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INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS
Tel. : 01-48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01-48 24 64 66
www.fikp.org
E-mail: bulletin@fikp.org

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**TURKEY:
LEYLA ZANA SENTENCED TO TEN YEARS PRISON IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF
INCREASED ANTI-KURDISH REPRESSION**

The Kurdish Member of Parliament, Leyla Zana, has been sentenced to ten years in prison *in absentia* by a Diyarbakir Court on the grounds of “membership of a separatist group and propaganda” for it as well as in support of the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan. Her lawyer has lodged an appeal.

Since coming out of prison in 2004, following her condemnation in 1994, along with several other DEP members of Parliament, for “membership of an armed group” (the PKK), Leyla Zana has been sentenced to 2 years jail by the Diyarbakir 6th

Criminal Court for a speech made during the 2007 celebrations of the Kurdish New Year, in which she stated that the 3 leaders of the Kurds were Jalal Talabani, Massud Barzani and Abdullah Ocalan.

On 24 May 2008, she had spoken at a seminar at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, in which she had expressed support for the PKK and for Ocalan.

On the announcing of the sentence, the co-President of the Europe-Turkey Commission of the European Parliament, Hélène Flautre, expressed “deep

concern” and considered that it was a blow against freedom of expression in Turkey: “As co-President of the joint EU-Turkey Parliamentary Commission and member of the Friends of Turkey, I want to express my deep concern following the sentencing, by the Diyarbakir Criminal Court, of Mrs Leyla Zana, a Member of the Turkish Parliament, holder of the 1995 Sakharov Prize for her struggle for freedom of thought.

She has thus been sentenced to ten years imprisonment for “propaganda in support of a terrorist organisation” on the basis of nine of her speeches.

On 1994, Leyla Zana had already been sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment for similar remarks and released after ten years thanks to international pressure. In particular, she received the Sakharov Prize while in prison. Indeed, yesterday's sentence is comparable to the one she received eight years earlier. So it proves that freedom of opinion is still threatened in Turkey by the Courts and the Penal Code.

This is why I am asking the Turkish government as well as the Turkish Parliament to take the necessary legislative measures to ensure that real freedom of opinion by guaranteeing fundamental freedoms by reforming the Anti-Terrorist Law and, consequently, clearing Leyla Zana of all charges".

In France, the MRAP (Movement against Racism and for friendship between Peoples) issued a communiqué on 20 May in reaction to the news: "A Turkish Court has just sentenced the Member of Parliament Leyla Zana to 10 years imprisonment on the grounds of some speeches she made, one of which was made in the European Parliament. She is also charged with "propaganda for the Kurdish people's party (PKK)".

The MRAP recalls that Leyla Zana had already served 10 years in prison (1994-2004) and had received the Andrei Sakharov Human Rights Prize and had twice been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The MRAP expresses its indignation at this fresh sentencing of a woman who has always struggles for the legitimate rights of the Kurdish people: "It is part of a policy of repression of the Kurdish people: thousands of arrests, amongst which are elected represen-

tatives, lawyers, journalists women and children.

France and the European Parliament must intervene to demand the liberation of Leyla Zana and of the Kurdish and Turkish political prisoners".

This sentence is part of a wide-spread legal repression that has put hundreds of Kurdish activists in the dock, with heavy sentences in the bargain. Thus on 17 May, the Erzurum Second Criminal Court sentenced 10 prisoners who were members of the Union of Kurdish Communities (KCK) to — a total of 170 years imprisonment.

These prisoners had been arrested on 11 January 2011, in the context of a dragnet against members of the KCK, in the districts of Beyazid (Dogubeyazit) and Agri. During the last hearing of their trial, attended by the lawyers and family members of the accused, their demand to be allowed to express themselves in Kurdish was refused.

Nine of the prisoners received sentences of between 20 and 20 years for being members of an illegal organisation, while Dogan Senses was sentenced to life imprisonment. The total of all these sentences is 170 years, while three of them are still due for trial on other charges.

Since 2009, 700 people have been arrested for membership of KCK, which is accused of being a PKK offshoot. The trials of KCK members began on 18 October 2010, with the trial of 152 Kurdish politicians and Human Rights activists. In all the wave of arrests, aimed at the KCK throughout the country has placed 7,748 people in detention and nearly 4,000 people have been arrested in the last 9

months according to estimates by the pro-Kurdish BDP party, dozens of whose officers and activists are still behind bars. During the latest dragnet, at least 507 people were taken into detention between 10 December and 3 January. Amongst them are local elected representatives, students, Human Rights activists, members of the KCK and even minors.

In March 2012, about 1,300 people were still in detention, including several hundreds arrested that very month. On 8 May 2012, 30 more people were taken into detention, still in the context of operations against the KCK. Moreover, despite reforms aimed at separating the cases of minors from "anti-terrorist" trials, heavy sentences are still being passed on young people. Thus a 17-year-old youth, accused of being a member of a terrorist organisation received a 20-year sentence following his trial in the 1st Minors' Court at Mersin. The evidence accepted by the court seemed only to come from anonymous testimony and from document recover from Internet. In addition to his prison sentence, the accused has to pay a fine of 12,000 Turkish lira (about 5,250 euros) according to the Firat News press agency.

He had been arrested during a police raid on his family home on 11 December 2011 and the prosecution had originally demanded a 40-year sentence. There were a multitude of charges against him: going to unauthorised meeting and demonstrations, assemblies, propaganda for an illegal organisation, resisting the police and being in possession of explosive substances. The young lad denied the charges but the Court based its finding on secret evidence, prints from Internet and the statements of police officers.

In this very ominous political and legal situation, the Speaker of the European Parliament, Martin Schultz, visited Istanbul on 31 May and once again, pointed out the connection between the solution to the Kurdish question and Turkey's application for membership of the European Union. Speaking during a ceremony taking place at Bilgi University, in which he received a Doctorate *honoris causa*, he said:

"I am giving this advice in the context of Turkey's strategy for membership of the E.U. — we must try to convince the two parties that it is possible (to create something) in between a sovereign State and a

region with a high degree of autonomy even while maintaining Turkish territorial integrity. This is just my humble advice".

Recognising that the Kurdish question was "Turkey's internal problem", Martin Schultz nevertheless pointed out that the European Union was concerned about the recognition and the rights of minorities in its member countries. He recalled that he had been faced with the Kurdish problem for the first time twenty years earlier, when he was just a socialist mayor in Germany:

"In the early 80s, I saw a great number of refugees coming from Kurdistan who arrived in my town

and I was immediately faced with the problem of these refugees, many of whom were Turkish citizens. About half of these considered themselves Kurdish and the other half Turkish. This became my reality. So the first part of the answer I offer you is that there really is a Kurdish question". Martin Schultz also raised the Iraqi situation and praised the success of the Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan:

"You know that the North of Iraq has an autonomous Kurdish government. Mr. Barzani is a regional leader of Kurdish origin who considers himself a Kurdish leader. This is not a problem... for Turkey, nor, in our eyes, is it a problem for Iraq".

IRAQI KURDISTAN: A FLOOD OF KURDISH REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

On 14 May 2012, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated that he had recorded 2,171 Syrian Kurdish refugees in Iraq's Kurdistan Region. Just in Duhok region the number of people crossing the border daily was between 10 and 15 families or 50 to 65 individuals. Every week, four or five families and about twenty individuals contacted the UNHCR offices in Irbil.

In Suleimaniah, they had recorded 95 refugees, including five families. Other refugees were waiting at the border for a change to cross into Iraqi Kurdistan according to a UNHCR report, published in the US paper *International Business Times*.

The report stressed that the Kurdistan Region authorities were expecting to receive further waves of refugees as violence escalated in Syria. Indeed, the majority of refugees arriving in Iraq were seeking to settle in the Kurdish Region.

"The movement of tens of thousands of people to Kurdistan is an important turning point from the political geographic and economic equation governing the region (...) This region, which has been a major source of dispute between the Kurds and the central authorities over the last decades, has become, today, an ideal refuge not only for people displaced from Syria but also for the Kurds fleeing Iran and Turkey".

Saad al-Jabbouri, a economics research worker living in the Netherlands, explains: *"The Commission thinks that the Kurdistan Region, as compared with other countries that are receiving refugees, like Jordan, which suffers from a great shortage of resources, can welcome displaced persons in conditions of security, economic stability and prosperity. The majority of these displaced persons, and especially the Kurds, prefer to seek refuge there".*

Thus, in HCR's eyes, Iraqi Kurdistan is the best possible choice for refugees, if the Kurdish authorities allow them

to settle. This new attitude of the HCR must be seen in the light of the difficulties experienced in Jordan following the influx there of refugees from Iraq, where the lack of means as well as of water — each refugee needs 80 litres of water per day, which is a heavy financial burden for the Jordan government.

A Kurd, who has recently reached Holland, confirms, on the AKNews site, that most of his tribe has emigrated to Iraqi Kurdistan: *"Most of the refugees prefer to go there because of its greater security and the good treatment they receive such as the social services provided. In this region, refugees do not suffer, as elsewhere like Jordan and Turkey, from lack of water or medical care. Kurds who arrive in Kurdistan have felt the great difference between conditions in the Region and in Syria, where they lived in conditions of extreme poverty compared with life in Kurdistan".*

Since 2011, a total of 20,000 Syrian refugees have been regis-

tered in the Kurdish region by the HCR, according to Eve McDonnell. Responsible for external relations: *“There are plans for setting up some projects with rapid results, in cooperation with the Region’s authorities, especially if, as seems highly probable, the crisis lasts much longer”*.

Quite apart from the Syrian conflict, Iraqi Kurdistan seems a model of economic development and is attracting foreign investments. Thus, in addition to Kurdish activists or deserting soldiers fleeing reprisals, Kurds are entering the Region illegally, in search of work. Some refugees, who have reached Europe, are even considering returning to Iraqi Kurdistan where other family members are living. This is the case with Barakat Jalal, ques-

tioned by AKNews: having found refuge in the Netherlands, he is planning to leave for the Domiz refugee camp, in Duhok Province, where relations are now living, once his case has been approved by the HCR and the local authorities.

The Domiz camp “has indeed, been organised to meet the primal needs of the refugees, be they for food, medical care. However, faced with the influx of displaced persons, hygienic and sanitary problems are arising. The HCR is also trying to involve the children in various activities, scholastic and extra-scholastic, inside the camp.

Elsewhere, as in Irbil, the refugees are more or less left to their own resources or else live

with members of their family already settled in Kurdistan, or acquaintances. Here they receive no specific aid, so many of them are still waiting to be registered by the HCR.

It should be noted that the Iraqi Federal Government has rejected any responsibility for the influx of refugees from Syria and that, apart from the HCR and the Kurdish government, the displaced persons in Iraq can only expect some help from charitable organisations or private initiatives. Thus, on 3 May, Barzani distributed some food rations to 292 families, each of which received 25 Kgr rice, 10 Kgr of sugar, 10 Kgr of vegetables, 5 litres of oil, 5 tins of tomato sauce, 4 sacks of vermicelli and a Kgr of meat.

IRAN:

SEVERAL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN A CRITICAL STATE

On 23 May, Mostafa Armin, Mose Hatefi, Saeed Drait and Ali Marhamati, four Iranian Kurds from the town of Maku (Western Azerbaijan) were sentenced to a total of 46 years imprisonment and banishment by the Khoy Revolutionary Court for “*collaboration with Iranian opposition parties*” according to the Kurdpa agency. A fifth prisoner, Vali Balkhany, was also due to appear in the dock but he died under torture a few days before the sentence was passed. It had been planned that he, like Mostafa Armin (who, however, survived) would be sentenced to 15 years and 6 months deportation in Barazian Prison. Saeed Drait and Ali Marhamati received four years each.

Another Kurd, Muhamad Sediq Kaboudvand, a journalist and a Human Rights activist, who has been imprisoned for several

years already, has also started a hunger strike, this time because to be allowed to visit his sick child.

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran announced on 26 May that Muhammad Sediq Kaboudvand had begun his hunger strike. His wife, Parinaz Hosseiny, reported that it was during her last visit, on 20 May that she was informed by the prison authorities that her husband was refusing all food until he was allowed to visit his son. He had already begun a hunger strike earlier in the month for the same reason. He had then been promised the official promise that he would enjoy special permission for this if he started eating again. According to Parinaz Hosseiny, the authorities then demanded that he write a letter of repentance but he refused, insisting that he had not committed any offence.

Muhammad Kabouvand suffers from health problems and is said to need a surgical operation but the prison authorities have refused him any access to treatment or transfer to hospital.

Parinaz Hosseiny pointed out that her son also suffered from a serious illness and that the doctors considered that the presence of his father could help improve his reaction to treatment: *“so I asked the authorities to observe their own laws and grant my husband this permission, which is a right in any Iranian prison”*.

Muhamad Sediq Kabouvand was arrested 5 years ago and accused of activity against nation security. He has, in fact, founded the Kurdistan Human Rights Defence Organisation. He also directed the publication of a bi-lingual Kurdish-Persian weekly “*Payam-e Mardom*”, banned in 2006. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment

for “propaganda against the regime”.

Since 3 May was International Press Freedom Day, the spokesman of the US State Department called on the Iranian Government to release Muhamad Sediq Kabouvand as well as 90 other journalists at present being detained in Iran.

Finally in Sine (Sanandaj), the capital of Kurdistan Province, Anwar Hossein Panahi, a Kurdish political prisoner initially sentenced to hanging, whose sentence had been commuted to 16 years imprisonment, has now been 5 years behind bars and all requests for a short leave have been refused.

Anwar Hossein Panahi, a Kurdish political activist, was arrested on 5 November 2007 and detained for 6 months in the premises of secret services, the Chorveh. He had been tortured and had several of his ribs broken.

The Revolutionary Court had sentenced him to death for attacking national security and as an “enemy of God” — a crime that carries an automatic death sentence. He had appealed and finally received 16 years jail. According to his lawyer, no evidence was put forward nor was there any confession to back the charges.

In these last five years, Anwar Hossein Panahi, who suffers

from a stomach and intestinal infection, has only had a single one-hour hospital examination whereas the doctors considered that his condition required a much longer stay.

In the same case, Anwar’s brother, Afshin Hossein Panahi, who had been sentenced to one year’s imprisonment has just been released while another brother Ashraf Hossein Panahi has died in suspicious circumstances. The whole family seems to be suffering from serious pressure and threats from the security forces and about thirty people related to them have been arrested and imprisoned since, while others have been sent into exile and forbidden to contact their relations.

Amjad Hossein Panahim one of Anwar’s brothers told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran team that his brother had undergone 6 months of physical and psychological torture immediately after his arrest. Although he was suffering from broken ribs and kidney infection, he had been tied to a fence in the prison courtyard at the height of winter until the cold and pain made him lose consciousness. “Throughout this period our family was kept in the most complete ignorance of either the reasons for his arrest although we repeatedly went to see the judicial authorities”.

Another brother, Ashraf Hossein Panahi, had started to collect

evidence of Anwar’s innocence. He had collected 5,000 signatures in his support from respected and trustworthy people in the region. He even wanted to take them all to the judicial authorities in Teheran, but he had been mysteriously assassinated on his way and his body found by people from a neighbouring village, who had seen an unknown vehicle in the area. The autopsy concluded that a blunt object that fractured his skull had caused death.

“After Ashraf’s death, my young brother Afshin tried to continue his action but he was also arrested and tortured while in detention at Ghorveh. He was only 19 years old and lost 50% of his vision. He has been sentenced to one year’s imprisonment.

Our home has been inspected once, even twice a week, all our communications such as phone calls are tapped and the movement of members of our family are watched so that it is impossible for them to contact us”.

Speaking more generally about the condition of Kurdish prisoners in Iran, Amjad Hossein Panahi explains that many of them have no lawyers through lack of financial means and so are deprived of their right to defence. Even those to accept a lawyer appointed by the court still have problems since most of these lawyers collaborate with the secret services.

CINEMA:

A GOLDEN PALM FOR REZAM YEZIL’S SHORT-LENGTH FILM



he Kurdish film director L. Rêzan Yezilbaş won a Golden Palm for short-length films at the Cannes Film Festival for his film “Sessiz- Bê Deng” (Silence).

The scene of this short film is set

in Diyarbekir, in 1984. Zeynep, a mother of three children, wants to visit her husband, who is in prison. She can only speak Kurdish, her native tongue, but this is strictly forbidden in official premises like the prison. Not knowing any Turkish, she finds

herself unable to say a single word. Her frustration is intensified when she is also forbidden to bring her husband a new pair of shoes.

“Diyarbekir Prison is the symbol of the torture of the whole prison system

in the period following the Army's 1980 coup d'état". Rêzan Yesilbaş explains. "But instead of describing the inside of the prison, that is the political detainees, their torture or their struggles and convictions I chose to direct my camera onto the little daily experiences of the women

outside, and the silence imposed on them since the use of Kurdish, the only language they know, was strictly forbidden in prisons at that time".

Born in 1977, Rêzan Yezilbaş received a degree in film-making at Marmara University in

2008. His short film "*Hukum*" (Sentence) was the first of his "Feminine Trilogy", and has been shown at several international film festivals. *Sessiz-Bê Deng*, the second of the trilogy was filmed in 2011 and the scenario of the third has already been written.

Kurdistan turc : photographies de territoires et géographie

Par Alexandre MOUTHON*

Ce photo reportage d'Alexandre Mouthon, réalisé à la veille des élections nationales turques de juin 2011, tente de saisir l'esprit des lieux à travers les dynamiques qui sont à l'œuvre au Kurdistan turc. L'auteur croise ici sa lecture de géographe et son coup d'œil de photographe. Il nous emmène ainsi avec lui au Kurdistan turc.

L'ESPACE d'observation géographique s'articule ici autour de trois villes et d'un village, en treize photographies de territoires. Quatre espaces aux fortes revendications identitaires territoriales qui participent aux enjeux géopolitiques de la région.

Hasankef, le village en sursis. Mardin, entre le Tigre et l'Euphrate, vigie de la frontière syrienne. Sanliurfa, la ville sacrée, seule cité du Sud-Est à être connectée par autoroute à l'Ouest du pays, jouant ainsi son intégration plus réticulaire qu'identitaire. Et Diyarbakir, la rebelle, la capitale culturelle du Kurdistan à la croissance effrénée.

Voici le village citadelle et troglodyte d'Hasankef, sur la rive Ouest du Tigre. Il est devenu ces dix dernières années un étrange produit politico-marketing. Les stambouliotes et l'opinion publique de l'Ouest de la Turquie continuent dans sa grande majorité à penser qu'il est préférable de ne pas se rendre à la marge sud-est de leur pays depuis la guerre civile (1985-1999), dans la région du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, séparatiste, enclin à la violence, accusé de terrorisme par Ankara et déclaré illégal.

Le village, un des berceaux millénaires de l'histoire du Kurdistan et fief symbolique de la lutte du peuple Kurde, devait et devrait disparaître, comme d'autres - une quarantaine environ - sous les eaux de retenues du barrage d'Ilisu prévu pour 2013, engloutissant ce site archéologique et tout la région, de Batman, la métropole régionale mono industrielle (industrie pétrolière) à Midyat, proche de la frontière syrienne. L'irrigation du Sud-Est anatolien par les barrages et les lacs de retenus du vaste projet GAP (Güneydogu Anadolli Projesi) de mise en valeur énergétique et

agricole du sud-est anatolien, lancé depuis plus de trente ans est réalisée à environ 70%.

Avec le barrage de Cizre, à la frontière syro-irakienne, l'armature de l'aménagement hydraulique du Tigre turc serait presque complète, permettant ainsi à Ankara de contrôler totalement le débit du fleuve et d'accroître sa pression sur la Syrie et l'Irak, dépendants en aval de ses eaux, tout en irrigant un vaste périmètre à la frontière. Et de faire taire un peu plus la culture Kurde au passage. En 2009, les bailleurs de fonds européens (dont la BNP Paribas) se seraient retirés les uns après les autres du projet face à sa controverse. Des associations et des ONG sont entrées dans le bras de fer, d'autant que les habitants ont décidé tout à gagner à faire la Une, le plus longtemps possible, puisque le site est potentiellement classable par l'Unesco. Les villageois ne se font pas vraiment d'illusions et profitent simplement de la valeur ajoutée qu'ils peuvent tirer de la situation. Une rumeur laissait entendre en 2009 qu'un accord tenu secret pour le moment aurait été signé avec le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères allemand en vue de l'obtention d'un crédit. Trois jours avant notre venue, une voiture de la police fut prise pour cible dans la rue de Hasankef. La voiture brûla mais les policiers réussirent à s'échapper dans la foule.

Nous sommes à quatre-vingts kilomètres de la Syrie, à mi-chemin se trouve Mardin. Tout au long de la frontière court une route Est-Ouest qui se prolonge vers l'Irak. Pour le moment une autoroute partit d'Adana arrive jusqu'à Sanliurfa et ses vastes périmètres irrigués.

Le pays a connu une croissance économique soutenue les cinquante dernières années, de l'ordre de 3% par an



en moyenne. En parallèle, le poids de la population urbaine dans la population totale n'a cessé d'augmenter pour atteindre 67% en 2005 et ainsi se rapprocher des 75% des pays dits développés comme la France. De 1950 à 2000, la croissance des populations citadines atteint 4,7% en moyenne. Cette croissance est ralentie depuis les années 1990 car la fécondité diminue, environ 2,1 enfants par femmes en 2008. L'exode rural est encore fort, ceci étant il subsiste encore en Turquie près de 45% de la population active dans l'agriculture. Ce pays fait parti des rares Etats à être en autosuffisance alimentaire. Le pays représente environ 1% de la population mondiale avec 73,6 millions d'habitants mi-2010.

Dans ce tableau, le Kurdistan a longtemps fait figure d'espace « en retard » de développement, peu industrialisé et mal connecté. Pendant la guerre civile, l'exode rural fut massif, les campagnards venant chercher refuge en ville. En 1992, Ankara a lancé une vaste opération de destruction des villages kurdes. En quelques années, cette politique de terreur a entraîné l'exil forcé des populations rurales. Ces quinze dernières années, la fécondité a diminué de près de 20% parmi la population kurde (politiques de planning familial et amélioration des services de santé).

En pleine période électorale, les meetings de l'AKP en terre kurde sont primordiaux. Le Premier ministre, M. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et son parti, l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement, de tendance islamiste modéré), au pouvoir depuis sa victoire de 2002, est présenté comme « la rébellion des pauvres, des désespérés, des silencieux et des exploités ».

Accrochée au-dessus de la plaine aride, la vieille cité citadelle de Mardin et ses minarets fixent au sud la Syrie toute →



⇒ proche et le monde arabe qui gronde. Devant l'agence locale de l'AKP, des mulets sont attachés. Les enfants jouent aux cerfs-volants sur les toits, en contre bas de la forteresse. Un site de contrôle aérien qui fut très actif pendant la guerre civile, l'armée s'organise aujourd'hui pour le quitter. Dans les années 1990, le PKK attaqua la base de Mardin.

Depuis 1999, année de l'arrestation d'Abdullah Öcalan au Kenya, le leader du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan fondé en 1978 et qui change de nom en 2002 pour devenir le Congrès pour la liberté et la démocratie du Kurdistan, le Kadek), les kurdes conquièrent, petit à petit, de nombreuses mairies du sud est anatolien. La mairie de Mardin est aux mains de l'AKP depuis 2009, date des dernières élections, jusqu'en 2014. Mais ici, ce sont les élections législatives du 12 juin 2011 que les Kurdes attendent. En 2007, le parti pro-kurde DTP (parti pour une société démocratique fondé en 2005) place 22 députés. L'assemblée compte 550 membres élus pour un mandat de cinq ans à la proportionnelle. Pour qu'un parti soit représenté au Parlement, il doit présenter un candidat dans au moins la moitié des provinces de la Turquie, il doit par ailleurs obtenir un minimum de 10% des voix au niveau national. Ce qui est interprété comme un barrage antidémocratique exclu d'emblé le DTP qui doit pour le contourner présenter ses candidats comme « indépendants ». En 2009, la Cour Constitutionnelle interdit le DTP. Le BDP (le parti pour la paix et la démocratie) le remplace derechef. En 2003, les autorités avaient déjà interdit le parti pro-kurde Hadeb créé en 1994. Le 21 avril, des manifestations ont éclaté après que le Haut Conseil Electoral ait invalidé la candidature de 7 candidats du BDP sur 66. La population kurde est en général estimée à quinze million de personnes. Il existe une controverse qui porte sur la comptabilisation des enfants nés de couples mixtes, nombreux.

Deux cents kilomètres séparent la plaine de Mardin-Ceylampinar de celle de Urfa-Harran à l'Ouest. Cette Haute Mésopotamie aride est devenu un gigantesque périmètre irrigué. De l'immense retenue d'eau du complexe organisé autour du barrage Atatürk sur l'Euphrate partent deux canaux. L'un, encore inachevé, irrigue la première plaine, le second, un des plus grand du monde, abreuve « Urfa la Prospère » qui est devenu le centre des plateaux irrigués par le GAP. La cité, grosse de cinq cent mille âmes, polarise alentour et s'étale. À Urfa, il y a soixante-dix pour cent de Kurdes, vingt pour cent d'Arabes et dix pour cent de Turcs.



L'avocat Bekir Eren, issu d'une vieille famille locale, se présente pour la première fois aux élections législatives avec l'AKP. Il va être élu, mais ne le sait pas encore. Urfa est plutôt conservatrice, de ce fait beaucoup de kurdes votent AKP. Urfa votera à 70% AKP le 12 juin 2011. Il préférera vanter l'avancement du GAP et l'héritage mésopotamien qu'aborder les revendications kurdes. Un grand nombre de journalistes et de photo reporters sont régulièrement arrêtés.

La route longe l'immense barrage-réservoir Atatürk, huit cent dix-sept kilomètres carrés. Il faut basculer à nouveau dans le bassin versant du Tigre. Évoquer les murailles de basalte noir de Diyarbakir fait encore frissonner nombre de turcs. La cité bénéficie moins qu'Urfa des bienfaits du GAP. Est-elle trop rebelle ? L'agglomération compte près de un million d'habitants, 90% de Kurdes et 10% de Turcs. Sa croissance a été fulgurante, alimentée par l'exode rural forcé des réfugiés de la guerre civile et du conflit irakien de 1991. Lorsque nous étions à Hasankef, quatre rebelles du PKK ont été assassinés à Tunceli, dans la vallée du Haut-Euphrate. En réaction, à un mois des élections, des milliers de personnes sont descendues dans les rues de Diyarbakir. La rumeur souffle le chiffre de cent mille.

La lecture urbaine de Diyarbakir est aisée. Deux avenues qui se coupent à angles droits, larges, modernes, commerçantes et embouteillées : le plan est Romain. De part et d'autre un entrelacs de ruelles délabrées donne à la vieille ville un air triste de bidonville. Les ordures ménagères - quand elles n'infestent pas les recoins - sont déversées dans le Tigre. Des vendeurs de légumes à la criée parcourent les étroits passages avec des charrettes à bras remplies de concombres. Les enfants sont livrés à eux-mêmes. En ce lieu s'entassent les familles kurdes les plus pauvres arrivées des campagnes.

L'afflux n'est pas encore terminé, mais les raisons ne sont plus les mêmes. Pendant la guerre civile, ils fuyaient selon le schéma d'urgence classique qui assigne à la Grande

Ville le rôle du refuge le plus sûr. Dans le même temps, la croissance urbaine fournissait aux familles de la classe moyenne résidant encore au centre la possibilité de s'installer à la périphérie dans des cités flambant neuves disposant des standards européens en termes de confort et d'infrastructures.

Aujourd'hui, l'exode rural se poursuit, mais au rythme ralenti de migrations plus économiques que politiques. De tout cela résulte une paupérisation des quartiers centraux. Le ministère en charge du développement culturel et du tourisme, avec la participation des municipalités, s'engage dans la restauration des somptueuses maisons traditionnelles et des caravansérails de Diyarbakir, juxtaposant à la misère et à l'insalubrité des quartiers, des îlots muséographiques et des maisons de thé pour la jeunesse branchée et l'intelligentsia locale.



Les résidences fraîchement achevées alternent avec les squelettes des bâtiments en cours. Dans les interstices, les accès sont encore en terre, il n'y a pas d'arbres, on marche dans la boue. Les animaux de basse-cour rappellent que l'agriculture est partout dans et hors les murs de la ville. Des maisons neuves de trois étages poussent sur n'importe quelle colline. Les silhouettes inachevées de coopératives immobilières spéculatives ou en manque de fonds mitent aussi le paysage.

En juin 2011, trente-six députés kurdes ont été élus au Parlement contre vingt-deux précédemment. Des fraudes massives et violations des droits de vote ont été constatées. ♦

**Géographe documentariste, travaille en indépendant à la réalisation de récits documentaires, notamment photographiques et vidéographiques*

Turkish Albaraka Bank Opens Branch in Erbil

By HEMIN KHOSHNAW
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region --The Turkish bank Albaraka has opened its first branch in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan Region, the latest move in a series of ventures by Turkish banks to enter the Kurdish market.

Despite severe crises between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan in the past, relations between the two have improved dramatically in recent years. Turkey now has a consulate in the Kurdistan Region and its businesses have dominated the region's market.

In fact, confidence in the flourishing ties between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey appears to be at an all-time high, to the point that Sami Gul, manager of the Albaraka branch in Erbil, has an enthusiastic way of describing the relationship.

"Economic relations between Turkey and Kurdistan are like the marriages of



A crowd stands outside the Erbil branch of Turkish Albaraka Bank on its inauguration day.

Catholics -- they last forever," said Gul.

The branch's inauguration ceremony was held on April 25 and attended by senior officials such as Sinan Chalabi, Kurdish minister of trade and industry, Nawzad Hadi, governor of Erbil and Aydin Salcan, the Turkish consul general in the Kurdistan Region.

According to the Kurdish minister of trade, trade between Turkey and Iraq has reached \$12 billion, 75 percent of which is with the Kurdistan Region. However, most of the trade is unilateral, meaning only Kurdistan imports goods from Turkey.

Celebi said that, in 1995, there was only

one Turkish company in Kurdistan. Today, this number has grown to 1,020 companies.

The Albaraka bank is an Islamic bank and belongs to the Fethulla Gulen group. The bank has 400 branches, 133 of which are located in Turkey.

"It aims to provide services for business projects in the region and consolidate the bilateral economic relations between Turkey and Erbil," said Gul.

The Turkish consul talked about the growth of economic relations between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey and how more banks are needed in this region to cope with the growth.

"We have opened airlines, schools and hospitals in the Kurdistan Region. Today, the branch of Albaraka has begun its services and other banks will follow," said Salcan.

For his part, Erbil's Governor Hadi expressed happiness at the inauguration, saying, "Opening this bank is the result of good relations between the two countries. Opening banks and expanding the banking system are prerequisites for a successful economy."

Apart from Albaraka Bank, there are currently branches of three other major Turkish banks in Kurdistan -- İş Bank, Ziraat Bank and Vakif Bank. □

Iraqi MP criticizes Turkish-Iraqi Kurdish rapprochement, says Turkey not reliable

TODAY'S ZAMAN, ANKARA

An Iraqi deputy has warned Massoud Barzani, the president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, about a recent rapprochement with Turkey, saying Turkey has never been a reliable country for the Iraqi Kurds.

