematic repression. Even as President Assad pledged to restore Kurdish citizenship following decisions at the June 2005 Baath Party conference, a leading Kurdish cleric, Skeikh Mohammed Khaznawi, was being tortured to death and security forces were rounding up almost all Kurdish political leaders.

In a November 2009 report Human Rights Watch documented the arrest of 15 prominent Kurdish leaders since the 2004 uprising. Of a total of 30 Kurdish detainees interviewed, 12 said they had suffered torture. Many were called in for questioning repeatedly and banned from travelling outside Syria.

"So many Kurdish leaders are in detention that they think it's too dangerous now to protest. They have not cast off their inhibitions," said Robert Lowe, an expert on Syrian Kurds and Manager of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics.

"Most of the 16 parties have someone in detention or awaiting trial. They know what will happen to them if they protest and think it's probably not worth it."

Syria's repression of Kurds has also been bolstered by its strengthened relationship with Turkey over the past five years, where an estimated 15 to 20 million Kurds routinely complain of discrimination and where a decades-old separatist war by PKK Kurdish rebels has cost more than 40,000 lives.

Where Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak to step down, from

president Assad he has demanded only an acceleration of reforms, despite hosting some representatives of the Syrian opposition in Istanbul last month.

Carrots after stick

That heavy stick has more recently been accompanied by some small carrots: In March, Kurds were allowed to celebrate Nowrouz, unhindered by security forces. On April 7, Assad decreed a restoration of citizenship to the Kurds, though it has yet to be carried out.

Kurdish protesters have also faced a markedly less brutal response from security forces, which have not opened fire on them, as they have on protesters elsewhere in the country.

So far, to the detriment of the wider protest movement, the regime's tactics appear to be working.

"I see no need to make demonstrations which could lead to violence," said a Kurdish tribal leader, close to the delegation of Kurdish and Arab tribal leaders that met with Assad on April 5.

"We have to remember what happened in 2004, when many schools, healthcare centres and agriculture centres were destroyed. Our demands are simple and there is no need to destroy our country to get simple things."

Azad the poet agrees. His demand is simple too; that single word which may have lost its lustre in the regime's torture dungeons and in the divisions that Kurdish politics in Syria has brought on his parent's generation, but which yet shines bright for the young.

"We began a new era and we will not be divided from our Arab brothers," said Azad. "We will increase our demonstrations until not only the Kurds, but all Syrians, have their freedom. We are all Syrians in the end."

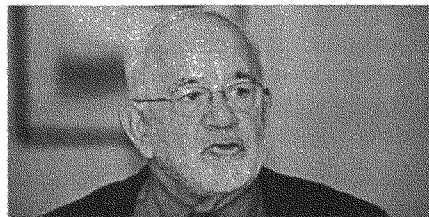
TODAY'S ZAMAN MAY 11, 2011

Intellectuals declare support for Kurdish candidates in polls

TODAY'S ZAMAN

A group of intellectuals who gathered under the roof of the Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc on Wednesday issued a declaration announcing their support for 62 independent deputy candidates endorsed by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

A member of the group, Professor Gencyay GURsoy read the declaration on behalf of nearly 350 intellectuals in a press conference held at the Taksim Hill Hotel. We are calling on everyone to vote for these candidates in order to once again bypass the 10 percent elec-



Gencyay GURsoy

tion threshold and make a new constitution, he said.

Ahmet Turk and current BDP deputy Sabahat Tuncel, who are among the BDP-supported candidates, were also present during Wednesday's press conference.

Among the members of the Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc are Ahmet Insel, Gulden Kaya, Arat Dink, Nuray Mert, Sennur Sezer, Murat «elikkan and Julide Kural.

With no hope of passing the 10 percent election threshold in the elections, the BDP urged its members to run as independent candidates. The pro-Kurdish party used the same tactic in the 2007 elections and managed to send 20 of its members to Parliament. The independent deputies later formed a parliamentary group to represent the party.

Iraq faces fateful debate about U.S. withdrawal

BAGHDAD

Some fear factional war, while others say dignity demands rapid departure

BY TIM ARANGO
AND MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT

In the Shiite enclave of Sadr City, young men demand in militant tones that American troops leave immediately. Iraqi Army officers worry the country will take a violent turn if they go. In the north, Kurdish factions that have enjoyed 20 years of American security guarantees fret about their future, and Sunni Muslims worry about Iran's rise as a political power. In Parliament, the political leadership has largely stayed silent.

Iraq now has a choice whether American troops stay or go at the end of this year, but U.S. officials have said time is running out to make a decision. The debate rippling across the country reflects a nation still struggling with issues of sectarian identity, national pride and how to secure its future.

For many Iraqis, it is a decision with two bad choices, between remaining beholden to a foreign power many still view as an occupier and charting a perilous new future on their own.

"We can choose now," said Mustafa Ali, 26, holding an Arabic translation of an American political philosophy book as he strolled the stalls on Baghdad's Mutanabbi Street. "But it's not useful. Both choices are bad."

But like many important milestones of the war, from ratifying a Constitution in 2005 to negotiating a security agreement in 2008 to setting elections in 2010 and forming a government afterward, Baghdad is marching to a different clock than Washington.

The decision could prove to be one of the most momentous ones yet of Iraq's young democracy. As Iraqis debate the issue, the discussion often pivots on symbolic matters of national dignity and has less to do with whether Iraq can remain secure without the help of the U.S. military.

"It's a golden opportunity for the Iraqi government to have the decision of whether not U.S. troops stay or leave in its hand, to show to the Iraqi people that the government has sovereignty," said Majid Mohammadi, a college student in Anbar Province.

Iraqis are also asking themselves a simple question with no simple answer: Will the country become more or less violent if the Americans leave?

Many Iraqis, especially in the north-



Muslim worshippers listening to an anti-American sermon in the Sadr City section of Baghdad. The radical cleric Muktada al-Sadr has been outspoken in demanding U.S. withdrawal.

ern areas where Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen are rivals for land, believe the American presence is a buffer against civil war.

But elsewhere, Iraqis who were inclined to see the Americans stay, now worry that if they do, it could cause new violence sparked by insurgent groups such as the Mahdi Army, the militia loyal to the anti-American cleric Muktada al-Sadr.

"I prefer that the U.S. forces leave Iraq because then extremists wouldn't have an excuse to carry guns," said Amira Jwad, 35, a government worker in Najaf.

Last month, Mr. Sadr said that he would order his men to attack U.S. forces if they stay. On Saturday, a member of Parliament from Mr. Sadr's party was quoted in a report saying that the party would recruit foreign fighters to take on U.S. forces. A spokesman for the party later said that they had no intention of recruiting fighters.

The most fervent opposition can be found in Sadr City, the Shiite slum in Baghdad that represents the heart of Mr. Sadr's constituency. On a recent Friday before prayers began, Najim Abbas, a young house painter, echoed what many there say when asked about Mr. Sadr's threat of reconstituting his militia.

"Whatever he says, we will do," said Mr. Abbas. "We will keep on resisting until the last days of our lives."

Once prayers began, the preacher cast the American issue as the most important facing the Iraqi people.

"Government services are important, but there are things that are more important than these things, which is the U.S. withdrawal according to the agreement," the preacher said. "We need to make this decision now. We don't want to wait. If we do, they will say, we don't have enough time to withdraw."

In the corridors of power no politician, including Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, seems to want to face up to the issue. Mr. Maliki, who has rarely con-

"We don't understand what the withdrawal means. It is a complete withdrawal? Or will they keep their bases?"

sulted Parliament as he consolidated power over the past five years, distanced himself from the issue last week, saying that the matter would have to be decided by Parliament.

"If there is an intention to change the terms of the agreement and have U.S. troops stay there must be a national consensus," Mr. Maliki said at a news conference in Baghdad. "The government is a partnership government so everyone is responsible for the decision. The government, the Parliament and political blocs, it's everyone's responsibility and all must bear this responsibility."

While the growing sense among American diplomats and Iraqi officials

Iran Pressures Iraq to Crack Down on Kurds

By Ken Timmerman

The Iraqi government is coming under pressure from Tehran to crack down on Iranian Kurdish rebels based in northern Iraq, and has recently moved tanks and artillery close to guerilla camps in the mountains near the Iranian border, Kurdish sources told Newsmax.

Tanks and artillery controlled by the Peshmerga forces of the Kurdistan regional government in northern Iraq have moved into the Assos Mountains north of Sulaymaniyah, within striking distance of rebel bases controlled by the Free Life Party of Iranian Kurdistan, known as PJAK.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani is scheduled to travel to Tehran this weekend for a two-day conference hosted by the Iranian government dubbed "Campaign Against Terrorism."

Iranian leaders have been urging Talabani to convince the Kurdish government to take military steps against the PJAK camps in meetings in Tehran in February and March of this year, Kurdish sources told Newsmax.

"If the KRG refuses to take these steps, then Prime Minister [Nouri al-] Maliki is threatening to send in the Iraqi army, just as he did against the Mujahedin-e Khalq [MEK] base at Camp Ashraf," Soran Kedri, a PJAK spokesperson in Europe told Newsmax. Maliki is widely seen as a close ally of Tehran.

Iran has been complaining about the MEK presence in Iraq for years. But unlike PJAK, which remains popular with many Iraqi Kurds, the MEK was widely despised since it was used by Saddam Hussein to launch attacks on the Kurds.

Nouri al-Maliki, iraq, iran, pjak,

mek, kurds, Barham Salih, Tehran Saeed Jalili

When Kurdish Prime Minister Barham Salih traveled to Tehran in January, Iranian National Security General Secretary Saeed Jalili asked him to use the Kurdish militia to crack down on the PJAK camps, which were being used as launching pads for guerilla incursions across the border into Iran.

"Protecting the border and ensuring stability and security are a concern for both sides," Salih told Iran's Fars News Agency right after meeting Jalili. "We are hopeful that greater efforts will be made to protect the prevailing stability and security."

PJAK leaders are also warning that Iran is planning to carry out a series of terror attacks inside Iran in the coming weeks, and blame the attacks on PJAK guerillas.

Iran has trained squads of Kurdish commandos to carry out the terror attacks with assistance from the Turkish military and Turkish military, PJAK leaders told Newsmax during a trip to their bases in Northern Iraq in February.

"We have eyewitness reports from our people inside the Iranian security apparatus who have seen Turkish generals coming to discuss this in Iran," said Amir Karimi, a member of the PJAK Coordinating Committee, the group's executive body.

"We also have eyewitness reports of people saying they were trained in Turkey to carry out terrorist attacks in Iranian Kurdistan and blame them on PJAK," he added. PJAK sources inside the Revolutionary Guards in Iran have described a series of specific attacks now under preparation that Iran plans to blame on PJAK.

"Iran has hired lackeys to blow up a Kurdish Shiite mosque in

Kermanshah, assassinate a Sunni cleric in Pavah city, and carry out a bank robbery during which they plan to kill all bank employees and customers inside," PJAK spokesman Soran Khedri told Newsmax.

"They are then planning to blame this attacks on PJAK, as part of their effort to get the European Union to go along with the United States and list PJAK as a terrorist organization," he added.

PJAK believes Turkey provided weapons to Iran, and that Iran gave them to the agents as a way of providing "proof" that PJAK is receiving military assistance from the United States.

On Feb. 4, 2009, the U.S. Treasury designated PJAK as an international terrorist organization as part of President Barack Obama's much-touted new strategy of "reaching out" to the government in Tehran.

In response to a Freedom of Information Act request by PJAK's U.S. attorney, Morton Sklar, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control released a heavily-redacted memorandum showing that the sole basis for the Treasury's action against the group was an allegation that they are "controlled by the KGK" — another name for the PKK.

The PKK is the much-maligned Turkish group that has used spectacular and bloody terror attacks to gain recognition of the rights of Turkish Kurds, but that in recent years has advocated political dialogue with the Turkish government

Both Iran and Turkey have stated publicly that PJAK is the Iranian "branch" of the PKK, but have never presented any evidence to back up the allegation.

The U.S. designation of PJAK as a terrorist organization has had a chilling effect on the group's ability to interact with

other Iranian opposition groups, who fear guilt by association. "Some groups won't deal with us because of this," another member of PJAK's political leadership, Sherzad Kamangar, said.

The Iranian authorities have arrested hundreds of PJAK activists who took part in post-election protests in June 2009, and has executed scores of them.

The Iranian regime is so worried about PJAK's effectiveness that it recently sent three hired killers to German in an attempt to assassinate PJAK secretary general, Rahman Haji Ahmadi.

"The German police called on Ahmadi this past week to warn him that three Iranian hired killers, using Turkish passports, had moved into a flat near to where he lives," said PJAK spokesman Kedri. "They warned him to be careful, but offered him no protection."

After the group was designated by the Treasury Department as a terrorist organization in February 2009, they called a unilateral halt to all armed attacks on Iranian Revolutionary Guards bases, to show that the group is primarily a political organization, not a militia.

"Despite this, the Islamic Republic continues its security operations against us and against the Kurdish people, hanging them for political activities," said Karimi.

Karimi and other PJAK leaders are frustrated at the actions of the Obama administration. "The United States is now saying that it supports the protest movement in Tehran, but at the same time they are labeling the protest movement in Iranian Kurdistan a terrorist group," Karimi said.



Turquie: le problème kurde perturbe la campagne pour les législatives

ISTANBUL, 6 mai 2011 (AFP)

LE PROBLÈME KURDE vient perturber une campagne électorale jusque-là sans anicroche pour le parti islamo-conservateur du Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, donné favori pour les élections législatives du 12 juin.

"La tension monte autour de la question kurde et les responsabilités sont partagées", estime l'analyste Mehmet Ali Birand, de la télévision Kanal D.

Les rebelles kurdes ont revendiqué vendredi une attaque meurtrière contre un convoi routier du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) au pouvoir.

Cette embuscade a été menée "en représailles à la terreur exercée par la police sur le peuple" kurde, a déclaré le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en lutte armée depuis 1984 pour la défense des droits de cette communauté.

Un commando a attaqué à la grenade et au fusil d'assaut une voiture de police escortant un autobus de l'AKP, près de Kastamonu (nord), où M. Erdogan venait de prononcer un discours. Un policier a été tué et un autre blessé.

L'attentat "visait la police (...) non les civils ou le Premier ministre", a cependant précisé le PKK.

Mais le leader emprisonné du PKK Abdullah Öcalan a, par le biais de ses avocats, menacé le régime d'une "guerre", s'il refuse de négocier après les élections.

"Soit un processus de négociations sérieuses commencera après le 15 juin, soit ce sera le début d'une grande guerre", a-t-il affirmé, dans des propos rapportés par l'agence de presse Firat.

La semaine dernière, l'armée a tué sept rebelles du PKK dans le sud-est du pays, où la police a multiplié les arrestations.

Et la région était déjà en ébullition il y a deux semaines, avec de violentes manifestations, après l'éviction de sept candidats kurdes aux législatives. Une décision qui a finalement été annulée pour six d'entre eux.

Jeudi soir, une organisation rassemblant de nombreux responsables kurdes, dont ceux du parti pro-kurde BDP (Parti pour la paix et la démocratie), a averti qu'elle pourrait appeler au boycott des élections si les opérations militaires et les arrestations se poursuivent.

Un boycott des élections par le BDP serait un revers pour M. Erdogan, a expliqué M. Birand à l'AFP.

"La légitimité des élections serait en cause", et M. Erdogan serait très embarrassé, "car il veut faire la démonstration d'une élection démocratique, à laquelle tout le monde participe", a-t-il dit.

Malgré certaines réformes en faveur des Kurdes qui représentent environ 15 millions des 73 millions d'habitants de la Turquie, le gouvernement est accusé d'avoir trompé l'opinion en promettant l'an dernier une solution durable au problème kurde, sans prendre de mesures effectives.

L'AKP, qui brigue une troisième victoire consécutive le 12 juin, est donné gagnant par tous les sondages, devant le CHP (Parti républicain du peuple, social-démocrate) et le MHP (Parti de l'action nationaliste, nationaliste).

M. Erdogan se prévaut d'une économie en pleine croissance, et il vient d'annoncer le creusement d'un canal parallèle au Bosphore, un projet pharaonique qui séduit au-delà de son électorat.

Un tableau séduisant que ternit le problème kurde.

Mais, affirme M. Birand, "les deux parties trouvent un peu leur compte dans cette tension sur la question kurde".

"Erdogan veut prendre des voix au MHP, donc il mène une politique nationaliste et s'en prend aux Kurdes", accusés de menacer l'unité nationale, affirme-t-il.

Quant au parti pro-kurde, "il montre ses muscles et fait la démonstration qu'il défend sa communauté", ajoute-t-il.



TURQUIE: DEUX POLICIERS TUÉS DANS UNE ATTAQUE DU PKK DANS LE SUD-EST

12 mai 2011

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie)(AFP) — Deux policiers ont été tués dans une attaque lancée tard mercredi par des rebelles kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a indiqué jeudi une source de sécurité locale.

Des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont tiré au fusil-mitrailleur sur des policiers en faction devant un commissariat de Silopi, près de la frontière irakienne, tuant sur le coup

l'un des fonctionnaires, a-t-on précisé de même source.

Un deuxième policier qui a été grièvement atteint, a été opéré dans la nuit dans un hôpital de Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est kurde peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, mais a succombé jeudi des suites de ses blessures, a-t-on appris de source hospitalière.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe "terroriste" par de nombreux pays, a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé en mars d'y mettre fin,

déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes, alors que doivent avoir lieu le 12 juin des élections législatives.

Le PKK a revendiqué une attaque la semaine dernière dans le nord de la Turquie: un policier a été tué et un autre blessé, en escortant un convoi du parti au pouvoir, après un meeting du Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK, en 1984, selon l'armée.



Un soldat turc tué par l'explosion d'une mine en Turquie

ISTANBUL, 14 mai 2011 (AFP)

UN SOLDAT turc a été tué par l'explosion d'une mine samedi dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

L'incident est survenu lors d'une opération de ratissage menée par l'armée dans une zone montagneuse de la province de Hakkari, aux confins de l'Irak et de l'Iran, a déclaré à Anatolie le gouverneur de la province,

Muammer Türker.

Des renforts ont été dépêchés sur les lieux et une vaste opération militaire avec soutien aérien a été lancée dans la région, a-t-il dit.

Le gouverneur n'a pas donné de précisions sur l'origine de l'engin explosif, mais les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont régulièrement eu recours dans le passé à des mines antipersonnel contre les forces de sécurité.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe "terroriste" par de nombreux pays, a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé en mars d'y mettre fin, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes, alors que doivent avoir lieu le 12 juin des élections législatives.

TURQUIE

La tension monte au Kurdistan

A un mois des élections législatives, qui doivent se dérouler le 12 juin, la question kurde s'invite dans la campagne. Dénonçant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer, les rebelles kurdes ont repris les attaques dans le sud-est du pays. Revue de presse.

| Pierre Vanrie |

 Courrier international

“RÉSOLUTION LA QUESTION kurde est bien entendu la condition sine qua non d’une véritable démocratisation de la Turquie”, souligne Sahin Alpay, le chroniqueur du quotidien *Zaman*, proche du gouvernement. “D’importants progrès ont déjà été réalisés dans ce domaine. Désormais, l’identité kurde n’est plus niée. La région autonome du Kurdistan d’Irak, dont les liens politiques et économiques avec Ankara se sont renforcés, soutient le processus visant à ce que le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) abandonne les armes et devienne un acteur politique. Le leader emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, de même que les responsables militaires du PKK qui se trouvent dans les monts Kandil [dans le Kurdistan irakien] expriment leur volonté d’aller vers un accord pour une solution pacifique. Le PKK a ainsi décrété en novembre 2010 un cessez-le-feu unilatéral [prévu jusqu’au 15 juin]. Le Premier ministre turc Erdogan a admis que son gouvernement menait des pourparlers officieux avec Öcalan. Et même le Parti républicain du peuple [CHP, opposition kémaliste] donne des signes de sa volonté de soutenir des réformes en faveur d’une solution à la question kurde et soutient les pourparlers avec Öcalan. Les Kurdes veulent notamment que la nouvelle Constitution [prévue pour après les élections] respecte le pluralisme ethnique de la Turquie, que la langue kurde soit reconnue et que les militants du PKK bénéficient d’une amnistie. Des réformes dans ce sens, dès lors qu’elles consolident l’unité du pays, devraient

recueillir l’assentiment des Turcs”.

“Sauf que”, poursuit Sahin Alpay, “dans le contexte des élections du 12 juin prochain, certains événements suscitent de l’inquiétude. Ainsi, malgré le cessez-le-feu, l’armée a ouvert le feu sur des militants du PKK [depuis fin mars, des opérations policières et militaires ont coûté la vie à 25 combattants du PKK et à 2 civils ; près de 1 500 Kurdes ont été arrêtés depuis le 19 avril]. Ensuite, des guérilleros du PKK ont tiré [le 6 mai, “en représailles à la terreur exercée par la police sur le peuple”, avait déclaré le PKK] sur le convoi du Premier ministre et ont tué un policier. On peut donc penser qu’il y a dans les deux camps des gens dont l’idéologie et les intérêts les incitent à saboter un processus allant dans le sens de la paix.” Sahin Alpay dénonce la tentative du parti prokurde, le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie [BDP, proche du PKK], de placer les Kurdes de Turquie sous sa tutelle. “Il est clair que la grande majorité des Kurdes n’approuve pas l’idéologie ethniciste et nationaliste kurde du BDP, ni la politique de ce parti consistant à défendre la paix en soutenant la violence du PKK.”

Hasan Cemal dans *Milliyet* considère néanmoins que les Kurdes de Turquie se sentent très proches du PKK. “L’erreur serait de croire que l’on peut dresser un mur entre le PKK et la question kurde. Cela aurait peut-être été possible dans les années 1980 et 1990, mais on a laissé passer l’occasion. En effet, le PKK est une organisation qui a désormais pris racine parmi les masses kurdes. C’est ce parti qui donne désormais au mouvement kurde la



direction à suivre. L’erreur du Premier ministre Erdogan est d’avoir déclaré pendant cette campagne électorale que “la question kurde était finie”. S’agit-il de propos électoralistes ou croit-il vraiment ce qu’il dit ?”

Dans ce contexte, Rusen Cakir critique dans *Vatan* ceux qui refusent de voir la réalité d’une certaine symbiose entre les Kurdes de Turquie et le PKK et qui tentent de l’expliquer en recourant à la théorie du complot. “Les obsèques des militants du PKK tués récemment par l’armée ont eu lieu à Diyarbakir [le 4 mai] en présence de dizaines de milliers de personnes. On voit très bien sur les photos qui ont été prises à cette occasion la détermination de ces dizaines de milliers d’hommes et de femmes, de jeunes et de personnes âgées, et les raisons qui les ont poussés à être là. Si vous persistez à chercher des complots derrière une telle mobilisation, c’est que vous n’avez rien compris.”

Fethiye Çetin, «métisse» turco-arménienne



À gauche : en 2007 à Istanbul, Fethiye Çetin s'exprime peu après l'assassinat de Hrant Dink, directeur de la rédaction de l'hebdomadaire arméno-turc Agos, qui fut son ami et dont elle défend la famille.

Avocate, militante des droits de l'homme, elle a raconté l'histoire de sa grand-mère, Arménienne rescapée du génocide. Elle donne la parole aux « petits-enfants » pour que la Turquie regarde son histoire en face

Les étagères de son bureau, situé dans un quartier commerçant d'Istanbul, regorgent de classeurs. Sur la tranche, le nom des affaires que cette avocate, militante des droits de l'homme, défend.

En Turquie, plus personne n'ignore Fethiye Çetin. Son premier ouvrage, *Le Livre de ma grand-mère* (1), l'a révélée au public et a provoqué un séisme dans un pays qui ne reconnaît pas sa responsabilité dans le génocide des Arméniens en 1915.

Fethiye, Turque musulmane, a brisé un tabou avec ce premier livre. Elle y raconte le secret de sa grand-mère, Seher, qui un jour la prend à part et lui révèle qu'elle est arménienne, rescapée du génocide.

Seher s'appelait Heranus et était la fille d'Hovanes et Isquhi Gadarian, née dans un village de la province anatolienne de Maden.

Une histoire loin d'être unique

L'ouvrage en est à sa onzième réédition en Turquie. Il a levé le voile sur une réalité jusque-là occultée en Turquie. L'histoire de sa grand-mère est celle de beaucoup d'Arméniens.

Chassés de leurs villages par l'armée turque, en 1915, ils entreprennent la marche de la mort vers le désert syrien. Beaucoup mourront en route. Sa grand-mère encore enfant est arrachée des bras de sa mère par un officier.

Rebaptisée Seher, adoptée par le militaire comme sa fille, elle est plus tard mariée à un Turc. Son frère a, lui aussi, échappé à la mort, comme sa mère, ce qu'elle apprendra des années après.

La révélation d'un lourd secret de famille

Fethiye a 25 ans lorsque sa grand-mère lui révèle son secret. Elle venait de s'inscrire à la faculté de droit d'Ankara. «Je ne me doutais de rien auparavant, mais, avec le recul, j'ai compris qu'il y

avait des indices qui auraient pu m'ouvrir les yeux, mais je n'avais pas le bagage pour les comprendre.»

Par exemple, ce jour de l'année où sa grand-mère cuisinait un gâteau très particulier, comme d'autres femmes autour d'elles qui ensuite se rendaient visite. «C'était, en fait, le jour de Pâques.»

À 61 ans, Fethiye a retrouvé la sérénité, mais à l'époque où elle apprend le «secret de famille», la colère l'emporte comme le flot d'un torrent. «J'avais envie de crier dans la rue à l'adresse de tout le monde: on nous a menti, on nous ment encore.»

Une introspection facilitée par son militantisme de gauche

Elle prend conscience de la complicité de l'État et de la manière dont il faisait perdurer le mensonge sur cette période de notre histoire. «J'ai commencé à questionner l'idéologie qui avait mené à ce silence, l'histoire telle qu'elle nous avait été racontée.»

Fethiye veut comprendre. Ce qui passe aussi par une introspection sur elle-même, sur son militantisme. «J'étais de gauche, j'avais passé des années dans des mouvements de jeunesse, mais une partie de moi restait nationaliste, c'était aussi la réalité de ce que nous vivions dans notre pays.»

Elle se remémore toutes les expressions que compte la langue turque, discriminatoires envers les minorités. Par exemple: «C'est lourd comme un mécréant». Et beaucoup d'autres encore.

«J'ai commencé à me retenir de les utiliser. J'ai senti le besoin de lutter contre le racisme et le nationalisme au sein même des groupes de gauche dans lesquels je militais.»

Même en prison, elle murmure son histoire

Une partie de ce nationalisme turc désormais la dérange. Fethiye termine ses études de droit et devient avocate. Sa propre histoire la mène à s'intéresser aux injustices, aux préjudices infligés aux non-musulmans.

Elle se spécialise en droit des minorités. «Ma première prise de conscience a démarré avec les Grecs, les Arméniens, les Juifs, les Assyriens, mais aussi les

Kurdes.»

Après le coup d'État militaire, en 1980, la militante de gauche est arrêtée et incarcérée pendant trois Turques de l'opposition, comme elle, elle doit murmurer lorsqu'elle raconte l'histoire de sa grand-mère.

Un paradoxe, «alors que l'on criait contre la dictature, pourquoi ne pas en parler ouvertement. Nous reproduisions les mêmes schémas que nos parents et nos grands-parents.» Aussi, à sa sortie de prison, elle décide qu'il est temps de lever le voile sur l'histoire de son pays.

Ecrire pour se réconcilier

Elle entreprend de rechercher la famille de sa grand-mère aux États-Unis, car elle a appris que le frère de Seher a survécu au massacre. Elle reçoit des réponses et recolle les morceaux du puzzle familial. «Je voulais que ce soit écrit.» En 2004 paraît *Le Livre de ma grand-mère*.

L'écriture l'a aidée à se réconcilier avec elle-même. Une fois le livre terminé, «j'ai retrouvé le sommeil. Ces larmes versées m'ont aidée à guérir.» Le livre est un succès grâce au bouche-à-oreille. Mais la famille de Fethiye se divise.

«La génération de mes parents était très mal à l'aise parce que je n'avais rien dissimulé, ni les noms, ni les photos. Ils avaient peur. Par contre, les jeunes de la famille m'ont soutenue. Ce qui est important car ce sont eux qui changeront les choses.»

Le secret de famille était bien gardé. «La génération de ma grand-mère a subi et s'est tue, celle de ma mère a appris la vérité et s'est tue. Ma génération a commencé à faire ressortir la vérité. ♦



Douze rebelles kurdes, un soldat turc tués dans le sud-est de la Turquie

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 14 mai 2011 (AFP)

DOUZE REBELLES KURDES ont été tués au cours des trois derniers jours dans le sud-est de la Turquie dans des affrontements à la frontière irakienne, et un soldat a péri à la suite de l'explosion d'une mine, ont affirmé des sources locales.

Les combats ont débuté jeudi soir alors qu'un groupe de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) tentait de pénétrer en Turquie depuis l'Irak à la hauteur d'Uludere, dans la province de Simak, ont indiqué des sources de sécurité.

Selon l'agence de presse Anatolie, les combats ont impliqué des hélicoptères d'attaque.

Une autre tentative d'infiltration a eu lieu dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi, ont déclaré les sources de sécurité, ajoutant que 12 rebelles avaient été abattus et que quatre autres s'étaient rendus.

De nombreuses armes ont été saisies, ont-elles signalé, précisant que les affrontements se poursuivaient.

Dans un incident séparé, un soldat a été tué samedi par l'explosion d'une

mine au cours d'une opération de ratissage menée par l'armée dans une zone montagneuse de la province de Hakkari, aux confins de l'Irak et de l'Iran, selon le gouverneur de la province, Muammer Türker, cité par Anatolie.

Des renforts ont été dépêchés sur les lieux et une vaste opération militaire avec soutien aérien a été lancée dans la région, a-t-il dit.

Le gouverneur n'a pas donné de précisions sur l'origine de l'engin explosif, mais les rebelles du PKK ont régulièrement eu recours dans le passé à des mines antipersonnel contre les forces de sécurité.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe "terroriste" par de nombreux pays, a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé en mars d'y mettre fin, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes.

Les heurts entre le PKK et les forces de sécurité se sont multipliés ces dernières semaines alors que doivent avoir lieu le 12 juin des élections législatives.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK, en 1984, selon l'armée.



Turkish forces kill 12 Kurd fighters crossing from Iraq

May 14, 2011- Reuters by Seyhmus Cakan

DIYARBAKIR, TURKEY—Turkish security forces killed at least 12 Kurdish militants after they were spotted crossing the border from Iraq, the military said on Saturday, while a soldier was killed by a mine blast.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas were killed during operations on Friday and early Saturday in the southeast province of Sirnak, the military statement said.

