

INSTITUT  
**KURDE**  
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

N°323

FEBRUARY 2012

*The publication of this Bulletin enjoys a subsidy  
from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCID)  
and the Fonds d'action et de soutien pour l'intégration et la lutte contre les discriminations  
(The Fund for action and support of integration and the struggle against discrimination)*

This bulletin is issued in French and English

Price per issue : France: 6 € — Abroad : 7,5 €  
Annual subscription (12 issues) France : 60 € — Elsewhere : 75 €

Monthly review  
Directeur de la publication : Mohamad HASSAN  
Numéro de la Commission Paritaire : 659 15 A.S.  
ISBN 0761 1285

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### **IRAQI KURDISTAN: A FLOOD OF SYRIAN KURDISH DESERTERS**

**E**ver since 2003, Iraqi Kurdistan has been acting as a country of asylum for many refugees from Iraq, mainly Christians and Mandeans but also Kurds, Moslems and Yezidis who have fled Mosul. At the moment, Iraqi Kurdistan is expecting waves of refugees coming from Syria. More and more Syrian Kurdish soldiers are deserting and, consequently, fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan "to avoid having to kill or be killed". One of them, who deserted from the Special Forces, was interviewed this week by the *Kurdish Globe*, using the pseudonym of Berxwedan Selim. The young man is, for the moment, living in

Irbil with his brother and three other Syrians, one of whom had also deserted. Enrolled into the 15th Brigade, stationed in Southern Syria, in Deraa Province (which was the first town to demonstrate and which has also experienced blood baths), he spoke about the living conditions for those serving under the Syrian flag:

*"We were under considerable pressure, from the officers who commanded us, to kill the demonstrators. My officer kept telling us that the demonstrators had to be killed. He said they were armed terrorists".*

The orders were to arrest and disperse the demonstrators by firing on them. However

Berxwedan indicated that there were splits within the Army, which is a reflection of all the elements that divide Syria. The soldiers who were from Homs and Deraa refused to kill the demonstrators, as did the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds, whereas the Alawiites and those loyal to the regime did as they were told. Berxwedan Selim also said that every soldier who refused to kill was either arrested or executed by the Army.

"In my unit two soldiers were killed by Bashar loyalists. These soldiers were friends of mine, Hozan from Qamislo and Saleh from Hama. They were killed because they refused our com-

mander's order to kill the demonstrators". Their execution was carried out at night and in secret. According to Berxwedan some Baathist loyalists shot each of them in the nape of the neck and then accused "terrorists" of the killing.

"Next morning, the officers said to us: "Look at these men. They refused to kill the terrorists and now the terrorists have killed them". But we knew that they had been killed by the officers".

After six months service, Berxwedan Selîm was given 72 hours leave. He then returned home, to Amude and, from there decided to flee, receiving help in illegally crossing the border both in Syria and from the other side, in Iraqi Kurdistan to reach Irbil.

According to him, Assad's army is still strong but he thinks that it will collapse in about 6 months because of the great number of deserters and because the soldiers have had enough.

"We did not have enough food, nor enough time to sleep, but plenty of arms of Russian brands. The soldiers understand that the situation is slipping out of al-Assad's control". He stressed that his brigade was officered by mercenaries, Alawiites and Iranians.

About a hundred deserters are living in Duhok. Questioned by the daily *Rudaw*, they reported similar experiences. Jihad Hassan, aged 19, had been in the Syrian Army for 9 months and ended by deserting and crossing the border. One of his brothers was killed by the Syrian armed services and another seriously wounded:

*"I did not want to suffer the same fate as my brothers. I did not want to be sent home in a coffin which is why I fled".*

Jihad Hassan took part in many clashes between the Syrian forces and the crowd. He thinks that the al-Assad regime is weakening daily.

*"It is easy to die in Syria. Syria is getting worse every day. The regime is losing control of the country. The Syrian people are at the crossroads. They must choose between supporting the al-Assad regime or opposing it. You have to kill or be killed".*

Hussein Mahmud, also age 19, who comes from Derik, had served for 6 months in Deraa, one of the first of the towns to revolt last year. In the end he fled from there and ended up in the Dumiz camp at Duhok. It was only the daily scenes of murder and torture in which the soldiers indulged in the camp that made him realise the extent of the events: *"In Deraa, I was completely isolated and could not contact my family. We were not allowed to telephone, read the papers, listen to the radio or watch television. However, every day the security forces brought in innocent people and tortured them, killed them and concealed their bodies".*

Posted to a checkpoint, he frequently came under attack from the free Syrian Army (the rebels). *"We were told that they were terrorists and that we should not hesitate to kill them",* he said.

Hussein Mahmoud explains that the pro-Assad demonstrations that are filmed by the official media are put on and organised by the authorities themselves and that the troops were ordered to take part: *"We were brought to take part in pro-Assad demonstra-*

*tions four times. They dressed us in civvies and gave us pictures of Bashar al-Assad and slogans to wave".* According to him, many Syrian soldiers feel trapped in the army: *"All the soldiers want to desert".*

The extent of desertion is confirmed by Ahmed Suleiman, 20 years of age, who served in Damascus for a year: *"The regime's forces are losing control of the area round Damascus. Much of the area has been liberated by the Free Syrian Army. The number of soldiers deserting is increasing daily.*

Ahmad Sulaiman also explains that the Kurdish soldiers are systematically sent to the front line of the fighting: *"They cannot retreat if they meet a strong resistance because there is a special unit of the Army charged with killing those who retreat".*

Anwar Haji Othman, Assistant Minister for the Peshmergas stated *"We welcome them for humanitarian reasons, we protect them as refugees. We will not hand them over to the Syrian government because they are Kurds and it is our right to protect them".*

According to Anwar Haji Othman, the first official figures show 15 families, and 130 civilian men divided between two camps in Duhok, where there are already 1800 Kurds from Syria who had fled from violence in 2004. But other refugees will be following suite, according to the Kurdish government's estimates. Thus Shaker Yassin, who runs the Immigration Office of the Ministry of the Interior, told AFP that they had set up a new camp at Duhok to welcome about 1000 families.



## TURKEY: THE SECRET SERVICES AT THE HEART OF A CLASH BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM

**T**he enquiry aimed at the Union of Kurdish Communities (KCK) in Turkey, accused of being a political show case for the PKK, suffered an unexpected turn when, on 8 February, the Public Prosecutor in charge of the case, Sadettin Sankaya, asked to interrogate four former agents of the MIT (the Turkish Intelligence Service) and its current Director Hakan Fidan, regarding contacts with the PKK that had taken place in Oslo in 2010, as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had admitted last October.

Hakan Fidan, the head of MIT and two other former heads of MIT refused to attend the summons and the Intelligence Service, in a communiqué, informed the Prosecutor *“that he must ask the Prime Minister’s authorisation in matters regarding them”*.

However, on 10 February, Sadettin Sarıkaya did not hesitate to issue a warrant for the arrest of the former chief of MIT, Enre Taner, a former senior official, Afet Günes and two other agents still serving. Finally this Istanbul based Prosecutor asked one of his Ankara colleagues to interrogate the present head of MIT.

The Turkish government rapidly came to the rescue of its agents, affirming that these men *“had only done their duty”* and the Minister of Justice filed a Bill to protect the agents from any later proceedings. President Abdullah Gul described this trial of strength as *“an unhappy and disturbing development”* and the Defence Minister, Ismet Yilmaz,

defended the agents on the NTV channel: *“The MIT assumes its responsibilities in the context of the law”*.

The Prosecutor’s stubbornness in wanting to these interrogations at any price resulted in his being taken off all enquiry into the KCK from the very next day, 11 February, *“for having exceeded his powers”* as the deputy Public Prosecutor for Istanbul, Fikret Secen, announced. He has been replaced by two magistrates.

This did not prevent the police, on 13 February, from carrying out another wave of arrests throughout Turkey, in Trade Union circles, especially in Diyarbakir, Ankara and Istanbul, on suspicion of collusion with the KCK. Thus about a hundred people are said to have been taken in for questioning while Trade Union premises and the homes of their leaders were also searched.

Evidently, the opposition jumped on the opportunity of embarrassing the AKP government and demanded that the Prime Minister himself be summoned to explain these negotiations or attempted negotiations with the PKK. The Bill was the subject of heated exchanges in Parliament before it was finally passed on 17 February. In a speech to the AKP youth organisation, the Prime Minister had previously justified this Bill on the grounds that elected members should not become *“vassals of the bureaucracy”*.

In view of the AKP’s clear parliamentary majority, the Bill was easy passed, though after heated debate. Kemal Kiliçararoglu,

leader of the CHP, the main opposition party, filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court, in the name of his party, to have it annulled.

Henceforth MIT agents, will be free of any judicial proceedings for any activity linked to their duties and no Prosecutor will be able to summon the without the Prime Minister’s authorisation.

The affair was widely commented on and criticised both by the press and by political analysts. Some saw it as a sign of a more or less latent conflict between the judiciary and the police on the one hand, considered hostile to the AKP and more attached to the opposition’s nationalism, and the secret services, said to be controlled by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Others, however, pointed out that the Fethullah Gülen Religious brotherhood is very active in police circles and that it could reflect internal disension within the AKP.

Finally, the fact that secret service agents contacted an enemy party for possible negotiations on the government’s orders is no exception in diplomatic history and only seems scandalous in the Turkish political arena, which is closed to any compromise or recognition of Kurdish movements. However, the judicial impunity of secret services revives the spectre of JITEM (which never had any legal existence) and other special commandos whose record of assassinations and kidnapping had bathed in blood the Kurdish regions in the 1990s and had very rarely been subjected to any investigations.



## IRAN: AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT IS A DISASTER FOR FREEDOM

**W**ith impending Parliamentary elections, due on 2 March, Amnesty International is concerned at the number of arrests in media and blogging circles that are aimed at padlocking the election campaign and any freedom of expression. Thus Ehsan Houshmand, a Kurdish sociologist who writes about the minorities in Iran, was arrested at the beginning of the year in the course of a series of arrests of several sociologists or writers covering social issues or minorities, many of whom expressed their views on blogs as a medium for getting round the censorship.

Is also concerned at the “discriminatory procedures” set up for selecting candidates for the elections. Many have been excluded outright for various reasons going from ethnic origins to religious beliefs or political opinions. According to a report by Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, spokesman for the Council of Guardians of the Revolution, that supervises the election preparations, out of 4,877 applications for candidacy, 2700 have been accepted by the Council, though the others can still appeal.

A drop of interest in the elections can be observed following the disappointment of the 2009 Presidential elections and the “Green Revolution” that followed. In 2008, 7200 people had applied to be candidate (and 1,700 had been disqualified).

The International Pact regarding civic and political rights (PIDCP)

of which Iran is a signatory, nevertheless states the right of everyone, without distinction of “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status”. Article 25 declares that: “Every citizen has the right and possibility, without any of the discriminations dealt with in Article 2 or any unreasonable restrictions:

- a) to take part in the direction of public business, either directly or indirectly through freely chosen intermediary representatives,
- b) to vote or be elected, in the course of periodic honest elections with universal and equal suffrage, with secret balloting that ensures freed of expression of the electors will
- c) to accede to his country’s public offices under general conditions of equality

Already, in 2011, the UN High Commission for Human Rights that supervises the application of the Pact had expressed anxiety over the restrictions applied in Iran to the right of free expression, of association, of meeting as well as the right to take part in public business. The High Commission had, at the end of its report, mentioned the closing of newspapers and of Iranian journalists’ associations, the arrest of journalists, press editors, film directors and of people working in media in general. It also denounced the supervision of Internet, of its use and its contents, the blocking of several Web sites that publish news and political analyses as well as the deliberate slowing of connexion

sped, the jamming of foreign broadcasts by satellite that had been observed during the 2009 Presidential elections.

The NGO thus once again called on Iran to ensure the safety of journalists in the exercise of their profession, without the threat of judicial reprisals and to “release, rehabilitate and compensate—the arbitrarily detained journalists. It also demanded that supervision of Internet should not contravene freedom of expression or respect for privacy.

The High Commission also expressed its concern about the conditions required for being a candidate for parliamentary elections and the right given to the Council of Guardians of the Revolution to reject candidatures. The breaches observed during the 2009 campaign were recalled and listed: the refusal of international observers at the time of the elections; the blocking of mobile telephones and access to Internet social networks and opposition sites; the arbitrary arrest of political activists, of members of ethnic minorities or of certain religious communities, of students, of trade unionists and feminists; the arrest of leading members of the opposition in February 2011; the banning and dissolution of two political parties that called for reforms. Finally it asked Iran to reform its electoral law and to “take adequate measures to guarantee free and transparent elections in full conformity with the Pact by including provision for an independent electoral commission”.



## LEBANON: THE KURDS STILL FEEL THEY ARE "SECOND CLASS CITIZENS"

**A** report on the Daily Star considered the situation of Kurds in the Lebanon, who have long been settled in the country yet are one of the most disadvantaged and least represented population groups in the country.

While the first Kurdish immigration to the Lebanon date from the end of the Ottoman Empire, other waves of migrants continued to flow in throughout the 20th Century both for economic and political reasons. Thus Bahaeddin Hassan, originally from Turkish Kurdistan, arrived there in the 70s, when he was only 15 years of age, drawn by the Lebanon's reputation for peaceful prosperity. At first, however, he only found the hardest and odd jobs to live on. Today, at 57, he has secured Lebanese citizenship, has been able to build a family and runs a clothing export firm. He is also president of the Philanthropic Association of Kurds in the Lebanon. He explains that the situation of Kurds in the Lebanon is one of the most difficult: "We have obtained the nationality but that's all. No one protects or defends us. No one hears our voice".

The Kurds had a long time to wait before obtaining Lebanese nationality, since the Christians, fearing a demographic imbalance unfavourable to them for a long time blocked their naturalisation, while willingly giving it to Armenians, Assyrians and other Christian immigrants. Finally, in 1994, under Rafic Hariri's government, some 10,000 Kurds (some of whom had been settled there for 3 generations) were able to secure

Lebanese citizenship. This had not happened since the 60s, when a handful of Kurds had been naturalised with the support of Kamal Jumblatt, whose family traced Kurdish origins going back to the 10th Century.

As for Moslem, mostly Arab, they show little interest in the Kurds. In an essentially clannish country where everything works through clientelism, the singular situation of the Kurds, who are Moslem but not Arab, keeps them marginalised in the country's social and political life. Even now, it's one of the least educated, most hit by unemployment and least represented politically of the country's ethnic component

Most of the Kurds, perhaps because of lack of access to education, are very little assimilated to the Arab world and still feel Kurdish above all else. Thus Fadia Mahmoud Ismail, 41 years old, brought to the Lebanon at the age of 13 to be married, says she is proud of her Kurdish heritage even though she does not envisage ever leaving the Lebanon: "*I don't feel Lebanese. My culture and language are Kurdish. I know that I am Kurdish and that will never change*".

However, like many Kurds in the Lebanon, she feels a lack of recognition in the country where she lives and particularly regrets that there is no Kurd in Parliament to represent them there or in public life.

Last November, a report written by Guita Hourani, a research worker at Notre Dame of Lebanon University, showed that the naturalisations had had a reverse side, making them vas-

sals of a political faction since most Kurds think they have a duty to be grateful to one political "boss" or other for their new citizenship. This prevents them gathering to form an autonomous influence group devoted to defending the Kurds' specific interests

However, according to Lokman Meho, who runs Beirut's American University Library, himself a Kurd who has worked for several years, Lebanese society is not entirely to blame for the social backwardness of the Kurds: "*Many of them are illiterate, many families prevent their daughters from going to school and subordinate jobs are passed on from generation to generation*".

Thus, Lokman Meho is one of the rare Kurds to have been brought up in this society until reaching university. In this he had the good fortune of growing up in a family that gave top priority to education. Because he had the luck of being a Lebanese citizen, he was able to enjoy a scholarship from the Hariri Foundation. After passing his masters and Ph.D. in the United States in social science and information technology, he returned to his native country three years ago to run the American University Library. However, despite this social and professional success, Lokman has always felt a second-class citizen in a very sectarian society in which the Kurds suffer from prejudices and are branded as "foreigners".

"*All the Kurds are proud of being Kurdish and Lebanese. They feel both identities equally. However, if they had not suffered so much (as Kurds) they would, perhaps have been more Lebanese*".



## PARIS: AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SYRIA

**O**n 3 February, an International Conference was held in the French National Assembly, organised by the Paris Kurdish Institute entitled: *ø The Syrian crisis: Issues and perspectives*". The aims of this encounter and the questions raised by the research workers, political representatives and analysts were presented thus: *"The bloody repression that has been rife in Syria for several long months now exposes the militaro-political nature of the Assad clan that has been in power since 1970. Thirty years after the massacres in Hama, the Syrian authorities have distinguished themselves by their war against society, as Michel Seurat (1947-1986), another victim of the Assad regime, described the system. The destruction of the urban areas of Homs and Deraa as well as the coastal and desert regions, go side by side with the open determination of Damascus to destabilise two fragile countries in the region, Iraq and the Lebanon.*

*The symposium on Syria being organised by the Kurdish Institute starts with the urgency of considering both the resources for survival of a hard-pressed regime and the dynamics of the resistance of a society whose very existence is threatened.*

*Who are the actors of a mainly provincial protest movement that is, nevertheless, changing the "political map" of the country as a whole? What chances have the political opposition bodies, mainly organised from exile? What role are the political, Islamist, liberal or left wing trends playing in the field of political dissent? To what extent does the religious situation play a part in the repression or the protest movement? What are the margins of manoeuvre*

*do the country's Christian minorities have? What part are the Kurds playing in the resistance? How should we analyse the relative weights being played by the local "great powers" (Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey) in the development of the Syrian crisis?"*

The first Round table, chaired by Ms. Joyce Blau, University Professor Emeritus, specialist in the Kurdish language and society, covered the subject of the "dynamics of the protest movement". It included Jordi Tejel Gorgas, research worker at *l'Institut des hautes études stratégiques* in Geneva and a specialist on Syrian Kurdistan, 2 members of the Syrian National Council, Kamiran Haj Ebdo and Munzer Makhous, as well as Cale Saleh, of the International Crisis Group, who had come from Cairo.

According to Jordi Tejel, the Syrian authorities are not yet on the point of collapsing. In this it differs from the other countries that had gone through the "Arab Spring", even if there are two points of similarity between the Syrian revolt and the other rebellions: *"the importance of the youth and of the Internet networks in the mobilisation"*.

*"After 10 months of revolt, the regime is still holding out, even if it is increasingly isolated. Bashar, however, has succeeded in fragmenting the area of protest — so far Damascus and Aleppo have remained broadly loyal. On the other hand town of the periphery have gone into revolt: Hama and Homs. The question that rises is what are the long-term consequences of this situation? Syrian territory is becoming increasingly fragmented. The situation in Syria this seems different from that of Egypt, Tunisia or even of Libya"*.

About the "prudence" of the Kurdish parties to openly engage in the struggle, civil or armed, Jordi Tejel Gorgas sees this as *"no doubt distrust of the opposition and, particularly of the Islamic parties that are present, since all the Kurdish parties are secular. We should remember that the Moslem Brothers are supported by Turkey and that Turkey is opposed to Kurdish autonomy in Syria. This can explain the wait-and-see attitude of the Kurdish parties. There is a real danger of the Syrian revolution being confiscated at the expense of the revolutionary youth"*.

Kamiran Haj Ebdo recalls that in Syria *"the Kurds enjoyed no rights and, especially no right to recognition of their existence; they are not mentioned in the history or geography books. There have been revolts but they have not reached the level of those of the 70s and 80s. After the Arab spring, we are convinced that the very concept of revolution will be altered. We have called for a national dialogue between the government and the opposition but there has been no sign of listening from the government. So there is no other choice but revolution"*.

Regarding the nature of the revolution, his analysis is that, fundamentally *"the strength of this revolution is that it is global. There is no ethnic or religious distinction, Christians, Moslem, men, women, believers and atheists. Another characteristic of this revolution is that it is peaceful. However, up to a certain point the regime has succeeded in distorting the movement— the revolution has become less global and less peaceful. It is important to return to its global character"*.

On the development of events, Kamiran Haj Ebdo does not see the Bashar al-Assad regime



being able to maintain itself — but it could be replaced by another authoritarian regime because of the “one-party culture” in which Syria is steeped:

*“Syria’s future depends on the global and peaceful character of the revolution. It is clear that the present regime is at an end. While, however, its president and his council of ministers must obviously go, the infrastructure and ideology the regime has set up will be harder to eliminate. We do not wish to replace one tyrant by another. But getting rid of the one-party culture will be difficult. Syria needs to create a culture of dialogue, of mutual recognition. It will be our task to build this new culture. We support the idea of a democratic Syria, multi-party, with people having different identities in which the Kurds will find their place and their land”.*

Munzer Makhous, also a member of the SNC, also insisted on the plural character of Syrian society both on the ethnic and denominational level. Paradoxically, what is a richness in times of peace becomes a handicap in a period of crisis since the regime uses this diversity to fragment the population the better to control it.

Cale Saleh, of the International Crisis Group, made a more detailed account of the Kurdish political parties and particularly of the Kurdistan National Council that covers 11 parties and is very powerful in the Jezireh: *“The differences between the political parties are mainly historic. They take different stands regarding the regime, going from total opposition to more “diplomatic” relations. The most anti-regime parties are Azadi and Yeketi, parties that, historically, have suffered many political prisoners during the al-Assad regime — they are always for a very tough opposition line. At the other extremity of the political*

*spectrum, the parties that have the best relations with the regime are closer to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani’s Iraqi party. They are mainly the Progressive Party, led by Hamid Darwish and the Left Party (Yasar). In the middle of the political spectrum are the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, that is linked to Masud Barzani’s KDP in Iraq.*

*The Kurdistan National Council was formed in October 2011 and regards itself as one of the three poles of the Syrian opposition, with the National Co-ordinating Committee and the Syrian National Council. It has declared that it would not start a separate dialogue with the regime as representative of the Kurds but that if the Arab opposition itself decided to start such a dialogue it would join in as the Kurdish component. It tries to embody the Kurdish element in the Syrian opposition and tries to get those Kurdish parties that are taking part in the Arab opposition to “leave” them and join it. It is trying to create an area that would enable it to mark itself off from the other opposition elements”.*

As for the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK, Cale Saleh sees it as *“the regime’s best card amongst the Kurds”* because *“the PYD needs to enjoy a sanctuary in Syria from which to hit out at Turkey, which is its real priority. The PYD refused to join the SNC — it demanded a greater representation, which was refused. It has joined the Arab opposition of the Co-ordinating Committee and says it has secured a promise of autonomy for the Kurds in Syria. However, according to the published documents, the stand of the Co-ordinating Committee regarding the Kurds is as vague as that of the SNC. The PYD has, no doubt, joined the CC because it is opposed to any foreign intervention (contrary to the SNC) — which would certainly be initially a Turkish*

*intervention, which is considered a catastrophe by the PYD”.*

The second round Table covered the regional issues. It was chaired by Jonathan Randal, former Washington Post correspondent, and included Ahmad Salamatian, former Iranian Member of Parliament, Dr. Sadedin Mela, member of the Kurdish National Council of Syria and Antoine Steir, director of *Cahiers de l’Orient*.

Ahmad Salamatian spoke about the intrigues and position of Iran, one of the Syrian regime’s supporters: *“The Islamic Republic feels concerned and threatened by the events in Syria. Indeed, Iran is an insular power, Shiite and surrounded by Sunnis, Persian-speaking and surrounded by Arabic and Turkic speakers. Moreover, the country is surrounded by pro-American neighbours: Afghanistan, Iraq (even if, paradoxically, in the latter country, the US seems in objective alliance with Iran!). Finally, it has reached the end of the utopia of the exportation of the Shiite Islamic revolution, which has now been replaced by State policy.*

*The paradox about the alliance between Iran and Syria is that the latter has a nationalist and Baathist regime. It should be recalled that when Khomeini was expelled from Iraq he was urged to go and settle in Syria. At that time Khomeini refused, saying that the Syrians were worse than the Iraqi Baathists.*

*Nevertheless, Syria is also doorway that Iran can use to have links with the Mediterranean — which is of vital interest for the Islamic Republic. Thus the Syrian revolution has become a domestic issue for Iran”.*

In the opinion of Antoine Sfeir: *“Iran is now a country of the Arab zone. It should be recalled that what is called the Shiite arc goes from*

Teheran to South Lebanon via Baghdad and Damascus. Indeed, the beginning of the Arab Spring, in 2009 occurred in Teheran (...) What is taking place is a war between Sunnis and Shiites. Saudi Arabia is trying to break the Persian arc. The context of the region is also evolving. Egypt is coming into the forefront of the stage. In Turkey, Erdogan has not won the two thirds of seats in Parliament that he needed to change the Constitution. Despite his election victory, this is an important setback for him.

After a long period characterised by a strategic alliance between the United States, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey, I think we are at present witnessing the total and regional break-up of the Nation-State — I would even say the failure of the Nation-State — and a return to Empires”.

Sadedine Mela, of the Kurdish National Council of Syria also points out the importance of Iranian, Turkish but also Russian interests in Syria: “The alliance with Syria represents a great advantage for Russia. Similarly for Iran, which is linked to it by a mutual defence treaty. Syria represents the central link in the Shiite axis in the region. It also influences, through its substantial Christian community, the Christians of the region. In the course of the last few years, Syria has also acted as the principal bridge to Iraq for Al Qaida. Finally the country is a bridge linking the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey.

Turkey, after having long supported the regime, has taken some risks and is gambling on a Sunni regime coming to power. However, it does not want to see a democratic regime set up in Syria. Firstly because of its complicated relations with the Kurds.

Iran, for its part, is plying the Shiite card and trying to prolong the

regime’s survival. The United States wants to replace Russian and Iranian influence in the country by that of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Russia now knows that it will not be able to prevent the regime’s fall and that it risks seeing a unilateral intervention that could be confided to NATO.

As for Israel, it is staying very cautious since it has been in a situation of an agreed truce with Syria since 1974. It runs the risk of seeing a democratic regime emerging after the revolution, which could demand the Golan back — a demand which it would be hard to resist if it came from a democratic state, It also fears the opening of a new front with the Hezbollah”.

The third Round Table analysed both the regional and international issues. Chaired by Mr. Kendal Nezan, President of the Paris Kurdish Institute, it included Joseph Bahout, of the *Institut d’Etudes Politiques*, Alain Gresh, Assistant director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Fuad Hussein, Chief of staff of the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government, and Joseph Maila, forecast manager of the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

Professor Josef Bahout pointed out the specific characteristics of the revolution in Syria, which is characterised by a marked internationalisation: “The first striking point about the Syrian revolution is that has been the most internationalised of the Arab revolutions. At present it is more of a regional or international crisis than a purely Syrian event. It is thus very different from the preceding revolutions of the Arab Spring cycle, so far.

Why this growing internationalisation? Because of the time factor. The Egyptian revolution succeeded after 18 days, the Tunisian after 23 days. In Syria, the first demonstrations

began 11 months ago. We are thus faced with a very different time scale. This extension in time has created violence and led both to a territorialisation, a militarisation and a “militianisation” of events and of the regimes forces.

This long time has also provoked the internationalisation of the conflict. This is also due to Syria’s specific position at regional level:

- the link between Syria and the Israeli-Arab conflict
- the link with the Arabo-arab cold wars
- the link with the Iranian question.

On the other hand, this long time has led to the realisation of self-fulfilling prophecies of the Baathist regime: this has finally become the cause of what it denounced, namely foreign involvement in Syrian internal affairs”.

Finally Syrian territory is also that on which several rival regional and international powers are confronting one another: “a confrontation Russia — Western World, with China, to a lesser extent in the Russia camp, a worldwide confrontation of the Shiite and Sunni worlds, with the possibility of its extension Eastwards through Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc. Iran is conducting operations in Syria, the Gulf States are injecting money etc.

Another issue in the Syrian crisis: the control of Iraq, being fought over between the Turkish and Iranian influences. Turkey would like to play the role of defender of Sunni interests in the Middle East. In this crisis, the actors are obliged to use their traditional resources. On the other hand there is an aspect of Arabo-Arab struggles, namely competition inside the Gulf Cooperation Council.

A final cleavage line, inside the Lebanon, which pits the 14 March forces and those of 8 March, notably

with the presence of the Hezbollah. All these cleavages have been able to be deployed because of the duration of the events in Syria. This we have come to the internationalisation of the conflict”.

Alain Gresh, for his part, dealt with one of the questions raised by Kendal Nezan in his introduction to this Round Table: “Is it not already too late for Syria?” and expressed his scepticism about a possible resort to foreign military action:

“Inside the country things have reached a deadlock. Despite all its violence, the regime cannot end the opposition and the opposition cannot overthrow the regime — to some extent because of its own divisions. Some communities are haunted by fear of the future, for example the Christians, who have seen the consequences of the change in Iraq. (Nevertheless one must avoid characterising Syrians solely by their membership of a community.) At this level the opposition has shown its weakness by failing to convince them. Now we are faced with a probable civil war which will have catastrophic consequences, both in Syria and in the Lebanon — but also on the whole process of demanding democracy throughout the Arab world.

There is no military solution. Already external intervention has had catastrophic consequences in Iraq and Libya ... Bringing down naughty dictators does not provide a lasting solution: the only solution possible seems to be political transition starting with negotiations with at least part of the regime. I am thinking about what has happened in Latin America, where one of the lateral consequences has been an amnesty on crimes.

There is a danger of creating the illusion that things will end by

military intervention, whereas this seems very difficult. A transition must be negotiated, even if the regime has, so far, been closed to all attempts of this kind. However, I think that the invitation made by Russia to come and negotiate is a good way and we should urge the opposition to accept it”.

Speaking on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Fuad Hussein, wanted, from the start, to mark the difference between the position of Iraqi Kurdistan and that of the Baghdad government regarding the Syrian question: “The KRG’s policy towards Syria is not necessarily that of the Central government. The Iraqi government has tried to adopt the role of link between the government and the opposition, so far unsuccessfully. These attempts have been rejected by the Syrian opposition.

*There is, in Syria, a struggle between two blocks: on the one side Turkey and on the other Iran. This opposition also reflects the opposition between Shiites and Sunnis. It is not only a religious opposition but also an opposition between different political ideologies. Many Alawites support Bashar al-Assad’s regime because they think that if the Moslem Brothers or the Salafists came to power in Syria, the issue for them would not be just a question of power but of survival...”*

Joseph Maïla, forecasting manager at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, examined “the place of the Syrian case in the Arab Spring”, in which he found motives for revolt similar to those in Tunisia, in the Yemen, in Morocco and also with Libya in the severity of the repression: “Here, too, there exists a responsibility to protect civilians, that which had led to the adoption of resolution N° 1973 passed on 17

March 2011, following Articles 138 and 139 of the Millennium objectives for developing the international community when civilians are in danger, of substituting oneself for the State, whose duty it normally is, when it is faltering or criminal, to protect the population”.

Finally he recalled the official position of France, which has endorsed the Arab League plan, that is to say transition plan of 22 January for a gentle transition for France and all the parties that renounce violence. No one thinks that the solution can come from a military intervention, even if this could, at least, meet the necessity for protecting the population”.

The fourth and last Round Table raised the question of Syria’s future. Chaired by Marc Kravetz, a journalist with France Culture, it included Abdulahad Astepho, president of the Assyrian Democratic Organisation, member of the Executive Committee of the SNC, Kamiran Hajo, member of the Kurdish National Council of Syria, Zuhat Kubani, leader of the Democratic Unity (PYD) in Europe, and Haytham Manna, president of the National Coordination Council for a Democratic Change abroad.

Zuhat Kubani, leader of the Democratic Unity Party (PYD) in Europe, supported “a practical and global programme including the building of socio-cultural institutions” and an “autonomous government” for Syrian Kurdistan. “The Kurds could then play an effective role for democratisation in Syria, which could also be useful as a model for the Arab world”.

Abdulahad Astepho, president of the Assyrian Democratic Organisation, member of the Executive Committee of the Syrian National Council, first of

all presented the reality of the Assyrian component of Syria, which is a people before being a faith, and recalled that “the appointment of religious dignitaries, Christian as well as Moslem, under the Assad regime had to be subject to the approval of the Intelligence Services”. The Assyrian leader said he was in favour of a democratic, secular Syria with a common national project.

Haytham Manna, president of the National Coordination Council for a Democratic Change abroad, exposed the roots of the discrimination against the Kurds in Syria, which he traced back to the French Mandate and the influence of Jacobinism as from the

40s, and that the Syrian-Arab chauvinism did not just date from the Assad dynasty: “It must be recalled that most discriminatory law against the Kurds in Syria was passed in 1962, that is before the Baath Party took power. The fact is that there exists, well beyond the Baath, a structural ideological problem in Syria (...) Nor must the regime be characterised as exclusively Alawiite — the Alawiites are not in the majority amongst the heads of the intelligence services. Syria is not a denominational State, like the Lebanon. The power structure in Syria seems to me more like what Max Weber called “groupings of military and security interest”. We must carry out a deeper analysis of the nature of this power to see how to destroy it and build a democratic

alternative with all the components of Syrian society: Alawiites, Israelites, Druzes, Christians and also Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians and Armenians ...”.

Finally Hajo Kamuran, of the Kurdish National Council of Syria, saw the country as being in a “No return” situation. Defending both the right of the Kurds and Assyrians to exist as recognised minorities in the Syrian Constitution he demanded “a right of self-determination in the framework of the country’s unity. This claim is a test for democracy and for the different opposition forces. The rights of the Assyrians — and other minorities — must also be recognised and guaranteed”.

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## CULTURE: DEATH OF DENG BÊJ ELI TICO

**T**he dengbej and tenbur player, Eli Tico, whose real name is Mihemmed Eli Mihemmed Elo, died on 16 February last in Syria. He was 82 years old. El Tico was a greatly loved artist of the Efrin region, with his repertory of a hundred ballads and epics, including one cele-

brating Sheikh Said and the 1925 uprising against Turkey.

He was arrested by the Syrian authorities in February 2008 after he has welcomed in his house in Aleppo, a delegation of Kurdish singers from the Kurdistan Regional Government. The Syrian police then carried out

a raid and searched his home before taking him to be interrogated at the Aleppo Security Centre, then referred him to the Mukhabarat (Intelligence) H.Q. in Damascus.

His repertory was often political and patriotic to the glory of all the figures of Kurdish resistance wherever they might be from.

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# Les ambitions néo-ottomanes de l'AKP et le conflit kurde

Point de vue | CERI |

par Cuma Cicek, Doctorant au CERI-Sciences Po

"Diplomatie multidimensionnelle et multirégionale", "Nous n'avons aucun problème avec les pays voisins", c'est ainsi qu'Ahmet Davutoglu, ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, s'exprimait il y a encore quelques mois. Un an après le début du printemps arabe, qu'en estil de la politique extérieure menée par Ankara ? Il y a encore quelques mois le président syrien Bachar el-Assad était un ami très proche de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, chacun des pays avait décidé de supprimer l'obligation de visas pour se rendre chez le voisin et d'établir ensemble un Conseil de coopération économique avec le Liban et la Jordanie. Aujourd'hui, le Premier ministre turc critique le régime syrien sur la scène internationale et accueille sur son sol les opposants à Bachar el-Assad. Alors qu'Ankara soutenait le renforcement nucléaire de Téhéran, il a cependant décidé en septembre 2011 d'accueillir près de la ville de Malatya, située non loin de la frontière avec l'Iran, le système radar antimissile de l'OTAN. L'alliance stratégique qui liait la Turquie à Israël depuis des décennies est aujourd'hui réduite à sa plus simple expression. Enfin, en novembre 2011, le président de la République turque Abdullah Gül a qualifié Chypre, qui prendra la présidence de l'Union européenne en juillet 2012, de "demi-pays", de futur leader d'une "Union misérable". Il est clair que la politique du "zéro problème avec les pays voisins" est devenue celle du "conflit avec tout le monde".

La Turquie a renforcé sa relation avec le monde arabe et musulman. Ankara jouit d'une très bonne réputation parmi les peuples arabes, comme on a pu le constater lors des visites de

Recep Tayyip Erdogan en Egypte, en Tunisie et en Libye. Ce dernier, plus célèbre que les leaders arabes auprès des populations, est parfois surnommé le deuxième Saladin. Son Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) possède une ambition néo-ottomane qui s'inspire de la période expansionniste de l'Empire ottoman et souhaite faire de son pays la première puissance économique et politique du Moyen-Orient. Les dynamiques économiques, sociales, politiques et historiques favorisant cette nouvelle politique existent mais le conflit kurde, talon d'Achille de la Turquie depuis des décennies, pourrait contrecarrer ce projet.

Celui-ci s'est récemment intensifié comme le montrent les attaques simultanées (les plus violentes depuis 1993) menées par les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans la province d'Hakkari les 18 et 19 octobre 2011 et la réponse très sévère de l'armée turque dans la vallée de Kazan en Çukurca qui ont fait 35 morts parmi les rebelles. Les espoirs de régler dans la question kurde de façon pacifique par une négociation entre le gouvernement d'Ankara et Abdullah Ocalan, chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) emprisonné depuis 1999, se sont envolés après les élections législatives de juin 2011. De plus, l'opération contre l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan, souvent qualifiée de section urbaine du PKK, qui avait entraîné plus de 2 000 arrestations a été relancée et au total plus de 4 000 personnes (membres du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), principal parti kurde, formation maires, députés, présidents d'assemblées locales, fonctionnaires, cadres locaux et nationaux, ou encore représentants

d'organisations non gouvernementales, et plus récemment, universitaires, avocats et journalistes) ont été arrêtées depuis mai 2009. Ces événements ont ravivé les tensions et les accrochages entre les forces de sécurité turques et les rebelles du PKK depuis le début de l'été 2011 dans l'est du pays. En outre, le massacre qui a coûté la vie à trente-cinq jeunes contrebandiers kurdes, dont dix-neuf âgés de moins de dix-huit ans, dans un raid aérien mené par l'armée turque à la frontière avec l'Irak et le débat suscité par cette tuerie au sein du gouvernement et de la société turque comme parmi les Kurdes témoignent des possibilités d'embrassement de la situation.

Le conflit kurde, grande source d'instabilité en Turquie, constitue un obstacle aux ambitions néo-ottomanes de l'AKP vers le Moyen-Orient et le monde arabe et musulman. Après trois décennies de violence, Ankara, qui a toujours privilégié les politiques sécuritaires, n'a pas su trouver de solution au conflit. Malgré le déni du conflit, les politiques d'assimilation, les moyens et les stratégies de sécurité mis en oeuvre, le mouvement pro-kurde s'est renforcé à la fois en Irak et en Turquie. Dans ce dernier pays, le PKK poursuit sa lutte contre les forces de sécurité et le mouvement pro-kurde est de plus en plus présent : formation de nouveaux partis politiques, développement des médias – quatorze chaînes de télévision et plusieurs titres de journaux ont été créés –, etc. Tant et si bien que le gouvernement turc a parfois affirmé que l'on assistait à la formation d'un Etat parallèle dans la région. En 2009, le parti pro-kurde est arrivé en tête aux élections locales dans huit villes de la région kurde de Turquie, notamment à Diyarbakir, considéré comme la plus importante d'entre elles. Le nombre des députés indépendants (mais soutenus par le BDP) est passé

de 22 à 36 entre 2007 et 2011. En outre, le mouvement pro-kurde a gagné en influence au sein de la société civile comme le montre le sommet régional organisé en octobre dernier à Diyarbakir lors duquel on a pu voir que la plupart des exigences du mouvement pro-kurde étaient partagées par les 700 ONG présentes.

L'existence en Irak d'une région autonome du Kurdistan, qui compte plus de cinq millions d'habitants, fonctionne comme un quasi-Etat avec son gouvernement, son président, son parlement, son armée, sa police et qui bénéficie du soutien des Etats-Unis témoigne également que la question kurde ne peut être abordée sous le seul angle de la sécurité. Le retrait des Etats-Unis de l'Irak a ouvert un espace à la Turquie, notamment dans la région kurde du pays. Les Kurdes d'Irak ne peuvent en effet pas conserver leur position actuelle après le retrait américain sans s'appuyer sur Ankara, l'aide de l'Iran étant exclue par les États-Unis. Washington souhaiterait voir la Turquie s'impliquer économiquement et politiquement dans la région kurde d'Irak, ce que le pays ne peut faire sans avoir pacifié ses relations avec sa propre population kurde.

En Syrie, Ankara est confronté à la possibilité de l'établissement d'une nouvelle région autonome kurde (proche de la région kurde irakienne) ainsi qu'à celle d'un renforcement du conflit kurde que pourrait provoquer le régime de Bachar el-Assad. La crise du régime ouvre en effet des opportunités à l'opposition kurde en Syrie, notamment au Parti pour l'unité démocratique (PYD), branche syrienne du PKK. L'opposition kurde qui mène une politique pragmatiste essaie de négocier dans le cadre d'une autonomie régionale à la fois avec le régime d'el-Assad et avec les groupes d'opposition syriens. Les Kurdes ont donc

une position pacifiste et attentiste tout en tentant de renforcer leur pouvoir.

En outre, la nouvelle politique turque à l'égard du régime d'el Assad a ouvert un espace au PKK en Syrie. Damas a hébergé le PKK et son chef Abdullah Ocalan jusqu'en 1999. La Syrie et le parti kurde se connaissent très bien et disposent de la capacité et des ressources nécessaires pour affaiblir Ankara. La formation peut donc espérer bénéficier du soutien des pays favorables au régime d'el Assad (comme le montre le cessez-le-feu signé entre l'Iran et le Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan, PJAK, branche iranienne du PKK) et opposés à la Turquie (la Jordanie, voire la Russie). Une solution pacifique

de la question kurde pourrait donc permettre à Ankara de parer les manœuvres éventuelles de son voisin syrien et renforcer le statut de la Turquie.

Enfin, Ankara s'est éloigné de Téhéran sur des sujets comme l'Irak ou la Syrie. Le modèle politique turc, qui s'appuie sur la démocratie, l'économie libérale et l'islam, renforce la position du pays auprès des Occidentaux et des populations du Moyen-Orient, notamment des forces de l'opposition des pays arabes. Ce modèle turc, qu'on qualifie aussi d'islam modéré, constitue pour ces dernières une source d'inspiration. Il est également apprécié des Occidentaux en raison de son libéralisme économique et du caractère démocratique

de son système politique. En outre, la crise du régime syrien affecte Téhéran, allié majeur de Damas. En Irak, la Turquie soutient les sunnites quand l'Iran appuie les chiites mais les deux pays se battent pour renforcer leur présence dans la région kurde du pays. Alors que la question kurde connaît un regain de tension depuis l'été dernier, l'Iran a signé un cessez-le-feu avec le PJAK. Le PKK a donc élargi son champ d'action et le conflit kurde est devenu partie intégrante des relations conflictuelles entre Ankara et Téhéran. Le discours de Murat Karayilan, président exécutif du PKK, confirme cette nouvelle situation : "l'alliance antikurde entre la Turquie, l'Iran et la Syrie s'est désagrégée".

Quant à la politique de la Turquie vis-à-vis d'Israël et des Palestiniens, elle n'est pas l'expression d'une solidarité musulmane mais révèle l'ambition néo-ottomane de l'AKP. Ce nouveau positionnement d'Ankara pourrait également pousser Tel Aviv à utiliser la cause kurde pour affaiblir la Turquie.

Dans ce contexte tendu, Recep Tayyip Erdogan aurait particulièrement intérêt à travailler à une résolution pacifique de la question kurde tant un durcissement du conflit et une escalade de la violence serait dommageable à la démocratie turque présentée comme un modèle aux pays arabes et musulmans.■



## L'armée turque abat cinq séparatistes kurdes

3 février 2012 Jon Hemming - Reuters

**DIYARBAKIR, Turquie - Les forces turques ont abattu vendredi cinq militants séparatistes kurdes qui se cachaient dans une grotte de la province de Batman (sud-est), a-t-on appris de source proche des services de sécurité.**

L'aviation a par ailleurs bombardé des positions séparatistes dans le nord de l'Irak, annonce l'armée sur son site internet. L'opération a été menée avec succès et les appareils sont rentrés à leur base, ajoute-t-elle sans plus de précisions.

Des négociations secrètes entre Ankara et le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont capoté l'an dernier et les combats ont repris de plus belle.

Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a promis cette semaine qu'il allait "combattre l'organisation terroriste mais négocier avec ses représentants politiques".

L'insurrection kurde a fait plus de 40.000 morts en Turquie depuis vingt-huit ans.□



9 février 2012

## Turquie: 13 rebelles kurdes et un soldat tués lors de combats

**ISTANBUL (AFP) - Treize rebelles kurdes et un soldat turc ont été tués jeudi lors de combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie citant des sources officielles.**

Un premier accrochage a eu lieu à 02H30 (00H30 GMT) près de la frontière irakienne à la hauteur de Cukurca, dans la province de Hakkari, lorsqu'un groupe de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a ouvert le feu sur une unité de l'armée, a affirmé le gouverneur de Hakkari, Muammer Türker, à l'agence.

"Un soldat a été tué et six autres blessés dans la première

salve tirée par les terroristes. Nos forces de sécurité ont riposté et les combats ont duré environ 1H30. Après que les terroristes eurent profité de l'obscurité pour s'enfuir, un ratissage a permis de retrouver les corps de quatre d'entre-eux", a-t-il dit.

Une opération de grande ampleur se poursuivait dans la région, a ajouté le gouverneur.

Un deuxième incident s'est produit à 04H00 (02H00GMT) à Ilica, dans la province de Bingöl, où les forces de sécurité ont donné l'assaut contre une maison abritant des rebelles, a déclaré le gouvernorat de Bingöl dans un communiqué

cité par Anatolie.

"Trois membres de l'organisation ont été capturés et les corps de neuf autres ont été retrouvés. Neuf (fusils d'assaut) Kalachnikov, cinq grenades, un lance-roquettes, deux (fusils d'assaut) M-16 et (...) une certaine quantité d'explosif C4 ont été saisis sur les lieux", a indiqué le gouvernorat.

Les affrontements entre l'armée turque et le PKK ont augmenté d'intensité au cours des derniers mois. En octobre, la Turquie a lancé une grande offensive par air et sur terre contre les séparatistes kurdes dans le sud-est du pays ainsi

que dans le nord de l'Irak après que 24 militaires ont été tués dans une embuscade.

En décembre, une frappe aérienne de l'armée près de la frontière avec l'Irak a tué 34 contrebandiers, la plupart âgés de moins de vingt ans, pris par erreur pour des rebelles séparatistes.

Et la semaine dernière, l'aviation turque a lancé un raid contre des positions des rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak, qui leur sert de base arrière pour leurs opérations en Turquie.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée, depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK en 1984. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays.

# L'opposition syrienne accuse l'Iran de fournir des hommes de main à Damas

L'Armée syrienne libre affirme détenir sept soldats iraniens à la solde de Bachar Al-Assad

Depuis des mois, les manifestants assurent que des soldats iraniens participent à la répression en Syrie. Mais les preuves de cette implication sont rares, voire inexistantes. Depuis vendredi 27 janvier, des soldats déserteurs de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), appartenant à la brigade Al-Farouk, affirment détenir sept Iraniens, cinq militaires et deux civils. Dans un communiqué, l'ASL demande, en échange de leur libération, l'arrêt des attaques à Homs et la libération du lieutenant-colonel Hussein Harmouche, premier officier supérieur syrien à avoir déserté avant d'être enlevé en Turquie et de réapparaître à Damas. Ce dernier aurait été exécuté lundi, selon des informations non confirmées.

Dans une vidéo mise en ligne par les insurgés syriens, les Iraniens, l'air fatigué et abattu, se présentent, avant que leur « chef », Sajjad Aminan, confesse être entré en Syrie le 16 octobre 2011. « Nous avons tué de nombreux civils dans la ville d'Homs, dont beaucoup de femmes et d'enfants. Nous avons reçu nos ordres directement des services de renseignement (...) », explique-t-il. Les insurgés exhibent des passeports et des documents présentés comme des papiers militaires. Il s'agit en fait de certificats de décharge du service militaire. Les hommes sont présentés en chemise noire, la tenue des Gardiens de la révolution (*pasdaran*), et avec un fusil Dragonov, l'arme de prédilection des snipers.

En fait, l'agence iranienne Mehr révélait le même jour que les cinq « soldats » iraniens n'étaient autres que les ingénieurs kidnappés le 21 décembre à la centrale électrique d'Homs. Quatre noms sont identiques et la photo des hommes, en civil, diffusée par Mehr, laisse peu de place au doute. Les deux civils supplémentaires seraient des émissaires venus négocier la libération des otages.

Tout début janvier, *Paris-Match* avait publié un reportage à Homs, dans lequel les Iraniens apparaissent : capturés en bleus de tra-

vail, ils sont soupçonnés par l'ASL « d'être des tireurs d'élite envoyés par Téhéran pour prêter main-forte à Bachar Al-Assad ». A la même date, un groupe inconnu, le Mouvement contre l'expansion chiite en Syrie, avait revendiqué l'enlèvement de cinq Iraniens. Vrais ingénieurs ou snipers en mission, qui sont vraiment les otages iraniens d'Homs ? Le mystère reste entier.

## Vrais ingénieurs ou snipers en mission, qui sont vraiment les otages iraniens d'Homs ?

En revanche, le communiqué de l'ASL est clair. Il demande au Guide suprême de la révolution islamique, Ali Khamenei, de « reconnaître clairement la présence en Syrie de membres des Gardiens de la révolution dans le but d'aider le régime d'Assad à opprimer le peuple syrien » et le met en demeure de « se retirer immédiatement du territoire syrien avant samedi midi ». « Nous sommes les amis du peuple iranien, nous ne sommes pas sectaires, nous ne sommes pas contre nos frères chiites », précise le communiqué. La veille, le 26 janvier, 11 pèlerins iraniens avaient été enlevés entre Alep et Damas. Les ravisseurs auraient laissé repartir le bus avec les femmes.

Pour Téhéran, cette mise en demeure est d'autant plus inquiétante que le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale plateforme d'opposition, reprend à son compte les accusations de l'ASL de « participation du régime iranien au massacre des Syriens ». En décembre, Burhan Ghalioun, président du CNS, avait déclaré que le nouveau pouvoir syrien romprait la « relation privilégiée » avec Téhéran.

Au moment où l'Iran se trouve sous une pression sans précédent à cause de son programme nucléaire controversé, la possible chute du régime Assad est une mauvaise

nouvelle. Elle la priverait de son principal et plus ancien allié arabe et isolerait le Hezbollah libanais, son bras armé au nord d'Israël. Il est donc essentiel de soutenir Damas. D'autant qu'à l'hostilité croissante des Syriens à l'Iran fait écho la sympathie, sur le Web, des opposants iraniens pour cette révolution qu'ils envient : en décembre, l'effigie de Bachar Al-Assad a été brûlée dans un stade du nord de l'Iran.

La nature du soutien iranien fait débat. Il est politique : des émissaires iraniens auraient tenté de convaincre les Frères musulmans syriens de diriger le gouvernement à condition de ne plus réclamer le départ de Bachar Al-Assad. Au plan militaire, Paris et Washington ont dénoncé des livraisons d'armes – ce qui constituerait une violation de la résolution 1747 du Conseil de sécurité instaurant un embargo des exportations d'armes iraniennes. Les douanes turques ont intercepté, à plusieurs reprises, des « cargaisons suspec-

tes » à destination de la Syrie. La dernière remonte au 10 janvier.

Le général Qassem Souleimani, haut responsable *pasdaran* en charge de la force Al-Qods, a effectué plusieurs visites à Damas, la dernière en janvier. Il est soupçonné de fournir aide et conseils, notamment dans les domaines de la cybertraque des opposants et du maintien de l'ordre urbain. Selon des sources libanaises, il aurait suggéré, l'été dernier, aux Syriens de tirer dans les jambes des manifestants, afin d'alléger les bilans. La présence en masse de troupes iraniennes semble peu probable : persanophones et peu familiers du pays, les soldats iraniens ne seraient pas d'une grande utilité. Enfin, en juin 2011, Téhéran avait débloqué des fonds pour aider Damas, mais le manque de devises créé par les sanctions pose de plus en plus problème. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD



L'ambassadeur de Syrie à l'ONU, Bachar Al-Jaafari, et les dirigeants de la Ligue arabe, au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, à New York, le 31 janvier. DON EMMERT/AFP

# Russia resists push to condemn Syria

UNITED NATIONS

West and Arabs jockey over Assad's future as his army attacks rebels

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

The tension between the forces for change that have erupted across the Middle East and the old politics of power influence were building here Tuesday as Arab and Western states confronted Russia over its adamant refusal to con-

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demn the Syrian government for its violent suppression of popular protests.

In the hours leading up to the diplomatic duel in the Security Council, the drumbeat of violence continued unabated in Syria, where government forces pushed rebels back from strongholds near the capital, Damascus.

With a draft Security Council resolution put on the table by Morocco and calling for President Bashar al-Assad to step aside to speed a democratic transition, Russia stressed its opposition to any such plan even while trying to distance itself from the man himself.

"The Russian policy is not about asking someone to step down; regime change is not our profession," Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. during a stop on his Asia tour

"We are not friends or allies of President Assad," he went on, Interfax reported, evidently hoping to deflect accusations that Moscow should be held responsible for the widening bloodshed. "We never said that Assad remaining in power is a precondition for regulating the situation. We said something else: We said that the decision should be made by Syrians, by the Syrians themselves." He then referred to Libya, the precedent seemingly guiding Russian opposition to

**"The Russian policy is not about asking someone to step down; regime change is not our profession."**

almost any Syria resolution. "The international community unfortunately did take sides in Libya," he said, "and we would never allow the Security Council to authorize anything similar."

It is the ghost of Libya and recent Security Council resolutions that haunts the debate on Syria in the United Nations and beyond. To stress the high level of Western interest in adopting a resolution, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Portugal headed to the council meeting.

They all made statements about the need to stop the spiraling violence. After the death toll for nearly a year of protests reached more than 5,400 in January, the United Nations stopped counting because it said figures were too hard to confirm. Part of the West's interest is that the demise of Mr. Assad would weaken Iran's position in the region and its main Arab ally, Hezbollah, which continues to back the Damascus government.

The Arab League, newly energized with the need to answer to Arab peoples demanding an end to despotic rule, was briefing the council on why it passed a resolution demanding that President Assad step down. The wording of the Arab League measure was adopted almost wholesale in the draft Security Council resolution.

It was hoped that Nabil al-Araby, the league's secretary general, and Sheik Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, the Qatari prime minister, would convince council members that the move was less about regime change and more about meeting the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people, who have been demonstrating for 11 months.

No vote was scheduled for Tuesday. The haggling over the wording will commence in earnest again Wednesday. But privately, diplomats were expecting a showdown vote, with at least Russia resorting to a veto, to come as early as Friday. Russia and China vetoed a similar resolution in October. Russia, backed discreetly by China and India, rejects the idea that the world organization can interfere in the domestic politics of any country to force regime change.

They feel that they were duped into supporting a no-flight zone over Libya last March, and infuriated at the West for using it as a license to overthrow the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. To a certain extent both the Arab League and the rest of the world were ready to dump Mr. Qaddafi because he had no friends. Syria does, but the issue is larger than Syria itself.