Hossein Ali, a member of the Kurdistan Alliance (KA) group in the Iraqi parliament, said, "The Iraqi Kurds' reliance on Turkey can jeopardize the political future of the Kurdistan region," on Tuesday to the Iranian semi-official Fars news agency. "All throughout history, Turkey has never been and never will be a point of reliance for Iraqi Kurds," he said, calling on Barzani to review his ties with Ankara.

Ali's remarks came after a statement made by Barzani to US officials during a recent visit to Washington that he opposes the delivery of F-16 warplanes to Iraq while Nouri al-Maliki remains prime minister, voicing fears that Iraq's Shiite-led government could use them against Iraqi Kurds.

"I told the US administration that Kurds won't accept handing over F-16 warplanes

to Iraq as long as Maliki is in power," Barzani was quoted as saying by Kurdish media outlets.

Iraqi Kurds have had strained relations with Turkey in the past due to the presence of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Kurdish-run northern Iraq, but ties have improved significantly in recent years. As ties have further normalized, Barzani has repeatedly over the last year called on the PKK to lay down its arms. The Kurds are striving to maintain balanced ties with Iraq's rival Sunni and Shiite groups, as they vie for influence in the country following the withdrawal of US troops on Dec. 31, 2011.

Ali's remarks also came amid recent tension highlighted in a row between Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

In a written press statement in late April, Maliki accused Turkey of becoming a hostile state, engaging in "unjustified interference in Iraqi internal affairs, still ... dreaming [of] controlling the region" and of becoming "an aggressive state for all [in the region]."

In response, Erdoğan said a stable political system in Iraq with the equal voice of

all sects and ethnicities is all that Turkey hopes for in Iraq and that even Shiite groups "are fed up with" the Shiite prime minister's sectarian-based politics in Iraq.

Political observers say Maliki is trying to ensure Shiite domination of power in his country by eliminating Sunni politicians from participation in political mechanisms. The Maliki-led central government issued an arrest warrant for Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, the top official in the Iraqi cabinet, one day after the US withdrawal from Iraq.

Iraq to Barzani: F-16s to protect Iraq from Turkey, Iran

Meanwhile, criticizing Barzani's remarks over the planned delivery of US fighter jets to Iraq, the Security and Defense Committee in the Iraqi parliament said the aircraft will be used to defend all of Iraq from threats that could come from neighbors. "These warplanes will be used in defending Iraq from external threats. These are supposed to protect Kurds as well against attacks from Turkey and Iran," the statement was quoted as saying by the Turkish media on Wednesday.

Last year, the US agreed to sell 36 F-16 jets to Baghdad in a multi-billion dollar deal aimed at increasing the capabilities of Iraq's weak air force. The jets are expected to be delivered to Iraq by October of this year. □

Syria's threatened minorities

Many Alawites and other religious and ethnic groups feel caught in a vicious zero-sum game.

Jonathan Randal

The longer the struggle for power in Syria drags on, the greater the danger for its minorities and, equally ominously, for those in neighboring states. This is the human dimension of the stalemated Syrian violence that is often obscured by overarching geostrategic considerations.

In world capitals, attention is focused on the political and ideological stakes pitting Iran, Syria and their influential Hezbollah ally in Lebanon against a loose coalition of Turkey, Gulf Arab petro-monarchies — notably Qatar and Saudi Arabia — Europe, the United States and, by extension, its Israeli ally.

Played out amid the turmoil unleashed last year by the Arab Spring, the stakes in the battle for Syria are momentous for the United States and for Russia, which backs Syria's government. The outcome could accelerate — or offset — the palpable decline in American influence in much of the wider Muslim world.

But the region's minorities increasingly risk becoming expendable collateral damage in the open-ended civil war in Syria. Many of Syria's ruling Alawites — and their Kurd, Assyrian, Maronite Christian, Greek Catholic and Orthodox fellow minorities, indeed even the prudent Druze — feel caught in a vicious zero-sum game.

Like many another dominant minority throughout Middle Eastern history, President Bashar al-Assad's beleaguered Alawites both protect and manipulate Syria's other minorities. Assad relentlessly insists they are all under growing threat from the still disorganized and disparate opposition drawn from the Sunni Muslim community which accounts for 70 percent of Syria's population.

That way, the longer the strife goes on, the less isolated his Alawites (perhaps 12 percent of Syrians) feel and the more they justify their backs-to-the-wall defense of privileges accumulated over more than 40 years in power. The counterexample is Iraq, where America's war put the majority Shiites in power and minorities paid a heavy price.

Past intercommunal bloodletting remains very much alive in the memories of the region's peoples. Indeed, the present slaughter of the innocents re-

calls two massacres that just 30 years ago took place barely 100 miles apart. To this day their very names remain ominous shorthand for unpunished wholesale slaughter. Each involved a dominant minority that felt threatened.

In February 1982 as many as 20,000 Sunnis died in the Syrian city of Hama when the Alawite regime of Bashar's father, Hafez al-Assad, suppressed in cold blood an uprising inspired by the quintessentially Sunni Muslim Brothers and other Islamist radicals.

Then, that September in neighboring Lebanon, Maronite Christian militiamen, egged on by allies in Israel's invading army, slaughtered hundreds of unarmed Palestinians in Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

The so-called "international community," a deliberately vague term in fact then designating the United States and its allies, swallowed hard but decided nothing could be done to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Have things changed much since?

That lack of forcefulness back then led to other tragedies. Israel's invasion and expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization from Beirut came only halfway through Lebanon's bloody 15 years of "little wars," those serial conflicts for which the word "Lebanonization" was coined to describe the country's penchant for inventing ever more irrational and deadly forms of mass murder and mayhem to afflict its 18 officially recognized sects and religious minorities.

Even an abbreviated account of Lebanon's past travails helps explain why many Middle Easterners are jaundiced about the repercussions from the struggle for Syria. Turkey helps Syria's Sunni insurgents but worries that Assad will use Syrian Kurds to cause trou-

ble among its own large and restive Kurdish population. The essentially Shiite government in Baghdad is nervous about a Syria eventually under the influence of Sunni radicals.

A black joke among Lebanese last year asked why their much battered country was spared the turmoil that attended the Arab Spring and its most violent ramifications, especially in Syria.

The jest's cynical answer: Because Lebanon, with its unhealed scars and complicated religious and ethnic makeup, is automatically qualified for the finals.

Despite occasional incidents, an unspoken understanding so far has kept major violence off Lebanese streets — precisely because pro- and anti-Syrian factions await the outcome next door in Syria. Once it becomes clear, the joke's cynicism assumes that the uneasy stalemate will end.

Is anyone at all planning, in some think thank for example, how to prevent the bloody retribution likely to be the Alawites' collective fate if Assad's regime is overthrown?

To conjure that fate and prevent further turmoil spreading throughout the region, the United States and allies would do well to work with — rather than against — Russia to prod all Syrian parties to the negotiating table and have them eschew escalating violence. That again involves swallowing hard and somehow persuading Assad and the insurgents to talk. That's a tall order and the hour is late.

JONATHAN RANDAL is a former Washington Post foreign correspondent whose book, *"The Tragedy of Lebanon-Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers and American Bunglers,"* is being republished by Just World Books.



Iraq's unity tested by rising tensions over oil-rich Kurdish region

As Iraqi Kurdistan ramps up oil production that could soon surpass Libya's output, Kurdish leaders have warned they may seek independence if disputes over oil revenues, power-sharing aren't resolved.

By Jane Arraf, Staff writer
Erbil, Iraq

In the capital of the Kurdish region, a gleaming new international airport welcomes visitors to a part of the country that is increasingly striking out on its own amid mounting questions over whether a united Iraq will survive. Unlike Baghdad, foreign visitors landing on one of the ever-growing number of international flights to Erbil need no prior visa. That's just one of the signs of autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan, the country's most prosperous and secure region.

Newly discovered oil has fueled the prosperity underpinning Kurdistan's boldness. But it has also heightened tensions with Baghdad that have simmered for decades over land and identity. As Iraqi Kurdistan ramps up oil production that officials say could surpass Libya's output by 2019, Kurdish leaders have warned they could seek full independence if disputes over oil revenues and power-sharing aren't resolved.

"The Kurds will not live in the shadow of a dictatorial regime," Massoud Barzani, the powerful president of the Kurdish region said in a speech in Erbil Friday. "The right to decide our destiny is a legitimate one and we ask others not to try to take this right from us."

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, told the Monitor in a recent interview he believes differences between Baghdad and Erbil can be solved.



Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, center left, shakes hands with Kurdish president Massoud Barzani, center right, upon his arrival in Erbil, north of Baghdad, Iraq, April 26. Sadr visited Erbil for the first time in a sign of solidarity with the Kurds. *Khalid Mohammed/AP*

"We can reach agreement on this," he said, referring to the wider issue of Iraq's fragile coalition government and increasingly bitter relations between Kurdish President Barzani and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. "We Iraqis had experiences many times on the brink of civil war – we retreated from that and we came back to dialogue and national unity."

Not everyone agrees with the president's assessment, however. Maliki's far-reaching consolidation of power has rankled other regions and even his political allies, with Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr recently visiting Erbil for the first time in a sign of solidarity with the Kurds.

SOUTHERN, OIL-RICH REGIONS ALSO PRESSING FOR MORE CONTROL

Nine years after Saddam Hussein was toppled, and two decades after breaking away from Baghdad, Iraqi Kurdistan is far more prosperous and secure than any other part of the country. Security has been maintained by the regional government's strict controls on its de facto borders, including those ostensibly under the jurisdiction of the central government.

Kurdish support two years ago for

Maliki's coalition government was essential to the Shiite prime minister retaining his post after failing to win a majority of seats. Since then a power-sharing agreement which included the Kurds and the major Sunni political bloc has fallen apart with almost none of the provisions implemented.

Because of the political wrangling, Iraq has no interior or defense minister. Instead Maliki effectively oversees both, as well as an increasing number of intelligence and security services reorganized to fall directly under his command. In a country with some of the world's biggest oil reserves, a proposed oil law mandating how revenue is shared between the provinces has never reached Parliament for a vote.

"We have to clearly define the oil law," says Latif Rasheed, senior adviser to President Talabani. "Not only regarding central authorities but regional authorities – this is happening in Kurdistan now; tomorrow it might happen in Basra if it's not clear."

In addition to Kurdistan, other regions, including the south – which has seen little benefit from its vast oil reserves – have been pressing for more control. Some local government officials in Basra and Diyala have even raised the prospect of seeking autonomy. ➤

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Mr. Barzani, who next to Mr. Maliki has emerged as the most powerful politician in Iraq, has warned that the Kurds could "resort to other decisions" if the prime minister does not follow through on a power-sharing agreement. Barzani's comments are widely seen as an implied threat to seek independence.

LEGACY OF SADDAM'S GENOCIDAL CAMPAIGN

The legacy of Saddam Hussein's military campaigns against the Kurds in the 1970s and 1980s has rekindled fears in Iraqi Kurdistan that a central government with unchecked powers could again pose a threat. That worry has been heightened by the withdrawal of US troops that served as a buffer between Erbil and Baghdad.

American protection in the form of a no-fly zone in 1991 created the semi-autonomous Kurdish region after the Kurds rose up against Mr. Hussein's weakened regime when he was driven out of Kuwait. Deeply traumatized by Saddam's genocidal campaign, two decades later Kurdish leaders have raised concerns in Washington over Iraq's purchase of American F-16 fighter jets.

"It's normal for Iraq to have an army, to have advanced weaponry but the concept of against whom that would be used this is what worries us," says Falah Mustafa, the Kurdish regional government's de facto foreign minister. "When we have worries about the nature of that army and the loyalty of that army we have all the right to be afraid because planes have been used against Kurdish people ... so our tragic history tells us to be careful."

Kurdish officials are adamant that they won't seek the breakup of Iraq but many seem prepared for the possibility that Sunni-Shiite tension could splinter the country on its own.

Feeding into Iraq's sectarian tensions, Sunni vice president Tariq al-Hashemi, wanted on terrorism charges, was given refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan and then allowed by the Kurdish government to leave the country, despite a no-travel order. He is now being tried in absentia in Baghdad.

As Kurdish political and economic power grows, ties with the rest of Iraq weaken. Most younger Kurds don't speak Arabic and few feel a strong connection to the rest of the country.

"What is not independent about Kurdistan today?" says one Kurdish official speaking on condition of anonymity. "The fact that we get our money from Baghdad – that's the only thing that's left."

KURDISH TIES WITH TURKEY IMPROVE

Kurds are looking at the possibility of replacing that revenue from an unlikely source. Opposition from powerful Turkey has been one of the main reasons the Kurds have not sought more autonomy. But as Baghdad's relations with Ankara have soured over accusations of Turkish interference in Iraqi affairs, Erbil's ties with Turkey have improved dramatically.

Kurdish officials maintain they are discussing with Turkey plans to build crude oil and natural gas pipelines that would carry fuel directly from Iraqi Kurdistan to the neighboring country.

Talabani, who last month hosted Baghdad's first Arab League summit in more than 20 years, maintains that it would be unrealistic for Kurds to push for independence despite calls by the younger generation to seek it.

The older Kurdish political elite spent years as mountain fighters followed by years in exile but Talabani says that for all Kurds in the region seeking control over their destiny, that era is over.

"Armed struggle is past – now we are in a parliamentary struggle ... we are always telling this to our [Kurdish] brothers in Turkey to understand the spirit of a new era," he says. "This is not the time of partisan war or armed struggle. Look to the countries that use popular struggle; even they get freedom from dictatorship from other places, so through this kind of struggle people can achieve their goals."

2 MILLION BARRELS PER DAY BY 2019

The dispute over oil – potentially worth billions of dollars as new fields come on stream in Iraqi

Kurdistan – is entangled in the wider issue of land, towns, and cities claimed by both the Iraqi and Kurdish governments – including the disputed city of Kirkuk. Kurds claim oil-rich Kirkuk as their historic capital, as do the Turkmen and other groups. Tens of thousands of non-Arabs were expelled from that city during Hussein's campaign to Arabize the country.

"There are a number of issues that have to be sorted out – one is the disputed territories, which I think is much more serious than the oil," says Mr. Rasheed, the Iraqi president's adviser.

Oil though has become the driving force behind Kurdish aspirations. Since Barzani turned the tap on the first oil well in the Taq Taq field three years ago, Kurdish officials expect production to rise to 500,000 barrels per day in the next 1-1/2 years. They say it could reach 2 million barrels per day by 2019 – a higher output than oil producers such as Libya.

Reflecting the rising tension, the Kurdish government in April shut off oil exports bound for the Iraqi government pipeline to Turkey. Foreign companies have cut back production and are selling the remaining fuel within Iraqi Kurdistan – a move that contravenes long-standing agreement under which oil revenue is distributed by Baghdad. The companies and Kurdish authorities say it's a necessary step to recover their costs after months of not being paid under existing agreements with the central government.

For many Iraqi Kurds, the question is whether the autonomy they have gained is enough or whether they should aim for more and risk losing it.

"It's a tough one for any Kurd to balance their natural desire for any independence, which every Kurd has deep down, even Jalal Talabani, with a reality that puts what we have today in danger," says Qubad Talabani, the Kurdish government's representative in Washington and the president's son. "I think that's what every Kurd grapples with – what their heart tells them and what their head tells them." □

USA, Turquie et Kurdes irakiens main dans la main

www.michelcollon.info

M. K. Bhadrakumar

Il y avait quelque chose de très bizarre lorsque, le vendredi 20 avril, le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a déclaré que la Turquie devenait un « Etat hostile » de la région. Après tout, Bagdad est censée être « l'âme » du monde arabe et la Turquie est censée être le modèle des nations arabes démocratisées telles que l'Irak.

« Les dernières déclarations du [Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip] Erdogan sont un nouveau retour à l'ingérence dans les affaires intérieures irakiennes et confirment qu'Erdogan est toujours en train de vivre dans l'illusion de l'hégémonie régionale », a déclaré Maliki, ajoutant : « Il est clair que ses déclarations ont une dimension sectaire, qu'il n'ait constamment avant, mais qui est maintenant devenue claire, et tous les Irakiens la rejettent ... Son insistance à poursuivre ces politiques nationalistes et régionalistes seront nuisibles aux intérêts de la Turquie et en feront un état hostile pour tous ».

Erdogan n'est pas habitué à entendre de telles semonces, même si la première provocation était venue d'Erdogan lui-même, lorsqu'il a accusé Maliki d'être « égocentrique ». Après une réunion à huis clos avec le leader kurde irakien Massoud Barzani à Istanbul la semaine dernière, Erdogan a déclaré que « le traitement actuel que réserve le Premier ministre Maliki à ses partenaires de la coalition, son approche égocentrique de la politique irakienne ... inquiètent

gravement les groupes chiites, M. Barzani et le groupe Iraquiya [soutenu par les Sunnites]. »

Erdogan faisait simplement ce qu'il fait d'habitude, en dictant à Maliki comment il devait diriger l'Irak. Mais le ministère turc des Affaires étrangères avait alors donné un poids particulier à ces propos par une déclaration confirmant qu'Erdogan les avait prononcées de manière délibérée, et qu'Ankara avait des opinions bien arrêtées sur la façon dont la démocratie devait fonctionner en Irak.

La déclaration dit : « La base de la crise politique dans laquelle se trouve l'Irak est que les politiciens irakiens cherchent à consolider leur pouvoir et à en exclure d'autres, plutôt que de suivre une politique fondée sur des principes démocratiques et universels. C'est un fait que derrière les perceptions erronées qui ont conduit à des accusations contre la Turquie par le Premier ministre Maliki, qui a incité la crise en Irak, il y a cette mauvaise compréhension de la politique. »

L'Axe au travail

Les tensions entre la Turquie et l'Irak se sont régulièrement accrues, et elles ont dernièrement fortement augmenté. La "crise en Irak" qu'évoque la déclaration turque est la bataille politique en cours entre Maliki et le vice-président irakien Tareq al-Hashemi, qui a pris une dimension sectaire chiite-sunnite. En somme, la Turquie patauge dans la politique sectaire de l'Irak et se positionne aux côtés des Sunnites et des Kurdes.

Hashemi est actuellement à Istanbul et a rencontré Erdogan



avant que ce dernier n'ait ouvert les hostilités verbales à Bagdad. Mais ce n'est qu'un point parmi d'autres. Le fait qu'Hashemi est arrivé en Turquie pour la dernière étape d'une tournée, qui l'a conduit au Qatar et en Arabie saoudite, donne une toile de fond régionale à ce qui est en train de se dérouler. (Soit dit en passant, Erdogan vient également de conclure une série de consultations à Riyad et à Doha.)

En effet, Maliki est également dans le collimateur saoudien et qatari. Riyad et Doha le voient comme un représentant iranien et ne font pas mystère de leur désir de le faire remplacer. Ils ont d'ailleurs boycotté le récent Sommet arabe à Bagdad, où Maliki avait le rôle d'hôte.

Donc, le même axe régional Turquie-Arabie Saoudite-Qatar qui travaille pour un « changement de régime » en Syrie, est également sur la voie de la confrontation avec Maliki - et le leitmotiv est une fois de plus d'isoler l'Irak dans la région.

En termes immédiats, Erdogan réagit aussi à ce qu'il perçoit comme une offense de Téhéran, qui avait frustré ses espoirs de faire jouer un rôle à la Turquie en tant que facilitateur des pourparlers entre l'Irak et le "Groupe des Six" (également connus sous le nom du P5 +1, les USA, la Grande-Bretagne, la France, la Russie et la Chine plus l'Allemagne). Téhéran a administré ce camouflet en pleine lumière lorsqu'il a proposé Bagdad comme lieu de la prochaine ronde de négociations avec le P5 +1, ce 23 mai. La pos-

ture d'Erdogan comme Sultan du Moyen-Orient musulman en a pris un coup.

Il est intéressant de noter que, à la suite de l'échange de mots vifs avec Erdogan, Maliki est parti dimanche pour Téhéran pour une visite de deux jours. Le plus embêtant pour Maliki, c'est qu'Erdogan s'est engagé dans le renforcement de ses liens avec le leader kurde Massoud Barzani. Ankara favorise une alliance entre Barzani et les dirigeants sunnites irakiens avec la perspective de contester le leadership de Maliki à Bagdad. Les Turcs ont veillé à ce que Barzani rencontre Hashemi à Istanbul la semaine dernière. Ankara joue sur les ambitions politiques de Barzani comme chef suprême du Kurdistan avec Erbil comme capitale dans le nord de l'Irak. Après avoir rencontré Hashemi, Barzani a accusé dans une conférence de presse à Isrambul Maliki de nourrir des ambitions dictatoriales.

La convergence d'intérêts entre Ankara et Erbil n'a rien de nouveau. Elle remonte à l'imposition de la "zone d'exclusion aérienne" sur le nord de l'Irak par les États-Unis, la Grande-Bretagne et la France dans les années 1990. La Turquie a joué un rôle clé dans l'émergence du Kurdistan comme une région autonome au sein de l'Irak.

Aujourd'hui cela prend également une forte dimension économique : Barzani a besoin d'une sortie vers le monde extérieur pour le commerce, et en particulier les exportations de pétrole du Kurdistan, la Turquie fournit cette sortie, et à son tour, en tire d'immenses ➤

➤ bénéfiques. Les liens commerciaux entre les deux côtés sont florissants, et représentent aujourd'hui plus de la moitié des 12 milliards de \$ US du commerce de la Turquie avec l'Irak.

Sur un autre plan, la Turquie est prête à aller jusqu'au bout dans la promotion de Barzani, seulement s'il donne un coup de main pour museler l'insurrection kurde à l'est de la Turquie, insurrection dirigée par les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui opèrent à partir de sanctuaires dans le nord de l'Irak.

Les dirigeants turcs ont déroulé le tapis rouge à Barzani, l'accueillant comme un chef d'Etat. Il a rencontré le président turc Abdullah Gül, Erdogan et le ministre des Affaires étrangères Ahmet Davitoglu, ainsi que le chef du renseignement Hakan Fidan. Barzani a allumé de nouveaux espoirs chez les Turcs, qu'il ferait quelque chose de concret pour empêcher le PKK d'ensanglanter encore la Turquie dans une guerre de guérilla menée à partir du territoire sous son contrôle dans le nord de l'Irak.

Il a déclaré aux médias turcs : « Vous n'arriverez à rien avec des armes. Le PKK devrait déposer les armes. Je ne laisserai pas le PKK régner dans le nord de l'Irak ... Si le PKK continue avec la lutte armée, il en subira les conséquences ». Ces mots auront sonné comme une douce musique aux oreilles turques.

Énigme kurde

Le dilemme d'Ankara, toutefois, c'est que Barzani avait déjà prononcé d'aussi jolies paroles dans le passé. Il avait promis de s'attaquer au PKK mais avait viré de bord sitôt rentré à Erbil. La dure réalité est que la sympathie envers la cause du PKK est très répandue parmi les peshmergas (combattants) kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak.

Mais il pourrait y avoir une différence qualitative cette fois. Premièrement, Barzani, qui a de bons instincts de marchand de bazar, sait que la Turquie pourrait l'aider, lui et sa famille, à faire une

quantité incroyable d'argent par le biais des exportations de pétrole via les pipelines turcs ; et deuxièmement, derrière la Turquie se trouvent les Saoudiens et les Qataris, qui sont également tout disposés à financer Barzani.

Du point de vue saoudien et qatari, le fait que Barzani peut s'avérer être une épine dans le pied de Maliki fait de lui un objet d'intérêt. Ils veulent que Maliki soit affaibli à un point tel qu'il ne puisse plus être d'aucune aide significative pour le régime syrien. Maliki a aidé la Syrie de façon décisive en l'approvisionnant en pétrole et, de manière générale, en brisant les sanctions occidentales.

Erdogan a souligné le fait qu'il avait discuté de la situation syrienne avec Barzani la semaine dernière. En effet, il y a une dimension kurde à la politique de la Turquie en Syrie. Le spectre de la renaissance de la vieille alliance entre le régime syrien et le PKK hante la Turquie. En guise de représailles à la lourde ingérence de la Turquie dans les affaires syriennes, Damas a commencé à montrer un intérêt renouvelé pour le PKK.

Ces mouvements restent pour le moment en sourdine, mais ils sont suffisamment de mauvaise augure sur ce qui pourrait arriver si la situation s'aggravait et que Damas prenait enfin la décision de rendre à Ankara la monnaie de sa pièce. Il est relativement facile pour Damas de frapper en retour la Turquie, si elle prenait la décision stratégique de le faire, parce que le leadership du PKK comprend des Kurdes d'origine syrienne et qu'un tiers des cadres du PKK est d'origine syrienne.

Réciproquement, pour que la Turquie puisse intensifier son ingérence en Syrie dans la période à venir, elle doit d'abord minimiser la portée des représailles de Damas. La Turquie espère que Barzani pourrait donner un coup de main, en agissant sur les groupes kurdes syriens.

Un autre facteur de complication est que les Kurdes de Syrie, qui



constituent environ 10% de la population du pays, ont été réticents à s'aligner avec les Frères musulmans et d'autres groupes d'opposition syriens, à moins qu'ils n'accèdent à leur demande d'une région autonome kurde dans l'est de la Syrie (où les champs de pétrole syriens se trouvent).

Le gros de la population kurde de Syrie vit dans la région aride de Ayn al-Arab et dans la zone agricole de Ifrin, bordant la Turquie. Les Kurdes sont également prédominants dans de vastes faubourgs de Damas et dans le centre commercial d'Alep, qui se trouve à moins de 50 kilomètres de la frontière turque. Sans surprise, l'autonomie kurde en Syrie restera toujours une question sensible pour Ankara, car elle pourrait avoir un effet domino en Turquie même.

Mais les groupes kurdes au sein de la Syrie sont très divisés et c'est ici que Barzani entre en jeu. Le plus grand groupe de coordination kurde en Syrie, le Congrès National kurde (KNC), bénéficie du soutien de Barzani. Si le KNC pouvait être amené à établir des liens avec l'opposition syrienne, la Turquie se sentirait beaucoup plus à l'aise.

En effet, la Turquie encourage Barzani à convoquer une conférence nationale kurde à Arbil en juin, en vue de pousser les intérêts de la Turquie : museler le PKK ; encourager les Kurdes de Syrie à abandonner leur ambiguïté actuelle pour un "changement de régime" à Damas et les amener à se lier de manière décisive avec l'opposition

à Assad, opposition basée en Turquie.

Ankara sait parfaitement que Barzani est un client peu sûr. Mais ce qui encourage les dirigeants turcs, c'est que les Etats-Unis sont également intervenus pour veiller à ce que Barzani tienne ses promesses. Début avril, les USA ont invité Barzani à Washington, où le président Barack Obama l'a reçu.

Prenant le relai de la Turquie, Washington nourrit également les instincts de marchand de bazar de Barzani. Un US-Kurdistan Business Council a été créé à Washington pour promouvoir les « investissements » US dans les territoires du nord de l'Irak sous le contrôle de Barzani. Le chef de la direction d'Exxon Mobil, Rex Tillerson, a rencontré Massoud Barzani à Washington. En Novembre, Barzani avait accordé des contrats lucratifs à Exxon Mobil pour explorer six champs de pétrole au Kurdistan, en ignorant les véhéments protestations du gouvernement fédéral de Maliki, qui rappelle que le pouvoir d'accorder des concessions pétrolières aux compagnies étrangères est réservé à l'Etat fédéral.

Pendant qu'il était à Washington, Barzani a également tenu une réunion avec le secrétaire à la Défense, Léon Panetta, et le secrétaire d'Etat adjoint William Burns, réunion au cours de laquelle la secrétaire d'Etat Hillary Clinton s'est arrêtée pour le saluer, et où ils ont interagi avec des 'think tankers' influents. Le vice-président Joe Biden a organisé un "déjeuner de travail" ➤

➤ pour Barzani.

Fait intéressant, les tirades de Barzani contre Maliki ont pris un ton remarquablement plus vif après sa visite à Washington. Il a déclaré à Al-Hayat que « l'Irak se dirigeait vers une catastrophe, un retour à la dictature », et qu'à son retour à Erbil, il convoquera une réunion de dirigeants irakiens pour "sauver" le pays de Maliki et pour chercher des "solutions radicales". Barzani a également déclaré qu'il ne livrerait pas Hashemi à Bagdad. Encore une fois, à l'origine de la discorde entre Maliki et Hashemi se trouve la question de la répartition des richesses pétrolières de l'Irak.

Le porte-parole de M. Maliki à Bagdad, Ali Moussawi, a qualifié la rhétorique de Barzani en visite à Washington d'"incompréhensible escalade". De manière significative, le gouvernement Maliki a depuis placé Exxon Mobil sur une "liste noire". La société ne figure pas sur la liste définitive des 47 candidats pré-qualifiés pour le prochain tour des droits d'exploration de l'énergie dans 12 nouveaux blocs dans l'ouest et le centre de l'Irak, ce qui ajouterait la quantité énorme de 800 millions de m3 de gaz et 10 milliards de barils de pétrole dans les réserves irakiennes. L'appel d'offres devrait se tenir le 30 et 31 mai.

Une carte à jouer

Quoi qu'il en soit, Barzani s'est senti encouragé après sa visite à Washington à s'engager dans un défi stratégique contre le gouvernement fédéral de Bagdad. Les USA l'ont chaleureusement accueilli comme il sied à un chef de l'Etat, le tout avec d'appuyées références à l'indépendance du Kurdistan.

Il est vraisemblable que Washington et Ankara agissent en tandem et qu'il y a une étroite coordination des politiques US et turques à l'égard des Kurdes de Syrie et d'Irak. Pour les deux pays, l'objectif ultime est d'affaiblir l'influence régionale de l'Iran. L'administration Obama espère que les efforts de la Turquie con-

tre le PKK seront couronnés de succès, et elle fournit un soutien de renseignements pour les opérations militaires.

Washington espère aussi que mis sous une pression concertée depuis plusieurs trimestres, Maliki va enfin réaliser ce qui est bon pour lui, et desserrer ses liens avec l'Iran et la Syrie. Enfin, Washington voudrait que les Kurdes syriens fassent le pas et rejoignent les groupes d'opposition basés en Turquie de sorte que l'agenda du "changement de régime" à Damas acquière plus de tranchant.

Cependant, il y a plusieurs impondérables dans le scénario émergent. Dos au mur, Damas peut laisser le génie kurde sortir de la bouteille, et le résultat pourrait bien être une version syrienne du Kurdistan irakien - une seconde zone autonome kurde le long des frontières de la Turquie. Cela pourrait alors amener les Kurdes de Turquie à rechercher une autonomie similaire. La meilleure solution pour Erdogan aurait été de faire des progrès vers une résolution politique du problème kurde en Turquie, comme il avait commencé à le faire. Mais la condition sine qua non serait justement un retour de la « normalité » dans les relations de la Turquie avec la Syrie et une plus grande stabilité en Irak.

On peut dire qu'Erdogan est sur un chemin glissant. Son échange acrimonieux avec Maliki souligne que l'isolement de la Turquie est presque complet dans son voisinage immédiat. Le maillon le plus faible dans la stratégie turque est Barzani lui-même.