The soldier died in Hakkari, another insurgency-plagued province bordering both Iran and Iraq, state-run Antaolian news agency said. Some PKK fighters operate from bases in the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq.

The PKK ended a six-month ceasefire in February and there have been fears of rising violence before a parliamentary elec-

tion on June 12 that is expected to result in a comfortable third successive victory for Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party.

Jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan has threatened "war" unless the government enters talks after the election to end a separatist conflict that has dragged on for 27 years, killing more than 40,000 people.

The PKK last week claimed responsibility for an ambush that killed a police officer and wounded another in the northern Black Sea province of Kastamonu after an election rally by Erdogan, and two more police were killed this week.

The PKK says police have been attacked in retaliation for operations and arrests in the southeast. Erdogan has accused the militants of being behind several petrol bomb attacks on the offices of his AK Party.



DNO shares jump on Kurdish oil export payment news

OSLO, May 5, 2011 (Reuters)

SHARES IN NORWAY'S DNO International jumped 6.4 percent on Thursday after the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said companies would receive the first oil export payments from Iraqi authorities in Baghdad.

DNO has a field in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq from which it has exported oil. So far it has not received any revenues due to long-running disagreements between Baghdad and the regional government over how to divide up income.

"It's the news from the KRG homepage (that is pushing

DNO shares higher)," said Marius Gaard, an analyst at Carnegie in Oslo. "It is the news we've been waiting for." DNO was not immediately available for comment.

DNO shares were up 6.4 percent to 7.77 crowns at 1343 GMT, while Oslo's benchmark index was off 0.2 percent.

On its website www.krg.org, the Kurdistan government said it had "received a written notice from the Federal Ministry of Finance in Baghdad, confirming release of the first oil export payment" to KRG contractors in the amount of "around 50 percent of net revenues (\$243 million) derived from the export of over 5 million barrels" from the Kurdish region in February-March.

Unconditional return to dialogue in Kurdistan necessary - Barzani

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: President of Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani called today on all Kurdish parties, pro or opposition, to unconditionally return to dialogue to deal with the problems in Kurdistan.

In a call made by Barzani this afternoon, he noted that "since the eruption of the unhealthy situation in Kurdistan region among the political parties, we believed that joint dialogue and discussions are the only way to resolve all problems and obstacles."

"For this reason, I sent a letter dated 10 April, 2011 to all parties and called on them to heed the supreme interests of the people of Kurdistan and to continue dialogue to reach an agreement within the law and legitimacy," he added.

Barzani reiterated his calls "for unconditionally open new chapter of relations in order to reach suitable solutions and obstacles by joint cooperation."



Negotiations were completely cut off between the two main parties and the three opposition parties following the intrusion of military forces into Sulaimaniya city and scattering all demonstrators by force.

The opposition demands administrative and political reforms in government establishments in the region, as well as forming a transitional government in preparation for early elections, while the central authority rejects these conditions and call upon the opposition to participate in a wide-base Kurdish government.

Full steam ahead on Turkish constitutional reform

By **Wolfgang Piccoli**

Recent opinion polls suggest that Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is on course to win a third successive term with a comfortable parliamentary majority at the June 12 general elections. However, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan appears unlikely to achieve his goal of securing the 367 seats necessary to modify the constitution without a referendum. That result would set the stage for an acrimonious political struggle in the aftermath of the election given the AKP's apparent determination to change the constitution and increase the powers of the president. Such volatility could hamper efforts to boost the economy, while also impeding Turkish efforts to boost its international reputation.

Opinion polls show support for the AKP is running at 45-48 percent, ahead of the Republican People's Party (CHP) at 25-28 percent and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) at 12-14 percent. However, the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) is expected to perform strongly in predo-

minantly Kurdish areas. Its candidates are running as independents in order to sidestep a requirement that political parties win at least 10 percent of the national vote in order to win representation in parliament. The BDP could take around 25 seats, up from 19 in the current parliament.

When combined with the expected improvement in the performance of the CHP, the increase in the number of BDP deputies is likely to mean that the AKP will need at least 50 percent of the popular vote in order to win the same number of seats as it did in 2007. If voting tracks the current opinion polls, the AKP is likely to win around 310-335 seats. While this is a comfortable majority (276 votes are required for a simple majority), it is far short of the supermajority it is looking for. The only real way the AKP could win the supermajority is if the MHP falls below the 10 percent threshold and fails to obtain representation in parliament and if the BDP performs poorly in the southeast.

The AKP, however, appears determined to attempt constitutional reform. Its election manifesto, announced on April 16, declares that its first priority

will be a new constitution. EU accession efforts, however, are effectively dead. Erdogan has made it clear that he wants to replace the current parliamentary system with a presidential one. He is then expected to attempt to win that post for two consecutive five-year terms.

Even if Erdogan fails to introduce a presidential system, a new constitution could still provoke volatility. Kurdish nationalists are demanding that it eliminate any mention of Turkish ethnicity. Any such initiative would provoke a furious reaction both from opposition Turkish nationalists and the Turkish nationalist wing of the AKP. Similarly, any attempt to amend the first four clauses of the current constitution -- theoretically unalterable -- would result in mass protests from Kemalists and a possible application to the Constitutional Court for the new draft to be annulled.

If, as seems likely, the AKP does not secure the hoped-for supermajority, politics in Turkey after the June election will almost instantly focus on the constitutional referendum and take the government's focus away from pressing economic issues and its efforts to boost the country's international profile.

Wolfgang Piccoli is a director with Eurasia Group's Europe Practice.

Iraq's North Offers Educational Oasis

Universities Proliferate in Kurdish Region as Students Seek Refuge From Violence in Baghdad and Other Areas

By BROOKE ANDERSON

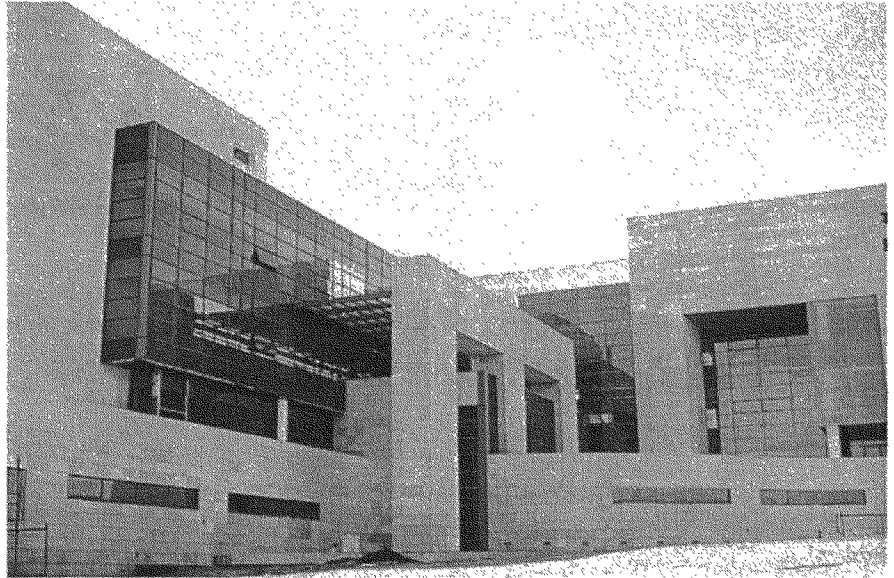
SULAIMANI, Iraq—For Iraq's brightest and best, the century-old University of Baghdad has traditionally been the place to aim for. But not, perhaps, when the students themselves feel like targets.

"So many times, I had to go home in the middle of class. Once, a bullet went right past my friend's head when I was with her," says 21-year-old Leylan Amir.

That was in 2007. To escape the violence in the capital, Ms. Amir and her mother and brother—then a medical student in Baghdad—moved to Sulaimani, a quiet city in the Kurdish-administered north. Her father stayed behind in Baghdad, where he still works and takes care of the family home. In Sulaimani, Ms. Amir began studying business at the American University of Iraq-Sulaimani. "I never expected to be here. It was a sudden decision to come," she says.

"I was lucky to come here, because, when I came, that's when things got really bad in Baghdad," Ms. Amir recalls.

The American University of Iraq-Sulaimani was founded in 2007 in Iraq's Kurdish region by a group of Iraqis and foreigners, inspired in part by the landmark American University of Beirut in Lebanon. Its executive M.B.A. program for working professionals is run in conjunction with Germany's Furtwangen University, and is accredited in Germany by the Foundation for International Business Administration. The program, which has been running for four years, has 26 graduates so far. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, thousands of Iraqi students have fled north to the much more stable Kurdish area. As a result, universities have proliferated throughout the region—a boon for the local economy. Over the past five years, at least 10 new universities have opened in the area, bringing the region's total to 20, and another five public universities are in the works, including one in the town of Hamdaniya to accommodate Christian refugees.



Courtesy of AUI-S

The American University of Iraq-Sulaimani's M.B.A. program is run in conjunction with Germany's Furtwangen University.

Universities in this area, controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government, allow students from Baghdad and other unstable parts of Iraq to complete their education without leaving the country, a factor that has reversed the brain-drain that typically comes with conflict.

Since 2003, the KRG has been engaged in a "visiting system" under which state university students from the south can transfer to the north and receive a degree from their home university. To participate, students must prove they are in danger, by providing a note from the police—though Christians, who are considered widely at risk, aren't required to provide this proof.

However, the language of instruction in the south is Arabic, whereas in the north it is Kurdish. While this is typically not a problem for the sciences, which are mainly taught in English, it can be difficult for those studying arts and humanities.

"I think it's sad they have to come here. The country is still in such turmoil, and people have to live as refugees," says Athanasios Moulakis, provost at AUI-S. "I'd like to see Iraq safe everywhere. But at least we can provide a familiar place

so they can function in a safe environment."

Mr. Moulakis says the university hopes eventually to expand to Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. For now, he and his colleagues need visas to visit the southern part of Iraq; most don't, he says, for security reasons.

While the situation in southern Iraq isn't as dangerous as in 2005, when a virtual civil war raged, the Baghdad area is still not considered safe and many of the exiles in the north are comparatively recent arrivals.

In addition to accommodating students who have fled the violence of the south, the Kurdish region has also become a refuge for professors. About 450 academics have been assassinated since the 2003 invasion. Like students, many of those surviving have fled north.

"We didn't have enough professors in the beginning," says Nasih Abdul Kadir, spokesman for the Sulaimani Technical College, a state college that opened in 2004. "Some of our professors came from Baghdad with their families because it was dangerous there. Of course it's sad, but we feel good because we're helping them—and they're helping us."

Another new university attracting refugees from the south is the Lebanese French University in Erbil, the provincial capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. Founded by academics from Beirut in 2007, the institution offers a four-year, French-style education in English. Its French partners are the University of Picardie-Jules Verne and the University of Nîmes. It will soon move into a new 50,000-square-meter campus.

The university's M.B.A. program is expanding, with 160 M.B.A.s expected to graduate this year, compared with 110 last year. Many have already found jobs in their fields, says Riad Al Khouri, dean of the business school.

"I've noticed over the past two years more emphasis on business studies," says Mr. Al Khouri. "As the region gets more prosperous, people get more interested."

In response to the burgeoning academic sector, the KRG in October last year initiated a major reform of the education system—the education ministry is tackling everything from academic freedom to nepotism, says spokesman Fuad Ali Smail. The ministry has also suspended the licensing process for new private universities—a move intended to maintain the quality of the region's universities.

"Before, we would hire people based on their connections and political affiliation," says Mr. Smail. "Now, it will be based on their education, CV [résumé] and job interview."

At the same time, with a \$100 million grant from the Qatari government, the KRG is sending 1,400 students abroad on full scholarships, to study for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, with the stipulation that they will return home upon completion. Students qualify for this program based on their academic

records. Most are Kurdish, but some are exiles from the south. In addition, professors will go on six-month training programs to Europe and the U.S.

"We were isolated for so many years, we need to train professors on an international level," Mr. Smail says.

Meanwhile, Iraq's south remains unstable. "We still have a relationship with the rest of Iraq," says Mr. Smail. "But we can't wait for the rest of Iraq to be stable. We need to help them here."

When asked about her plans after university, Ms. Amir, the AUI-S student, hesitates. "I can't picture myself going back to Baghdad," she says. "I don't see a bright future there." Still, she says she can't imagine leaving Iraq either, saying, "I want to stay because I want to change things."

The New York Times MAY 18, 2011

Anger Lingers in Iraqi Kurdistan After a Crackdown

By TIM ARANGO and
MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq — The protesters are gone from the central square, pushed out by the brutal tactics of the security forces. The jails have been emptied of the young students and journalists who were rounded up for speaking their mind in public. The wounded are home, quietly nursing their injuries.

The pro-democracy protests sweeping the Arab world arrived in the semiautonomous Kurdish region of Iraq nearly three months ago, inspired by the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt. But the protests here ended up more like those in Bahrain and Oman, crushed by an authoritarian government.

"We are ashamed of what they have done," said Bayan Barwai, a member of the Islamic Union Party, an opposition party that supported the protests. "Sixty days and nothing."

The crackdown in the region known as Iraqi Kurdistan, in which at least 10 people were killed, has exposed troubling questions about the kind of government the American war has left in Iraq's most stable region, as



Ayman Oghanna for The New York Times

During the February demonstrations, protesters in Sulaimaniya gave flowers to the Kurdish regional government's security forces as a gesture of peace but to no avail: at least 10 people were killed when the protests were broken up.

well as accusations that the Americans condoned the violent response.

While the American invasion toppled Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, it has emboldened the Kurdish regional government, long dominated by two

parties with an entrenched patronage system, to tighten its grip on power.

"The parties today behave just like how the Baathists behaved before," said Chnor Muhammed, a 33-year-old journalist who received a wound to

her left hand, referring to Mr. Hussein's party.

The protests that broke out here in mid-February took the Kurdish region by surprise. Located in northern Iraq, it has been relatively free of the violence that tore the rest of the country apart, making it a haven for foreign investment, and it has close ties to the United States, which has provided security guarantees stretching back to the days of the no-fly zone after the 1991 Persian Gulf war.

Nearly every day, hundreds and, at times, thousands of people turned out in the central square of Sulaimaniya to demand an end to joint rule by a two-party system, which they said was corrupt and repressive. The protesters demanded the resignations of high-ranking officials, the installation of a temporary government and new elections.

"People here are as frustrated as the rest of the Middle East," said Muhammed Tawfeek, the spokesman of Gorran, an opposition party that joined the street protests.

He said the crackdown, and threat of arrest, sent many of the protest organizers into hiding. "There are lots of young people who can't go back to their universities or their homes," he said.

After more than two months of daily protests, the demonstrations were quashed last month when the regional government ordered the security forces to occupy the central square. The security forces opened fire and detained protesters, actions that registered sharp rebukes from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The crackdown has presented an unexpected challenge to American diplomats who have relied on the region to be a stable counterpoint to the continued violence and political dysfunction that roils the rest of Iraq.

"Kurdistan is the only place in Iraq that the United States can be proud of," said Airy Hirseen, a leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which governs the region along with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Mr. Hirseen said that he had been in contact with American officials during the protests, and that they did not press the authorities to end their

aggressive response.

A number of witnesses said that an American military officer was seen at the central square during the protests, and the perception grew among the demonstrators that the Americans condoned the harsh response.

"They gave the green light for the P.U.K. to do whatever they want to the protesters," said Adnan Osman, a member of the regional Parliament from the Gorran party. "The embassy should give a statement and clear it up."

An American Embassy spokesman said the Americans urged the Kurdish security forces to show restraint, and for both sides to refrain from violence.

"The U.S. position has been clear: the people in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, like people throughout Iraq and indeed throughout the region, have the universal right to demonstrate peacefully, to freely assemble, to seek redress from their government and to express themselves without fear of intimidation or death," said the spokesman, David J. Ranz. "We have encouraged the Kurdistan regional government to respond to the legitimate grievances and concerns expressed by the demonstrators."

The Kurdish government, however, has not undertaken any significant reforms since the unrest began, illustrating what many see as waning American influence as the United States approaches the deadline to withdraw all of its troops.

"The Kurds are an important American ally and the domestic situation in Iraq is very fragile, and Washington is wary of weighing in heavily in a way that could rock an already unstable boat," said Kenneth Pollack, an expert on national security issues at the Brookings Institution.

He said the Americans' response to the crackdowns was similar to its response to unrest in other countries, particularly Bahrain, with whom the Americans believe they need a long-term strategic relationship.

American officials said there had been some positive signs, like a recent request by the Kurdish government for help training its forces on

crowd control. According to Lt. Gen. Michael Ferriter, the American officer in charge of advising and training Iraqi forces, the training was recently provided.

Meanwhile, some Kurdish officials have echoed other authoritarian governments in the region. Mr. Hirseen, the Kurdistan Democratic Party leader, blamed a trinity of state enemies for the protests: terrorists, foreign agents and Islamic extremists.

The opposition has said those charges are absurd. Mr. Tawfeek, the Gorran spokesman, said: "There is no Islamic flavor in it. It's all about democracy, separation of power and clean elections."

Mr. Hirseen said the protests and his government's response reflected a generational divide between the democratic aspirations of Kurdish youth and the traumas of dictatorship, civil war and genocide that still haunted the old guard. The current leadership, which came of age when violence was the norm, is more likely to see violence as an acceptable tool of government authority. "You can't be surprised with people in my generation who say, 'I love guns.'" he said.

For now, the protest movement here has stalled, but the anger among the opposition and young generation is only growing.

"I don't think it's over," said Mr. Osman, of Gorran. "The boiling will continue. I think the protests will start again, even stronger."

Kurdish Authorities and Opposition Gesture New Talks

RUDAW

Leaders of the three opposition parties in Iraqi Kurdistan were due to meet in the office of the Gorran (change) Movement in Sulaimani this week, but the meeting was postponed.

A source from the opposition said that the meeting was to discuss the recent request of Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Region that the opposition and authorities meet face to face to solve the current upheavals in the area.

Barzani met with a group of Kurdish intellectuals and members of social organizations this week. Following this he spoke to the media, urging all parties to return to the negotiation table and meet unconditionally to reach a solution.

"I ask all parties to act based on their national and historic responsibilities and turn a new page in their relations to help reach a lasting solution for our problems," said Barzani.

The three opposition parties met in April, at the peak of the protests in Sulaimani, and drafted a 22-point project for reform in Kurdistan, which they later presented to the authorities.

In a recent exclusive interview with Rudaw, Yousif Muhammad, the head of Gorran's political research group, said that his group is ready to resume talks and that the proposed project is not a page from the Koran—in other words, it shouldn't be taboo to alter.

"We can meet for talks and not make our project a condition at all," said Muhammad. "Let the PUK and KDP [the ruling parties] also present their proposals. If we have the will we can solve everything, but not if we procrastinate."

Generally the situation is understood as a stalemate between the authorities and opposition in the Kurdistan region. The streets of Sulaimani are calm, thanks to the presence of heavy security forces in the main area where demonstrations took place for two months.

During the protests Rudaw ran a poll asking readers if they thought the opposition had hijacked the protests. The authorities said that the opposition was behind the unrest, and therefore it wasn't clear exactly what people's demands were.

The result of the poll showed that 48



Kurdish opposition leaders in a meeting in April. Photo Rudaw.

percent of those who had voted on our website believed the opposition had hijacked the protests in Sulaimani; 31 percent believed they had not.

Ali Awni, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) leadership council, believes that it was in fact the opposition that started the protests in the first place.

"I believe that these protests did not originate with people. The KDP would not forbid a popular movement. It was started by the Gorran and the Islamic Union," said Awni. "If it was a people's uprising, it would have grown and would not have stopped."

Awni saw the end of the protests as a failure of the opposition, who may not get as many seats in parliament in the next elections. But Gorran spokesperson Muhammad Tofiq completely disagrees with Awni's analysis and blames the end of the protests on the heavy-handed crackdown on protestors by security forces.

"I am sure it will start again. Because of the presence of armed groups, Peshmarga, Asayish [security], army... the people have left the square. But it doesn't mean it won't start again, because they want their demands to be met," said Tofiq.

Karwan Ali, a journalist working with Kurdistan Nwe – the mouthpiece of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two ruling parties in the government – believes that the protests were first started by people, but that Gorran's involvement changed its course.

"It started as a popular thing, but after the clashes it took another direction," said Ali.

Ali called Gorran's participation in the demonstrations undemocratic.

"They speak in the name of the people, and that is not democratic. They demand the resignation of the government and President Massoud Barzani, but Barzani was democratically elected. Asking for his resignation is undemocratic," he said.

During the protests the authorities refused to cave in to most of the demonstrators' demands, as they feared the opposition had usurped the demonstrations for their own political gain. But Sherko Jawdat, who works as an economic development specialist for the Islamic Union, one of the three opposition groups, believes that it is legitimate and normal for the opposition to stand behind people's demands.

"Opposition parties everywhere support the streets' call for reform, it is a normal thing," said Jawdat.

He added that the 22-point project that the opposition leaders presented to the authorities included the people's demands, but the authorities had refused to listen to them.

Awni, of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, agreed the people's grievances are valid, such as "corruption, lack of public services and human rights values", but he acknowledged that the opposition, with their political agendas mixing with the protestors', made it difficult for authorities to distinguish the demands.

A young woman who participated in

the protests from beginning to end, and who wished to be identified by her initials, S.A., said that there were all kinds of people in the crowd, including some sympathetic to the two ruling parties.

"The crowd in Azadi Square was diverse - men and women from all walks of life were present," said S.A. "Some people were loyal to the opposition, some to the two ruling parties, and a larger number were independent thinkers, workers, journalists, ordinary people who were enthusiastic about this

new movement and believed in its peaceful, modern, and independent form.'

A young student from the American University in Sulaimani, who asked to be identified as Sherwan, did not participate in the protests at all, because, as he put it, he was tired of all the standoffs between the authorities and opposition.

However, Sherwan still criticized the use of force by the authorities during the protests, where more than ten people were killed and many more

injured after live ammunition was fired.

"If we want to be a democracy, we have to start acting like one, and shooting the protesters is certainly not the way forward," he said.

With the recent call for the resumption of talks from the president, and the opposition leaders working on meeting, both sides seem to be looking to each other for a way out of the current stalemate.

The New York Times MAY 19, 2011

Deadly Blasts in Kirkuk Hit Iraqi Security Forces, kill at least 29

By JACK HEALY

BAGHDAD — Three explosions aimed at Iraqi security forces ripped through the divided northern city of Kirkuk on Thursday morning, killing at least 29 people, most of them police officers, and wounding scores more.

The attackers used a now familiar tactic, detonating successive explosions so those who rush to the scene of the first blast are hurt. The initial blast was caused by a small improvised explosive device attached to a sedan outside the local police headquarters. After the police arrived, a larger car bomb went off, killing 26 officers and 3 civilians.

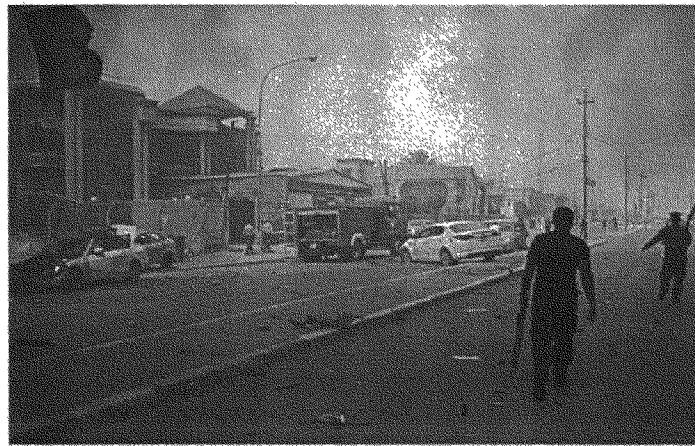
"I didn't feel anything," said Kaweh Hama Rashid, a police officer wounded in the second blast. "I just fell to the ground, and blood covered me. I saw all of my friends dying and wounded in front of my eyes."

About 30 minutes later, a third car bomb exploded near the provincial government headquarters, wounding about 13 people, including Kirkuk's head of criminal investigation, the target of the explosion, security officials said.

Three ethnic groups are grappling for control of the Kirkuk area and its rich oil reserves. The fight for primacy among Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens is one of the most potentially volatile issues facing Iraq as American troops prepare to withdraw over the next six months.

"Kirkuk is witnessing a deterioration in the security situation," said Hassan Toran, a Turkmen and head of the provincial council. "It's possible the attacks will increase if American troops leave Iraq."

Security officials said that at least 105 people were wounded in the blasts



Iraqi security officers went to the scene of a bombing in the northern city of Kirkuk on Thursday.

and that victims with critical burns were ferried to more advanced hospitals that were one to two hours away.

Dozens of wounded police officers filled the hallways of Kirkuk Hospital, some laid out on blood-covered floors, as family members crowded the entrance. Doctors said they were overwhelmed by the flood of people with severe burns and shrapnel wounds, and they put out a call for blood donors. The United States military sent a team of medical providers after receiving requests for help.

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki ordered investigators to the scene of the bombings, and said the government would compensate the victims' families.

Earlier this year, the United States military sent troops into Kirkuk to help defuse a standoff between rival groups of security forces that had threatened to destabilize the city.

The dispute began in February when leaders of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region deployed soldiers near largely Arab neighborhoods around Kirkuk, saying they were worried about attacks on peaceful demonstrations. The

move angered local Arab leaders, and American diplomats and military officials pressed Kurdish leaders to withdraw the soldiers.

Some officials and residents in Kirkuk said the standoff, which ended without bloodshed, demonstrated the need for a continuing American presence in the region. Under a security agreement, the 46,000 American troops remaining in Iraq are to withdraw by the end of the year.

Iraqi leaders have said they plan to hold discussions in coming weeks about whether they should ask for some American troops to stay longer — a politically delicate question. American leaders have suggested they would consider the request.

But military transfers are already taking place. On Sunday, the American military handed over a base in Kirkuk Province staffed by 160 soldiers to Iraqi security forces.

Lt. Col. Steve Wollman, a spokesman for American forces in northern Iraq, said there did not appear to be any connection between the base closing and Thursday's attack.



MAY 20, 2011

Kurdish Issue Heats Up Before Turkey's Parliamentary Vote

Voice of America

Dorian Jones | Istanbul May 20, 2011

With just weeks to go before Turkey's June 12 parliamentary vote, tensions are rising over Turkey's Kurdish minority's demands for the greater rights. The election campaign has already been marred by violent demonstrations, clashes between the army and the PKK rebel group as well as many arrests. But the ruling AK party are committed to taking a tough stance against the unrest.

Kurdish youths clash with police in the center of Istanbul.

Similar clashes have also occurred across much of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast. It is in response to last weekend's killing by the Turkish army of 12 members of Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers Party, or the PKK.

Tough stance

Since the start of his election campaign, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has taken a tough stance against the rebel group and the country's main pro-Kurdish party, the BDP.

"We can't get anywhere with those who try to undermine the democratic will of the people," he said in an address to parliamentary candidates. "There is no longer a Kurdish question in this country. I do not accept this."

That stance differs from 2005 when the prime minister declared in a speech "There was a Kurdish problem."

Greater cultural rights

In the last general election in 2007, Erdogan campaigned on the platform of meeting Kurdish demands for greater cultural rights. In the past few years, the government developed a 24-hour state Kurdish TV station and launched what it called the "Democratic Opening" to end the 26-year conflict with the PKK. But that broke down in mutual recriminations.

"The whole government was disappointed, even resentful, about their attempts towards the Kurds. But they



Photo: Reuters

Kurdish demonstrators clash with riot police in Istanbul, May 16, 2011

saw the benefit of getting nationalist votes away from the nationalistic party. They saw there is a solid support ground and they can easily get more votes by underlining their nationalist credentials rather than democratic credentials and this explains their present policy," Political columnist Nuray Mert explains.

Increasing legal pressure

In last few years the pro-Kurdish BDP has been getting more organized and has high hopes of defeating the AKP in the predominantly Kurdish southeast in the upcoming elections. But the party is facing increasing legal pressure.

Last month there were nationwide protests by Kurds when many BDP-supported parliamentary candidates were banned by Turkey's electoral commission because of alleged links to the PKK. The decision was later reversed, but during the unrest one person was shot dead by the police and hundreds arrested. According to the Turkish-based Human Rights Society, in past 50 days more than 2500 ethnic Kurds have been detained by the police. This month, Aysel Tugluk a leading BDP supported parliamentary candidate gave this warning about the crackdown.

"A calamity is just around the corner. I am not pessimistic," she says. "I only possess the sensibility that emanates from intuition and foresight. Once again we are at a crossroads. Everyone who is concerned about the Kurdish issue should know that we are moving toward ground zero, and fast."

So far, the AKP has defended the measures taken against the BDP. The prime minister accused the party of being involved in an attack earlier this

month by the PKK on a campaign bus of its members returning from a rally.

AKP parliamentary candidate Volkan Bozkir, is a former Turkish ambassador to the European Union. "It is not because they have said something. But they are part of a terrorist organization. They have been helping those terrorists who are killing young people," he said.

PKK's ultimatum

Last month imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan issued an ultimatum that unless talks start over greater Kurdish rights within three days of the general election, fighting will resume.

But Political scientist Cengiz Aktar says any hope of dialogue is remote. "The government have extreme difficulties to understand that they should talk to Kurds. In their minds there are plenty of bad Kurds and a few good Kurds who belong to their party. When there is vacuum in policy others come in and fill this vacuum, both the Turkish military and PKK may come back. Unless the government solves the Kurdish problem through political means the military will always be around," he said.

The ending of the Turkish army's interference in politics is heralded by the ruling AK party as well as the EU which Turkey is seeking to join - one of its most important democratic accomplishments of Erdogan's rule. But that breakthrough came at a time of relative peace. A return to widespread conflict, observers warn, could well unravel many of the country's achievements.

Dorian Jones is a freelance journalist living in Turkey.

29 morts dans une série d'attentats frappe la ville de Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak



Ces attaques interviennent au moment où l'armée américaine, qui participe à une force tripartite censée contenir les tensions entre Arabes et Kurdes dans la province riche en pétrole dont Kirkouk est la capitale, a d'ores et déjà commencé à se retirer de certains secteurs de cette zone en prévision de son départ définitif du pays à la fin de l'année.

par AFP

Une série d'attentats contre la police a fait au moins 29 morts et 90 blessés jeudi dans la ville multiethnique de Kirkouk, au nord de Bagdad, dans les violences les plus meurtrières en Irak depuis près de deux mois.

Ces attaques interviennent au moment où l'armée américaine, qui participe à une force tripartite censée contenir les tensions entre Arabes et Kurdes dans la province riche en pétrole dont Kirkouk est la capitale, a d'ores et déjà commencé à se retirer de certains secteurs de cette zone en prévision de son départ définitif du pays à la fin de l'année.

Les trois attaques de jeudi, qui ont eu lieu dans un intervalle d'un peu plus d'une heure dans cette ville à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, posent à nouveau la question de la capacité des forces de sécurité dans un secteur où la lutte contre les groupes armés est compliquée par les tensions intercommunautaires.