"That the Morocco resolution 'calls for' Assad to step aside is their worst example and fear," said George Lopez, a professor at the University of Notre

Dame's Kroç Institute for International Peace Studies and a sometime adviser to the United Nations. "If today it is Assad, tomorrow Putin? They worry?"

Other calculations come into play. Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin, who wants to regain the Russian presidency in March elections, seeks to portray Russia as regaining its superpower influence. Moscow's long ties to Damascus generate billions of dollars in weapons sales, plus it gives Russia the entrée it needs to the table for Middle East peace talks. The Russian Navy deploys from the Syrian port Tartous, widening Russia's sphere of influence into the Mediterranean.

Then there is concern that the implosion of Syria could drag other neighbors, like Israel, Iraq and Lebanon, into a wider conflagration.

But it is the worry about setting a precedent that seems to trump all those issues for Russia. To try to address that, diplomats here have inserted all kinds of reassuring language into the draft resolution. "Nothing in this resolution compels states to resort to the use of force or the threat of force," it said, and underscores the "strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, emphasizing the need to resolve the current crisis in Syria peacefully."

It also calls on both sides to halt the violence, though not equating the two sides as Russia often does. The official Syrian position is that it is under attack from terrorists from abroad, its explanation ignoring the protest movements sweeping the region.

Members of the Syrian National Council, a nascent government in exile, made their debut around the United Nations in another attempt to sway the argument in favor of condemning the Assad government. But it rejected a Russian offer to sponsor talks in Moscow between the government and the opposition. S.N.C. members said Mr. Assad's stepping down and an end to the violence were their precondition.

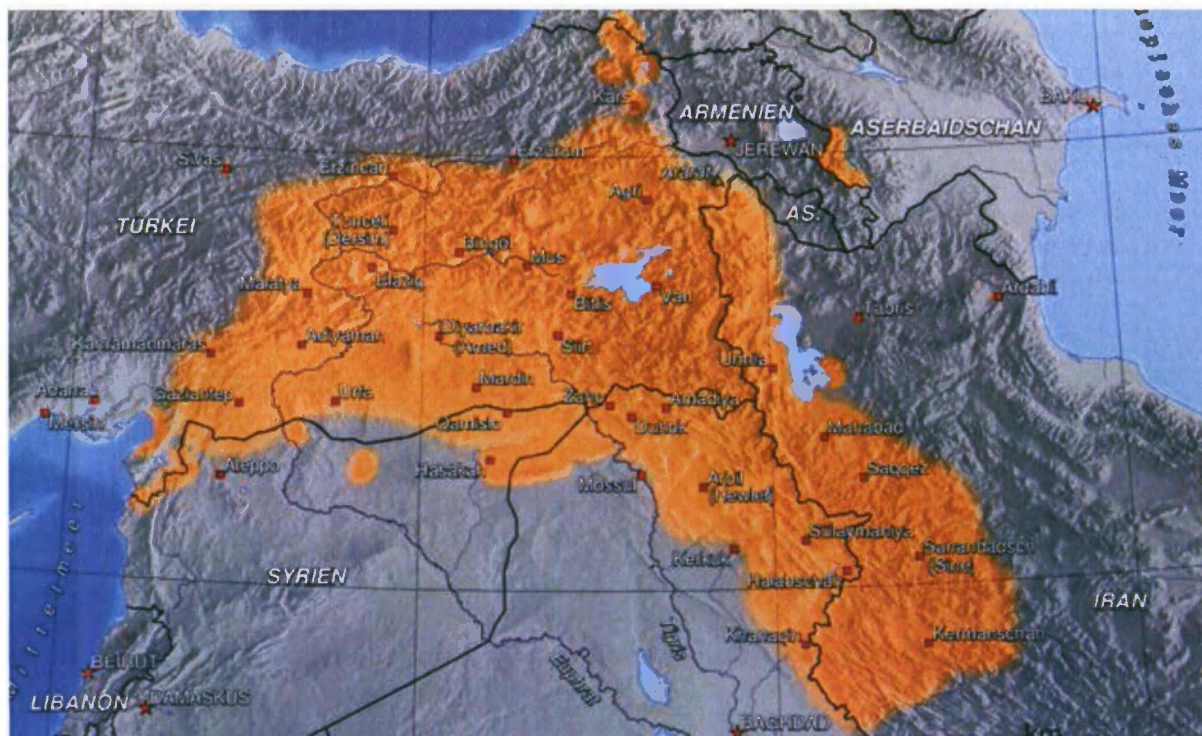
"I appeal to Russia, which has long historical ties with the Syrian people, to prevent the Assad regime from exploiting the Russia support in order to continue its oppression," Burhan Ghalioun, the president of the S.N.C., said after meeting with Russia's U.N. envoy, Vitaly Churkin. Mr. Ghalioun said that even if the resolution were to somehow pass, he did not expect it to affect either the violence or Mr. Assad himself.

"We don't anticipate him to accept or listen to the resolution," he said. "Nevertheless, to have that resolution is extremely important to emphasize his lack of legitimacy."

*Nada Bakri contributed reporting from Beirut and Ellen Barry from Moscow.*



# Middle East turmoil draws Turkey and Iraqi Kurds closer



If the Kurdistan region were a country it would still be Turkey's eighth biggest export market. (File photo)

**Jon Hemming / Reuters**

**A**RBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Upheaval in the Middle East and mutual economic interests are drawing together two unlikely partners; rising powerhouse Turkey and an entity whose name Turkish leaders hardly dare mention - Kurdistan, the semi-autonomous region of northern Iraq.

Ankara has developed solid political and trade ties with Iraq's Kurds, as its foreign policy of "zero problems with the neighbors" unravels due to the uprising in Syria, tensions with Baghdad and rivalry with Iran.

Iraqi Kurdish leaders also recognize that in an unstable region and with sectarian conflict threatening to upset the delicate political balance in Baghdad, their landlocked, oil producing territory needs an ally among its neighbors.

Turkey, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world, could be their best bet.

"We can call it a key relationship because Turkey has an important status because of its location and because of the role that it plays in the international community," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, the head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

"Turkey is a major partner for Iraq as a whole, but also for the Kurdistan region in terms of commerce and trade," he told Reuters in a recent interview. "I am sure Turkey would have a good opportunity to be a major or main partner with the KRG,

but also with Iraq."

But big issues remain, not least the presence in northern Iraq of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a militant group whose 27-year armed campaign for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey has claimed the lives of 40,000 rebels, soldiers and civilians.

Turkish leaders are also reluctant to see the emergence of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, fearing this could rouse the already restless Kurds just across the border in Turkey.

In a landmark visit to the region last year, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly referred to the "Kurdish administration," but never once used the word Kurdistan.

## PIPELINE DIPLOMACY

Victims of massacres and chemical weapons attacks, Iraq's Kurds rose up against Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War and broke free from Baghdad-rule. The 2003 U.S.-led invasion then toppled the dictator and led to a constitution that recognized the Kurds' hard-won de facto autonomy.

Once the poorest region of Iraq, Kurdistan is now its most prosperous, insulated from the insurgency and sectarian violence in the south by its mountains and stable government.

For now the region largely depends on receiving 17 percent of the national budget, but the regional government estimates there are about 45 billion barrels of oil reserves in the north, most of it as yet untapped.

Oil majors, analysts say, are expected to follow the lead of Exxon Mobil and sign exploration and production deals with the regional government. This should help to raise production, esti-

mated to reach 175,000 barrels per day this year, to 1 million bpd by 2015.

Kurdish oil exports are pumped into the Iraqi national pipeline system, but relations between the Kurds and Baghdad have been dogged for years by rows over late payments for crude, the legality of the regional government's oil deals and disputed territory.

Add to that the traditional distrust of Baghdad following Saddam's atrocities, the present political infighting in the capital and risk of renewed sectarian violence, and the Kurds feel they are right to look after their own interests.

That means the regional government becoming less reliant on Baghdad.

One pipeline pumping about 60,000 bpd already feeds directly from Kurdistan's Tawke oilfield into the main pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, and more are due to follow.

"Turkey is our port to Europe and the West," said a regional government official who declined to be named. "It is a member of NATO, and one day could join the European Union. It is a much better option than Baghdad or Iran."

With an economy growing at 8 percent last year, Turkey is hungry for energy and values a fast-growing market on its doorstep where it can sell its manufactured goods.

From the construction firms putting up new five-star hotels to accommodate Western oil executives flocking to the region, to banks, retailers and restaurants, more than half the foreign companies in Iraqi Kurdistan are Turkish. About 80 percent of goods sold in the region are made in Turkey.

Iraq as a whole is now Turkey's second biggest export market after Germany, selling more than \$8 billion of goods last year. But according to Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan, about 70 percent of Turkey's exports to Iraq are to the north.

If the Kurdistan region were a country it would still be Turkey's eighth biggest export market.

A war of words between Erdogan and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has also drawn Turkey closer to the Kurds. Erdogan has warned that Turkey would not remain silent if a sectarian conflict erupts in Iraq. Maliki has accused Erdogan of meddling.

Turkey has heavily courted the Kurds, along with Iraq's Sunni Arab parties in recent years, analysts said, but Maliki and Shi'ite parties remain allied to Iran.

## STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

Involving Turkey in the economy of Iraqi Kurdistan may not be enough to ensure Ankara's enduring support, particularly while its soldiers are being killed by PKK militants whose leaders are based in the mountains of northern Iraq.

"For 30 years, we have paid a very heavy price for the terror directed here because of the lack of authority in Iraq, especially northern Iraq," Erdogan told his parliamentary deputies on Tuesday. Turkey, the United States and the European Union all classify the PKK as a terrorist organization.

Turkey has staged 28 operations into northern Iraq in pursuit of the PKK in the last 20 years, Kurdish officials said, so it is in the regional government's interests to help solve the problem if it is to seek closer ties with Turkey.

The regional government, made up of pro-Western conservative parties led by landowners, has little natural sympathy with the PKK, a group with Marxist roots.

But a military move against the Turkish Kurd militants by the regional government's forces would be extremely unpopular with Iraqi Kurds, and in any case when the two sides have clashed in the past the PKK have generally come out on top.

While Erdogan has granted some Kurdish language and cultural rights in Turkey to try to de-link the "Kurdish problem" from the "terrorism problem," secret peace talks between the Turkish state and the PKK broke down last year, Turkish media said.

Masoud Barzani, the regional president, and the government are working behind the scenes to bring the two sides back to negotiations, said a second official who declined to be named.

"I think violence only brings catastrophe," Barzani said when asked about efforts to mediate between Turkey and the PKK.

"I cannot call it a mediating role, but both sides know our view very clearly ... We only see a peaceful solution to this and the moment there is a need to follow a peaceful approach then we are ready to do whatever we can," he said in a recent interview.

"Turkey is the key alliance for us, politically and economically," said the second government official. "It is a strategic alliance for us, mutually beneficial for both sides." ♦

 **REUTERS**

## Turkish forces kill 5 PKK fighters

Diyarbakir, Turkey -February 3, 2012- Reuters

**TURKISH SECURITY forces killed five Kurdish militants on Friday after discovering them hiding in a cave in the southeastern province of Batman, security officials said.**

More than 40,000 rebels, soldiers and civilians have been killed since the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) began its fight for self-rule in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast in 1984.

Turkey, the United States and the European Union all classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

Secret peace negotiations between the state and the PKK broke down last year, Turkish media said, and clashes have flared up once again.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said this week "we will fight the terrorist organisation, but we will negotiate with its political representatives".

The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) won 36 seats in a parliamentary election last June, though a court barred some jailed candidates from taking their seats.

PKK leaders also say they are willing to negotiate peace, but accuse Turkey of being insincere. □

# Pressure on Assad is also squeezing Iran

BY RICK GLADSTONE

As anti-government forces in Syria's violent uprising have increased the pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to step down, Iran, his main Middle East supporter, also finds itself under a siege that is undermining a once-powerful partnership.

The position is unusual for Iran, and

## NEWS ANALYSIS

its vulnerability in Syria has not been lost on the United States, which has been imposing stiff economic sanctions on both countries.

In the calculus of predicting the political outcomes of the Arab Spring upheavals, some U.S. officials see the possible downfall of Mr. Assad as an event that could further weaken Iran as its economy reels under the sanctions imposed to get Tehran to suspend its nuclear program.

"It would completely change the dynamic in the region," one Obama administration official said.

The departure of Mr. Assad, the thinking goes, not only would threaten to sever Syria from Iran, which has long been a goal of the United States and its Arab allies, but also could deprive Iran of its main means of projecting power in the Middle East. If Mr. Assad were to fall, Tehran would lose its conduit for providing military, financial and logistical support to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Both groups oppose Israel and are considered terrorist organizations by the U.S. government.

Moreover, the sanctions on Iran have severely impeded its ability to provide financial aid to Mr. Assad (let alone to Hamas and Hezbollah), whose treasury has been depleted by the uprising and sanctions on Syria. Another senior administration official said Iran had nevertheless tried its best to prop up Mr. Assad, adding that "you would see Assad fall faster if they weren't there."

Ali Banuazizi, a political science professor at Boston College and a co-director of its Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program, said, "To put it bluntly, if Iran is a threat, then one way to weaken that threat would be to weaken Syria and to help the anti-Assad movement in Syria."

The weakness of the Syria-Iran axis represents a stark turnaround from a year ago, when Mr. Assad's grip on power seemed assured and Iran was describing itself as the inspiration for other Arab Spring uprisings. Iran even sent two naval vessels through the Suez Canal to Syria last February — for the

first time in more than 30 years — in what the Iranians called a message of peace and friendship.

The uprising in Syria, now in its 11th month, has caused extreme discomfort to Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist organization that has been based in Damascus for years. Last Friday, Khaled Meshal, leader of Hamas, left Damascus with no plans to return. Earlier in January, Ismail Haniya, Hamas's prime minister in Gaza, visited Turkey, a former Assad ally that is now perhaps his most powerful regional critic.

It is by no means a certainty that Mr. Assad, who has repeatedly rejected calls for his resignation, will depart soon, despite the increased pressure on him on the streets of Syria and at the U.N. Security Council, where an effort by Western powers and the Arab League to force him aside has begun.

As signs of Mr. Assad's unpopularity have spread in Syria and his list of supporters declines, Iran has been one of the few conspicuous allies that has not abandoned him — possibly because it has no alternative. Except for Mr. Assad's minority Alawite sect, other components of Syria's fractured sectarian mosaic have no affinity for Iran. Many Syrians now view Iran as siding with their oppressor:

There have been at least three instances in recent weeks of abductions of Iranians in Syria by anti-Assad forces. The most notable was the seizure last month of five Iranians, whom Iran's state-run press called engineers but anti-Assad groups said were military advisers.

In a video posted online by a unit of the insurgent Free Syrian Army, which claimed to hold the Iranians, one of the men identified as a hostage said the five had been "involved in suppressing and shooting ordinary Syrians" and urged

**"To put it bluntly, if Iran is a threat, then one way to weaken that threat would be to weaken Syria."**

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, "to order the Iranian military personnel who suppress the Syrians to be repatriated from Syria, so we can also return home."

While the authenticity of that video has not been confirmed, it suggested a level of resentment in Syria toward Iran that had not been seen before.

Iran has continued to publicly recite

Mr. Assad's version of the uprising — that it is terrorism financed by foreign powers hostile to Syria. Ayatollah Khamenei added his voice on Tuesday, denouncing what he called "the interference of America and its allies in Syrian domestic issues."

At the same time, U.S. officials said there was growing evidence that Iran was helping train and equip Syrian security forces.

"Our concerns include the fact that some of the tactics being used by the Syrian regime mirror tactics used in Iran against their own population and about increasing evidence of numbers of Iranians in and around Syria," said the U.S. State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland.

In early January, the commander of the Quds Force in Iran, Qassim Suleimani, visited Damascus, raising suspicions that the Quds Force was advising Mr. Assad on how to quash the uprising. The Quds Force conducts special operations outside Iran.

Still, Iranian officials have also urged Mr. Assad to show more flexibility toward his adversaries, advice he has basically ignored.

Andrew J. Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a specialist on Syria, said the Assad government was caught up in its own constraints that prevented reform. "Assad would have to undermine the very people he has to maintain order," he said. "I don't expect it's going to change now. I think the Iranians know that."

At the same time, Mr. Tabler said, Mr. Assad's control has been weakened by U.S. and other sanctions. Given Iran's own economic troubles, the leaders in Tehran are unlikely to provide significant financial aid to Mr. Assad.

"Some time in the middle of the year Syria is going to run out of cash, and it will be interesting to see what happens," Mr. Tabler said. Mr. Assad's demise, he said, "would be the biggest blow to Iran's influence in the region in decades."

*Mark Landler and Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Washington.*

# Kurds Seize on Iraqi Crisis to Advance Bid for Oil, Land

By SAM DAGHER

**MOSUL, Iraq**—Iraq's Kurds are using a contract with Exxon Mobil Corp. and a national political crisis to strengthen their region's control of resource-rich patches of disputed land, raising the stakes in a long-running standoff with the central government in Baghdad.

Exxon Mobil's oil exploration and production deal with the Kurdistan Regional Government, announced in November, was effectively an endorsement by a global energy giant of development in Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Iraq, until then the domain of second-tier companies and wildcatters.

Despite opposition from Baghdad, Exxon Mobil is moving ahead with the project. It is now preparing for seismic studies and securing office space and accommodation for its staff in the Kurdish region's capital Erbil, a Kurdistan official said Monday.

Exxon Mobil declined to comment on the contract.

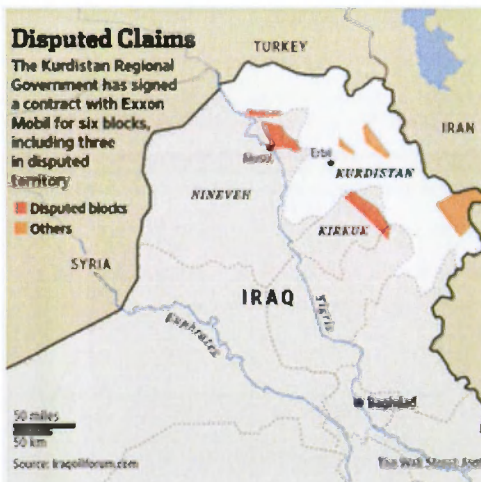
Kurds, meanwhile, are pointing to the Exxon Mobil deal to convince other major oil companies such as Total SA to sign on for other concessions, according to Kurdistan officials. Total declined to comment on its discussions with Kurdistan.

The semiautonomous Kurdistan region has signed more than 45 oil and gas deals and has been at odds with Baghdad for years over whether it has the authority to do so.

But the prominence of Exxon Mobil, and the fact that three of six exploration blocks awarded to the company are in disputed land in the northern provinces of Nineveh and Kirkuk, have entangled Exxon Mobil in simmering national and local feuds.

Kurdish leaders, who in addition to running their own virtual state in the north participate in the central government in Baghdad, are now openly using a conflict between Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and a Sunni-dominated faction in his coalition government to exact concessions from Baghdad on oil and land.

Kurds say they want to use a coming national conference—intended to resolve the political crisis in Baghdad—to settle



their own disputes with the central government.

The Sunni faction on Tuesday ended a nearly six-week-long boycott of parliament and signaled it was ready to lift a boycott of cabinet meetings if a list of its own demands are met at the conference.

With Mr. Maliki depending on Kurdish support to help hold his government together, Kurdish leaders are looking to get Baghdad to compromise in exchange for their cooperation.

The Kurds' goals include redrawing internal boundaries in Iraq, holding a referendum in disputed areas to decide whether Kurdistan or Baghdad should control their territory, and passing a long-stalled national oil law that would recognize the Kurdish contracts and formalize revenue-sharing with the central government.

The timing, venue and agenda for the conference haven't been set. Mr. Maliki is expected to try to use Sunni Arab hostility toward Kurdish land claims in the north to avoid making major concessions to the Kurds.

He has already warned the Kurdistan government that its deal with Exxon Mobil could trigger a war in the area. His ministers have also accused the Kurds of oil smuggling, and threatened to end a service contract with Exxon Mobil in Iraq's south in retaliation.

Kurds have brushed off the threats. "We are dealing with these areas as part of Kurdistan," said a senior Kurdish official.

Some residents in the disputed areas view the Exxon Mobil deal as infringing on their own claims.

"The owners of the land, oil and all resources in Nineveh province are the Iraqi people in general and the people of Nineveh in particular," said Abdullah Humeidi Ajeel al-Yawer, leader of a powerful Sunni Arab tribe, in an interview in the northern city of Mosul, seat of Nineveh province.

Mr. Yawer also heads a political party that controls almost one-third of seats on the provincial council. "The central and local [Nineveh] governments must fix the situation and if they both are unable to do so, then we'll have our say," he added.

Mr. Yawer declined to say what he would do should the central and local governments' efforts fail. He commands thousands of armed tribesmen in his Shammar tribe, a group that was on the brink of war with Kurdish forces in 2005.

The U.S. and the U.N. stepped in to mediate that conflict and also facilitated a reconciliation between Nineveh's Gov. Atheel Nujaifi and the Kurdistan government.

With the departure of all U.S. soldiers from Iraq in December, tensions have risen again. Mr. Nujaifi called the Exxon Mobil deal a new wedge for militants to exploit. Militants "want to put us in confrontation with the [Kurdistan] region," he said in an interview.

U.S. diplomats in Baghdad said they hope the situation will remain under control because of common economic interests, the promise of oil-fueled prosperity and development in the area and the moderating influence of Turkey, which shares borders, business and political ties with all actors in northern Iraq.

Turkey has a strategic interest in boosting oil and gas exports from Iraq's north through its territory, analysts say.

Turkey's involvement could pave the way for the Kurdish government to exchange fraying ties with Baghdad for Turkish protection, says Joost Hiltermann, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group and expert on Iraq's land disputes.

"You could see the emergence of an oil-rich, Kurdish-run Turkish vassal state in Iraq," he says.

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## Syrie :

## la tentation de l'aide militaire aux insurgés

Après le veto russe et chinois à l'ONU, le Qatar pourrait prendre la tête d'un groupe de soutien aux opposants syriens



Funérailles à Homs, samedi 4 février. La foule crie : « Tous martyrs, par millions, nous nous rendrons au paradis » MANI POUR « LE MONDE »

Doha  
Envoyé spécial

**U**n permis de tuer. » C'est par cette formule choc que le premier ministre qatari, Hamad Ben Jassem Al-Thani, a réagi au veto opposé par la Russie et la Chine, samedi 4 février, devant le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, au projet de résolution condamnant la répression en Syrie. L'indignation le disputait à l'écœurement dans les réactions internationales après le vote, à l'instar de celle de l'ambassadrice américaine aux Nations unies, Susan Rice, qui s'est dite « dégoûtée ». Le texte endossait le plan de la Ligue arabe prévoyant la mise à l'écart graduelle du président syrien Bachar Al-Assad. Son rejet a suscité un tollé d'autant plus grand qu'il est survenu au lendemain de la mort à Homs, bastion de la contestation, de plus de 200 personnes dans des bombardements. Le carnage s'est poursuivi durant le week-end, avec une centaine de tués supplémentaires, civils et militaires.

La Russie a motivé son obstruction en arguant que le texte appelait à un « changement de régime », une ligne rouge pour le Kremlin, qui ne veut pas perdre son dernier allié en Méditerranée. Son ministre des affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov, accompagné du chef du renseignement extérieur, est attendu mardi à Damas, pour évoquer la mise en place de « réformes démocratiques indispensables ».

Il est peu probable cependant que l'entêtement de Moscou fasse fléchir les dirigeants qataris. Après avoir désavoué le chef d'Etat syrien, qui fut longtemps son protégé, l'émir Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani s'est convaincu de la nécessité de s'en débarrasser. « Quand l'émir se fait le champion d'une cause, il ne lâche pas, prévient Salman Cheikh, directeur de l'antenne qatarie du Brookings Institute, un cercle de réflexion américain. Il a l'entregent et les ressources pour aller au bout de son idée. »

Dans l'immédiat, les options qui s'offrent au Qatar consistent à mettre sur pied le Groupe des amis du peuple syrien, dont le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, a lancé l'idée, et à remobiliser la Ligue arabe, dont il assure la présidence tournante jusqu'en mars. « Bon nombre des sanctions décidées par les Etats membres n'ont toujours pas été mises en application, comme, par exemple, la suspension des liaisons aériennes entre Damas et les capitales arabes, souligne Hazem Nahar, un opposant syrien en exil au Qatar. Si toutes ces mesures deviennent effectives, le régime aura beaucoup plus de mal à payer les chabiha [miliciens pro-régime] et les membres des services de sécurité. Cela pourrait accélérer son effondrement. » Au sein de la Ligue arabe, le Qatar peut compter sur le soutien de la Libye et de la Tunisie, dont le premier ministre, Hamadi Jebali, a appelé à expulser l'ambas-

sadeur syrien.

Voilà pour l'action diplomatique. En coulisses, le Qatar pourrait être tenté, comme il l'avait fait en Libye, de fournir un appui militaire aux insurgés syriens, voire de l'accroître si l'on estime, comme certains analystes, que cette coopération est déjà en place. « Ce n'est pas demain que l'on verra des troupes étrangères en Syrie, assure David Roberts, du Royal United Services Institute, autre cercle de réflexion basé à Doha. Les pays occidentaux sont toujours terrifiés par l'idée d'une intervention militaire.

Mais après le veto russo-chinois, le Qatar pourrait se sentir davantage autorisé à envoyer de l'argent, des armes et des instructeurs aux membres de l'Armée syrienne libre. » Une option encouragée par le sénateur américain Joe Lieberman.

C'est en rappelant son ambassadeur à Damas en juillet 2011, quatre mois après le démarrage du soulèvement, le 15 mars, que le Qatar a officialisé sa rupture avec le régime Assad. Ce tournant était attendu depuis que la chaîne Al-Jazira, reflet et relais de la diplomatie qatarie, avait pris le parti des opposants, après quelques semaines de flottement. D'un coup, le président Bachar Al-Assad et son épouse Asma sont devenus persona non grata dans la micro-monarchie. Les investissements qataris en Syrie, estimés à 5 milliards de dollars (3,8 milliards d'euro), comprenant la construction de deux centrales électriques, ont été gelés et transférés pour certains en Jordanie.

« Le Qatar s'est prêté au grand jeu régional, conçu par l'Arabie saoudite, qui consistait à sortir la Syrie de l'orbite de l'Iran chiite et à la ramener dans le camp sunnite », affirme M. Roberts, qui rappelle comment l'émir fut l'artisan, en 2008, du rapprochement entre Paris et Damas. « Il joue désormais la carte de la rue arabe. Il veut se positionner du bon côté de l'Histoire. »

Dans cette entreprise, toute la difficulté pour le Qatar consiste à ne pas froisser son puissant voisin iranien, avec qui il partage le North Field/South Pars, le plus grand gisement de gaz naturel au monde. Pour l'instant, l'entente entre les deux pays ne semble pas avoir pâti de la crise syrienne. Mais si Doha venait à s'impliquer ouvertement dans la militarisation du soulèvement en Syrie, prenant le risque d'apparaître comme l'allié des grandes manœuvres occidentales contre le programme nucléaire iranien, Téhéran pourrait ne pas rester passif. En 2004, un haut dirigeant iranien avait accusé le Qatar de pomper plus que de raison dans le champ gazier sous-marin, et une plate-forme d'extraction avait été saccagée par des Gardiens de la révolution. Le coup de semonce n'a pas été oublié à Doha. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

# SYRIE • Le régime de Bachar El-Assad peut-il tomber bientôt ?

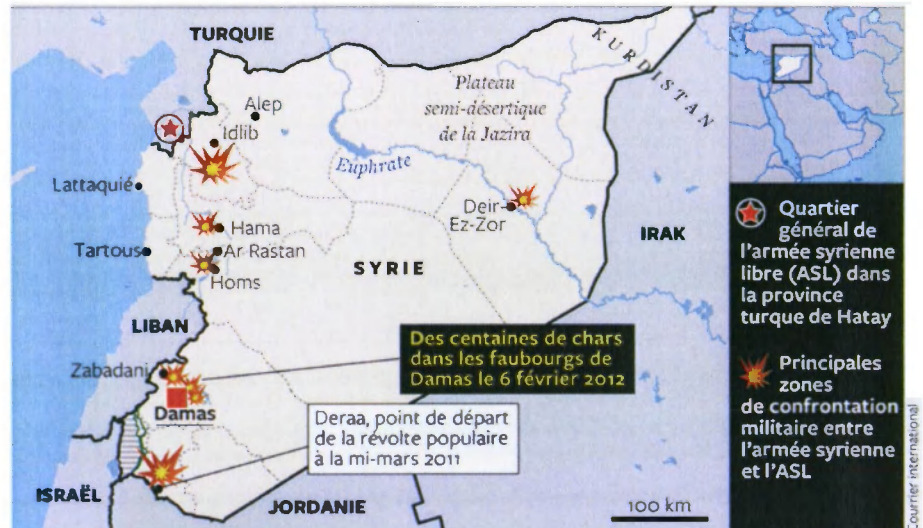
- Depuis mars 2011, la contestation prend de l'ampleur. La répression a déjà fait quelque 6 000 morts. Le 4 février, Russes et Chinois ont voté à l'ONU contre un projet de résolution condamnant les autorités de Damas, qui pourtant ne mentionnait pas le départ de Bachar El-Assad.
- Un règlement pacifique de la crise est donc repoussé. Sur le terrain, on déplore de nouveau des dizaines de morts. Le pays peut sombrer dans la guerre civile et dans des tueries confessionnelles.

Yassine Al-Haj Saleh\* / Jadaliyya

Il n'y a plus aucun doute sur le fait que le régime syrien va vers sa chute. Le point de rupture qui marque l'effondrement total se rapproche. Le régime perd confiance dans son armée régulière qui ne parvient pas à maîtriser la dynamique de son délitement. Un nouvel équilibre commence à s'imposer entre les militaires de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et les troupes du régime, forces armées ou milices, dans certaines régions.

Simultanément, la détérioration de la situation économique s'accélère et le gouvernement ne parvient plus à maîtriser le taux de change de la livre syrienne, qui a perdu plus de 50 % de sa valeur par rapport au dollar depuis mars 2011. Cette chute s'est accélérée ces dernières semaines et l'inflation atteint son taux le plus élevé depuis 1986. Il semble en outre difficile pour l'Iran et l'Irak du Premier ministre Maliki de continuer à soutenir un régime qui tente d'acheter le soutien de la bourgeoisie en lui fournissant aide financière et carburant. La discrimination est évidente à Damas, où les coupures d'électricité ne touchent les quartiers riches que quelques heures par jour. Malgré cela, la bourgeoisie bascule dans l'opposition au régime alors qu'elle était jusque-là hostile à la révolution. Tout indique que le pouvoir n'arrive plus à reprendre le contrôle du pays.

D'autres dynamiques sont désormais à l'œuvre. Près de onze mois de violences ont provoqué une crispation dans les esprits. Nombre de Syriens ont rompu tout lien avec le régime et se sont radicalisés, tandis que les signes d'hostilité se multiplient. Les slogans dans les manifestations et les graffitis sur les murs désignent le régime comme une force d'occupation. Les forces de répression sont appelées "brigades d'Assad", les appels à "exécuter le président" ou à "maudire l'âme de



son père" s'élèvent tandis que l'ancien drapeau de l'époque de l'indépendance est de plus en plus souvent hissé en place du drapeau actuel.

Une rupture idéologique, morale et psychologique avec le régime s'est opérée chez la majorité des Syriens, devenus plus lucides quant à leur situation. Le phénomène est sans précédent depuis l'indépendance. Après la chute du "mur de la peur" ou l'écroulement d'un régime sécuritaire réputé invincible, de plus en plus de Syriens commencent à ressentir leur supériorité face au régime ainsi qu'un mépris profond pour ses dirigeants.

Les deux signes les plus manifestes de la rupture et de la radicalisation sont le recours croissant aux expressions religieuses islamiques, mais surtout à la confrontation armée. Celle-ci ne se limite pas aux membres de l'Armée syrienne libre, déserteurs des troupes régulières. Des civils ont pris les armes en plusieurs endroits. Une telle évolution peut sembler regrettable sur un plan légal mais, d'un point de vue structurel, la violence reste le seul moyen de s'imposer contre le régime sur son propre terrain, et cela s'accompagne d'une religiosité revendiquée comme base de l'indépendance intellectuelle [par rapport au discours

nationaliste arabe utilisé par le parti Baas]. Cette évolution est toutefois coûteuse. L'islamisation grandissante dans certains des foyers de la révolte soulève des inquiétudes pour la Syrie de demain, où une domination communautaire [sunnite] pourrait en remplacer une autre [alaouite]. En outre, quand la violence est pratiquée par des civils, elle peut conduire au chaos et aux règlements de compte.

Le comportement de certains insurgés armés locaux est dénoncé par des militants des droits de l'homme et des intellectuels mais, dans le même temps, certaines initiatives et formations apparaissent, parmi les jeunes en particulier, indiquant l'existence de forces vives longtemps réprimées. Un nouveau sens de la politique et de l'action publique se révèle parallèlement aux tendances violentes et religieuses. Il marque aussi une rupture avec une opposition traditionnelle lente à comprendre et à agir.

Voilà qui est vital pour l'avenir du pays. Car si la radicalisation est bonne pour mener à bien une révolution, la Syrie de demain aura besoin de forces modérées capables de réconcilier la société. Il est de l'intérêt général que le régime tombe le plus vite possible, avant que le radicalisme accapare cette révolution.○

# SYRIE • Tactique : le président baasiste a encore des atouts

Une armée majoritairement fidèle au régime, une opposition désunie, enfin la crainte d'une mainmise islamiste... Tout cela permet au président syrien de gagner du temps.

Karim Emile Bitar / Bitter Lemons

La révolution syrienne est entrée dans une nouvelle phase, plus inquiétante. Le régime du président Assad est considérablement affaibli et isolé. La mission de la Ligue arabe en Syrie a tourné au fiasco. L'économie est en ruine. Les manifestations organisées par l'opposition continuent de plus belle. Mais les principaux piliers du régime résistent toujours. L'armée et les forces de sécurité lui demeurent fidèles, surtout pour des raisons communautaires [la communauté alaouite d'Assad est fortement présente dans les forces armées]. Assad peut toujours compter sur le soutien d'une grande partie de la population, en particulier parmi les minorités religieuses [alaouites, druzes et chrétiens] dont les peurs et les états d'âme existentiels restent intacts.

## Spectre d'une guerre fratricide

Parce que ces piliers du régime n'ont pas encore cédé (et pour de multiples autres raisons), les perspectives d'Assad apparaissent meilleures qu'elles ne l'étaient il y a deux mois. Le bon score des salafistes aux élections égyptiennes justifie apparemment la thèse fallacieuse des partisans d'Assad, selon laquelle la seule alternative à l'autoritarisme est l'intégrisme et la bigoterie. Damas se frotte aussi les mains de voir Paris et Ankara se déchirer après l'adoption par la France de la loi interdisant la négation du génocide arménien. Le désengagement des Etats-Unis en Irak et le spectre d'une guerre fratricide entre sunnites et chiites dans ce pays apportent de l'eau au moulin de la propagande officielle syrienne. Par ailleurs, après les manifestations anti-Poutine à Moscou, la Russie craint d'autant plus la contagion révolutionnaire et ressent la nécessité de continuer à soutenir Assad. Le glissement

de la Libye vers la guerre civile et l'incapacité des autorités de l'après-Kadhafi à procéder à un désarmement soulignent les risques inhérents aux interventions étrangères et à la militarisation d'une révolution. Face aux menaces occidentales et au durcissement des sanctions, l'Iran est encore moins tenté de prendre ses distances avec son seul allié arabe. Enfin, l'opposition syrienne ne parvient toujours pas à surmonter ses divisions et à présenter un plan d'action rassurant et cohérent.

Tous ces facteurs confortent Assad dans l'illusion qu'il lui suffit de laisser passer la tempête en s'accrochant au pouvoir. Même s'il est moins doué que son père, il a retenu ses leçons et s'efforce encore une fois de gagner du temps. Il sait que 2012 est une année électorale pour la France, les Etats-Unis et la Russie, et qu'une intervention militaire occidentale n'est pas envisageable. Il sait également que l'Irak, sous influence grandissante de l'Iran, évincera prochainement le Qatar à la tête de la Ligue arabe. Assad reste persuadé que son régime peut résister, au moins en l'absence d'un grand marchandage américano-russe ou américano-iranien qui amènerait ses deux protecteurs à lui retirer leur soutien.

Mais la vieille tactique baasiste consistant à essayer de gagner du temps marchera-t-elle encore ? Plusieurs raisons permettent d'en douter. Dans l'esprit de pans entiers de la population syrienne, le régime est d'ores et déjà tombé et il a perdu toute légitimité. Comme l'a dit le président Barack Obama dans son discours sur l'état de l'Union, Assad ne tardera pas à s'apercevoir qu'il est impossible d'arrêter les forces du changement. De nombreuses institutions sont sur le point de s'effondrer. Des alliés de jadis [au Liban et parmi les Palestiniens]

quittent le bateau. Plusieurs chefs d'Etat arabes, notamment d'anciens alliés d'Assad, ont définitivement perdu patience et sont décidés à le chasser du pouvoir.

Mais le plus important est que la situation économique est probablement devenue intenable. Les sanctions de l'Union européenne, empêchant la Syrie de vendre son pétrole, coûtent au pays 450 millions de dollars par mois. Les recettes fiscales ont diminué de moitié. Le déficit budgétaire atteint presque 20 % du produit intérieur brut.

## L'opposition est désorganisée

On en est arrivé au point où le régime est tellement affaibli qu'il n'est plus en mesure de réprimer les manifestations, alors que l'opposition est désorganisée et incapable de le renverser. Devant ce bras de fer, d'aucuns en appellent à la militarisation de la révolution et à une intervention étrangère.

Ceux qui souhaitent la chute d'Assad sont désormais placés devant le vieux dilemme philosophique opposant Machiavel et Kant : la fin justifie-t-elle les moyens ou, au contraire, le bon acte détermine-t-il la bonne fin ? Une étude approfondie, publiée par Columbia University Press et analysant des dizaines de cas passés, vient étayer la seconde thèse. A l'en croire, si un dictateur est renversé par des moyens pacifiques, il y a 51 % de chances pour qu'une transition démocratique ait lieu au bout de cinq ans. En cas de lutte armée, les chances sont réduites à 3 % seulement. On comprend que l'opposition syrienne soit impatiente d'abattre le régime et de respirer librement. Néanmoins, elle devrait méditer sur ces chiffres.○

# Turkey, an imperfect example for the region



In this Jan. 3, 2012 file photo, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, right, and the Gaza Strip's Hamas premier Ismail Haniyeh salute lawmakers and supporters of Erdogan's Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party at the Parliament in Ankara, Turkey. Ties between Turkey, NATO's biggest Muslim member, and Hamas, the Islamic militant group that says Israel should not exist, are blossoming. Last month, the Hamas premier visited the Turkish prime minister at his Istanbul home. Today, Turkish and Palestinian flags fly side by side at a building site in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. (AP Photo/File)

By **CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA**  
The Associated Press

**I**STANBUL — For adversaries in a long-distance spat, they made an odd couple. Turkey's leader, a brash visionary who propelled his country to regional prominence, tangled with an American author who dwells on the existential in his work.

The skirmish began when Paul Auster told a Turkish newspaper that he would not visit Turkey because it has jailed dozens of journalists, drawing a caustic retort from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Who cares?" was the essence.

In the swagger stakes, Erdogan won hands-down. But his reply points to the conundrum of a rising power that urges a region in upheaval to reform, but struggles to reform itself. Just as Auster's characters search for their identities, so Turkey wrestles with its own.

To exhaust the metaphor, Turkey has multiple personalities. This diversity has, for the most part, served it well. As a NATO ally, it has leverage in the West.

As a nation with a mostly Muslim population, it seems like a beacon of prosperity and democratic politics to Muslims in countries that are emerging from authoritarian rule, or still, as in Syria, in its bloody grip.

Turkey shone in a new poll of perceptions in 16 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Some 78 percent of respondents gave it a favorable rating. The United Arab Emirates was second with 70 percent. Saudi Arabia and China were at 64 percent, and Egypt was rated favorably by 62 percent. The United States and Israel were last, with 33 percent and 10 percent respectively.

Respondents said Turkey was a regional model because of its democratic system, economic development and Muslim identity. The survey of 2,323 people was conducted late last year by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, an Istanbul-based research center that describes itself as independent. The regional results had a margin of error of 2 percent.

One admirer is the Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who said during a visit to Istanbul last week that Turkey's role as a voice for Muslims

was critical to regional change.

By some indicators, however, Turkey has a long way to go before it is reliably democratic, and its flaws strip sparkle from its lead-by-example approach. Paris-based Reporters Without Borders places it at 148 out of 179 countries on its press freedom index. That puts it just ahead of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but well behind Morocco (138), Jordan (128) and Lebanon (93).

Auster, whose works have been translated and published in Turkey, also said he wouldn't go to China because of free-speech concerns. The fact that a writer who is barely known in Turkey riled up a leader with outsized ambitions for his country of 75 million people shows how sensitive Turkey is to criticism, especially when it comes from a Western source.

Auster's argument rankles Turkish officials, who note most jailed reporters in Turkey are accused of involvement in alleged conspiracies to topple the government, or suspected of links to Kurdish rebels. It's more complicated than critics think, they say.

But the arrests have tainted the reputation of a country that, on balance, has taken significant steps toward full democracy over the past decade. Erdogan pushed the military out of politics, and some analysts wonder whether the Turkish playbook might apply in Egypt, where the military still rules a year after the uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak.

Additionally, last week, the European Court of Human Rights identified Turkey as a leading violator among the 47 signatory states of the continent's rights convention. Its report said Turkey had the second highest number of complaints lodged against it, with 11 percent of all 119,300 court applications pending as of Jan. 1, 2010. Russia was first with 28.1 percent.

Many of those cases relate to the right to a fair trial and slow judicial proceedings that keep defendants, including journalists, in jail for years without case resolution. President Abdullah Gul recently compared Turkey's challenges to more dire ones in the region, where ousted authoritarian regimes, in Libya for example, left an institutional vacuum that weak governments struggle to fill.



"Just think of the problems that Turkey, as the most democratic, most secular and most developed country in the Islamic world, is going through," Gul said.

Columnist Mustafa Akyol described the quality of democracy in Turkey, a candidate for European Union membership with a secular political system, as very low compared to that of Britain or Sweden, but said the Turkish experience was regionally relevant.

"Whether we like it or not, the common Muslim mind is very resistant to cultural imports from other civilizations, and especially the West," Akyol wrote in the Hurriyet Daily News.

He added that Turkey's "successful capitalist growth is spearheaded by the 'Islamic bourgeoisie,' or business-

men who keep noting that the Prophet Muhammad was a merchant. And its evolving democracy is spearheaded by unapologetically Muslim politicians."

Since Ottoman times, Turks have had a conflicted view of the West, coveting its modernity and resenting its influence. But the idea that Turkey's pragmatic leaders would forsake the anchor of those traditional alliances is remote. Turkey conducts nearly half its foreign trade with Europe, and Erdogan has had regular telephone conversations with President Barack Obama over regional problems.

"You can argue that the 'Arab Spring' has forced Turkey to reinforce its ties to the West because those are the only stable ones. It's a question of stability versus instability," said Henri Barkey, a Turkey analyst at Lehigh University in

the United States. "One thing you can say about the West: It is what it is. It's not going to change."

Change and conflict in the Middle East, however, are making it hard for Turkey to stay above the fray as a model and mediator. Its leaders, who are mostly Sunni Muslim but say they favor no particular sect, have sparred with Iraq's Shiite-led government. Before a visit to Iran last month, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu warned of the threat of a "Cold War" of sectarian tension in the region.

The idealistic days of "zero problems with neighbors," the brand name of Davutoglu's early foreign policy, are over. ♦



FEBRUARY / 1 / 2012

## Turkish Prime Minister defends talks with Kurdish 'representatives'

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said yesterday he stood behind the idea of negotiations with "political representatives" of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), but vowed that military measures against the group would not be let up.

"I've said that we will fight the terrorist organization and negotiate with its political representatives. I stand by these words. But they should carefully keep to this framework," Erdoğan told the parliamentary group of his Justice and Development Party (AKP).

He made the remarks in response to the Peace and Democracy Party's (BDP) calls for dialogue to resolve the Kurdish problem and its accusations the party was being "criminalized" as part of massive police operations.

Yet, Erdoğan renewed charges the BDP was acting under PKK control and defended the judicial crackdown on the party. "The judiciary will do what it must do if anyone acts outside the law and gets involved with a terrorist organization," he said.



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan.  
AFP photo

The premier also categorically rejected BDP claims that he personally gave the go-ahead for the botched air raid at Uludere on Dec. 28, 2011, in which 34 civilians perished, calling them an example of "ignorance, enmity and slyness." He explained the military was not required to seek specific authorization for each action. "We give the security forces authority within a general framework and they use it within this framework. If necessary, they consult with us on some issues," he said. "We'll not allow anybody to demoralize the security forces. We will learn a lesson from what happened and fight terror with greater deter-

mination," he added.

In a speech to her own parliamentary group, BDP Co-Chair Gültan Kışanak told Erdoğan "the real ignorance is the idea that they can resolve the [Kurdish] problem through oppression."

### 'Democratic autonomy'

She stressed the BDP had already revealed its proposal for a solution in the form of "democratic autonomy" and described the demand as "indispensable." Kışanak urged the resumption of talks with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan as the only way to resolve the conflict.

In a separate attack on the government, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli argued the BDP and AKP were eroding Turkey's unity. The speech that Agriculture Minister Mehdi Eker made in Kurdish at a ceremony in Diyarbakır last week "cannot be tolerated," according to Bahçeli.

Bahçeli also urged the government to promptly shed light on the human remains exhumed in Diyarbakır, saying that unexplained digs were damaging the anti-terror struggle. ●

## Kurdish intellectuals give full support to PKK executions probe

ISMAİL AVCI, DIYARBAKIR

Kurdish writers and intellectuals have expressed their support for a recent investigation into the execution without trial of members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) who had expressed dissent.

The special prosecutor's office in Diyarbakir, which is also conducting a probe into extrajudicial killings committed in the region by state-sponsored, armed groups inside the gendarmerie -- collectively known as JITEM -- in the '90s, is talking to families of former PKK militants who were killed by the terrorist group after trying to leave or voicing dissent.

Ibrahim Güçlü, the founder of the Kurdish civil society organization Ala Rizgari, said the extension of the investigation to include the PKK's own executions was a very positive step. "This is an important development, as it will also reveal the shady links the PKK has with the Turkish state," he said.

"Kurdish politicians, intellectuals, civil society groups, public opinion leaders and even the Peace and Democracy Party [BDP] had previously complained the atrocities committed by Ergenekon and similar groups east of the Euphrates were not being investigated. In fact, the BDP, while appearing to accuse the prosecutors of this, did not really want this to happen. This is because they knew very well that the PKK and Hizbullah also carried out many executions in addition to Ergenekon, JITEM and similar groups. I do have my reservations about the conclusions the Diyarbakir prosecutor's office will reach, but I will definitely testify and share my own opinions with the prosecutors. I think they need to hear testimonies from the administrators of the Kurdish organizations that were targeted by the PKK before 1980 and those people who left the PKK."



Ibrahim Güçlü, Şerafettin Elçi, Bayram Bozyel, Şükrü Gülmüş (From left to right) Kurdish politicians say that a probe recently launched into the PKK's execution of its own dissenting militants over or those who attempted to flee is an important step in shedding light on the atrocities the southeast has seen. (Photo: Today's Zaman)

The investigation into executions by the PKK should have started years ago, according to Halim İpek, a spokesperson for the Kurdish Revolutionary Democrats Movement. "This is a hugely important step, although it comes a bit late. It really doesn't matter whether an execution was carried out in the name of the state or the PKK."

İpek said, "I think the judicial investigations will lead us to the light. We can't continue with all these mistakes. It doesn't matter if these were done in the name of the state or of the PKK. You can't build anything new on filth. This investigation is a confrontation."

Şerafettin Elçi, an independent deputy from Diyarbakir, said, "If there is strong evidence, these murders should be investigated regardless of who might have committed them."

Bayram Bozyel, the leader of the Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR), a Kurdish party, said all executions in the region that took place without trial should be investigated objectively and those responsible should answer before the law. "Of course this is a very positive step. But a democratic and peaceful foundation needs to be prepared before conducting a comprehensive investigation into the PKK's own killings." A former

PKK superior, Şükrü Gülmüş, who is currently the editor of the website Sercavan, said: "I don't see JITEM as an agency. The state itself has engaged in this war alongside the PKK and Hizbullah. To whoever is examining the unsolved assassinations committed by these three forces, all I can say is that I will try to offer my testimony as a witness to the prosecutor's office, if I am able to return to my country. I think the executions -- by the state, the PKK or Hizbullah -- should be taken as a whole and everyone should speak out about the murders within their own group."

Tigris/Euphrates Dialogue Group head Mu-hittin Batmanlı said: "The PKK has killed thousands of people and the facts need to be brought to light. Then you have those killed by Hizbullah, or by the village guards and JITEM. The ones that committed these crimes are saying 'they should be investigated,' as if they weren't the ones who executed these people. Only those who don't have blood on their hands can say this."□

# Syrian Kurds gain power through unity

## KRG to use international relations to help Syrian Kurds

### The Kurdish Globe

Syrian Kurdish politicians seek to unify their ranks and form centers of power to push their claims for international consideration by raising the profile of Syrian opposition groups. The Kurds in Syria strive for national recognition, economic equality and self-rule.

A number of Syrian Kurdish leaders held a conference in Erbil on 28-29 January to bring together leaders in exile with a delegation of the Kurdish National Council in Syria. The KNCS was founded on 26 October 2011 after the Kurds lost hope in their claims to be taken into consideration by other Syrian opposition groups.

Demonstrations demanding the end of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's regime started on 26 March 2011 and still continue.

"Syria is now passing through a crucial time. Signs show an essential change is near. So we need to unify the Kurdish household inside and outside the country," stated KNCS Chairman Abdulhakeem Bashar speaking to The Kurdish Globe in an interview on the sidelines of the conference.

The leaders studied possible stages after the fall of Assad and sought ways to contain security gaps and to protect public establishments, particularly in the Kurdish-dominated areas, said Kawa Azizi, a member of the conference and a leader in the Kurdistan Azadi (Freedom) party. He also explained they have taken into consideration how to offer health services and how to govern locally if the government falls.

The meeting also gave the Council an opportunity to listen to opinions

of the leaders living outside the country, according to Azizi. The leaders in exile will work within four organized committees, each based in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Arab Gulf countries, Europe and the Americas.

### Unity

Azizi and some other conference attendees complained that other Syrian opposition groups do not take Kurds, demands in consideration. Therefore, the Kurdish politicians decided to form the KNCS to negotiate their claims instead of working individually within different groups.

"Without unity what can we do? We face pressures... in the north is Turkey and in the south the central government as well as other external interferences. But when we are tight together, no one can penetrate our ranks," said Aziz, urging the Democratic Union Party also to join their ranks. This party, locally known as the PYD, is believed to be near Turkey's banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). According to him, the KNCS is still trying to involve the PYD in the Kurdish coalition that gathers 11 political parties as well as more than 200 independent political figures.

With the start of the demonstrations, Kurdish political actors joined different Syrian opposition groups, such as the Syrian National Council, the Damascus Declaration Alliance, the Syrian National Coordination Board and others. When the Council was founded, it decided to freeze activities of its members in Syrian opposition groups, protesting their stance for not recognizing the Kurds, rights.

Kurdish leaders, attempts in these groups have not yet "led to any understanding or any agreement



A view of Syrian Kurdish Leaders

that satisfies the Kurds, rights and ambitions," said Bashar who also heads the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in Syria, known locally as Parti.

### Kurdish demands

Syrian oppositions preparing to succeed Al-Assad have not yet shown readiness to give in to Kurdish demands. Three of the top demands, as declared by the KNCS, are constitutional recognition to the Kurdish rights; abolishing discrimination policies against the Kurds, such as Arabization operations; and a democratic solution for the Kurds to allow some form of self-determination.

The KNCS chairman stated that the Syrian opposition groups have been acting condescendingly toward the Kurdish demands and he warned that adopting this stance does not serve the revolution and it will prolong the regime's stay in power.

"I hope the Syrian opposition acts logically so all Syrians are partners in this country. They are not the owner of Syria, as the Baath claimed to be, we must protect the Syrian border together but everyone enjoys equal rights," he added.

However, negotiations continue between the Kurds and other Arab opposition groups at the current time. A KNCS delegation headed by Hameed Darwish met on 23 January with the Syrian National Council Chairman Burhan Ghaliun in Cairo. "We offered our sugges-

tions once again but their answer was negative," said Bashar. Syrian opposition groups have stated earlier that they will lift pressure on the Kurdish people but will not meet any of the demands raised by the Kurdish parties.

The Syrian National Council, founded on 23 August 2001 in Istanbul, aspires as the Syrian government in exile. Of all Syrian opposition groups, it is the most supported by the international community.

"Syrian opposition groups look for centers of power," Bashar said, placing part of the blame on a lack of unity. He hopes the unity his Council achieved by gathering leaders inside and outside Syria will add to their power. Another important point was holding this conference in Erbil, said Bashar adding, "It basically showed the support of KRG leaders to the rights of the Kurdish people. This is a lot of power for us."

### KRG support

Head of the Kurdistan Region presidency office, Fuad Hussein, asserted KRG's support for Syrian Kurds. "We encourage them to unite their ranks, KRG will also employ its international relations for the benefit of their demands," said Hussein.

"It is a national, political and humanitarian duty for us to support them, or any Kurd," said Hussein, pointing out Erbil's hospitality for the conference as a part of their

support. "Our policies are against no one. We just support the rights of our people and this does not have any effect to our relations," said Hussein, denying their support hurts anyone's interests.

At the opening of the conference, Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani expressed the Region's support for any decisions the conference made. He conditioned his support on the unity of Syrian Kurds.

"You must keep aside narrow party interests until situations become clear in Syria," said President Barzani, warning the Syrian Kurds that sticking to party interests and internal disputes could lead them to losing the opportunity, "and also, then, we will not be able to help you."

Barzani also noted the Syrian Kurdish unity was somewhat fractured by the PYD's refusal to attend. It was the only Kurdish party to boycott the conference.

In a statement on Feb. 1, Kurdistan

Region presidency denied the PYD accusations. "All political parties were invited to the conference, including the PYD. The conference was discussed with them before they reneged on participating in it," reads the presidential statement, adding that only the PYD knows the reason for its boycott.

"It is not logical for that great number of political parties to take part in an event to cause a fracture of the Syrian Kurdish unity," reads the statement addressing a question to the PYD. "How could they ignore such an intention?"

#### Arabization and poverty

In early 1965, the Syrian Baath authority began building the so-called Arab Belt -- a 300 km long, 10-to-15 km wide area of land -- to settle Arab families in Kurdish regions. The belt starts at the Iraqi border in the east and continues parallel to the Turkish border. In following years, more Arabs, mostly from Al-Riqqa and Halab provinces, were settled in the

Kurdish-dominated province of Al-Hasaka. Many Kurds were displaced to the southern deserts and many were deprived of agricultural lands.