Ankara dépend fortement de la capacité de Barzani de conclure des ententes avec le PKK, ainsi que de ruser avec les Kurdes syriens. Certes, Barzani a un intérêt direct à travailler avec Ankara puisque le Kurdistan irakien a développé des liens économiques étendus avec la Turquie et que ces liens s'approfondissent de jour en jour. Mais Barzani a également ses limites.

Tout repose sur sa capacité à exploiter les nationalistes kurdes dispersés à travers non seulement la Turquie, l'Irak et la Syrie, mais aussi l'Iran, l'Arménie, l'Azerbaïdjan, la Géorgie et le Liban et à convaincre ces nationalistes que leur seul espoir réaliste consiste à rechercher une plus grande autonomie au sein des structures étatiques existantes, sur des lignes qu'il a fixé avec le soutien US. C'est un défi de taille. Que les militants kurdes soient convaincus de déposer les armes et de suivre les traces de Barzani reste fortement douteux.

Barzani est un personnage controversé même parmi les Kurdes. Essentiellement, il s'agit d'un seigneur de guerre tribal qui utilise des méthodes coercitives, des méthodes souvent très violentes, pour garder sa famille au sommet du Kurdistan irakien, et sa famille exerce un contrôle personnel sur les terres, les propriétés, les ressources et les finances de la région. En clair, lui et sa famille dirigent un cartel d'affaires appelé « Kurdistan ». Les Kurdes ressentent de plus en plus qu'ils sont traités comme ses locataires et ses serfs.

Le système de patronage de Barzani est fondé sur sa pratique de traiter les revenus du pétrole et du gaz du Kurdistan comme les comptes privés de sa famille, sans aucun contrôle financier réel. Ce système de patronage est basé sur la règle du clan et il ne peut fonctionner que tant que il n'y a aucun Etat de droit ; mais la démocratisation de l'Irak propage son virus dans le Kurdistan aussi, et des Kurdes instruits commencent à être contrariés par le style de vie autocratique du clan Barzani.

Par exemple, les contrats pétroliers signés par les compagnies turques, états-uniennes, britanniques et autres vont être les principaux instruments utilisés par Ankara et Washington pour influencer Barzani, alors que personne n'a la moindre idée de ce qu'il y a dans ces contrats, comment ils ont été négociés, où l'argent vient et où il s'en va. Ce qui est certain, c'est que Barzani a de

gros intérêts commerciaux en Turquie, aux USA et dans plusieurs pays européens.

[...] Obama est littéralement en train de copier le monumental cynisme de Henry Kissinger et sa duplicité envers les Kurdes d'Irak - choyer leurs aspirations nationales dans le cadre d'un impitoyable et fourbe processus pour déstabiliser le régime de Bagdad, tout en ne voulant pas que leurs 'protégés' gagnent leur lutte, car ils pourraient être trop perturbants pour toute la région, en particulier pour l'allié le plus proche des USA, la Turquie. Barzani a toujours été, historiquement parlant, « une carte à jouer », et même à la mesure des opérations secrètes, Obama et Erdogan sont enfermés dans une entreprise cynique.

Kissinger, au moins, était franc. En revenant sur la trahison par les USA des Kurdes en Irak en 1975, il a commenté : « Les opérations secrètes ne doivent pas être confondues avec le travail missionnaire. » Obama serait probablement d'accord, mais la différence cruciale est qu'Erdogan lui a montré comment le flirt avec les Kurdes pouvait également s'auto-financer, et prendre un air de principe de comptabilisation des coûts, un angle qui fascine particulièrement Obama en ces temps difficiles.

En bref, alors que Kissinger était plongé dans la realpolitik, Obama s'assure également que les compagnies US fassent quelques affaires profitables dans les fabuleux champs de pétrole du Kurdistan. Les USA pourraient ainsi être sûrs d'obtenir une situation « win-win », quelle que soit la trajectoire de la démocratie en Irak, ou la longévité du régime à Damas. □

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In Syria, a Kurdish wildcard no one wants to play

PIOTR ZALEWSKI

The drive through town had become something of an obstacle course. On some streets, young boys, stones in hand, squared off against policemen, each group waiting for the other to make the first move. In other parts of the city, chunks of broken pavement, remnants of recent clashes, rendered any attempt at passage impossible. It was the evening of March 20 and Nusaybin - a town in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated south-east - was still on edge. Earlier in the day, riot police had fired tear gas and water cannons on men and women marching back from a rally to celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year. Similar scenes were to play out across the region throughout the week, after Turkish authorities decided to ban Newroz celebrations held on any day other than March 21.

At the offices of Mar-Has, the final stop on our ride through Nusaybin, the focus - rather than on the festering conflict between Turkey and its Kurds - was on events in Syria. Nusaybin lies within earshot of the border and Mar-Has, an NGO, helps people fleeing the country find their footing in Turkey, says Mir Mehmet, one of the group's members. "We provide them with food, with blankets, and we help find homes for them," he says.

Syria is said to be home to at least two million Kurds, many of them descended from families who fled Turkey after a series of bloodily suppressed Kurdish rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s. The government in Damascus having denied these Kurds citizenship, hundreds of thousands were left in limbo, unable to claim basic rights in Syria and - lacking national identity papers - unable to travel abroad.

That impasse was finally broken in April 2011 when Syrian president Bashar Al Assad, doing his best to appease the Kurdish minority and ensure that it remain on the sidelines of the anti-government revolution raging across Syria, promised to grant citizenship to 300,000 stateless Kurds. For those who



Kurdish protesters at a meeting of the Democratic Society Party in Nusaybin.

hoped to take advantage of the measure to travel to Nusaybin, if only to call on relatives, the opportunity to do so proved short-lived. At the beginning of 2012, Al Assad's regime decided to close the border crossing between Nusaybin and its neighbouring sister city, Qamishli. Syrian Kurds attempting to enter Nusaybin now have to do so illegally, with the help of a smuggler, or via the closest border crossing still open, at Kilis, almost 500 kilometres away.

Although there may be as many as several hundred Syrians currently living in Nusaybin, few were willing to be interviewed, citing security concerns. Of those who agreed to speak, Muntaser Sino claimed that during his first attempt to sneak across the border he was detained by Turkish border guards and sent back to Syria.

To date, Turkish authorities have received and accommodated well over 25,000 Syrian refugees, nearly all of them arriving in Hatay, a southern province of Turkey. The government in Ankara remains wary of new arrivals from Kurdish-populated northeastern Syria, however.

Some of these, Turkish officials fear, may be infiltrators from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a militant group that has waged war against the Turkish

army since 1984. (Some 40,000 people, including militants, soldiers and civilians, have died since the beginning of the conflict. Turkey, the United States and the European Union all list the PKK as a terrorist organisation. Many of Turkey's 12-15 million Kurds would disagree. To them, the group remains a symbol of resistance against a Turkish state that is yet to meet the Kurds' demands for cultural rights and some measure of political autonomy.)

Sino had been involved in the anti-Al Assad revolution from the start, he says. Among other things, he had helped diffuse videos of protests in Qamishli. Apprehended by Syrian agents during a trip to Lebanon, he was brought to Damascus and tortured for three consecutive days, he recalls. When Syrian military intelligence tried to recruit him to spy on fellow opposition members, he refused. Once released, Sino attempted to flee Syria. Apprehended the first time around, he tried once again and succeeded. Like many Kurds on the Syrian side of the border, Sino has family members in Nusaybin, he says. "I prefer to stay with them rather than in the refugee camps in Hatay."

Ibrahim, another Syrian activist based in Nusaybin, fled Qamishli in February. Back in Syria, he had been arrested twice, he says - once on account of his

➤ political activities, and once on account of his brother's. The day we met, he had received a phone call from his sister in Syria. Intelligence agents had asked about his whereabouts, she told him. The family had feigned ignorance.

Sitting in a small park overlooking the border area, Ibrahim points to several watchtowers, a field tilled by Syrian farmers, and to rows of barbed wire. This, he says, is where he snuck across the border and into Turkey. He comes here often, he says. "But no, not out of nostalgia," he protests, laughing, "but because it's one of the few places in Nusaybin where I can get coverage on my mobile phone, which is Syrian."

Although protests have regularly taken place in Kurdish towns across Syria since the spring of 2011, many experts suggest that the Syrian Kurds are yet to throw in their lot with the anti-Assad revolution. Qamishli-based activists insist the opposite, however, claiming that they have taken to the streets just as often as fellow Arab protesters. If Qamishli has not seen the kind of violence witnessed elsewhere in Syria, they say, it is because the regime has shrewdly decided to spare the Kurds the kind of indiscriminate force meted out to protesters in Homs, Hama or Idlib.

"They think that if they attack us hard, they will lose Damascus and Aleppo," says Alan Hassaf, a student activist. Both cities, he explains, are home to hundreds of thousands of Kurds.

Even those Syrian Kurds who've decided to close ranks with Arab protesters across the country acknowledge that doing so has taken a leap of faith. As they and others recall, back in 2004 when anti-government riots broke out in Qamishli few if any Arabs came to the Kurds' aid. Even after Al Assad's security forces killed dozens of protesters, sympathy for the Kurds was scarce. "Because of government propaganda, people thought of us as terrorists, as separatists," Ibrahim told me.

A number of local Arab tribes actually abetted the government crackdown. (Some of the tribes in question had been relocated to areas around Qamishli in the 1960s in order to dilute the Kurdish presence. Many remain loyal to the regime to this day.) The kind of enmity that developed between Kurds and Arabs over the decades hasn't been easy to overcome,

says Seda Altug, a Turkish researcher. "It wasn't easy for the Kurds to pick up and join the revolution right away," she explains.

If the trauma of 2004 has receded, then a more tangible force appears to be holding back the Kurds. According to numerous accounts, the PKK and its Syrian offshoot, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) - acknowledged as the most powerful among Syria's many Kurdish groups - have acted as a brake on anti-regime activities among the Kurds. At best, the PKK is playing for time, hoping to jump on the revolutionary bandwagon only once the regime's downfall is all but assured. At worst, it is colluding with Assad to contain protests among the Kurds. The idea of co-operating with the regime is not alien to the PKK. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Al Assad's father, former Syrian president Hafez Al Assad, provided the Kurdish rebels with access to training camps and allowed Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK's leader, to set up shop in Damascus. The honeymoon ended in 1998 when Turkey, threatening force, strong-armed Damascus into expelling Ocalan. He was later captured and sentenced to death by a Turkish court. After Turkey abolished capital punishment, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

In the 2000s, as Turkey and Syria began to enjoy warmer ties, Assad cracked down against the PKK, jailing many of its members and forcing others to flee abroad. After anti-regime protests broke out across Syria in 2011, however, the tide changed yet again. For a beleaguered Damascus government, the PKK and its political allies acquired renewed strategic value - both as an extra deterrent against Turkish intervention and as a means of preventing the Syrian Kurds from joining the revolution en masse.

According to several recent reports on the subject, over the past year the PKK has used intimidation and force to silence Kurdish anti-regime activists in Syria.

A Kurdish politician, speaking on condition of anonymity, recalled that members of the group had tried to sabotage several anti-regime protests in Qamishli in the spring of 2011.

At one of these, PKK supporters arrived with banners featuring pictures of Abdullah Ocalan. "They want-

ed to send a message to Turkey and to Syria. They wanted to show that the Kurds of Syria were under their control and they wanted to hide the purpose of the demonstrations," the politician said. When he asked the PKK members to take down the banners - "our purpose is not to support Ocalan but to oppose the Syrian regime," he explained - they threatened him with death. "Later, they told me, 'If you do this again, we will kill you. We will kill anyone who does this. We paid with our blood for this banner, for this flag.'"

A September 2011 ceasefire between the PJAK (the PKK's Iranian branch) and the government in Tehran, the politician added, is clear evidence "that the PKK, Syria, and Iran have reached an agreement."

There are signs that the PKK and the PYD may be recalibrating its alliances, however. Although the PYD had initially been more concerned with its own interests than with the Syrian regime's overthrow, says Alan Hassaf, the group has now changed course, siding more openly with the Kurdish protesters. In an interview with Kurdwatch, a German-based website, another Qamishli-based activist reported that the group "was trying to show the people that it represents the interests of the Kurds." "Whether we want it or not, the PYD is currently the strongest force in Qamishli," he added. "Without the PYD nothing works."

With Syrian nationals forming anywhere from 10 to 30 per cent of the PKK's membership, parts of the group may also be coming under pressure to ditch the alliance with Damascus.

"Some PKK fighters are not satisfied with the connection with the regime," says Sertac Bucak, a retired Kurdish politician from Turkey. "But the PKK is highly centralised. They will do what the leadership tells them to do - unless they decide to revolt, which is impossible to foresee for the time being."

According to Emrullah Uslu, a Turkish analyst, the PKK and its supporters in Syria may simply be holding out for a deal with a weakened regime or a post-Assad government.

As Uslu recently wrote in a commentary for the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation, "It appears that the PKK's strategy toward Syria does not call for fighting beside the ➤

➤ Assad regime until the very end. Rather, it has used the situation to its own advantage to open new avenues for itself and strengthen its position within Syria in order to be ready for further confrontations if the Assad regime falls."

Whichever way the PKK may currently be leaning, the group has made it clear that it will oppose any outside intervention in Syria, particularly by Turkey. "If the Turkish state intervenes against our people in [Syria]," PKK commander Murat Karayilan told the Europe-based Firat news agency in late March, "all of Kurdistan will turn into a war zone."

Yet the PKK is far from being the only actor interested in keeping the Syrian Kurds in check. The anti-Assad opposition, for one, appears haunted by what it sees as the looming spectre of Kurdish separatism.

During a key March 27 meeting in Istanbul, leaders of the Syrian National Council - the main opposition platform - preferred to see the Kurds walk out in protest rather than accept their request for autonomy in a post-Assad constitution. (The two sides reconciled a week later after the SNC inserted a reference to "Kurdish identity" in its "National Covenant for a New Syria.") While many Syrian Kurdish activists have pointed to old-school Arab nationalism as the main culprit, others have placed part of the blame for the SNC's intransigence at the door of the Turkish government. Ankara, the SNC's main backer, is doing its best to prevent the Kurds from becoming key players in a post-Assad Syria, they argue. As a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria complained in an interview with Rudaw, a Kurdish newspaper, "the Turkish government will never allow Kurds to be recognised in Syria's new constitution."

Such fears are not without basis. Turkey, having emerged as one of the key supporters of regime change in Syria, now finds itself in a pickle. On the one hand, it knows that the Kurds, if rallied, could potentially tip the balance of the anti-Assad rebellion. On the other, it worries that a united Kurdish front could quickly pave the way for another autonomous Kurdish region - in addition to the one in northern Iraq - on Turkey's southern border. This, Turkish officials assume, would further encourage calls for Kurdish autonomy at home.

Predictably, mistrust towards Turkey's



PKK graffiti in a park in Nusaybin. Piotr Zalewski for *The National*

intentions in Syria also runs high among the country's own Kurdish minority. "To be against Assad is the duty of anyone who calls himself a democrat," Ahmet Turk, a former leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), told me aboard a March 18 flight to Diyarbakir. "But if Turkey wants to determine the future of Syria without accepting the rights and the existence of the Kurds there, and to try to avoid giving them political status, that would be the same kind of unjust, tyrannical policy as Assad's." (Two days after our interview, the 70-year-old Mr Turk was rushed to a hospital after being punched in the face by a Turkish policeman during a Newroz demonstration.)

Overall, the Turkish Kurds' response to the events in Syria has been relatively muted, according to observers. Suspicion of Turkish motives is one reason. The PKK factor is another. Whatever their personal sympathies, says Bucak, Turkish Kurds and their political representatives may be wary of crossing the PKK when it comes to Syria. "The BDP is only willing to go as far as the PKK is willing to let them."

In the absence of clear backing from a range of regional players - including the Turkish government, the PKK and the Syrian opposition - Syrian Kurds opposed to the regime in Damascus have found a ready ally in Massoud Barzani, the president of the semiautonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Unlike the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad, which opposes efforts to unseat Bashar, Barzani has openly backed the transition to democratic rule in Syria.

In practical terms, he has extended his support to a coalition of Kurdish political parties opposed to the Assad regime. In January, Barzani invited members of the Kurdish opposition to

Iraqi Kurdistan, urging them to close ranks with other anti-regime groups and to better prepare for a post-Assad future. During a later visit to Washington, he announced that Iraqi Kurds were ready to provide their cousins across the border with "moral support, political support, [and] financial support."

However, Barzani's backing may not be enough to galvanise those Syrian Kurds who remain on the sidelines of the year-old revolution against Assad - or to sustain those who've already joined it. According to Othman Ali, head of the Turkish-Kurdish Studies Center in Erbil, it is now up to the Arab opposition and its Turkish backers to win over the Kurds. To try to do so is in Ankara's own interest. "Unless Turkey speeds up its efforts to win the hearts of Syrian Kurds by using its influence with the SNC to encourage the council to be more forthcoming with regard to Kurdish rights, as well as ensure better representation for them in the SNC and its executive Council, the PKK will avail itself of the opportunity to [assert] itself," Ali wrote in a recent commentary in *Today's Zaman*, a Turkish daily. "The PKK could well take advantage of the political and security vacuum which might be created with the fall of Assad's regime to expand the areas from which it can attack Turkey."

Of course, Ali cautions, to earn the Syrian Kurds' trust Turkey must first come to terms with its own Kurdish minority. A new national constitution, its adoption expected later this year, may be the Turkish government's last chance to do so.

Even if supporting the Syrian Kurds might appear be a gamble for Turkey, it is one worth taking, says Luqman Sulayman, a Kurdish writer and activist who fled from Qamishli to Nusaybin last year. "Turkey shouldn't fear the Kurds," he says. "In the next government of Syria, the Kurds will be more powerful. The Turks should want to have good relations with us in the future."

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Piotr Zalewski is a freelance journalist living in Istanbul.

A Kurdish Majority In Turkey Within One Generation?

By Palash R. Ghosh

Turkey is emerging as an economic superpower in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East with greater influence in regional politics. Promoting itself as a "model Muslim democracy," and widely admired by other Middle Eastern nations, Turkey now faces a novel problem that Europe has long contended with: a falling birth rate.

Since the 1990s, Turkey's fertility rate has steadily declined, due to, among other factors, rising household incomes, expanded access to higher education for women and increased birth control practices.

"The use of birth-control methods has increased in Turkey a lot, but that is not the only reason for the decline in population," an obstetrician named Kagan Kocatepe told *Hürriyet Daily News*, a Turkish newspaper.

"Many women want to have a successful career. That's why the maternity age has increased, as women have started giving birth to their first child in their 30s."

Indeed, Dr. Ismet Koç, a demographer at Hacettepe University in Ankara, warned that Turkey's fertility rate is now below 2.1, the replacement level, which suggests the population will eventually decline.

The fertility level in more prosperous western Turkey is now about 1.5 -- roughly the same as in western Europe.

The number of children produced by the average Turkish woman has plunged to two from three over just the past two decades, coincident with Turkey's rise as an economic power.

But there is a wrinkle to this whole phenomenon.

The Kurdish community of Turkey, which currently represents at least 15 percent of the population and dominates the southeastern region, has such a high birth rate, that some observers -- most prominently Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan -- believe Kurds could become a majority in Turkey within two generations.

The proposed scenario is somewhat similar to the Palestinian situation in Israel, where Arabs could become the dominant ethnic group in the 'Jewish State' within 30 years or so; or the southwestern United States, where Hispanics and Mexican-Americans are likely to become the majority within a few decades.

According to Turkish government statistics, the average Kurdish woman in Turkey gives birth to about four children, more than double the rate for other Turkish mothers.

Thus, Turkey is facing a demographic time-bomb -- Kurds, who tend to be concentrated in the country's impoverished southeast and are generally poorer and less educated, could conceivably outnumber Turks within about 30 years should present patterns persist.

Erdogan seems to be certain this will happen.

"If we continue the existing trend, [the year] 2038 will mark



Kurds in southeastern Turkey (Photo: Reuters)

disaster for us," Erdogan warned in May 2010.

The prime minister, who has repeatedly called on Turkish couples to have three children and even suggested financially rewarding such fecundity, once declared: "Our population is getting older. Right now we are proud of our young population, but if we don't pull these numbers up, Turkey will be in a difficult position by 2038."

Some Turkish academics scoff at Erdogan's solutions as unrealistic.

Cem Behar, an economics professor at Istanbul's Bogazici University, told the *Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review*: "It's clear that Turkey is going to face a decline in the growth rate of its population. Yet you cannot address such an issue by telling people to have more children."

Behar added: "There is no family policy in Turkey. And I don't think anyone is going to have more children just because [Erdogan] told them to do so. If the government really wants to promote having more children, it needs to prepare the necessary conditions for it, such as lowering taxes for those families or strengthening pre-school education."

A rapidly rising Kurdish population would pose sharp problems and challenges for the Turkish state and society.

Kurds have long faced discrimination, deprivation, even state-sponsored violence, throughout their long and epic residence in Turkey. As such, many Kurds seek a separate homeland, or at the least, autonomous self-rule in the southeast.

Kurds represent a dominant and highly contentious theme in Turkish politics.

For many years, it was, in fact, illegal for Kurds to speak their own language, use Kurdish names, play Kurdish music, etc. -- part of a comprehensive attempt by Ankara to wipe out the separate ethnic identity of the Kurds. Indeed, some Turks regarded Kurds simply as 'Mountain Turks.'

The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), a Marxist militant movement which Turkey, the European Union and the U.S. brand as a terrorist group, has fought for a separatist nation for decades. The PKK's periodic conflicts with the Turkish military have cost tens of thousands of lives on both sides -- seemingly with no resolution in sight.

Of course, many, perhaps most, Kurds in Turkey do not support the PKK and seek to assimilate with mainstream Turkish society -- while retaining their distinct Kurdish culture, ⇨

⇒ language and customs.

Now, with the Kurds having more babies than the Turks, will Kurds really become a majority in a country where they have long suffered abuse and deprivation? And if that were to happen, how would that affect the Kurds' status in Turkey?

International Business Times spoke with an expert on Turkey and demographics to explore this topic.

Dr. Tino Sanandaji is a PhD in Public Policy at the University of Chicago who does research on demographic change and its link to policy.

IB TIMES: Is the overall fertility rate in Turkey declining because the country is becoming wealthier, household incomes are rising and more women are using birth control methods?

SANANDAJI: Yes, sooner or later this happens in all industrialized countries -- parents prefer to have fewer children and invest more time and resources on them rather than having a large family.

IB TIMES: The birth rate for Kurds is more than double that of Turks. Is this due to the fact that Kurds are generally poorer and less educated?

SANANDAJI: Poorer, less educated and more rural. However, other factors should not be ruled out since low-income Kurdish women also have higher birth rates than low-income Turkish women.

IB TIMES: Prime Minister Erdogan warned that Kurds could become a majority in Turkey by 2038. Is this a realistic prediction?

SANANDAJI: No, that is impossible. Demographic change is a slow process even when birth rates differ sharply, because so many generations are already born and will be around for decades.

In the 1930s, the Kurds constituted about 9 percent of the population of Turkey, and though they had higher birth rates than the Turks it still took until the 1990s until they reached the 18 percent level.

Since it takes a long time, underlying forces can change in the meanwhile. Therefore, we should be careful about extrapolating current trends into the future. Nor can demographic trends be dismissed using the equally silly argument that since demographic predictions were sometimes wrong in the past, all predictions are always wrong in the future. Plenty of predictions turned out to be accurate.

This is a sensitive topic to some. When people read that the population share of their "tribe" is shrinking there is often a primal psychological response of fear, anger or denial, and wide exaggerations in both directions.

IB TIMES: In the event Kurds become a majority in Turkey, will that render the Kurdish nationalist and separatist movements irrelevant and moot?

SANANDAJI: If history is any guide, that development would raise tensions with the Kurdish separatist movement, because they will be more likely to win a democratic or military struggle once they are the majority population.

IB TIMES: If the Kurds are becoming more assimilated, why is this even a problem? If the Ankara government does not even classify Kurds as a separate ethnic group, why would they even care about their higher birth rates?

SANANDAJI: If Kurds are slowly assimilating but growing their population share rapidly, the net effect might still be more voters with an ethnic Kurdish identity. Once Kurds realize time is working on their side, they might become less willing to abandon their national identity, anticipating that if they hold on long enough their sheer numbers will change the balance of power.

If the rate of assimilation into a national Turkish identity is sufficiently rapid, Turkey will not necessarily break apart. But Turkey will likely be a different country in many other ways if Kurds become the majority.

IB TIMES: What, if anything, is the Turkish government doing to prevent these demographic trends?

SANANDAJI: One choice is to try to stabilize the Turkish birth rate, though no country I am aware of has successfully done this in modern times.

A second alternative for the government is to convince the Kurds in Turkey to accept the Turkish national identity, making the population issue less important.

Another option is to lower the Kurdish birth rate by promoting economic development, education and women's health in Kurdish areas.

But if current trends continue for generations, Turks might eventually reach a point when they must reluctantly decide between keeping a smaller Turkish nation state or risk becoming the minority population in a Kurdish-majority Turkey.

★★★



PKK militants kill three Turkish soldiers

TUNCELLI, Turkey - Friday, May 04, 2012 (Reuters)

KURDISH MILITANTS opened fire on Turkish troops who were carrying out a raid against suspected militant hideouts in eastern Turkey, killing three soldiers, security officials said on Friday.

The Turkish military launched the operation against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants overnight in the mountainous Tunceli province.

Army helicopters ferried special forces teams to the area at dawn on Friday, but their operations were hindered by heavy fog and rain, the officials said.

They said a group of around 15-20 PKK militants had been planning attacks on the Tunceli town centre. There was no immediate information on PKK casualties.

Spring generally sees an upsurge in clashes between the Turkish army and the PKK as the militants emerge from their winter shelters.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state since the militants took up arms in 1984 with the aim of creating an independent Kurdish state.

The PKK is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. □



Heurts et attaque en Turquie; 3 soldats, 2 rebelles tués, 2 policiers blessés

DIYARBAKIR, 04 mai 2012 (AFP)

TROIS SOLDATS et deux rebelles kurdes ont été tués dans des heurts survenus vendredi dans l'est et le sud-est de la Turquie où une attaque des rebelles a aussi blessé deux policiers, a-t-on indiqué de source officielle.

Trois militaires ont perdu la vie à Tunceli (est), lors de combats avec les rebelles, a indiqué le gouverneur local, Mustafa Taskesen.

Des membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont attaqué une patrouille militaire dans une zone rurale de Tunceli, théâtre des opérations du mouvement armé, considéré comme terroriste par la Turquie et bon nom-

bre de pays, a-t-il dit, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Dans une autre attaque, à Sîrnak, proche de la frontière avec l'Irak et la Syrie (sud-est), des rebelles ont attaqué au fusil mitrailleur une voiture de police, blessant deux de ses occupants, a annoncé le gouvernorat de cette province.

Deux rebelles ont été abattus lors d'une opération lancée pour capturer les assaillants, toujours selon cette source.

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 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.○



Irak: le gouvernement réuni dans une ville disputée entre Arabes et Kurdes

KIRKOUK (Irak), 8 mai 2012 (AFP)

LE GOUVERNEMENT irakien s'est réuni mardi de façon symbolique dans la ville de Kirkouk (nord), objet de longue date d'un conflit de souveraineté aigu entre les autorités fédérales et la région autonome du Kurdistan, mais en l'absence des ministres kurdes.

"La question de la résolution du problème de Kirkouk ne peut se faire par la force, mais par la volonté de ses habitants et résidents, et son identité devrait être irakienne. Aucune autre identité ne devrait prendre le dessus", a déclaré le Premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki dans un communiqué.

"Son identité est irakienne, ses communautés sont irakienne, kurde, arabe et turcomane, chiite, sunnite et chrétienne", a-t-il insisté lors de la réunion, selon des propos retransmis par la télévision.

"Il n'existe aucun privilège pour une communauté sur une autre. Cette province (également appelée Kirkouk, ndlr) demeurera dans cette situation politique, sociale et économique comme un microcosme de l'Irak et un exemple d'existence pacifique", a-t-il insisté.

Le Kurdistan et Bagdad s'opposent sur la souveraineté d'une bande longue de 650 km, riche en hydrocarbures, à cheval sur quatre provinces et comprenant la ville multiethnique de Kirkouk. Ce dossier est considéré comme l'une des principales menaces pesant sur la stabilité de l'Irak, en particulier si le Kurdistan décidait de déclarer unilatéralement son indépendance.

Signe de la persistance des tensions, le président du Kurdistan Massoud



Barzani "a appelé les ministres kurdes ne pas participer à la réunion" du gouvernement, a indiqué un responsable kurde sous couvert d'anonymat. Une source au gouvernement central a confirmé cette information et précisé que "les ministres ne sont pas venus".

L'Irak traverse depuis plusieurs mois une grave crise politique qui oppose M. Maliki, un chiite, aux factions laïque et kurde, qui l'accusent d'autoritarisme.

Outre les questions territoriales, les Kurdes et Bagdad s'opposent aussi vivement sur la répartition des revenus du pétrole pompé dans la région et sur le sort du vice-président sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi, recherché par la justice irakienne mais qui a bénéficié de la protection des Kurdes.○



Irak: violente manifestation contre un magazine accusé d'être contre l'islam

Erbil (Irak), 8 mai 2012 (AFP)

PLUSIEURS MILLIERS de personnes ont violemment manifesté mardi à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien dans le nord du pays, contre le rédacteur en chef d'un magazine ayant publié un article accusé d'être "contre l'islam", selon un journaliste de l'AFP.

Les manifestants se sont réunis devant le Parlement kurde pour protester contre un article publié dans le dernier numéro d'Al-Hamsa, un mensuel en kurde et en arabe, et qui rapporte une conversation entre son auteur et Dieu, ce que des leaders religieux régionaux ont jugé offensant à l'égard de l'islam.

Le rédacteur en chef du mensuel, Hayman Ari, a été arrêté lundi, tandis que le Premier ministre kurde Nechirvan Barzani a reçu des groupes islamiques.

Mardi, certains manifestants ont jeté des pierres et des bouteilles d'eau sur les forces de sécurité. D'autres ont tenté d'escalader les murs de bétons autour du bâtiment, ou attaqué à proximité des bâtiments et des magasins vendant de l'alcool.

Plusieurs manifestants ont été arrêtés et de nombreux policiers ont été blessés lors de la manifestation et des violences qui ont suivi, selon le gouverneur de la province, Nawzad Hadi, qui n'a pas donné plus de détails.

"Le gouvernement autorise certains à insulter l'islam et le Coran, et nous n'acceptons pas ça", a lancé un manifestant de 19 ans, Karwan Salim.

"Nous sommes des musulmans, nous n'acceptons pas de telles humiliations publiées par la presse. Nous n'acceptons pas de peine contre lui (Ari), il doit nous être livré pour qu'on puisse l'exécuter", a renchéri Ahmed Ali, 52 ans.○



Turquie: Deux rebelles kurdes tués dans des combats avec les forces de sécurité

ISTANBUL, 07 mai 2012 (AFP)

DEUX REBELLES kurdes ont été tués lundi dans des combats avec les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, ont affirmé des sources officielles citées par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les deux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués au cours d'une opération commune de forces spéciales de la police et de commandos de la gendarmerie dans les monts Kalender (province de Siirt), a affirmé dans un communiqué le gouverneur de Siirt Musa Colak, cité par Anatolie.