Les trois explosions ont fait 29 morts, dont 26 policiers, et 90 blessés, selon Sadiq Omar Rassoul, directeur des services de santé de la province de Kirkouk.

Un responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur à Bagdad a de son côté fait état de 29 morts et 80 blessés tandis qu'un responsable des forces de sécu-

rité a affirmé que 27 personnes avaient péri.

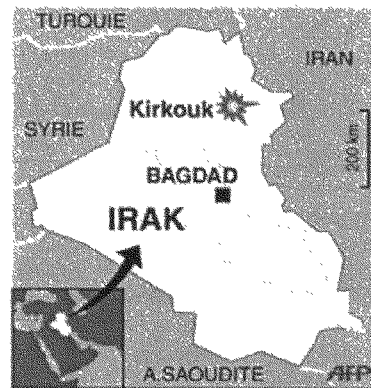
Les deux premières explosions, survenues dans un parking du quartier général de la police de Kirkouk vers 09H20 (06H20 GMT), ont vraisemblablement été les plus meurtrières.

La première a été provoquée par une bombe magnétique sur un véhicule, suivie quelques minutes plus tard d'un attentat à la voiture piégée dans le parking, selon le commandant de police Salam Zangana.

Le policier Chirzad Kamel a confié à l'AFP s'être précipité avec un collègue vers le parking après la première explosion.

"Quand nous sommes arrivés il y a eu une énorme explosion. Je suis tombé en arrière et j'ai vu des collègues morts, d'autres blessés, d'autres prendre feu", a-t-il raconté à l'hôpital général, où il faisait soigner ses blessures au ventre et au visage.

Une heure plus tard, vers 10H30, c'est le convoi du chef du département des enquêtes criminelles de la police locale, le colonel Aras Mohamed, qui a été la cible d'un attentat à la voiture piégée. Un responsable des services de sécurité a dans un premier temps fait état de 14 blessés, dont le colonel, dans cette puissante explosion qui a endommagé au moins sept véhicules du convoi.



Des voitures de police ont ensuite sillonné les rues de Kirkouk en appelant par haut-parleurs la population à aller donner du sang.

Selon des sources des services de sécurité, des attentats à Bagdad et Baqouba ont par ailleurs fait deux morts et 10 blessés jeudi, journée la plus meurtrière en Irak depuis le 29 mars, quand l'attaque du conseil provincial de Tikrit avait fait 58 morts.

Dans un communiqué, le représentant spécial du secrétaire général de l'ONU pour l'Irak, Ad Melkert, a condamné ces attaques, exprimant "sa préoccupation face à la poursuite d'actes de violences contre les forces de sécurité et les responsables gouvernementaux".

Ces attentats surviennent au lendemain de l'annonce de l'arrestation du chef militaire présumé d'Al-Qaïda en Irak et de trois autres dirigeants de la branche irakienne de la nébuleuse extrémiste.

La province de Kirkouk demeure une des plus instables d'Irak du fait de tensions ethniques liées à la dispute entre le gouvernement central de Bagdad et les autorités régionales du Kurdistan qui revendiquent ce territoire. Certains responsables américains voient dans la question de Kirkouk une des plus grandes menaces pour la stabilité de l'Irak.

Pour autant, en prévision de son retrait d'Irak, l'armée américaine a officiellement restitué dimanche à Bagdad la responsabilité de la base McHenry, un avant-poste créé en 2003 dans le secteur de Hawija, à l'ouest de Kirkouk et qui a abrité jusqu'à 500 soldats.

De nouvelles violences agitent la région kurde de Turquie

A trois semaines des élections nationales, les provinces de l'Est et du Sud-Est s'embrasent

Istanbul
Correspondance

La trêve est fragile dans les régions kurdes de Turquie, où l'Etat turc et la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) s'affrontent depuis 1984. A trois semaines des élections nationales, les provinces de l'Est et du Sud-Est, majoritairement kurdes, se sont de nouveau embrasées ces derniers jours. Des manifestations ont dégénéré en affrontements avec les forces de police dans les grandes villes de la région, ainsi qu'à Istanbul. Les commerçants ont tiré le rideau toute la semaine.

Au lycée Atatürk de Sînak, les élèves ont « boycotté » les cours et chanté des hymnes à la gloire des « martyrs » de la guérilla. Les soldats de la caserne voisine ont répliqué par des tirs, sans faire de blessés. L'armée turque a dressé des barrages et renforcé ses opérations aériennes pour traquer les rebelles, éparpillés dans les montagnes qui chevauchent la Turquie, l'Iran et l'Irak. La campagne électorale se déroule dans une ambiance de plomb.

La mort, entre le 12 et le 14 mai, de 12 rebelles kurdes, tués par l'armée turque alors qu'ils franchissaient la frontière en provenance d'Irak, a provoqué cette éruption de colère. Un groupe de 300 personnes, accompagné de plusieurs députés du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP, formation légale proche du PKK), a forcé le barrage, mardi 17 mai, pour se rendre sur le champ de bataille et récupérer les corps abandonnés dans les montagnes, sous les tirs des soldats turcs. Les militaires ont saisi les dépouilles mortelles et arrêté des

parents. « Ils ont tiré sur des villageois. Un obus de mortier est tombé à 100 mètres de moi. Les familles veulent seulement voir le corps de leurs enfants », plaide Gültañ Kisanak, vice-présidente du BDP. Quand une femme grimpe dans la montagne avec son enfant de 6 mois dans les bras, pour récupérer un corps, c'est qu'on touche le fond », poursuit-elle. Le deuil décrété par le mouvement kurde dans la région a été massivement suivi.

Procès à Diyarbakir

Les responsables du BDP accusent le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan d'être responsable de ces « provocations ». Pressions et violences nourrissent les rancœurs depuis des semaines. Environ 2500 personnes, élus, militants, responsables associatifs, ont été arrêtés dans les régions kurdes, ces trois derniers mois, et accusés de collusion avec la guérilla.

Dans le même temps, le procès de 151 élus et responsables politiques kurdes, soupçonnés de former un réseau de soutien civil au PKK, se poursuit à Diyarbakir. La guérilla joue, elle aussi, la carte de la radicalisation à l'approche de ces élections. Au moins 32 attaques ont été recensées dans le Sud-Est contre des permanences électorales du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, au pouvoir).

Début mai, deux policiers ont été tués, dans une attaque contre un convoi de véhicules après un meeting du premier ministre Erdogan, dans la ville de Kastamonu. Et Abdullah Öcalan, le leader du PKK emprisonné depuis 1999, a promis une guerre sanglante sitôt passé les élections législatives. ■

Guillaume Perrier

L'héroïsme des Syriens appelle notre soutien

La Syrie n'en finit pas de compter ses morts. La répression implacable, effrayante, y compris à l'arme lourde, contre des manifestants pacifiques est insupportable. Des fosses communes auraient été découvertes et des réfugiés arrivent maintenant au Liban, fuyant le déchaînement des violences du régime baassiste. La mollesse des réactions internationales face à ces événements est inacceptable.

Seul le Conseil des droits de l'homme de l'ONU a protesté contre la répression organisée par le président syrien, Bachar Al-Assad. Pour autant, contrairement à la Libye, la Syrie n'a pas été exclue de cette instance. Elle doit l'être sans tarder.

Les Etats-Unis et la Communauté européenne ont décidé le gel des avoirs d'un certain nombre de dignitaires du régime syrien. Etonnamment, le président Al-Assad n'est pas concerné, pas plus que ceux qui mènent la répression, tels ses ministres de la défense et de l'intérieur. Pourquoi épargner les plus hauts responsables de la barbarie en Syrie ?

Un cauchemar

Comment continuer à entretenir des relations diplomatiques normales avec un régime qui martyrise sa population ? Les Etats démocratiques doivent, au moins, convoquer les ambassadeurs de Syrie pour exiger l'arrêt des violences, et mettre en œuvre des sanctions sérieuses.

Dans les villes assiégées ou investies par les tanks et les troupes, les populations civiles vivent un cauchemar : le gaz, l'électricité

Fethi Benslama

Psychanalyste, professeur à l'université Paris-Diderot

Jacky Mamou

Ancien président de Médecins du monde

sont coupés, parfois l'eau. Les vivres et les médicaments manquent. Les soldats et les miliciens frappent, tuent et terrorisent les populations.

Outre les bombardements et les meurtres de manifestants, il y a de très nombreuses « disparitions » qui suscitent les plus vives inquiétudes. Des centaines de militants des droits de l'homme et d'hommes politiques ont été arrêtés. Les Etats démocratiques doivent soutenir fermement les avocats, les ONG de droits de l'homme qui réclament de rencontrer ces personnes afin de les sauver de la torture ou de la mort.

Il faut saluer le courage et l'héroïsme des manifestants qui exigent la liberté et la fin d'un demi-siècle de dictature des Assad sur le pays. Mais le courage et l'héroïsme ne suffisent pas face à la violence sauvage d'un régime féroce et sans scrupule. Des initiatives ont été prises par la société civile tel que l'appel des cinéastes syriens.

Il est grand temps que leurs homologues du monde entier les soutiennent. Il y a urgence ! ■



Cocktail Molotov en main, des jeunes Kurdes se battent pour leur héros emprisonné

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 20 mai 2011 (AFP)

ADEM, 15 ANS, est passé maître dans la fabrication de cocktails Molotov et il n'a pas son pareil pour lancer des pavés. Son héros est Abdullah Öcalan, le chef emprisonné de la rébellion kurde, même si de nombreux pays qualifient le mouvement armé de terroriste.

Adem est l'un de ces milliers de jeunes Kurdes de Turquie qui en découd régulièrement avec les forces de l'ordre, lors d'affrontements où des bâtiments publics sont incendiés et des manifestants ou policiers blessés, ou tués.

"La police a des gaz lacrymogènes, mais nous avons les pierres, et les cocktails Molotov", explique Adem, dans son uniforme de lycéen, interrogé discrètement dans une rue de Diyarbakir, la plus grande ville du sud-est, où la population est majoritairement kurde.

"Parfois, on les fabrique nous-mêmes, parfois quelqu'un passe et les distribue... Et on attaque les trottoirs à la masse", ajoute-t-il.

Lui et ses amis sont des sympathisants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), le mouvement en lutte armée depuis 1984, qui est qualifié de terroriste par Ankara et une bonne partie de la communauté internationale. Et Abdullah Öcalan, emprisonné à vie dans une île de la mer de Marmara, est leur héros.

"Le chef est en prison, c'est pour ça qu'on est dans la rue", assure Salman, 18 ans, qui désigne les banques et les bâtiments publics comme des "institutions hostiles", et explique comment, dans les combats de rues, on "tient une position", avant d'être parfois contraint de "faire retraite pour se reposer".

Des réformes encouragées par l'Union européenne ont ces dernières années amélioré la situation des Kurdes, 12 à 15 millions des 73 millions d'habitants de la Turquie.

Des radios et télévisions et des cours privés en langue kurde ont été ouverts, et on parle le kurde lors des réunions politiques.

Un tabou, l'interdiction du mot kurde ou de l'utilisation de la langue, a été levé en Turquie. Mais ces progrès sont de peu d'effet sur une partie de la jeunesse, pénétrée de haine.

Une génération qui n'a jamais connu la paix, qui a vécu dans les années 1990 les pires années de l'insurrection menée par le PKK: le sang quotidiennement versé par l'une ou l'autre partie, les persécutions menées par le régime d'Ankara, les villages incendiés par l'armée, les déplacements de populations.

Ibrahim Oruc a connu cette époque: il était adolescent, originaire de



Bismil, une ville près de Diyarbakir, lorsque ses parents ont quitté leur village.

Le conflit l'a rattrapé le mois dernier, 17 ans plus tard, lorsque des policiers ont ouvert le feu lors d'une manifestation violente à Bismil, protestant contre l'exclusion des listes électorales de candidats kurdes, pour les élections législatives du 12 juin prochain.

La décision a finalement été annulée, mais Ibrahim, un des manifestants, est mort sous les balles, et les violences ont repris.

Aucun représentant de l'Etat n'a envoyé les moindres condoléances, explique son père.

"Mon plus jeune fils, qui a neuf ans, répète que la police a tué son frère. Quel respect aura-t-il plus tard pour les institutions?", se demande Omer Oruc.

"Des tas de jeunes viennent me voir et disent qu'ils vont venger Ibrahim... Je leur dis que la meilleure vengeance est d'étudier, et de devenir des hommes instruits", ajoute-t-il, contenant des larmes.

Quelques heures après le décès d'Ibrahim, le 20 avril, des jeunes ont incendié les locaux du parti au pouvoir, l'AKP, le Parti de la Justice et du développement.

Huseyin Yagmur, le responsable local de l'AKP, n'a depuis pas trouvé de nouveau local, et il transporte son matériel électoral dans sa voiture.

Ceux qui acceptent de lui louer quelque chose sont découragés par des menaces, explique-t-il. "Moi aussi, je suis kurde, mais je ne suis pas séparatiste... Ils parlent de démocratie et de droits de l'homme, mais je n'ai même pas un endroit où m'installer", dit-il.



Irak: HRW dénonce les atteintes à la liberté de la presse au Kurdistan

BAGDAD, 24 mai 2011 (AFP)

L'ORGANISATION Human Rights Watch (HRW) a appelé mardi les autorités kurdes à cesser d'intimider les journalistes, faisant état d'atteintes croissantes à la liberté de la presse dans cette région autonome du nord de l'Irak après les manifestations de ces derniers mois.

"Les responsables du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan et les forces de sécurité sont responsables d'atteintes de plus en plus fortes à la liberté de travail des journalistes au Kurdistan irakien", indique dans un communiqué l'organisation de défense des droits de l'Homme basée à New-York.

"Les dirigeants régionaux doivent cesser de réprimer les journalistes au moyen de plaintes en diffamation, de coups, d'arrestations et de menaces de morts", poursuit HRW, relayant des préoccupations déjà exprimées par Reporters sans frontières.

Aucune réaction n'a pu être obtenue dans l'immédiat à ces accusations auprès des autorités du Kurdistan.

HRW cite notamment dans son communiqué le cas du magazine Lvin, poursuivi pour diffamation par le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président régional Massoud Barzani, qui demande la fermeture du titre.

L'organisation publie également le témoignage de Bryar Namiq, un journaliste de Kurdistan News Network qui affirme avoir été arrêté, insulté et battu par des membres des forces de sécurité le 11 mai alors qu'il travaillait à Souleimaniyeh, à 270 km de Bagdad.

Le Kurdistan a été en début d'année le théâtre d'importantes manifestations contre la corruption et l'hégémonie du PDK et de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président irakien Jalal Talabani sur la vie politique régionale.

HRW affirme que certains journalistes ayant couvert ou participé à ces protestations vivent désormais dans la crainte de représailles.

"Au moment où se multiplient les demandes au Moyen-Orient pour en finir avec la répression, les autorités kurdes tentent de museler et d'intimider les journalistes critiques", accuse Sarah Leah Whitson, directrice des programmes de HRW au Moyen-Orient.

Les Kurdes de Syrie très présents dans les manifestations

Au moins 27 personnes ont été tuées, le 20 mai, lors de mouvements pour la démocratie

Beyrouth

Correspondance

Quelle honte, les manifestants pacifiques sont reçus par les tirs ! », ont lancé, vendredi 20 mai, les milliers de protestataires réunis à Kamechliyé, ville à majorité kurde, dans le nord-est de la Syrie. Au cours des rassemblements après la prière, dans plusieurs localités du pays comme Baniyas (sur la côte méditerranéenne), Homs (sud) ou les banlieues de Damas, au moins 27 personnes ont été tuées, vendredi, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme.

Les opposants au régime de la famille Al-Assad avaient donné le nom d'« Azadi » à cette journée de mobilisation, un mot kurde qui signifie « liberté ». Ce choix ne doit rien au hasard. Depuis le début de la contestation, le 15 mars, la minorité non arabe – environ 2 millions de personnes – a pris part avec constance aux manifestations appelant à la « liberté » et à la « démocratie » en Syrie.

« Nous sommes unis »

Pour Eyad Aliko, 27 ans, fils de l'un des leaders kurdes syriens et activiste au sein de la formation Yekiti, la référence à un mot kurde, le 20 mai, est une « reconnaissance ». « En mars 2004, lors de notre mouvement pour revendiquer nos droits, aucun Arabe n'était avec nous. Ils craignaient une partition de la Syrie. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes unis, Arabes et Kurdes », poursuit le jeune homme. Réfugié à Beyrouth depuis plus d'un an, M. Aliko est en contact permanent avec les militants en Syrie.

Les revendications des Kurdes de Syrie sont doubles : elles concernent à la fois la scène nationale et le sort de la minorité. « Les Kurdes partagent les aspirations arabes à une ouverture du régime. Nous croyons aussi que seule la liberté nous per-

mettra d'obtenir nos droits », explique Eyad Aliko. La minorité est marginalisée dans le pays : répression de l'identité kurde au nom de l'« arabisme », restrictions à l'accès au logement et à la propriété. Sa mobilisation, depuis le début des années 2000, a été violemment réprimée, notamment lors du soulèvement de 2004. Face à un possible réveil de la minorité, le président syrien Bachar Al-Assad avait d'ailleurs, dès le 7 avril, émis un décret octroyant la nationalité aux quelque 300 000 Kurdes privés d'état civil depuis le début des années 1960. Cette mesure n'a pas, loin s'en faut, diminué la mobilisation dans les régions à majorité kurde, proches de la Turquie et du Kurdistan irakien.

Tout comme l'invitation des autorités à un dialogue national, le 13 mai n'a en rien entamé l'élan de l'ensemble des contestataires syriens. Le siège de la ville de Tall Kalakh, dans le sud du pays, a marqué un « tournant », estime un activiste des droits de l'homme : « Le régime est allé trop loin dans l'usage de la violence. » Selon plusieurs témoignages, plus de trente personnes ont été tuées dans cette ville, assaillie par l'armée le 14 mai et soumise à de nombreuses exactions. Les troupes avaient annoncé, le 19 mai, leur retrait. Un jeune homme originaire de Tall Kalakh rapportait que des centaines de militaires syriens étaient pourtant encore présents dans la ville, vendredi. L'armée a également coupé l'une des voies d'accès empruntées par les Syriens fuyant les violences dans cette région frontalière, pour gagner le nord du Liban.

Les opposants estiment que la mobilisation était forte, ce 20 mai, et soulignent l'expansion du mouvement. Les autorités, pour leur part, continuent de nier l'ampleur des manifestations. Selon l'agence de presse officielle SANA, « les rassemblements de dizaines ou de cen-

taines de citoyens après la prière du vendredi, appelant à la liberté, ont été rapidement dispersés ». La voix officielle du régime impute par ailleurs la mort de « 17 martyrs, civils, policiers et membres des forces de sécurité », vendredi, aux « tirs de groupes armés qui ont exploité les regroupements de citoyens à Idlib [sud-ouest de Damas] et dans les environs de Homs ». ■

Laure Stephan

L'Union européenne sanctionne le président syrien Bachar Al-Assad

L'UE demande au régime au pouvoir à Damas de « changer de cap ». L'Iran est également visé

Bruxelles

Bureau européen

Après les Etats-Unis, l'Union européenne a décidé, lundi 23 mai à Bruxelles, d'interdire de visa le président syrien Bachar Al-Assad et de geler ses avoirs en Europe. Cette décision porte à vingt-trois le nombre de dirigeants syriens sanctionnés par les Européens : un frère du président et plusieurs de ses cousins avaient déjà été visés début mai.

En dépit des demandes de la France, les Européens s'étaient dans un premier temps montrés indulgents à l'égard de M. Assad. En l'épargnant, ils souhaitaient favoriser la mise en place d'un dialogue entre son régime et les opposants en vue d'encourager les réformes politiques. En vain. Les ministres européens des affaires étrangères ont décidé de durcir le ton en raison de la poursuite de la répression menée contre les manifestants. Une répression dont le bilan dépasse les 900 morts, selon l'ONU et des organisations non gouvernementales (ONG). Lundi, les Vingt-Sept ont également appelé la Banque européenne d'investissement (BEI) à « ne pas approuver des opérations de financement en Syrie pour le moment ».

Les Etats-Unis avaient sanctionné Bachar Al-Assad le 18 mai, le président américain Barack Obama le prévenant au passage qu'il avait le choix entre « diriger la transition ou s'écarter ». Les Européens se gardent à ce jour de suggérer le départ de Bachar Al-Assad, par crainte de déstabiliser un pays voisin d'Israël. Ils se contentent de demander au président syrien de « changer de cap ». « Nous sommes aussi détermi-

nés que vis-à-vis de la Libye, mais le contexte est différent », a assuré Alain Juppé, le ministre français des affaires étrangères : « Il n'y a pas deux poids, deux mesures, (...) les sanctions, cela prend des semaines, mais c'est efficace », s'est-il justifié.

La question d'une résolution du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU condamnant la Syrie devrait être de nouveau discutée lors du sommet du G8, jeudi et vendredi à Deauville, a indiqué le chef de la diplomatie française : la Grande-Bretagne entend aller vite, la France tempore, car les Russes menacent toujours d'opposer leur veto. « La répression en Syrie se poursuit et il est important de voir reconnu le droit à un processus pacifique, la libération des prisonniers politiques et l'engagement de réformes, pas la répression », a dit le ministre britannique des affaires étrangères, William Hague.

« Une ingérence »

Les autorités syriennes ont quant à elles condamné ces sanctions en estimant qu'elles constituaient « une ingérence flagrante et manifeste dans les affaires internes de la Syrie » pour « tenter de déstabiliser sa sécurité ».

Outre des sanctions contre treize dignitaires biélorusses, d'autres mesures ont par ailleurs été décidées à l'encontre du principal allié régional de Damas, l'Iran, tandis que les pourparlers sur le programme nucléaire civil iranien sont dans l'impasse. Plus de cent entreprises soupçonnées d'être liées à ce programme, ainsi qu'à la fabrication de missiles iraniens, figurent dans le nouveau train de sanctions. ■

Philippe Ricard

Iraqi Officials Reject Demilitarization of Disputed Territories

By WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan -- The latest attacks on police in Kirkuk demonstrate the lack of security in Iraq, especially in areas that are disputed between Kurds and Arabs. The International Crisis Group, in their last report, called for the demilitarization of ethnically mixed regions and the replacement of soldiers with police, but Iraqi officials rejected the idea because security in these areas is poor.

The report, which was released in March, advises the Iraqi army and Peshmarga (Kurdish soldiers) to leave the disputed territories, with the aim of turning these areas into demilitarized zones in which neither group is authorized to operate.

"As in the rest of Iraq, the police in the disputed territories should provide internal security, while the army should be responsible for protecting the country's coast, borders and airspace," Joost Hiltermann, of the International Crisis Group, told Rudaw.

Hiltermann recognized that maintaining a viable police force in the disputed regions is "particularly difficult, yet keeping military forces in charge of internal policing would be a tragic error. The challenge will be in managing the transition."

But Iraqi officials think it is too early for this kind of change. "In Mosul, the police cannot control the governorate. Not now. We still need the army in Mosul. The police will never control the city if the army is not here," said Khasro Gorran, the former deputy governor of Mosul and head of the Kurdish Brotherhood bloc. But he also said that they don't have any problems with the police in the disputed areas of Mosul, which are controlled by the police and Peshmarga.

Aziz Waysi, commander of the Zerevani forces, claims that the police "sometimes help terrorists for money and other reasons. Especially in Mosul, we have a lot of examples." He says the situation would worsen were the region demilitarized. "The balance would be demolished and the situation would turn bad."

Giving an example, he spoke of the anti-government protests in Kirkuk's Hawija district on February 25, which the police weren't strong enough to control. Waysi even accused the Iraqi



Iraqi police by the Hamrin mountains south of Kirkuk. Photo by Wladimir Van Wilgenburg.

army of bringing in 'terrorists'.

In Mosul, where there are tensions between the local Sunni Arab governor and the Iraqi army over who controls security, army officials say the police aren't strong enough to control the province.

Iraqi army Colonel Rewbar Younis from Mosul says the situation needs to improve first. "Maybe in the future, when security is better, the Iraqi army can leave. But for the moment the Iraqi army will control the city."

In the disputed region of Kirkuk the police themselves say they are not yet ready to take over. The General Director of the Kirkuk Police, Jamal Taher Baker, says the Iraqi police in Kirkuk have weekly meetings with both the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmarga forces.

Currently there is a plan to establish joint security forces of Kurds and Arabs by July of this year. These joint forces will take over security from U.S. troops and work to repel violence in Kirkuk. Called Golden Lion, the forces will consist of police, Peshmarga, and Iraqi soldiers.

Baker says Kirkuk will eventually need the Iraqi army outside the city only. "In the whole world this is the duty of the army [protecting borders], but the situation is different here. And when the terrorist attacks are finished and the situation has improved, then the Iraqi army will leave the province, but now we need them."

The Kurdish Minister of Peshmarga, Jaafar Mustafa, who is responsible for the Kurdish armed forces, agrees. He thinks the police are not strong enough. "The police cannot control the regions outside of the city of Kirkuk. The police

are only within the city."

A few years ago there were fears that the presence of both the Iraqi army and Kurdish armed forces in this area could result in clashes or even a civil war, but the establishment of checkpoints and the joining of Kurdish and Iraqi forces prevented further clashes. Despite these conflict prevention measures, however, there was a clash between the Kurdish security agents and the Iraqi army on April 26 in Kirkuk. Local security officials quickly downplayed the event.

"Clashes in Kirkuk and along other parts of the trigger line are always possible, and could escalate in the absence of good-faith political negotiations aimed at determining the boundary of the Kurdistan region," said Hiltermann.

"As recent incidents have shown, each side may be testing the other's resolve - and persuade the U.S. that it is too early to withdraw its forces. This is playing with fire. What each side should do - and what they owe to future generations - is to make a genuine effort to reach across the table."

The recent insurgent attacks in Iraq will probably force the Iraqi army to continue to play an active role in combating insurgents in the hotbed of violence surrounding the so-called Sunni triangle.

Iraq's army chief, Babaker Zebari, warned in an interview with Rudaw that the Iraqi army won't be able to protect Iraq until 2020. This makes it unlikely that the ICG recommendation will be implemented by the Kurdish and Iraqi government.

Energized, thousands of protesters defy Assad

BEIRUT

Violent crackdown fails to dissuade crowds as U.S. steps up pressure

BY ANTHONY SHADID

Thousands of Syrians defied a ferocious crackdown and took to the streets Friday in what appeared to be an invigorated but potentially dangerous moment in the nine-week uprising against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad. Human rights activists said at least 26 people were killed when security forces opened fire.

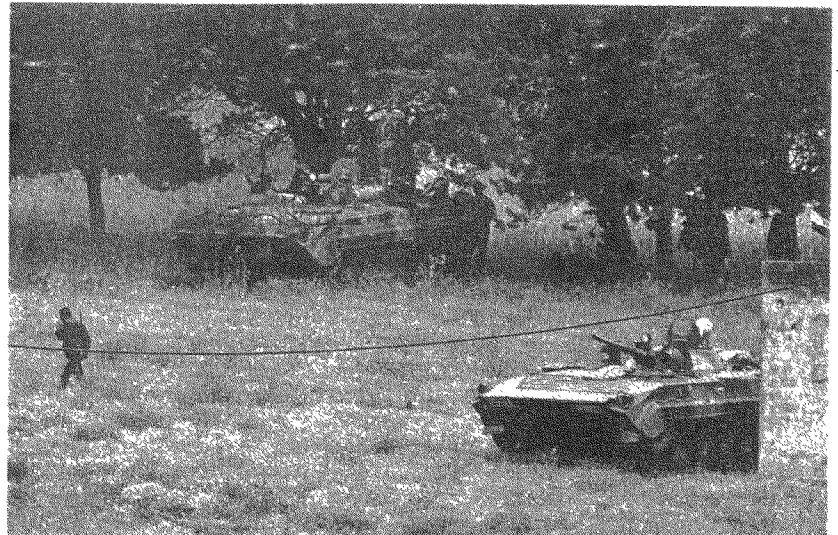
In an unsettling sign for the government, protesters gathered in somewhat greater numbers in the capital, Damascus, which has remained relatively quiet until now. Far bigger crowds than last week also took part in protests in Baniyas, a coastal town that the government had declared quiet after deploying troops there weeks ago, and Homs, a city in central Syria that is emerging as a locus of the challenge to Mr. Assad's authority.

Activists who provided details of the gatherings said some protesters raised an old version of Syria's flag in the most restive neighborhood of Homs. And in Albu Kamal, a town near the Iraqi border, a resident said protesters burned a municipal building and stormed a jail, freeing prisoners.

The turnout, though still far short of the mass demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia, suggested that the government's sweeping crackdown, in which hundreds have been killed and thousands were arrested, is proving incapable of crushing the dissent. Though the government has offered tentative steps toward reform, opposition figures have demanded an end to the government's violence, a step it so far appears unwilling to take.

"No dialogue with tanks and soldiers," went a slogan in Deir al-Zour, a town in eastern Syria.

The protests came as the Obama administration ratcheted up pressure on Mr. Assad, who American officials had described as a reformer as recently as March. The administration imposed sanctions on him and six other senior officials this week. And in Mr. Obama's



MOHAMED AZAKIR/REUTERS

Syrian soldiers on Friday in the village of Arida, near the Lebanese-Syrian border. Syrian officials in recent weeks have maintained that the government now had the upper hand.

major address on the Middle East Thursday, he used some of his harshest language yet on the government crackdown, saying Mr. Assad "now has a choice. He can lead that transition, or get out of the way."

Syrian officials in recent weeks have maintained that the government now had the upper hand, a sign that it believed the crackdown could bring quiet. Mr. Assad himself said in an interview with a Syrian newspaper this week that the unrest would soon come to an end.

But Syrian opposition figures and activists warned that the stalemate between a state bent on repression and protests that remained relatively small but resilient could prove dangerous, as sectarian tensions grew in the country and reports proliferated of some protesters resorting to taking up arms.

Some in the opposition insist that time is running out for a peaceful resolution.

"Politically speaking, the longer this crisis goes on, the longer it takes the government to recognize the legitimacy of the protesters and their demands, the bigger the gap between the two will become," said Louay Hussein, an opposition figure who has met with government officials. "The government is betting that the crackdown will kill the protests, but that won't work."

"I fear all scenarios because the street governs reality," he added.

Last week, the demonstrations and the death toll were smaller than on previous Fridays. But the turnout Friday in towns and cities across the country — from the Kurdish-dominated east to the suburbs of Damascus and restive towns like Baniyas and Homs — suggested at least a degree of organization, activists said.

"The young in the streets have no national leaders," said Anas, a 28-year-old activist in the outlying areas of Damascus. "They organize on their own in these towns and villages."