Kurds in Syria mainly live in the northeastern Al-Hasaka province and in parts of northern Halab, particularly in Ifrin and Kobani. Many of them also live in large cities, like Damascus and Halab.

According to Kurdish sources, Kurds made up around 70% of Al-Hasaka Province before the demographic changes; the rest were 15% Christians whose population declined because of emigration and nearly 15% Arabs. Although no accurate census tells the current Kurdish population, Arabs now make up the majority in the province because of the Arab belt and employing Arabs in the Kurdish towns, complains the KNCS chairman.

In 1962, Syria held an extraordinary census in Al-Hasaka Province and later stripped 120,000 Kurds of citizenship, whom the govern-

ment claimed had entered Syria from neighboring countries, mainly Turkey, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Kurds without citizenship reportedly now number 300,000. They do not have the right to travel, higher education, property ownership or employment. Kurdish sources say Syria has around 3 million Kurds.

A more important issue for Kurdish political activists is that the Kurds suffer economically, although their agricultural production is high. Jazira (Al-Hasaka) alone produces 55% of the country's grain. Syria also produces 300,000 barrels of oil and 2.3 million cubic meters of gas daily.

"The Kurdish people live in terrible poverty. Poverty was 55% four years ago, now it is almost 80%," said Bashar. ●

## Syrian Kurds aim to establish 'federal state'

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News İpek Yezdani

More than 10 Syrian opposition Kurdish parties have called for the establishment of a "Kurdish federal state" in Syria during a meeting in the northern Iraqi capital of Arbil, the Hürriyet Daily News has learned.

Over 200 Syrian Kurdish leaders attended the conference in Arbil on Jan. 28 and 29, which brought together leaders in exile with a delegation from the Kurdish National Council in Syria.

"All the participants signed a common text saying that a Kurdish federal government should be founded within Syria. It was also stressed during the meeting that the Syrian Kurds should be participating in the Syrian revolution as 'Kurds,' not as 'Syrians,'" Kendal Afrini, a Syrian Kurdish opposition member who attended the conference in Arbil and a representative of the Alliance of Syrian Liberals in Europe, told the Daily News.

Over 200 Syrian Kurdish leaders attended the conference in Arbil Jan 28.



The Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Kurdish Party known to be the Syrian extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was the only Kurdish party to boycott the conference.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leader Masoud Barzani, KRG Prime Minister Behram Salih and KRG Parliamentary Speaker Dr. Kemal Kerkuki also attended the conference in order to give support to the Syrian Kurdish parties.

Efrini said Barzani, who made the opening speech at the conference, also

expressed his support for the Syrian Kurds.

"Barzani conditioned his support on the unity of Syrian Kurds. 'You must keep aside narrow party interests until situations become clear in Syria,' Barzani said. And he warned the Syrian Kurds that sticking to party interests and internal disputes could result in them losing the opportunity. Barzani also noted that Syrian Kurdish unity was somewhat fractured by the PYD's refusal to attend," Efrini said. ●

# Both sides in Syria harden their stance

BEIRUT

## Government forces press their crackdown after diplomatic effort fails

BY ANTHONY SHADID  
AND NEIL MACFARQUHAR

The collapse of diplomatic efforts to mediate Syria's uprising reverberated across the country on Sunday, emboldening a government that pressed on with a crackdown in the capital's suburbs and the north and prompting rebel leaders to vow that only force of arms would drive President Bashar al-Assad from power.

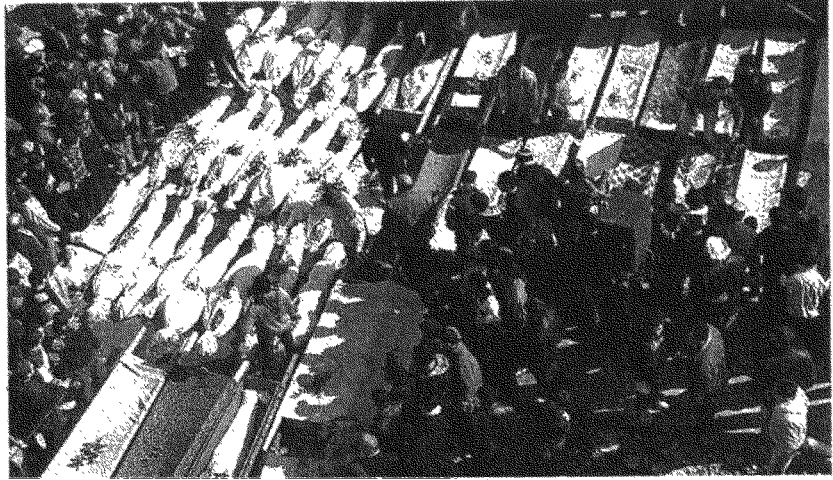
Words of optimism were rare on Sunday in a conflict that may or may not yet be a civil war, but that already bears the hallmarks of a prolonged struggle pitting a leadership that has remained relatively cohesive against an opposition that has managed to control territory in some places while crumbling before the government's onslaught in others.

The government's citadels of support — the capital, Damascus, and the second-largest city, Aleppo — have begun to feel the brunt of a contest that gathered force nearly 11 months ago in the countryside. In parts of the capital's suburbs, military forces have acted like an occupation army, with residents reporting instances of pillaging. A cancerous sectarianism that wrecked Syria's neighbors to the east and west — Iraq and Lebanon — has become so pronounced that some defectors have vowed to attack religious sites.

"It is the first step toward civil war, even if I don't call it a civil war yet," said Louay Hussein, a prominent dissident in Damascus.

The events over the weekend seemed sure to serve as hallmarks of an uprising that now stands as the Arab world's bloodiest revolt. A U.N. Security Council effort to pressure Mr. Assad's government collapsed with vetoes by Russia and China. The move came just hours after the Syrian military shelled the city of Homs in what opposition leaders called the deadliest assault since the uprising began in March.

Diplomats have lamented their lack of options in pressuring the Syrian government, and even some Syrian dissidents worry about what the growing



LOCAL COORDINATION COMMITTEES IN SYRIA, VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this image provided by the opposition, mourners in Homs gathered at the coffins of those killed by troops over the weekend. The toll in the conflict is estimated at 5,000.

confrontation will mean for a country reeling from bloodshed and hardship.

The veto is almost sure to embolden Mr. Assad's government, which brazenly carried out the assault on Homs on the eve of the Security Council vote. It came, too, around the anniversary of its crackdown in 1982 on another Syrian city, Hama, by Mr. Assad's father, Hafez, in which at least 10,000 people were killed in one of the bloodiest episodes in modern Arab history.

"It's quite clear — this is a license to do more of the same and worse," said Peter Harling, an expert on Syria at the International Crisis Group. "The regime will take it for granted that it can escalate further. We're entering a new phase that will be far more violent still than what we've seen now."

The Security Council voted 13 to 2 in favor of the resolution backing an Arab League peace plan for Syria, but passage was blocked by Russia and China, which opposed what they saw as a potential violation of Syria's sovereignty. The support of those countries has proved crucial in bolstering the Syrian government's confidence, despite an isolation more pronounced than at any time since the Assad family seized power more than four decades ago.

Russia and China said they had vetoed the measure because it unfairly blamed only the Syrian government for the violence. Russia's ambassador, Vitaly I. Churkin, called it an "unbalanced message," while the Chinese envoy, Li Baodong, said the resolution, in trying to predetermine the outcome of dialogue between the government and the opposition, "might further complicate the situation."

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Sunday that the wording backed by Western and other Arab governments did not go far enough in criticizing the increasing use of violence by the Syrian opposition, instead focusing solely on the actions of the government.

After the U.N. vote, predictions were grim about what is ahead in a conflict that the United Nations says has

claimed more than 5,000 lives. To many, two inexorable forces were at work: a government bent on crushing the uprising by force and an opposition that, if not increasing in numbers, appeared to be growing even more determined.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton fumed at a news conference in Munich on Saturday: "What more do we need to know to act decisively in the Security Council? To block this resolution is to bear responsibility for the horrors that are occurring on the ground in Syria."

Responding to the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, who asked, "What's the endgame?" Mrs. Clinton replied, "The endgame in the absence of us acting together as the international community, I fear, is civil war."

On Sunday in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, she called the double veto "a travesty," and warned that chances for "a brutal civil war" would increase as Syrians under attack from their government moved to defend themselves, unless international steps provided another way, The Associated Press reported.

But Mr. Lavrov said Saturday that Moscow still had two objections: that the resolution did not place sufficient blame for the violence on the opposition, and that it unrealistically demanded that the government withdraw its military forces to their barracks.

He told the security conference in Munich that adopting the resolution would risk "taking sides in a civil war." In a television interview quoted by the Itar-Tass news agency, he said that ignoring Russia's objections would result in "another scandal."

Security Council members, citing the killings in Homs, pointedly disagreed.

"The scandal is not to act," said Peter Wittig, the German ambassador to the United Nations. "The scandal would be failure to act."

The U.N. secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, who rarely weighs in on Security Council decisions, called the vote "a great disappointment."

The attack in Homs, where Syrian opposition leaders said more than 200 people had been killed, drew outrage from around the world and intensified pressure on the Security Council to act.

President Barack Obama condemned what he called "the Syrian government's unspeakable assault against the people of Homs," saying in a statement that Mr. Assad "has no right to lead Syria and has lost all legitimacy with his people and the international community."

The French foreign minister, Alain

Juppé, said, "The massacre in Homs is a crime against humanity, and those responsible will have to answer for it."

As in Iraq, after the U.S.-led invasion, a debate has ensued over whether to call the Syrian conflict a civil war. The argument sometimes masks the real forces at work — a regime bent on exploiting society's divisions, an opposition incapable of providing an alternative and deepening strife that has drawn in not only the government and defectors, but also gangs and free-lancers.

Whether or not a civil war is fought, many fear those forces will pull apart a society that could take years, even a generation, to reconcile.

Neil MacFarquhar reported from the United Nations. Nada Bakri and Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Beirut, David D. Kirkpatrick from Cairo, Steven Erlanger from Munich, and Andrew E. Kramer and Michael Schwartz from Moscow.

## Le Monde

Dimanche 5 - Lundi 6 février 2012

# Les responsables israéliens évoquent de plus en plus ouvertement des frappes militaires contre l'Iran

Les prises de position bellicistes israéliennes inquiètent l'administration américaine

Jérusalem  
Correspondant

Difficile de déterminer ce qui, dans les propos de plus en plus bellicistes des dirigeants israéliens, relève de la volonté d'inciter les Européens et les Américains à durcir les sanctions contre l'Iran.

Il est cependant indéniable que la réflexion politique et stratégique, susceptible de déboucher sur la décision de lancer des frappes préventives contre le programme nucléaire iranien, progresse en Israël.

Une chose est sûre : jamais les dirigeants politiques et militaires israéliens ne sont allés aussi loin pour envisager ouvertement un scénario militaire. Cette montée de la tension — au moins médiatique — a été perceptible lors de la conférence internationale sur la sécurité qui s'est tenue à Herzliya, au nord de Tel-Aviv, du lundi 30 janvier au jeudi 2 février, qui a été dominée par la question iranienne.

Israël accentue ses efforts pour convaincre la communauté internationale de sa détermination à utiliser la force pour se débarrasser d'une menace qu'il considère comme existentielle, mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'une telle décision — qui doit faire l'objet d'un consensus aussi large que possible entre les responsables militaires et les membres du cabinet de sécurité du premier ministre, Benyamin Nétanyahou — soit prise.

Dans l'immédiat, cette escalade de la rhétorique a vocation à provoquer celle des sanctions contre Téhéran, pour viser notamment la Banque centrale iranienne. « Si les sanctions échouaient à stopper le programme nucléaire de l'Iran, il faudra envisager une action », sous-entendue militaire, a insisté le ministre israélien de la défense, Ehoud Barak.

Ce message a été relayé par le chef d'état-major des armées, le général Benny Gantz, le chef du renseignement militaire, le général Aviv Kochavi, et le vice-premier ministre et ministre des affaires stratégiques, Mosché Ya'alon.

« D'une manière ou d'une autre, le projet nucléaire iranien doit être stoppé, a insisté ce dernier, parce qu'un régime messianique et apocalyptique ne doit pas posséder des capacités de destruction massive. »

Un Iran doté d'armes nucléaires, a ajouté cet ancien chef d'état-major de l'armée israélienne, « serait un cauchemar pour le monde libre, pour les pays arabes, et bien sûr une menace pour Israël. Il y aurait un chaos nucléaire au Proche-Orient, parce que d'autres pays ne resteraient pas sans rien faire », a-t-il ajouté.

D'ordinaire avare de déclarations, le général Kochavi a expliqué que l'Iran n'a besoin que d'une décision politique, celle du Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, pour passer au stade de la production d'une bombe nucléaire.

Si tel est le cas, a-t-il précisé,

« nous pensons qu'il faudra une année pour y parvenir », et sans doute deux ans de plus pour disposer d'une tête nucléaire opérationnelle.

L'Iran, a-t-il poursuivi, s'est doté de plus de 4 tonnes d'uranium enrichi à 3,5% « et près de 100 kg enrichis à 20% ». En poursuivant l'enrichissement jusqu'à 90% (ce qui ne devrait pas poser pas de problème technique insurmontable), Téhéran pourrait être en mesure de fabriquer « quatre bombes atomiques », a déclaré le patron du renseignement militaire.

## Les Etats-Unis privilégient les sanctions car ils ne veulent pas être entraînés dans une aventure militaire

Il n'y a aucun doute que l'Iran « s'efforce d'obtenir la bombe », a renchéri le général Gantz, évoquant un délai « d'un an ou un peu plus ». Le chef d'état-major de l'armée israélienne a cependant plaidé en faveur de la poursuite des sanctions contre l'Iran, tout en soulignant qu'Israël doit renforcer ses capacités militaires, une manière de s'opposer aux coupes envisagées dans le budget de la défense.

Tout porte à croire que les efforts déployés par Israël pour

dramatiser l'enjeu de la bombe iranienne portent leurs fruits. Le secrétaire américain à la défense, Leon Panetta, qui a rencontré plusieurs fois Ehoud Barak ces derniers mois, « pense qu'il existe une forte probabilité qu'Israël frappe l'Iran en avril, mai ou juin », écrit le *Washington Post*. Les propos prêtés à M. Panetta ont fait monter d'un cran l'effervescence médiatique sur la question iranienne.

Pour faire retomber celle-ci, le secrétaire américain à la défense a souligné, vendredi, que la chose la plus importante est de préserver l'unité de la communauté internationale, et de maintenir la pression sur l'Iran, par le biais de sanctions.

Parce qu'ils privilégient celles-ci et ne veulent pas être entraînés dans une aventure militaire, les Américains ont tendance à grossir le risque d'une action militaire préventive d'Israël.

Or plusieurs experts présents à Herzliya ont estimé que les sanctions commencent à agir, et qu'Israël se complait dans un discours très va-t-en-guerre. « Israël a exagéré le danger. Il a contribué à créer un brouillard s'agissant de la menace iranienne », a souligné Shahram Chubin, expert de la Fondation Carnegie. Toutes les exégèses à propos de la bombe iranienne, a-t-il estimé, ont « banalisé l'option militaire » et, de facto, affaibli la dissuasion d'Israël et celle des Etats-Unis. ■

LAURENT ZECCHINI

# Assad's Downfall and the Regional Balance of Power



**Dr. Josef Olmert**  
*Adjunct Professor, University of South Carolina*

**T**he remaining advocates of Bashar Assad are working overtime to portray a vision of a completely chaotic Middle East if and when the Alawite regime finally collapses. To predict chaos in the Middle East is a safe bet, so what's really new in this case? The threat of chaos is almost automatically linked to another round of Arab-Israeli war, this time a Shi'ite-led Iranian-Hezbollah-Alawite desperate attack on Israel. Well, while the Israelis may naturally take the proper precautionary steps to deal with the day after Assad, they are far from showing any sign of undue worry or panic.

There is concern about the arsenal of chemical warheads that is in Syrian hands, some of it was transferred to Syria from Iraq on the eve of the American invasion of March 2003. The fear is that these warheads may find their way to Hezbollah and Iran. Surely not a pleasant prospect, but not one that cannot be dealt with. Even Hezbollah and the Iranians know that any attempt to use these weapons against Israel will be calamitous to them. The thought that either of the two will risk their very existence [in the case of Hezbollah], or most vital national interests [in the case of Iran], in support of the Alawite dictatorship is good for psychological warfare, but not in the real world. The same applies to the possibility of Iranian closure of the straits of Hormuz in support of Assad. Really? Not really...

They will not do that. All this is relevant to the Syrian situation and its implications, not to the much talked-about scenario of an Israeli or American attack against the Iranian nuclear program. This is clearly a totally different opera. The connection between a final collapse of the Assad regime and the Israeli and/or American calculus regarding Iran is possible but not inevitable. Sure, a Syrian participation in an Iranian retaliation against a strike is not something cherished by Israeli and American planners and policy makers, but this is becoming a remote possibility since the Syrian Army is in a stage of disintegration. General Mustafa Al-Sheikh, the highest ranking Syrian defector, predicted some days ago that the Syrian Army will disintegrate until the end of February. This may be wishful thinking in terms of the timing, but not the process, which is very obvious, leading in the not distant future to that exact outcome. So, if we move away from the Israeli angle of the situation, what else can happen affecting neighboring countries and overall regional stability? First, we can expect a massive refugee problem, Alawites trying to cross to Lebanon and Turkey. Also, possible mass flight out of Ba'athi functionaries, not just Alawites. Chaos in Syria will

inevitably take its toll of neighboring Lebanon.

Tripoli, a Sunni city with a sizable Alawite minority, is likely to explode, and that will be part of a bigger issue in Lebanon, as the traditional anti-Assad forces there, mainly the Sunnis and some Christian Maronite factions, will find the new circumstances conducive to put pressure on Hezbollah, demanding it dismantle its arms. The not so old wounds created by the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri will reopen with ferocity. Whether all that will lead Lebanon towards chaos is not clear, though it's likely. Sheikh Nasrallah, however, will find himself and Hezbollah engaged in a conflict with the majority of the Lebanese people. So, under these circumstances, a war initiated by him against Israel may seem a good diversionary exercise, but still is highly unlikely. The Sheikh will fight for his own survival inside Lebanon as his first priority.

Another country that will feel the brunt of the Assad collapse will be Iraq, where the current Sunni-Shi'i tension may be greatly exacerbated, as the former will be much encouraged by the rise of a new regime in Syria, most likely Sunni-dominated. Not for nothing, the Maliki government in Iraq is the most pro-Assad Arab government. They know why.

Then there is Turkey. But for the expected Alawite flight across the northwestern border, the Turks should be greatly preoccupied by the fallout of a collapse in Damascus on the northeast border, where over 2 million Syrian Kurds live, just waiting to rid themselves of the Assad yoke. An unruly Kurdish population on the Syrian side of the border will not be good news to the Turkish government and military having to deal with their own unruly Kurdish population.

The Turks may gain, however, many political dividends from their support to the Sunni Syrian rebels. A Sunni-dominated regime in Damascus is likely to be friendly to Ankara, and so Turkey's overall regional standing may be significantly enhanced. Such a regime in Damascus will also be friendly to the Saudis, and a Turkish-Saudi rivalry over influence in Damascus of the future is highly likely. The big losers will be Iranians. They cannot expect a friendly Syrian government in the near future. The overall regional Sunni-Shi'i schism will be in display in the most dramatic way. But even that is not really new, as this schism has been a feature of Middle East Islamic reality since the killing of Imam Hussein in 680 A.D.

The downfall of Bashar Assad is behind the door. No Armageddon, but still a significant challenge to regional stability. □

# The Dilemma of National Identity in Turkey

Renewed tension between the government and ethnic Kurds reflects a country struggling to define itself.



By Sabrina M. Peterson  
Staff Editor

In late December 2011, the Turkish military's air strikes targeting militants from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish separatist group, accidentally killed 35 young cigarette smugglers. Immediately, tensions between Ankara and much of Turkey's Kurdish population escalated, with Kurdish citizens protesting in Turkish cities such as Istanbul and Diyarbakır.

Although the Turkish government has intermittently combated PKK militants over the last two decades, the December air strikes near the Turkey-Iraq border are part of the Turkish government's renewed campaign to suppress PKK activity in rural and urban areas. The reignited conflict has led to civilian deaths and discord between the government and Turkey's Kurds.

Turkey's Kurdish dilemma is rooted in the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, which made a distinctly "Turkish" ethnicity a cornerstone of the new state's culture. Although Kurds had coexisted with other groups in the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, after 1923 they found their Kurdish identity subsumed by the state's promotion of a single ethnicity in which everyone was a Turk. For much of the twentieth century, Turkey's Kurds have fought for official recognition of their ethnic identity, some degree of cultural autonomy, and the right to use the Kurdish language in media and education. The PKK, which came to represent the struggle of Turkey's Kurds, has fought for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey's southeastern region, and its violent insurgency tactics have led to numerous clashes with the Turkish government.

Much of the renewed violence of the PKK in the past few months is the result of a decline in the group's appeal among Turkey's Kurdish population. Since the announcement of Prime Minister Recep Erdogan's Kurdish Initiative in 2009, Turkey's Kurds have come to enjoy some cultural and linguistic rights that just years ago had been denied. Although the scale of Erdogan's vision for Kurdish-rights reform have been curtailed due to political opposition, the Kurdish Initiative, now called the

National Unity Project, has still played a role in taking some of the wind out of the PKK's sails.

Moreover, Turkey is currently in the process of redrafting its outdated 1982 constitution with the goal of broadening the conception of Turkish identity to include more ethnic diversity. This new constitution, which should be completed by the end of 2012, will likely deprive the PKK of its rallying point. While the redrafting may initially lead to more violence, as militants strive to reassert the PKK, over the long term it will be a significant step in showing Turkey's Kurds that they no longer need to rely on the PKK to effect change.

While Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party seem committed to rectifying Kurdish grievances, they have faced opposition that has hindered their efforts and reduced optimism. Backlash to Erdogan's Kurdish reforms has led to an increase in Kurdish sympathy for PKK militants, which, in turn, has emboldened them.

Underlying the opposition to reform is the fact that many political parties in Turkey regard cultural concessions to the Kurds as part of a slippery slope that will lead eventually to Kurdish demands for secession. The powerful military shares this view. This deep-rooted suspicion of Kurdish aspirations, along with the narrow conception of Turkish citizenship that is deeply entrenched in Turkish state culture, provides considerable obstacles for the resolution of the issue of Kurdish identity, and subsequently the cessation of PKK violence.

As Turkey moves forward redrafting its constitution, the idea of an ethnically homogenous nation-state must be reconsidered to reflect Turkey's realities. Many of the founding principles of modern Turkey have changed in the past few decades. For example, although Turkey was founded with a strong secular character, the Islamist political movement currently in power has recently questioned this conception of a nonreligious state. The traditional Turkish meaning of ethnicity should similarly be re-conceptualized to encompass the heterogeneous ethnic reality. Only this will begin to redress the Kurdish situation in Turkey and put an end to violence between the PKK and the government.◆



# Nucléaire iranien

## La guerre des nerfs

DIPLOMATIE

20 ET 21 FÉVRIER | NOUVELLE MISSION DE L'AIEA EN IRAN

Face à la menace nucléaire iranienne, les Israéliens s'impatientent. Les Etats-Unis ne souhaitent pas d'intervention en 2012, qui compromettrait les chances de réélection de Barack Obama. Washington espère encore faire reculer le régime de Téhéran

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

**L**e samedi 6 juin 1981, l'ambassadeur américain en Israël, Samuel Lewis, s'apprête à entrer, avec son épouse, Sallie, dans un dîner mondain organisé dans un hôtel de Tel-Aviv, lorsqu'un appel téléphonique l'interrompt. Au bout du fil, le premier ministre israélien, Menahem Begin : « Sam, veuillez transmettre au président Reagan un message urgent de ma part. Voici une heure environ, notre aviation a détruit le réacteur nucléaire près de Bagdad [à Osirak]; tous les avions sont rentrés intacts. » L'ambassadeur Lewis marque une pause, puis dit : « Monsieur le premier ministre, souhaitez-vous ajouter autre chose à propos de cet événement ? » Begin répond : « Nous allons rapidement briefer vos militaires. »

On peut se demander si quelque chose de semblable arrivera, en 2012, à Daniel Shapiro, le jeune ambassadeur envoyé en 2011 par Barack Obama en Israël, pays qui, d'une façon

générale, perçoit l'actuel président des Etats-Unis comme le « moins amical » envers l'Etat juif, depuis sa création en 1948. Un scénario militaire serait un cauchemar pour le président Obama, en campagne électorale pour se faire réélire le 6 novembre 2012. Les prix à la pompe à essence s'envoleraient aux Etats-Unis, faisant à l'inverse plonger ses chances de rassurer l'Américain moyen sur les perspectives de redressement économique.

Dans ce contexte, l'administration Obama a demandé au gouvernement israélien de ne rien faire militairement avant l'échéance du scrutin présidentiel aux Etats-Unis, affirment des sources diplomatiques et issues des milieux de défense et de sécurité, à la fois côté américain, en Europe et en Israël. L'évaluation américaine de l'imminence de la menace nucléaire iranienne n'est pas identique à celle des Israéliens, plus

« L'Iran s'approche

lentement mais

sûrement du moment

où il entrera dans

une zone d'immunité »

EHOUD BARAK

alarmistes pour le calendrier. Le message américain adressé aux Israéliens est : ne vous précipitez pas, il sera toujours temps d'agir plus tard, et peut-être ensemble, s'il le faut vraiment. Avec un ajout : vous avez besoin de nous.

Les responsables israéliens répondent en évoquant la « fenêtre de tir » qui se rétrécit. « Au cours des six prochains mois, il faudra prendre une décision, et une non-décision est aussi une décision, dit une source proche du dossier. Ça se jouera avant la présidentielle américaine. » Sinon, l'hiver étant moins propice à des frappes aériennes, une absence de décision en 2012 reporterait l'affaire à l'été 2013, ce qui donnerait une année supplémentaire aux Iraniens pour poursuivre leur stratégie d'accumulation d'uranium enrichi, à l'abri dans des lieux « bunkérisés ». En fait, les Israéliens ont cessé de mesurer les travaux iraniens en termes de « lignes rouges » – car tant ont déjà été franchies. Ils se préoccupent désormais du degré d'« irréversibilité » du programme.

« L'Iran s'approche lentement mais sûrement du moment où il entrera dans une zone d'immunité », a déclaré Ehoud Barak, le ministre de la défense, lors d'une conférence internationale sur les questions de sécurité, à Herzliya, au nord de Tel-Aviv, le 2 février. Cette « zone d'immunité », a-t-il expliqué, c'est « le moment où soit les mesures de protection des travaux [nucléaires], soit leur duplication, rendront une attaque [aérienne] impossible ». En allusion apparente aux appels américains à repousser toute action militaire, le ministre israélien a mis en garde : « Ceux qui disent "plus tard" pourraient découvrir que "plus tard", c'est trop tard ».









Au centre de l'imbroglio nucléaire iranien et des rumeurs de frappes aériennes qui se sont intensifiées ces derniers temps, il y a l'activité incessante des centrifugeuses, ces tubes métalliques qui enrichissent l'uranium. Depuis janvier, une batterie d'entre elles opère dans un site, Fordow, creusé à 90 mètres de profondeur dans une montagne, et donc a priori à l'abri des bombes. Les échanges de renseignements vont bon train entre Israéliens et Américains à propos de ce qui se passe dans ce site : ce qui y entre, ce qui pourrait en sortir... Car, chacun en est convaincu, cette installation a été conçue par l'Iran comme un lieu sanctuarisé, destiné à produire de la matière fissile utilisable dans un engin nucléaire.



Manceuvres, en 2008, sur le pont du porte-avions « USS Lincoln ». Le navire américain est revenu fin janvier dans le golfe Arabo-Persique par le détroit d'Ormuz, malgré les mises en garde iraniennes.



## Un programme nucléaire au cœur des tensions

### Des sites dispersés

-  Centre de recherche
-  Usine de construction de composants de centrifugeuse
-  Mine d'uranium
-  Usine de raffinage de l'uranium sous forme de yellow cake
-  Usine de conversion du yellow cake en hexafluorure d'uranium, étape préalable à l'enrichissement
-  Usine d'enrichissement d'uranium
-  Réacteur à eau lourde qui pourrait produire du plutonium à des fins militaires
-  Centrale nucléaire de production d'électricité, construite par la Russie, en activité depuis 2010



### Le rapport de forces dans la région

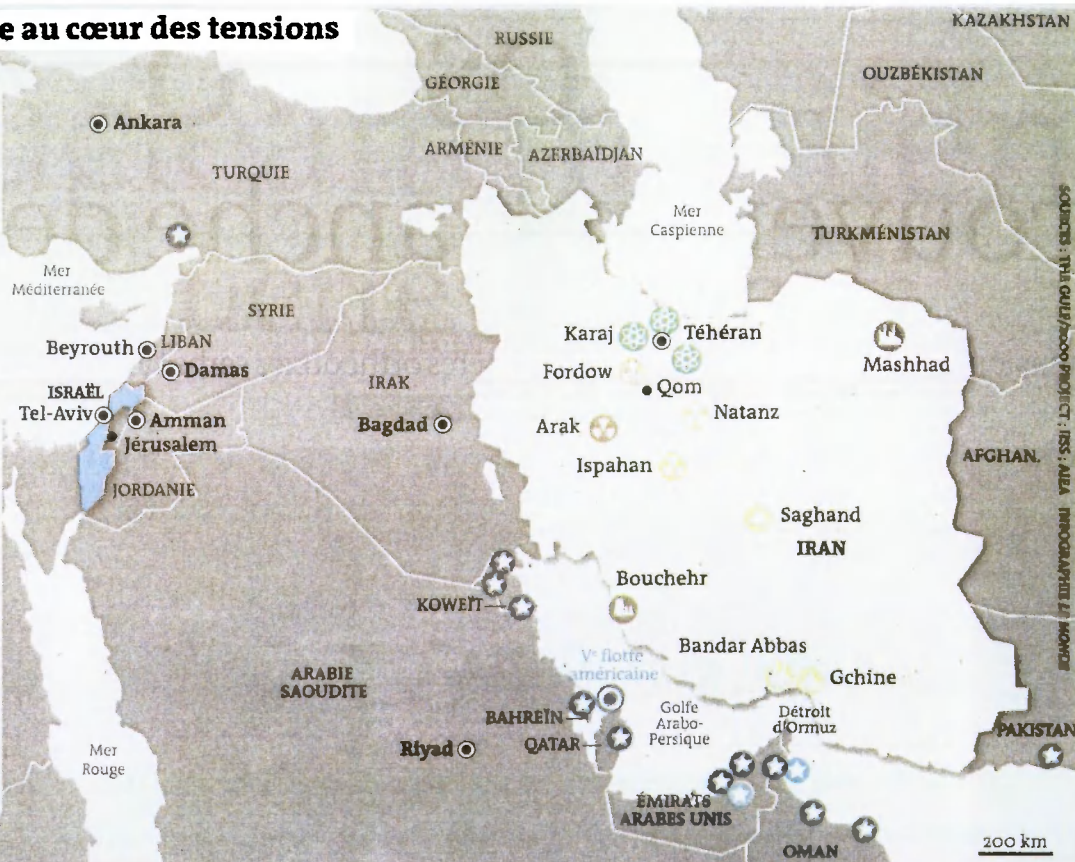
#### Les Etats-Unis

-  Base militaire américaine
-  Flotte militaire

#### Israël

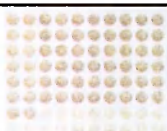
#### Les pays européens

-  Base militaire française
-  Base militaire britannique



#### Natanz, site d'enrichissement d'uranium

Site resté secret jusqu'à sa révélation en 2002 par des opposants iraniens exilés



8 000 centrifugeuses de type IR1 dont 6 200 enrichissent de l'uranium

4 922 kg d'uranium faiblement enrichi (depuis février 2007)  
73,7 kg d'uranium hautement enrichi (depuis février 2010)

#### Fordow, site d'enrichissement d'uranium

Enfoui dans un montage, à 90 mètres de profondeur, sur un terrain relevant des pasdarsans, site difficile à bombardier. Gardé secret jusqu'à sa révélation par les Occidentaux en septembre 2009



450 centrifugeuses  
Quantité d'uranium inconnue ; enrichissement commencé et prévu à 20% (uranium hautement enrichi)

Les responsables américains ont cherché à contrer l'idée que Fordow deviendrait invulnérable à partir d'une certaine date. Ils ont fait « fuiter » dans les médias des informations du Pentagone sur la préparation de nouvelles bombes américaines « anti-bunker », hautement performantes. Certains officiels américains suggérant même que des « armes nucléaires tactiques pourraient être la seule option » !

C'est dans ce contexte que se déroule la course contre la montre entre l'impact des sanctions internationales et l'avancée des travaux scientifiques iraniens. Avec l'embargo pétrolier, les Occidentaux sont passés d'une politique de sanctions centrées sur les activités de prolifération de l'Iran à une stratégie visant ouvertement le cœur de l'économie nationale, et comportant de ce fait l'ambition de provoquer un changement de régime, qui reste inavouée. Ce tournant n'a pas échappé à la Russie, en particulier, qui fustige un nouvel interventionnisme, hors du cadre de l'ONU.

Les mesures coercitives, couplées aux déclarations américaines répétant que « toutes les options restent sur la table », visent tout autant à retenir le feu des Israéliens qu'à mettre le régime iranien sous pression. Lorsque le *Washington Post* écrit, sous la plume du très renseigné David Ignatius, que l'administration américaine ne pense que des frappes israéliennes sont possibles « au printemps », ou bien quand les conseillers de Nicolas Sarkozy confient qu'une action militaire israélienne « préventive » pourrait se produire à l'été, le message sous-jacent

est clair : c'est un « je-vous-ai-compris » adressé aux dirigeants israéliens.

En diplomatie, la perception, la posture, sont souvent plus importantes que les faits. Ainsi, Barack Obama laisse son ancien conseiller pour le Moyen-Orient, Dennis Ross, dire que, « ne vous y trompez pas », jamais l'occupant de la Maison Blanche n'hésitera à utiliser la force contre l'Iran. C'est la meilleure façon d'éviter d'avoir à passer par la case « guerre », tout en se mettant à l'abri du reproche de mollesse que lui font ses concurrents du Parti républicain. Le président américain rappelle aussi, au besoin, que la voie militaire « n'est pas la voie préférée ».

Ce qui ne peut être énoncé publiquement, en revanche, c'est la tentation qui semble persister, au sein de l'équipe Obama, de mener une politique d'endiguement (*containment*) de l'Iran si ce pays franchit ce qui est habituellement décrit comme le « seuil » nucléaire – sans qu'il existe une définition unique et incontestée de ce terme. « Endiguer l'Iran jusqu'à ce que le régime tombe, nous dit un membre de l'administration, sous couvert d'anonymat. C'est ce que nous avons fait avec Staline et l'URSS, après tout. » Au début du mandat d'Obama, la secrétaire d'Etat Hillary Clinton avait laissé entrevoir cette possibilité en parlant de « *paraplui* » américain au Moyen-Orient. Des « fuites » récentes, dans la presse américaine, parlent d'un scénario du seuil « à la japonaise » pour l'Iran : la détention de la technologie et des composants de l'arme suprême, mais sans l'assembler.

Certains experts font par ailleurs observer

qu'historiquement, à moins d'un changement de régime (par exemple l'Afrique du Sud sortant de l'apartheid), aucun pays n'a jamais renoncé au nucléaire militaire une fois atteint un niveau technologique comparable à celui que maîtrise déjà l'Iran.

En public, l'objectif proclamé par les Occidentaux, c'est le démarrage de véritables négociations avec l'Iran. Ce n'est qu'une fois placé au bord du « gouffre » que le régime iranien finira par « bouger ». On en veut pour preuve l'arrêt de

**Les Israéliens  
préfèreraient de loin  
que ce soit l'US Army  
qui frappe l'Iran**

la guerre Iran-Irak, en 1988, quand la République islamique exsangue avait dû, selon le mot de Khomeiny, « boire la coupe de poison », et déclarer un cessez-le-feu. La récente reprise des visites de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) a été notée, mais fait craindre une nouvelle manœuvre dilatoire, tant l'opacité iranienne demeure. L'administration Obama continue de son côté d'essayer des mains tendues, notamment en envoyant des navires militaires américains secourir des marins iraniens

perdus dans le Golfe ou kidnappés par des pirates somaliens.

Ce qui a été observé avec grande attention par Washington, c'est la façon dont les Iraniens ont battu en retraite, fin janvier, après avoir menacé le porte-avions *USS Lincoln* s'il revenait dans les eaux du Golfe. En fait, quand l'énorme bâtiment a franchi le détroit d'Ormuz, accompagné en plus de navires britannique et français, Téhéran a fait comme si de rien n'était. Ainsi, l'Iran vitupère mais se garde, semble-t-il, de faire déraiper la situation militaire en sachant qu'un affrontement avec l'armada américaine ne jouerait pas en sa faveur. Comme en 2003, quand il craignait une attaque après l'invasion américaine de l'Irak, le pouvoir iranien semble ainsi se livrer à un calcul permanent de « coût-bénéfice ». Un point d'entrée possible pour une solution négociée du problème nucléaire ?

Il se peut que la réponse à la question « y aura-t-il des frappes en 2012 ? » dépende en grande partie de l'état de la relation entre Israël et les Etats-Unis. Plus précisément, entre deux hommes qui semblent se détester : Barack Obama et le premier ministre israélien, Benjamin Nétanyahou. Le second fera-t-il suffisamment confiance au premier pour retenir ses avions de chasse jusqu'en 2013 ou au-delà, au prétexte que le succès serait alors partagé ? Le « faucon » du Likoud conçoit le dossier iranien comme une « menace existentielle » pour Israël et considère que son legs historique ainsi que le « plus jamais ça », après la Shoah, sont en jeu. Il prend au mot Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et le Guide Khamenei lorsqu'ils appellent à l'élimination de l'Etat juif, comparé à une « tumeur cancéreuse ».

Certains, côté occidental, prêtent des calculs électoralistes au dirigeant israélien. Beaucoup pensent qu'un facteur d'ordre personnel joue énormément : « Bibi » aurait l'obsession de ne pas apparaître faible aux yeux de son père, Benzion Nétanyahou, un intellectuel d'extrême droite. La politique intérieure aux Etats-Unis, pays où « Bibi » a passé une partie de sa jeunesse, n'a, en tout cas, aucun secret pour le premier ministre israélien, persuadé qu'il « tient » Obama par là où ça peut faire mal. Le triomphe de Nétanyahou en mai 2011 devant le Congrès américain dominé par les républicains aurait achevé de le convaincre qu'il peut se passer d'un feu vert de la Maison Blanche pour attaquer.

Mais les Israéliens préféreraient de loin que ce soit l'US Army qui frappe l'Iran. Pour éviter que l'Etat juif, déjà mal à l'aise avec le chamboulement stratégique des révoltes arabes, se retrouve seul. Pour éviter qu'il soit en première ligne, face aux retombées diplomatiques internationales, et face aux représailles iraniennes. Ces éléments, ainsi que la question des moyens militaires d'Israël face à un programme iranien éparpillé en un archipel de sites, font l'objet de débats internes intenses. L'appui américain est souhaité afin de produire « une menace militaire crédible », seule susceptible de faire plier l'Iran.

Les services secrets israéliens pensent qu'il reste encore du temps, et qu'une opération militaire attirerait trop de problèmes pour un gain relatif, puisque le programme iranien ne serait que retardé. Meir Dagan, l'ancien chef du Mossad, a porté ce débat sur la place publique, en vantant par ailleurs l'effet des actions de sabotage. Les militaires sont partagés. Nétanyahou penche pour des frappes. Son ministre de la défense, Ehoud Barak, partagerait cet avis, mais il met l'accent sur l'importance de la relation avec les Etats-Unis. Il pense qu'un terrain d'entente est possible avec l'administration Obama, que Nétanyahou traite avec distance. « Bibi » pense qu'il faut passer par-dessus la tête du président des Etats-Unis, en s'adressant à l'opinion et aux élus.

Quand on demande à des connaisseurs qui, dans ce duo israélien, a la main haute, la réponse la plus fréquente est : Nétanyahou. Mais les pré-occupations d'Ehoud Barak sont partagées, si l'on en juge par l'une des tables rondes de la conférence d'Herzliya, intitulée : « Israël est-il un atout stratégique pour les Etats-Unis ? »

Cité dans le récent article, et fort remarqué, du *New York Times Magazine* intitulé « Faire la guerre ou pas », Ehoud Barak a posé comme condition préalable à une action militaire israélienne « un soutien ouvert ou tacite, en particulier des Etats-Unis ». A Herzliya, le même insistait : « Les Etats-Unis sont le meilleur et le plus formidable ami d'Israël, et cela est vrai de l'administration Obama ! (...) Nous demandons à nos amis – et c'est leur position – qu'il ne soit pas permis à l'Iran de devenir nucléaire ! »

Comme en écho, l'ambassadeur américain Dan Shapiro avait souligné l'« extraordinaire coordination » entre les deux pays, mais en glissant un commentaire semble-t-il plein d'allusions : « Israël a intérêt à ce que les Etats-Unis soient perçus favorablement, et comme forts, dans le monde arabo-musulman. » C'est-à-dire, pas débordés par leur petit mais puissant allié dans la région ? Benjamin Nétanyahou prévoit de se rendre à Washington début mars. L'AIEA doit retourner en Iran les 20 et 21 février.

En 1981, selon le récit qu'en a fait dans ses mémoires l'ambassadeur Lewis, un an environ avant le raid sur Osirak, « le refrain israélien était : soit les Etats-Unis font quelque chose pour arrêter ce réacteur [irakien], soit nous serons obligés de le faire ! » Puis, six mois avant l'attaque, les « fuites » dans les médias ont subitement cessé. Plus une seule sonnette d'alarme tirée par les Israéliens ! Ce silence abrupt, « rétrospectivement, c'était l'indice que la décision de bombarder avait été prise », estime Lewis.

Si l'on suit cette logique, la conclusion à tirer est la suivante : tant que, dans les médias internationaux, un « buzz » intensif se poursuivra sur un risque de frappes en 2012, celles-ci ne seront pas imminentes. Le 6 février, les médias israéliens ont annoncé que Nétanyahou avait ordonné le silence à ses ministres à propos de frappes sur l'Iran. ■

## Où en sont les Iraniens

L'avancée des travaux nucléaires iraniens ne fait pas grand doute. L'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA) a décrit dans son dernier rapport, diffusé en novembre 2011, les études que la République islamique a menées, relatives à la fabrication d'une ogive. On sait aussi que l'Iran a accumulé environ cinq tonnes d'uranium enrichi à 3,5 % et 74 kg d'uranium enrichi à 20 %. En théorie, en poussant l'enrichissement de ce stock vers des niveaux militaires (90 %), l'Iran aurait de quoi fabriquer de la matière fissile pour plusieurs engins nucléaires. Le premier prendrait environ six mois, selon Olli Heinonen, l'ancien numéro deux de l'AIEA. La grande inconnue est de savoir si – et quand – l'Iran décidera de franchir ce pas. L'administration Obama se dit persuadée que Téhéran n'a pas encore pris de décision. Les Israéliens pensent que cet aspect n'est pas le plus crucial. Ce qui compte à leurs yeux, c'est la nouvelle capacité iranienne à accélérer, à volonté, le programme d'enrichissement dans un site (Fordow) qui semble à l'abri des bombes. L'AIEA cherche à établir quel volume d'uranium enrichi a déjà été transféré vers ce lieu.

## L'effort d'« endiguement »

Les Occidentaux cherchent à ralentir le plus possible le programme nucléaire iranien. Les sanctions y contribuent, par exemple en coupant les réseaux extérieurs utilisés par l'Iran pour s'approvisionner en métaux utilisés dans des centrifugeuses. Des actions de sabotage et une série de cyberattaques ont également compliqué la tâche des scientifiques iraniens, qui semblent en outre visés par une mystérieuse campagne d'assassinats. Pour décourager Téhéran d'aller au bout de ses ambitions nucléaires, les Etats-Unis ont par ailleurs accru les livraisons d'armements à Israël et à des pays arabes sunnites du Golfe, tout en renforçant leur propre présence navale dans la région. L'objectif est de montrer à l'Iran que la poursuite des travaux nucléaires joue en réalité en sa défaveur dans le rapport de forces régional. L'étape ultime d'un tel effort d'« endiguement » pourrait être un parapluie nucléaire américain offert aux pays que l'Iran inquiète. Une stratégie pour prévenir la course régionale à l'arme atomique que l'entrée de l'Iran dans le « club » nucléaire serait susceptible de déclencher.

TIME

FEBRUARY 6, 2012

WORLD IRAN

# Can Israel Stop Iran's Nuke Effort? Too many targets—and too much bedrock—might make a knockout blow unlikely

BY KARL VICK/JERUSALEM

**T**HE POTENTIAL TARGETS ARE scattered and hidden all over Iran. They range from a uranium mine in the middle of the country to a nuclear power plant on the Persian Gulf coast to a complex in the northwest doing research on the use of atomic science in agriculture. There is an underground uranium-enrichment facility about a three-hour drive south of Tehran, centrifuges spinning outside the holy city of Qum and a precision-tools factory that makes them in Mashhad, way over by the Turkmeni-

stan border. These are nearly a third of the suspected sites for the much prophesied nuclear Iran that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calls “an existential threat” to his country.

The threat of an Israeli attack has for years been a component in the international campaign to get Iran to halt its nuclear program—as have ever more stringent economic sanctions. “All options, including military action, should remain on the table,” says Colin Kahl,

until recently deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East, “but force should be a last resort, not a first choice.” If it is the final option, would it solve the problem? How much punishment could Israel—or the U.S., for that matter—inflict? And would it be enough to stop Iran from getting the bomb?

A senior Israeli official serving in the country's security apparatus tells *TIME* that Netanyahu's Cabinet was advised in late September that the Israel Defense Forces lack the ability to deal a decisive blow to Iran's atomic effort. “I informed the Cabinet we have no ability to hit the Iranian nuclear program in a meaningful way,” the official quoted a senior commander as saying. “If I get the order, I will do it, but we don't have the ability to hit in a meaningful way.”

The key word is *meaningful*. The working assumption behind Israel's military preparations has been that a strike, to be worth mounting, must delay Tehran's nuclear capabilities by at least two years. But given the wide geographic dispersion of Iran's atomic facilities, combined with the limits of Israel's air armada, the Jewish state can expect to push back the Iranian program by only a matter of months—a year at most, according to the official. He attributes that estimate to the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, which is charged with assessing the likely effect of a strike.

It is not that Israel cannot do damage; it can. The U.S. commitment to keeping Israel's military dominant in the Middle East—in the policymakers' phrase, “Israel's qualitative military edge”—allowed it to lock in on Iran's nuclear ambitions years before most of the world had any clue what Tehran was up to. U.S. military aid, which in 2011 was \$3 billion, allowed Israel to lift its gaze beyond its immediate neighbors and begin assembling an arsenal to confront an Iranian threat that Israeli leaders began warning about in the mid-'90s.

By August 2002, when published satellite photos revealed an underground enrichment plant being built in the cen-

tral Iranian city of Natanz, Israel had already taken possession of F-15Is, U.S.-made fighter-bombers specially outfitted to carry the extra fuel needed to reach the Islamic Republic. Israel also has scores of F-16I fighters modified to escort the bombers, enough satellites to keep images of Iran arriving around the clock and fleets of drones, a technology Israel pioneered. The mammoth Eitan, wide as a 737, can carry either bombs or cyberwarfare gear programmed to jam Iranian radar, communications and computers.

Twelve months after the Natanz plant was revealed, Israel demonstrated the range of the F-15I by sending three of them 1,600 miles (almost 2,600 km) to Poland, ostensibly for a ceremonial role in the anniversary of the Polish air force. On the way back, the craft staged a flyover above the Auschwitz death camp. For the sake of comparison, Tel Aviv is just short of 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from Tehran.

## Lessons of History

IF ISRAEL IS PLAYING THE BAD COP TO Washington's good cop in some tag-team effort at marshaling global resolve to confront Iran, that doesn't mean the talk of an Israeli strike is just talk. “I don't think it's bluster,” says Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. “One wave can do a lot, depending on the quality of the penetrating munitions and the targeting abilities.”

Besides, Israel has done something similar before. Twice. In 1981, Israeli F-16 fighter-bombers destroyed the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq in a daring surprise strike. In 2007 a secret Syrian reactor in the desert west of Damascus was leveled in a midnight raid that Israel still does not officially acknowledge.

But this time is different. Iran learned a lesson from the assault on the Osirak reactor. When leaders of the authoritarian theocracy quietly revived Iran's moribund nuclear program, setting out to master every step and obtain every component in the entire nuclear fuel cycle, they took care to scatter their facilities across a half-million square miles (1.3 million sq km). The most critical facilities of all, housing the centrifuges that enrich uranium, went underground. Military experts say reaching them all would require an air campaign of hundreds of sorties and would have to last for weeks. Think of the extended opening salvos of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 rather than the lightning strike on Osirak.

“I think a modern air force like the U.S. Air Force can deal with it easily,” said a former senior official from Israel's security establishment in a recent background

briefing with foreign reporters. And Israel's air force? "I say, 'U.S. Air Force,'" the official repeated with a smile.

It's unclear how effective any air force will be against the main targets. The massive enrichment facility at Natanz may be vulnerable to Israel's bunker busters, even six stories underground. But Iran this month announced that centrifuges are spinning in the new Fordow facility outside Qum, which is thought to be protected by a shelf of rock more than 260 ft. (80 m) thick. That may be beyond the reach even of the Massive Ordnance Penetrator, a 30,000-lb. (13,600 kg) bomb built for the U.S. Air Force and delivered in recent weeks to B-2 stealth bombers newly modified to carry it.

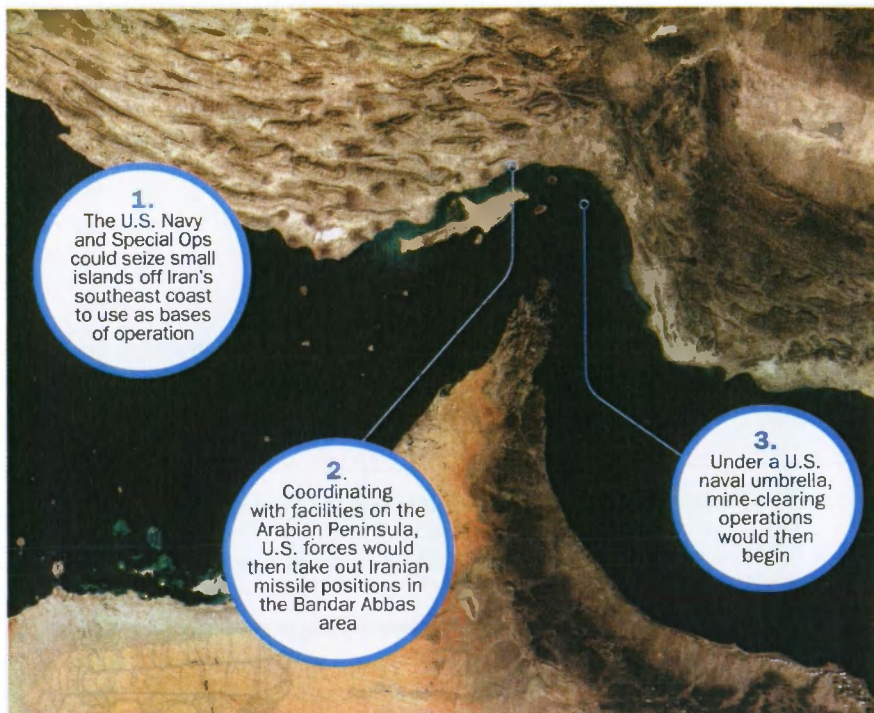
Plus, getting the necessary ordnance over the targets isn't easily done. "The Israelis just don't have the reach to launch a sustained campaign," says Tim Ripley, a Middle East defense analyst for *Jane's Defence Weekly*. In "Mission Impossible," his report assessing the prospects of an Israeli strike, Ripley notes that Israel lacks aircraft carriers or other forward bases to shorten the distance to Iran. Which means that in order to reach targets more than 1,000 miles away, Israel must rely on aerial-tanker planes to refuel scores of fighters en route, on the way back or even in both directions should pilots find themselves doing a lot of maneuvering. And Israel has only a handful of such flying filling stations. "The Israelis have loads of fighters," says Ripley. "But it's not quite like the U.S. Air Force, which has got hundreds of tankers."

The sheer number of targets makes any strike even more daunting, says Yiftah Shapir, a former Israeli Air Force intelligence officer whose duties involved planning for such strikes. "What you really have to calculate is not targets but aiming points," says Shapir, now an analyst at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. "Each target has numerous aiming points." Shapir tells TIME, "A strike could be done, but it could never do the damage we did to Osirak, where Osirak was all they had."

Cordesman reckons Israel probably has enough aircraft and enough range to do serious damage to 10 to 12 of Iran's atomic facilities. But damaged labs can be rebuilt, he notes, and Iran has announced plans for 10 new enrichment sites—further dispersing later-generation centrifuges in places smaller, harder to locate and easier to harden. The issue, Cordesman says, is not simply capability but consequences. "If anyone tells you this is sort of binary, either 'Yeah, they can do it' or 'Oh, no, they

## What if Iran Mined the Strait of Hormuz?

Cutting off the 20-mile-wide (32 km) waterway would shut down 20% of the global oil trade, sending the world into recession. Tactically, the U.S. could do the following, but the consequences of military action are unforeseeable



can't,' they don't know what they're talking about," he says. "Israel is going to act strategically. It's going to look at the political outcome of what it says and does, not simply measure this in terms of some computer game and what the immediate tactical impact is."

One forgotten lesson of Osirak is that, as a consequence, Saddam Hussein took his nuclear weapons program into the shadows and got much closer to a bomb before the rest of the world caught wind of his intentions. An attack on Iran, even one led by the U.S., might produce only a temporary halt in its nuclear program—and a greater resolve to develop weapons out of sight of international inspectors, if only to buttress Iranian security in years to come.

Whatever the state of Israel's military preparation, the countdown to war seems to have slowed in recent days. An accelerating cascade of events—the overrunning of Britain's diplomatic compounds in Tehran, the assassination of yet another Iranian nuclear scientist and a genuinely bellicose back-and-forth over whether Iran could shut down oil traffic through the Strait of Hormuz—threatened to generate momentum toward war just when sanctions were growing teeth. After 20 years of indecision, the European Union agreed to an embargo on Iranian oil, and Japan,

Turkey and even China were seeking alternate suppliers

A suddenly chummier joint front between Washington and Tel Aviv will keep Tehran guessing. A visit to Israel by U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey underscored how close cooperation remains between the allies, however fraught the relationship between Netanyahu and President Obama. Israel and the U.S. postponed a joint military exercise originally set for May, which would have brought Patriot missile batteries to Israel to supplement its own air defenses. Because missile attacks from Iran's proxies Hizballah in Lebanon and Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the Gaza Strip would be the first signs of retaliation for any Israeli attack on Tehran, the postponement of additional Patriot defenses was seen as a sign that the region was, at least for the moment, not in a rush to war.