Aucun membre des forces de sécurité n'a été blessé, a ajouté le gouverneur, précisant que l'opération se poursuivait.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée, depuis son déclenchement, en 1984, par le PKK dans le sud-est du pays. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux autres pays. ○



8 MAI 2012

Turquie: après débats en vue pour la rédaction d'une nouvelle constitution

ANKARA - Le Parlement turc s'est lancé dans la rédaction d'une nouvelle Constitution censée effacer toute empreinte des généraux putschistes, un projet ambitieux devenu le nouveau champ de bataille entre le pouvoir islamo-conservateur et l'opposition.

"La phase de rédaction de la nouvelle constitution a débuté", a annoncé lundi le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Et de réaffirmer son intention de transformer le système parlementaire actuel en système présidentiel, à l'orée des présidentielles de 2014.

Dominant la politique turque depuis dix ans, M. Erdogan, qui dirige le Parti de la Justice et du développement (AKP, issu de la mouvance islamiste) a fait de la Turquie un acteur régional avec une croissance économique vigoureuse (8,5% en 2011) qui fait pâlir d'envie l'Union européenne, à laquelle Ankara veut adhérer.

Il a remporté trois élections législatives successives depuis 2002 mais ne pourra briguer un quatrième mandat, selon les statuts de l'AKP.

Il souhaiterait, selon les commentateurs, échanger son poste de Premier ministre pour celui d'un président disposant de vrais pouvoirs, et continuer à diriger le pays.

"Nous allons discuter de tout cela, qu'il s'agisse d'un



Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan après un discours au Parlement à Ankara . afp.com

système présidentiel ou semi-présidentiel", a-t-il dit lundi, ajoutant que le dernier mot reviendrait au Parlement, où l'AKP est très majoritaire.

Déjà accusé d'autoritarisme par l'opposition - les arrestations de journalistes se sont multipliées ces derniers mois - M. Erdogan et ses ambitions provoquent la controverse.

"On vit déjà sous un semi-diktat, allons nous vers une dictature constitutionnelle ?" s'est interrogé Riza Türmen, député du principal parti pro-laïc CHP (Parti républicain du peuple), et ex-juge à la Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme.

"Nous ne sommes pas favorables à un système présidentiel", averti Devlet Bahçeli, le chef de file des nationalistes au Parlement.

"Si tout se passe comme il (Erdogan) le souhaite, et qu'il devient le premier Président de Turquie avec des pouvoirs à l'américaine ou à la française, il y aura débat sur la séparation des pouvoirs", estime Murat Yetkin, rédacteur en chef du journal Hürriyet Daily News.

Une commission parlementaire spéciale a consulté la société civile et les minorités religieuses pour bâtir un texte qui sera le quatrième depuis la création de la République turque, en 1923.

L'objectif est d'élaborer un texte plus démocratique remplaçant l'actuelle constitution héritée des généraux qui avaient pris le pouvoir en 1980.

M. Erdogan s'est dit favorable à un texte qui "mettra en avant le citoyen et non l'Etat". Le projet serait achevé d'ici la

fin de l'année et soumis à referendum.

Des réformes introduites par l'AKP ont considérablement réduit l'influence des militaires, jadis acteurs politiques majeurs et gardiens auto-proclamés de la laïcité. Des dizaines de hauts gradés sont en prison, accusés de complots contre le régime.

Mais la constitution de 1982 est restée en vigueur, en dépit de nombreux amendements.

D'après batailles sont à prévoir au Parlement sur le nouveau texte: le parti pro-kurde de la paix et de la démocratie (BDP) veut des droits accrus pour les 12 à 15 millions de Kurdes (sur une population de 73 millions), ce à quoi sont opposées les autres formations.

Et le CHP, qui dénonce une dérive islamiste du pouvoir, exige que les références au fondateur de la Turquie moderne, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, et à son héritage laïc soient maintenues dans le nouveau texte.

"De sérieuses interrogations subsistent sur la méthode à adopter. Ce processus peut à tout moment s'enliser", prévient Ibrahim Kaboglu de l'Université stambouliote de Marmara, qui fait partie des experts consultés. □

SYRIE : UNE VRAIE BOMBE À FRAGMENTATION

PAR LAURENT DE SAINT PÉRIER

Avec la militarisation de l'affrontement entre le pouvoir et la rébellion, la crise syrienne déborde dangereusement les frontières du pays et fait planer le spectre d'une guerre confessionnelle à l'échelle régionale.

Accepté par le régime comme par l'opposition, le plan Annan était, pour l'International Crisis Group (ICG), « le meilleur espoir » de trouver une issue au conflit syrien. Mais le cessez-le-feu du 12 avril n'a pas tenu vingt-quatre heures. Un an et cinq semaines après les premières manifestations pacifiques, le fossé ne cesse de se creuser entre le pouvoir et les contestataires, un fossé où s'amoncellent plus de 9 000 cadavres. Avec la militarisation du conflit, la menace d'une guerre confessionnelle s'accroît, et la crise déborde les frontières du pays.



Rebelle syrien au nord de la province d'Idleb, près de la frontière turque. © Frédéric Lafargue/AFP

L'onde de choc a atteint les voisins. Les plus vulnérables - le Liban et la Jordanie - tremblent sur leurs bases. Les plus forts - Israël, la Turquie et, dans une moindre mesure, l'Irak - observent avec inquiétude les développements du cataclysme. Pour Karim Bitar, spécialiste du Moyen-Orient et directeur de recherche à l'Institut des relations internationales et stratégiques (Iris), « la Syrie, qui maintenait sa stabilité interne en entretenant l'instabilité autour d'elle, exporte maintenant involontairement sa propre insta-

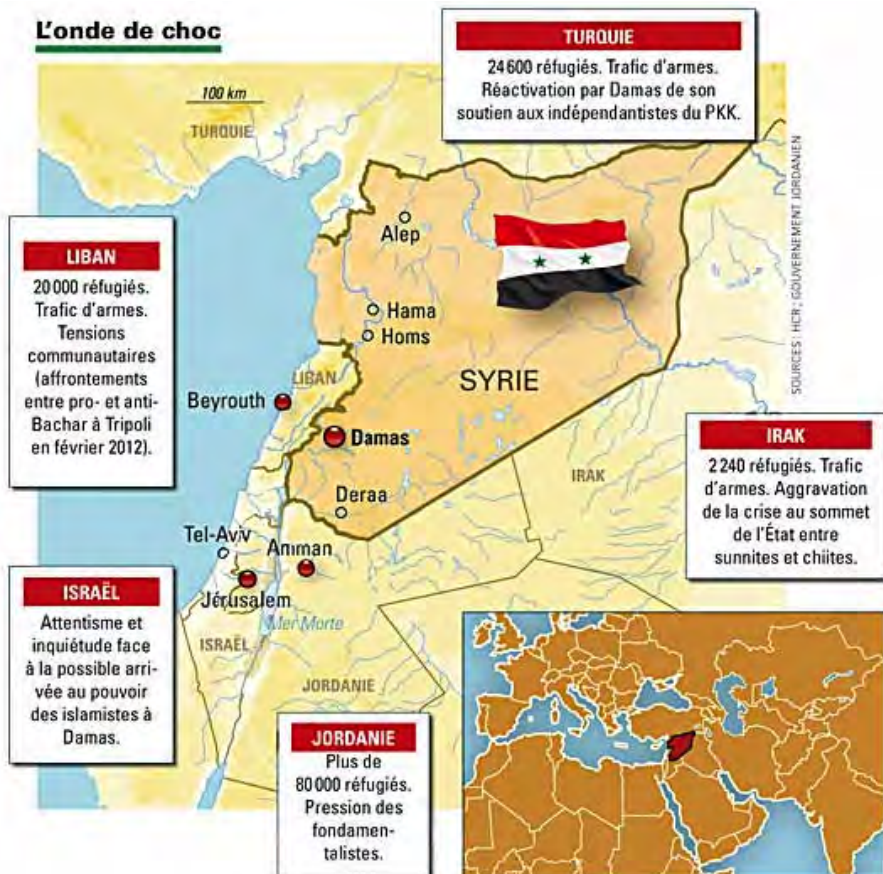
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Frontières arbitraires

Arbitrairement délimitées par les puissances coloniales après la Première Guerre mondiale, les frontières des États du Proche-Orient n'ont pas rompu la symbiose qui unit ses peuples. Les routes commerciales de Syrie sont vitales pour les marchés périphériques. Les liens tribaux rendent les populations de l'Ouest et du Sud syriens plus solidaires de leurs cousins d'Irak et de Jordanie que des citoyens de Damas. Et les connivences entre sunnites, chiites, druzes et chrétiens ignorent les postes de contrôle. Les États voisins de la Syrie tentent en vain de contrôler leurs frontières. Parallèlement, l'aggravation de la situation ranime les solidarités transnationales, aggrave les tensions préexistantes et suscite même d'inquiétants prolongements sur les scènes politiques locales.

Majoritaires dans la région, nombre de sunnites considèrent que la répression dirigée par Assad l'Alaouite vise leur communauté et crient vengeance. Le 11 février, le numéro un d'Al-Qaïda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, appelait les musulmans de la région à soutenir la rébellion. Depuis, les attentats se multiplient à Alep et à Damas, et les djihadistes affluent de l'étranger. Le 20 avril, le très recherché terroriste libanais Abdel Ghani Jawhar est mort à Al-Qusayr dans l'explosion de la bombe qu'il était en train de poser. À Bagdad, la teinte confessionnelle prise par la révolte syrienne trouve un écho dans la crise au sommet de l'État qui fait rage depuis fin 2011 entre les sunnites, détenteurs du pouvoir sous Saddam Hussein, et les chiites, qui contrôlent désormais le pays.

À Tripoli, dans le nord du Liban, où vit une importante minorité alaouite, des affrontements à répétition entre milices pro- et anti-Bachar ont fait plusieurs morts et des dizaines de blessés. De son côté, le Hezbollah, allié de Bachar, accuse ses adversaires sunnites d'armer les insurgés syriens, tandis que, depuis son fief du Chouf, le leader druze Walid Joublatt appelle ses coreligionnaires de l'armée syrienne à la mutinerie. Le 4 avril, une salve de tirs visait Samir Geagea, le chef chrétien hostile à Assad. Le Premier ministre, Najib Mikati, est parvenu jusque-là à jouer les équilibristes, mais pour combien de temps ? Le politologue libanais Joseph Bahout est ➔



► pessimiste : « On s'approche de l'affrontement au Liban. Si la crise dure, elle va s'internationaliser et trouver ici un second terrain. »

Au sud, la Jordanie voit avec appréhension affluer des dizaines de milliers de réfugiés. À la fin de février, le ministre de l'Information annonçait déjà qu'ils étaient 73 000 à être entrés légalement sur le territoire, auxquels s'ajouteraient 10 000 clandestins, dont de nombreux déserteurs. Selon le Haut-Commissariat aux réfugiés (HCR), ils seraient plus de 20 000 au Liban et près de 25 000 en Turquie. Entre 2003 et 2008, l'arrivée de 1,5 million de réfugiés irakiens avait dangereusement déstabilisé le royaume hachémite. « La Jordanie ne veut pas d'un nouveau scénario à l'irakienne. Elle craint aussi par-dessus tout que l'alternative au régime Assad ne soit une prise du pouvoir par les fondamentalistes », explique Oraib al-Rantawi, directeur du centre Al Quds d'Amman. Conjugué à la montée en puissance des partis religieux dans les pays du Printemps arabe, l'engagement révolutionnaire des sunnites de Syrie donne des ailes aux islamistes jordaniens.

Risques croissants

Puissance montante au Proche-Orient, la Turquie a pris la mesure des risques croissants que la crise syrienne faisait peser sur la région et sur sa propre stabilité. Le 10 avril, des tirs syriens ont atteint un camp de réfugiés de l'autre côté de la frontière. Contre Ankara, qui appuie le Conseil national syrien (CNS) et héberge l'état-major de l'Armée syrienne libre, Damas a réactivé son soutien aux indépendantistes kurdes du PKK, qui multiplie les attaques meurtrières contre l'armée turque. La marge de manoeuvre du Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, s'est amenuisée. « La Turquie est en recul sur la position agressive adoptée il y a quelques mois. Elle a pris note de la résilience du régime de Bachar al-Assad et évoque beaucoup plus timidement l'idée d'intervenir militairement en territoire syrien », explique Karim Bitar.

En Israël, autre acteur clé de la région, la classe politique est longtemps restée neutre et attentiste, tout en laissant entendre qu'elle préférerait en Syrie « un

diable familial à des démons inconnus ». Mais, en février, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Avigdor Lieberman, a demandé qu'Israël condamne la répression et a appelé au départ d'Assad. Proposition rejetée par le Premier ministre, Benyamin Netanyahou : une telle déclaration conforterait le discours du régime syrien selon lequel la contestation résulterait d'un complot sioniste.

Bien que préoccupantes, les conséquences périphériques de la crise syrienne pourraient rester limitées si ne se dessinait en filigrane un affrontement à bien plus grande échelle. Celui d'un axe sunnite mené par l'Arabie saoudite et soutenu par l'Occident contre un axe chiite dirigé par l'Iran. En janvier 2012, un rapport du Centre français de recherche sur le renseignement (CF2R) s'inquiétait d'une « libanisation fabriquée » en Syrie. Le pays du Cèdre en guerre civile était en effet devenu le champ de bataille indirect des puissances régionales et internationales. La pérennisation du conflit syrien pourrait bien, à terme, aboutir à une « libanisation » de toute la région, devenue plus instable que jamais.

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La Turquie refuse d'extrader le vice-président irakien, recherché par Interpol

Ankara-(AFP) - La Turquie refuse d'extrader le vice-président irakien Tarek al-Hachémi, poursuivi pour meurtres dans son pays et recherché par Interpol, a déclaré mercredi le vice-premier ministre turc Bekir Bozdag.

« Nous n'extraderons pas quelqu'un que nous avons soutenu depuis le début (...) Notre position à ce sujet est claire », a-t-il dit à des journalistes, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie, après qu'Interpol eut diffusé mardi une demande d'arrestation internationale en vue de son extradition de Turquie.

« Il se trouve en Turquie pour des raisons médicales », a dit M. Bozdag.

M. al-Hachémi, l'un des plus importants dirigeants sunnites d'Irak, se trouve depuis le 9 avril à Istanbul et dispose de la bienveillance du gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc, dirigé par Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans un pays majoritairement sunnite dont les rapports avec Bagdad se sont récemment dégradés.

M. al-Hachémi est l'un des dirigeants du bloc laïque Iraqiya, en conflit depuis des mois avec le premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki,



accusé d'autoritarisme.

Il estime être l'objet dans ce contexte d'une chasse aux sorcières à visées politiques.

M. Bozdag a ajouté que « la Turquie a aussi des demandes à l'Irak », comme l'extradition des commandants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie), qui utilisent leurs bases arrières situées dans le nord de l'Irak comme tremplin pour mener des attaques en territoire turc.

« Nous avons demandé leur extradition, mais n'avons à ce jour pas obtenu de réponse favorable de la part du gouvernement irakien », a-t-il déploré.

Le vice-président irakien et certains membres de sa garde rapprochée sont poursuivis pour le meurtre de plusieurs hauts responsables. Le procès doit commencer jeudi à Bagdad.

L'affaire al-Hachémi intervient dans une période de tensions entre Ankara et Bagdad.

M. Erdogan a récemment accusé son homologue irakien de monopoliser le pouvoir et de discriminations à l'égard des groupes sunnites dans son gouvernement, ce à quoi le premier ministre chiite a répliqué en accusant la Turquie de faire preuve d'animosité dans la région en cherchant à s'ingérer dans les affaires internes de ses voisins.

Après le lancement d'un mandat d'arrêt à son encontre en décembre, M. al-Hachémi avait rejeté les accusations le visant et avait pris la fuite.

Il avait trouvé refuge le 19 décembre auprès des autorités de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien qui ont refusé de le livrer à la justice de Bagdad, puis s'était rendu au Qatar, en Arabie saoudite, avant d'arriver en Turquie. ■

New Islamist Kurdish party to enter politics

ISTANBUL- Hürriyet Daily News
Vercihan Ziflioğlu

A new Kurdish party, which describes itself as Islamist, is set to enter Turkey's political scene in October.

The new party is likely to set some controversy in motion, as one of its prominent figures is Sıdkı Zilan, a lawyer whose clients in the past have included members of Hizbullah, a militant Sunni group based in southeastern Turkey that is unrelated to Lebanese Hezbollah.

"We want to enact whatever is necessary [to bring to life] an entity that is inclusive, Islamic and in favor of dialogue. We do not have any institutional ties with Hizbullah. I do believe, however, there will be people fancying us from the AKP [Justice and Development Party], the HAS Party [People's Voice Party], the SP [Felicity Party], the BDP [Peace and Democracy Party] and the



Lawyer Sıdkı Zilan says there is a need for an Islamic Kurdish political party.

Hizbullah community," Sıdkı Zilan told the Hürriyet Daily News.

It was decided to establish a conservative, Islamic-oriented party because there currently are no political parties which represent the Islamic community

among Turkey's four Kurdish parties, namely the BDP, the Rights and Liberties Party (HAK-PAR), Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP) and the Freedom and Socialism Party (ÖSP), according to Zilan.

"Naturally, there [is] a need for an establishment that will both give voice to the Islamic solution and support the Kurdish and the Kurdistan front," he said.

To a large extent, the Turkish state and the ruling AKP view the Kurdish problem through the prism of public security, he said, adding they were a party to the Kurdish problem even in the absence of a political party anyhow.

"The state is beset with problems of violence and public security originating from the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party]. The PKK was not the essence of the matter; perhaps it is a consequence. We will have achieved our goal to some degree if we can contribute to the acceptance and comprehension of this [fact]," he added. The PKK is recognized as a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. ●

AKnews

Agency of Kurdistan for News

Maliki's visit to Kirkuk was "provocative", says Kurdish MP

BAGHDAD, May 10, 2012 (AKnews) -By Salam Baghdadi

AN MP FROM the Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) yesterday expressed her disappointment over Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's visit to Kirkuk, adding that the visit was "provocative".

The Kurdistan Alliance ListThe Iraqi Council of Ministers held a meeting in Kirkuk province on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Maliki, who said that the identity of the disputed province must be an Iraqi identity and that no other identity can prevail.

Alaa Talabani said in a statement: "We hoped Maliki would discuss during his visit the sufferings of the province and the way to end it after it was targeted by the totalitarian regime in the broadest campaign of repression, displacement and killings in a desperate attempt to take out the original nationalism from it where the regime implemented forced displacement, killings, and looting of land and property against the citizens of Kirkuk from the Kurd and Turkmen.

"Maliki ignored the rights of Kurds and Turkmen that were robbed by the totalitarian regime and this made his visit provocative more so than a visit to inspect the province and work to end the suffering of the citizens and give them real guarantees about their stolen rights and accelerate holding a referendum to allow the people to deter-



mine the fate of Kirkuk to join the Kurdistan Region.

Talabani added that "this visit will increase the tense relations between the federal government and the Kurdistan Region.

"Iraq is facing a major political crisis and the State of Law Coalition doesn't appear to be working to resolve them in collaboration with partners in the political process by resorting to the constitution and the law to ensure the full rights of the citizens that suffered a lot in Kirkuk, especially from the dictatorial regime ruling."

Kirkuk province, as well as other areas in the provinces of Nineveh, Diyala and Salahaddin, are among the areas in which ownership is disputed between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Maliki's statements about the identity of Kirkuk may increase the tension between Baghdad and Erbil, which surfaced recently after the Kurdistan Region refused to hand over Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi to Baghdad. □

Iraq oil industry experiences new boom

BY BEN VAN HEUVELEN

BAGHDAD — Over the past four decades, Iraq's oil production has traced the path of a roller coaster, propelled upward by geysers of crude and dragged downward by the weight of war and sanctions. In the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Iraqi output has failed to achieve the heights it reached under Saddam Hussein — until now.

In April, Iraq exported more crude than it has in any month since it invaded Kuwait in 1990. This success, according to analysts and policymakers, could jolt the global economy and help offset the loss of oil supplies from Iran.

It also signals the rise of Iraq as a modern petro-state, with all the power and problems that enormous oil wealth brings.

“Over the next five to seven years, Iraq could be supplying nearly half of the incremental growth in world oil demand,” said Larry Goldstein, director of the nonprofit Energy Policy Research Foundation.

The cornerstone of Iraq's progress has been the government's ability since 2008 to reduce violence and then to maintain security after the U.S. troop withdrawal at the end of last year. Militias and terrorist groups still detonate bombs, attack security forces and target government officials for assassination. But the death toll has dropped dramatically.

These security gains have helped the oil sector. A strategic pipeline to Turkey was once unusable because it was bombed so often; for the past few years, it has carried about 20 percent of the country's exports.

The revenue is supercharging Iraq's economy. The government, which relies on crude sales for more than 95 percent of its income, has begun funding ambitious reconstruction projects, including roads, hospitals and power plants.

Yet oil has also amplified many of the country's problems. The influx of cash has often overwhelmed fledgling institutions, creating opportunities for large-scale corruption. And Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region has claimed authority to develop oil fields independently, inflaming tensions with Baghdad.



Iraq's oil boom started in earnest in 2009 and 2010, when it signed 11 contracts with companies such as BP, Exxon Mobil and Royal Dutch Shell. A year later, those companies were pumping more crude than the country's antiquated infrastructure could handle, and the Oil Ministry often had to order them to curtail production.

The surge in Iraqi exports has influenced the U.S. government as it has evaluated sanctions targeting Iran's oil sector. One key question has been whether the world's other oil producers can replace the lost Iranian output; if they couldn't, the price of oil would probably rise, hurting global economic growth.

According to a State Department official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk on the record, analysts at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad have reported to Washington that Iraq will add 500,000 barrels per day of production this year, equal to about one-quarter of Iran's current exports.

That figure jibes with the estimates of other analysts, including Goldstein, who said Iraq's output is especially important because Saudi Arabia does not seem ready to offer much more. The Saudis typically use their massive oil reserves to make up for global shortfalls, but they have already increased their output substantially in the last year.

“Their export capability is getting squeezed,” Goldstein said.

OUTPUT THAT'S OVERDUE

Iraqi production appears ready to rise even further.

From a technical perspective, an oil boom is overdue. Geologists have long been impressed by Iraq's underground seas of oil — one enormous field is named Majnoon, which is Arabic for “crazy” — but the limiting factor has

been a lack of investment.

International companies are now pouring billions of dollars into the fields, and the government is making significant, if uneven, progress toward building the supporting infrastructure.

Skeptical analysts have long regarded Iraq's oil sector as a series of bottlenecks, any one of which could choke the flow of crude. They have not doubted the potential of prolific Iraqi fields, but they have been wary of the inadequate pipelines, pumping stations and storage tanks that transmit oil from wellhead to tanker. One facility in Kirkuk, for example, which processes about one-tenth of Iraq's crude, is 80 years old and sometimes closes because of poison gas leaks.

But the recent easing of one key bottleneck has inspired some optimism. In March, the Oil Ministry opened an export facility in the Persian Gulf, off the coast of Basra. It takes days to load a supertanker with crude, but after building additional moorings, Iraq can now pump to more ships at the same time.

Because of the new facilities, Iraqi exports rose to 2.5 million barrels of oil per day in April, according to Falah al-Amri, the head of Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization — a one-fifth increase since the beginning of the year.

THE DEEPEST FISSURE

The progress on infrastructure may be inspiring international optimism, but Iraq still suffers from a legacy of war, political conflict and inefficient bureaucracy — what industry officials sometimes call “above-ground factors,” in contrast to the relatively straightforward challenges of drilling through thousands of feet of rock.

Oil has tended to compound those problems rather than solve them.

Perhaps the deepest fissure in Iraq's polity divides the Kurdistan region from the Arab-majority central government. The two sides have long disagreed about how to distribute authority over the country's oil, and they have signed contracts based on diverging interpretations of Iraqi law.

This conflict has led to a string of controversies that escalated April 1, when Kurdistan shut off its oil exports, which have accounted for as much as 8 percent of Iraq's international oil sales.

Iraq achieved its record production last month without Kurdistan's contributions — a testament to its technical advances in Basra — yet the dispute highlights how oil can lead to wealth and dysfunction. Rising oil ➤

► production in the south has eliminated one major incentive for Baghdad to seek a compromise: Iraq will be able to fund its entire \$100 billion budget without Kurdistan's oil, according to Oil Minister Abdul-Kareem Luaibi.

A central point of contention has been Kurdistan's decision to sign six contracts with Exxon Mobil despite

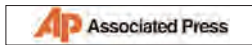
Baghdad's warnings that such deals would be considered illegal. Three of those deals require Exxon to explore territory claimed by both Kurdistan and Baghdad.

Since Kurdistan's export cutoff, leaders in Baghdad have threatened to dock the region's share of the federal budget, and the Kurdish president, Massoud

Barzani, has repeatedly made veiled threats to declare independence.

The standoff could result in violence. If so, the world might see the roller coaster of Iraqi production fall again.

□ □ □



Turkish troops kill five Kurdish rebels

Tuesday May 8, 2012 -AP

TURKEY'S state-run news agency says Turkish troops have killed five Kurdish rebels in an overnight clash in southeast Turkey.

The Anadolu Agency said today the clash took place near the town

of Tatvan in Bitlis province.

Kurdish rebels have been fighting for autonomy in the largely Kurdish southeast. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people since the rebels took up arms in 1984. □

middle east online
میدل ایست اونلاین

May 05, 2012

Erdogan refuses to let down Hashemi

Turkey will not extradite Iraq's Vice President, who is being tried in absentia in Baghdad accused of running death squad.

Middle East Online

ANKARA - Turkey will not extradite Iraq's Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, who is being tried in absentia in Baghdad accused of running a death squad, a senior official was quoted as saying on Wednesday.

"We will not extradite someone whom we have supported since the very beginning," deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency.

His comments came a day after Interpol issued an international Red Notice for the arrest of Hashemi, one of Iraq's top Sunni Arab officials, on suspicion of "guiding and financing terrorist attacks".

"(Hashemi) is currently in Turkey for health reasons," Bozdag said.

Turkey's prime minister said Tuesday that Iraq's fugitive vice president Tareq al-Hashemi would return home once he has finished treatment for his health, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Hashemi was in his country for health reasons as well as for political contacts.

"I believe that he will return to his home country after completing the treatment for his health problems," Erdogan was quoted as saying by Anatolia to journalists during the Turkish leader's visit to Rome.

He also voiced support for the Iraqi leader concerning the legal case he was facing in Baghdad.

"As I said earlier, we've supported him and will continue supporting him on this issue," said Erdogan.

Hashemi, who has been staying in Istanbul since April 9, insisted in a statement posted on his website Tuesday that he was not



*Erdogan:
We will
continue
supporting
Hashemi*

above the law and was ready to appear in court if his security and a fair trial could be guaranteed.

Last week, Hashemi's trial was delayed to May 10 after his lawyers called for the case to be heard in a special court.

Hashemi and his bodyguards face around 150 charges, including the killing of six judges and other senior officials, according to an Iraqi judicial spokesman. He has challenged the legitimacy of the trial and said his life is at risk in Baghdad.

Interpol said the red notice, its highest possible alert, was issued following an Iraqi warrant made "as part of an investigation in which security forces seized bombing materials and arrested individuals".

"It is of course important that Hashemi is named among those wanted by Interpol but we also have demands of the Iraqi government," said Bozdag.

"The terrorist organisation and its supporters are there... We also want them but so far we have been unable to get a positive response from the Iraqi government," he said, referring to leaders of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) holed up in northern Iraq.

Ankara has long demanded that Iraq prevent the PKK from using its territory, halt all rebel activities, limit their movements, close down their camps, cut off logistic support and hand over their leaders to Turkey.

Listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey and much of the international community, the PKK took up arms for Kurdish independence in southeastern Turkey in 1984, sparking a conflict that has claimed some 45,000 lives. ♦

Turkey strategic partner, says Iraqi Kurd premier



KRG PM Barzani (C), TÜSİAD President Ümit Boyner (L) and Koç Group chairman Mustafa Koç (2nd L) leave their hand prints on a platform at the opening ceremony of Divan Hotel in Arbil. DHA p

Sefer Levent , ARBIL / Radikal

KRG PM Barzani labels Turkey a strategic partner and says the ongoing crisis between the al-Maliki government and Arbil should be resolved in line with the constitution.

Turkey is a strategic partner and the solution to the ongoing crisis between Arbil and Baghdad should be based on territorial integrity in line with the Iraqi constitution, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani has said.

Upon being asked about KRG leader Masoud Barzani's statement that he

would hold a referendum on the Kurdish region's relations with the Nouri al-Maliki government if disputes over power sharing could not be resolved, the KRG premier said: "The president is not implying just Kurds. His advice is not only for Kurdish region but for the whole of Iraq. We are concerned for Shiites, Turkmens and Arabs as well.

The first choice is a solution based on territorial integrity which is in line with the constitution and the second one is to return to the Parliament. Iraq is all for us." Barzani also stated that he didn't agree Turkey had become closer to Arbil and was drifting away from the Baghdad government since U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq in December. The months-long political impasse began when the government issued terrorism charges against the nation's highest-

ranking Sunni, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi. Al-Hashemi fled to northern Iraq, which declined to hand him over to Baghdad and then permitted him to leave on a regional tour that took him to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Speaking with reporters after the opening ceremony of the Divan Hotel in Arbil, Barzani labeled Turkey a "strategic partner" of Iraq. "I don't agree with al-Maliki's criticism that Turkey is interfering in the internal politics of Iraq. Turkey is Iraq's best neighbor and it is our strategic partner in economics," Barzani said, adding that the trade volume between the region and Turkey currently amounted to \$8 billion.

Visit to Turkey

Touching on the trade ties with Turkey, Barzani said it was very important for the KRG that the Koç Group had decided to invest in Arbil and called on other companies to invest in the future. Barzani also claimed that there was no security problem in the KRG region: "Our region is 100 percent safe. I don't want you to feel sorry but the region is actually safer than Istanbul."

He also said they were claiming their constitutional rights in the ongoing dispute over Exxon. "If Exxon does not think we have constitutional rights they will not come to the region and invest here. The problem here is that al-Maliki government says 'do not claim your rights.'" Barzani also said he was pleased that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called him when he was elected as prime minister and that he was hoping to come to Ankara for a visit in the near future to improve relations. ●

ANSA
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08 May 2012

Turkey: Ankara's nightmare, post-Assad partition of Syria

With Alawi state on Mediterranean, risking domino effect

www.ansa.it

(ANSAMed) - ROME - The nightmare scenario for Turkish diplomacy takes the following form: an exploding of Syria that has up to now been held together in the iron grasp of the Assad dynasty, leading to the risk of a partition of the country along lines of 'ethnicity', leading to an Alawi state bordering the Mediterranean, a Kurdish state between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan and a Sunni state on the remainder of the territory.