Protests were reported in Hama, in central Syria, as well as in the towns of

Baniyas and Latakia along the Mediterranean coast. More demonstrations gathered in Houran, a province where the uprising began and where protests suggest a region in revolt. Activists said most of those killed were from Homs and Ma'rat Alna'aman, a town southwest of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city.

In Homs, a resident said that security forces shot at protesters in four different neighborhoods. "They were chasing the protesters with their cars and then started shooting at them," a man who identified himself as Abu Haydar said by phone. Like others interviewed, he did not give his surname for fear of retribution.

Mohaniad, another resident, said that for the first time, the number of protesters had reached 5,000, despite heavy security measures and road blocks and checkpoints erected along almost every major street.

"We lifted the old Syrian flag on top of one government building," Mohamadi said by phone from Homs. "We don't want anything related to this regime. We will even break the cup of tea that they are offering us."

In Baniyas, which has a mixed population of Sunni Muslims and minority Alawites, security forces used sticks and water canons to disperse the crowd. Obaida, a resident there, said an agreement was reached with the army to keep hated plainclothes security forces away from protests, but that the deal did not hold and those forces had arrested several people.

"The truth is that with the regime continuing to fire on peaceful protesters, they are losing the chance for dialogue," said Razan Zeitouneh, a human rights lawyer in Damascus. "People are not willing to enter into a dialogue with a government that has killed their children."

is that the government in Baghdad will not ask for American troops to stay, events here have a way of taking unforeseen turns. As the American military withdraws, it is also making contingency plans should the Iraqis make a last-minute decision to seek continued military support.

Despite efforts by U.S. forces to tell the Iraqi people that they will only stay if the Iraqi government asks, misinformation and conspiracy theories abound about the Americans' intentions.

At Al Shabander cafe in Baghdad, where many of the city's intellectuals congregate on Fridays to drink coffee and smoke, a short story writer, Ali Abdul Rahman, said he believed the Amer-

icans would ultimately dictate their future in Iraq.

"They want to keep a strong muscle over us for their benefit," he said. "We don't understand what the withdrawal means. It is a complete withdrawal? Or will they keep their bases? I think they'll keep their bases. I don't think they only came for our benefit."

Iraqis also fear that if the U.S. leaves other countries in the region will quickly swoop in and try to take advantage of the power vacuum.

"The sectarian conflict between Iran and the rest of the Arab countries will turn into Iraq because the Iranians will try and make the Shiites more powerful and the Arab countries will support the

Sunnis," said Ibrahim al-Sumydaï, a political analyst. "This will lead to a sectarian war."

For the rest of the year, many U.S. troops will spend their days alongside the Iraqi forces, training and advising them so they can function on their own and start to move from a counterinsurgency force to one that can defend the nation's borders.

But the debate around Iraq will hinge on more than security. As violence has fallen, Iraq has put a mirror to itself, asking fundamental questions about what type of country it can be and if it can achieve that without more help from the Americans.

la Croix mercredi 18 mai 2011

ENTRETIEN KHALED KHALIFA, écrivain syrien auteur d'« Éloge de la haine » (1)

« Il ne peut pas y avoir d'exception syrienne »



▀ L'écrivain craint qu'au nom de la stabilité dans la région, l'Occident néglige le droit des Syriens à la démocratie et la liberté d'expression.
▀ Il affirme que les Syriens ne veulent pas d'une intervention étrangère mais d'une pression pour stopper le bain de sang.

des révoltes, le pouvoir a interdit aux journalistes arabes et occidentaux de travailler sur le terrain. Nous demandons qu'il les laisse vérifier par eux-mêmes ce qui se passe. Et qu'il nous laisse manifester librement sans violence. Car la violence risque de diviser la société.

Y a-t-il un risque de divisions ?

K. K. : La diversité de notre société est une richesse, pas un problème. Aujourd'hui, toutes ses composantes aspirent à vivre dans la convivialité. La brutalité du régime, contrairement aux propos de certains responsables sunnites, s'exerce contre tous les Syriens, pas seulement contre les sunnites. Le pouvoir a voulu faire peur aux minorités en se présentant comme leur protecteur.

Nous vivons en Syrie un moment très important. On sent que le fondamentalisme sous sa forme la plus radicale est en perte de vitesse. Accéder à la démocratie, c'est l'espoir de tous les Arabes. Cela permettra de mettre fin aux violences confessionnelles.

Les Syriens souhaitent-ils une intervention militaire occidentale comme en Libye ?

K. K. : Intellectuels, jeunes démocrates et opposition refusent une intervention étrangère. Nous voulons que l'opinion publique internationale fasse pression sur le pouvoir pour arrêter le bain de sang. La Syrie est signataire de la plupart des

conventions internationales concernant les droits de l'homme. Qu'elle les applique.

Pendant des années, on nous a fait comprendre que nous étions condamnés à un pouvoir autoritaire en raison de la situation stratégique de notre pays, au cœur d'une région troublée. Le régime assurant une certaine stabilité, il garantissait les intérêts des grands pays occidentaux. Il est possible que la communauté internationale nous fasse payer encore très cher sa complicité avec le régime, sous prétexte de préserver cette stabilité. Si elle persiste dans cette attitude, elle perdra toute crédibilité auprès des Syriens. Il ne peut pas y avoir d'exception syrienne. Nous avons droit à une vie normale. Comme le reste du monde, nous aspirons à la démocratie.

On parle beaucoup des émeutes à Deraa, Baniyas et Damas,

mais finalement très peu d'Alep, votre ville d'origine.

Est-elle épargnée par les mouvements de révoltes ?

K. K. : Depuis deux mois, le gouvernement, la police, les services de renseignements, ont concentré leurs efforts sur deux grandes villes, Damas et Alep où les quartiers sont isolés par un quadrillage minutieux. L'objectif est d'éviter la contagion d'un quartier à l'autre. Tous les accès aux grandes places des villes sont bouclés par les forces de sécurité afin d'empêcher les manifestants de s'y rassembler, comme en Égypte sur la place Tahrir. Les événements à Deraa, qui ont provoqué la mort de centaines de civils, ont fait de cette ville l'icône de la révolution syrienne.

RECUEILLI PAR
AGNÈS ROTIVEL

Il est difficile de se faire une idée de ce qui se passe en Syrie. La révolte est-elle assimilable aux mouvements tunisien et égyptien ?

Khaled Khalifa : C'est une révolution populaire par excellence. Elle est partie prenante de cette lame de fond qui traverse le monde arabe. Les Syriens sont sortis dans la rue sans arme, avec des mots d'ordre pacifiques. Mais le pouvoir a choisi de répondre par la violence car il sait qu'à ce jeu, il est le plus fort. Par sa culture et son histoire, le peuple syrien est très proche des peuples tunisien et égyptien. Par contre, le pouvoir syrien ressemble beaucoup au régime libyen. Par sa réaction violente, il court le risque de créer une situation à la libyenne.

À la différence de l'Égypte, en Syrie, il n'existe aucune liberté de la presse. Tous les moyens de communication sont aux mains du régime. Il n'existe pas de voix discordantes. L'opposition est réprimée de façon très dure. Depuis le début

(1) Éd. Sindbad, Actes Sud, 336 p., 24 €.

Damas dément l'existence d'une fosse commune à Deraa

Le ministère syrien de l'intérieur a démenti hier qu'une fosse commune ait été découverte dans la ville de Deraa, foyer de la contestation lancée il y a deux mois. Il a dénoncé « une campagne calomnieuse » des médias « pour déstabiliser la Syrie ». Dimanche, l'agence de presse officielle Sana, citant un responsable local, avait indiqué que cinq corps avaient été découverts et que le procureur local avait ouvert une enquête. D'Égypte où il se trouvait, le militant Ammar Qurabi, de l'Organisation nationale pour les droits de l'homme en Syrie, a pour sa part fait état lundi de la découverte d'une « fosse commune » dans la vieille ville.

Five-Party Talks to Resume This Week

RUDAW

The spokesperson for the Kurdistan Democratic Party's politburo said that five-party talks will take place by the end of this week, but the time and location of the meeting has not been decided yet.

Jaafar Ibrahim, member of the KDP politburo told Rudaw, "At the end of this week the five-party meetings will start. We have not chosen the time and place yet, but we are in the middle of preparations for it. We hope the talks will lead to success and a solution to the problems."

The meeting will be between Kurdistan's two main ruling parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Gorran (change) Movement, the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Islamic Group.

Gorran spokesperson Muhammad Tofiq confirmed his movement's readiness for participation in the meeting.

"We are ready for the five-party meeting with our 22-point proposal," said Tofiq. "However, the time and place hasn't been assigned yet."



Logos of the five Kurdish parties involved in the talks.

The three opposition parties met in Sulaimani in April at the height of protests and drafted a 22-point resolution to present to the government. One of their demands was the dissolution of the current government.

In a statement to the media last week, president of the Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani urged all parties to resume their talks unconditionally to find a solution for the current stalemate that came about when the protests were ended by the security forces.

"I ask all parties to act based on their national and historic responsibilities and turn a new page in their relations to help reach a lasting solution for our problems," said Barzani.

The opposition has also expressed willingness to resume talks at any time. In a recent exclusive interview with Rudaw, Yousif Muhammad, the head of Gorran's political research group, said that his group is ready to resume talks and that the proposed project is not a page from the Koran—in other words, it shouldn't be taboo to alter.

"We can meet for talks and not make our project a condition at all," said Muhammad. "Let the PUK and KDP [the ruling parties] also present their proposals. If we have the will we can solve everything, but not if we procrastinate."

Jaafar Ibrahim from the KDP said, "We are ready to hear any suggestions the opposition may make during the talks and we hope that talks will continue to the very end. We also hope the outcome of the meeting is announced to the media only once the meetings are over."

Le Monde 26 mai 2011

Une forte explosion à Istanbul fait plusieurs blessés

L'explosion d'une bombe a fait sept blessés, jeudi 26 mai, dans un quartier résidentiel de la rive européenne d'Istanbul, a affirmé le chef de la police de la métropole turque. "L'explosion d'une bombe composée d'un explosif de puissance moyenne placé sur une bicyclette électrique a fait sept blessés dont un policier. Leur vie n'est pas en danger", a déclaré M. Capkin, dont l'intervention a été retransmise par la chaîne d'information NTV.

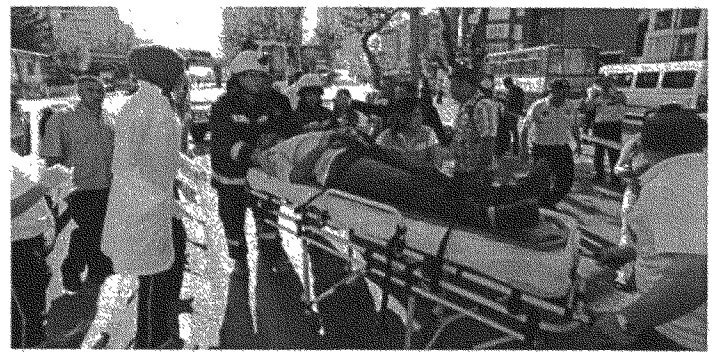
"Le fait que l'explosion se soit produite très près d'une école de police laisse penser que l'attentat a peut-être visé la police", a-t-il ajouté, refusant d'émettre des hypothèses sur les responsables éven-

tuels de l'attentat.

La déflagration est survenue vers 9 heures, heure locale (8 heures, heure de Paris) dans le quartier cosu d'Etiler, a indiqué un témoin de l'incident interrogé par la chaîne d'information CNN-Türk, précisant que l'explosion avait fait peu de dégâts aux alentours.

Deux autobus, un taxi et une voiture étaient immobilisés avec leurs vitres brisées au cœur du périmètre de sécurité établi par la police dans l'éventualité d'une nouvelle explosion et pour permettre aux spécialistes d'examiner les lieux, selon un photographe de l'AFP.

L'incident intervient à moins de trois semaines



Un des blessés est évacué vers un hôpital, après l'explosion d'une bombe, jeudi matin, à Istanbul. REUTERS/MURAD SEZER

d'élections législatives, prévues le 12 juin. Plusieurs groupes armés – kurdes, islamistes et d'extrême gauche – ont déjà commis des attentats à Istanbul. Les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont multiplié lors des dernières semaines les heurts avec les forces de sécurité après avoir menacé en mars de mettre fin à un cessez-le-feu unilatéral

décrété en août 2010, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes.

"Les groupes terroristes commettent toujours de tels attentats avant les élections", a dit Suat Kilic, député du parti AKP au pouvoir. "Ils veulent empêcher l'AKP d'avoir suffisamment de sièges pour réformer la Constitution." (avec AFP et Reuters)

The Kurdish question and Turkey's elections



by Markar Esayan

The war with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has been continuing for three decades. As far as I can remember, we have come pretty close to brokering a peace deal eight times.

But in each case, the peace was sabotaged by a suspicious assault or massacre, and the war kept going.

The most notable of these opportunities was the one in 1993. The state was about to declare a general amnesty; a cease-fire was on the table. All of a sudden, a group of PKK militants killed 33 unarmed soldiers in Bingol. The process was sabotaged. I did some research on this matter; I was curious as to how many people would have been saved had this attack not taken place and the war ended. By the time I wrote this column, I was ready to cry because of sadness and anger. Just wait for it & 30,000 people have died in this war since 1993.

30,000 &

Thirty-thousand families have experienced the agony associated with the death of their children. Thirty-thousand mothers have lost their kids. Some hundreds of thousands of people have lost a spouse, father, mother, uncle and/or friend.

What a pity.

Besides, PKK leader Abdullah ÷calan confessed that the Bingol incident was a provocation. It should be noted that he was in charge of running the organization back then; now we are waiting for the elections, wondering whether if once more we will fail to make use of another great opportunity to make peace.

Looking back at Daglica

Please recall the Daglica attack in October 2007. Twelve days before the raid, both the Van Gendarmerie Command and the Gendarmerie Central Command warned of such an assault, but despite this, 13 soldiers were lost as martyrs in the attack. More interestingly, the rifles in the station were replaced with

faulty ones shortly before the raid. The defensive posts upfront were evacuated one day before the raid and on the night of the raid, the lights at the outpost were turned on. The officer in charge left the outpost that night to attend a wedding ceremony.

Heron's did not spot 500 PKK militants.

Similar suspicions were raised in relation to the Aktutun Raid in the aftermath. Heron's footage shows that a large group of PKK militants stationed heavy weaponry on the hill close to the outpost. It was evident that the Heron's actually spotted the group of militants, but nothing was done to take action or measures despite the weather being crystal clear.

Twelve PKK militants allegedly trying to infiltrate the border in Sirtak's Uludere district were killed by security forces. These were mostly young boys around 19 years of age who had recently joined the PKK. Experts note that this may be a military operation rather than an infiltration attempt considering that the PKK camp has been there for a long time. Besides, there was a cease-fire in effect.

This is a dirty war.

This is a dirty war that claims the lives of Turkish and Kurdish youngsters. The objective is to drag the country into a chaotic environment, wear down the image of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and force it to drop the process. For the love of God, how can we explain the Kastamonu assault that targeted Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a time when ÷calan said, The contact with the state is in the final stage; making a deal is a matter of time? Is it reasonable to pick one of the sides of the negotiations as a target?

The assaults target peace; for this reason, they are fake. The government's legitimacy is undermined when soldiers and police officers are killed; when PKK militants are killed, ÷calan's image is damaged. In each such case, peace is jeopardized and peace talks lose legitimacy. At this point, Turkish and Kurdish political figures should take action because the sphere of the initiative, which has incomprehen-

sibly been abandoned due to the upcoming elections, has become a venue in which pro-war dark forces are free to roam about. We are having elections next month, but we are not talking about the Kurdish issue. It's as if everybody took a vow of silence and as if Turkey is not experiencing this problem.

The Kurdish opening was initiated with great ambition, but with a lack of proper preparations. The opening was launched without properly dealing with the established mindset within the military and the civilian security bureaucracy. The aspect of rehabilitation as part of the issue was never included in the analysis, while the Turks were not sure about the Kurds, nor the Kurds about the Turks. This was a strategically wrong step considering that both sides were not confident in the state's intention. The Turks and the Kurds were not told why this dirty war should be ended. The relevant actors failed to understand that the scope of the Ergenekon investigation should go beyond the Euphrates to deal with the Ergenekon connection within the PKK.

MEDIA AS A TOOL OF PROVOCATION

I do not know if you noticed this, but the TV stations and newspapers insulting Kurds before the arrival of the AK Party are now talking extensively about the victimization of Kurds after the latest events. They are writing about how the Kurds have been victimized. They did so because they are aware that this leads to hatred and provocation among Kurds. They are aware that focusing on victimization has nothing to do with rationality. They are seeking to provoke Kurds instead of making offers on how to go through a mental transformation.

Of course, the biggest part of the responsibility rests with the prime minister because he wants to resolve this problem. He could have never taken the initiative to resolve this problem; in this case nobody would have asked him why he did not do anything to address the problem. He would have promoted investments in the region and expanded the sphere of rights and freedoms without properly defining the problem. This way, he could have avoided taking any political risk.

But Erdogan wanted to stop the bloodshed. He noticed the plot and that Ergenekon showed its influence through the Kurdish issue. He took

action to address this problem by relying on public support. But it should be noted that this is an irrevocable path. Therefore there is no way he could reverse the process. I would like to know if he is aware of this.

Yes, Erdogan now has a difficult task ahead to fulfill. In the end, he is the leader of a political party that has to attract the support and sympathy of the people and voters every four years. He is challenging and struggling with his opponents who are comfortable with using illegal and unethical against him and his party. There are a number of assassination plans to kill him.

But he also enjoys a great deal of advantages. Above all, the people extended him much support when they endorsed the constitutional amendments with a 58 percent yes vote. The dominant discourse favors peace. The overall paradigm has

been changed after Barack Obama; the states do not rely on infliction of instability as an official policy anymore. The Turks and Kurds in Turkey now want immediate peace.

The Kurdish issue and Ergenekon are closely related. Erdogan could never give up on his struggle against these evils. There will be only one winner of this war. For this reason, the prime minister's addresses in Van and Diyarbakır bear great importance. We are expecting Erdogan to herald adoption of a language of peace and constructive steps that will soothe the anger in the region.

With Erdogan comes a great opportunity for Turkey. But this should lead him to act more prudently because this process of peace is different from the missed opportunities of the past. In the past, the state was in denial about the problem and it was not evident that this war was so dirty. Expectations

of peace were not so high. Therefore the disappointment of missed opportunities back then was not that devastating.

But the king is naked now. Besides, it was Erdogan himself who called the king naked. He ended the policy of denial. He used a different language. In Parliament, he remembered the victims of unsolved murders and the Dersim massacre. Turks and Kurds believed him. They appreciated that he does not represent the traditional state approach and that he is saying something different. The current anger among Kurds should be viewed as disappointment in connection with these high expectations.

The Kurdish issue is not a matter where you can take steps forward and then backward. Why? Obviously, we have a deep abyss just one step behind us.

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TIMES May 25, 2011

Turkish political parties competing for Kurdish support

In the run-up to Turkey's national elections next month, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is seeking the support of a rather unusual group – the country's Kurdish minority population.

Perhaps as a sign of the great strides that Kurds in Turkey have made in recent years Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan – who is widely expected to win a third consecutive term – told a heavily Kurdish crowd in the southeastern city of Sirnak that "for us, there is no separation between Turks and Kurds."

Erdogan has also vowed to build new schools, airports and hospitals in the relatively desolate and destitute southeast, which is dominated by Kurds.

However, while Kurds have generally supported the AKP in prior elections, some Kurds are apparently not enamored with Erdogan. What complicates matters for Erdogan is that

AKP is also seeking the support of Turkish nationalists, which is anathema to most Kurds.

A prior rally in the Kurdish town of Hakkari drew only about 1,000 people, with many shopkeepers shutting down in response to the Prime Minister's visit.

Erdogan's chief rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu, head of principal opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), has largely received a warmer welcome for Kurdish groups.

Speaking to a crowd in Hakkari, Kilicdaroglu promised to grant autonomy to local governments, a major demand of the Kurdish-controlled Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). He also vowed to reduce the 10 percent threshold rule for parliament (which has long been blamed for keeping out smaller parties, especially Kurds, from the national government).

The CHP leader also said he would seek to investigate the scores of unsolved murders



Turkey's Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek chats with a group of women during his Justice and Development Party (AKP) election campaign in the southeastern Turkish city of Batman April 21, 2011.

reported in the area.

Meanwhile, Erdogan and his party are skeptical of the CHP's devotion to the Kurdish cause, charging that BDP members and supporters are actually attending the CHP demonstrations.

"The CHP, which has never acknowledged the Kurdish issue in this country, is today hand-in-hand with the BDP," Erdogan said at the Sirnak

rally.

"The CHP, which has denied the Kurdish identity and the Kurdish language for many years, is today collaborating with the BDP."

Despite gains made by Kurds over the past decade, the southeast remains a dangerous and volatile region, as many Kurds want to secede from Turkey.

Last week, a dozen members

of the illegal Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) were killed by Turkish security forces as they tried to enter Turkey from northern Iraq. About 50 people as a whole have been killed over the past two months in clashes between state security forces and Kurdish nationalists.

The PKK was even blamed for a recent attack on a convoy of

Erdogan supporters.

Sirri Sakik, a BDP deputy, told reporters: "The tension has been increased by the government on purpose, to collect more [Turkish] nationalistic votes in the elections."

Of more urgency, the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, established June 15 as

a deadline for the government to make real progress on the question of Kurdish autonomy.

Ocalan has warned "either a substantial negotiation process starts on June 15 or a great war. Both would be great as they are sacred and meaningful."

Amidst reports that Ocalan and Turkish officials may have

communicated to come up with a solution, the PKK remains outlawed in Turkey and is regarded as a terrorist group in most Western nations.

PKK commenced a war in 1984 against the Turkish state to create an independent Kurdish homeland – about 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict ever since.



27 May 2011

Syrian Kurdish parties to boycott Antalya summit

By Shirzad Shikhani

Erbil, Asharq Al-Awsat – A group comprised of 12 Kurdish political parties in Syria have announced that they intend to boycott the Kurdish Syrian opposition summit that is scheduled to take place in Antalya, Turkey at the end of the month. These parties informed Asharq Al-Awsat that "the active political parties in the Kurdish region of Syria whose well-known leaders and representatives have been invited to attend this summit have informed their representatives that they intend to boycott the Antalya summit, saying that any such meeting held in Turkey can only be a detriment to the Kurds in Syria, because Turkey is against the aspirations of the Kurds, not just with regards to northern Kurdistan, but in all 4 parts of Kurdistan, including the Kurdish region of Syria."

Five prominent Kurdish political parties in Syria announced that they will not take part in the Kurdish Syrian opposition summit due to be held in Antalya, they are; the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria [KDP] that is led by Dr. Abdul Hakeem Bashar, the Kurdish Leftist Party [in Syria], the Kurdish Azadi Party, the Kurdish Future

Movement, and the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party.

Asharq Al-Awsat spoke with a number of Kurdish political leaders based in Syria, who all unanimously agreed on the collective decision taken by the Kurdish political parties.

Faisal Yussef, a senior member of the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party, told Asharq Al-Awsat that "our position with regards to not attending this summit is based upon the general Kurdish position, and so long as the Kurdish parties have unanimously agreed not to attend this summit, we will abide by that decision in order not to cause division within the Kurdish ranks, especially during this sensitive time in the history of our people."

Yussef revealed that "some Kurdish party leaders in Syria previously welcomed the holding of such a summit, considering this to be important; however they backtracked from this position and announced a boycott" adding that "this is strange." Despite this, Yussef stressed that "we do not want our people to take a different position on this issue in order not any division of the Kurdish people" adding that "we will abide by the decision of the Kurdish parties and their position on boycotting the

forthcoming summit."

For his part, Kurdish Leftist Party leader Saleh Kado told Asharq Al-Awsat that "the Kurdish parties unanimously agreed to boycott the summit, especially as this is being held in Turkey which has negative attitudes towards the Kurdish issue in general."

He added that "the Turkish leadership should first resolve the issue of 20 million Kurds living within their territory before seeking to bring together the Kurdish Syrian parties [in Turkey] to come to an agreement on a unified project with regards how to deal with the current events [in Syria]." Kado stressed that "we, the Kurds in Syria, do not trust Turkey or its policies, and that is why we have decided to boycott the summit."

Whilst Mustafa Ibrahim, a senior leader within the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, told Asharq Al-Awsat that his party's leader, Dr. Abdul Hakeem Bashar was invited to attend the Antalya summit, but that "he stressed that he will not go against the strong decision taken by the Kurdish political forces in Syria, in order to preserve Kurdish unity and discourse."

Kurdish Future Movement representative Mohammed Hammo told Asharq Al-

Awsat that he had been informed of the Kurdish parties' boycott of the Antalya summit by telephone from within Syria, but did not possess much information about this. Hammo, who is based in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, stressed that "there are many problems with regards to the telephone communication between ourselves and leaders within the [Syrian] interior, we rely upon the internet to stay in contact with them; therefore until now I have yet to receive all the details about this position."

Contrary to the position of the majority of the Kurdish political figures who unanimously agreed on the boycott of the Antalya summit, as it is being held in Turkey, Hammo said that "as Kurds, we should take advantage of every opportunity to discuss the future of our people and nation; I do not favor boycotting a summit of this [political] weight, particularly in light of the sensitive and critical situation in Syria today." Hammo said that "boycotting this summit is a huge mistake" although he stressed that this was his own personal opinion. Hammo also revealed that he intends to attend this summit in his own personal capacity, not as a representative of the Kurdish Future Movement, after being personally invited to attend.

Violent protest breaks out at PKK funeral in SE Turkey

ANKARA - Hurriyet Daily News

Conflict broke out following the tension-charged funeral of an alleged terrorist attended by 30,000 people in the southeastern province of Hakkari on Sunday.

Protesters set up barricades and started a fire after the funeral of Ramazan Terziolu, an alleged member of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, drawing a police response of tear gas and pressurized water.

Two explosions took place during the pro-PKK protest, but no one was killed or injured.

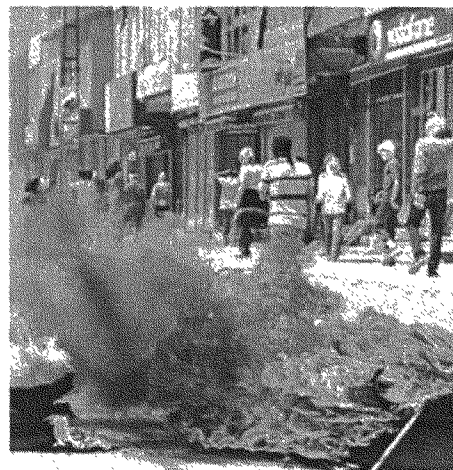
The funeral was attended by the mayors of Hakkari, Yuksekova, Seindinli, Cukurca and Esendere;

members of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP; and thousands of supporters carrying pictures of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Hakkari independent deputy candidate Esat Canan spoke after the funeral, saying that attacks on the PKK were attacks on the country's Kurdish people.

Twelve alleged PKK members were killed recently in the border province of ^lrmak s Uludere district in two separate operations by Turkish security forces.

The PKK is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.



Syrian Kurds Temporarily Choose Unity



Rudaw

By WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

Syrian Kurdish leaders are afraid to openly express Kurdish nationalist demands in their protests against the Assad regime, lest Assad use the 'separatist' argument against them.

Kurds have been suppressed for years in Syria. Following a policy of marginalization, the Syrian government took away the citizenship of thousands of Kurds and followed Arabization policies in Kurdish regions. As a result, the Kurdish regions are the poorest in Syria. Many of the Kurds living there are farmers, and recent droughts have caused them even more suffering.

In 2004 Syrian Kurds revolted against the Syrian government after a football match between an Arab and a Kurdish team turned violent. But it was heavily suppressed by the Syrian army, and many Kurds were taken to jail.

In 2010 Kurdish parties demanded autonomy, causing a rift between them and the Arab opposition parties that seek a solution within Syria, and think that 'separatist demands' divide and weaken the opposition. A Wikileaks

document from 2006 shows that the U.S. embassy in Damascus believed that the Kurds in Syria identify with Kurdish nationalism.

Now, quite unexpectedly, Syrian Kurds are waving Syrian flags and shouting slogans for unity, aiming to show that they are not 'separatists'. One Kurdish soldier, named Ahmad Fener Mustafa, who, refusing to shoot demonstrators, was executed by his superiors, was buried in the Kurdish city of Qamishi with a Syrian flag wrapped around his coffin.

When the Kurdish religious cleric Mohammed Mashouq al-Khaznawi was killed by the Syrian government in 2005, protests focused on Kurdish nationalism, with Kurdish flags waving. Khaznawi was buried with a Kurdish flag. But now there are few Kurdish flags to be seen.

All ongoing Kurdish demonstrations in Syria emphasize 'unity' with the Syrian people. Even a PKK demonstration was marked by Syrian flags. It seems that Kurdish parties recognized that Assad could use Kurdish demands against the opposition and would turn it into an Arab versus Kurdish issue.

An anonymous Kurdish party leader told Al Jazeera, "If we are seen to lead big demonstrations the regime will say: 'Look, the Kurds are deman-

ding to split from Syria and establish their own state.' Then the Arab tribes will confront us."

The Baath regime is already playing the Islamist card and threatening civil war, even though they never had any problems sending Jihadists from Syria to Iraq.

Prominent Turkish journalist and former government advisor Cengiz Candar - who has visited Syria with Turkish government leaders - says the Syrian Kurds are indeed afraid the government could use 'the separatist' argument against them and therefore take a unified position with other Syrian protestors. He also said that Turkey is not afraid of a possible break up of Syria, as much as it may worry about a flood of refugees and possible chaos like that of Iraq after the fall of the Baath regime.

It's therefore likely that the opting of the Syrian flag over the Kurdish flag by Syrian Kurdish parties and Syrian Kurds is a temporary maneuver. They probably still support Kurdish nationalist demands like autonomy, but are waiting for the right opportunity to express these demands again, once it is clear where the Syrian unrest is heading.



20 MAI 2011

Crainte d'affrontements interethniques en Irak après les attentats de Kirkouk

Par RFI Avec notre correspondante à Bagdad, Fatma Kizilboga

Au lendemain des attentats sanglants qui ont frappé la ville irakienne de Kirkouk, le débat sur la sécurité du pays s'intensifie. Les autorités de cette région riche en pétrole alertent le gouvernement sur un risque d'embrasement après la fin du retrait américain prévu à la fin de l'année.

Au lendemain du triple attentat qui a fait au moins 29 morts et 90 blessés jeudi 19 mai à Kirkouk, c'est la question des territoires disputés qui refait surface. Située à 250 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, la ville de Kirkouk reste le véritable laboratoire de l'Irak. Kurdes et Arabes se déchirent toujours l'héritage de ce territoire très convoité qui recèle dans son sous-sol l'une des plus grandes réserves de pétrole du pays.