Two days after the postponement, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said any decision on launching an attack on Iran "was very far away." —WITH REPORTING BY AARON J. KLEIN/TEL AVIV AND MARK THOMPSON AND MASSIMO CALABRESI/WASHINGTON ■

## US Intel Chief: Iran Trying to Strengthen Ties with Kurdistan

By **WLADIMIR van WILGENBURG**  
rudaw.net

**AMSTERDAM, the Netherlands** - James Clapper, the director of US national intelligence, told the US Senate last week that Iran is facing continuing domestic political problems and is trying to strengthen ties with Kurdistan and Iraq.

Clapper said Iran's leaders are continuously confronting domestic political problems, a stalling economy and an uncertain regional dynamic as the effects of the Arab Spring unfold.

"Elite infighting has reached new levels as the rift grows between Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad. The regime has intensified attacks on prominent government officials and their families as well, including former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani," he said.

Furthermore, he added that in its efforts to spread its influence internationally, Iran continues to support proxies and surrogates abroad and has sought to exploit the Arab Spring but has reaped few benefits. Therefore, Clapper concluded that, in Iraq, "It probably will continue efforts to strengthen ties to Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government."

Meanwhile, tensions between Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, his Sunni rivals and Kurds continue to be strained after Maliki announced that Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi was wanted for plotting assassinations. Hashimi is seeking refuge in Iraqi



Former Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Barham Salih (left) with Chairman of Iranian Parliament Ali Larijani, during a visit to Iran. Photo barham-salih.com

Kurdistan.

Clapper said Maliki's ties with the Sunnis and Kurds "will be a critical factor in maintaining political stability."

The Iranian Quds Force was formed in 1983 to arm and train Iraqi Kurdish forces to combat Saddam Hussein's army and to carry out intelligence operations in Iraq. As a result, most Kurdish parties in Iraq have had contacts or military ties with Iran. Currently, Iran has a consulate in Erbil and according to the Iranian consul, the trade between the Kurdistan Region and Iran was US\$6 billion in 2010 and 2011.

Ayad Allawi, leader of the Sunni-secular Al-Iraqiya list and a former Iraqi prime minister, told the Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily Al-Sharq al-Awsat, from Kurdistan, that because of Iraq's weakness, the country has become subject to regional intervention by Iran.

Allawi's statement comes amid

claims that Iraq is backing the Syrian regime as it battles a nearly year-long uprising. Akbar Velayati, adviser to Iranian Supreme leader Ali Khamenei, told Hezbollah's TV-station Al-Manar last week that Iraq is an ally of Syria.

"Syria's allies, like Iran, Hizbullah and Iraq are defending Syria," he said.

The news website Niqash reported that 33 Iraqis who were part of the Arab League's monitoring mission in Syria were biased toward Syria's leaders and tried to encourage protesters to give up their demonstrations against the regime.

The US intelligence chief said in his testimony that Iran is worried about the future of the Syrian regime. "Its biggest regional concern is Syria because regime change would be a major strategic loss for Tehran," he said. Therefore, some analysts have suggested that Iran pushed Iraq to support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a claim that the Iraqi government denies. □

## Solution for Iraq lies in its division - analyst

**ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq:** The best solution for the current crisis in Iraq is to divide the state into three separate states, a Kurdish analyst in North Iraq's Kurdistan Region has expressed today.

"The best solution for the current crisis suffered by Iraq lies in dividing Iraq into 3 states, a Kurdish, an Arab Shiite and Sunni state," Abdul-Ghani Ali Yahya told Aswat al-Iraq news agency, expecting at the same time the failure of the proposed National Conference, scheduled to convene soon to discuss proposals to settle the current crisis in the country.

"The fate of this Conference will be no better than the Arbil

Conference and other meetings, held at the residence of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani over the past few weeks; it is doomed to fail like the previous conferences, because it would be the last nail to be struck in the coffin of the imposed Iraqi unity," he continued.

Iraqi leaders and politicians cannot fool themselves up any more, standing behind sectarian and ultra-nationalist trends have reached a limit that rejects all forms of an Iraqi Federal Unity," Yahya said, adding that "Iraqis have tried all forms of unionist solutions, but they have failed to reach an agreement".○

# Lebanon : Kurds endure poverty, grapple with assimilation

By Brooke Anderson

www.dailystar.com.lb

**B**EIRUT: As a teenager in a rural area of predominantly Kurdish southeast Turkey, Bahaeddin Hassan heard of a far-off, beautiful place called Lebanon. He was starstruck.

At 15, he traveled overland through Syria to Beirut. Lebanon was not quite the paradise he had hoped for. Life was harsh, and for many years Hassan took whatever odd jobs came his way.

Today, at 57, having become a Lebanese citizen who has found fulfilling and lucrative work as a clothing exporter, he says he has stayed in his adopted land because it is indeed beautiful. But he laments the hardships many of his fellow Lebanese Kurds continue to endure.

"We got nationality, but we didn't get anything else," says Hassan, president of the Lebanese Kurdish Philanthropic Association.

"No one protects or defends us. No one hears our voices."

«the naturalized are... 'prisoners' of the one thing that should have freed them -- their citizenship, because many believe that they owe their citizenship to one politician or other.» While most of Lebanon's Kurds have become citizens, many have yet to feel truly at home within Lebanese society because the community continues to struggle with low education, high unemployment and lack of political representation.

Sitting in her home under a roof cobbled together out of scrap metal and tires, Fadia Mahmoud Ismail, 41, says she is proud of her Kurdish heritage, although she wouldn't consider leaving Lebanon, which has been her home since she came to Beirut as a 13-year-old bride, a conflicted sentiment echoed by many in the

community.

"I don't feel Lebanese," Ismail says. "My culture and language are Kurdish. I know I'm Kurdish, and that won't change."

While she has no plans to leave Lebanon, Ismail does wish that she and her fellow Kurds had greater recognition in Lebanese government and society. "I'd be happy if I turned on the TV and saw a Kurdish representative," she says.

In 1994, a total of 10,000 Kurds were granted citizenship under late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the second round of Kurdish naturalization after a handful of Kurds got citizenship in the 1960s under then-Interior Minister Kamal Jumblatt. After generations of statelessness, a status that excluded them from public and private sector services, many of Lebanon's Kurds finally got the chance to enjoy the basic benefits of Lebanese society.

However, their citizenship came at a price, as the Kurds, like all other communities in Lebanon, were forced to become part of the country's sectarian system.

Considered Sunni Muslims by the government, they don't have any specific representation in Parliament, unlike Armenians, many of whom migrated to Lebanon at around the same time.

When it comes to charitable funding, their only non-governmental organization, the Lebanese Kurdish Philanthropic Association, is overshadowed by larger Muslim organizations. Among other concerns, Kurds have long worried about a lack of resources to provide their children with instruction in the Kurdish language. More recently, the organization has been struggling to help Kurds fleeing the violence in Syria.

Kurds were initially preven-



Fadia Mahmoud Ismail in Basta near downtown Beirut says she is proud of her Kurdish heritage, although she wouldn't consider leaving Lebanon. (Mahmoud Kheir/The Daily Star)

ted from obtaining citizenship because of fears that they would upset the country's delicate sectarian balance. Later, many were naturalized for the benefit of Sunni politicians who sought their votes. But that has hardly garnered them political clout. Kurds say that in a recurrent cycle, once election time has passed, politicians no longer pay them any heed.

A report published in November by Guita Hourani at Notre Dame University-Louaize, documenting the community's upward mobility via naturalization, found that "the naturalized are not at all 'free' in their voting behavior, but are rather 'prisoners' of the one thing that should have freed them -- their citizenship, because many believe that they owe their citizenship to one politician or other."

Hourani notes that "the Kurds and other naturalized citizens continue to rely heavily on political patrons who, in return for favors going back to the event of naturalization in the first place, pay them back at the ballot box."

And approximately 40 percent of Kurds in Lebanon do not even have Lebanese citizenship. For years, their identification cards have indicated

that their status is "under consideration."

Today, after years of living in abject poverty, with menial jobs passed on from one generation to the next, little education and no political representation, Lebanon's Kurds continue to struggle to escape their dire circumstances, despite the modicum of security attained through citizenship. Indeed, Kurds remain the least educated group in Lebanon.

Although many Lebanese Kurds have come to Lebanon in recent decades, Lebanon's Kurdish community dates back to the 12th century, when the Ayyubids took control of the region. Later, the Ottomans sent loyal Kurdish families from the empire's interior to modern-day Syria and Lebanon, where they played an important administrative role.

These families -- which included the Janbulad family, ancestors of Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt -- became fully assimilated into the local culture.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I, Lebanon saw its first major wave of Kurdish migration, when thousands of Kurds left Turkey for nearby Lebanon and Syria. The second significant influx of

Kurds to Lebanon took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as many fled poverty and political repression in Syria and Turkey.

Although there are non-Muslim Kurdish communities in other countries, the Kurds of Lebanon all share the Sunni Muslim faith, as well as an emotional affinity for their ancestral homeland, which spans parts of modern-day Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. They speak two dialects of Kurdish, Kurmanji and Mhallami (a mixture of Arabic, Kurdish, Syriac and Turkish). Despite the linguistic difference, the two tend to be mutually intelligible, though Kurmanji speakers are generally better able to understand Mhallami speakers than vice versa.

Otherwise, the Kurds in Lebanon couldn't be more divided, with the community's estimated 60,000 having aligned themselves with a plethora of political parties through-

out the country's turbulent modern history, often to the detriment of their own well-being and security.

During Lebanon's Civil War, Kurds fought in the ranks of Lebanese left-wing and Palestinian militias, hoping to earn money and allies. Instead, their conflicting allegiances and lack of unity left them vulnerable, forcing the resettlement of Kurds who were no longer safe in their previously ethnically diverse neighborhoods.

In the early 1990s, following the Lebanese government's destruction of several of Beirut's squatter quarters, to which many Kurdish families had relocated during the war, about a quarter of Lebanon's Kurds emigrated to European countries, while many others left the country's capital for the Bekaa Valley, Tripoli and Syria, further scattering much of the already fragmented community.

One Lebanese Kurd, while

acknowledging his community's difficult circumstances, suggests that Kurds themselves could do more to initiate change.

"We can't put the blame entirely on the authorities and society. The Kurds are also to blame for their lack of upward mobility," says Lokman Meho, director of university libraries at the American University of Beirut

"Most are illiterate, many families prevented their girls from going to school, and menial jobs are passed from one generation to the next," adds Meho, a rare example of a Lebanese Kurd who has reached a high level of professional success.

His parents, who had never attended school themselves, encouraged their children to pursue an education.

Because of his Lebanese citizenship, Meho qualified for a college scholarship from the Hariri Foundation, allowing him to attend AUB. He then

went on to obtain his master's in library science and doctorate in information technology from universities in the U.S., returning to Lebanon three years ago to run the AUB libraries.

Despite his level of education and work, Meho says that growing up he always felt like a second-class citizen. Lebanese biases are often sectarian in nature, but Meho's childhood was spent among neighborhood kids who, despite being fellow Muslims, called him "dirty" and "foreigner."

"All Kurds are proud to be Kurdish and Lebanese. They feel both identities equally," Meho believes. Still, he thinks, "it could have been more tilted toward Lebanese if they hadn't suffered so much."

□ □ □

REUTERS

## Turkish clashes with PKK militants kill 14

February 9, 2012 - Reuters, by Seyhmus Cakan

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey - Turkish security forces killed 13 Kurdish militants in fighting in southeast Turkey overnight, security sources said, marking an escalation in violence at a time when cold winter weather normally limits clashes.

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) fighters attacked some 10 different security force locations at 2:30 a.m. in Cukurca in Hakkari province near the Iraqi border, the sources said.

One soldier and four militants were killed in the fighting and military operations were continuing in the area.

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Separately, nine PKK guerrillas died in clashes with Turkish troops in a mountainous region of Bingol province after the soldiers discovered a winter shelter used by the militants.

Security sources said most of the militants were believed to have killed themselves by detonating hand grenades rather than being captured.



A Turkish soldier runs down a hill at a small military outpost in the mountains of Cukurca (OSMAN ORSAL, REUTERS / February 9, 2012)

Three of the militants were captured alive, two of them wounded, the sources said.

More than 40,000 militants, soldiers and civilians have been killed since the PKK began its fight for self-rule in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast in 1984.

Turkey, the United States and the European Union all classify the PKK as a terrorist organization. □



# La mobilisation contre Damas vise aussi Téhéran

Les efforts diplomatiques face aux atrocités en Syrie vont de pair avec une volonté de priver l'Iran de son allié

Venir à bout de Bachar Al-Assad pour affaiblir l'Iran? Sans être la motivation première des diplomates mobilisées sur la crise en Syrie – où les atrocités perpétrées par le régime ont atteint un degré tel que le Haut-Commissaire aux droits de l'homme de l'ONU, Navi Pillay, vient de lancer un appel à la saisine de la Cour pénale internationale (CPI) –, l'aspect régional est dans tous les esprits. Un changement de régime à Damas priverait Téhéran d'un allié de longue date au Proche-Orient.

L'alliance entre la République islamique et le pouvoir de la famille Assad, qui repose sur la minorité alaouite d'obédience chiite, dure depuis plus de trente ans. Si, voici quelques mois, Téhéran paraissait s'agacer de ce partenaire en l'appelant à conduire des réformes politiques, l'aide apportée à l'appareil répressif syrien par la garde prétorienne du régime iranien, les puissants Gardiens de la révolution, ne semble s'être jamais démentie.

Derrière l'effort conjugué, occidental, arabe et turc, pour mettre fin au bain de sang en Syrie, les calculs géopolitiques sont bien présents. L'affaiblissement de l'Iran par la perte de la « carte » syrienne est espéré par les Occidentaux car cela conforterait leur stratégie sur le dossier nucléaire : mettre le régime de Téhéran sous pression afin qu'il s'engage dans un règlement négocié.

La Syrie est, au-delà du drame vécu par ses opposants, ciblés par l'appareil militaire et broyés dans des chambres de tortures en raison de leurs revendications politiques, l'épicentre d'un affrontement régional complexe, qui met face à face la puissance chiite iranienne et l'Arabie saoudite, « gardienne » de l'islam sunnite. Un aspect mis en exergue de manière inédite, vendredi 10 février, par le roi Abdallah d'Arabie saoudite lui-même. Habituellement discret, le souverain a fait une déclaration à la télévision nationale décrivant le blocage à l'ONU sur la Syrie comme « absolument regrettable ». Sans nommer la Russie, cette « sortie » semblait destinée à souligner la coupure apparue entre les pays arabes sunnites et Moscou (qui a opposé son



Le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (à gauche) accueille le président syrien Bachar Al-Assad à Téhéran, en février 2007. ATTA KENARE/AFP

veto à un projet de résolution sur la Syrie, le 4 février). La Russie a en outre beaucoup œuvré, ces dernières années à l'ONU, pour atténuer les mesures prises contre l'Iran.

Une réunion de la Ligue arabe devait être consacrée, dimanche, à la Syrie, des consultations étant également prévues entre les pétromonarchies du Conseil de coopération du Golfe (CCG). Tous ces pays, apparemment appelés à faire partie d'un « groupe des amis de la Syrie » réunissant aussi les Occidentaux et la Turquie, sont depuis longtemps extrêmement nerveux face aux ambitions, régionales et technologiques, de l'Iran.

Nicolas Sarkozy, dont la diplomatie se veut en pointe à la fois sur le dossier iranien et sur la question syrienne, déclarait le 8 février à Paris : « Un jour, le régime de Bachar Al-Assad tombera, parce que l'on ne peut pas massacrer impunément son peuple. Ce jour-là, d'ailleurs, l'Iran sera encore plus seul et isolé et affaibli. »

L'ambition de rompre l'axe entre la Syrie et l'Iran figurait déjà au centre d'une politique absolument inverse, tentée par la France de 2007 à fin 2010 : celle d'un rap-

prochement avec Bachar Al-Assad. L'administration Obama s'était lancée dans une approche similaire, mais dans une moindre mesure.

## La Syrie est l'épicentre d'un affrontement entre l'Iran et l'Arabie saoudite

En Israël, les événements en Syrie et le risque d'une percée des Frères musulmans dans ce pays donnent lieu à des analyses contrastées, que reflétaient bien des propos tenus le 2 février par le ministre de la défense, Ehoud Barak, lors d'une conférence sur les questions de sécurité organisée à Herzliya. Après avoir estimé que « le règne de la famille Assad est sur le point de s'achever », le ministre a dit son inquiétude à propos de transferts d'armes vers le Hezbollah au Liban. « En même temps, a ajouté M. Barak, la chute de la famille Assad sera un coup dur pour "l'axe radical" car cela privera le Hezbollah de son relais, et l'Iran perdra sa seule emprise dans le monde arabe. »

La Turquie se livre à ses propres calculs. Active auprès de l'opposition syrienne, elle doit composer avec le rôle de la Ligue arabe pour ne pas heurter les sensibilités régionales en affichant trop de réflexe « néo-ottoman ». Elle a aussi à l'esprit la question kurde, que Damas instrumentalise. Alors que 50 % des importations de pétrole de la Turquie proviennent d'Iran, la relation avec le grand voisin chiite s'est nettement dégradée.

La Turquie reproche à l'Iran de se montrer trop hégémonique en Irak et de pousser le premier ministre chiite, Nouri Al-Maliki, à une politique sectaire et antisunnite, qui, à terme, risque de conduire à un éclatement de ce pays. Ankara se considère de plus en plus comme le protecteur des sunnites d'Irak et la rivalité qui l'y oppose à Téhéran ne cesse de s'amplifier. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD  
ET NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

AFP

## Turquie: 2 soldats, 16 rebelles kurdes tués dans des combats dans le sud-est

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 14 février 2012 (AFP)

**DEUX SOLDATS TURCS ET SEIZE REBELLES KURDES** ont été tués lors de violents accrochages survenus lundi dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on indiqué mardi de source officielle.

Un précédent bilan fourni de source de sécurité locale faisait état de 10 rebelles tués.

Un premier incident s'est produit à Diyarbakir, principale ville de cette zone qui est le théâtre des combats entre les membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et l'armée.

Les forces de sécurité ont arrêté un véhicule sur une route et y ont découvert 125 kg d'explosifs. Le chauffeur a été abattu lors d'un accrochage.

Dans un deuxième incident, 15 rebelles ont été abattus lors d'une vaste opération de ratissage de l'armée dans une zone rurale et montagneuse de la province de Sirnak, frontalière avec l'Irak, où le PKK dispose de bases arrière, précise un communiqué du gouvernorat local.

Deux soldats ont été tués dans les heurts, déplore le document.

Les affrontements entre l'armée turque et le PKK ont augmenté d'intensité



au cours des derniers mois. En octobre, la Turquie a lancé une grande offensive par air et sur terre contre les séparatistes kurdes dans le sud-est du pays ainsi que dans le nord de l'Irak après que 24 militaires ont été tués dans une embuscade.

AFP

## Irak: mort d'un Kurde irakien détenu par le PKK (autorités)

ERBIL (Irak), 13 février 2012 (AFP)

**UN KURDE IRAKIEN**, kidnappé par les séparatistes des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a été retrouvé mort, a affirmé lundi le ministère de l'Intérieur de la région autonome.

C'est la première fois que les autorités de la région font état d'un tel incident et ordonne une enquête.

Dans un communiqué parvenu à l'AFP, le ministère indique que le 29 décembre, des membres du PKK avaient enlevé trois citoyens kurdes irakiens, Moussa Younes Abdallah, Sami Mohammad Taher et Mohammad Shahwan, tous originaires de la région de Dohouk, à 410 km au nord de Bagdad.

Leur sort est resté inconnu jusqu'au 27 janvier quand le PKK avait libéré

Sami Mohammad Taher et Mohammad Shahwan, indique le ministère précisant que le corps de Moussa Younes Abdallah avait été retrouvé deux jours plus tard.

"Nous, ministère de l'Intérieur et gouvernement de la région du Kurdistan d'Irak, condamnons les pratiques du PKK à l'encontre des civils dans les régions frontalières et considérons qu'il s'agit d'une action illégale en contradiction avec les principes des droits de l'Homme", indique un communiqué.

Le texte indique qu'un comité spécial a été mis en place "pour enquêter et entamer des procédures contre les auteurs de ces actes".

"Nous ne permettrons à qui que ce soit de se substituer à la justice et de détenir ou de tuer des citoyens irakiens. La Kurdistan est une région sûre avec un système légal et judiciaire", ajoute le communiqué.

Dimanche, le bi-hebdomadaire indépendant "Citoyen" avait affirmé que la victime était un espion des services de sécurité turcs auxquels il avait fourni des renseignements provenant de la sécurité du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK de Massoud Barzani) et des photos de Sinat-Haftanin, dans le nord de l'Irak, où 35 personnes avaient péri lors d'un bombardement aérien le 29 décembre.

AFP

## Vaste opération anti-PKK en Turquie: 109 personnes arrêtées

ISTANBUL, 13 fév 2012 (AFP)

**LA POLICE TURQUE** a arrêté 109 personnes au cours d'une nouvelle opération d'envergure organisée lundi en Turquie contre les milieux soupçonnés de collusion avec les rebelles kurdes, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie, citant les autorités judiciaires.

Des équipes de la police est intervenue dans les bureaux de certains syndicats et au domicile de leurs dirigeants à Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakir (principale ville du sud-est anatolien à majorité kurde) et dans une vingtaine d'autres villes, précise Anatolie.

Les policiers ont effectué des fouilles dans les locaux des syndicats visés, ceux défendant en particulier les droits des employés municipaux, saisissant certains documents, selon les médias.

Ces derniers avaient dans un premier temps fait état de près de cent arrestations par la police.

La plupart des interpellations (42) ont eu lieu à Istanbul, a ajouté Anatolie.

L'opération policière s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une offensive judiciaire visant à sévir contre le KCK (Union des communautés kurdes).

Le KCK, une organisation clandestine, est soupçonnée d'être la branche politique du mouvement armé PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), en lutte depuis 1984 contre le pouvoir central.

Les autorités accusent le KCK de vouloir remplacer les institutions officielles dans l'est et le sud-est anatoliens et de favoriser une insurrection dans ces régions.

Selon les autorités turques, le KCK souhaite se substituer à l'Etat turc dans les collectivités locales des provinces à forte majorité kurde en créant une structure administrative parallèle aux institutions officielles.

Depuis 2009, 700 personnes, selon le gouvernement, et 3.500 dont des députés, des intellectuels et des maires, selon les milieux kurdes, ont été incarcérées pour collusion avec le KCK.

## Total shifts Iraq focus to Kurdistan

French oil major Total has become the latest oil major to shift the focus of its Iraq ambitions toward the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, and away from the much larger but economically challenging contracts offered by Baghdad.

upstreamonline.com

**TOTAL'S** chief executive said on Friday he was considering possible investments in Kurdistan, something which previously prompted the central Iraq government to bar companies from investing in the south of the country, and added he did not plan to chase contracts in Baghdad's next licensing round.

"From what we are hearing the conditions of the fourth bidding round in Iraq do not appear very attractive," Christophe de Margerie told a press conference, Reuters reported. "The interest in Kurdistan is that there are plenty of gas and oil reserves there, and contractual conditions are better."

After the second Gulf war, Iraq opened its oil industry to foreign investment.

Its vast reserves and hopes of raising production to 12 million barrels per day – higher even than Saudi Arabia's – held out the possibility of a major bounty for Western oil companies which had largely been ejected from the region in the 1970s.

But the tough terms demanded by Baghdad have been a disappointment for some.

Total has a minority stake in the PetroChina-led consortium that won a contract to develop the Halfaya oilfield in



*Lining up: Total latest company to shift focus from Iraq to Kurdistan*

the Missan province but has long argued the \$1- to \$2-per-barrel fee offered by Iraq is not generous enough.

Norway's Statoil has told Iraq it wants to exit its stake in the 12.9 billion barrel West Qurna Phase 2 oilfield in southern Iraq.

Around the time the deal was announced, de Margerie said Statoil and partner Lukoil would struggle to cover their costs with the \$1.15 fee they agreed to accept.

While the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north of the country offers better terms, the reserves are smaller.

Also, companies who previously

invested in the region, such as China's Sinopec and US oil group Hess, have been barred from investing in the south as Baghdad disputes the KRG's right to issue contracts.

ExxonMobil became the first of the big Western oil groups who held a Baghdad contract to invest in Kurdistan last year, prompting a long-running spat.

Abdul Mahdy al-Ameedi, head of Iraq's contracts and licensing division, told Reuters on Thursday ExxonMobil should freeze its activities in Kurdistan if it wished to maintain its licence to develop Iraq's supergiant West Qurna-1 oilfield.

ExxonMobil has already been stripped of its role as project leader for a multi-billion-dollar water injection scheme that is core to the development of Iraq's supergiant oilfields in the south, he added.

Kurdish and industry sources told Reuters earlier this month Total has been mulling whether to risk Baghdad's ire for some months.

Total confirmed its interest in Kurdistan as it unveiled higher profits for 2011, thanks to rising oil and gas prices, and announced plans to boost its investment budget. ■

Bloomberg

February 10, 2012

## Total Chief Says Kurdish Oil Contracts 'Better' Than Iraq

February 10, 2012 - By Tara Patel

Total SA (FP), Europe's third-largest oil company, is looking "very closely" at investment opportunities in Kurdistan where contract terms are superior to those on offer in Iraq, Chief Executive Officer Christophe de Margerie said.

"It's a place where there are important oil and gas reserves and contracts are better" than Iraq, de Margerie said today at a press conference in Paris. Total is looking to see whether there are "interesting" exploration blocks in Kurdistan, he said.

The authorities in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, home to about 40 percent of the country's 115 bil-

lion barrels of reserves, angered Baghdad by signing a contract with Exxon Mobil Corp. The central government has so far refused to recognize production-sharing agreements between foreign companies and the Kurds.

"Kurdistan is in Iraq and it's up to Iraqis to decide among themselves" whether agreements should be separate, de Margerie said.

Iraq plans to auction 12 exploration areas as part of its fourth bidding round. The concessions, seven for oil and five for gas, cover 90,700 square kilometers, according to an Oil Ministry statement in April. Total has signed contracts in previous bidding rounds.

The latest auction "doesn't appear very attractive," de Margerie said. "The reward for investment doesn't appear for the moment to be enough."

Companies operating in the Kurdish region are banned from participating in the planned auction. ●

# Why Russia supports Assad

Russia has some good reasons to question Western policies on Syria. It should also question its own.

## Dmitri Trenin

Two senior Russian officials, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Mikhail Fradkov, the director of Foreign Intelligence, have just been to Damascus.

Their mission was not to nudge Bashar al-Assad from power and offer him exile in Russia. Rather, the talk was about dialogue with the opposition, offering a referendum on a new constitution, and the Arab League resuming its "stabilizing" mission. Russia, for its part, would stand firm alongside China at the U.N. Security Council, preventing a formal condemnation of the Syrian regime, any outside military intervention, or any sanctions against it.

Coming so late in the game, the attempt at reconciliation is bound to fail. Syria's civil war has de facto begun, and it will not end soon. America, Europe, Turkey and the Gulf states have already given Assad a thumbs down.

But the Russian mediation might have had a chance if Lavrov and Fradkov had come to Damascus last summer, or even last fall, and kept coming in an exercise of shuttle diplomacy. Given Russia's role as Syria's traditional backer and arms supplier, Moscow might have been more successful as a peacemaker than Ankara. Today, Lavrov and Fradkov's mission looks more like a face-saving gesture.

Russia's stance on Syria is often explained in terms of Syria's importance to Moscow. It is true that Syria is positioned in the strategic heart of the Middle East, and that Moscow's links to the Assad family go back four decades.

None of this, however, should be exaggerated. Syria is not an ally; Tartus is a naval resupply facility rather than a naval base; and the total value of Russia's arms trade with Syria during the previous decade amounted to around \$1.5 billion, which makes Damascus Moscow's seventh-largest client.

To understand Moscow's attitude to Syria, and the sources of its disagreement with the West and a number of Arab states, one has to take a broader view.

Last year, Russia abstained in the Security Council on the Libya no-flight zone vote, thus allowing the resolution to pass. Soon what was billed as protection of innocent civilians from a massacre in Benghazi turned into NATO's offshore war against the Libyan government, which finally resulted in the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime and the killing of the dictator along with many of his supporters and probably a number of civilians. That NATO's military actions went way beyond the

terms of the U.N. resolution did not seem to bother Western governments.

The Russian government is openly conservative; it abhors revolutions. This, however, is more than a self-serving ideological stance. When the Kremlin — or Fradkov's office — looks at the Arab Awakening, they see democratization leading directly to Islamization.

If the West's historical analogy is Europe's 1848 or 1989, theirs is Russia's 1917. They cite recent election results in Tunisia and especially Egypt. They point out that post-Qaddafi Libya is chaotic, with a lot of the former regime's weaponry finding its way into unsavory hands. In their view, Syria's uprising could have even worse consequences in terms of sectarian violence and the potential to affect the country's neighbors, particularly Lebanon and Israel.

Revolutions are bad enough, in the Kremlin's view, but attempts to interfere in other countries' civil wars can only make things worse.

The Russians appreciate that the United States and other Western powers would only intervene militarily if they could sustain zero losses themselves, as in Libya. Syria, however, is a more difficult case. Arming the Free Syria Army and providing it with intelligence will not be enough to prevail over Assad's forces. A prospect of a wider war with Arab and Turkish participation looms on the horizon.

Such a war could only make sense if it were the first act of a more serious

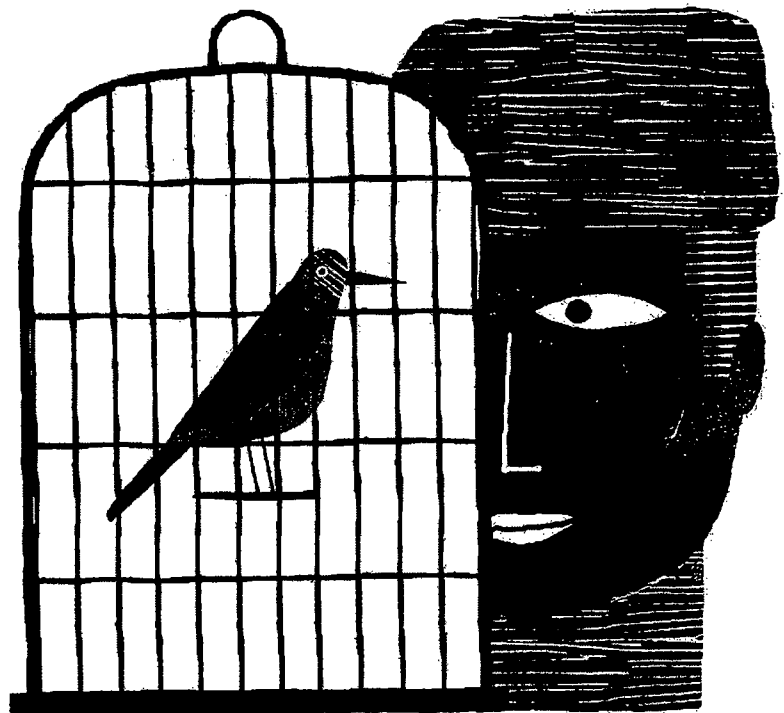
drama. Russians suspect that the real reason for the West's pressure on Damascus is to rob Tehran of its only ally in the region. Behind the activity of the Gulf States, particularly Qatar, in the Syrian issue Moscow sees the rising regional influence of Saudi Arabia, Iran's bitter rival in the region. Turkey's "neo-Ottoman" ambitions are also playing a role. What the Russians are most worried about, however, is that Israel may strike at Iran, dragging in the United States and thus precipitating a major war with Iran sometime this year.

Russian policy makers may have a point or two when they discuss other people's policies. They need, however, to step back and look at their own.

Delivering arms into a country going through civil war is damaging, both politically and morally. Confronting both America and Europe, even if Western policies are misguided, is clearly at odds with Russia's wider interests. Telling Qatar to shut up is not merely undiplomatic, but unwise. And openly quarreling with Turkey and Saudi Arabia has to be avoided.

To this, some would say that, having lost \$4 billion in Libyan arms and other contracts and facing the prospect of losing an equal amount in potential Syrian trade, Moscow has no other choice but to take a hard line. It will be a pity if, at the end of the day, this argument prevails.

*DMITRI TRENIN, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, is the author, most recently, of "Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story."*



CRISTOBAL SCHMAL

# U.S. and Israel at odds over Iran's atomic 'immunity zone'

WASHINGTON

BY MARK LANDLER  
AND DAVID E. SANGER

Amid mounting tensions over whether Israel will carry out a military strike against Iran's nuclear program, the United States and Israel remain at odds over a fundamental question: whether Iran's crucial nuclear facilities are

## NEWS ANALYSIS

about to become virtually impregnable.

The Israeli defense minister, Ehud Barak, coined the phrase "zone of immunity" to define the circumstances under which Israel would judge it could no longer hold off from an attack because Iran's effort to produce a bomb would be invulnerable to any Israeli strike. But judging when that moment will arrive has set off an intense debate with the Obama administration, whose officials counter that there are other ways to make Iran vulnerable.

Senior Israeli officials, including the foreign minister and leader of the Mossad, have traveled to Washington in recent weeks to make the case that this point is fast approaching. U.S. officials have made reciprocal visits to Jerusalem, arguing that Israel and the West should allow sanctions and covert actions to deter Iran's plans.

The Americans have also used the discussions to test their belief, based on a series of public statements by Israeli officials, that an Israeli strike against Iran could come as early as spring, according to an official familiar with the talks.

President Barack Obama tried to defuse arguments for military action in a telephone call last month with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, the substance of which was confirmed by a U.S. official who spoke only on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to describe the conversation.

While the two leaders have had an often contentious relationship over Middle East diplomacy, U.S. officials emerged from that exchange persuaded that Mr. Netanyahu was willing to give economic sanctions and other steps time to work.

The difference of opinion over Iran's nuclear "immunity" is critical because it plays into not just the timing — or bluffing — about a possible military strike, but also the calculations about how deeply and quickly sanctions against Iran must bite. If the Israeli argument is right, the question of how fast the Iranians can assemble a weapon becomes less important than whether there is any way to stop them.

"Zone of immunity" is an ill-defined term," said a senior U.S. official, expressing frustration that the Israelis are looking at the problem too narrowly, given the many kinds of pressure being placed on Tehran and the increasing evidence that far tougher sanctions are having an effect.

The Israelis have zeroed in on Iran's plan to put much of its uranium enrichment near Qum in an underground facility beneath so many layers of granite that even the Pentagon acknowledges it would be out of the reach of its best bunker-busting bombs. Once enrichment activities are under way at Qum, the Israelis argue, Iran could throw out U.N. inspectors and produce bomb-grade fuel without fear the facility would be destroyed.

At its core, the official said, the argument the Israelis make is that once the Iranians get an "impregnable breakout capability" — that is, a place that is protected from a military strike — "it makes no difference whether it will take Iran six months or a year or five years" to fabricate a nuclear weapon, he said.

The Americans have a very different view, according to a second senior official who has discussed the concept with Israelis.

He said that "there are many other options" to slow Iran's march to a completed weapon, like shutting off Iran's oil revenues, taking out facilities that supply centrifuge parts or singling out installations where the Iranians would turn the fuel into a weapon.

Administration officials cite this more complex picture in pressing the Israelis to give the latest sanctions a chance to inflict enough pain on the Iranian leadership to force it back to the negotiating table, or to make the decision that the

nuclear program is not worth the cost.

The Iranian currency has plunged, they note; its oil is piling up in storage tanks because it cannot find buyers, and there is growing evidence of fissures among the country's leadership.

After a period of doubt about Israel's intentions at the end of last year, administration officials said the two sides were now communicating better. Mr. Obama, they said, reflected that when he said in an interview on Sunday with NBC News, "I don't think that Israel has made a decision on what they need to do."

This is not the first time that the Israelis have invented a phrase that suggests a hard deadline before an attack. At the end of the George W. Bush administration, they said they could not allow Iran to go past "the point of no return." That phrase was also ill-defined, but seemed to suggest that once Iran had the know-how and the basic materials to make a bomb, it would be inevitable.

While nuclear experts believe Iran now has enough uranium to fuel four or more weapons, it would have to enrich it to bomb-grade levels, which would take months. Beyond that, Iran would have to produce a warhead that could fit atop an Iranian missile.

Still, Mr. Barak's theory of "immunity" has gained a lot of attention in recent weeks, complicating a debate charged with bellicose language — in Israel and Iran and among Republicans on the presidential campaign trail, where Mitt Romney and other candidates have pledged Israel full support in any military confrontation with Iran.

Disputes between the United States and Israel are inevitable, according to experts, given the radically different stakes of a nuclear Iran for a distant superpower and for a neighbor whose very existence the leaders in Tehran have pledged to eradicate.

U.S. officials also noted a distinction in the tone of Mr. Barak and Mr. Netanyahu, who does not publicly favor the phrase "zone of immunity." This week, a U.S. official noted, Mr. Netanyahu declared that on the topic of Iran, officials should just "shut up."

"I think that's good advice," the U.S. official said.



February 14, 2012

# Turkish officials aided Kurdish militants – prosecutor

By Daren Butler , Reuters

**I**STANBUL – A Turkish investigation of links between Kurdish activists and militants has uncovered evidence of state officials aiding the separatists, a prosecutor said on Monday, fuelling speculation about a power struggle within the security apparatus.

The statement from the Istanbul state prosecutor's office coincided with police raids across Turkey to detain around 100 people over alleged ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in the same investigation.

Underscoring security concerns, Turkish forces discovered around 150 kg (330 lb) of explosives and a remote-controlled detonating device inside a parked car in southeastern Turkey, officials said.

Monday's arrests came less than a week after prosecutors asked the head of the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) and his predecessor to testify over secret links between the PKK and the agency, which is controlled by Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan.

The government has moved to block the questioning of MIT operatives with a parliamentary bill requiring Erdogan's permission for such a move. At the weekend, the prosecutor who ordered their questioning was removed from the case.

However, Istanbul deputy chief prosecutor Fikret Secen said in a written statement defending the investigation that it was only directed at the actions of individual officials and not against government anti-terrorism policy.

"This investigation ... was launched due to evidence giving rise to suspicion that some state officials acted outside the duty given to them by the executive organ and aided the (militant) organisation in executing its operations," it said.

The head of MIT, Hakan Fidan, is close to Erdogan and the investigation is seen as exposing tensions between his organisation and elements within the police and judiciary.

Istanbul prosecutors have asked their Ankara counterparts to summon Fidan,



while detaining four other MIT officers for questioning but no action has been taken so far.

The prosecutor's investigation is focused on an organisation called the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which the PKK is alleged to have established with the aim of creating its own political system in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Around 150 politicians and activists are already being tried in the region's main city of Diyarbakir on charges of membership of an armed terrorist group and hundreds more people have been detained in related cases.

## 13 KILLED IN CLASHES

Security sources said those held on Monday were believed to be involved in bomb attacks and illegal protests and noted their detention came just two days before the February 15 anniversary of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's capture in 1999.

Officials say security forces are on high alert around Turkey fearing PKK attacks to mark the anniversary.

On Monday, Turkish troops killed 10 PKK fighters in a clash in Sirnak near the Iraqi border. Two soldiers were killed in the fighting. One PKK militant was also killed and another wounded in a separate fire-fight in Diyarbakir, security sources said.

Separately, security forces discovered around 150 kg of explosives and a remote-controlled detonator inside a parked car along the main road between the city of Mardin and Diyarbakir, in Turkey's turbulent and mainly Kurdish

southeast. Officials said the target of the bomb was likely an urban area in Turkey.

PKK militants have stepped up attacks on Turkish security forces over the last six months prompting retaliatory air raids on suspected PKK sanctuaries in the mountains of northern Iraq.

Turkish warplanes carried out strikes in northern Iraq over the weekend. There were no reports of casualties. The strikes were the second air raids in a month and come weeks after Turkish warplanes mistakenly killed 35 civilian smugglers.

The PKK, branded a terrorist organisation by Ankara, the EU and the United States, took up arms against the state in 1984 and more than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

## SECRET OSLO TALKS

Prosecutors are also believed to want to question MIT officials about secret talks they held in Oslo with PKK representatives. The contacts came to light last year through recordings on the Internet.

Some have interpreted the targeting of the MIT as a nationalist warning to Erdogan against seeking any negotiated settlement with the PKK. Erdogan is currently recovering from his second bout of intestinal surgery in three months.

Talks between the state and PKK were halted after Erdogan's AK Party won a third term in office last June with around 50 percent of the votes. The PKK has returned to fighting using northern Iraq as a refuge for operations in southeastern Turkey.

Erdogan, who has Islamist roots but whose AK party includes centre-right and even strongly nationalist elements, has pressed reforms in Turkey that have shaken the political establishment since he was first elected in 2002. He has cut back the influence of the army and shaken up a conservative judiciary.

Some have suggested an influential Islamic movement, headed by Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim theologian living in the United States, could be seeking to clip Erdogan's wings. ■

# Now, Iraqi Sunnis are arming Syrians

FALLUJA, IRAQ

Those fighting Assad get help as allies across the border return the favor

BY TIM ARANGO  
AND DURAJD ADNAN

Not so long ago, Syrians worked to send weapons and fighters into Iraq to help Sunnis fighting a sectarian conflict; suddenly, it is the other way around.

A belated celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday on Saturday on the outskirts of this western Iraqi city quickly took on the trappings of a rally for Syrian rebels. Young boys waved the old green, black and white flag Syria adopted in the 1930s after declaring independence from the French. Others collected money to send aid and weapons to the fighters opposing President Bashar al-Assad's government.

"I wish I could go there with my gun and fight," Sheik Hamid al-Hais, a tribal leader in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, said at his compound.

It is increasingly clear that the sectarian war in Syria is becoming the regional conflict that analysts have long feared. The rush of recent events — including bombings and assassinations in Damascus and Aleppo, and intensifying violence in northern Lebanon coming directly out of the sectarian hostilities in Syria — suggests that the Assad government now also faces antagonists across its borders.

Like Iraq and Afghanistan before it, analysts say, Syria is likely to become the training ground for a new era of international conflict, and jihadists are already signing up. This past weekend, Al Qaeda's ideological leadership and, more troublingly, the more mainstream Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, called for jihadists around the world to fight Mr. Assad's government.

Nowhere is the cross-border nature of sectarian hostilities more clear than in Iraq's western desert, where Sunni Arabs are beginning to rally to the cause of the Syrian opposition and, in the process, perhaps strengthen their hand in dealings with an antagonistic Shiite-led national government in Baghdad.

A weapons dealer who operates in Anbar, who said he goes by the alias Ahmed al-Masri, said: "Five months ago, I was told that the Syrian brothers are in need of weapons. I started to buy the weapons from the same guys that I

previously sold to — the fighters of Anbar and Mosul. I used to bring them from Syria; now it's the other way around."

The man said he was selling mortars, grenades and rifles, and that his contact in Syria was also an Iraqi. In some instances, he said Iraqis were giving away weapons, and in those cases he charged money only to transport them across the border.

"It's a good business, but it's not easy money," he said. "It's risky, but this is life."

Tribal leaders and security officials describe a small but increasing flow of weapons to Syria from Anbar Province and areas around Mosul, the northern city that is a headquarters for Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. For some weapons smugglers, the price of an automatic rifle has increased dramatically — to \$2,000 from about \$300, according to one account.

Abdul Rahim al-Shammari, head of the Provincial Council's security committee in Mosul, said explosives and weapons were being smuggled through Rabia, a border village. A weapons trader in the area, who spoke anonymously because of the nature of his work, described smuggling weapons parts in empty cigarette cartons and said he recently made a \$4,000 profit selling a PKC rifle. Across the border, he said, some Syrians were trading sheep and cows for weapons.

The sympathies in Anbar for the Syrian rebels are born of centuries-old tribal connections and a shared religion.

"We have common tribes and a common border," said Sheik Ali Hatem al-Suleiman, interviewed recently at his mansion in Baghdad, where he keeps a pet lion penned in the front yard. Mr. Hatem described Mr. Assad as a "butcher" and said that men in Anbar, his ancestral home, were already trying to help the opposition. "Yes, they are giving weapons; they have to," he said, adding that Anbar tribal leaders were to meet this week to discuss ways to support the rebels.

Meanwhile, Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, whose membership has declined substantially in recent years, is trying to take advantage of the violence in Syria. A recent report by McClatchy Newspapers quoted unidentified U.S. officials as saying that Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia was behind two deadly bombings in Damascus and probably also the bombing on Friday in Aleppo. In interviews, U.S. officials in Baghdad said they believed that was likely but had no evidence to confirm it.

On Saturday, Ayman al-Zawahri, the

ideological leader of Al Qaeda worldwide, issued a statement urging Muslims in the region — he specifically mentioned Iraq — to support the uprising, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadist communications.

In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a call to arms of its own, calling it a duty for Muslims everywhere to oppose Mr. Assad's government in Syria in a holy war, using any means necessary.

"Supporting the Syrian people and Free Syrian Army is a duty, as they are facing the injustice and oppression of the regime," the group said on its Web site.

On its Web site, the Islamic State of Iraq, front group for Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, has stated, "A lot of Syrians fought side by side with the Islamic State of Iraq, and it is good news to hear about the arrival of Iraqi fighters to fight with their brethren in Syria."

The group has also advised Syrian rebels to use the type of roadside bombs that proved so deadly in the Iraq war.

Some leaders in Anbar, where Al Qaeda has very little support, insisted that their region's assistance to Syria is only humanitarian. Officials in Falluja have said they are establishing a camp in the expectation of refugees.

"The people here want to help the people of Syria, not with weapons, but with whatever other help we can give them," said Faisal al-Esawi, a member of the Anbar Provincial Council.

"We need to stand next to the Syrian people, just like they stood next to us," he said, referring to Syria's open acceptance of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees during the war.

The Shiite-dominated central government in Baghdad has walked a fine line with its policy toward Syria, offering outright support neither to the Assad government nor to the opposition.

"We are immediate neighbors," said Hoshyar Zebari, the Iraqi foreign minister. "It's like Mexico for the United States. With a change in Syria, everyone fears the spillover."

"This doesn't mean we support Assad's regime," he said. "We can't really oppose the Syrian people."

Iranian influence also factors into how Iraq calculates its Syria policy. The Iranian government is perhaps the closest friend of the Assad government, and Iraq does not want to alienate Iran, which exerts a degree of political control over the Iraqi leaders and backs militias in Iraq.

There is also the fear that if Syria collapses, Iran will compensate for losing an ally in Syria by expanding its influence over Iraqi affairs.

In Anbar, the anger toward the central government's Syria policy is palpable.

Hours before the gathering Saturday in Falluja, a similar event was held at a soccer stadium in Ramadi.

In celebrating the birth of the Prophet

Muhammad, attendees also waved the version of the Syrian flag in use before the Assad family assumed power.

"We're here to support Syria and we want to stop the bloodshed," said Sheik Muhammad Hamis Abu Risha. "We

want the Iraqi government to support the people, not the killers. They are helping the Syrian government kill those Muslims."

Zaid Thaker, Yasir Ghazi and Omar al-Jawshy contributed reporting from Baghdad; Neil MacFarquhar and Rania Kadri from Beirut; and employees of The New York Times from Falluja, Ramadi and Mosul.

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

FEBRUARY 15, 2012

# Next up: Turkey vs. Iran

The oldest rivalry in the Middle East takes on a new intensity as tensions mount in Syria and Iraq.

## Soner Cagaptay

Hardly a day goes by that an Iranian official doesn't threaten Turkey. Take for instance Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi's recent warning to Ankara: "Turkey must radically rethink its policies on Syria, the NATO missile shield and promoting Muslim secularism in the Arab world, or face trouble from its own people and neighbors."

This is no surprise. Turkish-Iranian rivalry goes back centuries, to the Ottoman sultans and the Safavid shahs. It briefly subsided in the 20th century, when Turkey became an inward-looking nation-state, leaving a vacuum in the Middle East. In the past decade, though, Turkey's economic growth and emergence as a regional giant under the Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., have revived its standing. From the Syrian uprising to Iraq's sectarian convulsions to Iran's push for nuclear power, Ankara is the main challenger to Tehran's desire to dominate the region.

Following the A.K.P.'s ascent to power in 2002, the Turks were, initially, not interested in competition with the Iranians and relations between Ankara and Tehran seemed quite warm. Both countries defended the Palestinian cause. Ankara did not appear threatened by Iran's nuclear project. High-level visits between the two governments became routine and trade boomed.

Meanwhile, shared objections to the Iraq War appeared to bind the Turks and the Iranians. Iran even stopped harboring rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., which it had encouraged to attack Turkey because of Ankara's

pro-Western stance. After the Iraq War, Tehran began bombing the very P.K.K. camps it had earlier permitted on its territory, winning points with the Turks.

Then came the Arab Spring. The uprising in Syria put Ankara and Tehran at polar opposite ends of the regional and political spectrum. Given its democratic traditions, Turkey supported the revolution and sided with the protesters; authoritarian Iran continued its support for the Assad regime and backed his brutal crackdown on civilians.

The Syrian uprising has become a zero-sum game: Either Bashar al-Assad will win, or the demonstrators will triumph. Likewise, it has become a

proxy war between Tehran and Ankara, in which there will be only one winner.

Hence, all is fair game now between Ankara and Tehran. Encouraged by Iran, Assad ignored Turkish advice to reform. Turkey is now supporting, hosting, and reportedly arming the Syrian opposition. Iran's response has been to strike at Turkey by once again supporting the P.K.K., which has launched dozens of deadly attacks, killing more than 150 Turks since the summer of 2011.

Competition over Syria has also mobilized fault lines in Iraq, where Turkey and Iran have been supporting opposing camps. Since Iraq's first democratic elections in 2005, Iran has supported the Shiite-backed Dawa party of Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, while Turkey has backed the secular pan-Iraqi movement of Ayad Allawi. Following months of contention after the 2010 elections, Maliki formed a government in Baghdad, scoring a victory for Tehran.

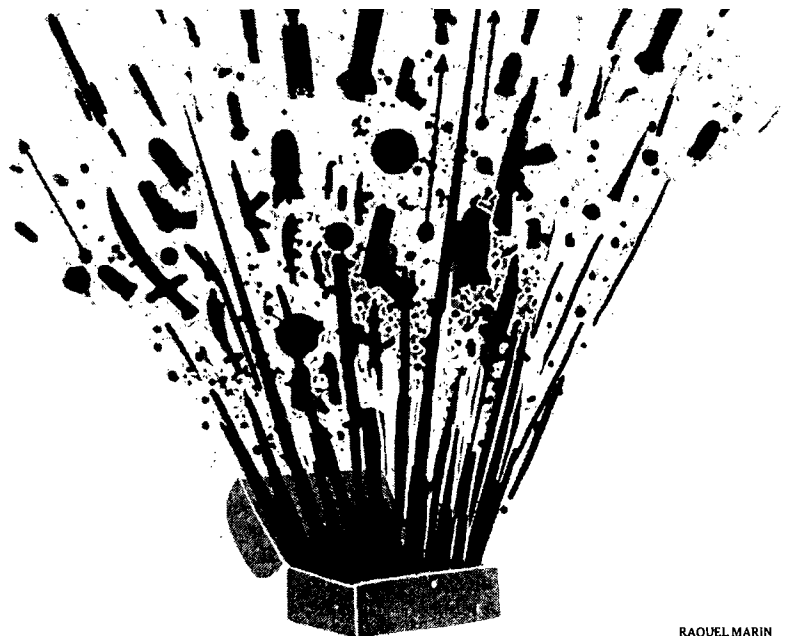
Maliki has cracked down on Ankara-backed factions, issuing an arrest warrant for Tariq al-Hashimi, Iraq's vice president and leader of the country's Sunni community. Hashimi has taken refuge in the Kurdish-controlled part of Iraq. The Kurds, who have until recently despised the Sunni Arabs for their persecution of the Kurds under Saddam Hussein, are now making amends. They are also closely aligning with Turkey to balance Iranian influence inside Iraq.

Turkish-Iranian rivalry in the Fertile Crescent has opened up a can of worms: Iranian leaders attack Turkey's "secular Islam" and threaten to "strike Turkey" should Ankara act on its commitment to support NATO's missile defense project by placing radars on its territory.

Turkey, anchored in NATO and oriented toward the Middle East, is a greater threat to Iranian interests than the merely pro-Western Turkey of a decade ago. There is a chance that Iran might become even more aggressive: Some analysts suggest that the Iranian Quds Force, the special-operations unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, might be connecting with the P.K.K. in northern Iraq to target both Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds.

Both countries are slowly showing their hands in the region's oldest power game. In the Middle East, there is room for one shah or one sultan, but not both a shah and a sultan.

SONER CAGAPTAY is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



RAQUEL MARIN



**Le Monde**  
Mardi 14 février 2012

# A Homs, l'Armée syrienne libre tient tête aux forces régulières

**P**as de répit pour les damnés de Homs. Le bombardement de la « capitale de la révolution syrienne » se poursuit sans discontinuer depuis dix jours. Commencé le 3 février, à la veille du vote du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur un projet de résolution condamnant la répression menée par le régime du président Bachar Al-Assad – un texte finalement bloqué par le double veto sino-russe, le pilonnage des quartiers aux mains de l'opposition armée par les forces loyalistes a fait 23 morts supplémentaires dimanche 12 février.

Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, basé à Londres, le bilan des violences dans la troisième ville de Syrie se chiffre à 500 morts depuis le 4 février, en grande majorité des civils.

Vues de l'étranger, ces statistiques macabres, qui gonflent jour après jour, donnent l'impression d'un écrasement lent mais inexorable des manifestants syriens et de leur branche militaire, l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), par la machi-

ne de guerre du régime baasiste. Les déclarations des représentants de l'opposition syrienne, qui s'alarment à intervalles réguliers du lancement d'une grande offensive terrestre contre la ville, entretiennent cette idée : celle d'une lente agonie et d'un coup de grâce imminent.

Sur le terrain cependant, même si le calvaire enduré par la population civile est indéniable, l'équilibre des forces semble plus complexe. De retour à Paris après avoir passé un mois à Homs pour « Le Monde », le photjournaliste Mani met l'accent sur la montée en puissance de l'ASL, qui non seulement contrôle des quartiers entiers comme Baba Amro (sud-ouest), Khaldiyyé (nord), Bayada (nord-est) et la vieille ville (centre-est), mais parvient peu à peu à étendre ses positions, au détriment des forces régulières.