This is not officially talked about in Ankara, but according to political analyst Abdullah Bozkurt, the idea gives rise to "true concerns" along Turkey's corridors of power. There is indeed an impression that the moves of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad over the past months have been in this direction. Faced with a revolt by a Sunni majority, among which there is a strongly influential Alawi minority - that of the al-Assad clan - the regime appears to be working towards a kind of 'community-based cleansing,'

→ preparing the way for a partitioning of the country. The rocky Mediterranean shore, a traditional territory of the Alawites who make up 12-15% of Syria's population, around the cities of Latakya, Banyas and Tartous (which is the base for the Russian Mediterranean fleet), would form the nucleus of an Alawi state that would remain under Assad's control. In this state the minority would be safe from pressures of the Sunni majority. Under the French protectorate following the First World War, there already was an Alawi state of Latakia between 1922 and 1936, which was allied with the French against the Sunnis. According to Bozkurt, Assad would try to enlarge this 'state of Latakya' to take in a slice of traditionally Sunni territory, especially at Homs, a key position on the Damascus-Aleppo axis. This is why the city has been the fulcrum of the heaviest clashes with the armed opposition. Another preparation for creating the Alawi state was the alleged bombing by the regime of Sunni areas of Latakya during Ramadan. This led to a mass exodus of thousands of refugees into Turkey. There is nothing new about tensions between Sunnis and Alawis or Alawites, followers of the sect founded by Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, who are considered to be liberal and pro-Western Muslims.

Tensions have been seen not only in Syria but in Turkey,

too, where Alawis represent a fifth of the population. If the Syrian crisis were to lead to partition, Turkey and for other Middle Eastern states would risk seeing the opening of a Pandora's box of minorities. According to daily paper Zaman, the Sunni part of Syria, close to the Erdogan government, would be cut off from the Mediterranean. An Alawi state would also upset Iran, cutting of communication lines with Lebanon's Hezbollah. A possible division into three of Iraq, into Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites would then become more probable. The Alawi community in Lebanon might be tempted to join up with their Syrian brethren, and Turkey could be exposed to seeing the balance of power upset between the Sunni majority and Alawi minority, whose presence is especially strong in Istanbul and along the 300-mile-long border with Syria. This is an area where Turkish policies hostile to the Damascus government fall on stony ground. Among Turkish Alawis in Hatay and in Istanbul, pro-Assad demonstrations have taken place and the government has been forced to move the Sunni refugees from Syria further to the North in order to avoid incidents. The creation of a Kurdish state in Syria between ar-Raqqah and al-Qamishli would also aggravate the situation in Turkish Kurdistan. (ANSAméd).◆

OPINION/ NURAY MERT

The presidential system and the Kurdish issue

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan revived the debate on presidential system last week. Everybody knows that Erdoğan is the sort of politician who is so power-driven that no measure of power satisfies his drive for more.

The debate on the presidential system is nothing other than a euphemism for his crave for more power.

Nevertheless, it is not the only stake behind the recent debate on the presidential system. From the beginning of this debate, I have sensed that it is also thought to concern the Kurdish issue.

Unfortunately, the governing party insists on pursuing a policy of suppression on the one hand and of "cheap bargaining" on the other hand. Moreover, these policies manage to find resonance among Kurdish political circles.

A short while ago, a Kurdish MP wrote an article hinting that Kurds may support Erdoğan's presidency (if not the presidential system) in return for a moderation of governmental politics concerning Kurds. Moreover, the theme of "the presidential system in return for Kurdish rights" started to circulate among politicians even before Erdoğan started the debate. Finally, a pro-government columnist (for the Taraf daily) stated that the "presidential system can solve the Kurdish problem."

The present government has always been very successful in manipulating the political debate in general, and Kurdish poli-

tics in particular, and the debate on the presidential system seems to be the latest of these manipulations. Nonetheless, success in manipulating the political debate is not the same thing as "successful politics" or "successful governance," especially with regard to the Kurdish issue.

Turkey has suffered more than enough from confusing "manipulation" with "governance," and confusing cheap bargaining politics with sustainable political negotiations. The Kurdish issue is the most risky of all the other problems of the country. The government may be trying to seduce the minds of some Kurdish politicians and circles by using the presidential system as a bargain piece. Kurdish circles who advocate federalism may be particularly prone to such a proposal, having the US system in mind. But everybody who is concerned with the future of democracy in Turkey and the future of Kurds should know that considering such a deal will turn to be either a waste of time, or a disastrous delusion.

In a country where it is still blasphemous to discuss the Kurdish demands for a political status and/or "democratic autonomy," the prospect of any sort of federalism is not very convincing. Besides, if there was a way of considering federalism or some other sort of autonomy as a political solution, the price paid should not be the presidential system; the parliamentary system can do better in this respect.

Finally, is it not obvious that the first casualty of a presidential election race in this country would be the demands of Kurds for a political status?

It is not only Kurds, but all of us who live in Turkey that should be more concerned about sustainable political solutions for the future of democracy and for social peace, rather than deluding ourselves or being prone to be deluded by such debates and deals about changing to a presidential system.●

Iran : le crépuscule politique de M. Ahmadinejad

Jusqu'au bout du bout, jusqu'au dernier jour de son mandat, il sera tel que les Iraniens et le reste de la planète le connaissent : plein d'orgueil et d'humilité démonstrative, la main sur le cœur et la provocation aux lèvres. Toujours confiant dans sa bonne étoile et sa capacité à rebondir. Oui, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad se bat encore malgré l'incroyable série de coups qu'il a reçus dans l'arène politique iranienne ces douze derniers mois.

Le dernier en date lui sera probablement fatal. Au premier tour des élections législatives, le 2 mars 2012, le président a vu ses partisans battus à plate couture. Même sa propre sœur Parvin a été éliminée dans sa ville natale de Garmsar.

Vendredi 4 mai se tient le second tour, qui décidera des 65 derniers sièges (sur 290) à pourvoir. Mais l'affaire est entendue : la parenthèse Ahmadinejad est terminée, un an avant le terme de son second et dernier mandat. Au point que des proches du Guide suprême de la République islamique, Ali Khamenei, ont débattu ouvertement de l'opportunité de laisser le président aller au terme de son mandat.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad n'aura pas échappé au sort de ses prédécesseurs : celui qui se présentait comme le « fils » du Guide suprême a été dépouillé de ses pouvoirs, bloqué dans ses initiatives, livré à la meute de députés hostiles. En mars, il a eu le déshonneur d'être le premier président iranien depuis la révolution à avoir été convoqué par le Parlement. Lui aussi aura donc été avalé par cette révolution qui, depuis ses débuts en 1979, dévore ses enfants les uns après les autres, les prodiges comme les prodiges.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 55 ans, est un « petit soldat » de la révolution. Ingénieur de formation, il est issu des pasdarans (gardiens de la révolution), le corps d'élite du régime, mais il n'est pas un officier combattant auréolé de la guerre contre l'Irak (1980-1988), plutôt un petit officier de renseignement chargé de la répression des Kurdes. C'est durant les années 1980, passées en Azerbaïdjan oriental, que M. Ahmadinejad rencontre ceux qui feront partie de son premier cercle jusqu'à ce jour, à commencer par Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, son beau-frère, son âme damnée.



M. Ahmadinejad salue ses partisans lors de sa visite, le 11 avril, sur l'île d'Abou Moussa, dans le Golfe, dont la souveraineté est revendiquée par les Emirats arabes unis. AFP

Maire de Téhéran au début de la décennie, M. Ahmadinejad crée la surprise de la présidentielle de 2005. Il supprime nombre de candidats plus connus et prestigieux. Au second tour, il taille en pièces Ali Akbar Hachemi Rafsandjani, qui a les faveurs du bazar et de la bourgeoisie. C'est à ce moment-là que se noue l'alliance entre le petit ingénieur toujours vêtu d'un modeste blouson beige, qui a promis de « mettre l'argent du pétrole sur la table des Iraniens », et le vieux Guide suprême, qui détient l'essentiel du pouvoir en Iran et vient de traverser deux mandats de cohabitation tendue avec le président réformateur Mohammad Khatami.

M. Ahmadinejad présente nombre de qualités aux yeux d'Ali Khamenei. Il n'est pas issu du clergé, contrairement à MM. Khatami et Rafsandjani, ce qui arrange le Gui-

Le Guide suprême n'a pas supporté que son poulain ait voulu mettre la main sur deux secteurs-clés du pouvoir : les renseignements et le pétrole

de, en déficit de légitimité religieuse. Il relégitime le régime auprès des couches sociales les plus défavorisées et les plus nombreuses. Enfin, il ne dispose pas de ressources financières propres comme M. Rafsandjani. Bref, c'est la parfaite marionnette.

Et sur la scène internationale, ses diatribes antisémites et ses outrances antioccidentales offrent l'avantage, comme le note judicieusement l'intellectuel en exil Ahmad Salamatian, « de rallier la majorité de l'opinion arabe derrière l'étendard iranien, malgré la fracture sunnites-chiïtes ». Pour lui, « Ahmadinejad a aussi cassé l'idée que le pouvoir était l'affaire des élites en Iran. Il a ouvert les portes de la politique au lumpen ».

Cette belle entente avec Ali Khamenei s'est fissurée lors du second mandat du président, entamé en 2009. La volonté de M. Ahmadinejad d'installer les siens au pouvoir, ajoutée aux problèmes institutionnels inhérents à la dyarchie au sommet de l'exécutif (qu'Ali Khamenei domine nettement), a eu raison de l'alliance entre le vieux Guide et le président. Surtout, la rupture trouve sa source dans la répression de juin-juillet 2009, conséquence de la réélection contestée de M. Ahmadinejad : pour défendre son poulain, Ali Khamenei a beaucoup perdu de son aura en s'impliquant personnellement dans la répression.

Ce dernier n'a donc pas supporté que M. Ahmadinejad ait l'outrecuidance, à peine deux années plus tard, de vouloir mettre la main sur deux secteurs-clés du pouvoir iranien, les renseignements et le pétrole. A chaque fois, il s'est fait durement rabrouer par le Guide suprême, qui l'a bloqué.

Depuis, les deux camps se portent des coups d'une dureté rarement égalée. Arrestations et procès pour corruption visent les proches de M. Ahmadinejad, lequel boude, menace, mais ne peut qu'assister, impuissant, à sa disgrâce. Dernière humiliation : il a dû venir siéger au Conseil de discernement, à la tête duquel son ennemi juré, M. Rafsandjani, a été reconduit pour cinq ans par le Guide.

Ce deuxième mandat a été marqué par deux autres faits majeurs : la crise autour de la question nucléaire et son cortège de sanctions économiques imposées par l'Occident en premier lieu ; la mise à plat du système de subventions aux biens de première nécessité, qui grevait lourdement le budget de l'Etat, en second lieu. Progressivement, M. Ahmadinejad a été évincé de toute décision concernant le nucléaire : la promotion de Saïd Jalili, le négociateur iranien, au rang d'envoyé spécial du Guide est un camouflet pour lui.

Enfin, ce n'est pas le moindre paradoxe de M. Ahmadinejad

d'avoir été à la fois le président le plus populiste de la République islamique et celui qui a mené la réforme la plus ultralibérale, allégeant les finances publiques d'un fardeau annuel de plus de 70 milliards de dollars (53,2 milliards d'euros).

S'il a pu mener à bien cette thérapie de choc, qui lui vaut les félicita-

tions du FMI, c'est parce que le cours du pétrole a été si élevé qu'il a pu distribuer sans compter les aides aux plus pauvres. Résultat, « des millions d'Iraniens qui n'avaient jamais eu d'argent ni même un compte en banque ont touché 280 000 tomams [171 euros] par mois, explique M. Salamatian.

C'est un changement majeur. »

Le reste du bilan économique de M. Ahmadinejad est un fiasco : inflation galopante, investissements et production en berne, chômage en hausse. « Ahmadinejad est un homme d'action fantastique mais il est constamment dans l'improvisation, conclut M. Salamatian.

Tout ce qu'il fait est basé sur un bénéfice politique immédiat. Il ne pense pas aux conséquences. » ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD
AVEC ASSAL REZA

Le président iranien ravive un litige avec les Emirats

EN SE RENDANT, le 11 avril, sur l'archipel contesté d'Abou Moussa, le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a fait coup double. Non seulement il a réveillé à son profit le nationalisme iranien. Mais il a également réussi à mettre son grain de sel dans le jeu diplomatique alors qu'il avait été tenu à l'écart, par le Guide suprême Ali Khamenei, des négociations sur le dossier nucléaire iranien lancées à Istanbul le 14 avril et qui doivent se poursuivre le 23 mai à Bagdad.

La courte visite de M. Ahmadinejad sur Abou Moussa est la première d'un président iranien sur l'île principale de 12 km² occupée par 2 000 habitants et située à 60 km au large des côtes émiriennes, sur la principale voie maritime pétrolière du monde.

Ce geste a entraîné un regain de nationalisme en Iran, où les déléga-



tions de parlementaires se succèdent sur l'archipel contesté. Depuis, les responsables iraniens se livrent à une surenchère, comme la proposition de créer une province du golfe Persique, avec Abou Moussa pour chef-lieu, ou celle de rebaptiser du nom de l'île la rue

dans laquelle se trouve l'ambassade des Emirats arabes unis à Téhéran. Pour nombre d'Iraniens, Abou Moussa est le symbole de l'injustice du colonialisme occidental aux dépens de l'Iran.

Cet archipel de six petites îles a fait partie de l'Iran de l'Antiquité jusqu'au début du XX^e siècle, lorsque les Britanniques en prirent le contrôle. A l'indépendance des Emirats arabes unis, en 1971, les Britanniques ont transféré à Charjah et à Ras Al-Khaimah, deux des sept émirats de la fédération, le contrôle d'Abou Moussa et des Grande et Petite Tomb, deux autres îlots disputés. Téhéran et Abou Dhabi ont convenu que la souveraineté de l'île revenait aux Emirats, mais en autorisant une présence de l'armée iranienne sur Abou Moussa.

En 1980, les Emirats ont porté le différend devant l'ONU. En 1992,

l'Iran a expulsé les travailleurs étrangers qui s'occupaient, pour le compte des Emirats, de l'école, de la clinique et de la centrale électrique d'Abou Moussa.

La visite n'a pas manqué de susciter la colère de la Fédération, qui y voit « une violation flagrante de [sa] souveraineté et de [son] intégrité territoriale ». Dans un contexte d'extrême tension régionale entre chiites et sunnites, le litige a des échos dans l'ensemble des pays arabes du golfe.

L'Arabie saoudite, grande rivale de l'Iran, a pris position pour ses alliés émiriens. Si jamais le conflit venait à prendre une tournure militaire, la France, qui a une base navale aux Emirats auxquels elle est liée par un accord de défense, se retrouverait en première ligne. ■

C. A.

Le Monde

Mercredi 9 mai 2012

Le régime syrien a organisé des élections législatives multipartites controversées

Des élections législatives prétendument multipartites se sont tenues lundi 7 mai en Syrie sur fond de poursuite de la répression. Ce scrutin visant à présenter le président Bachar Al-Assad comme un réformateur à l'écoute de ses concitoyens, et à convaincre ceux-ci que le pays est en voie de stabilisation a été boycotté par l'opposition et dénoncé comme une mascarade par l'ONU, les Etats-Unis et la France.

Les quelque 12 000 bureaux de vote ont fermé à 22 heures, selon la télévision officielle syrienne. Les opérations de dépouillement ont commencé aussitôt après mais aucune précision n'a été donnée sur le taux de participation ou sur l'annonce des résultats. Grâce à la nouvelle Constitution adoptée par référendum en

février, qui a supprimé l'article accordant au parti Baas, au pouvoir depuis 1963, le rôle dirigeant de la société, neuf nouveaux partis ont été créés en Syrie. Selon l'Agence France-Presse, sept d'en-

Les violences se poursuivent pendant les élections

Trois civils ont été tués, mardi 8 mai, en Syrie, par les troupes gouvernementales, a rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Lundi, ce sont 25 personnes qui avaient péri dans des violences, selon l'OSDH. Depuis le 15 mars 2011, la répression et les combats ont fait plus de 11 100 morts, en majorité des civils selon l'OSDH, et poussé à l'exil plus de 65 000 Syriens selon l'ONU, sans compter les dizaines de milliers de détenus. Les violences

tre eux ont présenté des candidats à ces élections.

Mais cette apparence de pluralisme n'a pas convaincu l'opposition, qui estime que la plupart des formations nouvellement éta-

se poursuivent en dépit du cessez-le-feu prévu par le plan Annan depuis le 12 avril, et pour lequel des observateurs ont été déployés. Par ailleurs, Reporters sans frontières (RSF) a condamné, lundi, la mort « d'un sixième citoyen-journaliste » depuis le début de l'année en Syrie, en accusant les forces gouvernementales. RSF dit avoir appris « avec effroi » la mort, le 4 mai, d'Abdel Ghani Kaake, 19 ans, affirmant qu'il avait été « délibérément visé ». — (AFP.)

blies sont dirigées par des obligés du régime de Damas, à l'instar du dirigeant communiste Qadri Jamil, possible futur premier ministre. Aux yeux de ses représentants, le scrutin ne modifiera guère la composition d'un parlement qui joue un rôle de chambre d'enregistrement et dont les membres sont traditionnellement choisis par la famille Assad, avec l'appui des *moukhabarat*, la police politique.

Les résultats semblent d'autant plus joués d'avance que selon les médias officiels, la moitié des 250 sièges en jeu sont réservés aux « représentants des ouvriers et paysans », dont les syndicats sont contrôlés par le parti Baas.

Interrogé lundi par l'AFP, à l'entrée d'un bureau de vote de Damas, Chahba Karim, 18 ans, estimait que ces élections apporte-

raient « une réponse définitive à la crise », relayant ainsi le point de vue des électeurs interviewés par la télévision d'État. Nouredine Al-Abdo, un opposant de la ville d'I-dlib, dans le nord de la Syrie, estimait au contraire que le régime syrien « se fait des illusions s'il pense qu'il existe encore à travers cette mascarade d'élection, alors qu'il est incapable de contrôler les villes

« Celui qui baigne la Syrie dans le sang (...) ne possède aucune légitimité pour rédiger une Constitution »
Communiqué du Conseil national syrien

et les villages sans ses chars ».

Dans un communiqué, le Conseil national syrien, principale coalition de l'opposition, a refusé par avance de reconnaître les résultats. « Celui qui baigne la Syrie dans le sang, pousse à l'exode deux millions de Syriens et tire sur le peuple syrien ne possède aucune légitimité pour rédiger une Constitution, promulguer une loi électorale ou convoquer

des élections », a-t-il déclaré.

Le scrutin a aussi été dénoncé par le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, pour qui « le processus démocratique ne pourra pas réussir tant que la violence continuera ». Pour la France, ces élections « s'apparentent à une farce sinistre », tandis que les États-Unis ont estimé lundi que le scrutin « frise le ridicule ». ■

SERVICE INTERNATIONAL

Le Monde

Jeudi 10 mai 2012

Itinéraire d'un djihadiste libanais tombé en Syrie

De plus en plus d'étrangers, à l'instar de Libanais du Fatah Al-Islam, combattent le régime

Beyrouth
Correspondance

Sur la photographie que montre son père dans son village natal de Bebnine (nord du Liban), Abdel Ghani Jawhar, enfant, pose en émir arabe devant un décor de studio, vêtu d'un manteau brodé d'or et d'un keffieh blanc. Quelques années plus tard, ce Libanais est devenu « Abou Hajar », un djihadiste parmi les plus recherchés, spécialiste en explosifs. Accusé d'actes terroristes au Liban et sous le coup de mandats d'arrêt, il est parti combattre en Syrie, ce printemps, avec plusieurs de ses pairs. Il y est mort, à 29 ans.

Abdel Ghani Jawhar appartenait au groupuscule djihadiste sunnite Fatah Al-Islam, qui s'est fait connaître par le sanglant combat (plus de 400 morts) qui l'avait opposé des mois durant à l'armée libanaise dans le camp palestinien de Nahr Al-Bared (région de Tripoli, nord) en 2007, ainsi que par plusieurs attentats meurtriers la même année. Comptant dans ses rangs d'anciens combattants en Irak, rassemblant des Syriens, des Palestiniens mais aussi des Libanais, le groupuscule est passé à la clandestini-

rité après l'été 2007. Certains de ses membres ont été arrêtés ou tués. Fatah Al-Islam n'a jamais obtenu l'adoubement d'Al-Qaida, malgré ses tentatives.

La mort d'Abdel Ghani Jawhar à Qusair (localité syrienne proche du Liban et proche d'Homs) avait été annoncée fin avril par plusieurs médias. Plusieurs récits ont été dressés pour expliquer sa disparition : un accident fatal lors d'une manipulation d'explosifs ; un affrontement avec l'armée syrienne. Son décès a été confirmé au Monde de source sûre début mai.

La nouvelle avait été accueillie avec prudence par divers hauts responsables sécuritaires : l'individu avait déjà été donné pour mort par le passé. Et l'affaire remet au premier plan un groupuscule dont la genèse demeure à ce jour une énigme. Création de Damas pour déstabiliser le Liban ? Efforts libanais et étrangers pour contrer le Hezbollah chiite ? Extrémistes cibles de manipulations diverses ?

Avec Abdel Ghani Jawhar, d'autres membres de Fatah Al-Islam ont rejoint le djihad en Syrie. L'un d'eux, Walid Boustani, évadé de prison au Liban en 2010, a été tué par les rebelles après un

« procès » expéditif, suite à une altercation, selon des médias libanais. « Abou Hajar », diplômé en chimie, se serait rendu en Syrie pour y dispenser son savoir-faire en matière de fabrication de bombes. Les deux hommes sont partis du camp palestinien d'Ain El-Heloué (sud du Liban) où ils avaient trouvé refuge – l'accès en est interdit aux forces de sécurité libanaises.

Cette affaire confirme une « internationalisation » en cours de la rébellion en Syrie. Autre illustration, la nationalité libyenne, selon une source digne de foi, d'un blessé hospitalisé en avril à Tripoli, dont la chambre était surveillée par des membres des forces de sécurité libanaises comme *Le Monde* a pu le constater. Mais s'il est avéré que des djihadistes étrangers prêtent main-forte aux insurgés, leur nombre reste limité. Ces combattants peuvent séduire une partie des rebelles, par leur expérience ; mais ils suscitent aussi l'embarras et le rejet dans leurs rangs.

« Abou Hajar » se serait rendu en Syrie pour y dispenser son savoir-faire en matière de fabrication de bombes

Au Liban, nul ne souhaite évoquer des liens passés avec Abdel Ghani Jawhar. Parmi les sunnites de la région de Tripoli – dont ce dernier est originaire –, la Jamaa Islamiya (branche libanaise des Frères musulmans) et les salafistes démentent les informations selon lesquelles il a appartenu à leurs

mouvements. Nabil Rahim, figure salafiste de Tripoli, ancien intermédiaire entre les djihadistes de Fatah Al-Islam et des émissaires d'Al-Qaida, reste distant.

Selon ce religieux, arrêté en 2008 et détenu pendant plus de trois ans, le combattant était « très proche de Chaker Al-Abssi », le fondateur de Fatah Al-Islam porté disparu fin 2008. « C'est sous ses ordres qu'il a attaqué l'armée libanaise [lors de plusieurs attentats en 2008], indique M. Rahim. Pour notre interlocuteur, Abdel Ghani Jawhar a rejoint Fatah Al-Islam en 2008. Selon les Syriens, il est aussi responsable d'un attentat perpétré à Damas la même année. Très intelligent, il a joué un rôle important au sein de Fatah Al-Islam. »

Quel intérêt avait ce jeune Libanais à combattre en Syrie ? « Ce n'est pas une question d'intérêt, mais de croyance et de conviction, répond M. Rahim. Il voulait être proche des innocents. » Proche des innocents, ce n'est pas ainsi que le décrirait notre source informée, qui affirme que le djihadiste défunt « a les mains tachées de sang depuis la bataille de Nahr Al-Bared à laquelle il a pris part ». A Bebnine, le père du combattant, Ali Saad Jawhar, longue silhouette émaciée, se dit « soulagé qu'Abdel Ghani, victime de la pauvreté, soit mort en martyr pour la cause syrienne ». ■

LAURE STEPHAN

Kurds in Iran's Regional Game

By HEVIDAR AHMED
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region -- The financial and political support it gave to some Iraqi Shia groups allowed Iran to have tremendous involvement in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.

Some analysts believe that Baghdad has become the second capital of Iran and that Iraqi leaders consult with Iran before making major decisions.

Others believe that Iran is using Iraq as a ground to confront its regional Sunni rivals such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

For the past several decades, Iran has been supporting Iraqi Islamist Shia groups, particularly when they fought Iraq's Baath regime.

Among the Shia parties close to Iran, with an active role in running Iraq, are the Hakim Family's Supreme Islamic Council, Prime Minister Nuri Maliki's Dawa Party and the Sadr Movement.

From the outset of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran opposed the presence of U.S. troops next door, and Iranian leaders argued that the cause of the insurgency and violence was America's occupation of Iraq.

Now, with U.S. troops out, Iran has proposed to hold its next round of nuclear talks in Baghdad to show the world, particularly America, that Iraq is stable without American soldiers on the ground.

Sayed Azim Hussein, Iranian Consul in Erbil, says, "We insist on holding the nuclear talks in Baghdad to tell the world and the region that Iraq is a strong country."

Hussein says it was the Iranian support of Iraq that made the Arab League conference in Baghdad at the end of March a success.

"Iran-Iraq officials had many discussions about the success of the conference," he says.

Iran has long understood Iraq's significance, with its geographical location, abundant natural resources and majority Shia population that gives Iran easy access to the country.

Muwafaq Rubai, a Shia politician and Iraq's former national security advisor, told Rudaw, "The Shia will never again let the Sunnis seize power in Iraq."



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani with Muhammad bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. Photo KRP.

"As long as we exist in Iraq, the majority must rule," he says.

Some statistics indicate that the Shia make up more than 60 percent of Iraq's population. The Iran-Iraq border runs 1,200 kilometers, the longest border Iraq has with any country.

Sanctions imposed on Iran by the U.S. and the EU due to its nuclear program have isolated the country, but Iraq could become Iran's open passage to the outside world.

Even Iraqi PM Maliki explicitly asked the U.S. to pardon Iraq for maintaining economic relations with Iran.

Recently, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a controversial visit to the disputed islands between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As a result, tensions escalated between the two countries and the UAE government strongly condemned the visit.

Several days later, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani visited UAE to participate in an economic forum. Some Iranian media outlets criticized Barzani's visit.

The Mehr news agency called the visit "suspicious." Fars News Agency wrote that "Barzani's visit to the UAE was to develop relations between the UAE and Kurdistan in order to participate in a conspiracy against Iran."

Regarding Barzani's visit to UAE, the Iranian Consul in Erbil said, "We advise all political parties to stay away from matters that create problems. The media wants to create problems in the region. However, the situation in the region is stable."

Syria is another issue that Iran is trying to keep a cap on through Iraq.

From the beginning of the revolution in Syria, Iranian officials have urged Iraqi Kurdish officials not to get involved in the situation by encouraging Syrian Kurds to protest against the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

The Iranian Consul says, "KRG's attitude towards Syria's situation is acceptable."

Iran has an embassy in Baghdad as well as five active consulate generals across Iraq.

A senior KRG official, who wanted to remain anonymous, believes that Iran is trying to weaken Iraq's Sunnis through Baghdad.

"Isolating Vice President Tariq Hashimi and Deputy Prime Minister Salih Mutlag was Iran's plan to weaken the Sunnis," the Kurdish official said. "The Kurds were supposed to be next in the plan. However, we found out about it and took the Sunnis' side by defending Hashimi, because isolating Sunni leaders in Baghdad could clear a path to target the Kurds."

Despite occasional political disputes, Iran and the Kurdistan Region enjoy strong economic and trade relations that take place through several border crossing points.

The KRG official said, "So far, Kurdish officials are dealing with the situation wisely. They were able to balance their relations with Turkey and Iran. They haven't let their relationship with one country affect the other. Balancing the situation is not easy but the Kurds have been successful so far." □

Splintered Syrian rebels show tenacity



New recruits taking part in a parade this week in the Syrian town of Qusayr as they joined the Free Syrian Army, an insurgent group of former soldiers and others.

BEIRUT

Eclectic mix of fighters and activists is united by drive to overthrow Assad

BY ANNE BARNARD
AND HWAIDA SAAD

More than a year into the uprising in Syria, protesters and fighters say, each of the opposition cells there still scrambles on its own for money and weapons, creating a risk that different factions will form conflicting loyalties to whoever ends up financing or arming them.

Those who have taken up arms, the fighters, acknowledge that they lack a workable chain of command to coordinate operations and channel arms supplies, even as they plead for international help.

Somehow, this decentralized patchwork of opposition fighters and activists has displayed the tenacity to withstand a withering crackdown that has left thousands dead and neighborhoods reduced to rubble. But it has still not managed to coalesce into a unified force, or identify a national leader, a clear ideology or specific goals, beyond bringing down President Bashar al-Assad.

That atomization, many fear, could turn the country into “divided emirates” rather than a viable new system, Abu Omar, an activist in a Damascus suburb, said in a recent interview, complaining that some groups hoard arms and the power they bring. “Deserving people are not being funded,” he said, “and all the money goes to people who do not deserve it.”

An eclectic mix of fighters and unarmed protesters opposes Mr. Assad. There are pious clerics and people who acknowledge that they rarely pray, experienced soldiers and barely trained

former conscripts, wealthy doctors and jobless youths. Some say they want Islamic law, while others insist that civil law alone should rule. Their goals are matters of intense curiosity as the United States and others debate whether and how to directly assist the opposition inside Syria. Ask their views, and the answers can be complex.

Abu Fahad, 30, says the protesters he organizes in Saqba, a Damascus suburb, are “religious, secular, and people who drink wine and smoke opium,” though mostly from the majority Sunni Muslim sect. They are not seeking economic gain, sectarian revenge or an Islamic state, he said, just the dignity of choosing their own president, “not some idiot who took power from his father as a gift.”

Exuding confidence as he sat openly

talking politics in his prosperous furniture shop, Abu Fahad, using a nickname to protect against retribution, said protesters were unlikely to choose leaders from Mr. Assad’s Alawite sect after 40 years of his family’s rule, but do not hate all Alawites. The proof he offered seemed ominous in its own way: Saqba residents, he said, have killed 30 neighbors suspected of being informants — all Sunnis.

As the exile opposition and a U.N.-sponsored peace plan fail to stem the violence, attention in Washington is increasingly focused on the opposition inside Syria, raising urgent questions about its motives, leaders and backers. But Syria remains something of a black box. Amid violence and government restrictions on journalists, fighters and protesters operate largely on their own and out of sight of independent observers.

On social media, activists portray themselves as democratic, inclusive and from the grass roots, while the government depicts its opponents as foreign-financed Sunni extremists. Yet the reality is more complicated, according to interviews with more than 20 activists and fighters, via phone, Skype and face-to-face interviews in Syria and neighboring countries, which offer a glimpse of the uprising’s anatomy.