Fragilité et inquiétudes

Ces dernières années, un partenariat dirigé par les commandants militaires



Trois bombes ont explosé jeudi 19 mai près des bâtiments administratifs de Kirkouk. (Reuters)

américains avait été mis en place entre l'armée irakienne et les forces de sécurité kurdes qui se partageaient les tâches et la gestion de ces terres. Mais à la veille du retrait programmé des GI's, la fragilité de ces accords se fait sentir. A Kirkouk, les responsables politiques et militaires irakiens font part de leurs inquiétudes. Tous craignent de revoir basculer la région dans des affrontements interethniques.

a ainsi appelé tous les partis à régler les différends afin de prouver leur volonté de cohabitation et leur capacité à garantir l'avenir sécuritaire du pays. Bagdad doit donc redoubler d'efforts afin d'organiser dans les plus brefs délais un recensement national qui permettrait de régler les litiges. Mais là encore, il semble impossible de trouver un arrangement qui permette le bon déroulement de cette initiative.

L'envoyé de l'ONU en Irak, Ad Merkel,



Irak: le parti de Barzani demande la fermeture d'un journal pour diffamation

ERBIL (Irak), 18 mai 2011 (AFP)

UN DES PARTIS au pouvoir dans la région autonome irakienne du Kurdistan demande à la justice de prononcer la fermeture pure et simple d'un magazine qui l'a accusé de projeter l'assassinat de trois chefs de l'opposition locale, a-t-il indiqué mercredi à l'AFP.

Le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani, président de cette région du nord de l'Irak, a porté plainte mardi pour diffamation contre le magazine Lvin ("mouvement" en kurde), à la suite d'un article du 1er mai, a précisé Jaafar Ibrahim, porte-parole du PDK.

Dans son numéro 160, Lvin accusait le PDK et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), le second grand parti de la région, de vouloir assassiner le chef du mouvement Goran, Nicherwan Moustafa, le secrétaire général de l'Union islamique du Kurdistan, Salaheddine Bahaddine, et le chef du groupe islamique, Ali Babir.

"Nous avons porté plainte pour diffamation contre le magazine Lvin et nous avons demandé sa fermeture et des dédommagements au titre du préjudice moral", a déclaré M. Ibrahim. "Il n'est pas raisonnable d'atteindre ce niveau d'attaques."

Chef de l'UPK, le président irakien Jalal Talabani a également porté plainte contre Lvin suite à l'article, sans toutefois demander la fermeture du titre, a indiqué à l'AFP Saadi Bira, membre du bureau politique de l'UPK.

Contacté par téléphone par l'AFP, le rédacteur en chef de Lvin, Ahmed

Mera, s'est élevé contre ces poursuites qu'il a jugées illégales.

"Il s'agit d'un complot politique contre la presse libre et notre magazine en particulier", a-t-il dit, précisant que son magazine avait par le passé été la cible de plus d'une vingtaine de poursuites.

Il a affirmé que le PDK réclamait en outre un milliard de dinars (858.000 dollars) de dédommagements, ce que M. Ibrahim a démenti, affirmant laisser "à la justice le soin de fixer cette somme".

Dans un communiqué, l'organisation de défense de la liberté de la presse Reporters sans frontières (RSF) a vu mercredi dans cette plainte "un danger réel pour la survie du journal".

Elle témoigne, poursuit RSF, d'une "campagne de répression lancée par les autorités contre les journalistes et les médias qui couvrent le mouvement de protestation populaire qui agite la région (...) depuis la mi-février", en référence aux manifestations contre la corruption et l'hégémonie de l'UPK et du PDK sur les affaires de la région.

De nombreux médias du Kurdistan affirment de longue date être victimes d'intimidations récurrentes des autorités de la région autonome.

RSF s'était alarmée mi-décembre de l'inflation du nombre de poursuites judiciaires contre les médias kurdes. Mais en janvier, un haut dirigeant du PDK, Najirvan Barzani, avait annoncé "dans un geste de bonne volonté" la levée de toutes les plaintes (...) contre les journaux et les écrivains", appelant les journalistes à faire preuve d'un "plus grand esprit de responsabilité".

TURQUIE: Le procès des massacres du Dersim n'aura pas lieu

EFO BOZKURT qui a perdu toute sa famille dans « les incidents en 1938 au Dersim » avait déposé plainte pour « crimes contre l'humanité » l'année dernière mais sa plainte a été maintenant écartée.

Efo Bozkurt 86 ans a perdu ses deux parents et ses cinq frères et sœurs en 1938 dans le village de Çaytasi dans le district d'Hozat.

La région du Dersim a été l'objet de violents massacres en 1938 qui ont touché des familles arméniennes convertis et rescapés du génocide de 1915. La province s'appelle désormais Tunceli. Quelques sources parlent de dizaines de milliers de Kurdes Alévis, Zazas et Arméniens qui auraient été tués et de milliers qui ont été forcés à l'exil.

La plainte a été refusée le 18 février 2011. Le procureur en chef a déclaré que « le droit criminel Turc en effet au moment des incidents qui sont prétendument arrivés au Dersim en 1938 ne comprenait pas le « génocide et crimes contre l'humanité » comme imputé par le plaignant ».

Il a été en outre dit dans la décision que les affaires présumés de meurtres devaient être évalués comme « homicides » et sont ainsi prescrits.

L'avocat du plaignant Hüseyin Aygün a annoncé qu'il allait faire appel car la décision du procureur ne respecte pas les règlements. L'article 90 de la Constitution est basé sur la loi internationale. La base est la décision des Nations unies qui indique « la prescription ne s'applique pas aux crimes contre l'humanité ».

L'avocat Aygün indique qu'il ira si nécessaire devant la Cour européenne des Droits de l'Homme mais a souligné que le sujet doit en particulier être discuté en Turquie.

« Le CHP [parti du Peuple Républicain] et l'AKP court l'un contre l'autre pour dire que « ce qui est arrivé dans le Dersim était un massacre ». Nous demandons une loi spéciale sur le mas-



sacre du Dersim de 1938. Les criminels sont morts il y a longtemps, nous ne sommes pas après une punition. La question importante est de discuter de l'histoire ouvertement et clairement. L'état doit faire des excuses officiellement » a affirmé Aygün.

La décision de justice affirme que le crime de génocide n'a pas été constitué et que la suppression du soulèvement a été limitée aux insurgés.

En résumé, la décision dit, « les actions des rebelles armés sont venues à une étape où ils ont perturbé la souveraineté nationale de notre pays et l'utilisation normale de la force a été rendue insuffisante. Cependant, c'est un fait historique que l'incident a été limité aux insurgés ».

« Pour constituer le crime de génocide, les actions doivent être exécutées selon un plan et d'une façon systématique ».

Stéphane@armenews.com

Liban: Les réfugiés kurdes « ont peur du Hezbollah »

Ils brandissent des écriteaux en langues kurde et arabe appelant le président syrien

Bachar el-Assad à quitter le pouvoir. Autour du cou, ils portent en médaille la carte du Kurdistan, un État qui n'a jamais existé dans l'histoire moderne.

Ils sont Kurdes-Syriens et ils vivaient jusqu'à il y a une dizaine de jours dans la province de Kamichli. Mais ils ont été obligés de fuir leur pays pour le Liban afin d'éviter d'être massacrés, emprisonnés et torturés.

Serbaz montre les images qu'il a prises sur son portable, celles de manifestations et de soldats qui encerclent les quartiers. Il les postait

régulièrement sur le site Internet et la page Facebook des « jeunes Kurdes pour la révolution syrienne ». Pour cela il utilisait une ligne téléphonique turque, Kamichli se trouvant à la frontière de la Turquie.

Serbaz a 25 ans. Il a quitté sa femme et sa famille pour sauver sa peau. Les autorités ont appris qu'il aidait la révolution sur Internet. Il est entré au Liban à l'insu des gardes-frontières syriens. Il était avec une dizaine de ses camarades. « Nous avons dormi deux nuits dans un jardin public. Puis nous avons été hébergés par des Kurdes au Liban », dit-il.

Serbaz, comme ses camarades, a peur des services de renseignements syriens au Liban, ou encore du

Hezbollah. Il se déplace peu. Mais hier, il est venu à la réunion de Sin el-Fil, juste pour montrer que « les Syriens sont courageux et que les Kurdes s'étaient déjà révoltés contre Bachar el-Assad en 2004 », indique-t-il.

Il donne la parole à son ami Raman, 21 ans. Ce dernier a été arrêté et relâché par les autorités syriennes, il y a tout juste deux semaines ; parce qu'il avait participé aux manifestations. « J'ai passé 24 heures en prison. Ils m'ont obligé à signer des papiers où je m'engageais à ne plus participer à des rassemblements et des réunions politiques », raconte-t-il.

Le scénario rappelle étrangement celui des services de sécurité libanais qui arrêtaient, avant février 2005, les militants qui luttait contre l'occupation syrienne de leur pays.

Pat.K.

Irak: un haut responsable kurde préconise le maintien des Américains

(AFP) par Safin Hamed

ERBIL — Un haut responsable kurde s'est prononcé dimanche pour le maintien des forces américaines en Irak au delà de la date prévue pour leur retrait à la fin de l'année, jugeant que leur aide était toujours nécessaire, notamment dans les zones disputées entre Arabes et Kurdes.

"Nous pensons que l'Irak a toujours besoin des forces américaines dans le secteur militaire, pour la sécurité et pour des raisons politiques", a déclaré le secrétaire général du ministère des Peshmergas (combattants kurdes) de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Jabbar Yawar.

"Si le gouvernement de Bagdad et le Parlement irakien veulent retarder (ce retrait), nous sommes d'accord", a-t-il ajouté lors d'une conférence de presse à Erbil, capitale de la région.

"Il y a toujours des problèmes non réglés comme la question des territoires disputés", a-t-il poursuivi en référence aux zones à la lisière du Kurdistan, où la dispute entre le gouvernement irakien et les autorités kurdes complique la lutte contre les groupes armés.

Cette dispute trouve son origine dans



Jabbar Yawar, haut responsable kurde, se prononce pour le maintien des forces américaines en Irak, le 22 mai 2011 à Erbil. (AFP, Safin Hamed)

l'arabisation au début des années 1990 de ces territoires par le président déchu Saddam Hussein, qui a forcé 120.000 Kurdes à fuir vers le nord, selon Human Rights Watch.

Les peshmergas ont profité de l'invasion américaine de 2003 pour progresser vers le Sud et l'Ouest, revendiquant le caractère kurde de plusieurs zones en dehors de leur région.

L'armée américaine compte encore 45.000 hommes en Irak, dont 1.200 qui participent toujours à la Force combinée de sécurité (FCS), un dispositif tripartite mis en place sur les territoires disputés et incluant des troupes kurdes et arabes.

Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a prôné la semaine dernière la

tenue d'une réunion entre tous les mouvements politiques du pays pour trancher la question sensible d'un éventuel maintien de l'armée américaine, toujours perçue par certains comme une force d'occupation.

Le chef radical chiïte Moqtada Sadr a récemment menacé de réactiver sa milice si les forces américaines ne partaient pas à la date convenue.

Le général Babaker Zebari, chef de l'état-major irakien, avait jugé l'été dernier le retrait américain prématuré, affirmant que son armée ne serait pas prête à remplir complètement sa mission avant 2020.

Violences en Irak: sept morts à Kirkouk

Sept Irakiens ont été tués samedi dans des violences dans la province multiethnique de Kirkouk, à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, deux jours après une série d'attentats sanglants contre la police, selon des sources policières.

Un huitième Irakien a été abattu dans la ville de Mossoul, à 350 km au nord de Bagdad, par des hommes armés en voiture, selon un responsable de la sécurité qui n'était pas en mesure de préciser les motifs de cette fusillade.

Dans la ville de Kirkouk, des hommes armés ont tué deux

frères kurdes âgés de 23 et 21 ans, Salim et Samah Abdelwahab, dans leur maison, selon le lieutenant de police Laith Mahmoud. "La police a trouvé leurs corps couverts de sang à l'intérieur de la maison".

Salim Abdelwahab était policier et son frère travaillait dans la réparation automobile.

Dans l'est de la ville, des insurgés ont abattu un homme handicapé qui était responsable de l'exploitation d'un générateur électrique du quartier, selon M. Mahmoud. L'Irak souffre de coupures de courant chroniques, les quartiers s'associent donc pour se munir de

générateurs communs.

Dans le sud de la ville, un ouvrier et sa fille de trois ans ont été tués par des hommes armés alors qu'ils quittaient l'usine où travaillait le père, a déclaré un responsable de la sécurité.

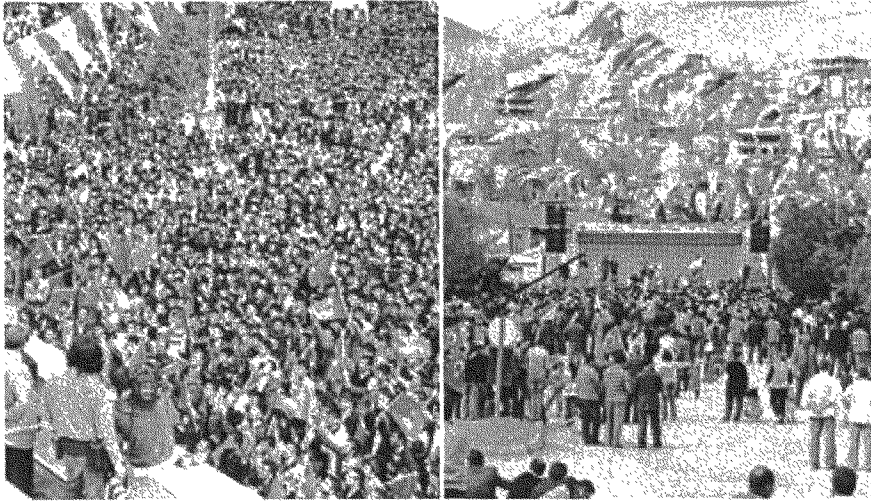
Dans la localité d'Al-Rachad, dans le sud de la province de Kirkouk, une bombe visant une patrouille de l'armée a tué deux soldats et en a blessé deux autres, selon un autre responsable de la police, Sarhad Qader.

Et à Al-Riyadh (est), une bombe contre une patrouille de police a blessé deux civils,

selon la même source. Jeudi, une série d'attentats contre la police avait fait 29 morts et 90 blessés à Kirkouk, les violences les plus meurtrières en Irak depuis près de deux mois.

Ces attaques interviennent au moment où l'armée américaine, qui participe à une force tripartite censée contemir les tensions entre Arabes et Kurdes dans la province riche en pétrole, a commencé à se retirer de certains secteurs de cette zone en prévision de son départ définitif du pays à la fin de l'année.(AFP)

Top Turkish parties trade places on Kurdish question



Far bigger crowds turned out to see CHP chief Kiliçdaroğlu's rallies in Van and Hakkari (L) on Monday than they had two days earlier when Prime Minister Erdogan visited the same cities.

ANKARA - Hurriyet Daily News

Far bigger crowds turned out to see CHP chief Kiliçdaroğlu's rallies in Van and Hakkari (L) on Monday than they had two days earlier when Prime Minister Erdogan visited the same cities.

With less than three weeks to go until general elections, Turkey's ruling and main opposition parties seem to have traded places on the Kurdish issue. As the social democrats break the ice with the country's Kurds, the governing party appears increasingly cool toward them.

The change in the positions of the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, and the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, was clear during the election rallies their leaders held over the weekend in Southeast Anatolia, where the majority of the population is of Kurdish descent.

In previous elections, the AKP won the sympathy and votes of many Kurds by launching an initiative to solve the long-standing Kurdish question. But in a move to attract the votes of nationalists, the party has shifted ahead of the June 12 polls, with the prime minister saying there is no Kurdish issue but problems of Kurdish people.

The CHP, shunned by nearly all Kurds over the last decade because of its policies of denying their concerns, has meanwhile enjoyed a boost from its new leader's bolder rhetoric on the issue.

Far bigger crowds turned out to see CHP

chief Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu's rallies in Van and Hakkari on Monday than they had two days earlier when Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited the same cities. Only around 1,000 people came to listen to Erdogan in Hakkari on Saturday while shopkeepers closed their doors and some groups protested the prime minister's visit.

Erdogan claimed Monday that the Hakkari shopkeepers were forced to close up their shops in an act of protest, implying that the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, was behind the action.

This is not about shopkeepers closing up shop; it is about them being forced to close up shop, the prime minister said, speaking at a meeting with businessmen in Ankara. How can they [the BDP] talk about peace and democracy, but prevent people from earning a living?

He said the protest was being enforced to create fear, and that the region did not really support the protest.

We need to stand strong together in our resistance, because cowards die many times before their deaths, and we must thus get results together, Erdogan said.

The prime minister also criticized Hakkari Mayor Fadil Bedirhanoglu for allegedly urging locals to shutter their shops in protest, even fining those who did not. In response, Bedirhanoglu called on Erdogan to prove his slanderous claims or be faced with a lawsuit.

These claims are a huge lie. If the prime

minister does not prove this, I will declare him a slanderer, and file a lawsuit if necessary, Bedirhanolu said Monday.

Erdogan also questioned the Hakkari Municipality in his comments Monday, asking what had happened to the 13 billion Turkish Liras sent to Hakkari and criticizing the municipality for not operating well.

Warm messages from the CHP

Kiliçdaroğlu received a good welcome in both Van and Hakkari, where he gave three important messages to Kurdish voters. In Hakkari, he said his party would boost rights for local governance through embracing the Council of Europe's charter. We will accept the local self-government charter. Thus we will help them [local governments] to strengthen, to have a good budget and stop them asking for more money from Ankara, he said.

His second message was a pledge to reduce the 10 percent election threshold for parliamentary representation, while his third promise was to establish a fact-finding commission to investigate the unresolved murders in the region.

Kiliçdaroğlu also touched on an ongoing case in which dozens of elected mayors have been arrested. Criticizing the government's conduct in the case, he said: You will put all of them in jail. This means limiting the people's will and not respecting it.

Slamming Erdogan's critical statements about the closure of shops during his rally Saturday, Kiliçdaroğlu said: Instead of criticizing the mayor, you should better deal with the problems of these shopkeepers if you are the prime minister.

Bahçeli critical of the developments

The head of Turkey's nationalist opposition party meanwhile criticized the government for not doing enough to stop violent protests in the Southeast and in Istanbul.

The state is not doing enough, Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, leader Devlet Bahçeli said in the central province of Afyonkarahisar on Monday. The prime minister is now saying that stores in Hakkari were forced to close. He's cooperating with the PKK [outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party], but is blaming their terrorists.

Even though the district governor and the mayor all assured Erdogan's safety, the BDP and the PKK were able to exercise much power over Hakkari, the MHP chief claimed. Such a scandal has not happened anywhere else, Bahçeli said.

Kurdish candidate: Öcalan will soon be Kurdish children's teacher

TODAY S ZAMAN.

Leyla Zana, an independent deputy candidate backed by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), said on Tuesday that jailed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan will soon be together with the Kurdish people and teach their children.

Zana's remarks came during a visit to a village located in the district of Hazro in the predominantly Kurdish province of Diyarbakır.

"This process [the BDP's struggle] aims to allow us to elect our own district governor and governor. This process aims to see our leader [Öcalan] among us. It aims to see our guerillas [members of the PKK] among us. We want to have a share in the administration of the country. If they [the state] accept this, we

are willing to live together. If they do not, we are ready to do this on our own. Öcalan will be among his people [the Kurds] one day and serve as their teacher. I believe these days are close. This government will either extend a hand of peace to Öcalan or we as the Kurdish people will reject everything of this system," she said.

Stating that the Kurds have suffered a lot in the past, Zana called on the villagers to cast a vote "for Kurdistan, for peace and for guerillas."

Zana, a former deputy elected from the now-defunct Democracy Party (DEP), gained prominence in 1991 for taking part of her oath of office in Parliament in Kurdish, a language not recognized as an official language in Turkey. She was convicted in 1994 by the State



Security Court (DGM) of links to the PKK, which is considered a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and the EU. She was sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges of leading a terrorist organization. Zana served 10 years and was released in 2004 after an appeals court overturned her conviction.



Kurds mount calls for autonomy in Turkey

May 25, 2011

Associated Press

ANKARA: Turkey's prime minister headed to the country's troubled southeast on Tuesday as Kurdish politicians increased their calls for autonomy ahead of parliamentary elections next month. Hundreds of policemen were put on alert in the cities of Batman and Sirnak before the arrival of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to attend his party's rallies in the run-up to June 12 elections.

Erdogan's helicopter was flanked by army attack helicopters, an apparent precaution against Kurdish rebels who have been fighting for autonomy in the region.

Tensions are running high in the region more than a week after the killing of 12 Kurdish rebels by Turkish troops as they attempted to cross into Turkey from northern Iraq.

In a protest against Erdogan, most shops kept their shutters

closed in the city of Sirnak and the town of Cizre on Tuesday, NTV and CNN-Turk televisions showed.

The killings sparked violent protests and led Kurdish politicians to warn of heightened conflict.

Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdish rebel group has warned his forces will unleash a "big war" after national elections if Turkey refuses to negotiate to end the decades-old conflict by June 15.

Aysel Tugluk, a former Kurdish lawmaker, issued a similar ultimatum to the government on Tuesday, though the rebels are a much-diminished force in military terms since the height of their power in the 1990s.

Tugluk, speaking in an interview with HaberTurk television, said the government should not ignore Öcalan's call for autonomy for the Kurdish minority in the southeast.

Turkey has granted more cultural rights to Kurds, but views auto-



nomy as a threat to state unity.

Turkish leaders have confirmed communication between some state officials and Öcalan to seek a solution to end the fight by autonomy-seeking Kurdish rebels.

But they refuse formal negotiations with the rebels, who are branded terrorists by Turkey and the West.

Erdogan has rejected calls for autonomy as well as allowing

education in Kurdish language and accused Kurdish politicians of provoking tensions in the country's largely Kurdish southeast.

Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek on Tuesday criticised opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, head of the Republican People's Party, for promising his party would grant autonomy to local Kurdish administrations if it comes to power.

Gary Kent: It is Unfair to Compare Kurdistan to Egypt and Tunisia.

By HAWAR ABDUL RAZZAQ

Gary Kent is Director of Labor Friends of Iraq. He has visited the country five times in the last three years and is an honorary member of the Iraqi Trade Union Movement. Kent has been a member of the British Labor Party since 1976 and has worked in Parliament since 1987. He is the administrator of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

From working closely with the Kurdish parliament, Kent believes that there is democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan, even though it is still a fledgling democracy and has a long way to go. In his words it has to do with the "free and fair" elections of the summer of 2009.

"Democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan is only 20 years old and still has a long way to go. The good thing is that, according to international observers, the elections for the Parliament and for the President were free and fair." said Kent in an interview with Rudaw.

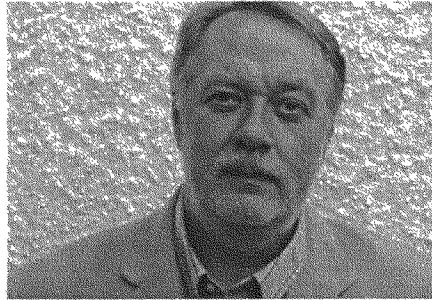
The rise of opposition groups in Kurdistan is something Kent counts as an important step towards a real democracy.

"The emergence of a formal opposition is a good thing historically," he said. "A vibrant democracy also requires institutions of liberty - for instance, separation of powers between the executive and legislature and judiciary, accountability, an inquiring, independent and responsible media, property rights and a web of independent institutions."

Kent's view on the arrival of opposition parties on the Kurdish political stage resonates well with what Kurdistan Prime Minister Barham Salih said after his cabinet received a vote of confidence in Parliament last month.

"The July 25, 2009 parliamentary elections and the emergence of opposition was a turning point, which enabled us all to serve the people of Kurdistan and to identify the shortcomings," said PM Salih.

However, Kent says that political parties in Kurdistan are in a situation where every party wants to be in



Gary Kent. Photo Rudaw.

power. He believes that these parties should know their responsibilities. For instance, the opposition needs to work on its approach on how to hold the government to account and how to propose alternative programs.

"As there has been no experience of an opposition before in the interests of democracy, all parties need to work on putting in place parliamentary mechanisms that recognize the important role of the opposition and give space to them to hold the government to account. At the same time the opposition has to recognize the legitimacy of an elected government to pursue their political program," said Kent.

Bringing about democracy is not an easy task. It is a long process that needs commitment and work by everyone, particularly those elected by the people to run the country. In the case of Kurdistan, Kent says that it is the work of the people themselves, but Kurdish leaders can learn from other examples of democracy in the world.

"This process is the work of Kurds themselves but politicians and others can learn from the experiences of countries such as the UK," said Kent. "The APPG takes no position on domestic politics - that is a choice for Kurds - but we are happy to talk with everyone who thinks that they can pick up lessons, negative and positive, from the UK's parliamentary and political traditions."

Kent's team has already met with members of the opposition in Kurdistan and has given seminars to members of the Kurdish Parliament on how those two important institutions work in a country like the United Kingdom.

Kent admits that he and his team

have no answer to all the problems, but they will stay supportive and willing to offer their guidance.

"We don't have all the answers but we stand ready to talk with anyone," he said. "We have met Gorran members and we stand ready to talk to them and other opposition parties about how oppositions work in the UK. It is up to them what lessons they draw from this. We have already given seminars in the Kurdistan Parliament on how our Parliament works and hope to do so again."

Many in Kurdistan, including Kurdish leaders believe that the Kurdistan region is heading towards an open society with more freedoms and democracy. Qubad Talabani, the Kurdistan Regional Government's representative to the United States writes on his blog, "one thing is very clear: the Kurdistan Region is thriving. We have a burgeoning secular, civil society, with an emerging democracy. So while we still have much work to do, and more progress to make..."

As an observer Gary Kent agrees that the Kurdistan region is moving on from the domination of two parties whose history was filled with challenges of civil war and foreign threats.

"My own view is that Iraqi Kurdistan is in transition from politics dominated by two parties which faced severe external threats and their own civil war as well as a command style economy in which the private sector is too weak," said Kent. "Political parties drew on Soviet models which don't suit an open economy and a vibrant democracy."

Kurdistan's Parliament has agreed to let the independent Westminster Foundation for Democracy work with Kurdish parliamentarians. Kent appreciates this cooperation from the Kurdish authorities and he hopes that the APPG can meet members of all parties to ascertain how they have been working and how British and other parliamentarians and politicians can share their experience.

Only recently a wave of protests ended in the city of Sulaimani that lasted two months. More than ten people were killed in the unrest and hundreds injured. The deployment of armed for-

ces finally brought the demonstrations to an abrupt end and there is now talk of dialogue between opposition groups and the authorities.

As someone concerned with helping Kurdistan to learn from other experiences of democracy and civil society, Kent says that peaceful talks are the way forward and he hopes that his team can work with the Kurdish parties on this issue.

"The call for calm and dialogue is best but APPG members wish to talk in more detail about how different parties and others see the current situation," he said. "The reports in Rudaw concerning the way in which discontent is being policed do not make happy reading and we will try to talk with those taking part in demonstrations and with the authorities who should protect their rights as well as that of other citizens."

Kent says that the force used to curb the protests were disproportionate to the scale of protests, and although he admits that it may happen in other countries too, in the UK for instance, he suggests that Kurdish security forces should try to see how other countries deal with demonstrators.

"It seems to me that the balance is not right. We certainly don't always get this balance right in the UK but perhaps one lesson is that the Kurdish security forces have to look very carefully at how other countries do this," he said. "There is clearly also a problem for historical reasons with the wide availability of guns."

From the start of protests in Sulaimani, one of the demands of the opposition was early elections to be held in the Kurdistan region. At first the two ruling parties who hold the majority of seats in Parliament frowned upon this demand, but soon they expressed willingness to meet this demand and the president of the Kurdistan region Massoud Barzani offered fresh elections as an option.

"We have put before the opposition three options," said Barzani last month. "Either participate in reform, get involved in a broad-based government or lets hold fresh elections so the people can determine for themselves."

Elections where people will get a chance to choose their leaders, is in Kent's view a solution for the current stalemate in Kurdistan.

"The decision to go for provincial

elections and possibly a parliamentary election is probably the best way forward and that allows the people of Kurdistan as a whole to pass judgment on their rulers."

It is common in Kurdistan to hear government officials warning of threats to the region's security especially in times of crisis. At the same time the opposition is never far behind to dismiss it all as an excuse to silence dissent.

For his part, Gary Kent is cautious about the idea of foreigners telling others what to do. So his opinion about Kurdistan's situation leans equally towards the authorities' concern for security and people's demand for reform.

"It's fair to say that crisis presents opportunity too and it is obvious that leading Kurdish politicians are seeking to take the bull by the horns and make positive changes while seeking to protect their security against efforts by Al Qaeda and others to destroy a growing pluralist and peaceful Muslim democracy," he said. "Reform bumps up against vested interests. There will be a struggle within the ruling parties and wider society to squeeze out the rot and it won't be easy but it has to be done, in my humble opinion."

Even though the unrest in Kurdistan was mainly confined to the province of Sulaimani and Kurdistan's other provinces, Erbil and Duhok escaped the wave of demonstrations, there was concern among Kurdish officials and business people about the impact the protests may have on the economy and foreign investment.

Gary Kent deplores the tragic incidents that occurred during the demonstrations, but regarding the image of Kurdistan abroad he doesn't think it was affected by the unrest.

"The events are tragic but need not threaten the viability of the Kurdistan Region," he said. "Many people in business and government who know that the region has been appallingly oppressed and isolated know that the economy cannot grow and social justice flow to ordinary people unless foreign capital participates in unlocking the natural wealth of the region. Such companies will be reluctant to invest if they see too much instability and risk. Frankly, the troubles don't represent such a threat."

Some Kurdish protestors said that

they had been inspired by the uprisings of the Arab world, but Gary Kent said that it is not fair to compare Kurdistan to Egypt or Tunisia. He said that Kurdistan has had a tragic history under Saddam Hussein who killed hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed thousands of villages. Despite all that, he said, there is a fledgling democracy in Kurdistan—something that was missing in Egypt.

"They [outsiders] can also note, compared to the rest of Iraq, a major increase in living standards, more electricity and visible economic growth," said Kent. "Relations with Baghdad and Turkey have improved considerably too. But Iraqi Kurds don't live elsewhere and most don't remember the great battles of the past because they are under 25. They cannot live today on such comparisons and rightly demand progress."

In the end Gary Kent said that his group has noted the "exemplary" treatment that Christians who have fled the rest of Iraq receive in the Kurdistan region. He said that this treatment deserves support and that his group will work to build further links between Kurdistan and the United Kingdom.

"We will do our best to build links between the peoples of Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK for the mutual benefit of all," he said. "Friends need to be candid with each other and we should highlight the successes of the region as well as those areas where change is necessary."