« Lors de mon premier séjour à Homs, en octobre, les combattants de l'ASL qui étaient présents à Baba Amro, restaient planqués la plupart du temps, raconte-t-il. Désormais, ils ne se cachent plus. Ils ont

aménagé des positions avec des sacs de sable sur tous les axes du quartier et ils ont des guetteurs dans les immeubles qui l'environnent. L'armée syrienne verrouille Baba Amro mais compte tenu de la très forte implantation de l'ASL, je doute qu'elle ait les moyens de lui reprendre cette zone. Si elle lançait une offensive terrestre, ses pertes seraient très lourdes. Certains activistes disent même que l'armée n'ose plus envoyer de soldats sur le terrain de peur que confrontés à la réalité de l'affrontement, ils ne choisissent de désertir aussitôt. »

D'avantage qu'à une préparation d'artillerie, destinée à faciliter l'entrée des troupes dans les bastions de la contestation, les bombardements des dix derniers jours s'apparentent, selon Mani, à « une punition collective ». L'armée syrienne chercherait ainsi à se venger des opérations de plus en plus audacieuses menées par l'ASL.

Le bombardement de Khaldiyyé, le 3 février, qui causa un véritable bain de sang – le nombre de morts estimé initialement à plus de 200, s'élèverait, selon une source locale, à 138 –, avait ainsi été précédé d'une attaque des forces de l'opposition contre une clinique utilisée comme place-forte par les loyalistes. Une dizaine d'officiers et de soldats avaient été capturés dans cette opération.

## « Les insurgés ont reçu le soutien de nombreux habitants »

**Mani**  
photjournaliste pour « Le Monde »

Quelques heures après le carnage de Khaldiyyé, l'ASL marquait à nouveau des points, en neutralisant le barrage militaire d'Al-Qahira, à quelques centaines de mètres du site du bombardement. Deux blindés ont été détruits, dont les images calcinées ont fait depuis le tour de la toile. Dans la nuit du dimanche 5 au lundi 6 février, les soldats de l'ASL menaient un autre

assaut spectaculaire contre les bâtiments de la Sécurité criminelle et de la Poste, dans le quartier de Bayada, au nord de Khaldiyyé. Ces deux sites abritaient des snipers pro-régime, dont les tirs avaient fait de nombreuses victimes dans la population civile.

« Durant cette opération, les insurgés ont reçu le soutien de nombreux habitants qui leur ont amené de l'essence, ce qui leur a permis de confectionner des cocktails Molotov qu'ils ont jetés sur les positions loyalistes, souligne Mani. En général, la population est très favorable à l'ASL. Elle est fière de ces combattants, qui constituent leur unique protection. » Obligés de se retirer sous le feu des mortiers adverses, les insurgés ont repris le dessus peu après et assurent désormais la garde des deux bâtiments. « Ils empêchent les riverains de piller la Poste, précise Mani. Ils ont surpris l'un d'eux avec un téléviseur sous le bras. Ils l'ont détruit sur le champ. »

L'efficacité croissante de l'ASL, aurait, selon Mani, un effet boule-de-neige. Elle inciterait un nombre croissant de Syriens de Homs à rejoindre ses rangs, aussi bien des opposants qui se tenaient jusque-là à l'écart de la résistance armée, que des soldats qui font le choix de désertir. « On entend parler de soldats qui partent en permission et qui ne reviennent jamais, dit le photjournaliste au « Monde ». Dans les combats, il est arrivé que des soldats et des officiers négocient leur reddition et leur ralliement à l'ASL. Ces combattants et la population des quartiers insurgés ont un moral de fer. Ils ne se soumettront jamais. »

La résistance de l'opposition promet de se compliquer dans les prochains jours, compte tenu de pénuries en produits alimentaires de base. Les quartiers aux mains des insurgés ne reçoivent quasiment plus de farine et le prix du pain s'est envolé. Un convoi du Croissant Rouge a distribué, dimanche 12 février, de la nourriture, des médicaments et des couvertures à plusieurs milliers d'habitants touchés par les violences. ■

**BENJAMIN BARTHE**

## La Ligue arabe appelle à soutenir l'opposition

CONSTATANT son impuissance à infléchir le régime syrien, la Ligue arabe a coupé les ponts avec Damas, dimanche 12 février. L'instance panarabe, encore présidée pour quelques semaines par le Qatar, a demandé à ses membres de rompre « toutes les formes de coopération diplomatique avec les représentants du régime syrien dans les Etats, les instances et les conférences internationales ». Les pays du Conseil de coopération du Golfe pourraient reconnaître dans les tout prochains jours le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale plateforme de l'opposition syrienne en exil, comme « représentant légitime du peuple syrien ».

La Ligue va, en outre, « ouvrir des canaux de communication avec l'opposition syrienne et lui fournir toutes les formes de soutien politique et matériel ». Cela pourrait autoriser ceux qui le souhaitent à financer et armer la branche armée de l'opposition, regroupée au sein de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). La Tunisie a proposé d'organiser, le 24 février, « une conférence des amis de la Syrie », dont la Turquie avait lancé l'idée.

Parallèlement, la Ligue arabe a mis fin à sa mission d'observateur, qui a échoué à faire respecter le plan de sortie de crise mis au point avec la Syrie en novembre 2011. Malgré les veto russe et chinois au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, la Ligue arabe revient à la charge en demandant au Conseil « d'adopter une résolution pour la formation d'une force de maintien de la paix arabo-onusienne conjointe ».

L'initiative a peu de chances d'aboutir étant donné la farouche opposition de Moscou à toute intervention extérieure. Arabes et Occidentaux vont par ailleurs tenter de faire condamner Damas, cette fois à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU, où le veto n'existe pas. Mais l'adoption d'une telle résolution n'aurait qu'une portée symbolique.

Sans surprise, Damas a refusé « catégoriquement » ces décisions, après avoir accusé les pays arabes d'être à la solde de l'Occident.

Enfin, le chef d'Al-Qaida, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, et les Frères musulmans jordaniens ont appelé au djihad (guerre sainte) contre le régime Assad. ■

**SERVICE INTERNATIONAL**

# La révolution syrienne menacée par les djihadistes

**Nora Benkorich**

Doctorante à l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)

L'assassinat, vendredi 10 février, à Damas, du général de brigade et médecin Issa Al-Khawli, directeur de l'hôpital militaire Ahmad Hamish, laisse planer l'hypothèse d'une entrée en lice des djihadistes en Syrie, qui serait de mauvais augure pour le mouvement d'insurrection pacifiste et pro-démocrate. D'une part, elle risquerait de conduire la communauté internationale, qui s'est déjà montrée pusillanime à l'idée de condamner la brutalité de la répression du régime, à faire un nouveau pas en arrière.

D'autre part, elle donnerait au pouvoir l'alibi dont il a besoin pour justifier un usage accru de la violence. A ce jour, l'assassinat d'Issa Al-Khawli n'a pas encore été revendiqué. Les médias officiels ont affirmé, conformément à l'argumentaire de Damas, que des « groupes terroristes armés » originaires d'Homs, Hama et Deraa étaient derrière l'opération – ce qui permet au passage de légitimer la répression de ces trois bastions de la contestation. Bien que cette allégation soit pourfendue par la plupart des milieux d'opposition syriens, qui accusent le régime de fabriquer des attentats pour travestir leur révolte, la menace est à prendre au sérieux. Pourquoi ?

Le jour de l'exécution d'Al-Khawli, des Américains ont déclaré à des journalistes du groupe de presse McClatchy qu'ils étaient convaincus qu'Al-Qaida portait la responsabilité de deux attentats survenus à Damas et de l'attaque-suicide de vendredi à Alep. D'après un rapport des services de renseignements américains, l'organisation djihadiste terroriste chercherait à accroître son influence, émoussée par la mort de son ancien chef Oussama Ben Laden, au Pakistan, en mai 2011.

Deux jours plus tard, le leader d'Al-Qaida, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, a accrédité ces propos en lançant un appel aux musulmans du monde entier à soutenir la rébellion syrienne et à s'investir davantage dans le combat armé « contre le régime cancéreux et pernicieux ». Cet appel, diffusé dans une vidéo qui circule sur YouTube depuis

dimanche, constitue la première exhortation explicite de l'organisation à prendre une part active au soulèvement syrien. Jusqu'à présent, elle est restée à la marge du « printemps arabe ».

Plus étonnamment, les modalités de l'assassinat d'Al-Khawli ne sont pas sans rappeler les méthodes employées par les djihadistes de l'avant-garde combattante pour éliminer des centaines de personnalités proches du régime. Cette organisation, convaincue que seul le « *djihad armé dans la voie de Dieu* » pouvait faire tomber le « régime infidèle du tyran Assad » (père), a mis en œuvre de nombreux attentats contre des symboles du pouvoir entre 1976 et 1982. Sa première opération, lancée en février 1976, était précisément un « assassinat ciblé ».

**« L'opposition, tant civile que militaire, devra se démarquer de ce mouvement, voire le combattre »**

Dans la ligne de mire : Muhammad Gharra, militaire, alaouite et baasiste – les trois critères de sélection établis par les djihadistes –, chef de la branche des services de renseignements d'Hama. Le modus operandi : il a été assassiné devant chez lui par une cellule de trois hommes, appelée *ousra* (famille), menée par un émir (prince) chargé d'exécuter la cible pendant que les deux autres se partageaient les missions de surveillance et de retrait. Issa Al-Khawli, alaouite, baasiste et gradé de l'armée syrienne, répond aux « critères de sélection » des djihadistes de l'avant-garde combattante.

Selon l'agence de presse officielle Sana, il a été assassiné par un groupe composé de trois hommes. L'information a été confirmée par l'opposant Nizar Nayyuf, qu'on ne peut soupçonner de sympathie pour le régime. Dans sa revue en ligne *Al-Haqiqa* (« La Vérité »), ce rescapé des prisons du Baas, qu'il a pu quitter pour des raisons de santé – il a failli mourir d'un cancer –, rapporte les propos de témoins oculaires affirmant que la victime a été abattue devant son domicile sous les yeux de son épouse et de ses enfants, par un groupe de trois hommes se répartissant les rôles d'exécution, de surveillance et de

retrait.

Le plus troublant est que l'opération intervient deux semaines après l'annonce de la création du Front de la victoire du peuple syrien, organisation djihadiste dirigée par un certain Abou Muhammad Al-Golani. Hostile à l'ingérence des Occidentaux qui « se présentent en sauveurs du peuple opprimé alors qu'ils tuent des musulmans partout », des Turcs vus comme « les nouveaux alliés des Américains », de la Ligue arabe décrite comme un instrument des Américains pour « donner une

chance au régime de résoudre la crise, quitte à tuer tous les citoyens syriens » et de l'Iran « qui cherche à restaurer l'Empire perse », ce mouvement estime que « le seul moyen de sauver la nation de l'égarement est le retour des djihadistes ».

Rappelons que l'action armée des djihadistes de l'avant-garde combattante a servi d'alibi au régime de Hafez Al-Assad non seulement pour annihiler tous les rivaux gênants du Baas – les Frères musulmans, les nassériens et les communistes, etc. –, mais aussi pour rallier les minorités pétrifiées par le discours sectaire des djihadistes, et un large pan de la majorité sunnite hostile à leur discours extrémiste, à sa cause. Si elle veut préserver sa « révolution pacifique », l'opposition, tant civile que militaire, devra se démarquer de ce mouvement, voire le combattre en le renvoyant dos à dos avec le régime, au risque d'être jetée dans le même panier comme de des djihadistes, comme par le passé. ■

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LE FIGARO

mardi 14 février 2012

# Israël: l'option d'une attaque contre l'Iran se précise

## Les Israéliens débattent surtout de la nécessité d'informer l'allié américain avant de frapper les sites nucléaires.

MARC HENRY  
JÉRUSALEM

**MOYEN-ORIENT** La guerre que se livrent en secret Israël et l'Iran a connu lundi un nouvel épisode. Benyamin Nétanyahou a accusé Téhéran d'avoir manigancé deux attentats visant des voitures des ambassades de l'État hébreu à New Delhi et en Géorgie, qui ont fait un blessé. « *L'Iran, qui est derrière ces atta-*



« **L'Iran est le plus grand propagateur du terrorisme dans le monde** »

BENYAMIN NÉTANYAHOU

ques, est le plus grand propagateur du terrorisme dans le monde », a lancé le premier ministre.

Ces déclarations illustrent l'extrême tension actuelle entre les deux pays. La probabilité de frappes militaires contre l'Iran n'est plus mise en doute par grand monde en Israël. L'inconnue porte plutôt sur le calendrier, la grande question étant de savoir si l'État hébreu peut se permettre d'attaquer seul les installations nucléaires iraniennes,

sans le feu vert au moins tacite de Barack Obama.

En attendant, les deux pays fourbisent leurs armes. Téhéran affirme que le Mossad, l'agence de renseignements israélienne, serait à l'origine de l'assassinat en deux ans, sur le territoire iranien, de cinq savants atomistes et d'un général responsable du programme de développement de missiles à longue portée. L'État hébreu est également montré du doigt pour une campagne de sabotage informatique, qui aurait permis de mettre hors service des centaines de centrifugeuses utilisées pour enrichir l'uranium. Selon des experts étrangers, le Mossad, en attaquant sur plusieurs fronts, aurait permis de retarder de plusieurs années le programme nucléaire iranien.

### Éviter une « nouvelle Shoah »

Mais tous les responsables israéliens admettent qu'il ne s'agit que d'une tactique de « retardement ». Autrement dit, malgré tous les « incidents » et des sanctions internationales de plus en plus dures, les Iraniens devraient produire leurs premières bombes atomiques d'ici à un an environ. Selon les médias, Benyamin Nétanyahou et Ehoud Barak, son ministre de la Défense, estiment, dans ces

conditions, qu'Israël doit attaquer pour éviter une « nouvelle Shoah ».

Cette position ne fait pas l'unanimité. Pour lancer une attaque, le chef du gouvernement doit obtenir le soutien de la majorité des 14 membres du cabinet de sécurité, ce qui n'est pas acquis pour le moment. Autre condition : l'appui sans réserve du chef d'état-major, le général Benny Gantz. Or, dans ce cas aussi, il ne semble pas que le premier ministre soit totalement sûr de son fait. Seule certitude : le précédent patron de l'armée, le général Gaby Ashkenazi, était hostile à une offensive qu'Israël mènerait seul.

Les commentateurs sont également très partagés. Les « modérés » redoutent une crise avec le grand allié américain si l'État hébreu décide d'agir sans en informer au préalable Washington. De plus, les responsables militaires prévoient qu'en cas d'attaque contre l'Iran, Israël doive s'attendre à devenir la cible de milliers de roquettes et de missiles tirés à la fois par les islamistes palestiniens du Hamas, à partir de la bande de Gaza au sud, et par Hezbollah libanais, voire la Syrie de Bachar el-Assad au nord.

Pour tenter de calmer le jeu et éviter de paniquer l'opinion publique, Benyamin Nétanyahou a ordonné la semaine dernière à ses ministres et aux généraux de faire silence dans les rangs à propos de l'Iran. Sa consigne a été respectée. Mais ce mutisme officiel ne rend les préparatifs guerriers que plus crédibles. ■

LE FIGARO

vendredi 17 février 2012

éditorial

par **Pierre Rousselin**  
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## Syrie: un conflit qui va durer



En Syrie, la violence redouble. Le régime est embarqué dans une opération de reconquête des zones dont le contrôle lui échappait. Tous les moyens sont bons. À l'abri du protecteur russe, Bachar el-Assad n'a rien à craindre. Les bilans sanglants vont se succéder et l'opposition devra survivre en attendant des jours meilleurs. L'impuissance occidentale est manifeste. Devant l'ampleur du carnage, une réponse devrait s'imposer, ne serait-ce que pour des raisons humanitaires, les hôpitaux n'étant

même plus accessibles aux victimes de la répression. Mais la voie du Conseil de sécurité est fermée et il n'y aura donc ni Casques bleus, ni couloirs humanitaires, ni zones protégées.

À ce compte-là, le pouvoir peut reprendre la main. Il le fera d'autant plus que les défections sont restées limitées et que la cohésion de l'appareil sécuritaire est loin d'être atteinte. Les ressources de sa sauvagerie sont sans limites.

À plus longue échéance, les choses se présentent autrement. La rébellion dure depuis trop longtemps, a subi trop de pertes

et suscité trop de solidarités pour être écrasée par les chars. Avec le temps, l'opposition se militarise et se radicalise. Cela n'a pas échappé à al-Qaida. Son chef Ayman al-Zawahiri avait à peine appelé au djihad en Syrie que des attentats étaient attribués à l'organisation terroriste qui cherche à profiter de la déstabilisation du pays.

Isolé dans le monde arabe, fragilisé par les sanctions internationales, le régime de Bachar el-Assad est, à terme, condamné. Son sort ne dépend pas seulement du rapport de forces dans le pays mais s'inscrit dans le « grand jeu » qui traverse la région. Dans un monde arabe en effervescence, les puissances sunnites, soutenues par les capitales occidentales, cherchent à faire reculer l'Iran chiite. En raison de sa situation géographique, la Syrie est une pièce maîtresse dans un conflit aux enjeux multiples. Cela n'annonce pas une issue rapide ■

# Kurdish conflict takes toll on Turkey's image

By Yasemin Ergin

Special to The Washington Times

**I**STANBUL — Turkey's regional status as a democratic role model is being threatened by the Muslim country's 30-year conflict with Kurds, which now is pushing Turkey toward violent upheaval.

Turkish warplanes on Sunday bombed suspected Kurdish rebel targets in northern Iraq in the second cross-border airstrike in less than a week.

Emma Sinclair-Webb of Human Rights Watch in Istanbul said Turkey's actions are undermining its prestige.

"Unless Turkey can really tackle the Kurdish issue in a more constructive way and guarantee minority rights, it will always be compromised internationally," she said. "Its regional role cannot be as a model, while there are those very burning issues."

Turkey's political, economic and cultural progress over the past decade has inspired emerging governments in the Middle East.

A poll conducted in 16 Arab countries by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Turkey's leading think tank, found that 78 percent of respondents regarded Turkey as a role model for the coexistence of religion and democracy.

That view often is echoed by leaders in Europe and Washington. Turkey, a NATO member, is a key U.S. ally and crucial strategic partner in the region.

Turkey's popularity abroad belies a brutal interethnic struggle that some say is pushing the country toward renewed conflict in its predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces and home of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, known by its Turkish acronym PKK.

## INCREASING VIOLENCE

An underground organization designated as a terrorist group by the United States and Europe, the PKK has fought a guerrilla war against the Turkish military for the past 28 years. Its aim is autonomy and political and cultural rights for the Kurdish people.

After years of relative quiet, last year was one of the bloodiest in the recent history of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, analysts say.

Over recent months, hundreds have been killed in clashes between Kurdish rebels and government troops in Turkey's southeast and during cross-border raids into northern Iraq. The upsurge in violence has shattered hopes for a peaceful solution that

has been in the works for the past seven years.

The broad support for the PKK among Turkey's Kurds, who represent about 20 percent of the population, stems from the government's pursuit of a strict assimilation policy for decades. It has cracked down on Kurds for using their own language, listening to Kurdish music or wearing traditional Kurdish garb.

Since 2005, the ruling Justice and Development Party, known by its Turkish acronym AKP, had been making concessions to the Kurds, slowly acknowledging their ethnic identity. In late 2009, the government launched a "Kurdish opening" aimed at resolving the conflict through political means.

It opened a 24-hour state-run Kurdish-language television channel and promised other reforms to end discrimination. A second initiative, started in 2010, included secret talks with PKK leaders in a groundbreaking and bold step, analysts say.

The moves toward reconciliation came to a halt after PKK militants began launching strikes in mid-2011 on Turkish soldiers and police.

"There is not a single party you can blame for the uptick in violence," said Henri Barkey, who specializes in Turkish affairs at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa.

"Whenever there was a step taken toward a political solution, a spectacular PKK attack undermined this process. The initiative of 2009 was mismanaged by the government. It did not prepare the public, and it did not consult the Kurdish leaders, so it was bound to collapse."

A new peace initiative now would be even more difficult to implement, said Fuat Keyman, director of the Istanbul Policy Center at Turkey's Sabanci University.

"The government has adopted an increasingly hard-line and condescending stance toward the Kurds," he said. "The AKP has lost support even in the parts of the Kurdish population that used to vote for it."

Mr. Keyman referred to attacks such as the Dec. 29 airstrike by the Turkish army in the Uludere district near the Iraqi border. The raid was aimed at suspected PKK militants, but killed 34 Kurdish villagers, including 17 children.

## POLITICAL REPRESSION

Turkey's ruling party described the bombing as an "unfortunate operational accident." Amnesty International has

expressed concern over the lack of an investigation.

Eren Keskin, a Turkish-Kurdish lawyer and human rights activist, said Turkey's failure to provide justice in the Uludere case is characteristic of the state's treatment of minorities.

"The Uludere bombing killed 34 young, innocent Kurds in one go," she said.

"The incident occurred two days before New Year's Eve. If it had been Turkish soldiers who died, all celebrations would have been canceled and national mourning would have been declared. But the victims were Kurds, so life went on as usual."

Last year, the sharp escalation in violence was accompanied by growing political repression, including a massive crackdown on pro-Kurdish media and arbitrary arrests of thousands of Kurdish activists, intellectuals and politicians.

Ongoing operations against suspected members of the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), an illegal political organization with direct links to the PKK, are troubling human rights observers who say that people are being arrested for their political opinions and personal connections rather than on any evidence of providing logistical or material support to the rebels.

"What has emerged in the last year is a serious clampdown on legal Kurdish politics," said Human Rights Watch's Ms. Sinclair-Webb.

"Turkish law, as it stands, allows people to be prosecuted under terrorism laws because of their networks of association. It's a witch hunt against particular political circles."

Critics of the AKP say that in attacking Kurdish civil society, the administration is repeating mistakes made by the government in the 1990s, an especially violent and repressive era in Turkish history.

The situation is bleaker than ever, said Ms. Keskin, who has defended minority rights in Turkey for almost 25 years and has been jailed several times for her criticism of the army and the government.

"I have witnessed terrible things in Turkey in the past 25 years: political assassinations, armed assaults and torture in prisons," she said.

"But in all these years, I have never seen rows of people being arrested on such arbitrary and weak charges as today."

Ms. Keskin said she thinks the Turkish leadership lacks the will to solve the conflict and protect minority rights. Turkey's Western allies need to be more critical of Turkey's democratic record, she said.

"Turkey needs much more political pressure if it isn't to move away even further from democracy," she said. ♦

# Crisis Point for Syrian Kurds

**Despite being the largest minority group in the country Kurds have for decades been subject to government oppression as a paranoid Syria sought to maintain firm control by denying them basic rights, concludes Idrees Mohammed.**

*Middle East Online*

**R**epressed for decades, the Syrian Kurds have been divided, marginalized and doubtful with respect to Syria crisis. Trusting neither Syria's regime nor its opposition, the Kurds have declined to take an active role in anti-Assad protests. From its part, the regime has tried its best to woo them with promises of reforms. Dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab nationalists, the Syrian opposition, influenced by Turkey, has been unsympathetic towards the Kurds.

Despite being the largest minority group in the country Kurds have for decades been subject to government oppression as a paranoid Syria sought to maintain firm control by denying them basic rights; at times uprooting its Kurdish population in order to establish an "Arab belt" to distance them from Kurds in neighboring countries, denying citizenship to hundreds of thousands of Kurds, classifying as "foreigners" who could not vote, own property or work in the public sector, prohibiting Kurds from registering their children with Kurdish names, and banning their cultural activities. Moreover, Syrian Kurds have been repeatedly discouraged from addressing the Kurdish question inside Syria. Syrian governments, particularly those of Hafez Assad, pursued a double-tracked policy in this regard, engaging Syrian Kurds in the politics of Iraq and Turkey on the one hand, while on the other, involving with Iraqi Kurds and assisting Turkey's Kurds in the struggle against their own states.

Syrian state policy has been a success insofar as its own Kurdish issue is concerned. Successive governments have successfully hindered the emergence of an effective Kurdish movement, and thus, a viable opposition. The involvement with the Kurds in Iraq and assistance given to the Kurds in Turkey have been aimed at both gaining their support in relation to its own Kurdish issue, and to establish a trump card against the Turkish and Iraqi governments. Regrettably, the current disorganization and division among Syria's Kurds are largely due to both this policy and the state's overall repression.

In recent years, regional geopolitical changes such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the ascendancy of Iraqi Kurdistan and the assassination of Lebanese former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri with its ramifications, have both further increased Bashar Assad's wariness with regard to internal affairs and served to give fresh impetus to Syria's Kurds and the Syrian opposition.

Bearing in mind the Kurds' decades-long grievances and the chilly atmosphere sparked by riots in Qamishli in 2004 and later in Aleppo, Syria's government has watched developments in Kurdish areas closely, and acted cautiously with the Kurds since the Arab Spring reached Syria. Kurdish participation in protests strengthens the anti-government chorus of opposition, lessens the government's legitimacy, and requires it to dispatch additional security forces to the area, thereby increasing the pressure on itself.

From this perspective, Syria's government has perceived the neutralization of its Kurdish voices as extremely important and to that end it has made several tactical approaches, including expressions of good intent to resolve the Kurdish question. In a rare move, it took a psychological step, agreeing not only to allow Nawruz, (the Kurdish New Year)

with its fluttering Kurdish flags, to be celebrated, but also sent an official delegation to the festivities. Moreover, the Kurds were offered several opportunities to participate in discussions be arranged to supposedly look into their grievances, including the issue of those deprived of identification documents.

While the Kurds have not rejected all such opportunities, there have been no concrete outcomes. Aware of the government's opaque position and unsure of its intentions, its calls to hold dialogues with parties were seen by many as a sort of "ploy" aimed at manipulating the Kurds, dividing the Syrian community and deepening divisions within the anti-government opposition. The Kurds have encouraged for a dialogue in which all Syrians participate, not merely specific groups, in order to forestall any suspicion that they were attempting to strike a deal with the government purely for the benefit of Kurds alone.

Hoping meanwhile, that non-Syrian Kurds might be persuaded to exert pressure on Syrian Kurds, the Syrian President invited Masoud Barzani, President of Iraqi Kurdistan to talks. Aware that rumor had it that he and Jalal Talabani were already encouraging Syrian Kurds to cooperate with their government, and aware that Iraqi Kurdish participation would strengthen this claim, President Barzani declined the invitation.

Holding talks with Syrian regime projects legitimacy onto the increasingly pressured and isolated regime. It would consolidate the unfounded allegations that Syria's Kurds tend to seize the crisis for separation and put the Kurds in jeopardy.

With respect to the Syrian opposition as represented by the Syrian National Council (SNC) the Kurds have, at least until recently, been unwelcome partners in an organization dominated by Arab nationalists and the Muslim Brotherhood. Often complaining of intentional marginalization, their rights ignored by the Turkish influenced opposition which hopes that the Kurds would have very limited influence, if any, on the road map to a post-Assad Syria.

Since not inviting the Kurds to opposition summits and conferences would undoubtedly have intensified the outrage of the Kurdish population, the SNC took this into consideration and did call the Kurds to a conference held in Antalya, but only as independent delegates, not as political representatives. On another occasion the Kurds pulled out of Istanbul conference, due to the Arab opposition's insistence on the "Arab" character of the state when it confirmed that Syria's official title would stay as the Syrian Arab Republic, implying that recognition of the Kurds as an ethnic group - a principle Kurdish demand - was rejected.

Turkey's complex problems with regard to its own Kurdish question - which it has spectacularly failed to resolve - have, for decades, led it to keep a close eye on developments relating to the Kurds of neighboring states. Turkey has now become the venue for the offices and activities of Syrian opposition figures and has been tightening its grip on the Syrian National Council in order to gain leverage over its agenda and events pertaining to the Syrian crisis in an effort to contain Kurdish ascendancy there.

Should the Syrian Kurds ever achieve their aims Turkey will have a new headache. Iraqi Kurdistan, which already enjoys de facto independence, is considered by the Kurdish nation to be a source of inspiration and political savvy, an important advocate of their aims and a reliable safe haven.

The Syrian Kurdish opposition held a conference in Iraqi Kurdistan recently at which its president clearly expressed support for the Kurdish stance in Syria. Even allowing for the fact that the situation of Iraqi Kurds is unlikely to be duplicated, should Syria's Kurds to be granted rights this would undoubtedly cement the power of the Kurdish nation and consolidate Kurdish influence. This scenario would then be both a powerful driving force for Turkey's restive Kurds to pursue their struggle for greater rights from the state, while ratcheting up Turkey's security concerns with regard to the PKK.

The Syrian Kurds do not seek separation. They will, however, try hard not to lose the current opportunity to gain ethnic recognition, poli-

tical and cultural rights and, very importantly, achieve federalism - an unusual political arrangement in the region. Meanwhile, Kurdish internal affairs, and the strategies of the SNC, Turkey and the regional powerhouse countries towards their demands, will involve huge challenges for the Kurds. To counteract the intentions of others, Kurds need to organize their affairs better and try to weaken the opposition to their

demands. Forming alliances would be strategic in this regard.■

***Idrees Mohammed is an observer of Turkey's foreign policy; primarily towards Iraqi Kurdistan. He is also interested in Kurdish experience. He tweets @IdreesMohammed***

**GULF NEWS**

February 23, 2012

## Widespread attacks in Iraq kill 60

**Coordinated bombings, shootings unfolded over two-and-a-half hours in the capital Baghdad**

**Kareem Raheem -(Reuters)**

**B**AGHDAD - Simultaneous early morning attacks on mostly Shi'ite targets across Iraq killed at least 60 people and wounded dozens on Thursday in one of the bloodiest days of violence since U.S. troops pulled out in mid-December.

The attacks that appeared to pitch al Qaeda-linked Sunni Muslim insurgents against Shi'ites raised fears of a return to the widespread sectarian carnage that tore Iraq apart and cost thousands of lives in 2006 and 2007.

The violence breaks weeks of relative calm as Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Sunni leaders have sought to resolve a political crisis that threatened to unravel their power-sharing agreement following the U.S. withdrawal.

At least 32 people were killed in blasts in Baghdad where 10 explosions tore through mainly Shi'ite neighborhoods during rush hour and other attacks targeted police patrols, commuters and crowds gathered in shopping areas.

"We were sitting at a restaurant having soup for breakfast when the bomb exploded. I lost consciousness and then saw smoke and dust when I came to. I saw people and body parts everywhere," police officer Ahmed Kadhim told Reuters.

Kadhim suffered shrapnel wounds to his left leg and back when a car bomb exploded near a restaurant killing six people and wounding 18 in Baghdad's northern Kadhimiya district.

The interior ministry blamed al Qaeda and affiliated armed groups for the attacks it said were an attempt to show that Iraq's security situation remained unstable.

The blasts hit just weeks before Baghdad plans to host an Arab League



*A man walks past the remains of a vehicle used in a bomb attack in Kirkuk, 250 km north of Baghdad. Two car bombs exploded in a quick succession in different districts wounding 20 people, including 15 policemen, in Kirkuk, police said. Reuters*

summit, which has been postponed because of regional turmoil and acrimony between Iraq's Shi'ite-led government and some Sunni Gulf states.

Holding a successful summit at the end of March would help Iraq restore its place in the Arab World since the U.S. withdrawal and help allay Sunni Gulf States worries over Iran's influence over Iraq's Shi'ite government.

"The attacks aimed to spark sectarian strife among the Iraqi people, and to prevent the Arab League meeting from being held," Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi said.

### DOZENS OF BLASTS

More than a dozen blasts and attacks hit other cities across Iraq from Mosul in the north to Hilla, south of Baghdad, many of them targeting police.

The violence was aimed at Shi'ite neighborhoods but also against security forces, a frequent target of Sunni insurgents. Iraqi officials had predicted such groups would try to stir sectarian tensions with attacks after American forces went home.

While violence has ebbed since the height of the war, Sunni insurgents affiliated to al Qaeda are still capable of large-scale assaults. Some rival Shi'ite militias have said they will cease fighting since the U.S. withdrawal.

Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella group for al Qaeda-linked insurgents in Iraq, has claimed responsibility for recent large attacks on the capital, including a December 22 wave of bombings that killed at least 71 people.

In Thursday's violence, one car bomb in the capital killed at least nine people and wounded 27 in the upmarket Karrada neighborhood, hurling shrapnel into the

next street and blowing out glass from nearby buildings.

Witnesses saw at four wrecked cars full of shrapnel and bloodied seats near an ice-cream shop at the site of another blast.

In at least three Shi'ite neighborhoods in Baghdad, nine policemen were killed, and in the capital's northwestern Kadhimiya district, a car bomb killed six people when it struck a street lined with restaurants.

In the biggest attack outside the capital, a car bomb killed seven people and wounded 33 in the town of Balad, north of Baghdad.

Iraq's political crisis erupted after Maliki moved against two senior members of the Sunni-backed Iraqiya political bloc shortly after the U.S. troop withdrawal in December, prompting a walkout by Iraqiya lawmakers that lasted until late January.

Tensions eased as Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish blocs tried to negotiate an end to the crisis. But a week ago a panel of judges detailed 150 attacks they said were carried out by death squads under Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi's command. Maliki sought Hashemi's arrest in December.

Hashemi, who has taken refuge in the autonomous region of Kurdistan, has denied accusations made against him, dismissing them as part of a plot to destroy Maliki's opponents.

The crisis was followed by a wave of attacks in December and January on Shi'ite neighborhoods, including a suicide bombing on a Shi'ite funeral procession that killed 31 in Baghdad and an attack on Shi'ite pilgrims that left 53 dead in Basra.

Violence had ebbed until Sunday when a suicide car bomber killed 19 people in an attack on a Baghdad police academy.□

AP Associated Press

## Turkish troops kill 15 rebels, suffer 2 losses

ANKARA, Turkey / February 15, 2012 - Associated Press

**A CLASH IN Turkey's mostly Kurdish southeast has left 15 Kurdish rebels and two Turkish soldiers dead, officials said Tuesday.**

The governor's office in Sirnak province said the clash took place in a mountainous area northeast of Sirnak after troops detected rebel hideouts late Monday.

Earlier, state television TRT had reported that troops, reinforced from the air with helicopter gunships, killed 10 rebels in Sirnak.

The violence comes just before the 13th anniversary of the capture of Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan on Feb. 15 — a day often marked by attacks or protests by rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.



AA file photo

On Monday, nearly 200 suspected Kurdish rebel supporters were arrested, while Turkish warplanes attacked Kurdish rebel targets in northern Iraq on Sunday.

The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by the European Union and the United States.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since the PKK took up arms in 1984.

upstream

13 February 2012

## Iraq warns Total over Kurdish deals

**Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain Shahrstani has warned French major Total would bear the "full consequences" if it signed oil deals with semi-autonomous Kurdistan.**

upstreamonline.com

**TOTAL** said on Friday said it was considering possible investments in Kurdistan, which is locked in a long-standing feud with the central government in Baghdad over who controls the Opec country's oil rights and territories.

ExxonMobil became the first oil major to sign up with Iraqi Kurdistan late last year, prompting Baghdad to reject that deal as illegal and threaten to end ExxonMobil's contract for the West Qurna-1 oilfield in the south of the country.

"The position of the Iraqi government will be the same as with the other oil companies, that no company has a right to sign a contract without the approval of the central government of Iraq," Shahrstani told Reuters when asked about a possible Total deal with Kurdistan.

"Any such contract has no standing with the Iraqi government, and the companies have no right to work on the Iraqi territories and they bear the full consequences."

Shahrstani was speaking after Iraq opened a new Gulf crude export outlet in the southern oil hub of Basra on Sunday, clearing the way for Baghdad to increase exports by about 300,000 barrels per day soon after crude begins loading.

Reuters reported if the project goes to plan exports from Iraq's southern oilfields would rise to about 1.9 million bpd by March and bring Iraq's total shipments to 2.3 million bpd, the highest level since the 2003 invasion that ousted Saddam Hussein.

Recovering after years of war and sanctions, Iraq signed deals with major oil companies like Shell, ExxonMobil and BP to develop the southern oilfields.

ExxonMobil has yet to reply to Baghdad over its decision to move into Kurdistan, Reuters reported.

But Shahrstani to the news agency the US major would not be able to participate for now in Iraq's fourth energy bidding round because of its agreements with Kurdistan, which has its own regional government and military force.

"Exxon was informed about the Iraqi government position clearly and openly. They asked for some time, and we are waiting for their final answer to inform them of our final decision," Shahrstani said.

"But right now they are not qualified to participate in the fourth bidding round," he said.

Baghdad says the central government has control over the country's oil reserves, but Kurdistan, which gained its semi-auto-



*Warning: Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain Shahrstani said Total would face consequences if it signed oil deals with Kurdistan*

nomous status in 1991, says it can sign oil deals for fields in its territory.

Iraq's oil ministry has already excluded US oil company Hess from the bidding round because of its participation in Kurdistan. But it will be more difficult for Baghdad to challenge a large supermajor like ExxonMobil, with involvement in huge southern Iraqi oil projects.

Total chief executive, Christophe de Margerie, said on Friday the French company would not seek contracts in the Iraqi bidding round due to conditions being unattractive but he said the company was considering Kurdistan deals.

Total has a smaller presence than

ExxonMobil in southern Iraq, but is in negotiations to develop gas projects in the Missan oilfield and it has a minority share in the Halfaya oilfield.

"If they don't find it attractive enough, they are most welcome to withdraw from it," Shahrستاني responded when asked by Reuters about Margerie's comments.

Shahrستاني also told Reuters his understanding was that Iran would not carry out a threat to close down the Strait of Hormuz because Iranian oil supplies also relied on the shipping lane and closure would not benefit Tehran.

Neighbouring Iran has threatened to close the Strait if Western sanctions

aimed at shutting down Iran's nuclear programme stop it from selling its oil.

"My understanding is that the Iranians would not close the Strait because they don't benefit anything from its closure," he said. "They are exporting most of their oil through the Strait of Hormuz, of course it is not to their benefit." ●



February 14, 2012

## Kurdish opposition will not vote for new government

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: Islamic Group MP at Kurdistan Parliament announced today that the opposition parties in the Kurdish Parliament will not vote for the new government, calling the "exchange of posts illegal".

MP Ahmed Sulaiman told Aswat al-Iraq that "the opposing parties (Change Movement, Islamic Federation and Islamic Group) have agreed not to participate, or vote or grant its trust to the new Kurdish government.

"According to the law, the government and parliament should be changed every four years, not two," he added.

The strategic agreement between the main two Kurdish parties

in 2006 was that the presidencies of the legislative and executive powers should be exchanged in each two years between them.

Change Movement member Shahoo Saeed refused to comment to Aswat al-Iraq, but the exact opinion shall be revealed before or during the session.

It was decided that next Wednesday and Thursday will witness the voting for the Parliament Speaker, the minister and their deputies, according to a parliamentary statement.

Candidate of the Kurdistan Union Federation Arselan Bayez will hold the post of Parliament Speaker, to replace Kamal Karkuki, while the Kurdish Democratic Party did not announce its candidate for deputy speaker post.

The Democratic Kurdistan Party nominated Njirvan Barzani to head the government, to replace Dr. Barham Saleh.

Imad Ahmed of the National Kurdistan Party was nominated to deputy premier post to replace Azad Berwari, in the Democratic Party. □

TODAYS ZAMAN

28 FEBRUARY 2012

## MHP concerned about Syrian opposition's support for Kurdish autonomy

TODAY'S ZAMAN, İSTANBUL

**C**hairman of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Devlet Bahçeli has said that his party is concerned about a promise by Syrian opposition forces to grant autonomy to that country's Kurdish minority.

Speaking at his party's parliamentary group meeting on Tuesday, Bahçeli offered his evaluation of the recent developments in Syria. He said the violence in the country is intensifying with each passing day. "The dark clouds cast over Damascus are getting darker every day, and the footsteps of an international intervention are ever more audible. In light of these facts, it appears that it will be difficult for the current regime in Syria to stand its ground for a long time."

He said the Friends of Syria meeting held in Tunisia last week, which brought together Syrian opposition forces, has worked to exacerbate the situation. "You'll remember that the bloody process that led to the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya also started with a similar international friends conference and handed [Libya] into the claws of Crusaders. Those who claim to be friends of Syria today are pursuing a new kind of cruelty, aggression and the fall of Damascus."

Bahçeli noted that the conference in Tunisia set a goal for the Syrian National Council (SNC) to be recognized internationally as a legitimate representative of the country and that the council will support the opposition. "Similar developments had taken place in the Libyan chaos. However, one of the issues that worries us is that opposition spokespeo-

ple have made statements promising Syrian Kurds the status of autonomy. After the peshmerga administration's birth following the occupation of Iraq and if a similar development happens in Syria, a new autonomous administration might form at our southern border."

He also noted that Kurds in Syrian cities, including Kamışlı, Cezire and Aleppo, have voiced demands to merge with northern Iraq. "As part of this process, the struggle to create a great Kurdistan made up of four regions [in four countries] will go a long way. Such views were voiced very recently at a meeting in Arbil, the attendees of which included representatives of the separatist Peace and Democracy Party [BDP]."

Bahçeli said the recent developments also indicate that the masterminds of "global operations" have now included the concept of "friendship" in their weapons of propaganda. "Following claims of emancipation, democratization and bringing peace, forming friendship groups is now in fashion. In fact, it is no longer meaningful or possible to tell who is a friend and who is an enemy." ■



**REUTERS**

## Armes et combattants irakiens pénètrent en Syrie

14 février 2012 / Par Khalid al-Ansary / Reuters .

**MOSSOUL, Irak (Reuters) - Des armes et des combattants sunnites en provenance d'Irak pénètrent en Syrie, alimentant les violences dans un pays qui jadis approvisionnait en armes les opposants au régime installé par les Américains à Bagdad, affirment responsables et marchands d'armes irakiens.**

L'insurrection en cours contre le clan alaouite du président Bachar al Assad touche une corde sensible dans les tribus sunnites des provinces irakiennes d'Anbar et de Ninive, limitrophes de la Syrie.

De fortes solidarités familiales et tribales existent de part et d'autre d'une frontière de 1.115 km de long très faiblement gardée où la contrebande et les trafics sont florissants.

Aujourd'hui, les responsables irakiens de la sécurité font état d'indices du passage de rebelles sunnites en territoire syrien pour rejoindre les rangs du soulèvement contre Bachar al Assad. Les trafiquants d'armes profiteraient de cette situation en multipliant par deux le coût des envois d'armes dissimulées au milieu de chargements purement civils.

Evaluer le flux de rebelles et d'armes illégales passant d'Irak en Syrie est difficile, mais la frontière était jadis un lieu de transit florissant dans l'autre sens, des volontaires étrangers s'infiltrant en Irak pour se battre contre les forces américaines venues renverser Saddam Hussein.

"Nous pensons que des combattants liés à Al Qaïda et à certains groupes armés sunnites envoient des hommes en armes en Syrie pour s'y battre au titre d'une espèce de soutien moral", a expliqué un haut responsable de la sécurité à Bagdad sous le sceau de l'anonymat.

### RISQUE DE CONTAGION

"Des responsables corrompus sont en poste aux confins des provinces de Mossoul et d'Anbar, ce qui, pensons-nous, autoriserait certains à infiltrer des armes et des combattants. Mais nous ne croyons pas qu'il s'agisse d'un trafic important".

"Les trafiquants d'armes sont plus actifs ces derniers temps, notamment depuis l'intensification des accrochages entre le régime syrien et ses adversaires", confirme Hamid al Hayes, président du Conseil d'Anbar, une institution tribale dont la milice Sahoua a permis jadis de combattre avec succès la rébellion des alliés d'Al Qaïda en Irak.

La crise syrienne est embarrassante à divers titres pour les chiïtes au pouvoir à Bagdad, avec ses accents communautaires - opposants sunnites face à un pouvoir alaouite, une branche dissidente du chiïsme.

L'Irak entretient par ailleurs des liens étroits avec les chiïtes au pouvoir en Iran, unique allié majeur du régime de Bachar al Assad dans le monde arabo-musulman.

Les responsables irakiens redoutent un effet de contagion du conflit syrien chez eux, où règne un équilibre des plus instables entre la majorité chiïte, la minorité sunnite jadis au pouvoir sous Saddam Hussein et les Kurdes.

Pour Bagdad, le pire des scénarios serait l'arrivée au pouvoir à Damas d'un régime sunnite de tendance salafiste.

Le général Ahmed al Khafadji, en poste au ministère irakien de l'Intérieur, a annoncé cette semaine à la chaîne de télévision Al Hourra que les patrouilles avaient été renforcées à la frontière pour empêcher tout passage de combattants en Syrie. □

**L'EXPRESS** 18 FÉVRIER 2012

## Des milliers de Kurdes manifestent à Strasbourg pour la libération d'Öcalan

**STRASBOURG -(AFP)-** Des milliers de Kurdes ont manifesté samedi à Strasbourg pour demander la libération du chef historique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, détenu en Turquie depuis 1999, et interpeller les pays européens..

Selon la préfecture, ils étaient "entre 9.500 et 10.000" près de la gare de Strasbourg au départ de la manifestation, qui devait parcourir plusieurs kilomètres avant un rassemblement en début d'après-midi dans un quartier du sud de la ville.

D'autres participants devaient ensuite rejoindre le cortège, ont affirmé les organisateurs, qui tablent sur "30.000 personnes", venant de toute l'Europe, et surtout de France et de l'Allemagne voisine.

Cette manifestation est organisée tous les ans à Strasbourg pour commémorer l'arrestation en février 1999 d'Abdullah Öcalan, détenu en Turquie.

Sur les nombreuses banderoles brandies par les manifestants, en anglais, fran-



çais ou encore en allemand, on pouvait notamment lire: "La liberté d'Öcalan est celle du peuple kurde" ou encore "Paix au Kurdistan".

"Il faut libérer Öcalan, c'est un personnage incontournable si on veut parvenir à la paix", a dit à l'AFP Eyyup Dorus, représentant en Europe du parti turc kurde BDP (Parti pour la paix et la démoc-

cratie).

"La situation des Kurdes en Turquie se dégrade, les arrestations se multiplient, l'Europe ne doit pas cautionner ça", a-t-il ajouté, expliquant le choix d'une manifestation à Strasbourg par la présence du Conseil de l'Europe, de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme et du Parlement européen.

Cette manifestation, "c'est un appel à la communauté internationale et notamment aux pays européens", a dit une autre porte-parole des manifestants, Yurtsever Tekiner, de la confédération des associations kurdes d'Europe.

Quelque 200 militants kurdes avaient déjà manifesté jeudi devant le Parlement européen. La moitié d'entre eux avaient gagné Strasbourg à pied, à l'occasion d'une marche de près de 400 km en provenance de Genève.

Les affrontements entre l'armée turque et le parti séparatiste PKK se sont intensifiés ces derniers mois. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait des dizaines de milliers de morts depuis le début de l'insurrection en 1984 du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays. ♦

## La prison d'Evin, un Iran en miniature

C'est une photo inversée de l'Iran, sa part d'ombre, que dévoile la belle lettre de Bahman Ahmadi Amoui. Ce journaliste d'opposition est détenu à la prison d'Evin depuis juin 2009 et purge une peine de cinq ans pour « propagande contre le régime » et « insulte au président ». Quand il peut, il fait passer des missives à sa femme, la militante Jila Bani Yaghoob. La dernière, datée du 14 décembre 2011, est particulièrement émouvante. Elle est traduite en intégralité sur notre blog Nouvelles d'Iran du Monde.fr.

Bahman Ahmadi Amoui y raconte comment l'enfermement, la perte des repères lui font perdre les mots, oublier les chiffres. Parfois, ces trous de mémoire sont

crève-cœur. Après dix-huit mois de privation de téléphone, les détenus d'Evin, explique le journaliste, ont enfin obtenu le droit de passer un appel de cinq minutes une fois par mois. Mais au moment de composer le numéro de son frère sous les yeux de ses gardiens impatients, Bahman Ahmadi Amoui a eu un trou et a fait semblant que le téléphone sonnait dans le vide. Il est reparti pour sa cellule, étourdi.

### Purges successives

Evine est un lieu dont la seule évocation fait frémir les Iraniens. Depuis 2009, les militants du « mouvement vert », qui contestait la réélection de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad à la présidence, y subissent la torture et l'interroga-

toire permanent. Mais au moins, ils sont ensemble et rêvent de l'Iran de demain. Or, depuis peu, les « verts » ont vu débarquer de nouveaux prisonniers. Car c'est au tour des proches de Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad de goûter les geôles de la République islamique, même s'ils y sont moins nombreux et n'ont pas subi les sévices de leurs codétenus. Les bourreaux ont rejoint ceux qu'ils avaient embastillés en 2009 : l'ironie est permanente dans la République islamique, qui dévore ses enfants au rythme des purges successives.

Le journaliste a donc accueilli dans sa cellule collective un « déviationniste ». C'est le qualificatif religieux donné par les partisans du Guide suprême Ali Khamenei aux proches du bras droit du président Ahmadinejad, le fantasque Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, accusé de quasi-hérésie. Présenté à ses codétenus, le « déviationniste » demande s'il est face à un tenant de la « sédition verte ». L'autre le corrige, avec fierté et

humeur : « Pas de la sédition, du mouvement vert ! »

Le journaliste conclut avec un mélange de philosophie et d'ironie : « Ceux qui nous appelaient des "poussières" [référence à un discours de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad qualifiant ainsi les manifestants en 2009], criaient victoire et, ivres de leur pouvoir, nous jetaient en prison, sont aujourd'hui enfermés avec nous. Qui d'autre va nous rejoindre demain ? »

Bahman Ahmadi Amoui note l'arrivée d'une autre catégorie de détenus, originaires du Kurdistan iranien, accusés d'appartenance à Al-Qaïda. Evine est un drôle d'endroit où se côtoient démocrates, présumés djihadistes et vrais Kurdes, ultraconservateurs déviationnistes, etc. Est-ce l'Iran qui est devenu « une grande prison » comme l'écrit le journaliste ? Ou est-ce la prison d'Evin qui est un Iran en modèle réduit ? ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

## En Syrie, les débuts d'une guerre régionale ?

Difficile de ne pas dresser ce sinistre constat : en Syrie, le scénario du pire s'installe – peut-être pour longtemps.

Ce n'est pas seulement l'accumulation des atrocités que vit une population insurgée à la merci d'un régime de tueurs en série. Le photographe Mani et l'écrivain Jonathan Littell terminent aujourd'hui dans nos colonnes le récit de ce qu'ils ont vu et vécu à Homs. Dans la troisième ville du pays, assiégée depuis plusieurs semaines, la tragédie est quotidienne : les tirs aveugles des chars postés à la périphérie ; ceux des *snipers*, qui tuent pour terroriser ; les enlèvements, la torture, les soins qui manquent ; les blessés par balles entassés dans des hôpitaux de fortune.

Bref, le cortège des malheurs d'une guerre faite à une population civile démunie. Mais celui

aussi des actes de courage quotidiens d'un peuple qui refuse de se soumettre.

Cependant, ce face-à-face est de moins en moins un affrontement syro-syrien. Le conflit s'internationalise, de la pire façon qui soit. Issu de la minorité alaouite – une secte dissidente de l'islam chiite –, le régime reçoit le soutien actif de l'Iran. Il a aussi l'appui de l'autre allié de Téhéran dans la région, le Hezbollah libanais, une formation chiite extrémiste

### Editorial

et l'une des composantes du gouvernement de Beyrouth.

Forte de 23 millions d'habitants, la population syrienne appartient à 70 % à la branche majoritaire de l'islam, le sunnisme. C'est de ses rangs, mais sans

exclure les autres minorités syriennes, qu'est partie la rébellion. Tout naturellement, de la Turquie aux pays du Golfe, le monde sunnite lui accorde sa sympathie et son soutien politique, voire financier.

Les tribus sunnites d'Irak se mobilisent pour fournir des armes aux insurgés. Ayman Zawahiri, chef d'Al-Qaïda, profite du chaos pour appeler au djihad contre le régime syrien. La Turquie héberge des éléments de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). Traversé d'autant de lignes de fracture que la Syrie, le Liban connaît ses premiers affrontements communautaires importés en « copier-coller » de chez son grand voisin.

Depuis le début du drame syrien, il y a un an, la Russie et la Chine, au lieu de faire pression sur Bachar Al-Assad, lui ont apporté un soutien diplomatique sans

faillie. Elles l'ont fait au nom du refus de l'internationalisation du conflit. Moscou et Pékin ont saboté les initiatives de la Ligue arabe, qu'appuyaient l'Europe et les Etats-Unis.

L'obstruction russo-chinoise a empêché ce qui eût été la meilleure façon d'internationaliser le conflit : obliger Bachar Al-Assad à accepter une transition ordonnée et son départ du pouvoir. Au lieu de quoi, Moscou et Pékin ont favorisé ce qu'ils prétendent vouloir éviter : une internationalisation sauvage du conflit, qui fait de la Syrie, comme hier du Liban, le champ clos des rivalités qui traversent le Proche-Orient. ■



17 FÉVRIER 2012

# Les Kurdes irakiens nomment un nouveau Premier ministre régional

XINHUA -

LE PARLEMENT RÉGIONAL IRAKIEN du Kurdistan a voté jeudi un nouveau Premier ministre et son adjoint pour les deux prochaines années, a signalé un site officiel kurde.

"Le Parlement du Kurdistan a nommé Nechirvan Barzani au poste de Premier ministre du gouvernement régional kurde (GRK), et Imad Ahmad au poste de vice-Premier ministre", a déclaré le site officiel de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), un important parti kurde dirigée par le président irakien Jalal Talabani.

Le nouveau Premier ministre GRK et son adjoint ont obtenu le soutien de la majorité des 71 députés, qui étaient présents à la session extraordinaire du parlement de 111 sièges dans la capitale régionale d'Arbil, à environ 350 km au nord de Bagdad.

Mercredi, le Parlement kurde a élu son ancien vice-président, Arsalan Baez comme le nouveau président du parlement et Hassan Muhammad comme son adjoint, après la soumission par le tandem sortant de leur lettre de démission au

Parlement.

Entre temps, le président régional du Kurdistan Massoud Barzani a nommé leader de l'UPK Kosrat Rasul Ali comme vice-président de la région, après que le parti d'Ali avait plus tôt approuvé sa candidature pour le poste.

Les membres de l'opposition du Parlement régional, qui n'étaient pas satisfaits avec le remaniement de haut niveau, sont sortis de la séance de mercredi.

Le récent changement de postes de haut niveau a eu lieu en conformité avec un accord stratégique de 2006 conclu entre les deux partis au pouvoir : le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) dirigé par Massoud Barzani, et l'UPK.

Selon l'accord, les deux partis puissants vont échanger les postes de haut niveau du gouvernement et du parlement tous les deux ans. Néanmoins, l'opposition dans la région exigeait que d'autres partis soient inclus dans l'arrangement politique.

**REPORTERS  
SANS FRONTIÈRES**  
POUR LA LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESSE

## ATTAQUES COORDONNÉES CONTRE LES ANTENNES LOCALES D'UN JOURNAL TURC EN EUROPE

samedi 18 février 2012.

REPORTERS sans frontières condamne fermement les attaques menées quasi-simultanément contre les locaux de l'hebdomadaire conservateur turc Zaman en Allemagne et en France, le 15 février 2012. « Nous sommes vivement préoccupés par la violence croissante des attaques subies par Zaman. Rien ne saurait justifier ces graves actes d'intimidation, qui auraient pu avoir des conséquences plus tragiques encore. Nous espérons que les enquêtes menées par les polices allemande et française permettront rapidement (...)