The picture that emerges, partial and anecdotal, is of a highly decentralized, proudly local movement, distrustful of the expatriate opposition. Many activists said they wanted Sunni empowerment and equal rights for all. If there was unanimity, it was in the fierce conviction that future leaders should come from their own ranks — “exclusively from this popular movement,” Abu Omar said — not from exile groups, like the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and secular movements.

The fighters and activists knew they were talking to journalists and have an interest in appearing neither sectarian nor extremist. But many spoke candidly of the uprising’s flaws and challenges,

“Deserving people are not being funded, and all the money goes to people who do not deserve it.”

and one — a former interior decorator — volunteered that he had executed three men. The former decorator, Abu Moayed, also a nickname, said he left his job at a Beirut architecture firm last year, which his employer confirmed, and went home to northern Syria, near the city of Idlib. He said he joined army deserters in the Baba Amr Retribution Battalion, named for the rebellious Homs neighborhood devastated by shelling.

Abu Moayed said the battalion had captured about 35 government soldiers and militiamen and executed 10 after the authorities refused a prisoner exchange. He said he had shot three, two Sunnis and an Alawite, who were implicated in killing hundreds. “Don’t ask

the reason," he said. "It's not vengeance — it's our right." But he acknowledged that he had acted from anger after the government killed two of his uncles, Khalid and Jamil al-Khatib. His father is missing and his wife and children are in hiding, he said, after a defecting soldier showed him a picture of his 5-year-old with words scrawled on the back: "To be executed."

Abu Moayad said the battalion bought weapons from the government's own supply, stored in a dairy factory. Its owner, a government militiaman, sells Kalashnikovs and grenade launchers, eager for the money in case he needs to flee, he said. Recently, he said, he bought

weapons on the Iraqi border with \$35,000 from wealthy Syrians abroad — but does not take orders from anyone outside. "Usually, revolutions are planted by honorable people and harvested by cowards," he said. "In Syria, we will prove the opposite."

Without known leaders, the opposition has failed to win major help from Western countries afraid to give aid without any accountability. But paradoxically, activists say, that weakness has kept the movement alive and autonomous, hard to decapitate or co-opt. And protesters say local donations provide what little they need: amplifiers, banners, cellphones.

Sheik Ahmed, a Sunni imam in Damascus, said Muslim Brotherhood supporters tried to take credit for rallying thousands after Friday prayer. But he said that mosques were the only places where people could routinely assemble, and that crowds there included non-Muslims and Muslims, from secularists to religious extremists. "Syria is not Egypt or Tunisia," Mr. Ahmed said, evoking countries where Islamist groups dominate after broad-based revolts. "I call for a democratic, civil state, then every citizen gets his or her rights."

Le Monde

Samedi 12 mai 2012

A Damas, opposition et pouvoir se renvoient la responsabilité des attentats

Les attaques meurtrières compliquent la mission d'observation des Nations unies

Au lendemain de l'attentat qui a causé 55 morts et 372 blessés à Qazaz, dans la banlieue sud de Damas, la question de la responsabilité de l'attaque terroriste la plus meurtrière depuis le début de la révolution syrienne est posée. Au soulèvement pacifique, qui a débuté en mars 2011, s'est progressivement ajoutée la lutte armée menée par l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), et, depuis décembre 2011, une série d'attentats qui va crescendo.

Mais autant l'opposition syrienne revendique manifestations et embuscades de l'ASL, autant elle rejette toute responsabilité dans les explosions meurtrières qui ont secoué Damas et Alep, encore largement contrôlées par le régime du président Bachar Al-Assad. Comme après chaque attentat, le pouvoir et l'opposition se sont rejettés sa responsabilité, avançant tous deux « preuves » et « indices » impossibles à vérifier en l'absence d'observateurs indépendants.

L'attaque de jeudi, matin 10 mai est la plus meurtrière menée jusque-là. Elle visait probablement un centre de la branche Palestine des services de renseignements et paraît avoir été programmée pour causer le maximum de victimes à une heure de pointe. Elle a été planifiée avec un soin et des moyens qui dénotent un professionnalisme cer-

tain : une première explosion relativement faible destinée à attirer les personnes aux alentours, puis, une minute plus tard, une énorme charge qui a causé la plupart des victimes et des scènes de désolation sans précédent à Damas mais qui rappellent Bagdad et Beyrouth.

Ce mode opératoire et la quantité d'explosifs nécessaires — pas moins de 500 kg — orientent les soupçons vers deux acteurs de l'imbroglio syrien. L'Etat et ses services de sécurité, qui ont fait la preuve par le passé au Liban et en Irak de sa capacité à jouer de la terreur pour parvenir à ses fins politi-

ques. Et la mouvance islamiste apparentée à Al-Qaïda, dont la présence en Syrie est de plus en plus attestée depuis la confirmation de la mort d'Abdel Ghani Jawhar, un ancien chef du groupuscule djihadiste Fatah Al-Islam.

Les témoignages abondent également sur l'afflux de combattants sunnites extrémistes venus d'Irak pour défier un régime assimilé aux hérétiques chiïtes, en raison de la confession alaouïte de la famille Assad au pouvoir.

Il y a enfin une troisième hypothèse : la manipulation, par les services de renseignement syriens, de la mouvance djihadiste afin de discréditer le soulèvement démocratique et de terroriser les indécis au sein de la société syrienne.

Manipulation

Cet attentat, font remarquer les militants antirégime, intervient alors qu'ils tentaient de mobiliser à Damas, profitant de la protection très relative offerte par la présence de la mission d'observateurs de l'ONU sous l'égide du plan de paix mis au point par Kofi Annan, l'envoyé spécial de l'ONU et de la

Ligue arabe. Les Comités de coordination de la révolution ont d'ailleurs appelé à des manifestations massives vendredi.

Le chef des observateurs onusiens, le Norvégien Robert Mood, qui s'est aussitôt rendu sur les lieux de l'attentat, a été pris à partie par des manifestants prorégime, dont certains armés, dénonçant la guerre par procuration menée par le Qatar, l'Arabie saoudite et la Turquie contre le régime syrien. Il est dans une position particulièrement délicate d'autant que ses forces ont été visées par un attentat raté mercredi.

Alors qu'une trentaine de nouveaux observateurs sont attendus en Syrie pour observer un cessez-le-feu sans cesse bafoué, la mission Annan se trouve prise dans un jeu de plus en plus compliqué qui met aux prises un régime réduit à ses forces de sécurité, une opposition civile et sa branche armée qu'elle contrôle de moins en moins, et enfin une mouvance djihadiste éventuellement manipulée. Autant dire une gageure. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD



2 car bombs open deadly new front in Syria conflict

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Dozens killed in attack on intelligence buildings in busy part of Damascus

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR AND HWAIDA SAAD

At least 55 people were killed and about 370 injured by two powerful car bombs that exploded outside a key intelligence compound in Damascus early on Thursday, Syrian state television reported. The blasts peeled open a new, more treacherous front in the struggle for the country.

The attack was the largest and deadliest reported in Syria since an uprising started in March 2011 against President Bashar al-Assad.

A campaign of such bombings would vastly complicate United Nations efforts to bolster a wobbly, month-old cease-fire. The attack also came amid discussions among Islamists over whether the battle for Syria constituted a legitimate jihad.

The attack tore off the front of a nine-story intelligence headquarters and left a grisly scene on the crowded highway in front of it, with incinerated corpses and many burning vehicles emitting plumes of black smoke visible across the capital. Pictures of the bloody wreckage with severed body parts scattered about were shown repeatedly on state television and other official media.

The dead and wounded included both soldiers and civilians. At least 11 soldiers were dead, said a source at the military hospital in the Mezze neighborhood where the bulk of the casualties from the security services were taken. The Ministry of Health also said that 15 of the dead were unidentified.

"We heard a huge noise," said a Mezze resident whose sister lives near

the blast site on the southern side of the capital. The explosions occurred at 7:50 a.m., the peak time for government employees to arrive at work and buses to ferry children to school.

"The friends I spoke to there said everyone went crazy, with so many rushing to the scene that security had to fire guns into the air to disperse the crowd," said the man, reached via Skype, who spoke anonymously because of the tense situation in Syria.

Two suicide car bombs laden with more than 2,200 pounds, or about 1,000 kilograms, of explosives erupted at the busy Qazzaz intersection, destroying 21 nearby vehicles and damaging more than 100 others, according to a statement from the Interior Ministry read on state television.

The compound housed two major branches of the military intelligence service, one known officially as the Palestine Branch but nicknamed the "Sheraton" by prisoners because detainees from so many nations had been incarcerated and tortured there over the years, activists said.

The building, known as the largest security branch in the country, held hundreds of prisoners — the Palestine branch had often concentrated on the surveillance and arrest of religious radicals.

The other building was the Patrols Branch, responsible for maintaining and dispatching the intelligence vehicles that prowl the Damascus area.

Maj. Gen. Robert Mood, the Norwegian officer leading the United Nations observer mission, visited the scene soon

after the blast.

"This is yet another example of the suffering brought upon the people of Syria from acts of violence," General Mood said in remarks broadcast on state television.

"We, the world community, are here with the Syrian people, and I call on everyone within and outside Syria to help stop this violence," he said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, although the running commentary on the official media was that the bombing was the work of terrorists being financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The opposition blamed the government for the attack, claiming it was trying to frighten Syrians over the cost of opposing the government by proving its own claims that Al Qaeda was bent on



KHALED AL-HARIRI/REUTERS

A U.N. observer at the site of the car bomb explosions on Thursday in Damascus.

destabilizing the country.

"It is the regime that wants to create fear in the hearts of the people," said Bassam Jaara, an opposition journalist in London, speaking on Al Jazeera, the Arabic satellite network. "They keep saying it is either Bashar or destruction and today we are seeing that destruction."

But Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Al Qaeda leader, has called on his faithful to join the fight, and experts said radical Web sites have been alive with discussions about whether Syria constituted a legitimate jihad.

A shadowy radical group called Jabhat al-Nusra, or the Victorious Front, has emerged in the past few months, issuing statements claiming it was behind a string of smaller bombings outside government and security buildings.

American officials have said that Sunni extremists, including fighters linked to Al Qaeda's Iraq franchise, were behind a series of deadly bombings in Damascus and Aleppo. But evidence of their role was elusive.

The concern is that Syria might mirror neighboring Iraq, where the extended fight against the occupation brought jihadis to the fore.

In Syria, the uprising started as a peaceful protest movement but has grown more deadly as the government deployed its army to put down the rebellion, in which some 10,000 civilians have died along with hundreds of soldiers.

Syrie : «L'Occident risque de se laisser happer petit à petit»

Recueilli par Sylvain MOUILLARD

PETER HARLING, spécialiste de la Syrie à l'International Crisis Group, analyse le pourrissement de la situation dans le pays, où le cessez-le-feu du 12 avril est quotidiennement violé.

L'attaque d'hier sur un convoi d'observateurs de l'ONU et l'attentat meurtrier de ce jeudi marquent-ils une fuite en avant ? Autrement dit, rendent-ils définitivement caduc le plan Annan ?

La mission onusienne aurait déjà capoté s'il existait une alternative crédible. Mais le plan Annan est né, justement, de l'incapacité de la communauté internationale à se mettre d'accord sur une politique claire sur le dossier syrien. C'est, ironiquement, ce qui devrait lui donner une certaine résilience : en l'absence de plan B, autant s'en tenir au plan A, sans nécessairement y croire. Ainsi, ceux qui défendent la mission en apparence font peu de choses pour l'aider en pratique : les Russes n'exercent que de faibles pressions sur le régime, tandis que certains Etats arabes et Occidentaux accroissent graduellement leur soutien à l'opposition.

Quelles sont désormais les options sur la table pour la communauté internationale ? Le sommet Russie-Etats-Unis du 20 mai pourra-t-il servir à mettre davantage la pression sur Moscou ?

La Russie a de nombreuses raisons de préférer la survie du régime : Moscou gagne en politique intérieure à tenir tête à l'Occident. Le pouvoir russe voit d'un mauvais œil des changements dans le monde arabe, qui profitent aux islamistes, et s'inquiète des conséquences dans son environnement immédiat (notamment au Caucase et en Asie centrale). La Russie rejette aussi le principe des ingérences étrangères sur des questions internes, et veut défendre les quelques intérêts qui lui restent en Syrie. De plus, Moscou est tombé sur une vraie mine d'or en faisant obstacle sur le dossier syrien, créant une situation qui lui donne un rôle central, une visibilité extraordinaire et une «influence» qui va

au-delà de ses moyens. La Russie voudra sans doute exploiter ce filon aussi longtemps que possible, mais n'a pas pour autant une véritable «alliance» avec ce régime, qu'elle peut lâcher subitement.

Les puissances occidentales sont-elles vraiment favorables à un recours à la force, et comment cela se mettrait-il en place ?

Une intervention militaire en Syrie aurait sans doute déjà eu lieu si les conséquences n'étaient pas à craindre. Mais beaucoup de questions se posent. Comment inscrire une intervention dans une légitimité internationale ? Quels sont les risques de guerre civile se prolongeant malgré la chute du régime ? Comment démolir un système de défense anti-aérien, assez robuste et disséminé dans des zones habitées, sans causer de nombreuses victimes ? Les alliés du régime, à savoir l'Iran et le Hezbollah, se mettront-ils de la partie ? Comment détruire ou sécuriser les importants stocks de missiles et d'armes non conventionnelles ? En raison de tout ceci, le régime tend à conclure que la décision de «faire quelque chose» est trop difficile à prendre pour les Occidentaux. Ce qu'il comprend mal, c'est que la décision de «ne rien faire» est au moins aussi difficile. Au-delà des dénonciations politiques et des sanctions économiques, il est probable que l'Occident se laisse petit à petit happer par ce conflit, en augmentant graduellement son soutien à l'opposition jusqu'au moment où une intervention apparaîtra inévitable.

Quels sont encore les atouts de Bachar al-Assad ?

Le régime se comporte comme s'il misait exclusivement sur une victoire par abandon de ses adversaires. Sur le plan militaire et sécuritaire, il met en œuvre une logique de punition collective qui ne fait qu'aggraver la situation. Sur le volet politique, il a défini un programme de réformes minimal et en fait clairement le moins possible. En matière diplomatique, il multiplie les provocations au prix d'un isolement sans précédent dans son histoire. Et il néglige la question économique. L'idée, c'est que ce régime peut conduire le pays et la région à la catastrophe et qu'il vaut mieux l'accepter



Un observateur de l'ONU le 10 mai à Damas (Photo Khaled al Hariri. Reuters)

pour limiter la casse. Mais c'est demander beaucoup de bonne volonté à son opposition et à ses ennemis.

Quelles sont les lignes de fracture au sein de la société syrienne ? Assiste-t-on à une radicalisation de l'opposition ? Y a-t-il une «majorité silencieuse» en Syrie ?

La «majorité silencieuse» ne l'est que dans des zones assez réduites, qui n'ont pas pour l'instant subi de plein fouet le conflit – notamment les quartiers les plus centraux de Damas et d'Alep, la ville druze de Sweida, dans le Sud, ou certaines villes de la côte méditerranéenne. Dans ces poches, un discours prédominant consiste à condamner le régime tout en se méfiant de l'opposition, en rejetant toute ingérence étrangère, en appelant à calmer le jeu pour éviter l'extension des violences. Ailleurs, la société tend à être très polarisée et mobilisée. Les lignes de clivages ne sont pas toujours nettes. Il existe de nombreux activistes issus des minorités au sein des réseaux de la société civile qui soutiennent les populations réprimées, par exemple. A l'inverse, le régime a recruté diverses catégories de sunnites dans le rang de ses forces supplétives. Les Kurdes sont de plus en plus divisés entre eux, etc. Mais le plus dur des violences, pour l'instant, oppose un appareil de sécurité dominé par les Alaouites à une opposition principalement sunnite, ce qui donne au conflit une tonalité confessionnelle et conduit à des formes de radicalisation, d'un côté comme de l'autre. □



Turquie: Cinq rebelles kurdes tués lors de combats avec les forces de sécurité

ANKARA, 08 mai 2012 (AFP)

CINQ REBELLES kurdes ont été tués mardi lors de combats avec les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Deux des cinq rebelles abattus dans une zone rurale de Tatvan (province de Bitlis) sont des femmes

Cela porte à sept le nombre de rebelles tués depuis lundi dans le sud-est de l'Anatolie, théâtre de la rébellion du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée, depuis son déclenchement, en 1984, par le PKK dans le sud-est du pays. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux autres pays. ○



12 mai 2012

Le Kurdistan irakien dément servir de base à des agents israéliens

OLJ/Agences

Le gouvernement de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien s'est insurgé samedi contre des allégations de responsables iraniens selon lesquelles son territoire servirait de base à des agents israéliens opérant en Iran.

"Ce n'est pas la première fois que des responsables iraniens disent cela sans présenter

de preuves ni de motifs", indiquent les autorités kurdes dans un communiqué.

"Le gouvernement ne peut plus rester silencieux face à ces accusations, donc nous confirmons qu'il n'y a pas de centre ni de bureaux israéliens au Kurdistan, et nous démentons cette accusation", poursuit le texte.

Le consul iranien à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien,



Azim Hosseini, le consul iranien à Erbil

Azim Hosseini, avait affirmé la semaine dernière au magazine kurde Safil que des espions israéliens utilisaient la région comme base pour des opérations dans l'Iran voisin.

Selon lui, les renseigne-

ments iraniens disposent de preuves que "les Israéliens sont présents au Kurdistan et qu'ils travaillent contre l'Iran".

"C'est faux", insiste le communiqué des autorités kurdes irakiennes. "Il s'agit d'une tentative pour entraîner le Kurdistan dans le conflit entre Israël et l'Iran, et nous ne le voulons pas".

L'Irak n'entretient pas de réactions diplomatiques avec Israël et a été son adversaire déclaré sous la présidence de Saddam Hussein. Il n'en va pas de même pour le Kurdistan irakien, dont plusieurs dirigeants se sont rendus en Israël au cours des dernières décennies. ■



18 MAI 2012

La Turquie accuse les Syriens de soutenir la rébellion kurde

RFI Avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

ALORS QUE les deux voisins et anciens amis se déchirent depuis le début du soulèvement contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad, il y a 14 mois, jeudi 17 mai, le ministre turc de l'Intérieur affirmait détenir les preuves de l'instrumentalisation de la rébellion kurde de Turquie par Damas. Au même moment avaient lieu des affrontements armés meurtriers entre rebelles kurdes et armée turque, là où l'armée de Bachar el-Assad tente de verrouiller sa frontière avec la Turquie.

Depuis le début de la révolte populaire et le refroidissement des relations entre Damas et Ankara, la grande crainte des Turcs est de voir le régime syrien jouer à nouveau la carte de la sédition kurde contre la Turquie, ancien allié désormais trop critique. « A nouveau » car la Syrie a déjà abrité durant une vingtaine d'années, jusqu'en 1999, le chef et la direction du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan).

La déstabilisation de la Syrie ces derniers mois et la tension croissante entre les deux pays, la Turquie appelant Bachar el-Assad à quitter le pouvoir, a fait resurgir ce spectre, que jusque-là rien ne permettait d'étayer. Mais pour le ministre turc de l'Intérieur Idris Naim Shahin, les renseignements recueillis sur place permettent d'affirmer que Damas soutient bien la rébellion kurde du PKK. Selon lui, la preuve en serait que des villages frontaliers échappant au contrôle des forces loyalistes seraient tenus par des éléments de cette rébellion kurde.

Le ministre ne dit pas si c'est cela qui explique l'attaque du PKK jeudi 17 mai qui a fait trois morts dans les rangs de l'armée turque, dans cette région frontalière où les réfugiés syriens affluent depuis un an et où la rébellion est très peu active habituellement. Mais cette accusation ne va certainement pas aider à enterrer la hache de guerre entre Ankara et Damas. □



L'Irak sans les Américains

Nouvelle ère.

La vie après le départ des GI, entre violence, business et... influence iranienne. Reportage.

DE NOTRE ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL MARC NEXON

Il est fier de son butin. Sanglé dans son treillis, le colonel Namer Sultan Halan veut montrer le matériel saisi lors de la capture de 25 membres d'Al-Qaeda en mars au sud de Bagdad. D'abord un drapeau noir frappé d'une inscription en arabe: «Allah est notre seul Dieu.» Puis un micro et son trépied recouvert de ruban adhésif noir destinés aux vidéos de propagande.



Il y a aussi une bombe artisanale remplie de poudre et de balles. Et surtout cinq calibres munis de silencieux. Le militaire prend l'un d'entre eux. Dévisse le tube d'acier à l'extrémité du canon. «Avec ça, ils peuvent tuer à bout portant», dit-il. Il désigne une fissure au bout du cylindre. «Vous voyez, ils le fabriquent eux-mêmes et doivent le réparer à chaque usage.»

Mais ce n'est pas tout. Le colonel tient à exposer ses prisonniers. On lui amène Mohammed, 30 ans, menotté et les yeux bandés. L'homme a la tête basse et la démarche raide. Il parle d'une voix chevrotante. «Je fais partie de la brigade Ansar al-Islam depuis 2006 et ma mission consistait à transmettre par Internet le contenu de nos actions au quartier général à Mossoul.» A-t-il déjà tué? «Non, je ne sais pas me servir d'une arme.» «Mais tes amis, eux, savent!» s'esclaffe l'officier.

A quelques mètres du bureau du colonel, voici maintenant les

La torture? «On n'a pas l'habitude de leur poser des questions poliment.»



Butin. Des membres d'Al-Qaeda soupçonnés d'avoir fait sauter un oléoduc sont exposés devant leurs munitions, à Bassora, le 23 décembre 2011.

deux pièces réservées aux interrogatoires. Trois hommes barbus, également les yeux bandés, en ressortent, le pas hésitant. Cinq autres attendent leur tour dans une cellule. Ils se tiennent allongés sur le flanc, un bras sur le visage. A leurs pieds, une assiette de riz. «*Continuez à dormir! Ne vous regardez pas!*» ordonne un gardien. Le colonel triomphe. «*Ils nous ont donné soixante noms... On prépare de nouvelles arrestations.*» Et la torture? «*On n'a pas l'habitude de leur poser poliment des questions*», confie l'un de ses collaborateurs.

Perruques punk. Quatre mois après le départ des troupes américaines, l'Irak s'enfoncé dans la violence. Avec son lot d'exécutions sommaires et d'attentats à la bombe. Le bilan? 1 200 morts depuis le début de l'année. Un chiffre en augmentation depuis 2010. Comme si neuf ans de guerre et près de 1 000 milliards de dollars dépensés par Washington n'avaient servi à rien.

Certes, statistiquement, les attentats diminuent. Mais, quand les insurgés décident de frapper, l'assaut est foudroyant. Comme le 20 avril, lorsque Al-Qaeda lance quarante attaques à travers le pays. «*On constate un regain d'activité*», a déploré David Petraeus, le directeur de la CIA. «*Ils surgissent en quelques minutes, raconte un policier posté à un carrefour de la capitale. L'un d'entre eux fait semblant de nettoyer sa voiture et brusquement pointe son pistolet.*»

Pourtant, Bagdad et ses 7 millions d'habitants s'acharnent à renouer avec une vie ordinaire. Le vendredi, le parc d'attractions Zawra est bondé. «*Là-haut, on peut embrasser discrètement sa fiancée tout en étant près d'Allah*», plaisante Bachiren contemplant la grande roue illuminée. Les familles défilent devant la cage du lion et celle des chimpanzés en dégustant des barbes à papa. Les gamins s'achètent des perruques punk et des femmes voilées de noir font même des tours de karting. Le soir, dans le quartier Karada, les rues ne désertent pas.

Au milieu des odeurs de kebab, les vendeurs alignent les jeans taille basse, les montres

clinquantes et les chaussures de sport turques. La veille, une bombe a pourtant explosé dans un bus, tuant deux personnes.

Bagdad renaît. Mais dans la douleur. Car la ville est un interminable bourdonnement: celui des groupes électrogènes qui remédient à la pénurie d'électricité (six à huit heures par jour). Résultat: une gigantesque toile d'araignée de câbles surplombe les rues. Il y a aussi le chômage, qui frappe un tiers des jeunes de moins de 30 ans. «*Il faut verser un pot-de-vin de 2 000 dollars pour travailler dans un ministère*, explique Saïf, 25 ans, diplômé en travaux publics. *Alors j'apprends l'anglais avec les séries télévisées et je quitte le pays.*»

Autre cauchemar: les barrages policiers. Innombrables et peu efficaces. «*Vous transportez des armes? Non*», répond le conducteur, souvent enclin à glisser une barre chocolatée pour amadouer le policier. Les forces de sécurité sont pourtant convaincues de pouvoir

coincer les insurgés. Leur sésame? Un détecteur d'explosifs de la taille d'un pistolet doté d'une tige métallique orientée vers tout véhicule suspect. Une arnaque, en fait. Son fabricant britannique est poursuivi par la justice. Et l'Irakien chargé du projet a été emprisonné. Il n'empêche. Les autorités laissent faire. «*C'est ridicule, mais nos policiers se sentent rassurés avec ces appareils*», prétend Saad al-Muttalibi, conseiller gouvernemental. Pastous... «*Ils réagissent surtout aux parfums et aux plombages dentaires!*» grogne un homme en uniforme, un paquet de chips dans les mains.

Mais il y a plus grave. Le pays vit désormais sous la menace d'un éclatement. Au cœur du malaise: les tensions croissantes entre les chiïtes (60% de la population), les Arabes sunnites (20%) et les Kurdes (20%). «*On est au bord d'une guerre civile*», met en garde le politologue Saad Salloum. Un ferment idéal pour Al-Qaeda. Car, depuis le renversement de Saddam Hussein



«**Wanted**». Le chef de tribu Moustafa Kamal Hamad, traité de «*collabo*» parce qu'il a aidé les GI à traquer Al-Qaeda.

en 2003 et l'éviction des sunnites des postes clés, la majorité chiïte, longtemps opprimée, détient le pouvoir. Et n'entend pas le lâcher. Certes, le gouvernement repose sur une coalition. Mais de façade.

En réalité, les chiïtes mènent la danse sous la houlette du Premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, un conservateur au visage fermé. Et connu en France pour avoir annulé en 2009 un déjeuner à l'Élysée parce qu'on y servait du vin. L'homme, jadis réfugié en Iran et en Syrie, est inflexible.

«**Il se prend pour Dieu.**» Sa dernière obsession? Traduire en justice le vice-président Tareq al-Hachemi, un sunnite accusé d'avoir fomenté des attentats. Une initiative dévastatrice. Car, dans les fiefs sunnites, la colère monte. Comme à Ramadi, situé en plein désert, à trois heures de route de Bagdad. «*Nous voulons notre autonomie*», prévient Muzhir al-Mulla, membre du conseil provincial d'Anbar. «*Nous avons des ressources et nous sommes capables de gérer la sécurité*», poursuit-il avant de vitupérer contre Maliki: «*Pire que Mussolini! Pire que Hitler!*» «*Sous Saddam Hussein, il existait au moins une loi et des institutions*», renchérit Ziad Shehan, le chef d'une milice privée, attablé devant trois poulets grillés.

Le Premier ministre, il est vrai, compte une foule d'ennemis. Y compris dans son entourage. Assis dans son bureau sous une photo qui le montre priant au côté de Maliki, le juge Mounir Haddad fait partie des déçus. «*J'étais son ami, dit le magistrat, devenu célèbre pour avoir signé l'ordre d'exécution de Saddam Hussein, mais il n'écoute plus personne. Il se prend pour Dieu.*»

Et les premiers à en faire les frais sont les Américains, auxquels Maliki a refusé la présence d'une base militaire. Une humiliation... Retranchés dans le périmètre de leur ambassade, les 14 000 expatriés américains broient du noir. «*Ils donnent des conseils, mais personne ne les suit*», souligne Ahmed Abdul Hussein, journaliste réputé du quotidien *AlMada*. D'autant que

Le pétrole de la discorde

La région autonome du Kurdistan et le gouvernement de Bagdad ne cessent de s'écharper sur la répartition des revenus pétroliers. La première réclame le paiement de 1,5 milliard de dettes. Le second veut revoir à la baisse la part du budget fédéral (17%) allouée au Kurdistan. «*L'Irak se prépare à un retour à la dictature*», tempête le dirigeant kurde Massoud Barzani. Lequel brandit à nouveau la menace d'une déclaration d'indépendance.



■■■ L'intendance patine. «*J'en'arrive plus à faire venir des cornflakes!*» peste l'ambassadeur. «*On a le sentiment qu'ils tirent un trait sur le pays*», s'étonne un diplomate occidental.

Un vide rapidement comblé par une autre puissance: l'Iran. Plus une décision ne se prend sans l'aval du grand voisin chiite. «*L'ancien président du Parlement irakien a dû sauter dans un avion pour Téhéran avant d'être adoubé*», raconte Ahmed Abdul Hussein. L'Iran tente même d'imposer l'un de ses dignitaires à la tête de la plus haute autorité religieuse irakienne. Son nom? Mahmoud Hachemi Shahroudi, 63 ans, né de parents iraniens mais originaire de Najaf. L'homme a contrôlé le système judiciaire à Téhéran pendant dix ans. Et il fait désormais campagne pour remplacer Ali al-Sistani, le grand ayatollah en Irak, lui aussi d'origine persane.

Il suffit de sillonner la capitale pour mesurer l'influence iranienne. Les yaourts, les climatiseurs, les voitures bas de gamme et même les dattes proviennent du pays des

mollahs. Surtout, le portrait de Moqtada al-Sadr, un chef religieux et militaire protégé de Téhéran, orne désormais les bus et les bâtiments officiels. Dans le quartier de Sadr City (ex-Saddam City...), où vivent 2,5 millions de chiïtes, les fidèles s'agenouillent devant la photo de leur leader en uniforme lors de la prière du vendredi. Et sa milice veille. «*S'il me le demande, je reprends les armes*», raconte Fadhil, 28 ans, son tapis de prière à la main, qui s'enorgueillit d'avoir jadis fait sauter trois blindés américains.

Les sunnites? «*On les accueille!*» lance un vendeur de posters situé dans un pâté de maisons encore défigurées par les impacts de balles. «*Ne le croyez pas, murmure le jeune Amir en pressant la pas, j'ai vu les deux derniers de mon quartier être abattus d'une balle dans la tête.*»

La vague chiïte déferle sur Bagdad. Au grand désespoir des sunnites, contraints de se claquemurer dans leur quartier. Quand ils le peuvent... Car, parmi eux, un groupe vit dans la terreur: les anciens des

Harcelés. Un soldat kurde devant les dégâts d'un attentat à la bombe, à Kirkouk, le 19 avril. C'est le sixième de la journée dans le Nord irakien.