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Syria cracks down on Internet battlefield

Facebook and YouTube, the dissidents' tools, are being used against them

BY JENNIFER PRESTON

The Syrian government is cracking down on protesters' use of social media and the Internet to promote their rebellion three months after allowing citizens to have open access to Facebook and YouTube, according to Syrian activists and experts on digital privacy.

Security officials are demanding that dissidents turn over their Facebook passwords and are switching off the 3G mobile network at times, sharply limiting the ability of dissidents to upload videos of protests to YouTube, according to several activists in Syria. Supporters of President Bashar al-Assad, calling themselves the Syrian Electronic Army, are using the same tools to try to discredit dissidents.

In contrast to the Egyptian government under Hosni Mubarak, which tried to quash dissent by shutting down the entire Internet in Egypt, the Syrian government is taking a more strategic approach, turning off electricity and telephone service in neighborhoods with the most unrest, activists say.

"They are using these tactics to cut off communication for the people," said Radwan Ziadeh, director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies. He said the Facebook pages of at least two friends had been hacked recently and now featured pro-government messages.

With foreign journalists barred from Syria, dissidents have been working with exiles and using Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to draw global attention to the military crackdown on protesters that

has killed more than 700 people and has led to mass arrests. The Syrian Revolution 2011 Facebook page, which now has more than 180,000 members, has been a vital source of information for dissidents.

"The only way we get information is through the citizen journalists," said Ammar Abudhamid, a Syrian activist based in Maryland who was one of several Syrian exiles to help organize delivery of satellite phones, cameras and laptops into the country earlier this year. "Without them, we would not know anything."

While Facebook has proved to be a powerful platform for activists to help mobilize protests and broadcast their struggle in Tunisia, Egypt and now in Syria, it can also pose risks to dissidents. There are about 580,000 Facebook users in Syria, a 105 percent increase since the government lifted its

"He knew I had one because they were watching my 'bad comments' on it. I knew then that they were monitoring me."

four-year ban on Feb. 9, according to Fadi Salem, director of the Governance and Innovation Program at the Dubai School of Government.

Though Syrian officials sought to portray the decision as a sign of openness, human rights advocates warned that the government could use Facebook to closely monitor criticism of the regime and ferret out dissidents as nearby countries erupted in revolt.

A man in his 20s living in Syria said that the police demanded his Facebook password late last month after arresting him where he worked and taking his laptop.

"I told him, at first, I didn't have a Facebook account, but he told me, after

he punched me in the face, that he knew I had one because they were watching my 'bad comments' on it," he said. "I knew then that they were monitoring me."

The man, who asked that his name not be used because he feared that talking openly could cost him his life, gave up his password and spent two weeks in jail. After he was released, he said that he found pro-regime comments made in his name on his Facebook account.

"I immediately created a new account with a fake name, and so did most of my friends," he said.

To help counter the protesters' successful online narrative, government supporters in Syria have created Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and YouTube channels to disseminate pro-regime messages on pages in Syria and around the world, including pages run by the White House and Oprah Winfrey, the talk show host.

The Syrian Electronic Army group is also working to disrupt dissident efforts. Its Facebook page, with 60,000 members, was shut down by Facebook itself this month for outlining detailed instructions on how to attack opponents online, a violation of Facebook's terms of service.

For now, activists in Syria say they will not know whether using Facebook has helped or hurt them until the revolt comes to an end.

"Using it for activism is a risky gambit," said Peter Eckersley, a staff technologist at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital privacy group that was looking into reports of an anonymous effort to hack into people's Facebook accounts in Syria. "It may be effective if the regime that you are campaigning against is insufficiently ruthless or powerful. If you win quickly, Facebook is the right tool to use. If not, it becomes much more dangerous."

Europe joins U.S. and puts sanctions on Syrian leader

BRUSSELS

Foreign ministers set differences aside and respond to crackdown

BY STEPHEN CASTLE

Five days after the United States imposed sanctions on Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, the European Union followed suit on Monday, overcoming internal divisions on whether to target him over the deadly crackdown against protesters in his country.

Earlier this month, the European Union announced a weapons embargo against Syria and visa bans and asset freezes on 13 senior Syrian officials but left Mr. Assad's name off the list. Cyprus led calls within the European Union at the time to keep lines of communication open to the leadership in Damascus and not to isolate its president.

European ministers said, however, that the escalation of pressure was

made inevitable by the continued violence in Syria. More than 700 people have been killed in more than two months of protests, according to activists.

Catherine Ashton, the E.U. foreign policy chief, said the message to the Syrian government was "to stop the violence and respect human rights." She added that 10 other Syrian names had been added to the sanctions list, though they have not been publicly identified.

Ms. Ashton did not call directly on Mr. Assad to resign. "It is for the people to decide the future and the government," she said.

In a statement, the European foreign ministers said they were "determined to take further measures without delay should the Syrian leadership choose not

to change its current path.”

Though the practical impact on Mr. Assad may be limited, the step is an important symbolic one, increasing his international isolation.

Washington imposed sanctions on Mr. Assad and six top aides last week, freezing any assets held within U.S. jurisdiction.

Germany's foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, argued that the European Union was left with little alternative by

The European Union's ministers are "determined to take further measures without delay" if necessary.

the uncompromising stance of the Syrian government.

"If someone represses his own people like that, responds to peaceful demonstrations with force, this can't be left unanswered by the European Union," he said.

In a separate move, the E.U. foreign ministers also expanded sanctions against Iran by singling out more than 100 companies or entities linked to the country's nuclear program. Several more Iranian officials were added to the visa ban and asset freeze list, though names were not released on Monday.

The expansion of sanctions is the latest step to try to increase pressure on Iran, which is suspected of trying to develop atomic weapons under the cover of its declared civilian nuclear energy

program. The government in Tehran says it needs nuclear power to meet a growing domestic demand for energy.

Talks with Iran on suspending the nuclear program, which were led by Ms. Ashton, have failed to produce a breakthrough. The last meeting was held in Istanbul in January and failed to yield any progress.

Meanwhile the E.U. ministers also added 13 more officials from Belarus to their sanctions list in protest of the crackdown on opposition parties there, which included the recent jailing of Andrei Sannikov, an important opposition figure.

Mr. Sannikov was sentenced on May 14 to five years in prison for organizing mass disturbances.



SAMEDI 21 ET DIMANCHE 22 MAI 2011

La répression, toujours aussi sauvage et sanglante, ne fonctionne pas: des milliers de manifestants ont à nouveau défié vendredi le régime syrien en défilant dans plusieurs villes du pays. Comme à l'accoutumée, l'armée et ses supplétifs civils, les *chahiba*, ont tiré sur la foule, tuant au moins 34 personnes, selon des militants des droits de l'homme.

A l'appel de l'opposition pour un «Vendredi de la liberté» et de l'unité nationale, les contestataires ont défilé, en particulier à Homs (centre), Deraa (sud), Baniyas

A Baniyas, des hommes ont défilé torse nu pour montrer qu'ils n'étaient pas armés, contrairement aux accusations du régime.

(nord-ouest) et Qamichli (nord). Les manifestations ont touché Alep, la deuxième ville du pays, jusqu' alors plutôt épargnée par les événements, et même des banlieues près de Damas. Si la protestation devait gagner durablement ces deux villes, ce serait un grave revers pour le régime syrien. Comme mot d'ordre, les opposants avaient choisi *Azadeh*, le mot kurde (en fait persan) pour «liberté», une façon de répondre au régime qui cherche à attiser les dissensions ethniques et religieuses.

En Syrie, rien n'arrête les manifestants

RÉBELLION Au moins 34 personnes sont mortes dans les défilés qui ont gagné Alep et la banlieue de Damas.



Extrait d'une vidéo postée vendredi sur YouTube montrant des manifestants à Baniyas. PHOTO AFP

A Baniyas, les manifestants portaient des branches d'olivier et des hommes ont défilé torse nu pour montrer qu'ils n'étaient pas armés, contrairement aux accusations du régime qui, depuis le début du soulèvement, attribue les troubles à «des gangs criminels armés» ou à des «groupes terroristes». Le bilan le plus lourd a été enregistré à Homs, assiégé depuis près de deux semaines par l'armée, où onze personnes ont été tuées, dont un enfant de 10 ans et un adolescent de 16 ans. Le principal responsable de la répression dans cette ville, le colonel

Mohammed al-Abdallah, ancien attaché militaire à Paris, a par ailleurs été tué, avec ses quatre gardes, près de la frontière sy-

rienne, sans que l'on sache dans quelles circonstances. Une telle attaque semble indiquer une radicalisation d'une partie de l'opposition. Jeudi, le président Obama avait haussé le ton, au lendemain de l'annonce de sanctions américaines contre le régime, visant, pour la première fois, Bachar al-Assad en personne. Il a ainsi appelé

le président syrien à diriger la transition ou à se retirer du pouvoir. Ce durcissement inattendu semble prendre en compte le récent regain de tension, dimanche, sur le plateau du Golan, resté

calme pendant des décennies, et sur la frontière israélo-libanaise, que les observateurs imputent à Damas. Pour une bonne raison: détourner l'attention de la révolte en cours. Celle-ci a déjà provoqué la mort de près d'un millier de personnes et 8 000 arrestations.

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Kurdish Government's Budget Draft Slammed by MPs



Kurdish security officers. Photo Rudaw.

By **HEMIN BABAN RAHIM**

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan -- A Rudaw investigation revealed the combined budget of eight ministries of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to be less than that allotted to the KRG's security services, which amounts to 15.57 percent of the entire budget of the Kurdistan Region. Iraq's security budget comprises 14.5 percent of the national budget, which is at least five times the size of the KRG's.

Meanwhile, a Kurdish parliamentary committee has raised serious questions over the fate of the funds that were left unspent from last year's budget.

The results of Rudaw's investigation show that the ministries of the interior and Peshmarga and the security directorates of Erbil and Sulaimani take 21.23 percent of the KRG's annual budget and 15.57 percent of the overall budget.

That is more than the combined operating budget of the ministries of higher education, health, reconstruction and housing, trade and industry, municipality and tourism, transportation and telecommunications, agriculture and water resources, and martyrs' and Anfal affairs.

Ashti Aziz, a lawmaker in Kurdish parliament and member of the Gorran opposition movement, said, "This budget puts Kurdistan in an emergency situation because the deficit increases year after year." She blamed the deficit partially on the large amount of resources allocated to security. She added that the ministries and agencies dealing with security have the highest share of new employment opportunities as well.

"Is there a dangerous plot against Kurdistan to need such a large security

budget?" asked the lawmaker.

Meanwhile, parliament's health and environment committee has criticized the low amount of funding dedicated to the health sector.

"The budget allocated for health is too little and stands at only 5.58 percent of the budget," said Hawraz Sheikh Ahmed, a member of the health committee.

"It should be at least 10 percent, because there are still many health problems in Kurdistan. The poor funding this sector receives has meant that our hospitals actually make people sick."

Kurdistan Region's budget for 2011 stands at 13.9 trillion Iraqi dinars (IQD), approximately \$11.5 billion. Of that amount, 9.7 trillion is allocated for operating budgets, while 4.1 trillion is designated for investment budgets.

Nearly 9.3 trillion of 2011's budget will be used to complete projects leftover from 2010. There are 2,334 such projects, according to the draft budget. Only 543 new projects have been proposed for this year, and an overall budget of 2.7 trillion is allocated for them. What has drawn even more criticism is that there are 61 projects from the years 2003, 2004, and 2005 that still need funding worth of 68.1 billion in order to be completed.

Aso Karim, a member of parliament from the majority Kurdistan bloc, blamed the "poor performance" of implementation committees and the government for the delay in timely completion of projects from previous years.

"In 2010, out of 1,442 projects, 1256 of them were finished and handed over to the government, but many more did not meet the deadline," said Karim. He added that 21 projects outlined in the 2011 draft budget were given less than 10 percent of the funds necessary for their completion. At least

10 percent of their funds should have been provided, he said.

In another case, only four billion Iraqi dinars were set aside for the building of an airport in the city of Dohuk, while the project requires 144 billion.

Ashti Aziz, from the Gorran bloc, said that unfinished projects hinder the building of new projects. She added that many of these projects are not strategic projects that would significantly contribute to the rebuilding of Kurdistan's infrastructure.

Aziz said while, in Dohuk province, there is a high demand for a cancer hospital, the authorities have proposed building a tunnel -- with a budget of 30 billion -- which is not as urgent and necessary at this point.

A major cause of concern among MPs is the fate of the funds for 2010 projects that were not fully spent. Hama Saeed Hama Ali, an MP who is a member of the integrity committee, said his committee sent a letter to the prime minister's office asking him for an explanation as to the whereabouts of the leftover funds from 2010 fiscal year.

"Because we haven't received the final auditing sheets, we don't know what has happened to 90 billion dinars from the political parties' budgets, 120 billion from youth empowerment projects, 10 billion from sports funds, 30 billion from the industrial bank project, and 150 billion for exemplary schools," said Hama Ali, listing a long litany of funds that remain unaccounted for.

"Of the youth empowerment funds only 40 percent has been spent, and none of the funds for sports or the industrial bank have been spent. It's all very unclear and opens the door for corruption."

The Kurdistan region receives its annual budget from the central government in Iraq, and, according to Ismael Galali, a lawmaker and member of the finance committee, from the 298 billion Iraqi dinars allocated for the provincial development budget, the KRG claims to have received only 191 billion, raising suspicion over what happened to seven billion Iraqi dinars.

Galali suggested the parliament form a budget committee that will only deal with budget matters in order to bring about more accountability.

Some MPs have called for parliament to cut 50 billion dinars from the political parties' budgets and allocate it to marriage loans for young people. ■

Irak: au moins 19 morts et 2 soldats américains tués dans de nouvelles violences

De Salam FARAJ (AFP)

Au moins 19 personnes ont péri et 84 ont été blessées dimanche en Irak dans une dizaine d'attaques, qui posent de nouveau la question de la capacité des forces irakiennes à sept mois du retrait prévu de l'armée américaine, qui a perdu dimanche deux de ses soldats.

Au total, 13 bombes artisanales et trois voitures piégées ont explosé, en plus d'un attentat suicide.

L'attaque la plus meurtrière a été un double attentat perpétré vers 09H00 (06H00 GMT) à Taji, à 25 km au nord de Bagdad, qui a fait 12 morts et 23 blessés, selon un responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur. Une source à la Défense a fait état de 14 morts et 30 blessés.

Après l'explosion d'une voiture piégée, un kamikaze a activé sa ceinture d'explosifs au moment où les forces de police, les secours et de nombreuses autres personnes affluaient sur les lieux. Huit policiers figurent au nombre des tués.

Dans le sud de la capitale, quatre bombes artisanales ont explosé près d'un poste de police du quartier d'Amel avant qu'une voiture piégée n'explose à son tour, faisant au total deux morts et 15 blessés, selon le responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur.

Toujours dans le sud, un milicien "Sahwa" travaillant pour le gouvernement a été tué et quatre blessés par une bombe magnétique dans le quartier de Dora et un attentat a fait trois blessés dans le secteur de Saïdiya.

Dans le quartier déshérité de Sadr City (nord-ouest), deux bombes contre un hôpital et un marché ont fait deux morts et 14 blessés. Selon des témoins, l'une de ces explosions était le fait d'une voiture piégée.

Dans le secteur d'Al-Talbiya (nord), une voiture piégée a explosé au passage du convoi d'un général du ministère de l'Intérieur, faisant un mort et cinq blessés, dont deux des gardes du corps de l'officier. Un autre attentat près de la place Wassiq (cen-

Des forces irakiennes inspectent le site où a eu lieu une explosion, le 22 mai dans le nord de Bagdad (AFP, Ahmad al-Rubaye)



tre) a fait un mort et 12 blessés.

Dans l'est de Bagdad, six personnes ont été blessées par une bombe au passage d'une patrouille de police, et deux autres ont été blessées par deux bombes qui visaient la voiture d'un employé du commandement des opérations de Bagdad, dans le secteur d'al-Kanaat.

Ces attentats interviennent trois jours après la mort de 29 personnes - presque tous des policiers - dans trois attentats dans la ville multiethnique de Kirkouk.

Deux soldats américains ont par ailleurs été tués dimanche dans le centre de l'Irak, selon l'armée américaine.

Signe des difficultés des forces irakiennes face à une insurrection qui a toujours la capacité de frapper fort, ces violences rendent un peu plus pressante la délicate question du retrait, ou non, des forces américaines, toujours présentées par certains Irakiens comme une force d'occupation.

Plus de huit ans après l'invasion qui avait précipité la chute de Saddam Hussein, l'armée américaine compte encore 45.000 hommes en Irak, engagés dans la formation des forces irakiennes. Et de nombreux responsables américains ont exhorté Bagdad à se décider au plus vite sur une éventuelle demande de prolongation de cette mission.

Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a prôné la semaine dernière la tenue d'un dialogue national pour trancher ce débat sensible.

Dimanche, le courant du chef radical chiite irakien Moqtada Sadr a réaffirmé son hostilité à la présence américaine.

"La protection de toutes les régions du pays relève de la seule responsabilité des forces irakiennes, qui sont capables de le faire", a déclaré le député sadriste Jawad al-Hasnaoui. "Nous n'avons pas besoin des forces étrangères."

Mais un responsable kurde s'est au contraire prononcé pour le maintien des Américains.

"L'Irak a toujours besoin des forces américaines dans le secteur militaire, pour la sécurité, mais aussi dans le domaine politique", a déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse à Erbil Jabbar Yawar, secrétaire général du ministère des peshmergas (combattants kurdes) de la région du Kurdistan.



à vélo au bout du monde

Renversant Kurdistan

Depuis la rupture du cadre du vélo de Matthieu, le mauvais nuage qui trônait au dessus de nos têtes semble avoir disparu. Bien que toujours en Turquie, nous avons changé d'univers, en atteignant le Kurdistan.

Pas de frontière, pas de check point, en théorie, nous sommes toujours en Turquie. Rien, mis à part les "Jandarma" sur-militarisées (casernes militaires), ne laissent présager que nous avons quitté le sol turc.

Regardez sur un atlas ou une carte du monde, vous ne trouverez aucune allusion à ce pays. D'un point de vue géopolitique, nous sommes ici encore en Turquie, mais la population locale et un brin d'étymologie, nous font dire que nous sommes en plein cœur du "pays des kurdes", le Kurdistan. Et le Kurdistan, c'est Renversant.

Renversant tout d'abord lorsqu'au hasard d'une discussion vous évoquez cette province à un turc nationaliste (pléonasm). Inquiet, on vous parle alors de PKK, de terrorisme, de tensions. La seule issue pour éviter les "turcs de la montagne" (comme les appelait Atatürk), serait alors de contourner la région ou de se munir d'une arme automatique. Réjouissant programme! Mais le renversement n'est pas là, il est tout autre. Il n'est pas observable au prime abord. En effet, lorsque nous roulons, comme depuis le début de l'épopée turque, il fait toujours gris, le vent est toujours de face, et lorsque les enfants ne nous caillaient pas, les loups et chiens errants ont toujours autant d'appétit pour nous croquer les mollets. Mais une nouvelle donnée vient s'inscrire sur notre route. Ici, il est désormais inenvisageable d'aller bivouaquer dans mère nature, non pas que celle-ci soit plus inhospitalière qu'ailleurs. Non. Au fil des çay (thé à la turc) proposés sur la route, les portes s'ouvrent sans craintes, les tables se dressent, et la nuitée rapidement et naturellement nous est proposée. Alors, voisins et amis curieux viennent observer les deux cyclistes, qui, un peu fous, venus de France sont de passage dans leur village.

Les kilomètres et les villes s'égrainent àprement sur le chapelet de notre voyage kurde. Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Mardin, nous arrivons après quelques douloureux cols à Diyarbakir où Agnès et Marie viennent nous rejoindre pour 8 jours charmants de découverte cyclopedique. Nous allons partager avec elles notre quotidien nomade et découvrir chaque jour un peu plus en leur compagnie, l'accueil kurde. Ainsi nous testerons avec elles les nuitées dans une Lokanta (restaurant routier) tenue par



de fervents partisans du DTP (parti autonomiste dont les députés ont la fâcheuse tendance à finir leur mandat en prison). Agréable moment avec cette dizaine d'hommes fiers, qu'à plusieurs reprises nous menaçons comiquement de dénonciation à la Jandarma locale. Une autre nuit encore, c'est dans la chaleur d'un foyer familial que nous partagerons un délicieux repas, et après une longue discussion déchiffrée dans un anglais approximatif, nous finirons par nous écrouler dans une pièce voisine.

Accueil, partage, ces mots semblent être inscrits dans la doctrine kurde. Plus que devoirs, ils entrent dans les valeurs du savoir-vivre. La capacité à accueillir l'étranger fait l'honneur des familles que nous croisons, la déception est perceptible quand nous devons refuser certaines invitations. Un proverbe local dit, "L'hôte est un envoyé de Dieu". Ces personnes croisées au hasard du voyage en sont la preuve vivante. Qu'il est divin de laisser l'inconfort quotidien de sa selle et de la route pour sécher ses vêtements trempés près du poêle familial, de se laisser offrir un dîner épicé et s'allonger sur un matelas de fortune, la tête sur un oreiller douillet. Au moment d'aller dormir, la télévision diffusera de nombreux clips où les membres du PKK, hommes comme femmes, se tiennent par la main et dansent en hommage à leurs martyrs.

Ces chants nous les entendons souvent, car ici, les occasions de festivité ne manquent pas. Sur la route entre Gaziantep et Sanliurfa, un taxi collectif flamant neuf se gare sur le bas-côté et décharge danseurs et musiciens. Zurna et Dohol (instruments de musique locaux) raisonnent. Des hommes nous

invitent à rejoindre le cortège, et rapidement nous sommes entraînés dans la danse. Pas de mariage, pas de fête religieuse, cette grande famille célèbre simplement la nouvelle acquisition du pater familias: un taxi collectif flamant neuf. Tous dansent, main dans la main, l'homme de tête faisant voler un foulard aux teintes flashy devant lui, le reste de la troupe imitant ses pas. Nous revivons ces instants de danses et de chants, après qu'Agnès et Marie nous aient quittés à Van après 400km d'intempéries et de reliefs. Cette fois-ci la fête est grande, c'est un mariage qui est célébré. Les hommes dans leurs beaux sarouels et costumes de bonne coupe, les femmes dans leur tenue scintillantes et colorées dansent ensemble. Seul le repas se fera séparément, les hommes avant les femmes... surprenante logistique machiste.

Après toutes ces festivités, il faut reprendre la route avec un objectif: rejoindre au plus vite la Géorgie pour demander nos visas Azéris. Ainsi, nous quittons le Kurdistan, passons Erzurum, puis Trabzon pour enfin atteindre la frontière turco-géorgienne que nous franchissons de nuit.

La Géorgie nous offre un paysage et une ambiance radicalement différents de la Turquie. A Batumi, les voiles se font voler la vedette par les minijupes, les mosquées sont détronées par de belles églises géorgiennes et le Cay, après des hectolitres bus en Turquie, se voit dorénavant troqué par le vin et la vodka. Nous risquons d'apprécier le pays qui, il y a 5000 ans, aurait inventé la vinification. Avant toute chose, nous devons rejoindre Tbilissi, où Christine, jeune institutrice française nous attend.



Al Jazeera — 26 May 2011

Campaign trail fight gets 'dirty' in Turkey

Country's political future at stake in June 12 vote, but sex tapes scandal and Kurdish unrest share campaign spotlight.

Simon Hooper / Al Jazeera

A bitter election campaign is under way in Turkey, coloured by a sex tapes scandal and growing unrest in the Kurdish southeast, which could pave the way for the most radical overhaul to the country's political system in decades. Incumbent prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is expected to sweep to a third consecutive victory in parliamentary elections on June 12, but less clear is whether the quirks of Turkey's electoral system will hand Erdogan a majority large enough to press ahead with his promise to re-write the country's constitution.

Erdogan, bolstered by victory in a referendum last year on an expansive package of constitutional amendments, has pledged to introduce a "constitution of the people", replacing the existing one, drafted in 1982 in the wake of a military coup, with one founded on western democratic values, pluralism and individual freedoms.

But critics, wary of the AKP's Islamist roots, say the project could further undermine Turkey's secular system and even lead to "South American-style authoritarianism".

They also accuse Erdogan of harbouring personal ambitions over his stated desire to replace the existing parliamentary system with a presidential style of government.

"It's almost for sure that we will have a new constitution in the next couple of years," Ali Carkoglu, a professor of political science at Istanbul's Koc University, told Al Jazeera.

"Everything depends on the result of this election. If the AKP wins with enough seats to reshape the constitution, then a great deal of conflict could emerge out of this. These are issues which touch the very foundations of the republic, and the debate now is getting very ugly."

STABILITY AND CONTINUITY

Erdogan's centre-right party is running on a platform of stability and continuity, founded on nearly a decade of impressive economic stewardship in a country more commonly associated with hyper-inflation than the hypermarkets, new highways and hospitals now found across Turkey's once underdeveloped Anatolian heartland.

That has given the AKP a seemingly unassailable platform, according to opinion polls, which suggest the ruling party has the backing of upwards of 45 per cent of Turkey's more than 50 million voters.

But the AKP's ballot box advantage could translate into even greater parliamentary weight if Turkey's floundering ultra-nationalists - the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) - fail to achieve the 10 per cent share of the national vote required for a party to enter parliament.

The MHP, which currently holds 72 parliamentary seats, looks set to be punished by its traditionally conservative support base after videos posted on the internet purportedly showed several senior figures having sex in a house allegedly hired by the party for the purpose of extra-marital affairs.

Ten high-ranking officials have already quit over the scandal,



Opinion polls suggest Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is heading for a third straight election win [EPA]

and Birol Baskan, a Turkey specialist at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, said the party's MPs were at risk of losing their jobs as well.

"The MHP is now destroyed - morale is low and the party leader [Devlet Bahçeli] is demoralised. I don't think they can survive this," said Baskan.

A scenario in which the nationalists failed to cross the 10 per cent threshold would be to the advantage of the AKP, said Baskan, with the extra seats it could expect to gain pushing it towards a two-thirds super-majority of 367 seats - a result that would enable it to rewrite the constitution without the consent of other parties, or even resort to a referendum.

That has led to bitter accusations that Erdogan has set his sights on destroying the MHP as a parliamentary force, and allegations - strenuously denied by the ruling party - that forces connected to, or sympathetic to, the AKP were behind the leaking of the sex tapes.

'DIRTY CAMPAIGN'

Clearly it's becoming a very dirty campaign, simply because if one of the parties can be eliminated, then the governing party will reap the benefits of the extra seats, and then they can have a much easier time passing the new constitution" said Carkoglu.

Yet even with a parliamentary super-majority, any AKP attempt to radically change the political system would likely polarise the country, said Diba Nigar Goksel, the editor-in-chief of Turkish Policy Quarterly.

Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has endured periodic run-ins with Turkey's traditional establishment, which accuses it of seeking to dilute the secularist foundations laid down by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923.

The most striking example of those continuing tensions is the ongoing investigation into the so-called Ergenekon - or 'Sledgehammer' - plot, which has seen hundreds of army officers, retired soldiers and journalists jailed, pending trial over allegations that they conspired to overthrow Erdogan's government.

Several of those defendants are standing for election from their

prison cells as figureheads of opposition to AKP dominance, including Cetin Dogan, a retired general alleged to have been the plot's conspirator-in-chief.

"The unity and peace of our country is facing a serious threat," Dogan said in an appeal to voters.

But Goksel said efforts to write a new constitution could also reveal fractures within the ruling party itself.

While the AKP's success in elections has been built on in its ability to draw pragmatic support from a range of factions and interest groups within Turkey, that coalition would be much harder to sustain on "ideological issues", she said.

"The reason the AKP is able to get so many votes is because it is can go to different provinces with different messages," Goksel told Al Jazeera.

"In order to get this much support, you have to have very diverse groups and very diverse thinking in your party. That's a strength in some ways, but it is also a liability, because it makes the party contradict itself."

One issue that has already exposed apparent divisions within the AKP is Erdogan's stated preference for a presidential system of government.

While a more personality-driven style of executive politics would suit the charismatic former mayor of Istanbul, other senior AKP figures, including the current president, Abdullah Gul, and Bulent Arinc, the deputy prime minister, have expressed reservations.

'DESPOTIC AMBITIONS'

Opponents have been more forceful in their objections. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) accused the AKP of "despotic ambitions", while Nursen Mazici, a political sciences professor at Istanbul's Marmara University, wrote that under a presidential system "Turkey would become an authoritarian model, like Venezuela".

Carkoglu said constitutional questions and Erdogan's combative political style would likely throw up problems after the election because there was "no tradition of forming consensus" in Turkish politics.

The AKP, which was fined and warned in 2008 by the country's constitutional court over alleged anti-secularist activities, could still encounter opposition from Turkey's staunchly secularist judiciary, he added.

The issue of greater rights for Turkey's estimated 14-million Kurdish minority also looks set to pose a problem for Erdogan

and his party, both in the run-up to next month's vote and afterwards.

Having once courted support in the southeast with its "Kurdish initiative", which liberalised rules banning the use of Kurdish language and promised greater cultural rights, the AKP appears largely to have given up its quest for votes in the region, amid Kurdish discontent and a renewed insurgency by the separatist fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Earlier this month, Erdogan told a rally in the eastern city of Mus that there was no longer a "Kurdish question" in Turkey. A few days later, PKK fighters attacked an AKP campaign bus in the Black Sea region of Kastamonu - killing one policeman - shortly after Erdogan had addressed a rally.

The PKK's jailed leader, Abdullah Ocalan, then threatened the government with a "great war" unless it began talks on greater Kurdish autonomy within days of the election.

Meanwhile the funerals of PKK fighters killed by Turkish forces have triggered periodic riots and angry protests on the streets of Diyarbakir, the main city in the restive southeast.

"No matter how many votes the AKP gains, no matter how masterful the government turns, no matter if the prime minister becomes president, and no matter how remarkably Turkey grows, without finding a solution to the Kurdish conflict, nothing will work or become sustainable," wrote Cengiz Aktar in the Hurriyet newspaper.

Baskan said the Kurdish issue was the weak point of Erdogan's campaign for re-election, with independent candidates representing the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) likely to gain votes at the AKP's expense in Kurdish-majority districts.

"Even among the Turkish population, there is a suspicion that Erdogan cannot manage this problem effectively," he said.

But he said the threat of Kurdish unrest, and speculation over Erdogan's presidential ambitions, were distractions from the main debate over what a new constitution for the country should look like.

"This is about much needed developments to turn Turkey into a much more liberal democracy; freedom of speech, freedom of religion, these constitutional reforms are top of the agenda, rather than the merits of a presidential versus a parliamentary system. What sort of secular system do we want? These are the real issues that this election is about."