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« Nous sommes vivement préoccupés par la violence croissante des attaques subies par Zaman. Rien ne saurait justifier ces graves actes d'intimidation, qui auraient pu avoir des conséquences plus tragiques encore. Nous espérons que les enquêtes menées par les polices allemande et française permettront rapidement d'interpeller tous les auteurs et organisateurs de ces attaques », a déclaré l'organisation.

« Nous le répétons, la presse turque doit cesser d'être assimilée aux acteurs poli-



tiques locaux. Le gouvernement ne saurait être ciblé à travers Zaman, pas plus que les titres pro-kurdes ne devraient faire les frais de la lutte contre le PKK. Il est inquiétant de constater que les journalistes paient de plus en plus fréquemment le prix physique de la polarisation persistante des médias turcs. »

Le 15 février 2012, vers 14h40, une quinzaine d'individus cagoulés a fait irruption dans les locaux de Zaman France à Pantin (banlieue parisienne). Ils ont physiquement menacé les journalistes et mis le bureau à sac. Aucun blessé n'est à déplorer, mais les membres de la rédaction sont choqués et les locaux ont subi des dégâts importants. Des ordinateurs, ainsi que du mobilier et des portes et fenêtres, ont été détruits. La rédaction a demandé à faire l'objet d'une protection policière et envisage de déménager. Il s'agit de la troisième attaque contre les locaux du journal en six mois.

Dans la soirée du même jour, des indivi-

us ont lancé des cocktails Molotov et endommagé l'entrée des locaux de Zaman à Cologne (ouest de l'Allemagne). Peu après, ils s'en sont pris à un café turc voisin. Deux suspects, âgés de 17 et 22 ans, ont été arrêtés.

D'après la rédaction de Zaman France, l'attaque a été revendiquée par un groupuscule se présentant comme proche du PKK, la « Brigade Euphrate de vengeance de la révolution ». La police allemande suit également la piste d'une possible implication de sympathisants de la rébellion kurde. Le 15 février est la date anniversaire de l'arrestation du leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, en 1999.

Le conflit opposant depuis 1984 les autorités centrales turques et le PKK a récemment regagné en intensité, avec une succession d'attentats terroristes et d'opérations militaires dépassant les frontières turques. La presse est de plus en plus otage de cet affrontement : plusieurs dizaines de journalistes travaillant pour la presse de gauche ou pro-kurde ont été arbitrairement incarcérés ces derniers mois dans le cadre d'une enquête visant le KCK, un réseau accusé de soutenir le PKK. Une trentaine d'entre eux, arrêtés lors d'une rafle simultanée dans plusieurs villes du pays en décembre 2011, n'ont toujours pas été informés des accusations retenues contre eux, et les arrestations se poursuivent. □

# Iraqi panel links vice president to death squads

BAGHDAD

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An Iraqi judicial panel said Thursday that the country's Sunni vice president and his employees had run death squads that killed security officials and Shiite pilgrims, offering the first independent assessment of accusations that have thrown the nation into political chaos.

After wrapping up a two-month investigation, the nine-judge committee found at least 150 cases where either Tariq al-Hashemi, his bodyguards or other employees were linked to attacks ranging from roadside bombs to assassinations of security agents and Shiite pilgrims, said Abdul-Sattar Bayrkdar, a spokesman for the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council spokesman.

Mr. Bayrkdar did not offer any evidence to support the panel's conclusions, which are not legally binding. He said the death squads operated from 2005 to 2011, and were responsible for a bombing last December on the government's Integrity Commission,

headquarters that killed 25 people and the assassination of a deputy education minister in 2010.

A spokesman for Mr. Hashemi declined to comment. But Mr. Hashemi, the highest ranking Sunni politician in Iraq, has denied the allegations in the past, and has accused Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a Shiite, of coordinating a smear campaign against him as part of a power grab.

Mr. Hashemi is a member of the secular but Sunni-dominated Iraqiya political party, whose lawmakers have rejected the charges as bogus.

The case stems in part from television footage that aired on state-run TV in December, showing purported confessions by men said to be Mr. Hashemi's bodyguards: The men said they killed officials working in the Iraqi health and foreign ministries, as well as Baghdad police officers. They said they received \$3,000 from Mr. Hashemi for each attack.

Raad al-Dahlaki, a fellow Sunni and Iraqiya lawmaker, rejected the panel's findings, saying "there is not clear evidence against al-Hashemi."

"These charges are against his bodyguards," he said. "If they are true, they have to face fair trials — not politically motivated ones that put pressure on the judicial system."

The Interior Ministry, which is effectively run by Mr. Maliki, issued the arrest warrant for Mr. Hashemi in December — as the last of the thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq were leaving the country after more than eight years of war.

Mr. Hashemi sought refuge from arrest in the autonomous Kurdish government in northern Iraq. He has been in the Kurdish capital, Irbil, since and refuses to return to Baghdad where he says he does not feel safe and is unlikely to receive a fair trial. He and other Sunni officials allege the judiciary is not independent of Mr. Maliki's government.

Ali al-Moussawi, a media adviser for the prime minister, declined to comment on the findings, but he said he doubted they would disrupt Iraqi politics because "all believe in the independence of the judicial system, which must continue working in that way."

The investigation was ordered by the Supreme Judicial Council's chief judge, Medhat al-Mahmoud, a few days before Mr. Hashemi's arrest warrant was publicly announced.

Mr. Mahmoud created the panel specifically to investigate the charges against the vice president.

One of the panel's judges, speaking on condition of anonymity in order to speak about the committee's members, said that Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds and Turkomen sat on the panel.

"We are an independent body that is not linked to any executive body," Saad al-Lami, another of the nine judges, said after the findings were announced. He said Mr. Maliki's office had "nothing to do with these investigations."

The panel's findings will be turned over to Iraqi criminal courts, said Mr. Bayrkdar, the council's spokesman.

International Herald Tribune FEBRUARY 17, 2012

# 'Red lines' drawn, but U.S. officials doubt Iran is ready to start a fight

WASHINGTON

BY BRIAN KNOWLTON

A top U.S. intelligence official said Thursday that Iran was unlikely to intentionally provoke a military conflict with the West.

But senior U.S. officials repeated their warning that the United States would not allow Iran to cross two "red lines" — to develop a nuclear weapon or to close the Strait of Hormuz, a vital passageway for much of the world's oil.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told lawmakers that the United States remained open to a "diplomatic solution" with Iran over its increasingly defiant pursuit of nuclear capabilities. But he added, in unmistakable terms, "We do keep all options on the table in the event that the red lines that I just made very clear are crossed."

The comments did not necessarily

represent new positions by the United States; but they come amid high tension over Iran's nuclear program and confusion over the lengths to which its leaders might go to protest world sanctions or the threat of an attack, presumably led by Israel, to prevent Tehran from building a bomb.

The U.S. intelligence official, Lt. Gen. Ronald L. Burgess Jr., director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran probably had the ability to "temporarily close the Strait of Hormuz with its naval forces." Some Iranian officials have threatened to do so if the country were attacked or to protest the sweeping sanctions on Iranian oil exports imposed by the United States and the European Union.

"Iran has also threatened to launch missiles against the United States and our allies in the region in response to an attack," General Burgess said. "It could

also employ its terrorist surrogates worldwide.

"However," he added, "it is unlikely to initiate or intentionally provoke a conflict or launch a preemptive attack."

It was not clear how the general interpreted three recent attacks thought to be linked to Iran, against Israeli targets in Georgia, India and Thailand.

Western governments have been watching closely for signs of Iran's reaction to the tougher sanctions they have imposed. But the intentions of Iran's divided leadership are notoriously difficult to divine, and even as its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared defiantly that "the era of bullying nations has passed," another Iranian official said on Wednesday that Tehran was ready for new talks on the nuclear issue.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, confirmed that she had received a reply from a top Iranian official responding to her invitation

to negotiations over the future of its nuclear program. In Iran, Al Alam television said the country had offered to "hold new talks over its nuclear program in a constructive way."

Mr. Panetta, in testimony before a House Appropriations subcommittee, left open the door for a "diplomatic solution" but added that the Obama administration and some of its allies had made a few things clear: "We will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. This isn't about just containment. We will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon." And "we will not allow Iran to close the Straits of Hormuz."

Further, he said, "we have expressed serious concerns to Iran about the spread of violence and the fact that they continue to support terrorism and they continue to try to undermine other countries."

Mr. Panetta made his comments a day after Iran claimed that it had made major advances in producing nuclear fuel and asserted that it was poised to impose an oil embargo on European countries to retaliate for sanctions. At the same time, it indicated an openness to new talks on its nuclear program.

But analysts said Iran's nuclear claims appeared either overstated or in-

significant, and they also expressed skepticism about its offer — the latest of many — for nuclear talks.

"If there's a meta-narrative here, it's that Iran tends to speak loudly but carries a small stick," Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said. "Their alleged terror attacks projected incompetence more than fear; their announced nuclear progress is likely exaggerated; and their threat to preemptively cease oil exports to Europe turned out to be another bluff."

Le Monde

Samedi 18 février 2012

# Al-Assad, son meilleur ennemi

Depuis le début de la crise syrienne, Bachar Al-Assad est son meilleur et plus sûr ennemi. Le président syrien a non seulement dilapidé les nombreux atouts dont il disposait, mais il a grandement contribué à cimenter et à politiser une révolte qui, au départ, ne visait pas à le renverser ou à changer de régime. Au début du « printemps arabe », le jeune président syrien était l'un des rares dirigeants de la région disposant auprès de son propre peuple d'une image de réformateur.

En une décennie de pouvoir de M. Al-Assad, la liste des désillusions accumulées par les Syriens était déjà longue. Pourtant, le président semblait toujours paré, auprès de sa population, d'une qualité essentielle : celle d'être l'homme par qui le changement pouvait intervenir. Même une partie de la presse et des diplomates occidentales gardaient cette conviction que le changement, en Syrie, ne pouvait venir que de l'intérieur. Les proches du président leur ont longtemps servi l'antienne du jeune prince éclairé, empêché d'agir par une « vieille garde » rétrograde et des circonstances contraires.

**Cet ensemble de tactiques à court terme et de mensonges ne forme pas une stratégie**

Ce crédit-là n'avait pas été entamé par la mise au pas brutale, début 2001, du « printemps de Damas », qui avait vu la parole politique se libérer pendant six mois. Ni par l'abandon de la réforme de l'Etat en 2002-2003, mise en échec par une classe de profiteurs, dans laquelle la famille du président a joué un rôle de premier plan. Bachar Al-Assad n'avait pas plus tenu ses promesses, faites lors du dernier congrès du parti Baas en juin 2005, d'introduire le multipartisme et de réformer le parti.

M. Al-Assad disposait de deux autres atouts non négligeables. Celui d'avoir bénéficié d'une

## Analyse

PAR CHRISTOPHE AYAD  
Service International

succession dynastique dès 2000, ce qui lui a laissé une décennie pour s'installer et trouver les bases d'une légitimité. Enfin celui, comme il le soulignait dans une interview au *Wall Street Journal* du 31 janvier 2011 — entre la chute de Ben Ali et celle de Moubarak —, d'incarner une forme de résistance à l'hégémonie américano-israélienne dans la région.

Cette aura de réformateur, ou au minimum de modernisateur, il n'a pas fallu plus d'un mois pour que M. Al-Assad la dilapide. Bien que les causes de la révolte syrienne, qui a éclaté le 15 mars, soient anciennes et profondes, tout s'est joué à Deraa, grosse bourgade du sud syrien. Les services de sécurité y ont arrêté une douzaine d'enfants coupables d'avoir graffé sur un mur, par jeu et par imitation, « *le peuple veut la chute du régime* ». Les mineurs ont été torturés et leurs parents, venus demander leur libération avec une délégation de cheikhs tribaux et religieux, se sont vu insulter par le chef de la sécurité, Atef Najib. « *Oubliez vos enfants, faites-en d'autres!*, leur aurait-il lancé. *Et si vous ne savez pas comment faire, amenez-nous vos femmes!* »

Quand la révolte a pris de l'ampleur, M. Al-Assad a limogé le gouverneur de Deraa, mais jamais son chef de la sécurité, un cousin, déjà connu pour ses frasques à Lattaquié puis à Damas. Cette solidarité du clan primant toute considération politique a été une constante depuis le début de la crise, lui aliénant une bonne partie de ses soutiens politiques.

Deraa est un symbole essentiel. La ville était un bastion du baasisme rural, sur lequel le père de Bachar, Hafez Al-Assad, avait bâti son pouvoir en gagnant des soutiens au-delà de la petite communauté alaouite. Le père disposait d'un réseau de relais dans tout le pays et toutes les communautés dont le fils semble dépourvu, comme s'il dirigeait un pays étranger.

A Deraa, M. Al-Assad a réussi à transformer

une révolte locale et pour la dignité en révolution nationale et politique. Depuis, le scénario n'a fait que se répéter. Le deuxième moment-clé a été son discours au Parlement du 30 mars 2011, après deux semaines de sanglante révolte. Une fois de plus, il a déçu et aggravé la crise. Alors que sa conseillère Bouthaina Chaabane avait laissé entendre qu'il annoncerait des mesures spectaculaires — fin de l'état d'urgence, fin du rôle dirigeant du Baas dans la Constitution, instauration du multipartisme, libération de la presse, etc. —, il s'est contenté, enivré par la servilité de députés l'acclamant à tout rompre, de traiter les manifestants par le mépris et de nier le problème. Toutes les réformes ont été égrenées dans les mois qui ont suivi, mais chaque annonce, trop tardive et jamais tenue, est apparue comme un aveu de faiblesse.

Il y a, dans l'obsession de M. Al-Assad de ne pas apparaître comme faible, l'aveu probable d'une illégitimité qui lui reste chevillée au corps. Elle l'a conduit à des sommets d'insensibilité : à un leader libanais, qui lui rendait visite et lui demandait pourquoi torturer à mort des enfants comme Hamza Al-Khatib (12 ans), il répondit ingénument que l'adolescent n'avait pas été torturé et n'avait donc pas souffert.

Cet ensemble de tactiques à court terme et de mensonges dont on ne sait s'il les croit lui-même ne forme pas une stratégie. Ils ont lassé puis exaspéré les précieux alliés qu'étaient le Qatar de l'émir Al-Thani et la Turquie de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, alliés de Damas au début de la crise. Il a fallu du temps avant que la chaîne Al-Jazira et le premier ministre turc, parrain et modèle des révolutionnaires arabes, lâchent leur protégé syrien. La répétition d'un tel scénario avec la Russie de Vladimir Poutine n'est qu'une question de temps. Et alors, il ne restera plus à Bachar Al-Assad que le soutien de l'Iran, lui-même affaibli et assiégé, là où son père aurait probablement opéré une volte-face géopolitique aussi cynique que spectaculaire afin de sauver son régime. ■

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# Turkish spy row hits Kurdish peace, democratization move

By Daren Butler

**I**STANBUL (Reuters) - A prosecutor's investigation of Turkey's top spy has exposed a deep rift between police and the intelligence agency which could scupper efforts to end a Kurdish separatist insurgency and damage the government's democratization efforts

The crisis, driven by police concern about the activities of National Intelligence Agency (MIT) spies uncovered by police operations against Kurdish militants, has also fed speculation, denied by both sides, of a row between the government and an influential Islamic movement.

The conflict surfaced last week when prosecutors sought to question MIT head Hakan Fidan, who is close to Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, over MIT's infiltration of an organization linked to the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Prosecutors are also believed to want to discuss government-sanctioned talks which the MIT leadership held secretly with the PKK in Oslo in 2010, amid concerns that the agents offered too many concessions to the militants.

The government has countered with a legal reform requiring the prime minister's permission before MIT officials can be questioned. Parliament approved the bill overnight but it must still be ratified by the president.

The prosecutor who ordered the questioning has been removed from the case and is being investigated by judicial authorities.

The ruling AK Party's law led to a fierce response from the opposition, concerned it will strengthen Erdogan's grip on power, and vowed to challenge it in the constitutional court.

There are also signs of unease in the movement led by Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim theologian living in self-imposed exile in the United States, who retains strong influence in some quarters of the AK.

"The hasty approach to prepare amendments to the law that will require the prime minister's permission to investigate top intelligence officials would sabotage the democratization process," said Huseyin Gulerce from Zaman newspaper, regarded as close to Gulen.

The Gulen movement, thought to be influential in the police, has been a strong supporter of investigations into alleged plots to overthrow Erdogan's government. Gulerce said the cases paved the way for civilian supremacy in politics after decades of military dominance, but that this battle was not yet over.

If prosecutors are stopped from investigating MIT, it could weaken their ability to pursue these other cases.

## MILITARY TUTELAGE

"The power of the century-old system of military tutelage has neither come to an end nor does it suffer from any serious weaknesses. They still have lots of plans and traps to undermine civilian democracy," Gulerce added.

Beyond the parliamentary moves, Erdogan could act against those in the judiciary and police he regards as challenging him.

The controversy over the intelligence agency comes at an awkward time, with NATO-member Turkey trying to defuse the West's brewing crisis over neighboring Iran's nuclear work, while also scrambling to stop Syria's uprising from exploding into a sectarian conflict that could destabilize the region.

MIT head Fidan is an expert on Iran, and also acted as Erdogan's emissary to Damascus last year for crisis talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. He was also present at least one of the meetings with the PKK in Oslo.

Erdogan knew who his enemies were when he set out to tame the all-powerful army and see off challenges from a hostile judiciary during his first 10 years in power. They belonged to a conservative, secular elite which mistrusted the Islamist pedigree of Erdogan and the AK Party.

This time, tensions within the security apparatus appear to stem from rivalries among factions sympathetic to Erdogan.

"This incident has harmed MIT, it has harmed the prime minister and the AK Party, the police, prosecutors and even Fethullah Gulen's circles who are presented like a party in this debate," said political commentator Avni Ozgurel.

Erdogan, who has Islamist roots but whose AK party includes center-right and



A prosecutor seeks to hear the testimony of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) Undersecretary Hakan Fidan. (File photo)

even strongly nationalist elements, is easily the country's most powerful politician, and there is speculation that he aims to become president in 2014, before his third and final term as premier ends in 2015.

Still recovering from intestinal surgery, Erdogan has yet to comment on the dispute, but a close adviser has described the crisis as a "game" and warned against giving Turkey's enemies an opportunity to undermine its influence in the region.

"It is of vital importance for the fight against terrorism that the military, police and intelligence services act together in harmony," Erdogan's close adviser Yalcin Akdogan wrote under the assumed name he uses in the pro-government Yeni Safak daily.

## DAMAGE ALL ROUND

"Harming the AK Party government today means harming Turkey and everybody within it," he warned in a column which dismissed the idea of a clash between the AKP and Gulen's movement.

Prosecutors want to investigate allegations that MIT agents had effectively aided Kurdish militants in the course of infiltrating an organization believed to be a PKK front and that they undermined police operations against the group.

Police have detained hundreds of people in a bid to break up the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which the PKK is alleged to have established with the aim of creating its own political system in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Media reports say MIT complains in turn that the police have sabotaged agency

that the police have sabotaged agency infiltration of the organization, exposing its operatives and putting them at potentially fatal risk.

Ozgurel said he believed the state had been planning a major initiative in the spring to resume PKK talks aimed at inducing the militants to put down their weapons.

The Kurdish conflict is a major burden on Turkey, both in economic terms and the mounting death toll, and solving the problem would be a major coup for Erdogan.

But fears about public perceptions of the PKK talks and the spy agency's links to the KCK were likely to undermine chances for a resumption of negotiations with the militants.

"This will scare politicians as it reduces their capacity to take risks," Ozgurel said.

"Turkey will lose time and energy because of this because it is impossible to continue for now."

MIT had already been dragged into the spotlight in January when it denied allegations implicating it in a botched air strike near the Iraqi border in December that killed 35 villagers mistaken for militants. Media reports said MIT provided the intelligence for the attack.

Some have interpreted the targeting of MIT as a warning from nationalists to Erdogan against seeking any negotiated settlement with the PKK, having been alarmed by what the PKK had been offered during the abortive Oslo talks.

Branded a terrorist group by Ankara, the European Union and the United States, the PKK took up arms against the state in 1984. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

Talks between the state and PKK were halted after Erdogan's AK Party won a third term in office in June with around 50 percent of the votes. The PKK has returned to fighting using northern Iraq as a refuge for operations in southeastern Turkey.

But there is some hope. In the long term, media revelations of detailed negotiations between the state and the PKK could help clear the way for a peace deal by preparing public opinion and breaking taboos over addressing the militants' demands.

"Starting with relaxing of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's situation and the freeing of members of the KCK, to the forms of self-governance for the Kurds, such a consensus has been reached on all significant points making it crystal clear how the state views a possible solution," said Hurriyet Daily News commentator Mehmet Ali Birand.♦

## AL ARABIYA NEWS 24 FEBRUARY 2012

# Syria's opposition SNC outlines post-Assad vision and reaches out to Kurds

By Al Arabiya with Agencies

The head of the main opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) said on Friday an international "Friends of the Syrian People" meeting in Tunis had fallen short of the aspirations of the Syrian people.

"This conference does not meet the aspirations of the Syrian people," SNC chief Burhan Ghalioun told Reuters.

Earlier, Ghalioun outlined the council's vision for a post-Bashar al-Assad Syria, proposing an interim presidential council of national leaders and a truth and reconciliation committee.

In a copy of his speech at the meeting in Tunis, SNC leader Ghalioun called for the continuation of the uprising until Assad was ousted or handed over power as per an Arab League plan.

After that, Ghalioun called for the "formation of a presidential council composed of national leaders and the formation of a transitional government of political, military and technocratic figures who have not fought against the revolution."

He also proposed the creation of a



President of the Syrian National Council Burhan Ghalioun (C), and Kurdish National Council representative Abdul Hakim (R) during the Friends of the Syrian People meeting in Tunis. (AFP)

council that would address the abuses of the Assad regime and prevent any political or sectarian reprisals.

"The committee will work to reconcile and restore the sense of nationalism and human values that have been lacking during this crisis," he said.

The transitional period would end with elections to a parliament that would draw up a new constitution.

Ghalioun sought to reassure Syrian Kurds they would have a place in a post-Bashar al-Assad country, promising decentralized government and national recognition of Kurdish identity.

"The new Syria will have a decentrali-

zed government, thereby enabling local authorities to take control of their affairs," Burhan Ghalioun said, according to a copy of his speech.

"Your identity will be nationally recognized and respected and your rights as citizens will be assured. You will play a significant role in rebuilding the Syria of our dreams, the Syria of which we have been dreaming for decades."

Ghalioun, who has drawn some criticism over his position on the Kurds in the past, said there was no contradiction between a Syria that embraces its Arab character and that respects Kurdish national identity and assures Kurds equal rights before the law.♦

# Kurds shield Iraq VP in death squads case

By YAHYA BARZANJI and LARA JAKES- (AP)

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraq's Sunni vice president on Monday asked for popular support to fight government charges that he commandeered death squads and said he would continue to defy arrest with the help of the nation's powerful Kurds in a showdown that tests the limits of Baghdad's reach.

The government's case against Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi deepens tensions in a country still splintered by Sunni and Shi'ite sectarian rivalries. It now also threatens to draw a new wedge between Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shi'ite, and Kurdish leaders in Iraq's north who refuse to hand over al-Hashemi for trial.

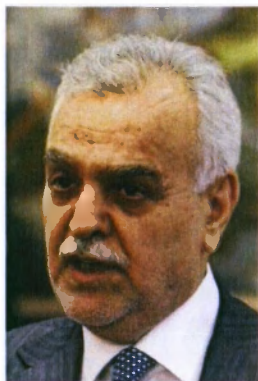
In a half-hour speech from the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq's north, al-Hashemi described the charges against him as "politically motivated" and said he would not return to Baghdad.

"I renew my determination to stand in a fair trial in an atmosphere that allows revealing the whole truth, away from any attempts of fraud or deceit or pressure," al-Hashemi said in his televised speech from Irbil. He vowed to remain in the Kurdish region.

Al-Maliki media adviser Ali al-Moussawi scoffed at al-Hashemi's speech.

"The only way is to turn himself in to the judicial authorities and stand before a court and present whatever evidence that proves he is innocent," al-Moussawi said.

Last week, a judicial panel in Baghdad concluded that al-Hashemi was behind at least 150 bombings and assassinations since 2005. The panel's findings stemmed from a review of a December warrant for al-Hashemi's arrest that accused him of paying his bodyguards \$3,000 to kill security forces and government officials.



Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi

The warrant was announced the day after U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq, raising eyebrows among critics who called it al-Maliki's first attempt at a power grab without fear of American interference.

Al-Hashemi was visiting the Kurdish region when the arrest warrant was announced, and has remained there ever since. The region is part of Iraq but has its own security forces and has for generations given asylum to people persecuted by Baghdad — though mostly during Saddam Hussein's regime.

Al-Maliki and Kurdish regional President Massoud Barzani have had a rocky relationship for years over how to share disputed land, oil revenues and federal funding. Barzani has shown no indication that he plans on handing over al-Hashemi to Baghdad, and officials in Irbil say doing so could worsen sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

Sunnis see the attack on al-Hashemi, the highest-ranking Sunni political official in the country, as proof that they'll never be allowed to share real power in the Shi'ite-dominated country. Many Shi'ites view Sunnis as remnants of Saddam Hussein's regime with ties to terrorists.

Sending al-Hashemi back to Baghdad "would worsen the crisis instead of ending it," said



Kurdish patrons sit in a local cafe as TV broadcasts a speech by Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi in Sulaimaniyah, Feb. 20, 2012. al-Hashemi slammed government charges that he ran death squads as politically motivated and called on "all honest Iraqi people" to rise up in his defense. (AP)

Kurdish government spokesman Fuad Hussein.

"Al-Hashemi is our guest. The last thing Iraq needs now is new sectarian problems," Hussein said in an interview last week.

That is likely to infuriate Baghdad.

"Nobody should use a legal matter or case as a tool to press the government. Justice should be kept away from political agendas," Abdul-Hadi al-Hassani, a lawmaker from the Shi'ite party al-Maliki heads. He said all of Iraq's jurisdictions — including Kurdistan — should respect the court's decisions.

In the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah, residents took a certain glee at standing firm against Baghdad. Sweets seller Saman Karim said it's likely that Barzani is more interested in snubbing al-Maliki than he is in helping al-Hashemi.

"The Kurds have no sympathy toward al-Hashemi — they just want to humiliate the central government," Karim said.

How that will shape Iraq's already unstable political balance is anyone's guess. The Kurdish parties hold 51 of the 325 seats in parliament, and are generally considered kingmakers in most tiebreakers facing the legislature.

Political analyst Reidar Visser, an Iraq expert at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, said the issue likely will cause the relationship between al-Maliki and Barzani to deteriorate even fur-

ther. "It is clear that al-Hashemi expects to enjoy immunity from detention in the Kurdish areas, which is going to create additional problems for the long-standing but shaky alliance between the Kurds and al-Maliki," Visser said.

It's also possible the Kurds will use al-Hashemi as a bargaining tool, said Kurdish human rights activist Omar Mohammed. He predicted the Kurds eventually will hand over al-Hashemi in exchange for something it wants from Baghdad.

Al-Hashemi said he wanted the trial to be moved to the northern city of Kirkuk, which is ethnically shared among Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen, and where the investigators or jury would not be tainted by Baghdad's accusations.

He also lashed out at the judicial panel, which was appointed by Iraq's highest court to investigate the charges. The panel's results aren't legally binding but they have been passed along to a criminal court which could choose to charge al-Hashemi with even more crimes. The panel touted its findings as the first independent review of al-Hashemi's case, but critics and some experts said its judges were named by officials sympathetic to al-Maliki.

"Our judicial system is still working to satisfy some influential people," al-Hashemi said.

□ □ □



## TURQUIE • Un pays régi par de "dangereuses absurdités"

Les guerres intestines se multiplient au sommet de l'Etat turc : entre la justice et la police d'une part, le gouvernement et les services secrets de l'autre, le tout sur fond de question kurde. Cette situation grotesque met en danger la séparation des pouvoirs, estime l'écrivain Ahmet Altan.

| Ahmet Altan | Taraf

Au moment où j'écris ces lignes, le Parlement turc étudie un projet de loi selon lequel un membre des services de renseignements (MIT) ayant commis un délit dans le cadre d'une mission ordonnée par le Premier ministre ne pourra être jugé que si le chef du gouvernement donne son accord. Le Premier ministre interviendra donc dans des affaires criminelles concernant la justice, et ce en contradiction avec le concept de séparation des pouvoirs. Pourquoi une loi paraissant aussi aberrante est-elle en train d'être adoptée ?

Et bien tout simplement pour corriger une autre aberration. En effet, le Premier ministre Erdogan a donné l'ordre aux services de renseignements de nouer des contacts avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan [PKK, séparatiste], afin de créer les fondements d'un processus de paix. Sauf qu'un procureur a considéré qu'il s'agissait là d'un délit. Il a donc convoqué les membres du MIT qui ont noué ces contacts afin de les soumettre à un interrogatoire, et il n'est pas exclu que cette interpellation débouche sur des arrestations. On se trouve donc dans une situation où l'initiative politique courageuse et décisive d'un gouvernement élu est bloquée par la justice.

Le pouvoir judiciaire essaie ainsi de mettre l'exécutif sous tutelle au mépris du principe de séparation des pouvoirs. En réaction, l'exécutif prépare une loi qui réduit la marge de manœuvre du judiciaire, et le corps législatif participe à ce mouvement. Pas de doute, nous sommes bien en Turquie où l'on tente d'empêcher une absurdité en en inventant une autre. Les trois pouvoirs sortent ainsi de ce qui devrait normalement être le cadre de leur action. Pourtant, corriger des anomalies par d'autres anomalies n'est pas une bonne idée.

C'est précisément là que réside l'erreur, ou alors la roublardise, du Parti de la

justice et du développement [PKK, islamiste modéré, au pouvoir]. En effet, le parti au pouvoir ne semble aucunement vouloir en finir avec ce système politique hérité du coup d'Etat de 1980. [La Constitution de 1982, adoptée alors sous la pression des militaires, est, malgré des amendements, toujours en vigueur, malgré les promesses de l'AKP d'en rédiger une nouvelle.] Le pouvoir en place entend ainsi exploiter, autant que faire se peut, les prérogatives importantes que ce régime issu du coup d'Etat accorde aux dirigeants de ce pays.

Le gouvernement n'a toujours pas rendu de comptes au sujet du massacre d'Uludere [35 civils kurdes ont été tués, le 28 décembre 2011, par un bombardement aérien à la frontière entre la Turquie et l'Irak]. Le meurtre de Hrant Dink [journaliste turc d'origine arménienne assassiné en janvier 2007] n'a toujours pas été élucidé. Et voilà que certains affirment que le KCK [structure faisant le lien entre le PKK et ses relais civils en Turquie, concurrençant l'Etat turc dans les régions à majorité kurde et dont l'existence a justifié de très nombreuses arrestations depuis 2009] serait en fait sous la houlette des services secrets [la justice turque accuse en effet des agents du MIT d'avoir été plus loin que la simple infiltration du KCK].

Le coprésident du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie [BDP, prokurde et jugé relativement proche du PKK] s'est interrogé – une rumeur circule à ce propos – sur l'implication du MIT dans un attentat meurtrier commis à Istanbul et dont la responsabilité avait été attribuée au PKK. Où va-t-on si même le dirigeant du BDP n'arrive plus à distinguer entre les militants du PKK et les agents des services secrets ?! Tant qu'une vraie solution n'est pas apportée à un problème kurde qui accompagne la République depuis sa création [1923], on se retrouvera face à ce genre de situation où la police arrête des membres des services secrets parce qu'ils apparaîtraient à une structure comme le



▲ Dessin de Bleibel, Liban.

KCK.

Mais regardez donc la situation dans laquelle nous sommes : l'ancien chef d'état-major de l'armée est en prison pour propagande antigouvernementale, la police est sur le point d'arrêter des membres des services des renseignements, une loi accordant au Premier ministre la liberté de commettre des délits est en préparation, le gouvernement est persuadé qu'il est victime d'attaques orchestrées par les procureurs et la police, le patron d'un des plus grands clubs de football du pays [Fenerbahçe] vient d'être condamné pour "avoir dirigé un gang", des responsables de l'institution en charge des appels d'offres pour la fonction publique ont été arrêtés pour corruption, il y a presque plus de généraux en prison qu'en liberté, des milliers d'activistes politiques kurdes ont été emprisonnés, etc.

Ces quelques lignes ne suffisent-elles pas à montrer que nous vivons décidément dans un système tout à fait anormal ? Pourquoi le parti au pouvoir s'accommode-t-il à ce point d'un régime issu d'un coup d'Etat ? D'où vient cet attachement à une conception de la justice inspirée par des putschistes ? Si l'AKP persiste à maintenir ce système, la Turquie risque d'être citée dans le livre des records comme celui qui aligne le plus grand nombre de "dangereuses absurdités" ! ○

# Syrie: Paris et Ankara, accord à froid

Les deux pays, brouillés, mènent la dénonciation de la répression, à deux jours de la conférence de Tunis.

Par **MARC SEMO**

Envoyé spécial à Ankara et Istanbul (Turquie)

Les deux capitales sont depuis des mois les plus engagées dans le dossier syrien et elles appellent chacune de leur côté à une conférence internationale des «amis de la Syrie» avec la Ligue arabe, les Etats-Unis et les principaux pays européens. La première se tiendra

ce vendredi à Tunis, comme le souhaitait Paris.

## ANALYSE

La seconde devrait avoir lieu à Istanbul, comme le veut Ankara. Mais si les autorités françaises et turques agissent de fait à l'unisson pour mobiliser la communauté internationale, elles sont désormais en rivalité ouverte et... ne se parlent plus. Ou pas directement, et surtout pas sur les affaires syriennes.

«**RIVALITÉ.** «Nos contacts ne se font plus que par chercheurs interposés», soupire un diplomate. En rétorsion au vote de la loi sanctionnant la négation du génocide arménien, Ankara a décidé de geler les relations militaires et politiques. «Sur le dossier syrien, la Turquie sait être incontournable et elle veut rappeler clairement aux autorités françaises qu'elles ne peuvent rien sans elle», analyse Kadri Gürsel, éditorialiste de politique étrangère au quotidien de centre gauche *Milliyet*. Les positions des deux pays sur une crise internationale majeure n'ont pourtant pas été aussi proches depuis longtemps. «Il y a autant de rivalité que d'émulation entre les deux ministres des affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoglu et Alain Juppé, qui partagent les mêmes convictions sur l'urgence d'arrêter les massacres du régime baasiste», assure Khaled Khodja, le représentant en Turquie du Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale organisation de l'opposition, qui dispose depuis quatre mois d'un bureau officiel, installé non loin de l'aéroport d'Istanbul, le premier du genre.

La crise syrienne est un moment de vérité pour une diplomatie turque toujours plus active sur la scène régionale. Après avoir longtemps hé-



Un homme blessé lors de bombardements dans le quartier de Bab Amro, à Homs, en Syrie, samedi. PHOTO YOUTUBE. AFP

des critères européens de Maaspense qu'un pays comme l'Argental-Assad à «écouter son peuple», le gouvernement turc, inquiet des risques de déstabilisation de son voisin du sud, avec lequel il partage 800 kilomètres de frontière, a de plus en plus ouvertement appelé à un changement de régime. «Nous voulions que Al-Assad soit le Gorbatchev de la Syrie, mais il a choisi d'en être le Milosevic et c'est tout le problème», expliquait le 10 février Ahmet Davutoglu à des étudiants lors d'une visite à Washington de cinq jours. Une durée assez exceptionnelle qui souligne l'importance de la Turquie pour acheminer des aides à la population civile syrienne, voire même instaurer des «corridors humanitaires», hypothèse évoquée dès l'automne par le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, mais aussi par son homologue turc.

Certes, pour le moment, tout est bloqué car un tel déploiement impliquerait un accord des autorités syriennes ou une résolution du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, actuellement paralysé par les veto de Moscou et de Pékin. Mais la communauté internationale fait monter la pression, comme en témoigne le vote massif de l'assemblée générale de l'ONU pour soutenir la résolution présentée par la Ligue arabe, avec le soutien des Occidentaux. «Il donne une légitimité à une interven-

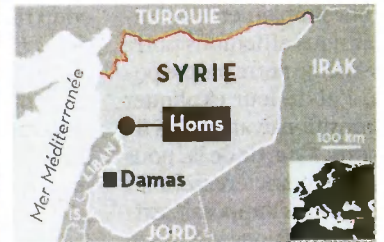
tion humanitaire de la communauté internationale, même si seule une résolution du Conseil de sécurité pourrait lui donner un cadre légal», souligne un diplomate, rappelant qu'en tout cas Ankara n'agira pas seul. Les autorités ont déjà prévu des «zones tampons» sur leur sol qui pourraient, en cas d'urgence, accueillir un afflux massif de réfugiés. Elles abritent déjà depuis l'été quelque 5 000 réfugiés près d'Antioche, mais aussi une centaine de déserteurs, dont le colonel Riyad al-Asaad, qui se présente comme chef de l'Armée syrienne de libération et donne ses interviews en présence de diplomates turcs. «L'enjeu pour le gouvernement islamo-conservateur

**Ahmet Davutoglu** ministre turc des Affaires étrangères

au pouvoir depuis 2002 est énorme: si la Turquie n'est pas au centre d'une opération sur la Syrie, c'est toute la crédibilité de la politique menée ces dernières années au Moyen-Orient et la popularité conquise par le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dans la région qui prendront un sérieux coup», analyse

«L'objectif [...] n'est pas clair [...]. Nous ne voyons donc pas de possibilité de participer à la conférence de Tunis.»

**Alexandre Loukachevitch** porte-parole russe des Affaires étrangères



Soli Özel, spécialiste des relations internationales.

Mais au-delà de leurs déclarations fracassantes, les autorités restent dans les faits prudentes. Elles craignent de subir les contrecoups du conflit syrien, avec une reprise de la rébellion kurde, attisée par Damas, voire même à terme une montée des tensions entre sunnites, largement majoritaires, solidaires de la révolte syrienne, et alévis –secte progressiste issue du chiisme –, représentant un tiers de la population.

**GAZ.** En outre, les derniers alliés du régime syrien, l'Iran et la Russie, sont les voisins de la Turquie et ses principaux fournisseurs de gaz. L'opposition de gauche, qui fut la première à dénoncer dès le printemps l'aveuglement répressif d'Al-Assad, critique ouvertement «l'aventurisme» de la diplomatie turque. Osman Koruturk, député et pilier de la commission des affaires étrangères, soupire: «Le gouvernement veut exporter la démocratie chez nos voisins, alors qu'en Turquie même elle est de plus en plus mal en point.»

# Israeli strike against Iran? No shortage of obstacles

WASHINGTON

Technical difficulties and logistical headaches would complicate attack

BY ELISABETH BUMILLER

Should Israel decide to launch a military strike against Iran, its pilots would have to fly long distances across unfriendly airspace, refuel in the air en route, fight off Iranian air defenses, attack multiple underground sites simultaneously — and use at least 100 planes.

That is the assessment of U.S. defense officials and military analysts close to the Pentagon, who say that an Israeli attack meant to set back Iran's nuclear program would be a huge and highly complex operation. They describe it as far different from Israel's "surgical" strikes on a nuclear reactor in Syria in 2007 and the Osirak reactor in Iraq in 1981.

"All the pundits who talk about 'Oh, yeah, bomb Iran,' it ain't going to be that easy," said Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula, who retired last year as the U.S. Air Force's top intelligence official and who planned the U.S. air campaigns in 2001 in Afghanistan and in the 1991 Gulf War.

Speculation that Israel might attack Iran has intensified in recent months as tensions between the countries have escalated. In a sign of rising U.S. concern, Thomas E. Donilon, the national security adviser, met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in Jerusalem on Sunday, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, warned on CNN that an Israeli strike on Iran right now would be "destabilizing." Similarly, Foreign Secretary William Hague of Britain told the BBC that attacking Iran would not be "the wise thing" for Israel to do "at this moment."

But while an Israeli spokesman in Washington, Lior Weintraub, said the country continued to push for tougher sanctions on Iran, he reiterated that Israel, like the United States, "is keeping all options on the table."

Tehran insists that there is no weapons elements in its nuclear program, and a team of United Nations inspectors arrived in Iran on Monday for its second visit in three weeks. The leader of the delegation of inspectors, Herman Nackaerts, told reporters on Sunday as his team left its headquarters in Vienna, "We hope to have some concrete results after this trip." Though weapons development was the most important question, he said, "we want to tackle all outstanding issues."

Mr. Nackaerts, the International Atomic Energy Agency's deputy director general, warned that "this is of course a complex issue, which may take a while," according to a transcript of his remarks made available on Monday by agency officials.

The latest visit is to last two days, though it may be extended, as the previous one was. Diplomats who were briefed on the discussions held on the last visit said that Iranian officials failed to address the major concerns about Iran's activities that were raised in a report issued by the agency in November.

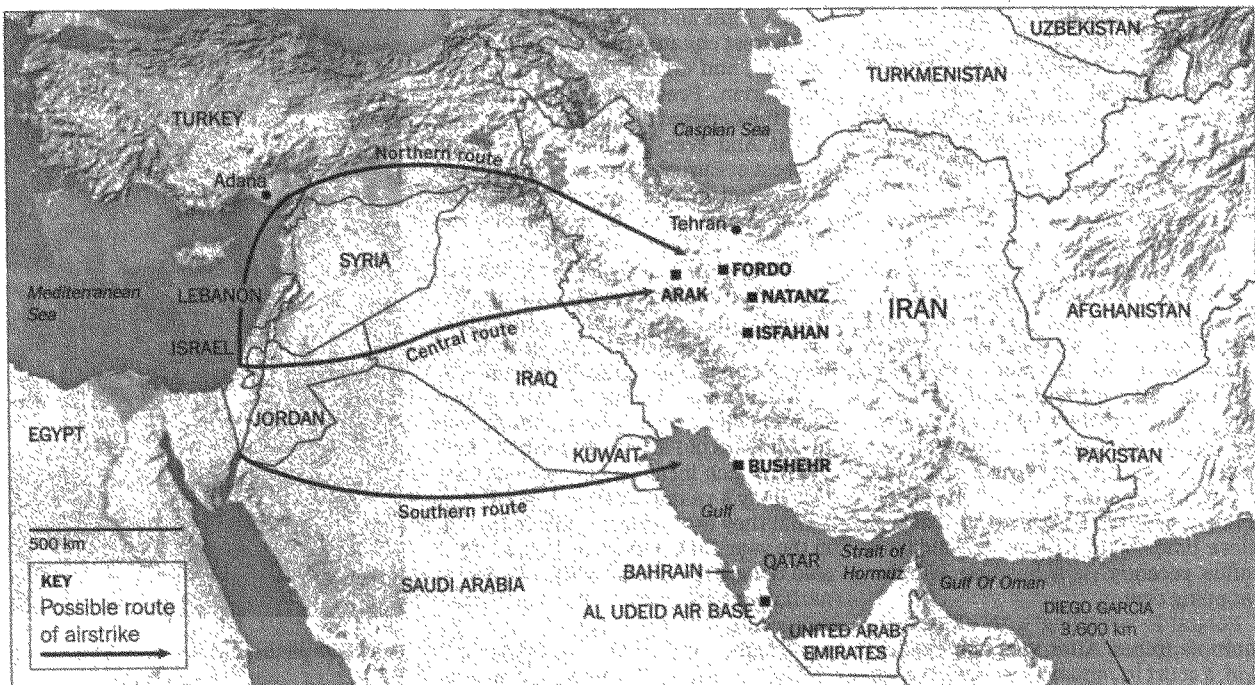
The possible outlines of an Israeli military attack on Iranian facilities have become a source of debate in Washington, where some analysts question whether Israel even has the military capacity to carry it off. One fear is that the United States would be sucked into finishing the job — a task that even with the U.S.' far larger arsenal of aircraft and munitions could still take many weeks, defense analysts said. Another fear is of Iranian retaliation.

"I don't think you'll find anyone who'll say, 'Here's how it's going to be done — handful of planes, over an evening, in and out,'" said Andrew R. Hoehn, a former Pentagon official who is now director of RAND Corp.'s Project Air Force, which does extensive research for the U.S. Air Force.

Michael V. Hayden, who was director of the C.I.A. from 2006 to 2009, said flatly last month that airstrikes capable of seriously setting back Iran's nuclear program were "beyond the capacity" of Israel, in part because of the distance that attack aircraft would have to travel and the scale of the task.

Still, a top defense official cautioned in an interview last week that "we don't have perfect visibility" into Israel's arsenal, let alone its military calculations. His views were echoed by Anthony H. Cordesman, an influential military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "There are a lot of unknowns, there are a lot of potential risks, but Israel may know that those risks aren't that serious," he said.

Given that Israel would want to strike Iran's four major nuclear sites — the uranium enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordo, the heavy-water reactor at Arak and the yellowcake-conversion plant at Isfahan — military analysts say the first problem is how to get there. There are three potential routes: to the north over Turkey, to the south over Saudi Arabia or taking a central route across Jordan and Iraq.



The route over Iraq would be the most direct and likely, defense analysts say, because Iraq effectively has no air defenses and the United States, after its December withdrawal, no longer has the obligation to defend Iraqi skies. "That was a concern of the Israelis a year ago, that we would come up and intercept their aircraft if the Israelis chose to take a path across Iraq," said a former U.S. defense official who asked for anonymity to discuss secret intelligence.

Assuming that Jordan tolerates the Israeli overflight, the next problem is distance. Israel has U.S.-built F-15I and F-16I fighter jets that can carry bombs to the targets, but their range — depending on altitude, speed and payload — falls far short of the minimum round trip of 3,200 kilometers, or 2,000 miles. That does not include an aircraft's "loiter time" over a target plus the potential of having to fight off attacks from Iranian missiles and planes.

In any possibility, Israel would have to use airborne refueling planes, called tankers, but Israel is not thought to have enough. Scott Johnson, an analyst at the defense consulting firm IHS Jane's and the leader of a team preparing an online seminar on Israeli strike possibilities on Iran, said that Israel had eight KC-707 U.S.-made tankers, although it is not clear they are all in operation. It is possible, he said, that Israel has reconfigured existing planes into tankers to use in a strike.

Even so, any number of tankers would need to be protected by even more fighter planes. "So the numbers you need just skyrocket," Mr. Johnson said. Israel

has about 125 F-15Is and F-16Is. One possibility, Mr. Johnson said, would be to fly the tankers as high as 15,000 meters, or 50,000 feet, making them hard for air defenses to hit, and then have them drop down to a lower altitude to meet up with the fighter jets to refuel.

Israel would still need to use its electronic warfare planes to penetrate Iran's air defenses and jam its radar systems to create a corridor for an attack. Iran's anti-aircraft defenses may be a generation old — in 2010, Russia refused to sell Iran its more advanced S-300 missile system — but they are hardly negligible, military analysts say.

Iranian missiles could force Israeli warplanes to maneuver and dump their munitions before they reached their targets. Iran could also strike back with missiles that could hit Israel, opening a new war in the Middle East, though some Israeli officials have argued that the consequences would be worse if Iran were to gain a nuclear weapon.

Another major hurdle is Israel's inventory of bombs capable of penetrating the Natanz facility, believed to be buried under 9.1 meters of reinforced concrete, and the Fordo site, which is built into a mountain.

Assuming it does not use a nuclear device, Israel has U.S.-made GBU-28 5,000-pound "bunker buster" bombs, or 2,267 kilograms, that could damage such hardened targets, although it is unclear how far down they can go.

This month, a Bipartisan Policy Center report by Charles S. Robb, the former Democratic senator from Vir-

ginia, and Charles F. Wald, a retired U.S. Air Force general, recommended that the Obama administration sell Israel 200 enhanced GBU-31 "bunker busters" as well as three advanced refueling planes.

The two said that they were not advocating an Israeli attack, but that the munitions and aircraft were needed to improve Israel's credibility as it threatens a strike.

Should the United States get involved — or decide to strike on its own — military analysts said that the Pentagon had the ability to launch big strikes with bombers, stealth aircraft and cruise missiles, which could be delivered by submarines, followed up by drones that could carry out damage assessments to help direct further strikes. Unlike Israel, the United States has plenty of refueling capability. Bombers could fly from Al Udeid air base in Qatar, Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean or bases in Britain and the United States.

Nonetheless, defense officials say it would still be tough to penetrate Iran's deepest facilities with existing U.S. bombs and so are enhancing an existing 30,000-pound "Massive Ordnance Penetrator" that was specifically designed for Iran and North Korea.

Scott Shane contributed reporting from Washington and Alan Cowell from London.

INTERNATIONAL  
Herald Tribune FEBRUARY 21, 2012

## Syria sends armor to Homs for likely assault

BEIRUT

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Syria's military sent tanks and other reinforcements toward the rebel stronghold of Homs on Monday for a possible offensive to break the opposition's grip even as Red Cross negotiators tried to broker a cease-fire to deliver emergency aid.

The mobilization around Homs, in central Syria, indicated that President Bashar al-Assad's regime was preparing a ground assault after weeks of shelling the district of Baba Amr.

"The human loss is going to be huge if they retake Baba Amr," said Rami Abdul-Rahman, who heads the British-

based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The group said at least eight people were killed by shelling in parts of Homs on Monday.

Amateur videos posted online showed what activists said were shells falling on Baba Amr. Phone lines and Internet connections have been cut with the city, making it difficult to get firsthand accounts from Homs residents.

In Geneva, a spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross said it had been in talks with the Syrian authorities and opposition groups. "We are currently discussing several possibilities with all those concerned, and it includes a cessation of fighting in the most affected areas," the spokeswoman, Carla Haddad, said.

The talks were not aimed at resolving political differences after more than 11 months of bloodshed and unrest, but "the idea is to be able to facilitate swift access to people in need," she said.

Activists say the government might be trying to subdue Homs — an important stronghold for anti-Assad groups — before a referendum Sunday on a new constitution, which would allow a bigger role for political opposition to the Baath Party, which has controlled Syria since

a coup in 1963.

The leaders of the uprising have dismissed the referendum as an attempt at superficial change. "We have called for a boycott of the referendum which cannot be held while parts of Syria are a war zone," said Omar Idilbi, a Beirut-based member of the opposition Syrian National Council.

Mr. Assad still counts on support from Iran and allies like Russia, which fears losing its main Arab partner. But his government is facing escalating pressure and isolation from Western and Arab states.

In Kabul, two senior Republicans on the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee urged international cooperation to help supply the rebels with weapons and other aid. The two, John McCain and Lindsey Graham, stopped short of endorsing direct U.S. military involvement.

"The United States doesn't have to directly ship weapons to the opposition, but there are a whole lot of things that can be done" through groups such as the Arab League, Mr. McCain said Sunday.

Commentary

# Iraq's Kurds under Pressure

February 21, 2012  
Middle East Policy Council

**I**raq's Kurds continue to come under intense pressure from the authorities in Baghdad. In the latest twist of what has become a thorn in the relations between the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the former has decided to move forward with punitive measures against foreign oil-and-gas companies that have cut deals with the Kurds against Baghdad's wishes. Meanwhile, across the border, Kurdish leaders in Turkey are taking friendly fire about their strategy of armed resistance.

On the surface, the political process in the north of Iraq appears to be on the right track. According to an Al Sumaria TV report, "Iraq's Kurdistan Presidency announced, on Thursday, that leader Masoud Barazani accepted the resignation of Barham Saleh's government.... Kurdistan's current government was formed following 2009's parliamentary elections and is led, by virtue of the strategic agreement concluded between Kurdistan Democratic Party headed by Masoud Al Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan headed by Jalal Talabani, to the election of Barham Saleh as Prime Minister of Kurdistan for the first half of the term and Vice-President of Kurdistan Democratic Party Nigirvan Barzani for the second half."

Unfortunately, the same can't be said about the relationship between the Kurds in the north and the central government in Baghdad. In an attempt to put pressure on the Kurds as well as the companies attempting to cut deals with them, the government is waging a legal as well as a PR war. For example, the Iraq daily *Azzaman* notes statements by government officials who argue: "Iraqi Kurds are heavily involved in the smuggling of oil to Iran....Member of Parliament Furat al-Sharaa said Iraqi Kurdistan was the hub of oil smuggling operations. Sharaa, who is a member of the parliament's energy commission, said the illegal trade was carried out through a fleet of oil tankers....He said the smugglers carried crude oil from southern Iraqi oil fields to Iraqi Kurdistan and then to Iran. The long distance through which oil tankers travel is an indication of some form of complicity from higher authorizes as the trade would not be possible without their consent."

AK News' Joel Wing comments on the latest development regarding Iraq's decision to "[s]anction Exxon for [making a] deal with Kurdistan.... In February 2012, [Baghdad] announced that Exxon would be excluded from the fourth bidding round for twelve oil and gas fields, which is scheduled for May. This is the first time that Baghdad has decided to confront a major oil corporation. It has

done the same with other companies, but they did not have the standing of Exxon. This could backfire against the central government, as it is losing its leverage in this dispute....The Iraqi government's increasingly confrontational stance towards Exxon may not pay off....The environment in southern Iraq may simply not have the pay-offs that Exxon was hoping for, which is why they are willing to sacrifice their position there, and move to Kurdistan."

There is evidence, however, that the pressure is paying off. Adel Kadhem writes last week that "A South Korean firm is reported to have given up working on an oil field in northern Iraq. A statement by the Oil Ministry said the firm, which it did not name, sold its share in the field in the hope of taking part in developing oil fields in other parts of the country. The ministry has said it will ban any foreign firm from working in Iraq if it found it had struck an oil development deal with Kurdish authorities....The Kurds dispute the ministry's stand, saying the constitution grants them the right to sign such deals."

The Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri Al Maliki, also made the case over the weekend for a constitutional approach to the 'Kirkuk problem.' According to Aswat AlIraq, "Premier Nouri al-Maliki stressed the necessity to solve all Kirkuk problems on constitutional bases. In a statement issued by the Premiership, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, Maliki met Kirkuk ... MPs, where he stressed that 'the constitution is the criteria to solve all problems, including of Kirkuk.' He called 'for further collaboration to preserve the unity, security and stability of Iraq'"

Meanwhile, across the border in Turkey, Iraq's Kurdish leaders have sent an unmistakable message to Turkey's Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party. Turkey's *Today's Zaman* noted: "Massoud Barzani, the leader of northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish government, speaking in a meeting with Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in Arbil, has claimed using violence and taking up arms is an 'outdated and useless strategy' in solving the decades-old Kurdish question in Turkey....Ruling out armed opposition and terrorist activities...., Barzani stated that he believes the real solution to Turkey's Kurdish question — the Kurds' search for equal cultural and political rights in Turkey — is only possible with dialogue and peaceful initiatives."