La corruption dépouille l'Irak

«*Je suis sûr qu'ils se sont mis 700 millions de dollars dans la poche!*» Le député sunnite Talal al-Zobair ne décolère pas. En cause: le sommet de la Ligue arabe organisé à Bagdad en avril. Un événement où la corruption a tenu le premier rôle. «*La rénovation des chambres a officiellement coûté 50 millions de dollars, raconte le manager d'un hôtel. Avec cette somme, j'aurais pu construire un autre établissement!*» Le magistrat Mounir Haddad enfonce le clou: «*Avant, il n'y avait qu'un voleur au pouvoir: Saddam Hussein. Aujourd'hui, ils sont au moins 500!*»

«*Conseils du réveil*», enrôlés en 2007 par les Américains pour traquer Al-Qaeda. Soit près de 100 000 hommes encore puissamment armés. Dans le nouvel Irak, on les traite de «*collabos*». Les autorités rechignent même à les intégrer dans l'armée. Par peur d'un complot. Alors, les haines s'aiguisent. «*On nous déteste parce que nous pouvons mobiliser en moins d'une heure des milliers de partisans*», raconte Mustafa Kamal Hamad, un chef de tribu, installé dans un canapé sur le gazon de sa villa ultraprotégée au sud de Bagdad. «*C'est pourtant nous qui détenons les meilleures informations sur les terroristes*», dit-il en replaçant son revolver sur sa bedaine.

Traqués. Pas faux. Diaa Ubaib Azawi, 23 ans, fait partie de cette armée de l'ombre. Il a pourchassé durant six ans les membres d'Al-Qaeda aux côtés des soldats américains en les informant sur leurs caches. Aujourd'hui, au fond de sa ruelle, Diaa mène la vie d'une bête traquée. Il a échappé à cinq tentatives d'assassinat, la dernière remonte à six mois. Un soir, deux hommes ont tenté de l'étrangler à l'aide d'un câble avant de fuir face à sa résistance. «*On a posé un oiseau décapité devant ma porte et j'ai reçu un courrier avec trois balles... On me demandait de choisir celle avec laquelle je voulais mourir.*» Diaa connaît tous les endroits suspects. «*Il y a encore une cinquantaine de militants d'Al-Qaeda dans ce faubourg*, dit-il, au volant de sa voiture. *Regardez cette maison: elle a explosé alors qu'ils confectionnaient une bombe!*» Il dépasse des enfants à vélo et une décharge parfois encombrée de cadavres. «*Il y a trois mois, ils ont tué sur ce trottoir l'imam qui refusait leur réunion dans sa mosquée.*» Diaa aime aussi montrer les lettres de félicitations du haut commandement américain. Il a récemment vendu ses pistolets et n'a conservé qu'un kalachnikov. Il attend son visa pour les Etats-Unis et la possibilité de retrouver Mary, une recrue américaine affectée un temps à Bagdad. «*Elle est belle, n'est-ce pas? dit-il en montrant une photo sur son portable. Ici, je n'ai plus d'avenir...*» ■

« J'ai vu les deux derniers sunnites du quartier être abattus d'une balle dans la tête. »

Iran backs own man to succeed Iraqi Shiite leader

NAJAF, IRAQ

Tehran seeks to cement sway over neighbor as pro-democracy cleric ages

BY TIM ARANGO

As the top spiritual leader in the Shiite Muslim world, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has instructed his followers on what to eat and how to wash, how to marry and how to bury their dead. He has championed Iraqi democracy, insisting on direct elections from the earliest days of the occupation and warned against Iranian-style clerical rule.

Frail at 81, he still greets visitors each morning at his home on a sooty and narrow side street here, steps from the glimmering gold dome of the Imam Ali Shrine. But the jockeying to succeed him has quietly begun, and Tehran is positioning its own candidate for the post, a hard-line cleric who would give Iran a direct line of influence over the Iraqi people, heightening fears that Iran's long-term goal is to transplant its Islamic revolution to Iraq.

The succession — a lengthy and opaque process whose outcome is by no means assured — could shape the interplay of Islam and democracy not only in Iraq, where Shiites are the majority, but across the Shiite Muslim world, which numbers some 200 million people and stretches from India to Lebanon to Iran and beyond. The grand ayatollah's prescriptions for daily living are imbued with the force of law among the majority of the world's Shiites who follow him, his religious teachings sacrosanct and his political sway powerful.

For Iraq, the contest adds another element of uncertainty in a fledgling democracy whose politics are in upheaval as its three main factions — the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds — contend for power, and analysts worry it could tilt back toward authoritarianism.

"Iraq does not need this now," said Hussein Mohammad al-Eloum, a cleric from a prominent religious and political family whose other sons are the ambassador to Kuwait and the former oil minister. "Sistani, may God protect him."

Iran's candidate, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, an Iraqi-born cleric in his mid-60s, led the judiciary for a decade in Iran and remains a top official



OFFICE OF THE IRANIAN SUPREME LEADER, VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, with Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during a religious ceremony in Tehran.

in the government there. With Iranian financing, his representatives have for months been building a patronage network across Iraq, underwriting scholarships for students at the many seminaries here and distributing literature.

"He's there to prepare himself for after Sistani," said Mehdi Khalaji, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who spent 14 years studying at seminaries in Qom, Iran's holy city.

The move has raised fears that Iran is trying to extend its already extensive influence in the political and economic life of Iraq. A recent visit by Iraq's prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, to Tehran, where he met with Ayatollah Shahroudi, raised tensions further about Iran's religious influence in Iraq.

Reidar Visser, a historian, wrote in his Iraqi politics blog that "by visiting Shahroudi yesterday, Maliki did nothing to kill the rumors about some kind of Iranian design on the holiest center of Iraqi Shiism."

The process of choosing the next supreme spiritual leader is a tortuous and somewhat spontaneous one that relies on the will of the people, expressed in whom they choose to pay their religious taxes to — devout Shiites are expected to pay one-fifth of their discretionary income to their ayatollah — and the validation of a spiritual leader's religious scholarship by his clerical peers.

"The Iranian government cannot control who pious Shias will look to," said Vali Nasr, an academic and author of the book "The Shia Revival." "It's a very democratic process."

Ultimately, it could take several years before a clear successor rises.

"It will take Najaf two to three years before a strong marja emerges," said Sami al-Askari, a Shiite politician here who lived in exile in Iran and knows Ayatollah Shahroudi from his time there. "It is not like the Vatican. In the marjaiya it is a slow and complicated

process."

The tradition of the marjaiya in Najaf and its religious academy, called the Hawza, is to keep a measured distance from politics, to live a pious and ascetic life and intervene only occasionally in political affairs.

Ayatollah Sistani, who himself is Iranian but was able to rise in Najaf partly because he has not been entwined with Iranian politics, intervened at key moments during the war to urge followers to support elections and exercise restraint during the years of sectarian carnage.

But for more than a year he has refused to even meet with politicians — he has barely left his house for the last several years — and has been subjected to constant rumors about his health.

Yet on a recent morning, as he does every day of the year except on two days of rest, one for Ashura, the Shiite commemoration of the martyrdom of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson, the other for Ramadan, he greeted visitors, who had lined up outside his spare and unassuming house, surrounded by open-air storefronts selling religious knickknacks and gaudy T-shirts and guarded by security men in knock-off Lacoste polo shirts.

He agreed to meet, although not be interviewed by, a reporter for The New York Times. Seated in the corner of a stark room covered in Persian rugs, he was helped to his feet by aides to shake hands. While seemingly in good health but clearly declining, he exchanged pleasantries and showed no outward signs of serious illness.

Clerics here give high marks to the quality of Ayatollah Shahroudi's scholarship, partially because he studied under and had the validation of Ayatollah Bakir al-Sadr, who was assassinated in the 1980 by Saddam Hussein's henchmen and who, if alive today, would be the father-in-law of Moktada al-Sadr, the anti-American cleric.

Still, the clerics would prefer to see

another Najaf-based leader — there are three other senior clerics here who would be contenders — rise to the level of top ayatollah because they feel these men would maintain Najaf's quietist tradition.

"Shahroudi had an official job in Iran, which was the head of the judiciary," said Mr. Eloum. "And the important point for the Hawza in Najaf is independence, full independence from any kind of government, even if it's the Iraqi government."

Mohammed al-Mana Khani, another senior cleric, said: "The way Shahroudi thinks has changed. If he had kept his views learned from Sadr, and stayed in Najaf, it would have been better. But 30 years in Iran has changed him."

Ayatollah Shahroudi's office here has a cream-colored facade that looks freshly painted and on a recent evening was empty but for two security guards. A lone assault rifle was leaned against the wall in the outer foyer, and two portraits of the cleric hung on the walls. The next morning 34 boxes that were

stamped with the names of cigarette brands but contained books to be distributed to religious students were stacked high.

A slim biography that is being passed out here contains the details of a life of activism, exile and rise to political power, with deep sympathies toward militant Islam, that seem sharply at odds with the traditions of Najaf.

In Najaf, Ayatollah Shahroudi was a student of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran's Islamic revolution whom he describes in the biography as "the biggest blessing on the believers in this age." When Ayatollah Shahroudi taught in Qom, one of his students was Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, the Shiite militant movement in Lebanon.

A photograph at the end of the book shows Ayatollah Shahroudi posing with a famous Iranian militant, Mostafa Chamran, who organized guerilla fighters in Lebanon before he died in 1981. He emphasizes his suffering under Mr. Hussein's regime — three brothers went

missing, their exact fates still unknown.

He is also said to be quite wealthy, a stark contrast to the piety and simple life believers expect of their leaders and which is embodied by Ayatollah Sistani.

"Shahroudi is one of the wealthiest men in Iran," said Mr. Khalaji, the former student in Qom. "He imports goods, has businesses and owns many factories. His personal life is luxurious." The cleric made a fortune, he said, by importing auto parts and equipment for oil exploration from Eastern Europe.

Ayatollah Shahroudi has not visited Najaf since his representatives began establishing their organization here. "He wants to come and visit," said Ibrahim al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi who runs his office here.

Outwardly espousing ambitions to succeed Ayatollah Sistani would be a breach of etiquette.

"For the future, you can't tell," Mr. Baghdadi said. "This is up to God."

Duraid Adnan contributed reporting.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune MAY 14, 2012

BEIRUT

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Syrian forces killed at least five people and torched a number of homes in a raid on a farming village Sunday that activists said showed worsening relations between Syria's myriad religious groups.

The continuing violence further undermines a United Nations-backed peace plan designed to bring an end to the country's 14-month-old crisis. A cease-fire that was scheduled to begin April 12 has had only a limited effect, throwing into doubt the rest of the plan, which calls for talks between the government of President Bashar al-Assad and those seeking to end his rule.

The deaths Sunday occurred during a raid by government forces on al-Tamana, an impoverished village about 55 kilometers, or 35 miles, northwest of the city of Hama. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition group based in Britain that has a network of informants in Syria, said that five people were killed in the raid and that government troops were setting fire to homes.

Speaking via Skype from Hama, an activist, Mousab Alhamadee, said one local rebel leader was killed alongside five civilians.

"He was a hero in the Free Syrian Army who was trying to defend the civilians," he said, referring to the umbrella group of local anti-government militias.

An amateur video posted online Sunday showed men carrying the body of a woman from a house. A second video showed men in a mosque praying over five coffins, three of them open with flowers piled on bodies in white cloth.

The area, a plain of farmland along the Orontes River, is dotted with villages of Christians, Sunni Muslims and

Syrian forces kill at least 5 in raid



HUSSEIN MALLA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sunni gunmen firing at the Alawite backers of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, in the northern port city of Tripoli, Lebanon, on Sunday as violence spilled over the border.

Alawites, the offshoot sect of Shiite Islam to which Mr. Assad belongs.

Mr. Alhamadee, who is from a village near al-Tamana, said that sectarian tensions were low before the uprising but had deteriorated as Sunni villages like al-Tamana joined the anti-Assad uprising.

He said that most of the village's residents had fled and that government forces were setting fire to houses and looting shops. He and the Observatory also reported shelling in a nearby village, Hayaleen.

"The regime is trying to punish these villages and to put an end to this revolution as quickly as it can," he said.

Syria's uprising started in March 2011 with protests calling for political reform. The government brutally cracked down on dissent, and many in the opposition

have since taken up arms to defend themselves and attack government troops. Some soldiers have also switched sides and joined forces with the rebels.

World powers have supported the peace plan, but the bloodshed has not stopped. More than 100 U.N. observers have been deployed in Syria to oversee the truce between the government and armed rebels.

The daily death toll in Syria has declined as the number of observers has risen, but few experts expect the U.N. plan to succeed in its entirety.

Also Sunday, two Turkish journalists who had been detained in Syria for two months arrived in Istanbul on a plane from Iran after that country helped negotiate their release by the Syrian authorities.

Syrian Kurds fleeing to Iraqi safe haven

BY SAMER MUSCATI

It was a January evening when his Syrian army unit raided a house near the city of Zabadani, not far from Damascus, the former sergeant recalled. A 70-year-old man wearing a hospital gown was brought to the house, and the soldiers, including a colonel, interrogated him. When he wasn't able to respond to their satisfaction, one of the guards beat him ferociously in the face with a helmet. "I heard the old man muttering in a muffled sound as he fell to the ground," the former sergeant told me. "About 15 minutes after they first brought the man in, I went inside and saw his lifeless body. There was blood coming out of his nose and ears. I'm positive he was dead and they just disposed of his body."

With violence raging in Syria, thousands of people are fleeing to neighboring countries to escape the bloodshed. Although the flow of refugees to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey has been covered extensively, the Syrians who have fled to Iraq, most of them Kurds, have received less attention. As of April 14, when most of these photos were taken, more than 80 Syrian Kurds a day were crossing into Dohuk province, in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. Most were coming from Syria's poorer Kurdish northeastern provinces of Qamishli and Hasakeh. About 1,300 Syrian Kurdish men, women and children were living in tents in Domiz, the main refugee camp for new arrivals, near the city of Dokuk.

After years of discrimination, neglect, and repression, the Syrian government made some concessions to the Kurdish community last year, including granting citizenship to an estimated 200,000 stateless Kurds. It was an effort to keep the Kurds, about 10 per cent of Syria's population, from joining the anti-Assad protest movement.

Protests And Exile

Since the start of the uprisings last year, the violence and repression in Kurdish areas have been less bloody than other parts of Syria. But many Syrian Kurds — mainly young men — who fled to Iraq told Human Rights Watch that they felt they were in danger back home. Some feared arrest by security forces because



A Kurdish mother with her two daughters at the Domiz refugee camp. Although the immediate family feels safe at the camp, the mother said she is worried about the relatives they left behind in Syria. "We sold so many of our things to get here," the mother said. "All that we have left is our children." © 2012 Samer Muscati/Human Rights Watch

of their political activism or participation in anti-government protests. Others left to avoid being conscripted into the Syrian army, or they deserted, as the sergeant did, after witnessing abuses and the targeting of civilians. Some who left the army joined the rebel Free Syria Army but left soon after because, as Kurds, they said, they were discriminated against or not trusted.

Human Rights Watch researchers who traveled to northern Iraq in April interviewed more than three dozen Syrian Kurdish refugees, who described the dire events they had witnessed at home.

A 17-year-old at another refugee camp, Moqabli, showed us his wounds, where security forces shot him during a peaceful protest in Qamishli on March 12 as he was helping an injured soldier who had been trying to defect. "As soon as I could limp, I made my way to the border," he said. "I was so afraid that the army would be looking for me." Another army defector said that in Rastan, in Homs governorate, his battalion arrested 30 men during house raids one night in June in retaliation for the killing of a 19-year-old soldier, Omar Hamza. After the soldier's death, the defector said, he heard the brigadier general of the 41st regiment say, "We should not let the blood of Omar flow freely. There must be retribution." The 30 men were interrogated and later that night taken out to a main street, handcuffed and blindfolded. After making the men kneel to the ground, the brigadier general and two other soldiers executed

them with machine guns. "I still have flashbacks from that episode," the defector said. "I know it happened but I still don't believe what I saw."

A 23-year-old Kurdish political activist who lived in Damascus said he was arrested last July and severely beaten because he was well-known to the authorities as a regular at protests. He was released only after he signed a guarantee that he would refrain from future protests. "In prison, they kicked me so badly I felt like they were playing soccer with my body," he said. "They also slapped and beat me, they treated me no better than a dog."

Crossing The Border

To escape such horrors, many of the Kurds, the largest ethnic minority in Syria, have told us they paid hundreds of dollars to guides to help them navigate across the border through informal crossing points to Iraq, a country better known for exporting refugees than receiving them. Their hours-long journeys on foot were often perilous. In some cases, the refugees said, Syrian guards shot at them as they approached the border.

One 19-year-old activist said that a Syrian border patrol shot at his group of 37 asylum seekers on April 8 at 2 a.m. when they were about 400 meters from the border. "Shots rang out from the border patrol base toward us," he said. "I saw two from our group getting shot and dropping to the ground. I don't know if they survived because after that we all scattered in different directions."

Domiz was set up in early April. Before that, many new arrivals had been going to Moqabli, a camp already occupied by Kurds who fled Syria in 2004 after a crackdown by security forces. Local authorities started moving the new arrivals to Domiz in early April.

With about 50 new arrivals daily to Domiz, local authorities and relief agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, have been struggling to keep up with the influx. They are concerned about their ability to meet future demand, especially for food supplies. Other refugees are living outside the camps in other areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, where they have friends ■■■

■■■ or family, or where they have greater opportunities for finding employment. Local authorities estimate that as many as 5,000 Syrian refugees have moved to Iraqi Kurdistan since the start of the year.

Although they are now safe in Iraq, the refugees said they worry about loved

ones left behind and what the future holds for their country. They said they want to return to Syria once things get better but fear that they and their Kurdish community will continue to face enormous challenges and discrimination in Syria regardless of who leads their country.

Foreign Policy In Focus contributor Samer Muscati is the emergencies researcher for the Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch. He is a lawyer, documentary photographer, and former journalist who has worked in post-conflict countries such as Iraq, Rwanda and East Timor.

REUTERS

Three Turkish soldiers killed in PKK clash

ISTANBUL - May 17, 2012 - (Reuters) -By Ayla Jean Yackley

THREE TURKISH soldiers were killed in clashes with Kurdish rebels near the Syrian border in southern Turkey on Thursday, the provincial governor's office said.

Separately, a provincial leader of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party was shot dead late on Wednesday outside his home in Sirnak, near the frontier with Iraq, an official in the governor's office told Reuters.

In Hatay, fighting between a Turkish military unit and guerrillas belonging to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) erupted in the mountains in the district of Dortyol on Thursday morning, the statement said.

Dogan News Agency said four PKK militants were also killed in the clash, while one soldier was wounded. That report could not immediately be confirmed.

PKK attacks on Turkish military targets in a 27-year conflict usually occur in the country's mainly Kurdish provinces east of Hatay, but the Mediterranean province has been the scene of spo-

radic clashes in past years.

Hatay borders Syria and has absorbed thousands of refugees fleeing President Bashar al-Assad's 14-month crackdown against anti-government protesters and armed militants.

The PKK in March threatened to step up attacks against Turkey if its forces entered Syria after Erdogan, one of Assad's most vocal critics, mooted the possibility of establishing buffer zones within Syria to protect civilians. Turkey shelters almost 25,000 Syrian refugees.

The PKK threat signaled a possible renewed alliance between the PKK and Damascus, which backed the rebels in the 1980s and 1990s. It also shows the risks of a regional escalation in the Syrian conflict.

Turkey's Kurdish population is estimated at 14 million people, and Syria has about 1.7 million. Iraq, where the PKK leadership is based, is home to more than 4 million Kurds.

In Sirnak, an unidentified assailant shot dead Ali Kilinc, 48, the AK Party's deputy chairman for the province, an official in the governor's office told Reuters.

The PKK took up arms against Turkey in 1984 in a campaign for independence, and more than 40,000 people, mainly Kurds, have died in the conflict. The rebels have since scaled back their demands to cultural rights and political autonomy.□

Daily Press May 17, 2012

Iraq summons Turkish envoy again as tensions grow

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq has summoned Ankara's ambassador in Baghdad to protest the behavior of two Turkish diplomats, the latest episode in a drawn-out public row between the neighbors.

An official from Iraq's foreign ministry met Turkey's ambassador, Younis Demirer, to complain about the Turkish diplomats in the cities of Basra and Mosul, a statement on the foreign ministry website said on Thursday.

"Some activities conducted

by the two Turkish General Consuls in Basra and Mosul ... are far from their Consular duties and obligations stated in the Vienna Convention for Consular Relations of 1963," the statement said, without elaborating.

It said that the meeting took place on Tuesday but did not say what the diplomats were accused of.

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and his Iraqi counterpart Nuri al-Maliki have traded tit-for-tat criticisms and accusations several

times this year.

Erdogan last month accused Maliki of fanning tensions between Shi'ite Muslims, Sunni Muslims and Kurds in Iraq through "self-centered" behavior.

Maliki quickly responded that Turkey was becoming a "hostile state" with a sectarian agenda, saying it was meddling in Iraqi affairs and trying to establish regional "hegemony".

Iraq summoned Turkey's ambassador at the time and Turkey responded by summo-

ning Iraq's envoy in Ankara.

Analysts say mainly Sunni Turkey is worried that growing tensions in Iraq and violence in their mutual neighbor Syria may lead to a wider Sunni-Shi'ite conflict in the region.

Erdogan's government has recently forged close ties with Masoud Barzani, president of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, which is embroiled in a row with the Baghdad government over claims to the city of Kirkuk and the region's oil.

Iraq is Turkey's second largest trading partner after Germany with trade reaching \$12 billion last year, more than half of which was with the Kurdish region.◆

Turkey's Attack on Civilians Tied to U.S. Military Drone

By ADAM ENTOUS And
JOE PARKINSON

ULUDERE, Turkey—After winding along a narrow mountain ridge, a caravan of 38 men and mules paused on the Turkish-Iraqi border. Then they heard the propellers overhead. Minutes later, Turkish military aircraft dropped bombs that killed all but four of the men.

The strike in late December was meant to knock out Kurdish separatist fighters. Instead it killed civilians smuggling gasoline, a tragic blunder in Turkey's nearly three-decade campaign against the guerrillas. The killings ignited protests across the country and prompted wide-ranging official inquiries.

The civilian toll also set off alarms at the Pentagon: It was a U.S. Predator drone that spotted the men and pack animals, officials said, and American officers alerted Turkey.

The U.S. drone flew away after reporting the caravan's movements, leaving the Turkish military to decide whether to attack, according to an internal assessment by the U.S. Defense Department, described to The Wall Street Journal. "The Turks made the call," a senior U.S. defense official said. "It wasn't an American decision."

The U.S. role, which hasn't previously been reported, revealed the risks in a new strategy for extending American influence around the globe. It raises an outstanding question for the White House and Congress: How far do we entrust allies with our deadly drone technology?

After a decade of troop-intensive land wars, the Obama administration is promoting advanced drones, elite special forces and intelligence resources as a more nimble, and less expensive, source of military power. The strategy relies heavily on close cooperation with regional allies, in part to reduce the need for American troops on the ground.

In Pakistan and Somalia, where local authorities can't or won't act against militants, the U.S. employs armed drones and special-operations teams to track and kill suspected terrorists. In Yemen,



Four months after the Turkish military, working with U.S. Intelligence, bombed a civilian convoy incorrectly identified as Kurdish militants, survivors and relatives are demanding answers. Reporting and video by WSJ's Joe Parkinson in Uludere, Turkey.

the U.S. carries out drone strikes with the government's approval. In Turkey—a North Atlantic Treaty Organization member that has a modern air force—the U.S. helps provide intelligence for operations but plays no direct role in any strikes.

The downside to such arrangements, say current and former U.S. officials, is that countries can use U.S. intelligence in ways the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency can't control. Allies have varying standards for deciding who is a justified target. And these partnerships can embroil the U.S. in local disputes with only slender links to the security of Americans.

"What happens if this information gets to the [foreign] government and they do something wrong with it, or it gets into the hands of someone who does something wrong with it?" said Rep. Mike Rogers (R., Mich.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, who didn't know specific details of the attack.

At the Pentagon, press secretary George Little said when asked about the strike, "Without commenting on matters of intelligence, the United States strongly values its enduring military relationship with Turkey."

The conflict between Turkish security forces and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has taken an estimated 40,000 lives since violence first flared in the 1980s. Ethnic Kurds, about 18% of Turkey's population, have long sought a degree of political autonomy and the right to public education in their native tongue. Tensions have risen since Turkey last fall intensified its campaign against the PKK, which the U.S.

and European Union designate a terrorist group.

U.S. drone flights in support of Turkey date from November 2007, when the Bush administration set up what is called a Combined Intelligence Fusion Cell in Ankara, part of an effort to nurture ties with the government led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. U.S. and Turkish officers sit side by side in the dimly lighted complex monitoring real-time video feeds from Predator drones.

The Obama administration has moved to expand cooperation—by stepping up intelligence sharing and by supporting Turkey's request to buy armed and unarmed U.S. drones to give the Turks full control.

The issue is sensitive for both sides. Turkey doesn't want to be seen as reliant on the U.S. And selling drones to Turkey faces opposition from key members of Congress, who worry about spreading the technology, as well as Turkey's standards for deciding when to launch a strike.

While the White House is moving forward with plans to provide Italy with arms for its drones, proposals to sell or lease drones to Turkey face resistance in Congress, which reviews such sales in advance. Proponents argue they build long-term military relations with close allies, as well as give U.S. companies better access to the fast-growing global market.

The caravan strike is illustrative of the dangers. Servet Encu, 42 years old, said he had made the journey across the mountainous border separating Turkey and Iraq several times a month ■■■

■■■ since he was a teenager, smuggling all kinds of goods.

In his and other impoverished Kurdish villages of southeastern Turkey, smuggling is a trade made profitable by differences between the two countries, including taxes and currency values. Fuel costs twice as much in Turkey as in Iraq, a substantial oil producer, rewarding smugglers who ferry jugs of gasoline through the mountains. The Turkish military usually doesn't bother villagers crossing the border, as long as they aren't smuggling weapons or drugs. But PKK militants also cross the border in the region.

The convoy, laden with food and gasoline, was returning to Turkey on Dec. 28. They were less than an hour from home after hiking along barren, icy ridges for more than four hours, Mr. Encu said in an interview.



Mathias Depardon for The Wall Street Journal
The incident revealed the risks in a new strategy for extending American influence around the globe: promoting advanced drones, elite special forces and intelligence resources instead of troop-intensive land wars. Shown, girls in the border village of Ortasu.

Mr. Encu called his Kurdish village by cellphone for help picking a route to avoid Turkish soldiers who might confiscate their cargo, he recalled.

Above and out of sight, a U.S. Predator drone loitered. It was on a routine patrol when U.S. personnel monitoring its video feeds spotted the caravan just inside Iraq and moving toward the Turkish border, according to U.S. officials and the Pentagon's assessment of the fatal strike.

U.S. military officers at the Fusion Cell in Ankara couldn't tell whether the men, bundled in heavy jackets, were civilians or guerrilla fighters. But their location in an area frequented by guerrilla fighters raised suspicions. The Americans alerted their Turkish counterparts.

U.S. officials said additional surveillance from the Predator might have helped the Turks better identify the convoy. But, they said, Turkish officers instead directed the Americans who were remo-

tely piloting the drone to fly it somewhere else. U.S. officials said compliance with the Turks' request was standard procedure.

As darkness fell, Mr. Encu said, the men in the caravan heard the dull hum of Herons—the Israeli-made surveillance aircraft used by Turkey and less sophisticated than U.S. drones.

Then Turkish warplanes appeared. "It was like a lightning bolt," Mr. Encu said. "I saw a bright light and the force of the explosion threw me to the ground...When I turned my head I could see bodies on fire and some were missing their heads."

The strikes lasted for about 40 minutes, survivors said. Of the 34 men killed, 11 were members of Mr. Encu's extended family. It was the largest number of Kurdish civilians killed in a single attack in Turkey's long conflict with the region's militants.

Rescuers dug for corpses under a collapsed mountain ridge. They wrapped body parts and loaded them on a trailer that was towed to the nearest village, according to accounts of residents and local officials.

The killings sparked clashes between hundreds of stone-throwing protesters and the police in Kurdish parts of Turkey. In the town of Uludere, Mayor Fehmi Yaman charged that the attack marked the latest in a series of government efforts to intimidate the local population, much of which supports Kurdish militancy.

"The military knew these people were civilians. It was a deliberate attack," he said. "The government has tried all means of suppression, which have failed, and now they tried this."

The Turkish military initially said it ordered the strike because the convoy moved along a pathway frequently used as a staging point for attacks by the PKK. Turkey's government and its armed forces both have open investigations into the matter.

Turkey's military didn't respond to repeated requests for comment for this article. Turkey's Prime Ministry, Interior Ministry and Defense Ministry said they would neither comment on the incident nor on questions over the scale of military cooperation between Turkey and the U.S.

The killings threaten to spoil efforts to forge a Turkish-Kurdish consensus for a planned new constitution expected to partly address the issue of rights for the Kurdish minority.

A former senior U.S. military official, involved in sharing intelligence with Turkey before the December attack, said he and fellow officers were sometimes

troubled by Turkish standards for selecting targets. The former official said Turkish officers sometimes picked targets based on a notion of "guilt by association" with the PKK.

A current U.S. intelligence official defended the partnership. "That is going to be the exception. It is a horrible exception. It's a tragic exception," he said of the caravan strike. "But the vast majority of efforts to expand our information sharing and to work with our partners and allies around the world are going to have positive outcomes."

U.S. personnel work in the Ankara Fusion Cell, in part, to monitor Turkey's use of U.S. intelligence, U.S. officials said.

Turkish officials have assured the U.S. of their measures to avoid civilian casualties. They say privately that Predator drones help reduce attacks on the PKK using less precise weapons, such as artillery.

But U.S. officials say such mistakes are feeding a debate within the intelligence community and the Defense Department about setting better guidelines for sharing of U.S. intelligence.

Intelligence officials are divided on the issue. Some say the U.S. should withhold intelligence if it believes an ally might abuse the information. Others warn new rules could slow intelligence sharing during emergencies.

In Uludere, December's events continue to reverberate. Local men have reduced cross-border smuggling trips, slowing the local economy.

Monuments to the dead have sprung up in villages. In Gulyazi, home to 13 of those killed, a 30-foot-high tent shelters a memorial where residents left handwritten messages next to portraits of the dead.

On the outskirts of one village, widows and bereaved mothers gather regularly. One day last month, scores of women marched along a dirt track to a makeshift cemetery where many of the dead were buried.

Fatma Encu, a cousin of Servet Encu, clutched a framed portrait of her eldest son, Huseyin, who was killed at age 19. "I don't want compensation," she said. "I just want the murderers to be found and punished."

Chief of the Turkish general staff, Necdet Ozel, said the military was sharing information with prosecutors, according to a Turkish news agency. "We are not hiding anything," he said. □

« L'Etat de barbarie » persiste en Syrie, mais la tyrannie recule devant la révolution Pourquoi Michel Seurat reste d'actualité

Ziad Majed

Professeur des études du Moyen-Orient
à l'Université américaine de Paris

En 1986, Michel Seurat, chercheur en sociologie, meurt entre les mains de ses ravisseurs dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth, capitale libanaise ravagée par la guerre civile et déjà sous le contrôle des services de renseignement syriens.

Il a passé une année en captivité durant laquelle il fut confronté à la barbarie qu'il avait si bien cernée dans ses travaux sur la Syrie. En relisant ses textes aujourd'hui, après la réédition de son ouvrage *L'Etat de barbarie* (Seuil, 1989), on est saisi par leur actualité et leur pertinence, trois décennies après leur première publication dans la revue *Esprit*, en 1983.