May 16, 2011

U.S. Forces hand over military base to Iraqi Army in Kirkuk

KIRKUK / Aswat al-Iraq: The U.S. force have handed over a military base to the Iraqi Army in northern Iraq's city of Kirkuk on Sunday, the city's Police Director said.

Al-Bakkara military base, southwest of Kirkuk, was handed over to the Iraqi Army by the U.S. Forces, in a celebration on Sunday, attended by local government, Army and police commands, as well as U.S. Army officers, Lt. Brigadier, Sarhad Qader told Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

Qader said the base was the second military base, handed over

by the U.S. forces to the Iraqi Army, after al-Rashad base, 35 km to the southwest of Kirkuk, that was handed over early this year.

The measure had taken place, being part of the complete withdrawal of the U.S. non-combat forces, estimated to reach 50,000, scheduled to take place at the end of the current year, after the withdrawal of the U.S. combat troops last August, in compliance with the Security Agreement, signed between Baghdad and Washington at the end of 2008. Kirkuk is 280 km to the north of Baghdad.

Kurdistan: the other Iraq

By Liz Sly

So, I'm lying on a fluffy white duvet and surfing the flat-screen TV embedded in my hotel room wall. I've just finished a meal of Milanese risotto flavored with saffron, washed down with a glass of chilled pinot grigio. Through the window, I can see the twinkling lights of what claims to be the oldest continually inhabited city in the world, giving way to the darkness of the plains of northern Iraq.

That's right. I'm in Iraq. In a five-star hotel. With Italian wine and Italian food, cooked by a real Italian chef. There are buckets of iced champagne sitting on the bar downstairs, and a Bulgarian pianist is playing classical music in the marbled lobby. It's just too un-Iraq to be true — and in some ways it's not true.

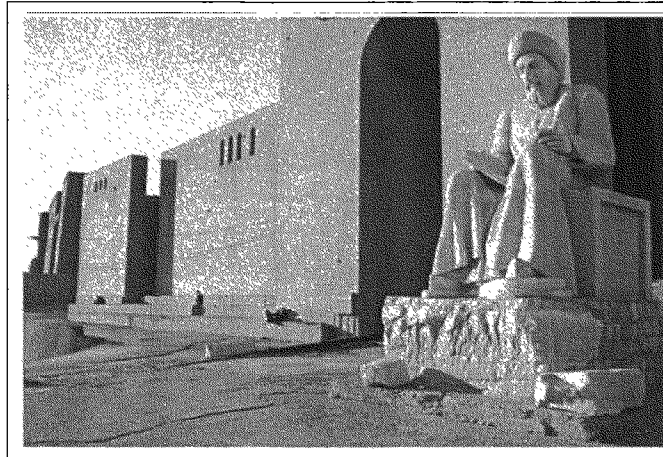
For this isn't the real Iraq, the one where bombs go off and people are assassinated and the electricity is almost never on. This is Kurdistan, the northern enclave that broke away from Saddam Hussein's Iraq after the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War and secured virtual autonomy from Baghdad following the U.S. invasion in 2003. It's mostly safe, and much of it is beautiful, in some places spectacularly so. It's populated not by Arabs but by Kurds, who claim European descent, speak their own language and are possessed of an unqualified love for all Americans.

It's also old, with archaeological settlements dating back 9,000 years and remnants of a multitude of civilizations too numerous to list. Kurds like to promote it as "the other Iraq," an acknowledgment that it is in fact part of that country. But as they will also readily tell you, they dream of independence in an expanded nation of Kurdistan reaching into Turkey, Syria and Iran.

And it is supposedly the hot new tourist destination of 2011, scraping in at No. 20 on National Geographic's list of "20 best trips of 2011."

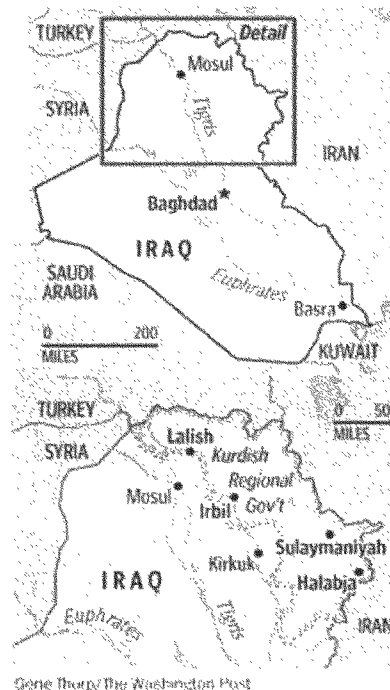
I'm here to find out why.

It soon becomes apparent that the five-star Irbil Rotana Hotel is not the real Kurdistan, either. It's a pinprick of Western-style luxury in a largely unspoiled land. Irbil's spanking new airport, a cavernous structure of white steel and gleaming marble, speaks to



Ancient and glorious — and mostly safe — this Iraq destination is ready for its day in the sun.

Iranian soldiers in 2009 found out.



Kurdistan's aspirations to become a global destination for businessmen and tourists. Its rattlingly empty terminals suggest that there's still a long way to go to fulfill those ambitions.

Here, travelers can obtain 10-day visas, which are not, however, valid for the rest of Iraq. And that raises one of the key challenges of any visit: figuring out where Kurdistan ends and the rest of Iraq begins. The borders between the region of Kurdistan and the rest of the country are hotly disputed, and it's not a good idea to stray beyond them into areas still prowled by insurgents.

Indeed, it's a good idea to steer clear of any of Kurdistan's borders, as three Americans who went hiking in the direction of Iran and were detained by

In addition to the risk of straying into hostile territory, travelers need to be aware of possible anti-government protests. Kurds recently underwent their own mini-version of an Arab Spring, with almost daily demonstrations in the region's second city, Sulaymaniyah. Live ammunition was used against the demonstrators, and though the protest movement has now been crushed, the core grievances that caused it, including corruption and restrictions on free speech, have not been resolved. The unrest has severely dented Kurdistan's claims of being an oasis of calm in a troubled region and undermined its boasts of democracy.

Kurds, however, know where the boundaries lie and where protests are likely to occur, so the best way to get around, short of joining an organized tour, is to hire local guides. Driver Ako Abdullah and Kurdish journalist Kameran Najm are waiting for me at the airport, along with American photographer Sebastian Meyer, and we set out for Sulaymaniyah, a two-hour drive away.

Sulaymaniyah is what is known in Iraq as a "new" city, which means that it was built in 1784. It looks little like the flat, beige, monotonous cityscapes of Iraq so familiar from years of TV war coverage. Mulberry trees line the streets, snow-capped mountains glitter against a clear blue sky, and the bazaar is crowded with Kurds in the billowing pants and round caps that are the most visible signs of their distinctive culture.

We stop for tea at the legendary Sha'ab (People's) tea shop, which is packed with men sipping glasses of piercingly sweet tea and shouting loudly while playing dominos. Apparently they are discussing such matters as poetry, art and politics, because this is the intellec-

tual hub of a city that prides itself on its learning. The walls are lined with pictures of turbaned men who are famous poets, artists and writers.

There are also blurry, fading photographs of the pesh merga fighters, the onetime rebels who occupy a central role in Kurdish history and are key to understanding Kurdistan and its culture. They pose in baggy pants, carrying Kalashnikovs, in the snowy mountains where they took refuge to wage their guerrilla war against Hussein.

Their triumph came in 1991, after the Gulf War, when the Kurds revolted and ejected Iraqi forces. One of the fiercest battles was fought here in Sulaymaniyah, at what is known as the Red Security Building. It's actually gray, but that's the name it was given when it housed the offices of the dreaded Mukhabarat, Hussein's intelligence service. The facade is still peppered with bullet holes, a reminder of the fierce fighting that took place as the pesh merga fighters closed in on the besieged Baathists inside.

Kurdish authorities have preserved the structure as testimony to the tyranny of Hussein's regime and have turned the prison block where Kurdish dissidents were kept and tortured into a museum. The walls of one room have been embedded with the shards of mirrors, 80,000 in all, in an eerily evocative memorial to the estimated 80,000 victims of Hussein's attempt in the late 1980s to wipe out the Kurds altogether.

Otherwise, little has been done to formalize the facility, except to strew a few authentically grubby blankets around the stone floors and install a smattering of life-size white plaster figures cast in postures of suffering.

It could be garish, but it's not. There's a raw immediacy to the dank, dark cells where prisoners were crammed by the score, and wandering through them, you can feel the misery and the squalor. In the interrogation room, a plaster man is strung by his wrists from the ceiling. Apparently there's a truly terrifying recording of screams that plays when you press a button. But on the day we visit, it isn't working.

Not forgetting Hussein is high on the agenda of the Kurds, who wear the suffering of their past with a mixture of pride and determination to guard against history's habit of repeating itself.

To that end, they have also constructed an appropriately ugly museum memorializing one of Hussein's ugliest deeds, in the town of Halabja, an hour's drive southeast of Sulaymaniyah.

It was here, in 1988, that Iraqi warplanes dropped bombs packed with mustard gas and cyanide on Kurdish civilians, apparently to punish them for supporting the pesh merga. The museum features a diorama of plaster dead people and real stuffed animals based on scenes captured by news photographers, a wall inscribed with the names of the 5,000 or so victims and a video of the horrific injuries inflicted.

It's a powerful reminder of the evils of Hussein's regime, so easily forgotten in the chaos and bloodshed that followed the U.S. invasion. And it's a reminder that despite the brutal efforts of Arab dictators to suppress the clamor for democratic change now sweeping the Middle East, none yet has come close to Hussein in the scale of atrocities committed against his own people.

But now it's time to check out some of the more ancient aspects of Kurdistan's heritage, so we head back to Irbil. Because it's already dark, we have to skip the 9,000-year-old village of Jarmo, reputedly the oldest discovered site of human habitation in the world, though locals assure us that there's nothing to see but a few holes in the ground.

The next day, we head northwest across the rolling plains of biblical Ninevah, where the pre-Christian Assyrian empire was based. Striking out across what appears to be an empty field, we encounter the half-buried remains of an Assyrian aqueduct at the site of Jerwan. Built about 3,000 years ago, it lies alongside a definitely modern minefield planted by Saddam's army.

The minefield, mercifully, is marked by rows of upside-down red triangles on sticks. The ruins bear no sign identifying them as an important archaeological site, and we clamber over them, running our fingers over the cuneiform inscriptions left by the workmen of a forgotten civilization, who constructed what is reputed to be world's oldest aqueduct.

Heading north into the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, we pass a growing number of pointy, conical structures, signifying that we are closing in on our next destination — Lalish, the spiritual capital of the obscure and much threatened Yazidi religious minority.

One of the lures of Kurdistan is its diversity; most Kurds are Sunni Muslim, but there are also sizable minorities, including Christians of various ancient denominations. The pointy cones are graves and temples belonging to the Yazidis, who claim to be the original inhabitants of the land.

Lalish is where they believe the world

began, where Adam (without the help of Eve), gave birth to man and where Noah built his ark, on the nearby peak of Mount Arafat. Their main temple, carved from a cave in the mountainside, is dedicated to a more modern figure, Sheikh Adi, known as the religion's 12th-century "reformer."

Inside it is dark and cold, but the walls and pillars are strung with brightly colored cloths which you can tie into knots while making a wish. Deeper in, alongside Sheikh Adi's tomb, there's another wishmaking opportunity. This time, you get three chances to toss a cloth onto a tall pillar. If you miss, you don't get your wish.

The Yazidis seem to have a lot of rules. Lettuce is banned, as is the color blue — because it insults the sky, explains the shrine's guardian, Baba Chawush, who invites us for tea in his home adjoining the temple. Yazidis pray five times a day in the direction of the sun, their holy day is Wednesday, and they venerate a peacock angel who stands at the right hand of God.

There's more, some of it undisclosed, because for many centuries the Yazidis were a closed and secretive sect. But now they have concluded that their survival may best be ensured by opening up to the world. Tourists are welcome, and so are their probing questions, although you're left with the impression that they aren't quite telling you everything.

Another reason to visit Kurdistan is the spectacular scenery, and you don't have to stray into dangerous territory to find it. Two hours northeast of Irbil lies the legendary beauty spot of Rawanduz, along a road that climbs improbably high into jagged peaks and winds perilously along plunging gorges.

Rounding one last peak, we come across the reason Iraqis flock to the area in the thousands during the summer months: a lurid amusement park perched on the mountainside, complete with a Ferris wheel and a contraption best described as a cross between a luge and a roller coaster, which sends you rocketing down the mountainside at breakneck speed in a little capsule.

On surrounding peaks is evidence of further development. Grand houses and holiday chalets painted pink, blue and lavender are springing up all around, suggesting that Kurdistan's reputation as an unspoiled wilderness is in jeopardy. But my colleague Kamaran assures me that plenty of other beauty spots remain untouched.

Finally, it's time to explore the Kurdish capital of Irbil, which claims to outrank Syria's capital, Damascus, as the oldest

continually inhabited city in the world by a few thousand years.

At first glance, there's nothing old at all about this pancake-flat metropolis, whose squat beige structures give it a strong resemblance to most other Iraqi cities. Except that the streets are clean and freshly paved, and every other building, it seems, is either brand-new or under construction.

Irbil is in the throes of a massive economic boom, fueled by its proximity to the real Iraq. Businesses are flooding here to gain a foothold, and tourists from the rest of the country swarm here to shop in the rapidly proliferating malls and to eat and drink in safety at the restaurants, bars and outdoor cafes of Ankawa, a Christian suburb where alcohol is readily available.

For American travelers, the biggest draw is likely to be the ancient citadel, a vast

walled city towering 90 feet above the traditional bazaar. I had assumed that its soaring ramparts were some form of defense, but David Michelmore, a British conservationist working at the site, explains that the citadel is high simply because so many civilizations have been layered atop one another. The earliest identified dates to the Uruk era in approximately 6000-4000 B.C.; the uppermost structures were mostly built in the 19th century under Ottoman rule.

In 2006, the last remaining residents were evicted to prepare for a massive restoration expected to last a decade. Michelmore envisages that once complete, it will resemble the exquisite walled city in Damascus, with the Ottoman-era homes converted into trendy restaurants and boutique hotels.

But sometimes, unrestored has its own charm. We stroll along the deserted cobblestone streets and wander into living

rooms and courtyards that once belonged to now long-dead merchants and functionaries, admiring the elaborate murals and the elegant wood and stone carvings of a bygone era, when home decor didn't come from Ikea.

That's perhaps one of Kurdistan's biggest attractions: that it's still so untouched by the modern world. Yes, modernity is galloping at a furious pace into Irbil and beyond. But in three days of exploring, we haven't encountered a single other tourist.

Where else in the world can you climb over 3,000-year-old ruins next to a minefield? Or sip tea with the adherents of an ancient religion?

And there's certainly no place else in Iraq where you can toast the day's end with a glass of chilled pinot grigio.

Chicago Tribune | May 26, 2011

Turkey: 8 injured in bomb blast during rush hour in Istanbul, PM accuses Kurdish rebels

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA
Associated Press

ISTANBUL — A bomb mounted on a bicycle near a bus stop exploded during morning rush hour in Istanbul on Thursday, injuring eight people, including a police officer, officials said.

Several ambulances rushed to the scene on a multi-lane thoroughfare in a busy commercial section of the city. Television footage showed medics moving a woman with a neck brace on a stretcher into a hospital.

Police Chief Huseyin Capkin said the bomb was not a powerful one, but was still designed to cause moderate destruction. Police were investigating whether the target was a police training school nearby. Huseyin Avni Mutlu, Istanbul's governor, said police were also investigating whether the bomb was time- or remote-controlled.

"Our consolation is that no one was killed," Capkin said.

The police chief said one of the injured was a policeman who was passing by. He said none of the injured was in life-threatening condition. One woman however, lost a leg in the blast while another sustained severe burns to her face, the Dogan and Anatolia news agencies reported.

CNN-Turk television said the explosion occurred as a bus passed by, shattering its rear windows and injuring passen-



Security members, medics and forensic experts work at the scene after a bomb exploded at a bus stop during rush hour in Istanbul, Turkey, Thursday, May 26, 2011. Seven people were injured as several ambulances rushed to the scene on a multi-lane thoroughfare in a busy commercial section of the city. (AP Photo) (AP / May 26, 2011)

gers in the back of the vehicle.

Five vehicles in total were damaged in the blast, Capkin said.

Fearing a secondary blast, police sealed off the area with yellow tape and bomb disposal experts arrived. Investigators searched for clues.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility and the police chief refused to say who may be behind the attack.

A Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, is fighting for autonomy in southeastern Turkey and has carried out bomb attacks in Istanbul in the past. The rebels' jailed leader has warned of more violence if their demands for negotiations are not met after elections on

June 12.

Turkey also has a history of attacks by Islamic and leftist extremists.

In 2003, Islamic militants tied to al-Qaida carried out suicide bombings in Istanbul, killing 58 people.

An attack blamed on al-Qaida-affiliated militants outside the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul in 2008, left three attackers and three policemen dead.

"They will not get away with it," Capkin said of the culprits. "The people of Istanbul should feel at ease."

HRW: Kurdish Government Not Better Than Saddam Hussein's

By WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG
RUDAW

Human Rights Watch (HRW) severely criticized the human rights situation in Kurdistan on Tuesday, and claimed that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is not much better than the former government of Saddam Hussein.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government promised a new era of freedom for Iraqi Kurds, but it seems no more respectful of Kurdish rights to free speech than the government that preceded it," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. She refused to comment further on her comparison between the former and current governments.

KRG officials and security forces are carrying out a growing assault on the freedom of journalists to work in Iraqi Kurdistan, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday. They added that regional officials should stop repressing journalists through libel suits, beatings, detentions, and death threats.

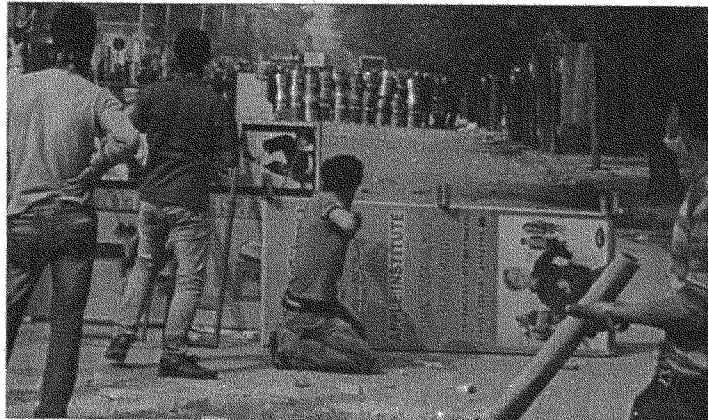
This notion—that Kurdish security forces attack journalists—is shared by the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Frank Smyth, the Washington, D.C. representative of CPJ, who visited Kurdistan in April, wrote on his blog for the CPJ that "security forces have also been attacking journalists who have been covering the protests."

Kamal Chomani, a correspondent and managing editor at Livin magazine agrees that the current government is not much better than the Baath regime of

Saddam Hussein. He hopes that the last report helps to pressure the government into becoming more democratic.

"During the time of Saddam Hussein some people would beat you, torture you, or even kill you if you wrote about them. You can see the same thing today in Sulaymaniyah. You saw how security people beat Rebin Herdi and other journalists who were arrested or tortured," said Chomani.

But Hiwa Osman, Country Director for the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), which trains journalists in Kurdistan and Iraq, says that the current government isn't like the former autocratic regime of Saddam Hussein. "I wouldn't necessarily say that. In the former government, if you just spoke about



A scene from Sulaimani's protests in February. Photo by Kurdish View Blog.

the president, you would be executed. We [Metro Magazine] published caricatures of [Kurdish president] Barzani and nobody came after us."

Still, Osman adds that physical attacks against journalists are increasing. "That's a key problem that needs to be faced," he said. "Although we are claiming to be a democracy, although we are trying to do all the right things, some of the symptoms of the past regime linger on." He warns that these aggressions are "becoming like a culture amongst some of the security officers". "Many journalist friends of mine tell me you cannot carry a camera and walk normally around Suleymaniya or, to some extent, Erbil."

The idea that the Kurdish government is backtracking on democracy is shared by other foreign journalists. Christian Science Monitor editor Dan Murphy wrote last Monday that when Saddam was still in power, "Free Kurdistan" was a popular destination for journalists, but now, he says, "Kurdistan's leaders behave much like the autocrats of the Arab world" in their repression of local protests. On Twitter he wrote that the Kurdish leaders weren't acting like Saddam, "just like any group of Middle Eastern autocrats."

HRW directs further criticism at the U.S. for being largely silent about the recent serious human rights violations against journalists and protesters. "Eight years after the United States removed Saddam Hussein in the name of protecting the rights of Kurds, it is standing by silently as the government it helped to install in Kurdistan abuses and represses the population," Whitson said.

However, Dale Prince, a spokesman for the U.S. Embassy's Regional

Reconstruction Team in the Kurdish capital Erbil, says that he spoke to several local media channels about press freedom in Kurdistan this month. "We support the universal rights of people to demonstrate peacefully, to freely assemble, to express themselves without fear of intimidation or death, and seek redress from their government. This has been our consistent message in Iraq and throughout the region," he said.

Since anti-government protests erupted on February 17, the local press freedom group, Metro Center to Defend Journalists, has documented more than 200 cases of attacks against and harassment of Kurdish journalists, and Reporters Without Borders has tallied forty-four physical attacks against media workers and outlets and twenty-three arrests. The majority of these violations were committed by the security forces, says Metro. The U.S. government asked the KRG to investigate these incidents.

One of these violations is the court case against Livin, says Human Rights Watch. The independent magazine is being sued by the ruling Kurdish parties for an article that claimed the KDP and PUK had planned to assassinate opposition leaders. According to court documents obtained by Human Rights Watch, the KDP is seeking total damages of one billion dinars (US\$864,000) and an order to shut down the magazine by revoking its license.

But Hiwa Osman says that in any modern democracy, the editor-in-chief of Livin magazine would be sued for publishing a story claiming that the ruling parties would try to assassinate opposition leaders, without proof to back up the claim.

"It's not a healthy thing to have. But you cannot accuse officials all the time of such things. We shouldn't give the media a free pass to accuse officials of criminal acts without any concrete evidence. This is understood everywhere else." said Osman.

Judit Neurink, director of The Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan (IMCK), a training facility for journalists in Kurdistan, agrees with this and criticizes Human Rights Watch for using the case against Livin as an example of the lack of press freedom in Kurdistan.

"This [article] isn't in any way journalism; it was based on the testimony of one anonymous source that has not been verified. This is against all journalistic

ethics. For me, personally, this article shouldn't have been published. If this was published in the Netherlands or the West, they [the government] would also go to the court and there would be a big scandal," she said.

This doesn't mean that Neurink thinks there are no threats against the media. "It's a fact that the media in Kurdistan is in danger, but then you [Human Rights Watch] shouldn't use this example. It sends a wrong message to journalists [in Kurdistan] that you can publish these important stories using anonymous sources."

Government officials of the Kurdish Foreign Ministry and Presidency Office and the spokespeople of the KRG refu-

sed to give a statement to Rudaw, though Kawa Mahmud, a KRG spokesperson, told Rudaw that the KRG would study the HRW report and might release a statement this weekend.

Nawzad Hadi, the governor of Erbil, told Rudaw that he hadn't heard about the report, but said that the media is free to operate in Kurdistan. "I don't believe we have a problem with the media here. It's very open. Al Jazeera is not allowed in Iraq, but they are in Erbil and Suleymaniya. There are many newspapers and media outlets. The number of newspapers in Kurdistan is unusual, and increasing daily."



World Bulletin.net 25 May 2011

Veteran journalist: secularists provoked coups in Turkey

The journalist's remarks are a continuation of a series of confessions he has made since last week.

Cihan news agency

Veteran secular journalist Mehmet Ali Birand has said the Republic of Turkey, which Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established and entrusted to the military, has had two big enemies over the years: pious Muslims and Kurds.

The journalist's remarks were published in a column titled "Why did we support coups?" published by the Posta daily on Tuesday.

According to the journalist, the military was traditionally provoked by secularist circles to stage coups in Turkey.

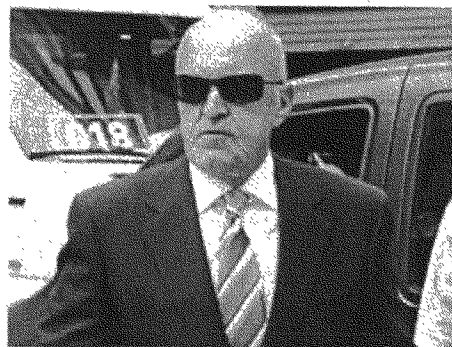
"It has always been secular circles in society that pushed and forced the military for coups. The breakdown of secular circles is as follows: The Republican People's Party [CHP], which is made up of social democrat politicians. Among them are people who know that they cannot reach any good position [in politics] through elections and therefore seek to be appointed to high positions thanks to the military. Mid-sized and large capital groups. Retired and employed judicial bureaucrats.

Academics. Retired and active duty members of the military. The media. We all had a common goal: not to share our self-built system," Birand stated.

The journalist's remarks are a continuation of a series of confessions he has made since last week.

In a column dated May 19, Birand said pro-coup thoughts penetrated the genes of a majority of members of the secular mainstream media. For him, the mainstream media considered the General Staff as superior to democracy and Parliament until the recent past. "We tolerated all coups. And we supported them. Our genes got confused in the past few years, and we started to look at things from a different perspective. The order between democracy and Parliament and the General Staff changed for the first time. Democracy moved one step forward."

So far Turkey has witnessed three direct military coups -- in 1960, 1971 and 1980 -- and an unarmed military intervention in 1997, which is called a postmodern coup. The coups were not, however, acts of a junta nested within the Turkish



Armed Forces (TSK) staged on its own. Some media groups displayed a "contributive" role, which came either as a covert or open support for the military to seize control of the country. Each coup was bloody and inflicted deep sufferings on Turkey.

In Tuesday's column Birand also wrote about the perception of pious Muslims and Kurds in Turkey by secular circles.

"The Republic of Turkey, established by [Mustafa Kemal] Atatürk and entrusted to the military [for protection], has had two big enemies over the years: reactionarism and the Kurdish question."

According to Birand, reactionarism has been the most talked-about and dealt-with enemy.

"Newspapers would publish the photos of bearded men, and stories would read that 'two more reactionaries have been captured.' Black chador-wearing women would be called 'black cockroaches.' For us,

there was no distinction between pious Muslims and reactionaries. They would be considered the biggest enemy of our self-built system. We had no tolerance to see them among us. We did not try to understand them."

With regard to Kurds, the journalist

said the "Kurdish question" was another most-feared enemy for secular circles that was not ever mentioned. "Each uprising of Kurds was defined as 'insurgence' and a 'path to independence.' The actual reasons [leading to uprisings] were never examined. We did not ever think that they could have stemmed from

poverty, the feudal system or conditions in the region. When the Kurdish question was mentioned, we all thought about the division of Turkey. We continuously maintained a policy of assimilation and denial of the Kurdish identity," Birand said.

AKP accuses CHP, BDP for alliance ahead of polls

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

The ruling party has accused the main opposition and the pro-Kurdish party of creating a destructive alliance ahead of the June 12 general election, claiming they intend to revive terrorist organizations and gangs in the country.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan hit out harshly at his political opponents while speaking Tuesday in Sirkat, a Southeast Anatolian city. His rally there came a few days after he received a poor reception in Hakkari, another city in the heavily Kurdish-populated region.

Only 1,000 people turned out for the prime minister's rally in Hakkari, where nearly all shopkeepers closed their doors in reaction to his visit. Though Erdogan had a better turnout in Sirkat, the unexpectedly good showing made Monday in Hakkari by his main political rival, Republican People's Party, or CHP, chief Kemal Kiliçdaroglu, clearly still rankled.

It's pleasing to see that the CHP's chairman could hold a rally in Hakkari, in Van. But pay attention to this: The CHP's new leader, who could get only around 150 votes in Hakkari, has addressed the voters of the BDP [pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party], Erdogan said in Sirkat.

The participants [in Hakkari] were not from the CHP, but from the BDP, the prime minister claimed. He accused the opposition parties, the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, and shadowy gangs



Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan hit out harshly at his political opponents while speaking Tuesday in Sirkat, a Southeast Anatolian city.

of cooperating in a campaign against his ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP.

It's a new step. The connection between Silivri and Kandil has been registered by the dialogue between the CHP and the BDP. The scenario is being implemented, Erdogan claimed.

Silivri is the name of a prison where dozens of intellectuals, journalists, civil-society representatives and former generals have been kept on charges of ties to the alleged Ergenekon gang, which purportedly sought to topple down the government in 2003 and 2004. Kandil is a mountain in northern Iraq where the outlawed PKK has its headquarters and camps.

The alleged alliance between the CHP and the BDP is aiming at reviving the gangs in the country, according to Erdoan, who claimed that these parties were trying to redesign the country's politics through provocations.

Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali

^ahin also slammed Kiliçdaroglu's rhetoric on the Kurdish issue and accused him of speaking differently while visiting the country's eastern provinces. I think the CHP and the MHP [Nationalist Movement Party] will face internal chaos after June 12, he said.

Arinç harsh against the CHP

Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arinç also criticized the CHP for its overtures to the country's Kurds, saying the party is abandoning its institutional character.

During his visits to the [Southeast] region, CHP leader Kiliçdaroglu unfortunately pursues the same line as that of the BDP, Arinç told reporters in Bursa.

He promises more than what the BDP promises. He engages in actions that do not suit his party's institutional identity on the issues sensitive to the Kurdish community in an effort to receive their applause, the deputy prime minister said. This is wrong. The Kurdish problem can't be solved in this way.

Arinç also criticized Kiliçdaroglu's visit to the mayor of the BDP-run eastern province of Hakkari, as well as the CHP leader's critical remarks about judgments in the ongoing case against the illegal Kurdish Communities Union, or KCK.

Kiliçdaroglu likewise met with the chief prosecutor and complained about the prosecutions being carried out, Arinç said, adding that it was wrong to defend suspects in a case against a group that has alleged links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

The KCK is alleged to be the urban wing of the PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

S.O.S Syrie

Imaginez des villes entières coupées du monde, pas de téléphone, plus d'électricité, des patrouilles de chars qui mitraillent la foule, imaginez des tireurs embusqués sur les toits fauchant les passants, des miliciens investissant, une à une, les maisons et embarquant tous les hommes de 15 à 80 ans. Imaginez les prisons, les tortures qu'ils y endurent. N'oubliez pas. C'est ainsi qu'en Syrie sont traités étudiants, démocrates, citoyens ordinaires qui, du nord au sud du pays, réclament, jour après jour, pacifiquement, au prix de centaines de morts, de milliers d'arrestations, une liberté et une dignité qu'ils n'ont jamais connues.