The remarks come after considerable debate within Turkey about the path that their Kurdish population will take. Reflecting on the continued militarization of the conflict, *Hurriyet Daily News'* Kadri Gursel asks, "If weapons are, as Diyarbakır independent deputy Leyla Zana has said, 'The insurance of the Kurds,' then what kind of insurance will this alleged 'insurance policy' provide for the Kurds within its current context and content and against what dangers today and tomorrow?...In fact, in today's circumstances, 'weapons' are now a tool to be abandoned for the Kurdish movement....Those who took arms in the mountains are captives of the political equations they have formed by taking to the mountains with arms. Thereby, it is much more difficult to come down from the mountains than go up." ♦

# A year later, and Syrian opposition is still fractured

BEIRUT

## Rebels fail to build coalition that other nations can rely on

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

Syria spirals downward into a more hellish existence in cities like Homs, where relentless government artillery barrages and lethal snipers gradually annihilate entire neighborhoods; or in remote villages where army soldiers

### NEWS ANALYSIS

materialize to slaughter peasant farmers brazen enough to declare themselves outside government control; or in myriad places whose victims add to a national death toll that doubles without restraint from 30 to 60 and beyond in mere hours.

The bloodbath has brought new, worldwide attention on the most fraught Arab uprising, not least because among its latest victims were high-profile foreign and local correspondents whose vivid reports of civilian deaths contradicted a threadbare government line about "foreign terrorist gangs."

A top question raised by the global attention is how to propel forward Syria's opposition movement, and whether its disjointed internal and external components are prepared for the long war of attrition that appears fated to come.

Nearly a year after the uprising erupted, the opposition remains a fractious collection of political groups, longtime exiles and newly forged activists, still deeply divided along ideological, ethnic or sectarian lines. It is difficult to celebrate the mix as the "mosaic" of Syria anymore.

They have failed to build themselves into the kind of vehicle onto which the international community can pile all of its ambitions for change in Syria. There is no real plan.

The bickering opposition will be the focus of intense discussions on Friday when senior diplomats from about 80 countries converge on Tunisia for the inaugural meeting of the group Friends of Syria. One reason it is difficult to intervene in the conflict is that it stands at the nexus of many tribal and religious tensions, with every neighboring coun-

try having a different stake in the country's fate.

The stated priority at Friday's meeting is to figure out how to provide humanitarian assistance to besieged cities like Homs. But bolstering the opposition will be the main task hovering in the background.

The internal divisions have kept Western and Arab governments from recognizing the council as a kind of government-in-exile, and the summit meeting in Tunis will not very likely change that. Russia, Syria's main international patron, is avoiding the meeting entirely.

The divisions within the main umbrella organization, the Syrian National Council, were fully on display last week when its 10-member executive committee met at the Four Seasons Hotel in Doha, Qatar. The council has been slow on critical issues like recognizing the transformation of the Syrian uprising from a nonviolent movement to an armed insurrection, even if in self-defense, according to members themselves, diplomats and other analysts.

Aside from grouping only about 70 percent of the opposition groups, the national council has yet to seriously address melding itself with the increasingly independent internal alliances in Homs and other cities across Syria trapped in an uneven battle for survival, they said, warning that the council runs the risk of being supplanted.

"They were in a constant, ongoing struggle which delayed anything productive and any real work that should be done for the revolution," said Rima Fleihan, an activist who crawled through barbed-wire fences to Jordan from Syria in September to escape arrest. She was representing the local coordinating committees on the council until she quit in disgust this month.

"They fight more than they work," Ms. Fleihan said. "People are asking why they have failed to achieve any international recognition, why no aid is reaching the people, why are we still being shelled?"

Syria inevitably draws comparisons with Libya and its Transitional National Council. In some ways, the task in Libya proved easier not just because NATO intervened but also because the opposition leveraged the huge chunk of eastern Libya it held around Benghazi into the attempt to claim the whole country. And the unified focus on the war submerged most overt political differences for a time.

Now, of course, the Libyan transition remains an open question. The experience of militias made up of mild-mannered doctors and accountants, not to mention young Islamists, suddenly going feral and becoming little more than armed gangs hangs like a ghost of uprisings past over the evolving Syrian opposition.

The United States and other Western governments remain wary of supporting yet another opposition movement where the Muslim Brotherhood or some coalition that includes them professes to take a back seat, only to see them ride to

power. Western diplomats speaking on background basically said they have seen this movie before and did not love the ending.

Syrian national council members describe opposition divisions as a natural result of trying to forge a working organization — not a parliament — that encompasses wide diversity from a complex society that has known only oppression.

Indeed, the men at the Four Seasons in Doha ranged from the suits, ties and neatly trimmed beards of various Islamist representatives to the one Christian on the executive committee, a longtime university professor in Belgium who wandered around in flip-flops.

The national council members argue that progress has been made among a group of people who were virtual strangers when they first gathered in Istanbul in September, and that sniping about their unrepresentative nature is mostly a disinformation campaign by Damascus.

"This is a manufactured problem," said Burhan Ghalioun, the council president, speaking in an interview outside of an executive committee meeting last week after his first term as leader was extended for another three months. "Some independent people don't want to join the S.N.C., but there is no strong opposition power outside the national council."

The unlimited expectations of the people inside Syria that the council could rescue them were also impossible to meet, he said, particularly given the lack of funding. Although the Qatari government picked up the bill for the meeting and for much travel, council members said no significant financial support from Arab or Western governments has materialized, despite repeated promises, so they have to rely on rich Syrian exiles. They hope Tunis will change that.

After using Skype to reach embattled cities like Homs, Hama and Idlib, national council members admitted sheepishly that activists on the ground just flung accusations at them, demanding why they seemed to swan from one luxury hotel to the next while no medical supplies nor other aid flowed into Syria.

The bickering was in plain sight.

"Is this any way to work?" Haithem al-Maleh, an 81-year-old lawyer and war horse of the opposition movement, said, yelling as he came barreling out of one Doha meeting, only to be corralled back in. "They are all stupid and silly, but what can I do?"

The council, with 310 members, is organized on three levels: the broad membership itself, a "secretariat general" of about 70 members divided among political groups and the executive committee.

It remains Balkanized, however, among different factions, and arguments unspool endlessly over which groups deserve how many seats at what level. The mostly secular, liberal representatives and those from the Islamist factions harbor mutual suspicions about future intent.

No one from Syria's ruling Alawite community; the small religious sect of President Bashar al-Assad, sits on the executive committee, despite repeated attempts to woo a few prominent dissidents. The fight over Kurdish seats remains unsettled, even though Masoud Barzani, a leading Kurd in neighboring Iraq, tried to mediate.

The council has also not reconciled with members of the Syrian National Coordination Committee, some of whom remain inside and who have generally taken a softer line about allowing Mr. Assad to shepherd a political transition starting with the referendum on Sunday on a new constitution.

"Time is running out for the Syrian opposition to establish its credibility and viability as an effective representative of the uprising," said Steven Heyde-

mann, who focuses on Middle East issues at the United States Institute of Peace, a study group partially funded by Congress. They have been told repeatedly that their first priority should be to build their visibility on the ground, he said, as hard as that might be.

Their diplomatic efforts remain troubled. The S.N.C. has yet to appoint an official envoy in Washington, and jockeying over who should lobby the U.N. Security Council this month was so intense, diplomats and analysts said, that the S.N.C. sent an unwieldy delegation of some 14 members who continued arguing in New York over who would meet which ambassador.

"There is a lot of ego involved," said Louay Safi, a Syrian-American political science professor and head of the policy and planning committee.

The main issue the council is grappling with now is how to coordinate an increasingly armed opposition. Their answer thus far is that they support the defensive use of weapons.

For many activists, that is not good enough.

"There is a scary vacuum of political leadership," said Wissan Tarif, an activist with the human rights group Avaaz. "Those fighting must know they are accountable to a political leadership, otherwise we are heading toward another disaster."

*Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from London and an employee of The New York Times contributed from Beirut.*

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune** FEBRUARY 22, 2012

## China, Iran and Russia affirm their ties to Syria

CAIRO

### 3 allies of regime ignore increasing pressure over violent crackdown

BY ROD NORDLAND

China, Russia and Iran all made declarations of support for the Syrian government on Tuesday, reaffirming their alliances in the face of broad, intense international lobbying for unity against President Bashar al-Assad as his long crackdown on domestic opponents has sharpened against restive areas.

The worst violence Tuesday was reported in the central city of Homs, which has been under sustained assault for more than two weeks. The day's toll of residents, as compiled by various groups that try to track the violence from inside and outside the country, ranged from 16 to more than 40. At the same time, the faction of the opposition that is armed has claimed several more lives, according to the Syrian government, whose news agency reported the funerals of three soldiers killed in or near Damascus and in the city of Hama, to the north.

Russia announced that it would not participate in a meeting in Tunisia on Friday of a contact group of Western and Arab nations, Friends of Syria, where opposition figures were expected to lobby

for greater international recognition and support. The Syrian state-run news agency SANA reported that a Chinese special envoy to the Middle East, Wu Sike, visited Damascus on Tuesday and called for dialogue with all sides in the crisis. SANA also reported from Beijing on a news conference by the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hong Li, in which he called for "the international community to respect the sovereignty, stability and unity of Syria."

Mr. Li did not say whether China would attend the Friends of Syria conference.

Iranian officials, at a regular Foreign Ministry news conference in Tehran, did not explicitly discuss the conference, but denounced Western meddling in the affairs of its long-standing ally as benefiting Israel at the expense of those who resist its power. "What is happening in Syria serves the best interests of Israel and weakens the resistance," said a ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehdanparast, as quoted by SANA.

But the United States threw some of the Iranian's support for Syria into question, suggesting that Iran's reports that it has sent two warships to help train Syrian forces were false. "We have absolutely no indication whatsoever the Iranian ships ever docked in Syrian ports," a Pentagon spokesman, George Little, was quoted by Reuters as saying.

Iran's Press TV satellite broadcaster had said the two ships, a destroyer and a supply ship, docked in Tartus on Saturday "to provide maritime training to naval forces of Syria under an agreement signed between Tehran and Damascus a year ago."

The assault on Homs appeared to be a continuation of the government attack

**China called for "the international community to respect the sovereignty, stability and unity of Syria."**

on the city that began Feb. 4, after China and Russia vetoed a resolution condemning the violence and backing an Arab League plan for Mr. Assad to step aside. Last week, in the strongest international rebuke to date, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to pass the same resolution in nonbinding form.

Details of the violence inside Syria come largely from activist groups and official Syrian media. Foreign journalists are generally not allowed in Syria and rely on difficult-to-verify reports from activists and residents inside the country.

A new Cairo-based group, The Activist News Association, has been collecting information from contacts inside of Syria. Rami Jarrah, a Syrian activist who helped create the group, said that Syrian government and ground forces were massing outside of Homs. "Active resistance has long since stopped but the government is using the excuse of 'armed resistance' to continue this bombardment," Mr. Jarrah said. "They're killing the democratic movement."

Based on photographs of victims sent from inside Syria, he said, 79 deaths took place around the country on Tuesday, 46 of them in Homs, where shelling of the Sunni Arab neighborhood of Baba Amr was particularly heavy, and 33 in Idlib to the north.

Another exile activist group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, reported that in the northern city of Aleppo, unknown gunmen killed Muhammad Ramadan, a pro-regime businessman. It also reported scattered protests and skirmishes in Damascus, where a group of youths raised an opposition flag at the Al-Jaawzeh Bride at the southern entrance of the capital, the London-based Observatory said.

*Alan Cowell contributed reporting from London and Fares Akram from Gaza.*

# KURDISTAN

## La répression d'Ankara ferme la porte à toute solution pacifique

Le premier ministre turc réprime sans merci le mouvement kurde. Il fait donner l'armée contre les civils. Des milliers de militants sont en prison de même que des députés et des maires. Une délégation du PCF et de l'Anecr s'est rendue sur place.



Des militants du BDP, le Parti de la paix et de la démocratie, montrent, en janvier 2010, des photos de détenus politiques par le régime de Recep Erdogan.

**Depuis 2009, plus de 6 200 Kurdes ont été arrêtés dont des centaines de femmes et d'enfants et près de 140 élus (maires, députés...)**

Diyarbakir, Van (Kurdistan de Turquie), envoyé spécial.

Qui se soucie du Kurdistan? Dans cette région de Turquie, l'armée agit en toute impunité. Pendant que le premier ministre, Recep Erdogan, dénonce les atrocités commises contre les civils en Syrie, sa troupe réprime sans relâche, tuant et emprisonnant tous ceux qui réclament le respect des droits du peuple kurde. Diyarbakir en sait quelque chose. Les rugissements des avions de chasse qui partent vers la frontière irakienne font trembler la ville à longueur de journée. La répression est terrible. « Ils utilisent même des armes chimiques », dénonce une responsable du BDP, le Parti de la paix et de la démocratie, organisation largement soutenue par la population. « C'est comme à Halabja », dit-elle, en référence au massacre perpétré par Saddam Hussein dans cette ville irakienne en 1988. À une différence près: l'Union européenne reste, ici, dans une posture de silence complice.

Depuis 2009, plus de 6 200 Kurdes ont été arrêtés dont des centaines de femmes et d'enfants et près de 140

élus (maires, députés...). Un chiffre à réactualiser chaque semaine. Le pouvoir turc fait feu de tout bois, les accusant d'appartenir au KCK, une organisation clandestine, soupçonnée d'être la branche politique du mouvement armé PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), fondée par « Apo » Ocalan, emprisonné à vie.

La stratégie turque est vicieuse, comme l'explique Abdullah Demirbas, maire BDP de Sur, lui-même emprisonné à plusieurs reprises, toujours en procès et qui se voit interdit de sortie du territoire malgré un état de santé qui nécessiterait des soins à l'étranger. « Le gouvernement turc n'a aucune volonté de résoudre la question kurde même s'il fait croire l'inverse à l'extérieur », dit-il. « Les Kurdes ont fait des propositions précises pour une économie démocratique dans un État démocratique ainsi que l'élaboration d'une nouvelle Constitution qui reconnaisse, laisse s'exprimer librement les différentes

cultures, les différentes religions et institutionnalise la liberté politique et linguistique. La seule réponse du pouvoir a été le lancement d'opérations de répression. »

De fait lorsque le 13 avril 2009, le PKK a décrété la prolongation du cessez-le-feu, justement pour favoriser l'émergence d'une solution politique, le gouvernement d'Ankara a immédiatement procédé à l'arrestation de centaines de maires, de députés, de conseillers généraux du BDP. « En faisant cela, le pouvoir lance un message clair: la politique ne servirait à rien », insiste le maire de Sur. Et il jette des milliers de jeunes dans les bras de la guérilla, comme le propre fils du maire de Sur qui voit dans l'emprisonnement et l'inculpation de son père, pourtant pacifique, la preuve que rien ne se réglera sans les armes. Depuis 2009, 2 000 d'entre eux auraient rejoint les camps du PKK dans la montagne. « En ce XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les armes devraient laisser la place à la

discussion, estime Osman Baydemir, maire (BDP) de Diyarbakir. Malheureusement le gouvernement turc ne le veut pas. »

Quelle meilleure illustration de ces propos que la rencontre au siège de l'Association pour les droits de l'homme (IHD). Le secrétaire général, Raci Bilici, nous reçoit. Le président en est empêché. Et pour cause: il est en prison depuis deux ans. Deux semaines auparavant, les locaux de l'association ont été perquisitionnés et les disques durs des treize ordinateurs saisis. « Depuis 2005, la pression de l'État s'est renforcée », souligne-t-il. Concernant la répression, des Kurdes, il parle de « violation du droit à la vie ». Il ajoute: « La torture continue. Il n'y a toujours pas de liberté d'expression en Turquie. » Malgré les poursuites judiciaires qui pleuvent, Bilici et ses collaborateurs publient des rapports accablants pour le pouvoir turc. Des rapports envoyés aux ambassades étrangères, y compris celle de la France.

Si les militants kurdes sont pourchassés, ils ne sont pas les seuls. Tous ceux qui s'opposent à la politique d'Erdogan sont poursuivis et em-



prisonnés. C'est le cas de nombreux journalistes et de syndicalistes. « *Nous nous battons pour la paix, la liberté et la démocratie, donc notre lutte rejoint celle des Kurdes* », assure, à Van, Yilmaz Berkim, président du syndicat des enseignants (SES), affilié au KESK, qui décrit les batailles pour le respect du droit de grève ou pour la signature de conventions collectives.

Cela, ils l'ont dit à une délégation du PCF et de l'Association nationale

des élus communistes et républicains (Anecr) qui s'est rendue sur place, la semaine dernière, pour témoigner mais également agir. Sylvie Jan devait ainsi, au nom du collectif PCF-Kurdistan, dénoncer l'accord de coopération sécuritaire récemment conclu entre la France et la Turquie. « *Cela se traduit par de nombreuses arrestations de militants kurdes en France.* » Elle rappelait également que Pierre

Laurent, secrétaire national du PCF, avait été le seul à protester contre la fermeture de la chaîne kurde Rosh TV.

« *Ne gardez pas pour vous ce que vous avez vu ici!* » demandait Osman Baydemir. Un appel reçu cinq sur cinq par la délégation. « *Nous allons faire en sorte que l'ensemble des militants s'emparent de cette cause* », répondaient Danielle Lebaill, membre de l'exécutif du PCF, et Joël Dutto, élu de

l'agglomération marseillaise. Michel Billoux, sénateur, et Marie-Christine Viergeat, députée européenne, ont dit l'engagement de l'Anecr à soutenir et parrainer des élus emprisonnés. Une initiative reçue comme un engagement politique fort. « *De telles délégations contribuent à populariser notre lutte et ce que nous vivons* », remerciait le maire de Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir.

PIERRE BARBANCEY



24 FÉVRIER 2012

## L'opposition syrienne promet une autonomie aux Kurdes

LE CONSEIL national syrien a promis vendredi, si le régime de Bachar al Assad est renversé, d'instituer un conseil présidentiel à la tête de la Syrie et d'accorder à la minorité kurde un gouvernement autonome et une reconnaissance de son identité.

« La nouvelle Syrie sera dotée d'un gouvernement décentralisé, permettant de fait aux autorités locales de prendre le

contrôle de leurs affaires », a dit Burhan Ghalioun, qui dirige le Conseil national syrien, selon le texte de son discours devant le groupe des « Amis de la Syrie » réunis à Tunis. « Votre identité sera reconnue et respectée nationalement, et vos droits civiques seront garantis. Vous jouerez un rôle significatif dans la reconstruction de la Syrie de nos rêves, la Syrie dont nous rêvons depuis des décennies », insiste-t-il.

Commission Vérité et Réconciliation

Burhan Ghalioun a souligné qu'il n'existait pas de contradiction entre une Syrie ancrée dans sa nature arabe mais respectant l'identité nationale kurde. Vivant essentiellement dans l'est de la Syrie, aux confins de la Turquie et de l'Irak, la communauté kurde de Syrie représenterait selon les estimations 10 à 15% des 22



millions d'habitants.

Le CNS, principale organisation de l'opposition au régime Assad, propose également la création d'une commission Vérité et Réconciliation.

Avec Reuters

LE FIGARO

27 février 2012

## Irak: 30 déserteurs syriens accueillis au Kurdistan irakien

ERBIL (Irak) -AFP

Trente soldats syriens kurdes déserteurs ont été accueillis ces deux derniers jours au Kurdistan irakien et y ont reçu le statut de réfugiés, a indiqué lundi le vice-ministre de la Défense de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

C'est la première fois que les autorités irakiennes font état de l'arrivée de déserteurs syriens sur le territoire.

Au cours des deux derniers jours, 30 soldats syriens kurdes sont passés au Kurdistan via la frontière commune entre l'Irak, le Kurdistan et la Syrie. Ils sont tous des membres kurdes de

l'armée syrienne. Nous les avons reçus pour des raisons humanitaires, ils sont sous notre protection et nous leur avons accordé le statut de réfugiés, a déclaré à l'AFP le responsable, Anwar Haji Othman.

Nous n'allons pas les remettre au gouvernement syrien car ils sont Kurdes et nous avons le droit de les protéger. Et aussi parce qu'ils ont déserté l'armée syrienne. A présent, ils ont le statut de réfugiés dans la région du Kurdistan, a-t-il poursuivi.

La secrétaire d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton avait exhorté dimanche l'armée syrienne à placer l'intérêt du

pays avant la défense du régime de Damas, et invité ceux qui le soutiennent encore à l'abandonner car il va tomber.

Une quinzaine de familles et 130 civils hommes, tous Kurdes, sont également arrivés de Syrie au Kurdistan irakien ces derniers jours, a indiqué lundi un responsable en charge de deux camps de réfugiés syriens kurdes situés près de Dohouk (410 km au nord de Bagdad).

Ces familles syriennes ont été réparties entre les deux camps, où vivent 1.800 Kurdes syriens, a dit ce responsable, Barzan Bourhoum Mourad.

L'Irak a jusqu'à présent fait

preuve d'une grande prudence face à la crise en Syrie, son voisin, avec lequel il partage quelque 600 km de frontière. Bagdad a fait savoir que ni les autorités ni l'opposition syriennes ne seraient invitées au sommet de la Ligue arabe qu'il doit accueillir fin mars.

Le 12 novembre, la Ligue arabe avait voté la suspension de la Syrie de l'organisation, en raison de la répression brutale de la révolte populaire menée par le régime du président Bachar al-Assad.

Ces violences ont fait jusqu'ici plus de 7.600 morts depuis mars 2011, dont plus de 150 morts ce week-end.

# Northern Iraq's reserves put oil majors in a quandary

thenational.ae

By April Yee

"One more," says Eric Ailland, as he flicks a stone into the gleaming black pool.

It is sucked in without a splash, which is enough to reassure the French engineer that the dark stuff seeping to the surface in this field in Iraqi Kurdistan is oil.

For years Kurdish villagers have brought their sheep here to graze, sometimes also filling a jerrycan or two with oil. But this picturesque land of soft green and yellow hills edged by slate-blue mountains has now become the centre of a race for resources between the world's oil majors, which believe Iraqi Kurdistan could hold as much as Libya's 45 billion barrels of reserves in massive reservoirs like the Tawke field.

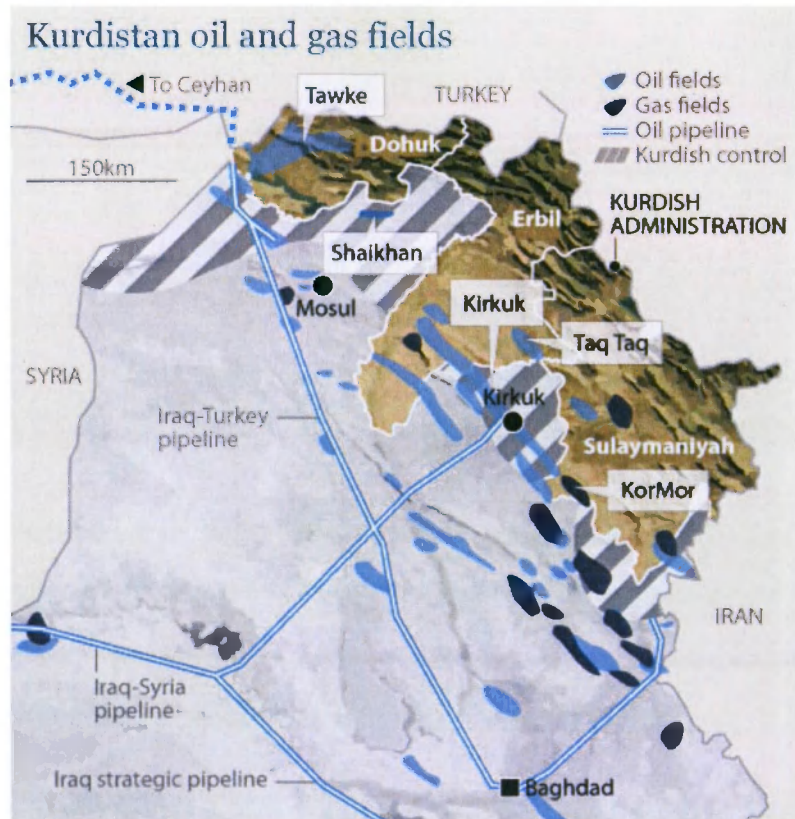
And this Kurdish region - politically and economically sidelined for decades by the Saddam Hussein government in Baghdad - is using its oil potential to assert its independence from the rest of Iraq.

"This type of field - it's once in a lifetime that you will see it," says Mr Ailland, who once drilled for Total in Yemen and Indonesia. "We thought it was a shallow reservoir. And then one year later ... this one turned out to be a giant."

Satisfied with a final rock toss, he turns towards a work camp. It is a stroll through the grass and a short drive back to the complex of prefabricated trailers where he and 120 workers live. They wear neat blue jumpsuits and white hard hats, whether it is minus 8°C or 54°C.

Mr Ailland, the local production manager for DNO, a Norwegian explorer that is 42.8 per cent owned by the UAE's RAK Petroleum, is at the forefront of his company's push to double production to 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) and drill farther down into the Tawke field to layers dating from the Jurassic and Triassic periods.

Such work in Kurdistan was inconceivable a decade ago. Saddam Hussein was



in power, the US was trying to determine whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and the Kurdish region, crippled by the international sanctions against Iraq and attacks by Hussein's military forces, had only a handful of hospitals and a per capita GDP of US\$375 (Dh1,377).

"This was a devastated wasteland," recalled Barham Salih, the prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, in a speech last year.

In 2002, a year before the US invasion of Iraq, Kurdistan signed its first oil deal. More than 45 contracts with companies from 17 nations have followed.

The prospect of virgin fields in a relatively safe environment has attracted a steady stream of big-name players in spite of the threat of their being blacklisted from operating in the rest of Iraq by the federal government in Baghdad.

"There's been a huge amount of interest from the big majors," says an official with the Kurdistan government, asking not to be named. "This year we expect to see a number of significant new entrants to the

market."

In September, Tony Hayward, the former chief executive of BP, bought into a Kurdish explorer through his investment vehicle, Vallares.

Two months later, ExxonMobil, the world's biggest international oil company, signed drilling deals for six areas. And this month, Christophe de Margerie, the chief executive of Total, which operates in southern Iraq, said the French major was looking at entering Kurdistan. Oil companies operating in Kurdistan earn an average \$6.50 for every barrel they pump compared with the usual \$1 elsewhere in the Middle East, according to Morgan Stanley research.

Kurdistan's welcoming of foreign partners has raised tensions between the semi-autonomous region's seat of power in Erbil and Baghdad. This month, the Iraqi oil ministry warned Total against signing any agreements with Kurdistan and barred ExxonMobil from a forthcoming auction of exploration licences. Baghdad says the Kurdish contracts violate the 2005 constitution. Erbil cites what it sees as its history of persecution at the

hands of Baghdad when justifying acting alone.

"The challenge is to turn oil from the curse it has been to the blessing we should have," says Mr Salih. "From the devastation and the destruction of the agonies of genocides, we can eye a future that is democratic and is prosperous - a future where Kurdistan will not be the case of genocide and the victim of ethnic cleansing, but where Kurdistan is a hub of stability."

The dispute between Erbil and Baghdad has also affected smaller independents such as DNO. In May 2009, the company completed a 42-kilometre pipeline from the Tawke field to Fishkabour, Kurdistan's juncture with Syria and Turkey. There, the pipeline feeds into another owned by the Iraqi government that funnels oil from the Kirkuk field in Iraq to Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast. But five months into the pipeline's flow, Erbil stopped exports, saying Baghdad had not been paying the companies for the oil.

"The pipeline was ready, the oil was in the pipeline, everything was ready," recalls Mr Ailland.

Only last year, after more than a year during which DNO had to constrain production and mostly sell to the local market, did a compromise between the regional and federal governments allow

exports to resume.

Now DNO is taking precautions, including building 140,000 barrels of storage capacity in case of another pipeline shutdown.

It is just across the street from the U-shaped pipe where Kurdish oil meets Kirkuk crude, and around the corner from the station where truckers unload cargoes from Kurdistan fields that have not yet been connected by pipe.

"They are always shutting down the facilities, so we need to adapt ourselves to the situation," says Mr Ailland, his voice barely audible above the machines sanding the sides of the massive oil storage tanks.

The entry of the supermajors into Kurdistan could transform a landscape that has long been the domain of small independents - a fact of which DNO is keenly aware.

"DNO is not a mega company, not at all," says Magne Normann, its chief operating officer. "But to do what we are doing, you don't need to be a very large Exxon company. It can, as a matter of fact, be a disadvantage if we are talking about something to move fast."

Like many other oil companies, DNO points to its practice of training local talent. Ninety per cent of its staff at Tawke come from the region, many of them

brought on as trainees with the understanding that they will eventually leave DNO to serve Kurdistan in other roles.

"I see that as a benefit to the region," says Mr Normann. "We need to train more people."

Drive through Kurdistan today, and patriotism is not hard to find. Enormous busts of musicians known for singing separatist ballads anchor a major traffic circle in Zakho, the biggest town on the way to Tawke. At the entrance to DNO's facilities, the Kurdish flag - a golden sun in the middle of red, white and green bands - flies at the gate monitored by armed guards.

Ahmad Abdulkader Nuraddin, DNO's deputy general manager, recalls being recruited from the UNoil-for-food programme that bought Iraqi oil from Hussein's government under strict conditions. He says that before joining the company he was surprised to learn that DNO was in the oil business. "It was not even a dream to have oil companies," he says. "We never thought that one day we would control ourselves and have our own government, the Kurdistan government. I am optimistic. I think there will be something here. I think we'll continue developing, and we'll have a country one day."

Hurriyet  
DailyNews...

26 February 2012

## Kurdish Conference finally to convene

Göksef Bozkurt / hurriyet.com.tr

ANKARA - Kurds living in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran have been planning to hold a Kurdish conference for a long time, but with the interruption of national-international equilibriums, they were not able to organize it until today. In the second half of 2011, the initiatives of co-presidents of the



Independent deputy Leyla Zana (R) and Masoud Barzani (L), the head of the Regional Kurdish Administration in north Iraq, are seen at a conference on Feb 20.

Democratic Society Congress (DTK) Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk were in vain, but initiatives for holding a Kurdish conference have since started again.

Will the Kurds this time succeed in getting together despite all the pressure? I asked Peace and Democracy Party

(BDP) co-president Gültan Kışanak to answer this question. Kışanak emphasized that it was not easy for the Kurds - living within the borders of four separate states - to convene a Kurdish conference or to adopt a joint stance. Was this the reason the congress had been obstructed for years? Kışanak replied that it was a situation that the four states

and the international powers would monitor carefully, raising the question: "Why are the Kurds are convening? The issue of a United Kurdistan has the potential to activate everybody."

I openly asked Kışanak: "Do you have a united Kurdistan as your ultimate goal?" She smiled and replied with the same openness: "No. The Kurds do not intend to adopt this political stance by organizing such a conference. Almost all of the Kurdish organizations are struggling to gain essential rights and freedoms within the boundaries of the country they live in, according to the law of equality. Without damaging this perception, they want to get together to discuss what responsibilities the Kurds have for each other, what they need to do for each other."

Kışanak thinks that in the wake of current developments in the Middle East, organizing such a conference has become easier. In an environment where the Middle East is being re-designed, Syria and Iran are classified as countries "to be intervened in" and Turkey as a country "to intervene," Kışanak reminded that Kurds were living in all three of those countries. "It is impossible to proceed in the redesigning process without realizing they could be an important actor in this geography."

Kışanak explained that correspondence among Kurds across the region was ongoing and that there would be a preparatory committee formed soon, with three representatives participating from each of the four countries. The committee will decide on the components of the conference, its agenda, content and aims. A consensus has emerged that the

conference will meet in June.

The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the umbrella platform of the Kurds in Turkey, the DTK, are likely to participate in the conference. But it seems that the real debate will center around the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in four countries, as some Kurdish groups are discussing whether or not the PKK will be included in the conference. If violence escalates in spring, this debate will get even tougher.

The Kurds will be focusing on the process until June. As for what the governments of the four countries think, we will understand soon.●

TODAYS ZAMAN

22 February 2012



Columnists  
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## MİT crisis and the PKK

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is one of the parties involved in a recent political crisis that was triggered by a prosecutor attempting to question five National Intelligence Organization (MİT) executives as suspects. The prosecutor accused MİT agents who had infiltrated the PKK/Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) network of crossing the line and getting involved in criminal activities such as murder, bombings, arson, etc. One of the heaviest accusations leveled at MİT is that it controls the KCK network and directs its attacks.

While the country was facing this major crisis, the PKK acted as if it had nothing to do with it. The terrorist organization not only accepted the fact that MİT, which is supposedly the PKK's enemy, controls the KCK network, it also tried to put the blame on MİT. Individuals affiliated with the PKK/KCK have accused MİT of killing children and civilians, and tried to keep the PKK away from its dirty past.

We don't yet know how MİT-PKK relations will resonate in the Kurdish community. However, we do know that we face such a bizarre web of relations that the PKK can hardly explain this to the Kurds and that MİT can hardly explain it to the Turks.

When it comes to the possible impact on the PKK, there will for sure be a deep paranoia within the PKK as to who might be working for MİT or not because -- allegedly -- some 1,000 people within the KCK network are working for MİT. Even after my article back in November, which pointed out MİT-KCK relations, KCK members already started asking the question: Who is working for MİT? Now, with the leaked documents it has become very clear that KCK-MİT relations are undeniable.

It is not easy for the PKK leaders to come and defend these odd relations with MİT because those who try to explain what is going on could be easily branded MİT agents as well. Such accusations leveled against the PKK would function as a ghost that would haunt the PKK whenever a suspicious event takes place within the PKK. Given the fact that a lot of gossip is circulated within closed networks such as the PKK, it would be very difficult for the PKK to stop haunting rumors about the organization.

When it comes to the PKK's relationship with society, especially those segments that fall into the PKK's sphere of influence, news of MİT-KCK relations will haunt the PKK as well. Although many committed Kurdish nationalists for now try to ignore such rumors and evidence that the KCK network is controlled by the PKK, whenever there is an operation against the KCK, especially against the PKK militants on the mountain, suspicions will grow even further. That would lead to major distrust of KCK activities in the region.

The key for the PKK to stop these haunting rumors and to stop alienating the PKK/KCK from its supporters -- pro-PKK Kurds -- lies with Abdullah Öcalan. Öcalan will come and say that he knows what is going on in the KCK, that he is aware of the fact that MİT has deeply infiltrated the KCK network and, from time to time, influenced the network to manipulate it, and say that he allowed this to happen in order to bring about peace. Öcalan supporters will then justify such accusations. Otherwise it will continue to haunt the PKK as it haunts MİT in the eyes of Turks.□

# Kurdish leaders insist on peaceful struggle

The Kurdish Globe  
By Ako Muhammed--Erbil

## Erbil hosts conference to commemorate 66th anniversary of Republic of Mahabad

**K**urdistan Region President Massoud Barzani encouraged Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan to adopt a peaceful approach to achieve their rights and insisted "the time of armed struggle is over."

Barzani's statement came during a Feb. 19 conference in Erbil to celebrate the 66th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad. A number of leaders from all parts of Kurdistan also attended the meeting.

A larger meeting for Kurdish leaders from all parts of Kurdistan is expected to be held in Erbil this year, aiming reportedly to unify Kurdish parties and to discuss Kurdish questions at a time when the region faces crucial developments.

"A part of our struggle was armed because we had to defend the identity and the existence of our nation' that stage has come to an end successfully' and now is the time to achieve our rights," said Barzani, admitting that this type of struggle harmed the Kurdish people and the parties that were fighting.

Attempts were made to push the struggles toward war, between Kurds on the one side, and Arabs, Turks and Persians on the other, but all these attempts failed, said Barzani. He urged protecting the spirit of brotherhood with the neighboring nations.

Armed struggle proved that the Kurds could not overcome the authorities they fought, but neither were the authorities able to destroy the Kurds, remarked Barzani. "This reality proves that the issue of our nation cannot be



President Barzani said he supports Kurdish demands for self rule in other parts of Kurdistan, but with "peaceful means". / GLOBE PHOTO/ Safin Hamed

solved through fighting' we now have to take the peaceful and democratic path, even if the governments, response is not positive. We must be patient." Barzani later encouraged Kurds to prepare for and benefit from rapid changes taking place in the area.

Prominent Kurdish political activist Layla Zana, who also attended the ceremony, complained that the peaceful struggle of the Kurds in Turkey are yet to be taken into consideration by the authorities.

"In the north [of Kurdistan, Turkey] we have been demanding to solve the national problems peacefully for 30 years, but the opposite side hasn't taken any serious steps," Zana, Member of the Turkish Parliament, told Erbil-based AKnews.

There have been developments in the Kurdish question in Turkey, she said, but "there are still many crucial issues untouched."

Zana called on the Kurds from Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria to unite and to strive together for their causes.

Kurdistan's political parties agree on the necessity of national unity but they are slow in taking steps, said Selahattin Dermitas, Co-President of Turkey's Peace

and Democratic Party (BDP). Addressing the attendants of the conference, Dermitas called on the Kurdish parties to "remove obstacles and work for the interests of their people."

Holding a Kurdish national conference should not be delayed any further, urged the BDP co-president, showing his party's readiness to make sacrifices to achieve the goal of "forming national unity."

"After centuries, a gate for freedom has been opened for the Kurdish people. And we must make a decision," Dermitas said. "Today is a chance to learn a lesson from the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad to create this national unity."

Kurdistan Republic of Mahabad was established on 22 February 1946, and Qazi Mohammad was appointed President of the Republic. On the 15th of December, the Iranian Royal Forces took back control of Mahabad, overthrowing the Kurdish Republic. Mohammad and three of his aides were hanged in the city's Chwarchira Square on March 31, 1947.

### Qazi and Barzani relations

In his speech, President Massoud Barzani shed light on the relations between Qazi Mohammad and Mullah

Mustafa Barzani, the President's late father, who went to Mahabad during the time of the Republic to support the Kurds.

"There are attempts by some traitors who work to distort history and to relay the relations between our leaders in other ways, as if Qazi and Mustafa Barzani had differences between them," said President Barzani, noting that he knew which party prompts these writers to do so, but didn't mention names.

President Barzani said that the story he heard from his father -- Mullah Mustafa Barzani -- and from his colleagues, proves good relations between Barzani and Qazi.

"One day in 1945, Barzani and his men went to eastern Kurdistan, where they were warmly welcomed by the people in the bordering towns and in Mahabad," Barzani said, telling the story. "The people of Mahabad shared their homes with the Barzanis. There is also an order by Qazi in which he commands every establishment to welcome the Barzanis, but some tribes tried to stand against the Barzanis."

He said that after that Mullah Mustafa Barzani and his men sat with those tribes in Mahabad and confirmed their loyalty to Qazi Mohammad, the disputes went away.

"Qazi is the leader of all Kurds and I am the first soldier of this Republic," he said, quoting a famous speech by Mulla Mustafa Barzani.

President Barzani also assured that Qazi had trusted Mustafa Barzani. After the collapse of the Republic, Qazi handed the flag of Kurdistan over to Barzani and during his trial, Qazi noted that he had passed the flag to "safe hands, and a day will come when the flag would be raised [again]."

# Syria urged to allow aid into areas under siege

TUNIS

## Red Cross reaches Homs as world leaders press to ease humanitarian crisis

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS

Leaders of more than 60 countries and international organizations on Friday called on Syria's government to halt attacks on besieged cities to allow in medical and other humanitarian supplies and asked the United Nations to plan for a peacekeeping force, despite Russian and Chinese vetoes of intervention recently at the Security Council.

While the Syrian government crackdown continued Friday, there was a breakthrough, with the Syrian Red Crescent beginning to evacuate women and children from the besieged city of Homs, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The two organizations entered the city's heavily bombarded Baba Amr neighborhood on Friday afternoon, negotiating with Syrian authorities and the opposition "to evacuate all persons in need of help without exception," said Hicham Hassan, a Red Cross spokesman. It was not clear whether evacuees would leave Homs or just Baba Amr.

Foreign Minister Alain Juppé of France said the governor of Homs was working with the Red Cross to evacuate the journalists Édith Bouvier and Paul Conroy, who were wounded Wednesday in an attack on Baba Amr that killed two of their colleagues, Marie Colvin and Rémi Ochlik, Reuters reported.

Those killings, plus continued bombardment of Homs and the deaths of hundreds of civilians across Syria, fueled foreign outrage and increased pressure on outside powers and Syria to contain the humanitarian tragedy.

Those gathered in Tunisia's capital for the meeting of a group called "Friends of the Syrian People" said they would tighten sanctions and travel bans against President Bashar al-Assad and senior aides. They also pledged to provide millions of dollars worth of food and medicine to be distributed from border areas in Turkey, Jordan and, possibly, Lebanon.

While intended to demonstrate unity against Mr. Assad's government, the meeting here underscored deepening divisions over how to end the crack-

down that has lasted nearly a year and resulted in thousands of deaths.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, pointedly expressed frustration that the world was not doing enough. And later in a meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton of the United States, he said that arming Syria's largely unorganized opposition was "an excellent idea," though it was not on the agenda of the meeting Friday.

"Is it justice to offer aid and leave the Syrians to the killing machine?" he told the gathering, according to Al Arabiya television, a private Saudi-owned news channel.

The United States and others have ruled out military intervention in Syria, but the violence is increasingly creating a confrontation, with countries weighing in on either side of the conflict.

The request to the United Nations to begin planning for a peacekeeping mission, which would ultimately require Security Council approval, risked another diplomatic showdown with Russia and China. And arming Syria's opposition, which Mrs. Clinton suggested the day before was inevitable "from somewhere, somehow," raised the prospect of a proxy war in the Middle East.

Prince Saud's remarks were echoed by three prominent U.S. senators, who urged the Obama administration to provide arms, intelligence and money.

"We remain deeply concerned that our international diplomacy risks becoming divorced from the reality on the ground in Syria, which is now an armed conflict between Assad's forces and the people of Syria who are struggling to defend themselves against indiscriminate attacks," John McCain and Lindsey Graham, both Republican senators, and Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, an independent, said in a joint statement. "What is needed urgently are tangible actions by the community of responsible nations to ensure that the Syrian people have the means to protect themselves against their attackers."

A Russian official on Friday blamed the United States, NATO and the Arab League for fomenting violence inside Syria by supporting the opposition and denounced the Tunis meeting as foreign interference that would fail to loosen Mr. Assad's grip on power.

"There is no situation there which would raise the question of Assad's de-

parture," Aleksei K. Pushkov, a senior member of Parliament in Russia who visited Damascus on Monday and met the Syrian leader. "This is an absolutely artificial and far-fetched theme. Everyone who arrives there understands why Assad is not leaving: because he has no reason to leave."

As the leaders arrived here at a seaside hotel in Tunis, some 200 Assad supporters noisily demonstrated outside, waving signs declaring those here as "enemies of Syria." The protest forced Mrs. Clinton's motorcade to divert briefly to another hotel and delayed the start of the meeting until truncheon-wielding police cleared the area.

Although the leaders here cast their demand to allow humanitarian assistance as something of an ultimatum, they did not detail the consequences for Mr. Assad if he refused. Instead, the leaders hoped to create what one official

present called "a tsunami" of diplomatic, economic and ultimately moral pressure on Syria and its patrons.

"If the Assad regime refuses to allow this lifesaving aid to reach civilians, it will have even more blood on its hands," Mrs. Clinton told the gathering. "So, too, will those nations that continue to protect and arm the regime."

The negotiated language of the meeting's final statement dropped an explicit call by some countries for "a peaceful, nonmilitary solution" in favor of those, including the United States, that wanted a more open-ended reference to "a political solution" that did not preclude future military action.

The meeting was modeled on the conferences that accompanied the NATO-led conflict in Libya last year. The leaders announced that they would meet again in Turkey and France, but for now they lack the mandate to act forcefully.

Syria's opposition was represented by the leaders of the Syrian National Council, a group consisting largely of exiles, and another representing Syria's Kurds.

The council's leader, Burhan Ghalioun, appealed for international support but also sought to reassure Syria's ethnic and sectarian groups, Christians, Kurds and especially the Alawites who have dominated Syria's government and economic under Mr. Assad's rule.

He sought to create at least a vision of a democratic alternative to Mr. Assad's government. He called for a "presidential council" that would form a transitional government, and a truth and reconciliation committee.



Supporters of the Syrian leader, Bashar al-Assad, scuffling with the police in Tunis on Friday as a gathering of nations and groups met to call for an end to the bloodshed.

AFP

## Syrie: principaux points du projet de la nouvelle Constitution

DAMAS(AFP) -15 février 2012

**PRINCIPAUX points du projet de nouvelle constitution syrienne qui sera soumis à référendum le 26 février et introduit le pluralisme politique en supprimant toute référence au parti Baas, au pouvoir depuis près d'un demi-siècle, selon le texte diffusé par l'agence officielle Sana.**

### MULTIPARTISME

Le texte supprime l'article 8 qui donne depuis 1971 la primauté au parti Baas comme "dirigeant de la société et de l'Etat" et instaure les principes de "pluralisme politique" et d'un pouvoir "exercé démocratiquement à travers des élections".

Les partis ne peuvent être créés sur des bases religieuses ou ethniques, ce qui exclurait théoriquement les Frères musulmans ou les partis kurdes de toute activité politique en Syrie.

### PRESIDENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE

Le président est élu au suffrage universel direct, pour deux mandats de sept ans chacun, après avoir obtenu la signature de 35 membres du Parlement.

En vertu de l'actuelle Constitution, le parti Baas propose au Parlement le nom du candidat qui est par la suite soumis au référendum populaire.

Le président (mais aussi le Premier ministre, les ministres, les députés et les membres du Conseil constitutionnel supérieur) ne peuvent avoir la double nationalité.

Le président nomme toujours le Premier ministre et les membres du gouvernement, au moment où l'opposition réclame que ce poste soit pourvu par la personne issue de la majorité parlementaire.

L'âge minimum d'un candidat à la présidence passe de 34 à au moins 40 ans. Le président doit avoir vécu au moins 10 ans en Syrie avant de soumettre sa candidature. Il doit être marié à une Syrienne, ce qui implique que le chef de l'Etat doit être uniquement de sexe masculin.

La religion du président reste l'islam et la jurisprudence islamique continue d'être la source de toute législation.

### SOCIALISME

Le nouveau texte supprime toute référence à un "Etat socialiste", à dans sa nouvelle mouture, il préconise le développement des activités des secteurs publics et privées.

L'Orient  
LE JOUR

29 FÉVRIER 2012

## Des Kurdes de Syrie cherchent la sécurité au Kurdistan irakien

**REPORTAGE** Les autorités locales se sont engagées à protéger les réfugiés et à ne pas les remettre au régime de Damas.

Comme de nombreux Syriens kurdes, Omar Izzat Ibrahim a fui son pays en proie à une sanglante rébellion et s'est réfugié, coupé de sa famille, au Kurdistan irakien où il vit dans le petit appartement de l'un de ses proches.

Ibrahim est un dissident de l'armée syrienne, tout comme les trente hommes également accueillis ces derniers jours dans cette région autonome au nord de l'Irak. Les autorités kurdes irakiennes se sont par ailleurs engagées à les protéger et à ne pas les remettre aux autorités de Damas, d'après le vice-ministre de la Défense de la région Anwar Haji Othman. « À présent, ils ont le statut de réfugiés dans la région du Kurdistan », a-t-il expliqué.

« Beaucoup de soldats veulent quitter l'armée et désertent », témoigne Ibrahim, jeune homme de 30 ans originaire d'une ville frontalière avec la Turquie. « Dès

le début de la rébellion, nous avons subi une intense pression de la part de nos chefs. Ils nous insultaient sans cesse, surtout les soldats kurdes qui venaient de villes touchées par la contestation », souligne-t-il.

Ibrahim s'est donc fabriqué de faux papiers lui accordant six jours de permission et a été caché par des proches avant d'être secrètement exfiltré début février à Dohouk, au nord de l'Irak. Il vit depuis dans un appartement d'Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien, avec quatre autres personnes, et un petit poste de télévision pour seule distraction.

Les Kurdes représentent environ 9 % de la population syrienne et vivent surtout dans le Nord-Est et à Damas où ils forment une importante minorité. Ils se disent en butte aux discriminations et réclament la reconnaissance de leur langue et leur culture. Mais ils ont toutefois largement échappé à la répression militaire qui s'est abattue sur plusieurs villes du pays en réponse à la contestation du régime du président Bachar el-Assad.

Omar Izzat Ibrahim, un déserteur syrien kurde, a fui vers le Kurdistan irakien. Safin Hamed/A FP



Les responsables kurdes d'Irak s'attendent néanmoins à l'arrivée de quelque 1 000 familles syriennes à Dohouk et s'appêtent à mettre sur pied un camp dans la région pour les accueillir, selon Chaker Yassine, qui dirige le bureau en charge de l'immigration au ministère kurde de l'Intérieur. « Il arrive des gens fuyant la violence depuis le début de l'année au Kurdistan », indique M. Yassine, qui déclare ne pas pouvoir fournir de chiffres sur le nombre de Syriens arrivés depuis le début de la crise il y a onze mois, nombre de gens s'étant installés chez des proches.

« J'étais hors de Syrie, et quand je suis rentré à Damas, j'ai été arrêté à l'aéroport parce que je n'avais pas rejoint l'armée », explique Mohammad, un autre Syrien de 28 ans installé dans le même appartement qu'Ibrahim. « Dans la prison, j'ai vu beaucoup de jeunes hommes se faire torturer », ajoute Mohammad qui préfère taire son nom de famille par sécurité. Le jeune homme a ensuite été libéré grâce à l'intervention de sa famille auprès d'un juge et il a pu passer la frontière avec l'aide de contrebandiers.(AFP)■

# Les pourparlers avec l'Iran sont mal partis

Les négociations sur le nucléaire iranien s'annoncent mal. La République islamique prétend être disposée à reprendre prochainement des conversations avec le groupe dit des Six : les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU (Chine, Etats-Unis, France, Royaume-Uni, Russie) plus l'Allemagne. Elle avait cette semaine l'occasion de donner un signe de bonne volonté. Elle a choisi de ne pas le faire.

Pour la deuxième fois en un mois, Téhéran accueillait une mission de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA). Chargée de faire appliquer le traité de non-prolifération nucléaire (dont l'Iran est signataire), l'AIEA est mandatée par l'ONU pour s'assurer du caractère non militaire du programme nucléaire iranien. Elle accuse Téhéran de lui cacher

nombre d'éléments de ce programme. L'AIEA voulait, cette semaine, visiter dans une base militaire un site nucléaire supposé. L'Iran s'y est opposé. L'AIEA a pris acte. Elle a jugé, mardi 21 février, que sa mission, dite de « la dernière chance », se soldait par un « échec ».

Voilà qui ne va pas faciliter les conversations qui doivent, parallèlement au travail de l'AIEA, aboutir à une reprise des négociations entre l'Iran et les Six. Il s'agit du

## Editorial

même objet : le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU veut pouvoir contrôler la nature du programme d'enrichissement de l'uranium que l'Iran poursuit à grande vitesse.

Téhéran semblait pourtant être demandeur de nouveaux

pourparlers. Les Six le sont aussi. Ils entendent faire tomber la tension, alors que bruits de bottes, sanctions et représailles témoignent depuis quelques semaines d'une situation de plus en plus conflictuelle.

Tout au long du mois de janvier, Israël a fait monter la pression, évoquant ouvertement l'opportunité de bombarder les sites nucléaires iraniens. Les Israéliens ont reçu le soutien actif des candidats républicains à l'élection présidentielle américaine de novembre – tous plus belliqueux les uns que les autres à l'égard de l'Iran.

Cependant, l'administration Obama et les Européens – Londres et Paris en tête – mettent sur pied un système de sanctions destiné à instaurer un embargo sur les hydrocarbures iraniens.

L'Iran a répliqué sur le mode du défi. Il menace de fermer le

détroit d'Ormuz, la porte d'entrée du Golfe. Il a annoncé l'arrêt de ses exportations de pétrole vers la France et le Royaume-Uni. Le message est sans ambiguïté : ni les sanctions économiques ni la menace militaire ne feront fléchir la République islamique dans sa volonté de mener à bien son programme nucléaire, dont la finalité reste civile, assure Téhéran.

Certaines de ces initiatives relèvent de la gesticulation. Le pouvoir iranien est divisé. Le pays est en campagne pour le scrutin législatif du 2 mars : la surenchère nationaliste sur le thème du programme nucléaire est à son summum.

Dans ce contexte périlleux, la porte fermée à l'AIEA est de mauvais augure. Peu importe qui a pris cette décision à Téhéran : elle rapproche plus qu'elle n'éloigne la perspective d'un conflit. ■



JEUDI 23 FÉVRIER 2012

Les Etats-Unis se méfient des opposants, dont ils ne savent rien.

## Washington hésite à épauler les rebelles

Des « mesures supplémentaires » seront envisagées si la pression diplomatique ne suffit pas en Syrie, ont fait savoir mardi les porte-parole de la Maison Blanche et du département d'Etat américain. L'administration Obama suggère ainsi qu'elle pourrait enfin passer à l'acte en Syrie, comme le demandent de plus en plus de républicains, notamment John McCain, candidat malheureux à la présidentielle de 2008.

Concrètement, cela signifierait apporter un soutien logistique aux rebelles syriens ou assurer la sécurité de « zones

protégées ». Dans l'immédiat, Maison Blanche et département d'Etat continuent pourtant de souligner que l'heure reste à la diplomatie : « Nous ne voulons pas prendre des mesures qui contribueraient à une plus grande militarisation en Syrie », a rappelé mardi le porte-parole de la présidence, Jay Carney. Les militaires américains font valoir que des « zones protégées » ou des « corridors humanitaires » requerraient la neutralisation des forces aériennes syriennes, et donc une opération militaire de grande ampleur, dont ils ne veulent pas.

Ces déclarations contradictoires traduisent surtout le grand embarras de la diplomatie américaine, tétanisée par l'évolution de la situation en Syrie. Washington serait très heureux de voir tomber le régime de Bachar al-Assad, allié de l'Iran et pourvoyeur d'armes au Hezbollah. Mais les services de renseignement américains n'accordent guère davantage de confiance aux rebelles syriens, qu'ils voient liés aux sunnites irakiens et infiltrés par Al-Qaeda. Il serait « prématuré » d'armer ces rebelles, « tant que nous n'aurons pas clarifié qui ils sont et ce qu'ils représentent », soulignait récemment le général Martin Dempsey, chef d'état-major des armées. « Si on veut livrer des armes à l'opposition syrienne, on ne peut de toute façon pas le faire ouvertement », ajoute un diplomate

occidental. *Cela se fait, ou se fera, via les alliés qui sont sur place : Qatar, Arabie Saoudite... »*

A défaut d'intervenir ouvertement sur le terrain, les Etats-Unis continuent donc de se démener sur la scène diplomatique. La secrétaire d'Etat, Hillary Clinton, participera demain à la Conférence des amis du peuple syrien, à Tunis. L'idée est d'y rassembler une « coalition internationale la plus large possible » pour maintenir la pression sur Bachar al-Assad, durcir les sanctions contre le régime et renforcer l'opposition en l'encourageant à inclure toutes les composantes de la société syrienne.

De notre correspondante à Washington  
LORRAINE MILLOT



# How to halt the butchery in Syria

“No-kill zones,” drones to protect civilians, and a policy of encouraging defection could help curtail the war.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter**

**PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY** Foreign military intervention in Syria offers the best hope for curtailing a long, bloody and destabilizing civil war. The mantra of those opposed to intervention is “Syria is not Libya.” In fact, Syria is far more strategically located than Libya, and a lengthy civil war there would be much more dangerous to our interests. America has a major stake in helping Syria’s neighbors stop the killing.

Simply arming the opposition, in many ways the easiest option, would bring about the scenario the world should fear most: a proxy war that would spill into Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan and fracture Syria along sectarian lines. It could also allow Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups to gain a foothold in Syria.

There is an alternative. The Friends of Syria, a contact group of Western and Arab countries that met in Tunis on Friday, should establish “no-kill zones” now to protect all Syrians regardless of creed, ethnicity or political allegiance. The Free Syrian Army, a growing force of defectors from the government’s army, would set up these no-kill zones near the Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian borders. Each zone should be established as close to the border as possible to allow the creation of short humanitarian corridors for the Red Cross and other groups to bring food, water and medicine in and take wounded patients out. The zones would be managed by civilian committees.

Establishing these zones would require nations like Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to arm the opposition soldiers with antitank, countersniper and antiaircraft weapons. Special forces from countries like Qatar, Turkey and possibly Britain and France could offer regional, and ultimately national, truce.

The key condition for all such assistance, inside or outside Syria, is that it be used defensively — only to stop attacks by the Syrian military or to clear out government forces that attack the no-kill zones. Although keeping intervention limited is always hard, international assistance could be curtailed if the Free Syrian Army took the offensive. The absolute priority within no-kill zones would be public safety and humanitarian aid; revenge attacks would not be tolerated.

President Bashar al-Assad is increasingly depending on government-sponsored gangs and on shelling cities with artillery rather than overrunning them with troops, precisely because he is concerned about the loyalty of soldiers forced to shoot their fellow citizens at point-blank range. If government troops entered no-kill zones they would have to

face their former comrades. Placing them in this situation, and presenting

tactical and strategic advice to the Free Syrian Army forces. Sending them in is logistically and politically feasible.

Crucially, these special forces would control the flow of intelligence regarding the government’s troop movements and lines of communication to allow opposition troops to cordon off population centers and rid them of snipers. Once Syrian government forces were killed, captured or allowed to defect without reprisal, attention would turn to defending and expanding the no-kill zones.

This next step would require intelligence focused on tank and aircraft movements, the placement of artillery batteries and communications lines among Syrian government forces. The goal would be to weaken and isolate government units charged with attacking particular towns; this would allow opposition forces to negotiate directly with army officers on truces within each zone, which could then expand into a re-  
the option to defect, would show just how many members of Syria’s army were actually willing to fight for Mr. Assad.

Turkey and the Arab League should also help opposition forces inside Syria more actively through the use of remotely piloted helicopters, either for delivery of cargo and weapons, or to attack Syrian air defenses and mortars in order to protect the no-kill zones.

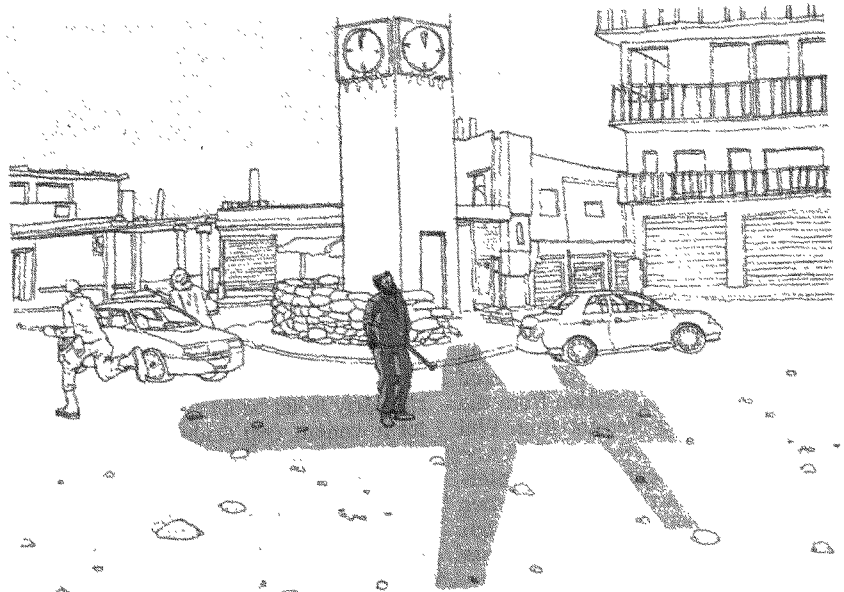
Turkey is rightfully cautious about deploying its ground forces, an act that Mr. Assad could use as grounds to declare war and retaliate. But Turkey has some of its own drones, and Arab League

countries could quickly lease others.

As in Libya, the international community should not act without the approval and the invitation of the countries in the region that are most directly affected by Mr. Assad’s war on his own people. Thus it is up to the Arab League and Turkey to adopt a plan of action. If Russia and China were willing to abstain rather than exercise another massacre-enabling veto, then the Arab League could go back to the United Nations Security Council for approval. If not, then Turkey and the Arab League should act, on their own authority and that of the other 13 members of the Security Council and 137 members of the General Assembly who voted last week to condemn Mr. Assad’s brutality.

The power of the Syrian protesters over the past 11 months has arisen from their determination to face down bullets with chants, signs and their own bodies. The international community can draw on the power of nonviolence and create zones of peace in what are now zones of death. The Syrians have the ability to make that happen; the rest of the world must give them the means to do it.

*ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER, a professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton, was director of policy planning at the State Department from 2009 to 2011.*

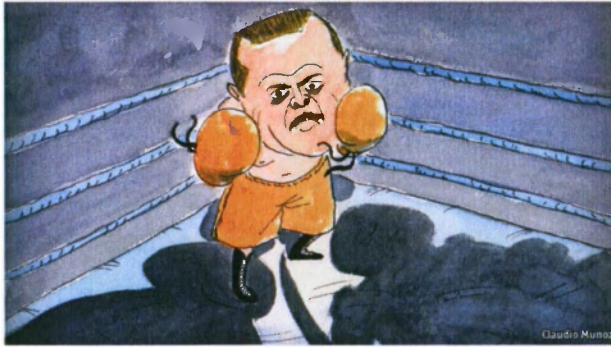


MATT ROTA

## Turkey's political in-fighting Erdogan at bay

The Turkish prime minister faces new enemies both at home and abroad

ANKARA |



FOR nine years Turkey's prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has moved smoothly from one victory to another, winning three elections in a row with a bigger share of the vote each time. He has seen off coup plots by once-omnipotent generals and attempts by their cronies in the judiciary to ban his mildly Islamist Justice and Development (AK) party. So far the economy has survived the financial crisis largely unscathed. And although membership talks with the European Union are stuck, relations with America are (in the words of the foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, who recently spent five hours with Hillary Clinton) in "a golden age".

The new philosophy in a bureaucracy once steeped in corruption and sloth is that the state exists to serve the citizen and not the other way round. The old maxim that "the Turk's only friend is a Turk" has been replaced by growing confidence in Turkey's regional clout. Mr Erdoğan's rivals are riven by internal feuds. A recent opinion poll suggests that if a new election were held today AK would get 54% of the vote, four points more than in 2011.

But the picture is less rosy when you consider a nasty power struggle between Mr Erdoğan and Turkey's most influential Islamist movement, led by an imam living in Pennsylvania named Fethullah Gulen. Commanding a sprawling global empire of media outlets, businesses and schools, the so-called Gulenists, who mix piety with hard-nosed pragmatism, are

said to have infiltrated the judiciary and the police force. Their next target was apparently Turkey's MIT spy agency. This story gained credence this month when an allegedly pro-Gulenist prosecutor summoned the MIT chief, Hakan Fidan, an Erdoğan protégé, for questioning in a case against the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), amid claims that some of his men may have joined its ranks.

A furious Mr Erdoğan responded by getting the AK-dominated parliament to pass a law that makes judicial interrogation of MIT officials subject to prime ministerial consent. The offending prosecutor was taken off the case, and a group of suspected pro-Gulenist officials in the Istanbul police force were reassigned.

Although Mr Erdoğan appears to have won the first round, the breach may yet have a big effect on his political fortunes, because the Gulenists may withdraw their support. The affair is complicated by Mr Erdoğan's health. He has recently had two operations, amid persistent rumours that he is being treated for colon cancer. He and his doctors deny this. But would-be successors within AK are said to be switching to the Gulenists. It is surely in both sides' interest to make peace.

The Gulenists and AK had been making common cause against the army. Gulen-affiliated newspapers brimmed with leaked documents exposing army mischief that have been used as evidence in the

Ergenekon trial against alleged coup-plotters. But with hundreds of officers behind bars and the threat of a coup dispelled, the alliance has frayed. Some argue that this reflects policy differences. More probably it is about power, with the Gulenists (in Mr Erdoğan's view) wanting too much. Even before the MIT row, the prime minister was said to be concerned about the arrest of journalists, which damages Turkey's image. There are now at least 70 in jail, mostly on thinly supported terrorism charges. Some of them, notably Ahmet Sik and Nedim Sener, had been highly critical of the Gulenists.

Yet Mr Erdoğan's own democratic credentials are not so shiny. Hundreds of students are on trial or in prison for such "crimes" as protesting against dam projects. Anti-government journalists have been sacked by media bosses fearful of jeopardising other business interests. The most recent was Nuray Mert, a columnist for *Milliyet*, an establishment daily, and a fierce critic of Mr Erdoğan's decision to opt for a military solution to the Kurdish problem. This took a tragic turn in December when Turkish warplanes mistakenly bombed a group of Kurdish smugglers along the Iraqi border, killing 34 Kurds, mostly teenagers. As Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party, also points out, Mr Erdoğan has been quick to pass legislation to protect his spy chief but has done nothing to amend vaguely worded anti-terror laws used to jail thousands of dissidents, including nine MPs.

Equally worrying is the lack of progress on the new constitution that Mr Erdoğan vowed would crown his third term. A parliamentary committee meant to be drawing up a draft has done such groundbreaking things as inviting the Greek Orthodox patriarch, Bartholemew I, to air his views. But there are still concerns about Mr Erdoğan's ambition to create a strong presidency, presumably designed for himself. And it is hard to see the whole process being completed without consent from the largest Kurdish party. Mr Erdoğan is unwilling to talk to it unless it publicly disavows the PKK. Never mind that his own men, led by Mr Fidan, were secretly negotiating with the PKK until last summer, when it escalated its campaign of violence.

The descent of Syria, Turkey's

southern neighbour, into civil war is another concern. After years of cultivating the Syrian president, Bashar Assad, the Turks are betting on the collapse of his regime. They have offered sanctuary to commanders of the rebel Free Syrian Army and other members of Syria's opposition. Mr Davutoglu is said to have lobbied Mrs Clinton to intervene but, especially in an election year, the Americans

will be cautious. The longer Mr Assad hangs on, the greater the risk of his turning against Turkey. Resuming his father's support for the PKK or stoking unrest among Turkey's small Alawite population may both be options.

And then there are worries over the economy. By the standards of its Greek neighbour, Turkey looks scintillating: a budget deficit under 2% of

GDP, a public debt of only 40% and GDP growth in 2011 of almost 8%. Yet a current-account deficit of over 10% of GDP points to overheating, and the economy is now slowing sharply. Mr Erdogan's next fights may prove to be his toughest yet.



February 13, 2012

## Turkey detains over 100 more in latest KCK wave

More than 100 people were detained early on Monday for suspected links to the militant Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) during operations carried out in 30 provinces across Turkey.

worldbulletin.net  
(Cihan)

Among the premises raided on Monday were the offices of the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK), the Trade Union of Public Employees in Health and Social Services (SES) and the All Municipal and Local Administration Workers' Union (TÜM BEL-SEN), all in Ankara.

Ten people were detained by the Ankara Police Department's counterterrorism teams. Another 10 were also detained in Gaziantep on Monday as part of the KCK investigation, news reports said. The operations were conducted under the order of İstanbul Specially Authorized Prosecutor Bilal Bayraktar and Sadrettin Sarıkaya, who had been overseeing the investigation into KCK but who has been removed from the case in the wake of his attempt last week to summon Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT) undersecretary to testify as part of the probe.

Bayraktar stated that operations were carried out simultaneously in 30 provinces and that dozens of people were detained, 42 of whom were in İstanbul. Bayraktar added that police seized a handgun in İstanbul and a Kalashnikov rifle in Van



province.

In operations carried out by the İzmir Police Department's counterterrorism units, 11 people from the İzmir, Aydın, Antalya and Denizli provinces were detained on Monday. It was claimed that the suspects had been taking orders from the militia arm of the militant organization, located in the southeastern regions of Turkey bordering northern Iraq.

Mersin police detained six people and seized computers that had organizational documents belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In addition, Van police detained five people, including Van Deputy Mayor Gülbahar Orhan. Another nine were detained in the predominantly Kurdish pro-

vince of Diyarbakır.

The Batman Governor's Office said in a statement released Monday that 24 people suspected of acting on the KCK's orders were also detained in the province. The detainees are suspected of having thrown Molotov cocktails and participated in illegal demonstrations in the province.

A total of 35 people detained early Monday in simultaneous KCK operations in the Mediterranean province of Adana were sent to court Monday afternoon. Cihan stated that the 35 detainees, including 15 under 18 years of age and three women, had been interrogated by Adana police that morning. Furthermore, Şanlıurfa police detained three suspects in the early hours of Monday.

The investigation into the KCK, which prosecutors say is a group that controls the PKK and other affiliated groups, started in December 2009, and a large number of suspected KCK members, including several mayors from the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), have been detained. The suspects are accused of various crimes, including membership in a terrorist organization, aiding and abetting a terrorist organization and attempting to destroy the country's unity and integrity. BDP officials say the investigation is the government's way of suppressing BDP politicians, denying any links between the suspects and any terrorist organization.

In a similar development, the Mersin Police Department's counterterrorism unit seized 27 homemade explosives at an address in Mersin on Monday.

In a separate incident in Mersin's Toroslar district on Sunday, 18-year-old R.T. lost his fingers when he failed to throw a homemade bomb at a passing police cruiser before it went off. The young man was taken to Toroslar State Hospital for treatment.■

# Syrians approve new constitution

BEIRUT

## Despite wide backing, Western officials quickly dismiss the referendum

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR AND ALAN COWELL

As violence continued to rage in Syria, its Interior Ministry announced on Monday that voters had approved a new constitution by a margin of almost 9 to 1 in a referendum that Western leaders labeled a farce.

In a bulletin across the bottom of the screen on state television, the ministry said 89 percent of the voters, or nearly 7.5 million of the 8.4 million people who cast ballots, had voted in favor of the constitution — an offer of reform that critics dismissed as too little, too late.

More than 750,000 no votes were cast, or about 9 percent of the total, the ministry said, while nearly 133,000 ballots, or 1.6 percent, were spoiled. The turnout exceeded 57 percent of the more than 14 million eligible voters, according to the ministry.

After a morning of new shelling in the central city of Homs and elsewhere, some Western leaders disparaged the referendum as having no credibility. Some of them spoke even before the result was announced.

"The referendum vote has fooled nobody," the British foreign secretary, William Hague, said in Brussels.

European foreign ministers meeting there agreed to tighter economic sanctions, including limits on transactions by Syria's central bank, a ban on Syrian

cargo flights into Europe and travel restrictions on several senior officials.

"To open polling stations but continue to open fire on the civilians of the country has no credibility in the eyes of the world," Mr. Hague said.

Referendums in Syria generally produce the results the government wants, so the huge plurality in favor of the constitution was unsurprising. Although the government controlled the voting and the count, it was possible that the authorities in Damascus did not need to manipulate the results, since they still enjoy some support and the opposition mostly boycotted the balloting.

The referendum came after almost a year of a crackdown that has sent tremors throughout the region and has driven a widening wedge between the United States on one hand and Russia and China on the other. That division seemed to expand on Monday, with both Russia and China castigating the Obama administration's calls for President Bashar al-Assad to leave office.

In an article in the Moscow News on Monday, Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin scorned Washington for seeking to emulate NATO's intervention in the Libyan revolt that overthrew Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

"No one should be allowed to employ the Libyan scenario in Syria," Mr. Putin wrote. "I would like to warn our Western colleagues against the temptation to

**"To open polling stations but continue to open fire on civilians has no credibility in the eyes of the world."**

resort to this simple, if previously used, tactic. The logic is such conduct is counterproductive and very dangerous. No good can come of it. In any case, it will not help reach a settlement in a country that is going through a domestic conflict."

In Beijing, People's Daily said the United States had no right to criticize Chinese and Russian policy. The Obama administration, the newspaper said, "has not considered how to allow the Syrian people to put an early end to this disaster at minimal cost."

Despite some small signs of optimism, Reuters reported that shells and rockets were again fired by security forces on Monday into parts of Homs, which has become the center of an 11-month uprising that has become one of the bloodiest of the Arab Spring.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France said he believed "things are starting to move" in efforts to rescue two wounded foreign journalists who are trapped in Homs and to retrieve the bodies of an American war correspondent, Marie Colvin, and a French photographer, Rémi Ochlik, who were killed in the city last Wednesday.

"We have the beginnings of a solution," Mr. Sarkozy told RTL radio.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said that while negotiations were still under way to evacuate the wounded and bring aid to Homs, workers from the Red Crescent, as the organization's branches in Muslim world are known, began distributing food and hygiene kits to 12,000 people in Hama.

*Alan Cowell reported from London. Hwaida Saad and an employee of The New York Times contributed reporting from Beirut, an employee of The New York Times from Damascus, Stephen Castle from Brussels and J. David Goodman from New York.*

# French law on Armenia genocide is struck down

PARIS

## Court, citing free speech, calls it unconstitutional; Sarkozy will modify text

BY SCOTT SAYARE

The Constitutional Court in France on Tuesday struck down a law criminalizing denial of the Armenian genocide, drawing cautious approval from Turkey, which suspended military, political and economic ties with France last month after Parliament approved the

legislation.

President Nicolas Sarkozy immediately pledged to submit a modified version of the legal text, however, with accommodations for the ruling of the court.

Mr. Sarkozy said in a statement, "Measures the immense disappointment and the profound sadness of all those who had welcomed with recognition and hope the adoption of this law."

Mr. Sarkozy is to meet shortly with representatives of the Armenian community in France, where about 500,000 citizens claim Armenian descent. The Turkish government has intimated that Mr. Sarkozy was using his support for the law to help him gain votes in the coming presidential election.

The Turkish government pressed hard to head off the French legislation before it was passed last month, arguing that lawmakers sought to write an official history and thus reached beyond the bounds of their mandate.

The Constitutional Court largely agreed in its decision, which came in response to an appeal by dozens of legislators from across the political spectrum.

"The legislature did unconstitutional harm to the exercise of freedom of expression and communication," the court wrote.

The law called for up to one year in prison and a fine of up to €45,000, or about \$60,000, for those found guilty of

denying genocide officially recognized by the French government. France officially recognizes only the Holocaust and the Armenian deaths as genocides.

Turkish leaders will meet to consider the lifting of economic sanctions and the reinstatement of political and military cooperation with France, the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, said at a news conference. "The verdict is positive," he said "I hope that everyone learns the necessary lessons from this."

Turkey has long maintained an Armenian genocide did not occur. Turkish law treats the public affirmation of an Armenian genocide as a criminal affront to Turkish identity. For instance, a

Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, was fined last year for his statement in a Swiss newspaper that "we have killed 30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians."

Historians widely believe that about 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed by Ottoman Turkish military forces beginning in 1915, toward the end of the Ottoman empire, in what is viewed to be the first genocide of the 20th century. Turkey maintains that no more than 500,000 Armenians died, and that many were the victims of starvation or exposure, and not targeted killings.

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune** FEBRUARY 28, 2012

# Arm Syria's rebels

Western and Arab states need to step up the flow of matériel and training for the Free Syrian Army.



**Roger Cohen**

GLOBALIST

**LONDON** Here are some home truths about Syria. It's going to get worse before it gets better. Nobody can put this genie back in a bottle. This is the mother of all proxy fights. The remorseless Assad regime is finished, when it dies being the only question.

Nations get to freedom from tyranny by different routes. When Communism fell, some glided from the Soviet empire into the West as others agonized.

Yugoslavia — a beautiful idea that never worked — is one of several nations being invoked as possible exemplars of Syria's bloody fate; others include Lebanon and Iraq.

The ingredients are familiar: Syria is a multiethnic state ruled with an iron fist by one minority — the quasi-Shiite Alawites — and including Christian, Druze and other minorities that between them compose about a quarter of the population. The majority is Sunni. When the iron fist comes off in countries like this, liberty is more readily seen as getting free of each other than

uniting in the give-and-take of a new liberal order.

So it has proved for a year now in the Syria of Bashar al-Assad who, taking a leaf from his father's book, has attempted to suppress through mass slaughter the quest of a broad uprising to be free of the family stranglehold. Assad is a doctor by training! No doctor ever trampled so brazenly on the Hippocratic Oath.

The Assads are a mafia, a minority (the family) within a minority (the Alawites) within a minority (the Mukhabarat secret police). They co-opted others — notably the Sunni merchant class — through imposed stability, but in essence, like every tyrant dislodged in the Arab Spring, they have ruled a nation as if it was their personal fiefdom, a plaything to be passed from father to son for the benefit of cousins and cronies.

Well, that's over. Aleppo is the not the new Marrakesh after all. Those lovely tourism posters on London buses have been packed away. Arabs have had it with their Godfathers.

I said it's going to get worse before it gets better. The Syrian compact is broken; a new compact under the Assads is inconceivable. Wider interests are in play. Iranian Shiite theocracy, increasingly isolated, is defending the regime against a Free Syrian Army funded in part by Saudi Sunni theocracy: that's the proxy war.

Vladimir Putin, fearful of Russian Springs in his own neighborhood, has with signature cynicism opted to defend an old ally against U.S. demands that Assad go, an objective not pursued with any coherence until now by the Obama administration. Israel knows Assad, who helps arm Hezbollah but is a predictable and largely passive enemy. It does not know what may lie beyond a security state whose habits it can predict.

In short, Syria is dangerous. But that not a reason for passivity or incoherence. As the Bosnian war showed, the basis for any settlement must be a rough equality of forces. So I say step up the efforts, already quietly ongoing,

**As the Bosnian war showed, the basis for any settlement must be a rough**

to get weapons to the Free Syrian Army. Train those forces, just as the rebels were trained in Libya. Payback time has come around: The United States warned Assad about

**equality of forces.**

allowing Al Qaeda fighters to transit Syria to Iraq. Now matériel and special

forces with the ability to train a ragtag army can transit Iraq — and other neighboring states — into Syria. This should be a joint effort of Western and Arab states.

At the same time, mount a big U.N.-coordinated humanitarian effort centered on enclaves for refugees in Turkey, Jordan and elsewhere, establishing, where possible, safe corridors to these havens.

Push hard to bring Russia and China around: They will not defend Assad beyond the point where that defense looks

like a liability for other bigger interests in the United States, the Gulf and Europe.

I hear the outcry already: Arming Assad's opponents will only exacerbate the fears of Syria's minorities and unite them, ensure greater bloodshed, and undermine diplomatic efforts now being led by Kofi Annan, a gifted and astute peacemaker. It risks turning a proxy war into a proxy conflagration.

There is no policy for Syria at this stage that does not involve significant risk. But the only cease-fire I can see that will not amount to an ephemeral piece of paper is one based on a rough balance of forces. For that, the Free Syrian Army must be armed.

In the end, this course will support, not undermine, Annan's diplomacy and perhaps open the way for the sort of transition outlined by the Arab League. In return, the divided Syrian opposition must provide a firm commitment to respect the rights of minorities. The treatment of minorities — like that of women — is one of the many pivotal tests of the Arab Spring.

If Assad falls, Iran is critically weakened. Tehran's established conduit to Hezbollah disappears. Choosing between engineering the downfall of Assad and bombing Iran's nuclear facilities is really a no-brainer: The former is smart and doable, the latter is folly. Assad's wife has been buying property in London: Make her use it and make the Syrian people free.

## La loi sur le génocide arménien invalidée par le Conseil constitutionnel

**Ankara a accueilli avec "satisfaction" la censure par les Sages français de la loi pénalisant la négation des génocides, dont celui des Arméniens par les Turcs en 1915. Le président Nicolas Sarkozy charge le gouvernement de préparer un nouveau texte.**

**AFP** - Le Conseil constitutionnel a censuré mardi la loi pénalisant la négation du génocide arménien en 1915, à l'origine d'une brouille entre Paris et Ankara, la jugeant contraire à la liberté d'expression, mais Nicolas Sarkozy qui soutenait ce texte en a promis un nouveau.

Le chef de l'Etat "a chargé le gouvernement de préparer un nouveau texte, prenant en compte la décision du Conseil constitutionnel", a annoncé l'Elysée. Une mission confiée au ministère de la Justice qui n'a pas précisé de calendrier alors que le Parlement achève ses travaux normalement le 6 ou le 7 mars.

Nicolas Sarkozy, qui soutenait ce texte controversé, qualifié d'"électorale" dans l'opposition, "mesure l'immense déception et la profonde tristesse de tous ceux qui avaient accueilli avec reconnaissance et espoir l'adoption de cette loi destinée à les protéger contre le négationnisme (...) menace contre notre communauté nationale", a ajouté la présidence.

Pour sa part, le gouvernement turc a immédiatement salué la décision qui "a évité une probable grave crise entre la France et la Turquie", selon le vice-Premier ministre Bülent Arinç.

Le vote du texte, définitivement adopté par le Parlement français le 23 janvier, avait entraîné une brouille diplomatique et commerciale entre Paris et Ankara.

La génocide arménien est reconnu par une loi française de 2001.

Mais le Conseil constitutionnel a jugé "qu'en réprimant la contestation de l'existence et de la qualification juridique de crimes qu'il aurait lui-même reconnus et qualifiés comme tels, le législateur a porté une atteinte inconstitutionnelle à l'exercice de la liberté d'expression et de communication".

La loi prévoyait de punir d'un an de prison et de 45.000 euros d'amende toute négation publique d'un génocide reconnu par la loi française.

Pour la censurer, les Sages, selon un communiqué ([www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr](http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr)), se sont appuyés notamment sur l'article XI de la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789 stipulant que "la liberté de communication des pensées et des opinions est un des droits les plus précieux de l'homme".

Ils précisent que leur décision ne remet pas en cause la loi de 2001 sur la reconnaissance du génocide arménien, ni la loi Gayssot de 1990, qui réprime la négation de la Shoah en s'appuyant sur le droit international de l'après Seconde guerre mondiale ou l'existence de jugements de condamnation pour



négationnisme.

François Hollande, candidat PS à la présidentielle, s'est engagé à reprendre, s'il est élu, cette question "dans l'apaisement et dans la conciliation". "C'était une loi qui devait réconcilier mais elle n'était pas présentée forcément au meilleur moment", a-t-il jugé en marge du salon de l'agriculture.

Le député UMP Claude Goasguen, président du groupe d'amitié France-Israël, a déploré la décision, craignant que la loi Gayssot soit à son tour "attaquée", et que désormais on puisse "dire n'importe quoi en matière de négationnisme".

Mais son collègue UMP Michel Diefenbacher, un des signataires de la saisine du Conseil, lui a indirectement répondu en considérant que la loi Gayssot était "de toute autre nature", n'ayant fait que transposer dans le droit français la "décision juridictionnelle rendue par la Cour internationale de Nuremberg" en 1945-46.

"Dans le cas du génocide arménien, il n'y a aucune décision juridictionnelle, c'était une initiative du Parlement qui n'a pas de compétence pour intervenir dans ce domaine", a-t-il ajouté.

Avec Jacques Myard, également UMP, M. Diefenbacher a asséné que "la vérité historique ne peut être établie que par la recherche, en aucun cas par la loi".

Et pour François Bayrou, candidat MoDem à l'Elysée, "la relance de cette procédure par Nicolas Sarkozy traduit aujourd'hui une obstination dangereuse dont on comprend bien l'inspiration en période électorale".

La députée UMP qui avait défendu le texte, Valérie Boyer, élue de Marseille où vit une forte communauté arménienne, s'est déclarée "triste et déterminée" après la censure. "Aujourd'hui en droit français, nous avons deux sortes de victimes et de descendants de victimes", a-t-elle affirmé parlant d'"une grave inégalité de traitement" entre Arméniens et juifs.

Neuf (bien neuf) députés UMP déplorant la décision du Conseil ont déposé mardi une proposition de résolution pour "réaffirmer la lutte contre la contestation de l'existence des génocides". □

# Syrie : l'opposition en voie de décomposition ?

**Le Conseil national syrien vient de voir vingt de ses membres faire défection pour créer une organisation concurrente.**

Par Armin Arefi



*Le président du CNS, Burhan Ghalioun, doit faire face à une majorité d'islamistes financés par le Qatar. © Armando Franca / Sipa*

Bachar el-Assad s'en frotte les mains. Considéré par Alain Juppé comme un "interlocuteur légitime" de la communauté internationale sur la Syrie, le Conseil national syrien (CNS) se déchire en interne. En effet, dimanche, la principale coalition de l'opposition au régime de Bachar el-Assad a vu vingt de ses membres faire défection pour créer une organisation concurrente : le Groupe patriotique syrien. "Le Conseil national syrien s'est formé sans parvenir à obtenir de résultats satisfaisants et sans être capable de répondre aux demandes des insurgés présents à l'intérieur de la Syrie", indique le groupe dans un communiqué transmis à Reuters.

La création de la nouvelle instance, présidée par Haytham al-Maleh, un ancien juge et opposant de longue date, est le dernier revers en date pour une opposition minée par les désaccords. "Intervention étrangère, partenaires ou actions à mener contre Moscou, le moindre positionnement les oppose", affirme le spécialiste de la Syrie Barah Mikail. Déjà, en juin 2011 avait été créé un autre mouvement concurrent, le Comité national de coordination des forces de changement démocratique en Syrie (CNCD), qui regroupe des partis de gauche, kurdes, ainsi que des intellectuels syriens. Principal point de discordance entre les deux organes, la question de l'intervention étrangère en Syrie. Totalement exclue par le CNCD, elle est dorénavant publiquement évoquée par le CNS, depuis le pilonnage sans fin de l'armée syrienne contre la ville martyre de Homs.

Pourtant, les deux partis ont fusionné le 30 décembre dernier au Caire, après avoir parachevé un accord autour des principes d'une période de transition en

Syrie. Mais, coup de théâtre, deux semaines plus tard, le CNS fait volte-face. Son président, l'universitaire Burhan Ghalioun, va même jusqu'à démentir avoir signé le texte, expliquant que celui-ci "ne constituait pas un document politique", comme il avait été présenté par le CNCD. "Dans les faits, la frange islamiste du parti n'avait pas été consultée, ce qui a obligé Ghalioun à reculer", explique Barah Mikail.

## Le rôle du Qatar

Si les grandes figures du CNS sont des laïcs, la majorité du Conseil est formée d'islamistes syriens, financés par le Qatar. Ce n'est donc pas un hasard si c'est dans l'émirat que s'est déroulé le 9 février le congrès du CNS, ou encore si c'est Doha qui a financé le sommet à Tunis des "Amis de la Syrie", où le CNS tenait la vedette au milieu d'une soixantaine de pays. "Le CNS n'est pas l'émanation de l'opposition syrienne, mais un groupe très disparate constitué et financé par le Qatar et appuyé par la France", affirme pour sa part le chercheur Fabrice Balanche. En mars dernier, Paris s'était déjà tenu aux avant-postes de la contestation en Libye, en étant le premier pays à reconnaître un organe semblable, le Conseil national de transition, aujourd'hui au pouvoir.

"Le CNT disposait tout de même de membres à l'intérieur de la Libye", souligne Fabrice Balanche. "Le CNS, lui, n'est constitué que d'exilés, qui n'ont que très peu de contacts avec la révolte sur le terrain", ajoute le chercheur. Pour

dissiper les craintes, le CNS se livrerait à de la communication en mettant en avant des "costumes-cravates", explique Barah Mikail. Son président, Burhan Ghalioun, vit en France depuis 30 ans. Son porte-parole, Bassma Kodmani, chercheur associé au Ceri (Sciences-Po), a quitté la Syrie il y a 43 ans. "Il existe chez ces personnes une aspiration à la diversité ethnique, religieuse et idéologique, mais elle est bloquée par les islamistes", renchérit le spécialiste.

## L'Iran visé

Malgré des divergences manifestes, la France veillerait à ce qu'aucun autre groupe d'opposition n'émerge à l'étranger. Outre le soutien diplomatique, le Quai d'Orsay se serait opposé en octobre dernier à la tenue à Paris d'une conférence de presse de Syriens de l'intérieur, dont l'opposant historique Michel Kilo. "La France ne veut pas déplaire aux Qataris, avec lesquels elle entretient des liens diplomatiques et économiques privilégiés", indique Fabrice Balanche.

Et l'émir Hamad ben Khalifa Al Thani aurait mis un point d'honneur à faire tomber Bachar el-Assad. "Le Qatar a lancé dans la région un mouvement de libération "frériste" (des Frères musulmans, NDLR) pour éviter que l'ensemble du monde arabe ne soit déstabilisé", analyse Fabrice Balanche. S'il a participé à l'intervention militaire en Libye, le Qatar entretient des liens très étroits avec les islamistes d'Ennahda en Tunisie, et avec les Frères musulmans en Égypte. "Le Qatar adopte une posture pragmatique en se plaçant aux côtés des forces du moment, qui sont les islamistes", note de son côté Barah Mikail.

Autre ambition qatarie, l'affaiblissement, par l'intermédiaire de la Syrie, de son allié chiite iranien, bête noire des monarchies sunnites du Golfe. Et cela porte ses fruits. Après des tractations avec l'émir Al Thani, Khaled Mechaal, le chef politique du Hamas, organisation largement financée par Téhéran, a annoncé qu'il déménageait de Damas pour s'installer à Doha. ■

# En Syrie, Damas met en scène un référendum et poursuit la répression

En dépit des violences, le régime syrien a organisé une consultation sur un projet de Constitution

**T**out est possible dans le pays du président Bachar Al-Assad, même la tenue d'un référendum, en pleine répression d'une révolution, sur une nouvelle Constitution. Le projet instaure théoriquement le multipartisme, abolit le « rôle dirigeant » du parti Baas au pouvoir depuis cinquante ans, et limite à deux septennats – à compter de 2016 – les mandats du président, doté de larges prérogatives.

Dimanche 26 février, 14 millions d'électeurs étaient appelés à se rendre dans 14 000 bureaux de vote. Bachar Al-Assad et son épouse Asma ont glissé leur bulletin dans l'urne un peu avant midi, à Damas, sous les applaudissements. A la même heure, Homs, « capitale de la révolution » et troisième ville du pays, était pilonnée à l'arme lourde pour le 24<sup>e</sup> jour consécutif. La situation des habitants du quartier de Baba Amro, privés d'eau, d'électricité, de vivres et de soins, y est désespérée.

La répression des forces de sécurité a entraîné des morts dimanche à Damas, Deraa, Deir-Ez-Zor, Idlib et Hama. Le bilan de la journée oscille entre 30 et 60 tués, selon l'opposition syrienne. Cette dernière a appelé au boycott du référendum, qualifié de « mascarade » et de « diversion ». La consultation n'a pas pu être organisée sur des parties entières du territoire. Le régime n'avait pas divulgué lundi matin le chiffre de la participation et n'avait pas non plus indiqué quand il publierait les résultats. Imperturbable, il compte organiser des législatives d'ici à trois mois.

Mais où en sera le pays, qui glisse inexorablement vers la guerre civile ? La Syrie n'est plus un pays coupé en deux, ce sont deux pays en un seul, suivant l'endroit où l'on se trouve, le discours que l'on écoute. Vendredi, à Tunis, 70 pays et organisations internationales se réunissaient afin de trouver un moyen de mettre fin au bain de sang, une conférence qualifiée de « campagne médiatique » par M. Assad.

## Nouvelles sanctions

Mais cette coalition des « Amis du peuple syrien » diverge encore sur la manière de procéder. L'Arabie saoudite, pays le plus hostile au



Manifestation anti-Bachar Al-Assad, à Idlib (nord de la Syrie), le 26 février. RODRIGO ABD/AP

régime de Damas, n'a pas caché son irritation face aux atermoiements des autres participants : Riyad voudrait que l'on arme les opposants syriens, pour faire pièce à « la machine à fuir » du pouvoir.

Le Qatar et la Tunisie militent pour une force de paix Ligue arabe-ONU, chargée de faire observer un hypothétique cessez-le-feu. Avec ou sans mandat du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU ? L'obstruction russe

au Conseil hypothèque cette perspective, mais certains diplomates estiment qu'un mandat n'est pas nécessaire, en se référant à l'opération de l'OTAN au Kosovo en 1999. Se pose aussi la question des troupes pour une organisation qui n'a jamais mené une telle mission.

Les Occidentaux hésitent. Hillary Clinton y est défavorable, arguant qu'une intervention militaire « précipiterait » la guerre civile. La secrétaire d'Etat américaine s'inquiète du fait qu'Al-Qaïda pourrait tirer profit de livraisons d'armes.

Pourtant, le statu quo risque de ne pas être tenable longtemps. En cas d'aggravation de la situation à Homs, la question de l'intervention « va se poser avec urgence », fait-on remarquer au Quai d'Orsay : « Cela n'attendra pas la pro-

chaine réunion des Amis de la Syrie à Istanbul, dans trois semaines. S'il y a un massacre, on ne peut pas laisser faire ça. » Tout en écartant « un scénario d'intervention directe de la France comparable à la Libye », la diplomatie française envisage toutes les options : faut-il ouvrir des zones protégées pour les civils, des corridors humanitaires ?

En attendant, Alain Juppé participait, lundi matin à Bruxelles, à

un conseil européen qui doit entériner de nouvelles sanctions, dont le gel des avoirs de la banque centrale syrienne, puis, l'après-midi à Genève, à l'ouverture de la session du Conseil des droits de l'homme, à qui il doit demander d'étudier les conditions d'une saisine de la Cour pénale internationale pour juger Bachar Al-Assad. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

## L'opposition dénonce un massacre à un check-point

A Homs, 64 personnes ont été retrouvées mortes, lundi 27 février, tuées à un check-point en tentant de fuir le quartier de Baba Amro, selon des militants locaux. Ils affirment que des femmes auraient également été kidnappées au barrage, tenu par l'armée et les miliciens pro-régime. Lundi, les violences ont causé 125 morts dans le pays, selon des

opposants. Par ailleurs, les autorités syriennes se sont félicitées, lundi, des résultats du référendum de la veille sur la nouvelle Constitution. Selon les chiffres officiels, 57,4 % des électeurs syriens se sont rendus aux urnes ; 89,4 % des votants ont voté en faveur de la nouvelle charte. Washington a dénoncé le « cynisme » du régime.



# Kurdish Rights Discussed at Friends of Syria Conference

By HEMIN KHOSHNAW and  
HEVIDAR AHMED  
rudaw.net

**ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan** -- The United States has urged Syria's two major opposition umbrella groups to unite and for Kurdish rights to be recognized by Arab opposition groups, according to Abdulhakim Bashar, the head of Kurdish National Council (KNC).

Bashar, who attended the Feb. 24 Friends of Syria conference in Tunisia, said the request came during a meeting he had with Burhan Ghalioun, the head of Syrian National Council (SNC), and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

While the SNC is the main opposition umbrella group, including many of the country's major Arab parties, many Kurdish groups have not been willing to join as they are uncertain of the group's policies toward Kurdish rights in a post-Bashar al-Assad Syria. Instead, a number of Kurdish organizations have formed the KNC, highlighting the lack of unity among the country's diverse opposition groups.

Speaking to Rudaw from Paris, Bashar said Clinton told him and Ghalioun that the U.S. would welcome uniting the KNC and SNC as it would be "in the interests of Syria's Kurds and Arabs."

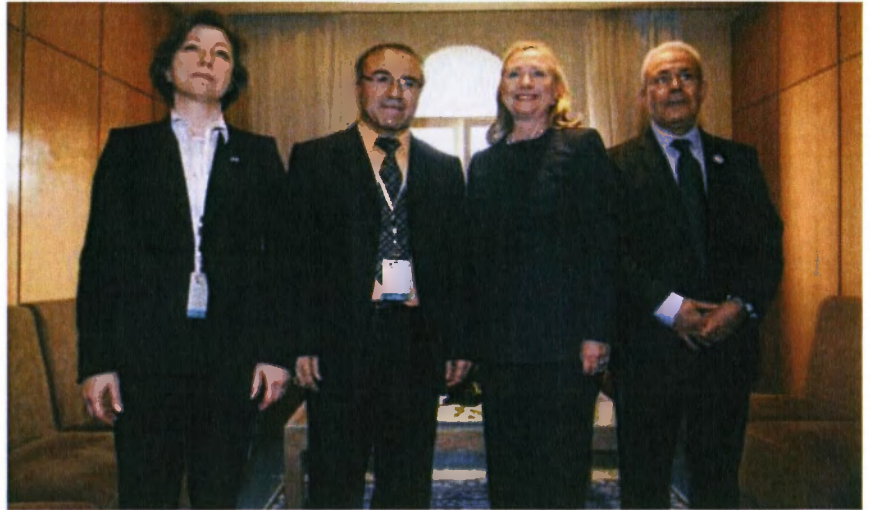
Secretary Clinton told Ghalioun that Kurdish rights need to be enshrined in the post-Assad Syria and that "the Kurdish issue in Syria needs to be resolved," according to Bashar.

"I believe the time has come for the two councils to untie," said Bashar, who added he is talking to other members of the KNC to make a decision in that regard.

Syria has been swept with protests and rising insurgency since last March. The government of President Assad has met protesters' demands for change with violence. The isolated regime is now battling for its survival as international opposition against it increases.

Bashar added that British Foreign Minister William Hague echoed Clinton's demands, asking for a solution to the Kurdish issue in a post-Assad Syria.

Kurdish parties in Syria are deeply divided. While some have joined the SNC and KNC in opposing the Assad



**Burhan Ghalioun, the head of the Syrian National Council, Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, Abdulhakim Bashar, the head of the Kurdish National Council. Photo Rudaw.**

regime, a major Kurdish party known as the Democratic Union Party (PYD) has sided with the government in Damascus. Most Kurdish parties are equally distrustful of the SNC and the Assad regime, hence the divided Kurdish stance toward developments in the country.

Many Arab political parties have not been forthcoming in expressing support for Kurdish rights if and when the current regime in Damascus falls, leaving many Kurds with a feeling that they might not benefit from a regime change if they strongly oppose Assad. So far, the Syrian security forces have not meted out the same violent response to Kurdish protesters, hoping not to anger them and broaden the ranks of opposition.

Bashar told Rudaw that Ghalioun expressed positive views in the meeting about Kurdish rights but declined to disclose the details.

In his speech at the Friends of Syria conference in Tunisia, Ghalioun said that the post-Assad Syria will recognize Kurdish rights.

Speaking to Rudaw from London, Usama al-Munjed, spokesman for the SNC, said Ghalioun's words express the SNC's view.

"Obviously, Burhan Ghalioun is the head of the Syrian National Council and speaks on its behalf. His remarks about the rights of Kurdish brothers represent the point of view of the SNC in general," said Munjed.

Following the Tunisia meeting, U.S.

President Barack Obama said the time has come for Assad to leave power, adding that the massacre of the Syrian people has to be halted "through whatever available means." Obama's remarks were seen as his strongest reaction to the evolving situation in Syria since the outbreak of protests last year.

PYD's head, Mohammed Salih Muslim, went to Tunisia but did not attend the Friends of Syria conference that brought together representatives of around 60 countries and Syrian opposition groups.

Muslim said there were "disagreements" before the start of the conference, citing the Saudi boycott of the meeting as an example.

"The conference only lasted three hours. This shows it was not successful. The conference will reconvene in Turkey in three weeks. This is dangerous because the fate of the Syrian people will be handed to other countries," Muslim told Rudaw.

The PYD's head warned about Ghalioun's remarks regarding Kurdish rights.

"Ghalioun did not say anything new about Kurds and Kurds need not be deceived by those words," said Muslim. "Ghalioun only expressed his personal opinion but those around him are never ready to recognize Kurdish rights." □

# Iraqi leader's risk pays off

BAGHDAD

Shiite premier emerges from crises with even stronger hold on power

BY TIM ARANGO

When Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki rounded up hundreds of former Baathists, accused the vice president of running a hit squad and threatened to use the apparatus of state to target other top Sunni leaders, some rivals and critics said Mr. Maliki's authoritarian streak had finally antagonized enough of the Iraqi political class to jeopardize his hold on power.

Instead, Mr. Maliki appears to have emerged from a potentially destabilizing political crisis with even more power over the Iraqi state and more popularity among his Shiite constituents, many people here said.

"People trust him more and more after this," said Rahman Tal Jukon, a retired businessman in Hilla, a town in the Shiite-dominated south where expressions of support for Mr. Maliki, once tepid, are now more common and enthusiastic. "He is a brave man. He has guts."

Mr. Maliki's political calculus, pushing to the edge of a full-blown crisis, appears to have paid off, though worries remain that Iraq is sliding toward one-man, one-party rule. His rivals among the Sunnis are busy retrenching as their political leadership fractures, causing a pervasive feeling that Sunnis have lost any meaningful stake in Iraqi public life.

In a recent report, Ramzy Mardini, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, wrote: "It is clear that Maliki has come out as the winner in the political crisis he provoked. He has made it more difficult for his Shia rivals to dissent while simultaneously confining his Sunni opponents in a position suitable for exerting pressure and exploiting divisions within their ranks."

Iraqiya, the largely Sunni bloc of lawmakers that is led by a secular Shiite, Ayad Allawi, was forced to end boycotts of Parliament and the cabinet that were staged to protest Mr. Maliki's actions, without winning any rewards.

Members of the bloc have split, and some ministers have refused to participate in the boycott, adding to a sense that Sunni optimism after the 2010 parliamentary elections, when Iraqiya won the most seats, has dissipated completely.

Zuhair Araji, a former Iraqiya member who withdrew from the coalition, called the boycott "unwise" and said the alliance had embarrassed itself.

Similar sentiments are heard in the



Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's rivals are busy retrenching as their leadership fractures, causing a pervasive feeling that Sunnis have lost any meaningful stake in Iraqi public life.

capital's Sunni neighborhoods. "Iraqiya came back to the Parliament and the government because they failed, and they have lost all their popularity in Iraq," said Aymen Fakhry, who lives in the Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad.

Obaida al-Jobori, a Sunni and a restaurant owner in the Karada neighborhood of Baghdad, said: "Sunnis made a big mistake when they decided not to participate in the political process with the Shias and Kurds. They proved Sunni leaders are not experienced enough to help their people in the right manner."

Two months ago, just as the last U.S. troops were leaving, Iraq seemed at the edge of the abyss. The U.S. ambassador had cut short his vacation to rush back to Baghdad. President Jalal Talabani had returned from knee surgery in Ger-

many to mediate the crisis. The vice president and top Sunni politician, Tariq al-Hashimi, had left Baghdad, running from an arrest warrant on terrorism charges. A spate of attacks had wrought familiar scenes of grief and bloodshed.

Analysts worried that the government was close to collapse and that its fracturing would start a new civil war.

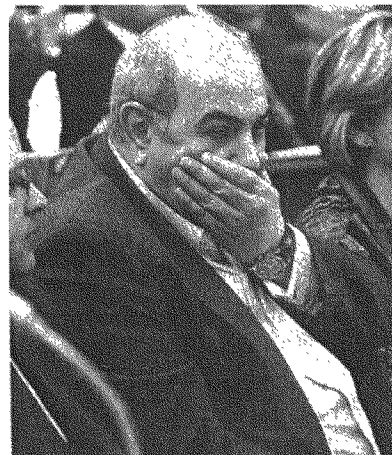
Mr. Maliki has made some concessions, however. Local officials say many of the former Baathists who were arrested late last year have been released. And to head off efforts made by Sunni-dominated regions to gain more autonomy, Mr. Maliki has pushed for legal amendments that would give provinces more autonomy on budgets and the right of consent over when national security forces are deployed within their borders.

"There was no crisis from the beginning, but problems, you could say," said Ali al-Allaq, a member of Parliament from Mr. Maliki's Dawa Party and a close adviser to the prime minister.

Mr. Allaq, his head wrapped in a black turban as he glanced at his two iPhones resting on a tabletop, described the problems as those that "any young democracy would have."

The overarching question for Iraq is how long it can continue without genuine reconciliation before the sectarian divide leads the country back to bloodshed.

While Mr. Maliki cemented his support among the Shiite majority and neutralized rivals from his own sect, like the radical cleric Moktada al-Sadr, Sunnis seem more adrift than ever. That is a potentially combustible set of circumstances when coupled with the chaos



Iraqiya, led by Ayad Allawi, was forced to end a boycott of Parliament that was staged to protest the prime minister's actions.

across the border in Syria, where that country's Sunni majority is battling a government whose leaders are Alawite, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

"Sunnis after 2003 are like fish inside a small pool with a shark," said Mayson Merza, a Sunni who lives in the Karada neighborhood of the capital. "They can't get out, and they can't remain inside. We have a very sectarian government, which is looking to eliminate all Sunnis and replace them by thieves and Iranian agents out to destroy Iraq and the Arab nation."

After the crisis erupted in December, analysts warned that the country was on the edge of a civil war. "There has been a rapid and widespread deterioration of security in Iraq since the mid-December end of the U.S. military mission there," Michael Knights, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, wrote this month in *The National Interest*, a foreign policy journal.

After a bloody January — by some accounts a deadlier month than any last year — February had been on pace to become one of the least violent months since the U.S.-led invasion nine years ago, until a series of car bomb attacks in Baghdad and around the country last Thursday left more than 40 people dead.

The Iraqi psyche, weighted by history and past grievances, still frames political issues through a simplistic sectarian lens: Shiites fear the restoration of Sunni power, and many Sunnis, who feel they are the natural leaders, are beholden to their resentments over the Shiite empowerment wrought by what is seen as the United States' war.

Mr. Jukon, the retired businessman in Hilla, spoke of Sunni domination from

**The Iraqi psyche, weighted by history and past grievances, still frames political issues through a sectarian lens.**

the British colonial mandate after World War I until the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003. "That affects how some people see this," he said, of the political crisis.

Ahmed al-Khafaji, the deputy interior minister, a Shiite whose life, like those of many Iraqi leaders, was shaped by years in exile in Iran, dismissed criticisms that the Iraqi state had shut out Sunnis from power.

"Freedom is the most important thing," he said.

"Here is an Islamic newspaper," he said, waving it about. He pointed to his laptop, and his cellphone. "Now we have 600 satellite channels."

He echoed the familiar refrain here that it will take generations to achieve a durable sectarian coexistence.

"With time, democracy will continue, and one day we will be like Switzerland, or France or the Italians," he said. "In the United States in the 1960s, a black man couldn't get on a bus, and now Obama is president."

## Le Monde

Mardi 28 février 2012

# Walid Joumblatt : « il faut armer et unifier l'opposition »

## Entretien

### Beyrouth

Correspondance

Mercredi 22 février, le leader druze Walid Joumblatt, 62 ans, vétéran de la politique libanaise, participait à un petit rassemblement à Beyrouth, « en solidarité avec les martyrs d'Homs ». Influent, le chef du Parti socialiste progressiste, qui s'était officiellement rapproché de Damas en 2010, renoue avec ses positions antisyriniennes. **A quand remonte votre dernière visite à Damas ?**

C'était le 9 juin. J'ai décidé alors de ne plus y mettre les pieds [la presse libanaise avait relaté une visite en août, que M. Joumblatt dément]. La conversation avec Bachar Al-Assad fut un peu surréaliste. A une question sur son cousin Rami Makhlouf [l'une des plus grosses fortunes du pays, accusé de corruption], le président m'a dit, « c'est un fou ». Quand je lui ai demandé ce qui s'était passé avec Hamza Al-Khatib [originnaire de Deraa, torturé jusqu'à la mort, à 13 ans], il a affirmé que l'enfant n'avait pas été torturé, mais qu'il avait bien été tué. Comment tient-on ce genre de réponse ? Je ne sais pas, c'est un psychopathe. **M. Al-Assad a longtemps été**



KHALED DESOUKI

**décrit comme un réformiste écrasé par son clan...**

C'est le plus grand mensonge jamais inventé. Ce réformiste n'a même pas supporté, lors du « printemps de Damas » [courte période d'ouverture politique au début des années 2000], les demandes minimales de changement. Tout le monde s'est retrouvé en prison. Les régimes de dictature ne peuvent pas changer.

**Aujourd'hui, avez-vous des contacts avec Damas ?**

Non, j'ai rompu et j'en suis heureux. J'ai la conscience tranquille. **Regrettez-vous de vous être rapproché de Damas en 2010 ?**

Non. La tension était très grande au Liban après le 7 mai 2008.

Après les affrontements entre druzes et chiites, sunnites et chiites, il fallait amorcer un virage pour la paix civile. Cela passait par le Hezbollah puis la Syrie. J'ai rencontré Bachar Al-Assad le 31 mars 2010. Et puis, le peuple arabe s'est révolté, jusqu'au soulèvement de Deraa, le 17 mars 2011.

**Le régime est-il près de s'écrouler ?**

Pas du tout ! J'aimerais bien ! On assiste impuissants [à la mort des civils]. Ce qui se passe à Homs est affreux, il s'agit d'une destruction systématique, dans un silence international complice. Les Occidentaux ont trouvé dans le veto russe et chinois leur meilleur alibi ; ils ne veulent rien faire pour sauver le peuple syrien. Ils sont incapables d'imposer un cessez-le-feu à Homs. Depuis quarante ans, le régime Assad a favorisé la sécurité des frontières nord d'Israël. L'intérêt d'Israël, dans certains milieux occidentaux, prime sur celui du peuple arabe.

**Que préconisez-vous, alors ?**

Il faut armer l'Armée syrienne libre et essayer d'unifier l'opposition au régime, ne pas trouver des excuses en disant qu'elle est divisée. On sait faire la différence entre la véritable résistance et les cinquièmes colonnes.

**Si Homs tombe, la révolte**

**s'effondrera-t-elle ?**

La révolte ne s'effondrera pas. Si Homs tombe, cela facilitera la mainmise du régime sur le couloir stratégique qui mène au port de Tartous. Cela renforcera l'alliance tripartite russo-irano-syrienne. **Vous appelez à « faire le tri » parmi les druzes en Syrie. Que voulez-vous dire ?**

Je ne parle pas en termes confessionnels. Le régime agit la théorie funeste de l'alliance des minorités. Les druzes sont des citoyens syriens. Ou bien ils sont avec le pouvoir de Bachar Al-Assad, ou bien ils sont contre. Les druzes ont un glorieux passé de lutte contre le mandat français. Il est temps de lutter contre la tyrannie du régime syrien qui tue ses citoyens partout.

**Après l'avoir soutenue, vous critiquez la position libanaise, consistant à se tenir à l'écart des événements en Syrie...**

Mais la politique, ça évolue ! Je ne comprends pas comment on peut se taire sur les massacres de citoyens innocents syriens. Le gouvernement du Liban doit au contraire les dénoncer. Mais je ne lâcherai pas cet exécutif, pour des raisons de nécessité interne, de stabilité. ■

**PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR LAURE STEPHAN**