Imaginez un pays sous dictature de père en fils depuis quarante ans, un régime qui, dans une totale impunité, plante ses pieux armés dans le cœur de chaque citoyen. Telle est la Syrie du clan El Assad, et l'Etat de barbarie qu'il a partout instauré, les lois humaines foulées aux pieds. Des millions de citoyens sans défense ont été poussés à la révolte. Un peuple accueillant et paisible a cessé d'endurer - et cette révolte à mains nues, contre la machine de mort, relève du miracle. Depuis deux mois, les manifestations se soldent, à Deraa, à Homs, à Kamchli, à Banyas, à Lattaquié, par des massacres de l'armée, des milices et des services secrets. Mais, ne cédant pas à la terreur, admirables de courage, les manifestants recommencent le lendemain, enterrant leurs morts et repartant de plus belle.

Tout cela est admirable. Tout cela est monstrueux.

Tout cela se déroule dans l'indifférence générale. Indifférence de la communauté internationale, indifférence de nos représentants, indifférence des opinions publiques, les yeux tournés ailleurs. Frontières fermées ; organisations humanitaires, presse internationale bannies : Silence, on Tue !

Quelques protestations du bout des lèvres, en Amérique et en Europe ont eu lieu. Les massacres continuent. C'est un fleuve de sang.

Donnons ici les noms des responsables syriens à la tête de la répression : Maher Al-Assad, chef de la 4ème division de l'armée ; Ali Mamlouk, chef des renseignements généraux ; Mohammed Ibrahim Al-Char, ministre de l'intérieur ; Hafez Makhlof, colonel des renseignements généraux, branche de Damas ; Abd Al-Fatah Quodiyah, chef du renseignement militaire ; Jamil Hassan, chef du renseignement de l'armée de l'air syrienne ; Rustum Ghazali, chef du renseignement militaire du gouvernement de Damas ; Atef Najib, responsable de la sécurité politique à Deraa ; Mohammed Dib Zeitoun, chef de la sécurité politique à Banyas. Gravons ces noms dans nos mémoires, dans l'attente d'un châtement prochain devant le peuple syrien et la conscience internationale.

Retenez les noms de ces prisons : Tadmor (Palmyre) ; Palestine, Adra, Douma (Damas) ; Seid Naya. L'enfer, en Syrie, porte ces noms.

Pour l'heure, il faut descendre dans la rue exiger que les massacres cessent et que nos gouvernants ne se contentent plus de pieuses remontrances. Bashar Al-Assad n'a pas été déclaré criminel ni hors-la loi. Il n'est sous le coup d'aucune inculpation de la Cour pénale internationale. L'ONU n'a pas mis les tueurs en demeure de remettre leurs chars et leurs milices, sous peine de proscription. Tournez vos yeux vers la Syrie.

Signez cet appel et venez manifester votre peine, votre indignation, votre solidarité avec le peuple syrien, dimanche 29 mai à 15h, esplanade du Trocadéro, à Paris.

PREMIERS SIGNATAIRES :

Amirshahi Pouria, secrétaire national du PS chargé des Droits de l'Homme ; **Bennahmias Jean-Luc**, député européen ; **Benslama Fethi**, psychanalyste ; **Bergé Pierre**, président de la Fondation Yves Saint-Laurent, actionnaire et président du conseil de surveillance du Monde ; **Bianco Jean-Louis**, député-Maire de Dignes ; **Dray Julien**, député de l'Essonne ; **Durpaire François**, historien ; **Franck Dan**, écrivain ; **Goupil Romain**, réalisateur ; **Henry Pierre**, président de FTDA ; **Hollande François**, député de Corrèze ; **Lepage Corinne**, députée européenne ; **Pingeot Mazarine**, écrivain ; **Sifaoui Mohamed**, journaliste, écrivain ; **Stora Benjamin**, historien ; **Ribes Jean-Michel**, directeur du Théâtre du Rond Point ; **Rocard Michel**, ancien premier ministre ; **Youssouphou Baki**, président de la Cé ; **Huchon Jean-Paul**, président de la région IDF ; **Benguigui Jean**, comédien ; **Benguigui Yamina**, adjoint au Maire de Paris de la lutte contre les discriminations ; **Delanoë Bertrand**, maire de Paris ; **Levy Bernard-Henri**, philosophe et membre du conseil de surveillance du Monde ; **Chomski-Magnis Huguette**, présidente du MPCT ; **Hertzog Gilles**, écrivain ; **Schapira Pierre**, adjoint au Maire de Paris chargé des relations internationales ; **Pau-Langevin George**, députée de Paris ; **Branco Juan**, président de Jeune République ; **Boutih Malek**, ancien Président de SOS Racisme ; **Kendal Nezan**, président de l'Institut Kurde de Paris ; **Encel Frédéric**, géopolitologue ; **Desir Harlem**, député européen



Turquie: Une bombe désamorcée avant une visite d'Erdogan en zone kurde

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 23 mai 2011 (AFP)

LA POLICE TURQUE a désamorcé une puissante bombe lundi dans le sud-est anatolien avant une visite du Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dans cette zone kurde pour un meeting en vue des législatives de juin, a indiqué une source de sécurité locale.

La bombe contenant 36 kg d'explosifs et télécommandée a été retrouvée au pied d'un pont entre les localités de Nusaybin et Cizre, dans la province de Simak, à la frontière avec l'Irak. M. Erdogan doit se rendre mardi dans cette région pour y prononcer un discours électoral.

Les autorités locales soupçonnent les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du

Kurdistan (PKK), considéré par la Turquie et de nombreux pays comme un mouvement "terroriste".

Le PKK a revendiqué une attaque début mai dans le nord de la Turquie dans laquelle un policier a été tué et un autre blessé, en escortant un convoi du parti au pouvoir, après un meeting de M. Erdogan.

Le PKK a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral en août 2010, mais a menacé en mars d'y mettre fin, déplorant l'échec du gouvernement à dialoguer avec les Kurdes.

Les heurts entre le PKK et les forces de sécurité se sont multipliés ces dernières semaines alors que doivent avoir lieu le 12 juin des élections législatives.

Le Monde

30 mai 2011

Le Blogs de Guillaume Perrier

Erdogan et la question kurde

Guillaume Perrier

Les enregistrements vidéos du MHP mis à part, la question kurde est le principal sujet de débats et de clivages qui apparaît dans cette campagne pour les élections législatives. Les candidats ont multiplié les meetings dans les régions kurdes du Sud Est et de l'Est de la Turquie.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan était à Siirt, Van, puis Hakkari, le week-end dernier. Il visitera Diyarbakir, mercredi 1er juin, pour un grand meeting à J- 11 avant le scrutin du 12 juin. L'accueil est plutôt froid dans la région et pour cause...

L'AKP avait réalisé de bons scores chez les Kurdes en 2007, les promesses "d'ouverture démocratique" rencontraient alors de grands espoirs. En 2005, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dans un discours mémorable à Diyarbakir avait reconnu l'existence du "problème kurde". Mais les Kurdes ont déchanté. Une détente rapide n'était déjà plus qu'un rêve aux municipales de 2009, marquées par une poussée du BDP. Encore plus au moment du référendum de

2010. Le parti kurde BDP avait appelé au boycott du vote et avait été largement suivi. Le non soutien des Kurdes, pourtant concernés au premier chef, aux réformes de la Constitution votées par l'AKP, avait déclenché la colère du premier ministre qui depuis, entend le leur faire payer.

Aujourd'hui, selon M. Erdogan, "il n'y a plus de problème kurde". Le gouvernement turc revient à un discours très classique, nationaliste, centralisateur et assimilationniste: "Tek bayrak, tek ülke, tek millet" (un seul drapeau, un seul pays, une seule nation). En s'adressant à "ses frères aux racines kurdes", Erdogan confirme la réalité de la politique de turquification. L'Islam sunnite, majoritaire en Turquie, sert de ciment unificateur.

La répression judiciaire a repris de plus belle : après la dissolution du DTP en décembre 2009, puis l'exclusion de la vie politique de plusieurs élus kurdes dont le modéré Ahmet Türk, les arrestations de centaines d'enfants lanceurs de pierres et de milliers de militants du parti et d'associations paravent ont exténué la région kurde. Le procès du KCK, le réseau de soutien civil du PKK, continue, avec son lot

d'irrégularités et d'incohérences. Le ressentiment contre l'AKP et contre la police, qui dans toute la région est de plus en plus visible, est fort.

La solution de la question kurde est le plus grand projet à mener en Turquie, selon Ahmet Insel. Le seul véritable "projet fou", estime-t-il. Certains éditorialistes et intellectuels turcs de l'Ouest ont mis en garde les médias turcs contre la vieille tentation de l'auto censure sur la question kurde. Il est en effet assez hallucinant de constater l'absence sur le terrain des médias turcs, TV comme presse écrite, pour tenter de comprendre et d'expliquer cette éternelle question kurde. En la réduisant le plus souvent à une question de sécurité, de "terrorisme", et en se contentant de reprendre les communiqués officiels des forces de sécurité, les médias turcs perpétuent le problème à leur manière. Après l'explosion d'une bombe à Etiler (rive européenne d'Istanbul), qui a fait 8 blessés la semaine dernière, les journalistes étaient en direct depuis les lieux de l'attentat toute la journée. Dans le Sud-Est, les attaques, les explosions et les funérailles se succèdent à un rythme effréné. Dans l'indifférence



totale de l'Ouest du pays.

Le parti kémaliste CHP, lui, a changé de tactique. Après avoir été l'un des premiers à se pencher sur la question kurde, avec le rapport publié dès la fin des années 80, le CHP a dérivé vers un nationalisme étroit sous Deniz Baykal. Kemal Kiliçdaroglu entend insuffler un autre esprit au CHP. L'ex bâtonnier de Diyarbakir et défenseur des droits de l'homme, Sezgin Tanrikulu est candidat sous l'étiquette du parti unique d'Atatürk, ce qui est difficilement compréhensible pour une grande partie des Kurdes. Toujours est-il que l'accueil réservé à Kemal bey à Hakkari a été beaucoup plus chaleureux que pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Du coup, le premier ministre accuse le parti kémaliste de fricoter avec le BDP, forcément infréquentable. Qui sème le vent...

Regional rivalries emerge from Arab Spring

By Robert Fisk, Middle East Correspondent

Behind the Arab Spring lie its secrets. Turkey and Qatar have now developed a passionate anger towards Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime – the Turks even planning for a "safe haven" inside Syrian territory if they fear a tide of refugees approaching the Turkish border – while Gulf Arabs suspect Algeria may be secretly re-arming Libya.

Turkey believes that Assad has twice dishonoured promises to pull his brother's armed thugs off the streets of Syrian cities, and the coverage of the Syrian uprising by Qatar's Al-Jazeera television channel has so enraged the Syrians that they have blocked £4bn worth of Qatari investment projects.

Qatar's own armed forces are now assisting Libyan rebels in the western port

city of Misrata, their officers helping to train guerrilla fighters on the perimeter of the fighting. No official statement has been issued about this Qatari involvement although the Gulf emirate has six Mirage fighter-bombers stationed on Crete and flying sorties over Libya.

The fear that Algeria has been supplying tanks and armoured personnel carriers to the Gaddafi regime across its 750-mile common desert border lies behind the recent visit of the Emir of Qatar to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, whose army is better equipped than Gaddafi's. The weapons which the Gulf Arabs believe have been given to the Libyan regime by the Algerians would go some way to account for Nato's slow progress in its air campaign against Gaddafi.

More serious, perhaps, are Turkey's plans for a "protection zone" inside northern Syrian territory if the uprising there turns into full-scale civil war. Turkey remembers, to its horror, the weeks in which hundreds of thousands of

Iraqi Kurds fled across its borders after Saddam Hussein unleashed his forces against them following the 1991 liberation of Kuwait. Thousands died in the frozen mountains and only a US safe haven inside northern Iraq allowed the Turks to turn back the refugees.

As in northern Iraq, part of northern Syria's population is Kurdish; many believe that Assad has no intention of keeping his promise of granting them citizenship, and Turkish forces in the south-east of their country are still fighting their own Kurdish guerrillas in the mountains; they do not want more stateless Kurds crossing the border.

Assad had apparently promised the Turks that he would speak publicly about withdrawing troops from the streets, but he failed to do so – a fact which particularly infuriated Turkey's foreign minister.

Elections and the Kurdish issue



Columnists
FATMA DISLIZIBAK / today's zaman

One of the issues that political party leaders promise to address and produce solutions for if they come to power after the June 12 general elections is undoubtedly Turkey's biggest problem, the Kurdish problem.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) already launched an initiative in 2009 and has taken important steps towards a solution to the problem, yet it has been insufficient in discussing a complete solution and ending the terrorism perpetrated by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which benefits from the Kurdish problem. Now, the Republican People's Party (CHP), which for a long time denied the existence of a Kurdish problem in Turkey, has changed its discourse, with its leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu making radical promises such as granting autonomy to local administrations in a bid to contribute to solving the problem. Only after the elections will we see how these promises will materialize into actions and what kind of steps will be taken for a solution.

Bugun's Gulay Gokturk says the current election environment

in Turkey is not very healthy for discussing solutions to the Kurdish problem because the CHP in particular is making abundant promises in comfort, with the belief that it will not come to power, while the AK Party is concerned about losing nationalist votes. She thinks that only after the elections are over will it be possible to engage in healthy debate about the Kurdish problem, at the center of which will be the autonomy issue. In her view, the CHP promising autonomy to local administrations in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government is a very concrete and binding position for the party, which will strengthen the AK Party's hand if it wants to make such a reform after the general elections. The CHP, which resorted to all means to sabotage the Kurdish initiative launched by the AK Party until a short time ago, will no longer be able to backpedal so easily from what it said before the elections, says Gokturk.

Assessing the current state of the Kurdish problem, Milliyet's Taha Akyol says nobody can deny the steps Turkey has taken toward the solution of the Kurdish problem. First of all, there is no issue left unspoken. Is there anything Kurdish politicians cannot mention because it is forbidden to do so? The bans before speaking Kurdish have been lifted, and the state has begun negotiations with [jailed outlawed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, he explains. Akyol says one can make a list of things to do toward the solution of the Kurdish problem in the long and medium-term in line with his/her political view, but nobody can deny the progress of democracy in Turkey.

Syrian opposition meet in Turkey to discuss increasing pressure on Assad

The National/UAE
Thomas Seibert

ISTANBUL // Members of the Syrian opposition in exile gathered for a conference in southern Turkey yesterday to discuss ways of raising the pressure on the regime of President Bashar al Assad.

The meeting comes at a time when the government in Ankara is showing increasing signs of impatience with Damascus after weeks of fruitless efforts to push the Assad government to implement political reforms. The Assad regime has been trying to crush a popular uprising against the government.

Rights activists say more than 1,000 people have been killed in the crackdown that started in March and has been condemned by the United Nations and triggered western sanctions against the Assad government.

Ammar Qurabi, the president of the Egypt-based National Organisation for Human Rights in Syria, or Nohr, one of the groups behind the two-day meeting in the Mediterranean resort of Antalya, said he expected about 300 participants at the "Syrian Conference for Change".

In a first reaction to the general amnesty declared by the Assad regime yesterday, Mr Qurabi stressed that important details about the scope of the amnesty were not known.

"As a start, we welcome any step that gets people out of jail," he said. But he added it was unclear if people that were still in police custody after their arrest by Syrian security forces would also be released.

Mr Qurabi and other opposition representatives said one aim of the meeting was to create a body that could represent the Syrian opposition

internationally, but not to form some kind of government in exile.

"Maybe we will establish a small committee" to coordinate communication between exile groups and to support the resistance to the Assad regime within Syria," Mr Qurabi said. As for political demands, Mr Qurabi pointed to the so-called Damascus Declaration of 2005, a five-page document calling for democracy in Syria and supported by a broad range of opposition groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, a powerful Sunni group banned in Syria.

Mr Qurabi said yesterday that the Muslim Brotherhood would also be represented in Antalya. The opposition should "unite under the roof of a revolution of freedom and dignity for the construction of the new Syria", he said earlier in a Nohr statement released in the run-up to the conference.

"This regime cannot be reformed," Anas Abda, secretary of the Damascus Declaration General Council, another opposition group, told the semi-official Turkish news agency Anadolu in Antalya. "The main demand of the conference is this: We want real change in Syria."

But even before the meeting got under way, cracks appeared between opposition groups. Some reports said Kurdish organisations had not been invited to the meeting. In London, Ribal al Assad, the director of the Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria and a cousin of the Syrian president, said in a statement it was "very clear that some of these individuals [in Antalya] are not genuine representatives of the Syrian people. Moreover they are individuals who promote extremism or sectarianism, which has no place in the path to freedom and democracy."

The Turkish government did not embrace the Antalya meeting officially. Mr Qurabi said the organisers had had no contact with Turkish government representatives. "We sent them the files about the conference, and they allowed it to go ahead," he said, adding there had been no other Turkish involvement in the event.

A visit to Istanbul in April by leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood triggered an angry statement by Nidal Kabalan, the Syrian ambassador in Ankara. "For us, the Muslim Brotherhood is like the PKK is for Turkey," Mr Kabalan told a Turkish newspaper at the time, in reference to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a rebel group fighting for Kurdish self-rule and regarded as a terrorist organisation by Ankara.

The fact that Turkey, one of the closest international partners of the Assad regime in recent years, is once again playing host to a meeting of the Syrian opposition despite reservations in Damascus is no coincidence, said Oytun Orhan, an expert on Syria at the Centre for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, a think tank in Ankara.

"Turkey is disappointed by Assad," Mr Orhan said. The government in Ankara has been calling on Mr Assad to implement what Turkish officials have described as "shock reforms" for more democracy, but Ankara's pleas have been ignored by Damascus. "So Turkey is keeping up the pressure for reform on one hand and trying to sharpen the profile on the opposition on the other."

According to Turkish news reports, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, renewed his demands for reforms when he spoke to Mr Assad by telephone last

Friday. "Radical steps that stun everyone are needed now," Mr Erdogan reportedly told the Syrian leader.

Mr Orhan said Turkey had invested a considerable amount of international credibility by telling the increasingly sceptical West that the Assad regime was willing to reform the country. But as Syria keeps ignoring Ankara's advice and moves closer to Iran, Turkey has started to change tack, Mr Orhan said.

"This is not the first meeting of the Syrian opposition in Turkey," he said about the conference in Antalya. "It can be read as a message to Syria."

Mr Orhan said Turkey was also concerned about a perceived increase of Iranian influence in Syria. "I think there is a Turkish-Iranian competition in Syria, just like in Lebanon and in Iraq," he said. In a recent analysis posted on the website of the Centre for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, Mr Orhan argued that Iran saw a potential regime change in Syria as a threat. "Right now, the Syrian government does not trust any player, including Turkey, as much as it trusts Iran," he wrote.

In Antalya, the conference triggered a short confrontation between Syrians opposed to the Assad regime and supporters of the government in Damascus.

Government opponents and supporters arrived in Antalya on the same flight from Istanbul, Turkish media reported. The government supporters protested when the opposition representatives unveiled signs with anti-Assad slogans after their arrival, the report said. Turkish police intervened to prevent the situation from escalating. The Assad supporters were gathering for a counter-conference in another hotel in Antalya, the reports said.

Les voisins de la Syrie embarrassés par la crise

Plus que tous les autres pays arabes, la Syrie est un acteur prééminent dans la région, ce qui explique le malaise de ses voisins face à la crise. Passage en revue.

Par Catherine Gouëset

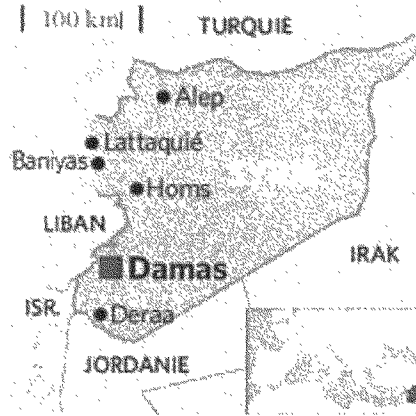
TURQUIE: UN PARTENAIRE PRIVILÉGIÉ ... ET INQUIET

Partenaire privilégié de la Syrie, la Turquie redouble d'efforts pour appeler le président Bachar el-Assad à la raison, tout en gardant le silence sur d'éventuelles sanctions contre son voisin. La Turquie redoute une division de la Syrie et l'entrée de réfugiés syriens sur son sol mais elle craint aussi que la question kurde chez son voisin fasse tache d'huile en Anatolie.

Or, avec une opinion publique déçue des relations avec l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, Ankara a réorienté sa diplomatie vers ses voisins de la région ces dernières années: "zéro problème avec les voisins" est la ligne de conduite depuis quelques années. Jadis en mauvais termes en raison du soutien de Damas aux rebelles séparatistes kurdes, la Turquie et la Syrie entretiennent désormais des liens diplomatiques et économiques étroits. Les deux pays ont récemment supprimé les visas et le volume commercial bilatéral a triplé en dix ans, atteignant 2,5 milliards de dollars en 2010.

Mais face à la brutalité de la répression en Syrie, Ankara a haussé le ton récemment. Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a une nouvelle fois exhorté Bachar el-Assad à entreprendre des réformes, le 27 mai. Quelques jours plus tôt, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, estimait que Damas pouvait encore résoudre pacifiquement la crise, si elle lançait des "réformes drastiques et de grande ampleur", non sans ajouter que "le temps presse". Le 9 mai, déjà, Damas n'avait pas apprécié la comparaison par le Premier ministre turc, de la répression en cours au gazage de milliers de Kurdes dans la ville de Halabja, en 1988, par le régime de Saddam Hussein en Irak.

Autre signe de tension, la Turquie accueille une grande réunion, du 1er au 3 juin, des opposants au régime



syrien à Antalya, ville turque sur la Méditerranée.

LIBAN: À L'OMBRE DE DAMAS

La répression en Syrie, puissance de tutelle au Liban pendant 30 ans, est un sujet ultrasensible dans le petit pays méditerranéen. Le Liban, qui est encore aujourd'hui le théâtre d'affrontements récurrents entre pro-syriens, menés notamment par le puissant Hezbollah chiite, et anti-syriens, mené par l'ancien ministre en exercice Saad Hariri, craint plus que tout une nouvelle immixtion de trou-

L'ENJEU KURDE

La Turquie craint que les troubles en Syrie fassent tache d'huile, des rebelles kurdes étant présents des deux côtés de la frontière. Or la situation au Kurdistan turc après ne promesse d'éclaircie en 2009, s'est considérablement durcie depuis 2010.

Même inquiétude à Bagdad: "Un changement de régime à Damas renforcera les Kurdes en Irak qui se sentiront encouragés à passer de l'autonomie dont ils jouissent actuellement à l'indépendance dont ils rêvent" explique le chercheur Hamid Fadel.

Les Kurdes qui forment, avec les Arméniens près de 10% de la population en Syrie, sont la principale minorité du pays. Le régime, conscient de leur importance, a annoncé, en avril, la régularisation situation de 300.000 d'entre eux.

bles sur son territoire. Les troubles en Syrie pourraient se propager dans le Liban voisin -sans gouvernement depuis plus de quatre mois- à tout moment, estiment des analystes. Les blogueurs syriens se cachent même au Liban

"Nous pensons que d'aller au Liban nous apporterait plus de liberté de mouvement et d'expression, explique un journaliste réfugié à Beyrouth. "Nous avons été surpris quand nous avons découvert que les Libanais ont encore plus peur des services de renseignements syriens que les Syriens eux mêmes."

Des centaines de manifestants ont d'ailleurs défilé le 28 mai à Tripoli pour demander la libération de Syriens détenus par l'armée libanaise. Environ 5000 Syriens se sont réfugiés au Liban depuis le début de la crise, surtout de la ville frontalière de Tall Kalakh.

Les signes de tensions sont multiples. Une réunion de soutien aux manifestants en Syrie a du être organisée, le 24 mai, dans un entrepôt près de Beyrouth, après que 28 hôtels libanais eurent refusé de l'accueillir. La semaine passée, le chef du très puissant Hezbollah libanais, Hassan Nasrallah, a appelé les Syriens à "sauvegarder" le régime du président Bachar el-Assad. "Nous appelons les Syriens à sauvegarder leur pays et leur régime", a-t-il déclaré. Et en avril, la Syrie a accusé des proches de Saad Hariri de financer et d'armer les contestataires en Syrie.

Damas et Beyrouth ont une histoire commune tumultueuse. En pleine guerre civile (1975-1990), la Syrie a envoyé ses troupes au Liban, où elles sont restées jusqu'à leur retrait en 2005, après l'assassinat de Rafic Hariri, l'ancien Premier ministre libanais. Les liens diplomatiques formels n'ont été renoués qu'en 2008, et la Syrie, tout comme l'Iran, soutient toujours le camp du Hezbollah.

ISRAËL: LA PAIX FROIDE

La contestation en Syrie pourrait pro-

fiter à Israël en affaiblissant l'influence de l'Iran, et en portant un coup au Hezbollah libanais, ainsi qu'au Hamas, le mouvement islamiste palestinien. Mais elle fait craindre de nouvelles tensions à la frontière entre les deux pays et l'instabilité en cas de chute de Bachar el-Assad, selon des analystes.

Israël et la Syrie sont toujours officiellement en état de guerre. Damas exige un retrait intégral du plateau du Golan, occupé depuis 1967. Les dernières négociations de paix entre les deux pays ont été suspendues fin 2008 à la suite de l'offensive israélienne à Gaza. Mais "depuis 40 ans, la frontière entre Israël et la Syrie est la plus calme" souligne Yoav Limor, commentateur militaire de la télévision publique, cité par Marc Henry dans *Le Figaro*. Celui-ci rappelle également que un commentaire de Schlomo ben Ami, ancien ministre des Affaires étrangères, selon qui, les dictatures qui entourent Israël "sont stables et savent imposer leur volonté aux éléments incontrôlés".

Certains observateurs craignent néanmoins "la possibilité, imprévisible, que le régime syrien cède à la tentation de provoquer une crise à Gaza ou au Liban sud, afin de détourner l'attention de l'opinion" estime Michaël Eppel, spécialiste du Moyen-Orient à l'Université de Haïfa. C'est notamment ce qui expliquerait la virulence des manifestations sur le front du Golan, lors de la commémoration de la Nakba, le 15 mai, alors que cette zone était restée calme pendant des décennies.

Les voisins de la Syrie embarrassés par la crise

Dans tous les cas de figure, quels que soient les changements politiques en Syrie, le mouvement islamiste Hanaas (au pouvoir à Gaza), préservera son statut privilégié à Damas "car le Hamas est arabe et sunnite", comme la majorité de la population, estime Eyal Zisser, chercheur sur le Moyen-Orient à l'Université de Tel-Aviv.

Côté Palestinien, l'accord de paix signé début mai entre le Hamas et le Fatah montre l'affaiblissement de Damas, selon certains observateurs. Si "le chef politique du Hamas, Khaled Mechaal, a fait le voyage de Damas au Caire, pour signer un accord de paix avec le chef du Fatah", Mahmoud Abbas, c'est que les isla-

mistes "sentent le changement arriver en Syrie", estime le ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères Hoshiyar Zebari.

IRAK: LA CRAINTE DE TENSIONS CONFESSIONNELLES

Les chiïtes irakiens, qui ont attendu 80 ans avant d'accéder au pouvoir, en 2003, après la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein, sont en général favorables au maintien du régime baassiste en Syrie. Ils redoutent une arrivée au pouvoir à Damas de sunnites qui empoisonnerait le climat en Irak.

Pour Hamid Fadel, professeur de Sciences politiques à l'université de Bagdad, les chiïtes irakiens (un peu plus de 60% de la population) redoutent d'être encerclés par des régimes sunnites.

L'Irak a soutenu les mouvements de contestation dans plusieurs pays arabes en raison de la "tyrannie" et l'"oppression" subies par les peuples, et condamné l'intervention saoudienne à Bahreïn contre la majorité chiïte de ce royaume. Mais plusieurs personnalités politiques chiïtes circospectes vis-à-vis des manifestations en Syrie. " N'oublions pas que les dirigeants (syriens) ont aidé l'opposition à Saddam Hussein", explique un dirigeant du Conseil supérieur islamique d'Irak (CSII), un des principaux mouvements religieux chiïtes, tandis qu'un député reprend l'antienne du pouvoir syrien, à savoir que "des étrangers interviennent dans la situation en Syrie".

IRAN: L'ALLIÉ FIDÈLE

Les troubles en Syrie mettent dans l'embarras son plus proche allié dans la région, l'Iran. Ainsi, le porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères affirmait début mai que l'Iran "n'accepte en aucune manière l'usage de la violence et la répression contre ceux qui expriment leurs revendications pacifiquement", avant d'ajouter que les médias occidentaux "exagèrent les manifestations limitées qui peuvent exister (en Syrie) pour faire croire qu'elles représentent la demande de la majorité de la population".

Cette prudence contraste avec la virulence des critiques iraniennes contre la répression des mouvements populaires partout ailleurs dans le monde

arabe, notamment à Bahreïn où la population, majoritairement chiïte comme en Iran, est dirigée par une dynastie sunnite. "L'Iran appuie le mouvement de révolte arabe dans les autres pays, mais pas en Syrie car Damas résiste à Israël, et Téhéran fonde ses relations avec les pays arabes sur leur degré d'opposition" à l'Etat hébreu, relève Mohammad Saleh Sedghian, directeur du Centre d'études irano-arabes basé à Téhéran.

La Syrie est le principal allié de l'Iran dans le monde arabe depuis la révolution islamique de 1979. Sur le plan stratégique, un renversement ou un affaiblissement du régime syrien "ne pourrait qu'avoir des conséquences négatives pour l'Iran", estime Mehrdad Serjouie, analyste indépendant à Téhéran, mais "Compte tenu du sentiment anti-israélien dans les mouvements de révolte arabes, (une victoire du) mouvement démocratique ne placerait pas la Syrie sous l'influence d'Israël" tempère Amir Mohebian, directeur du centre d'étude Arya Strategic Studies. En revanche, reconnaît-il, "le soutien iranien au régime du président Assad pourrait être perçu négativement par l'opposition syrienne" et peser sur les relations avec Téhéran si elle arrivait au pouvoir.

LES AUTRES PAYS ARABES

Les régimes arabes épargnés par la contestation gardent le silence face à la répression sanglante des manifestations en Syrie, préférant le maintien du pouvoir, bien qu'il s'en méfient, à une déstabilisation de la région. Les dirigeants arabes se sont abstenus de condamner le régime syrien, et sont évidemment inquiets des conséquences" du soulèvement en Syrie "sur leurs propres pays", estime Maha Azzam, analyste au groupe de réflexion britannique Chatham House. "C'est au moins un régime qu'ils connaissent (...) ils ne veulent pas un changement radical qui ferait de la Syrie une société démocratique, ce qui constituerait une plus grande menace pour ces régimes qu'une Syrie dirigée par le Baas", explique-t-elle.