Dans le contexte de la révolution syrienne actuelle, deux questions développées par Michel Seurat semblent particulièrement intéressantes à revisiter.

Dans son analyse du système fondé par Hafez Al-Assad, Michel Seurat utilise un concept d'Ibn Khaldoun, historien et sociologue maghrébin du XIV^e siècle : la « *asabiyya* » (ce que Durkheim appelle « *la solidarité mécanique* »). Ce concept lui permet d'expliquer le rôle du pouvoir et des associations que le clan Assad a créées dans la transformation de la communauté alaouite en une confession politique (et pas seulement religieuse). Cette transformation s'est opérée à travers un discours, une réactivation dans la mémoire collective d'une hostilité à la ville et son « *histoire d'exploitation des ruraux* » et un recrutement des jeunes de la communauté dans l'armée et les services de renseignement.

Elle a également été renforcée par un contrôle du parti Baas et une instrumentalisation de ce dernier pour soumettre les institutions de l'Etat et les organisations de la société, notamment urbaines, à ses commandes. Ainsi, Hafez Al-Assad a soudé la communauté et établi une *asabiyya* dominante dans le pays, tout en élargissant progressivement l'assise sociale et les réseaux économiques de son pouvoir.

La question communautaire de même que celle des rôles des forces armées et du parti Baas restent aujourd'hui omniprésentes pour la compréhension de ce qui se passe en Syrie, celle du fils et héritier de Hafez, Bachar Al-Assad. La *asabiyya* persiste en tant que solidarité de corps pour maintenir la base fidèle au régime et est de ce fait le principal atout qui lui reste, après la décomposition de son autorité, de son contrôle symbolique, de son discours et de sa métamorphose en une simple machine répressive depuis mars 2011.

Par contre, la démographie et les évolutions socio-économiques ont modifié la donne du paradoxe urbain-rural. Le mouvement de contestation n'est plus uniquement citadin, comme Michel Seurat le décrivait au début des années 1980. Il est également rural, et le rapport entre les villes et les campagnes ne

peut plus le contenir ou dresser ses frontières. Ces dernières sont dépassées par la nouvelle génération qui reconstitue son champ politique, à la fois dans des régions périphériques, dans les nouveaux espaces rattrapés par l'élargissement des agglomérations et dans le cœur même des cités syriennes.

Michel Seurat utilise cette « controverse hégémo-marxienne » pour intituler un de ses textes sur la confrontation qui opposait les Frères musulmans (et des formations politiques et syndicales islamistes comme de gauche) au pouvoir Assad entre 1979 et 1982. Une confrontation qui s'est soldée par les massacres de la ville rebelle de Hama et des campagnes d'arrestations massives contre les opposants politiques.

Hafez Al-Assad est parvenu en fin de compte, en s'appuyant sur la *asabiyya* à l'intérieur du pays et sûr la complicité ou le silence à l'extérieur (notamment au niveau international), de même que sur sa rhétorique idéologique (se réclamant du nationalisme arabe et de la lutte contre l'impérialisme et le sionisme), à réduire en cendres le champ politique syrien et à éradiquer les Frères musulmans du pays.

« Les Syriens dans leurs manifestations quotidiennes et dans leur résistance à la machine de mort reconstruisent leur champ politique sur les décombres de la peur »

Mais, s'il a réussi, c'est aussi parce que les Frères n'ont pas pu étendre horizontalement leur soulèvement que Damas et sa bourgeoisie ne les ont pas suivis, et que la terreur s'est rapidement installée, érigeant les murs de la terreur et du silence. La Syrie est devenue un espace fragmenté, ses habitants solitaires, des « *hommes écrasés les uns contre les autres* » comme le décrit Hannah Arendt dans son analyse de la tyrannie.

Si cette lourde défaite de la société syrienne a anéanti toute possibilité d'action politique collective pendant des décennies (exception faite du court printemps de Damas en fin 2000 et début 2001), la révolution syrienne aujourd'hui marque la sortie définitive de la solitude.

De Deraa à Homs, de Deir Ezzor à Hama, de Damas à Idlib, de l'université d'Alep à Salamiyya et de Kfernabel à Kamechlie, les Syriens dans leurs manifestations quotidiennes et dans leur résistance à la machine de mort reconstruisent leur champ politique sur les décombres de la peur.

Ils rétablissent dans leur solidarité citoyenne des liens territoriaux et se réapproprient la géographie, l'espace, afin de dépasser le déchirement, la fragmentation et retisser les rapports sociaux.

Ainsi, la société syrienne se libère chaque jour un peu plus de la tyrannie. Elle renaît, se découvre et constitue une nouvelle mémoire. Seul le pouvoir déclinant demeure encore ce qu'il fut il y a trois décennies : un Etat de barbarie. ■

AFP

Turquie: Quatre soldats tués dans des combats avec les rebelles kurdes (officiel)

ISTANBUL, 17 mai 2012 (AFP)

QUATRE SOLDATS TURCS ont été tués jeudi lors de deux accrochages distincts avec des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le sud et le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé des sources officielles locales.

Trois militaires ont été abattus à 7H45 (4H45GMT) par des "membres de l'organisation terroriste séparatiste" --expression en usage pour désigner le PKK-- alors qu'ils participaient à une opération dans une zone boisée des monts Amanos, dans la province de Hatay (sud), a affirmé le gouvernorat de Hatay.

Une vaste opération a été lancée dans la région pour retrouver et neutraliser les rebelles, a ajouté le gouvernorat dans un communiqué diffusé sur son site internet.

Un soldat a par ailleurs été tué et un autre a été blessé par un tir de mortier du PKK à Derecik, dans la province de Hakkari (sud-est), riveraine de l'Irak et de l'Iran, selon un communiqué du gouvernorat de Hakkari, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

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

AFP

Raid aérien turc contre des Kurdes: Washington a fourni des renseignements

WASHINGTON, 17 mai 2012 (AFP)

L'ATTAQUE AÉRIENNE de l'aviation turque qui a coûté la vie à 34 Kurdes à la frontière turco-irakienne fin décembre a été lancée à la suite de renseignements fournis par un drone américain, a-t-on appris jeudi auprès d'un responsable américain de la défense.

Lors de ce raid aérien le 29 décembre, des chasseurs F-16 turcs avaient confondu des trafiquants de cigarettes et de carburant âgés de 16 à 20 ans avec des séparatistes kurdes qui empruntent le même chemin pour s'infiltrer en Turquie depuis leurs bases du Kurdistan irakien.

"Nous sommes au courant de l'incident", a affirmé à l'AFP ce responsable américain sous couvert de l'anonymat, rappelant que les Etats-Unis fournissent des moyens de reconnaissance et de surveillance à l'armée turque au moyen de drones Predator.

"Dans ce cas particulier, (les drones) ont repéré un groupe de personnes avec des animaux transportant de lourdes charges. Cette information a été transmise aux Turcs et nos drones ont quitté la zone", a-t-il détaillé.

"Nous n'avons rien à voir avec cette attaque aérienne, nous n'étions plus

dans la zone quand l'attaque s'est produite", a-t-il ajouté.

L'armée turque a toutefois démenti une telle implication américaine.

"La première identification visuelle du groupe impliqué a été effectuée par des drones des forces armées turques", a affirmé l'état-major des armées turques dans un communiqué diffusé sur son site internet.

Cette bavure avait mis le gouvernement turc sur le gril et déclenché une vague de protestations des milieux pro-kurdes qui ont crié au "massacre".

Fin 2011, Ankara a dû faire face à une flambée de violences dans le conflit qui l'oppose au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) après la mort de plusieurs dizaines de soldats dans des attaques pendant l'été.

Les rebelles du PKK, qui ont pris les armes en 1984 pour l'indépendance puis l'autonomie du Sud-Est de la Turquie peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, utilisent leurs bases arrières dans le nord de l'Irak, pays voisin, pour lancer des attaques contre des objectifs en territoire turc.

Alliés de la Turquie, les Etats-Unis ont repositionné fin 2011 sur la base d'Incirlik (sud de la Turquie) quatre drones Predator, non armés, qui étaient auparavant stationnés dans le nord de l'Irak, afin de continuer à fournir des renseignements à la Turquie sur le PKK. ○

AFP

Un dirigeant kurde accuse Bagdad de vouloir mener un "nettoyage ethnique"

SOULAYMANIA (Irak), 28 mai 2012 (AFP)

UN DIRIGEANT KURDE irakien a accusé lundi Bagdad de vouloir mener un "nettoyage ethnique", dans une nouvelle attaque des dirigeants kurdes contre le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki.

Cette déclaration du Premier ministre du Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani, neveu du président de la région autonome Massoud Barzani, intervient alors que les relations entre le gouvernement central de Bagdad et les Kurdes sont de plus en plus tendues.

"Aujourd'hui, il y a des gens sur la scène politique irakienne qui veulent (...) maintenir la politique d'arabisation et de nettoyage ethnique", a déclaré M. Barzani au cours d'un discours célébrant le rapatriement au Kurdistan des restes de 730 Kurdes tués par les forces de Saddam Hussein lors de la campagne d'Anfal dans les années 1980.

Il n'a pas précisé qui ses propos visaient, mais il faisait vraisemblablement



allusion à M. Maliki.

"Les tueries quotidiennes de citoyens kurdes et les expulsions à Jalawla, Sadiyah et Kirkouk sont la même politique que celle de l'ancien régime mais sous de nouvelles couleurs", a-t-il ajouté, faisant référence à des zones disputées par Bagdad et le gouvernement du Kurdistan.

Massoud Barzani s'est dit opposé à la vente de d'avions F-16 à l'Irak par les Etats-Unis tant que M. Maliki dirige le gouvernement, affirmant redouter qu'ils ne soient utilisés contre le Kurdistan.

Il avait auparavant accusé M. Maliki de glisser vers la dictature, lui reprochant de vouloir "tuer le processus démocratique" après l'arrestation du chef de la commission électorale pour des faits présumés de corruption.

Outre les questions territoriales, Bagdad et Erbil s'opposent vivement sur la répartition des revenus du pétrole pompé dans la région et sur le sort du vice-président sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi, recherché par la justice irakienne mais qui a bénéficié de la protection des Kurdes. ○

Les révélations du Wall Street Journal sur Uludere

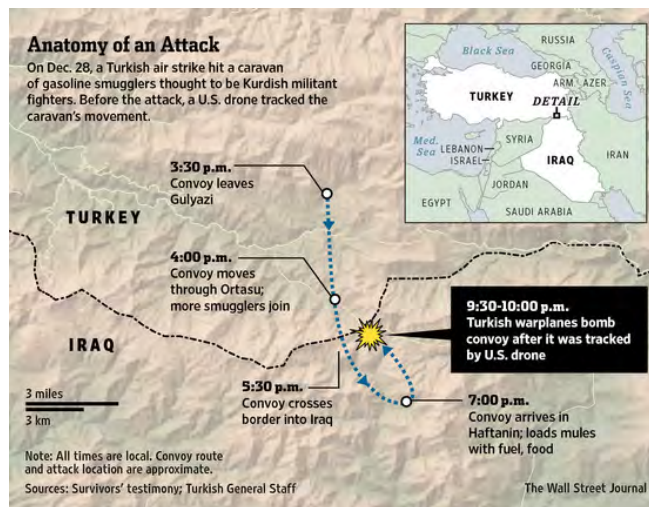
Guillaume Perrier

Les autorités turques sont embarrassées après la publication, le 16 mai, par le Wall Street Journal, d'une enquête attendue depuis de longues semaines, sur le massacre d'Uludere (Roboski en kurde), un village situé à la frontière avec l'Irak. Depuis, le sujet occupe la une de la presse turque.



Le journal rapporte, s'appuyant sur un rapport du Pentagone, que les frappes de l'armée turque contre un groupe de contrebandiers qui franchissaient clandestinement la frontière, le 28 décembre dernier, officiellement confondus avec une colonne de combattants du PKK, auraient été le résultat d'un renseignement délivré par les drones américains. Ce n'est pas vraiment un scoop. Les drones Predator surveillent la frontière Nord de l'Irak et fournissent à la Turquie les renseignements sur le PKK, comme le stipule un accord tripartite avec Bagdad.

L'armée et le gouvernement turcs sont sous pression depuis plusieurs mois et peinent à expliquer cette "bavure" contre des civils qui a profondément choqué l'opinion turque et kurde. Et selon plusieurs membres de la commission



d'enquête parlementaire, les images des drones montraient clairement qu'il s'agissait de civils.

L'armée turque a démenti jeudi les informations publiées par le WSJ. "Le rapport ne reflète pas la réalité", a répondu le chef d'Etat major Necdet Özcel, dans un communiqué officiel publié

sur le site internet des forces armées turques. "La première image détectée du groupe, dans cet incident, a été réalisée par un drone appartenant aux forces armées turques", ajoute cette déclaration officielle sans préciser quel a été le rôle exact des drones américains.

Le vice premier ministre Bekir

Bozdog a souligné qu'une enquête judiciaire et administrative était en cours. Et le président Abdullah Gül, avant de s'envoler pour un long séjour aux Etats-Unis, où il participera au sommet de l'Otan à Chicago, a appelé les journalistes à faire confiance aux sources de renseignements turques. Erdogan avait lui aussi déclaré que l'information avait été obtenue non pas par les Predator mais par les drones turcs.

Dans son enquête, le WSJ suggère également que l'armée turque a refusé des renseignements américains plus précis permettant d'identifier les intrus, si le doute existait encore. L'Etat major, dans sa réponse, a toutefois ignoré cet aspect de la question. Une faute soulignée par les éditorialistes turcs comme Eyyüp Can (Radikal) ou Ahmet Altan (Taraf).

Après le premier article, le WSJ publie un nouvel article vendredi pour répondre aux critiques et aux questionnements. Le rapport militaire américain que le WSJ a pu se procurer précise que le drone Predator était en patrouille le long de la frontière lorsqu'il a repéré ce groupe d'hommes et d'animaux en marche vers la frontière turque, avant d'en informer, à Ankara, la cellule de renseignement dédiée à la lutte contre le PKK. Selon le journal, les officiels turcs auraient ensuite demandé au drone américain de quitter la zone. ■



PKK: La Turquie presse Obama de lui vendre des drones Predator

ANKARA, 22 mai 2012 (AFP)

LE PRÉSIDENT TURC Abdullah Gül a annoncé mardi que l'administration américaine était favorable à la vente à son pays de drones armés Predator pour lutter contre les séparatistes kurdes et tentait de convaincre le Congrès américain à cette fin.

"En fait l'administration américaine est favorable (à cette vente), ils s'efforcent de convaincre le Congrès", a-t-il déclaré au terme d'un entretien lundi soir avec le président américain Barack Obama en marge du sommet de l'Otan à Chicago.

La Turquie souhaite acquérir un nombre indéterminé de ces appareils pour

combattre les membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) en Turquie et dans le nord de l'Irak, où ils disposent de repaires, mais le Congrès n'y serait pas enclin en raison des tensions entre la Turquie et Israël.

M. Gül a exhorté les Etats-Unis, allié traditionnel de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan, à "faire confiance" à son pays.

La loi américaine oblige l'administration à informer le Congrès avant toute transaction de taille portant sur des armes.

L'armée américaine a utilisé les drones Predator non armés depuis ses bases irakiennes depuis 2007 puis depuis une base du Sud de la Turquie peu avant son retrait d'Irak fin 2011 et a partagé les renseignements recueillis avec les autorités turques.

Le PKK mène régulièrement des attaques meurtrières en Turquie.

Les Etats-Unis considèrent comme la Turquie et bon nombre de pays le PKK comme une organisation terroriste. ○

Regional Crises Boost Turkey's Ties With Iraq's Kurds

Dorian Jones
voanews.com

ISTANBUL, Turkey -The prime minister of Iraq's Kurdistan autonomous region is visiting Turkey - his first trip there since taking office in March. The visit is expected to build on the growing rapprochement between Turkey and Iraq's Kurds. That process is being enhanced by deepening crises in Iraq and mutual neighbor Syria.

Political analysts in Turkey see the visit by Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani as a sign of the growing importance of his Turkish neighbor.

Ankara has responded by laying out the red carpet with meetings with the Turkish president, prime minister and foreign minister.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Selcuk Unal says the Iraqi Kurds are seen as an important ally.

"The Iraqi Kurds are playing an international role legally and legitimately in all Iraqi politics and we are talking with them on many issues, the political situation in Iraq and in the region," he said.

Barzani's visit comes as tensions continue to rise between Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis and the country's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shi'ite, over the distribution of power and control of resources.

Tensions have also risen between Turkey and Iraq's central government.

International relations expert Soli Ozel, a columnist for the Turkish newspaper Haberturk, says these current tensions with Baghdad are driving the warming relations between Ankara and the Iraqi Kurds.

"The fact that relations with Baghdad are rotten, it now transpires that the Kurds are the Turks' natural allies in



Iraqi Kurdistan region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, left, meets Turkey's President Abdullah Gul in Baghdad, Iraq. (File)

Iraq," said Ozel. "They are our second export market, and people say if you include the informal trade, they may very well be the first export market. And their gas and oil is going to global markets via Turkey. Therefore, we have to discuss what the Iraqi Kurds do, with very different words and with a very different approach, and this is what happening."

The transformation in relations is a marked shift from the past. Only a few years ago, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Iraqi Kurdish regional President Masoud Barzani was a "bandit." The Turkish government believed the Iraqi Kurds were not doing enough to stop the Kurdish rebel group, the PKK, from operating from northern Iraq. The PKK is fighting the Turkish state for greater Kurdish rights.

Political observers say Ankara's greatest fear was that the Iraqi Kurds would declare an independent state, possibly inciting Turkey's own Kurdish minority to similar demands.

But former senior Turkish diplomat Sinan Ulgen says the recent visit of Iraqi Kurdistan's President Barzani shows this fear has eased.

"When Barzani came to Ankara a few weeks ago, he made reference to a possible independence of the Kurdish region if Maliki continues to operate

in the authoritarian way that he is operating," said Ulgen. "Even that statement, which was unthinkable a couple of years ago for the Turkish policymakers not to react to, has not really led to any sort of reaction from Ankara. That shows how much [relations] have changed."

The conflict in Syria is also providing common ground between Iraqi Kurds and Turkey. Syrian Kurdish groups have been meeting in the Iraqi Kurdish region, and Ankara is lobbying the Iraqi Kurds to use their influence to persuade them to unite with the Syrian opposition against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

But international relations expert Ozel remains skeptical whether the Iraqi Kurds can deliver.

"With the Syrian Kurds, the ones who are more influential are not Barzani people, but the PKK," said Ozel. The thing is Turkey wants to subcontract too many things to Barzani, and I don't think it's going to wash."

The prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan is expected to reject Turkey's calls to remove PKK bases from the region. But political observers say the Iraqi Kurdish visit to Turkey will emphasize the growing importance of the relationship and that both sides will be looking to build on what unites them - rather than what divides them. ●

Spat with Iraq bares Turk plunge into regional power game

By Jonathon Burch

A NKARA (Reuters) - A bitter rift with Iraq has exposed Turkey's role in a wider Middle East power struggle, with Ankara acting to protect its stability and prosperity from an Iranian-Iraqi "Shi'ite axis" it fears in the wake of the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq.

Turkey, a Sunni Muslim but secular regional power bordering Iraq, Iran and Syria, long tried to play regional mediator as Shi'ite Muslim giant Iran and Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia jostled for sway in a region now undergoing political upheaval.

But the fall-out wrought by Arab Spring uprisings and the U.S. exit from Iraq have forced Turkey to make tricky adjustments by cutting old alliances and forming new ones, jettisoning its "zero problems with the neighbors" policy.

That shift, coupled with a more aggressive diplomacy personified by an increasingly combative Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan - has thrust Turkey into a regional strategic game pitting Gulf Arab states and Ankara against Iran.

"What is really critical is the American withdrawal from Iraq, because that basically made Iraq a much more open playing field for the Iranians," said Soli Ozel, a prominent Turkish academic and commentator.

"Inexorably, perhaps unwillingly, Turkey began to find itself a part of the sectarian games as opposed to the position that it very delicately tried to preserve which was being above sectarianism."

Turkish officials have been waging a war of words with Baghdad since December when Shi'ite Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, based on allegations that he ran death squads.



A Turkish soldier secures a road overlooking the mountains during patrol in the southeastern Turkish province of Sirnak

The row is symptomatic of Turkish anxiety that the country's rising "soft power", based on a booming economy and relative democratic stability ushered in by Erdogan after a long era of military coups, could be threatened by a nascent "Shi'ite axis" embodied by Iran and Maliki's Tehran-backed Baghdad government.

"This is about an escalating power struggle in Baghdad combined with the regional conflict between Iran, Turkey and the Gulf Arab states being played out in Syria and Iraq," said Hasan Turunc, a fellow at Oxford University.

Gulf Arabs and Turkey alike want to see a street uprising and insurgency in Syria unseat President Bashar al-Assad to help roll back the regional clout of his close ally, Iran and prevent any spillover of its increasingly sectarian bloodshed.

MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS

Turkey accuses Maliki of sowing sectarian discord by trying to sideline his Sunni rivals - Maliki also called on parliament to remove his Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq - and has warned of a regional Shi'ite-Sunni "cold war".

Maliki says it is Ankara that is stirring sectarian tension, calling Turkey a "hostile nation" meddling in Iraq's internal affairs. Erdogan and Maliki have exchanged public insults and both countries have summoned each other's top diplomats over the past few months

in tit-for-tat maneuvers.

Compounding tension, Turkish leaders have met publicly with Hashemi, now sheltering in Istanbul after fleeing Iraq in December. Interpol is seeking the arrest of Hashemi, who is being tried in absentia in Iraq. Hashemi denies the charges.

Ankara's aversion to Maliki is not new. For years, Turkey cultivated close links with Sunni groups in Iraq and it supported the Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc against Maliki in the 2010 parliamentary election.

"Even before the last U.S. soldier was beyond the borders Maliki ordered the arrest of Hashemi, and Turkey took a very strong position. Turkey never really liked Maliki," said Ozel.

Turkey, anxious to protect trade interests in Iraq amid fears that any renewed Iraqi sectarian war could wash over its borders, long strived to encourage a precarious balance between Iraq's Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish factions.

This was no better exemplified than by Erdogan's trip to Iraq in March 2011 when he made sure to visit all three centers of power: Baghdad, the Shi'ite stronghold of Najaf, and Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdish region in the north.

But that balancing act, analysts say, ended after the U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq at the end of last year.

Turkey has since publicly received the president of the

autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, Masoud Barzani, and Maliki's rival and Iraqiya leader, Ayad Allawi.

For its part, Iran has seen Turkey's shift in orientation towards its own backyard, a region it once deemed "backward", as a more potent challenge to its aspirations to Middle East predominance than the old, purely pro-Europe Turkey.

As with Iraq, Turkey has traditionally tried to mediate over Iran, particularly Tehran's controversial nuclear ambitions.

TURKEY FALLS OUT WITH IRAN

But friction between Turkey and Iran has mounted over their backing of opposing sides in Syria's conflagration and Ankara's assent to housing part of a NATO missile defense shield that the United States says is directed against the Islamic Republic.

Some Iranian officials also objected to Turkey playing host to a revival of talks between the six global powers and Iran to head off confrontation over its shadowy nuclear program.

The talks between Iran and Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States did go ahead in Istanbul in April but not before Erdogan lashed out at Tehran, saying the Iranians "lacked honesty" and were "losing their international prestige".

Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat and now chairman of the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies think-tank, said Erdogan's increasingly strident approach was aggravating strains in ties between Ankara and its neighbors.

"It is his posturing that has led to crises with our neighbors. If he hadn't approached matters in a polarising, black-and-white fashion, we wouldn't have lost the ability to manage these relationships," Ulgen said.

"Instead of being the last person to intervene, very often he is the first to react. What he says then becomes policy, =>

⇒ and limits Turkey's room for maneuver; it corners us and policy becomes ossified."

PRECARIOUS KURDISH RELATIONS

One entity that has profited from this regional power tussle is the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Once branded a "bandit" by Turkey, Barzani has been wooed by Erdogan for the purpose of close relations as Ankara has sought out new allies in a transforming region.

Barzani needs the support

of a powerful neighbor that can act as a conduit for its oil supplies. In turn, Turkey is relying on Barzani to clamp down on the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is waging a separatist insurgency in Turkey and whose leadership is based in northern Iraq.

Visiting Turkey last month, Barzani called on the PKK to disarm and said he would not allow any militant group to operate freely in northern Iraq. However, analysts say he is unlikely to bring about any concrete change because of

PKK sympathies among many of Barzani's supporters.

Despite strained relations with the Baghdad government, trade with Iraq is booming. Turkey sold more than \$8 billion of goods to Iraq last year, making it Turkey's second biggest export market after Germany. According to Turkey's finance minister, about 70 percent of exports to Iraq are to the north.

While some observers say Turkey could stand to lose some state-funded projects in Iraq as relations sour, it is unli-

kely that trade between Turkey and Iraq will suffer in the long-term.

"Compare it to Turkey's relations with Israel. Turkey and Israel are at odds and there is a lot of public outrage in both countries, however, if you look at economic relations, they are growing," said Oxford University's Turunc.

"Trade and commerce do not necessarily get influenced by the daily political rhetoric and the same can be said for Iraq."○

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

May 17, 2012

Turkey Aims to Damp Drone-Report Furor

By JOE PARKINSON and ADAM ENTOUS

ISTANBUL—Turkish drones were responsible for the initial intelligence footage that prompted a deadly strike against civilian smugglers, Turkey's armed forces said Thursday, seeking to damp a furor sparked by a Wall Street Journal article that described the role played by a U.S. drone.

Turkey's General Staff said in a written statement that Turkish-language reports, which cited a Wednesday article in the Journal, were "not based on the truth."

Quoting a Pentagon after-action report, the Journal said a U.S. Predator drone spotted a group of men and pack animals and passed the footage to Turkey's military. The Turks identified the convoy as Kurdish militant fighters and took the decision to strike using jets from its air force.

The Pentagon assessment describes only the role of the Predator and doesn't address the issue of whether Turkey may also have been tracking the convoy.

The Turkish military statement said: "The first detected visual image of the group in the incident was made by the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle belonging to the Turkish Armed Forces," adding that details have been passed

to officials investigating the matter.

The statement didn't make any mention of a U.S. role. Turkey's military and defense ministry have previously said intelligence leading to the strike came exclusively from domestic sources. Turkey's military and three government departments declined to comment for that article.

In Washington on Thursday, U.S. military officials reiterated the contents of their after-action report, noting that it focused on the role of the Predator. The Journal article also quoted witnesses who recalled hearing Turkey's Heron drones just before the strike.

The issue is sensitive for Washington and Ankara. Turkey doesn't want to be seen as reliant on the U.S. Selling drones to Turkey faces opposition from key members of Congress, who worry about spreading the technology, as well as Turkey's standards for deciding when to launch a strike.

The Dec. 28 strike, which killed 34 civilians who turned out to be gasoline smugglers, represented the biggest civilian death toll in Turkey's three-decade conflict with Kurdish separatists. The deaths sparked pro-

tests across the country and prompted investigations that have yet to conclude. The Journal report reignited a national debate about the bombing raid, with opposition politicians calling on the government to clarify what happened.

"We had suspicion about Turkey's ability to gather this intelligence over its borders by itself. The reason why the government is keeping quiet now is that it wants to avoid political responsibility," said Deputy Chairman of Turkey's main opposition party, the CHP, Sezgin Tanrikulu.

Pentagon press secretary George Little on Thursday declined to discuss the December incident. He called Turkey an important ally and said "we will continue to work with Turkey" in its efforts against Kurdish militants.

According to U.S. military officials, two reports were prepared in response to the Dec. 28 incident. The initial report said the Predator "identified a small caravan of pack animals and persons who merged with another group of pack animals and persons in a region of northern Iraq close to the Turkish border."

The after-action assessment offered more detail. It said the Predator was on an eight-hour patrol along the Iraqi-Turkish border when its American controllers spotted the convoy walking toward the Turkish border. The report doesn't say at what time that sighting occurred or how long the Predator conducted surveillance.

American officers flagged the "activity" to their Turkish counterparts in the Combined Intelligence Fusion Cell in Ankara, where U.S. and Turkish officers watch Predator drone feeds real time.

Then the Turkish officers directed the Americans to fly the drone to another "sector," clearing the airspace over the convoy. U.S. officials said the U.S. drone wasn't in the area when the Turks launched their strike. □

Full Text of Turkish Military Statement

"Some media outlets, which base their reports on a foreign newspaper, claim that in the incident, which happened in south of Uludere behind the border on 28th of December 2011, the first image was obtained from the US Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (Predator). The news does not reflect the truth. The first detected visual image of the group in the incident was made by the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle belonging to the Turkish Armed Forces. Detailed information of the issue have been sent to offices investigating the incident."

Translated by Ayla Albayrak, Wall Street Journal

Al-Maliki response to Erbil demands contains "nothing new" - Kurdish official

By Maad Fayad

London, Asharq Al-Awsat - Iraqi Kurdistan Region representative to Baghdad, Mohammed Ihsan, informed Asharq Al-Awsat that "the National Alliance's response to the Erbil meeting's message to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki...did not contain anything new or put forward any solutions." Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani, Iraqiya bloc leader Iyad Allawi, Sadrist bloc leader Moqtada al-Sadr and Iraqi Parliamentary speaker Osama al-Nujaifi had met in Erbil two weeks ago to discuss the political crisis in Iraq, threatening al-Maliki with a vote of no confidence if he continues to refuse to implement the Erbil Agreement which brought him to power.

Ihsan added "the response sent by the National Alliance - with the exception of the Sadrist bloc - at the end of the 15-day deadline...carried the language and style of the State of Law coalition, not all parties of the National Alliance."

Speaking to Asharq Al-Awsat from Erbil, the Kurdistan Region representative to Baghdad stressed that "the response called for a meeting to find a mechanism to solve the political problems, and this is the State of Law coalition's way of procrastinating and circumventing these problems" adding "I have not heard or felt any seriousness on the part of al-Maliki to implement the 9 points that were included in the Erbil meeting's message regarding national partnership and implementing the Erbil agreement." Ihsan asserted that "I

believe this response is nothing more than procrastination, and does not include any solutions to the suffocating political crisis in Iraq."

Regarding the tension between Baghdad and Erbil, which can be seen in some of the statements issued to the media, Ihsan stressed that "Regardless of these media campaigns and how some members of the State of Law coalition or al-Maliki have attacked the Kurdish leadership, in the end we must sit down at the dialogue table and find a solution to this intractable problem" adding "it will be better to do this today than tomorrow, for the longer this takes the more complicated the problems become."

Commenting on the State of Law coalition's threat to take clear and bold stance regarding "accusations and slander" made by the Kurdistan Region presidency towards al-Maliki, Ihsan said "this demonstrates the political and social hypocrisy of some Iraqi politicians."

In a statement issued yesterday, State of Law coalition MP Abd-al-Salam al-Maliki said "the accusations and defamation against Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the media by the presidency of the Kurdistan Region will not pass unnoticed, and we will take a clear and bold stance on this."

He added "the failure of the conspiracy led by Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani against the government has led him to threaten to reveal alleged secret documents." The State of Law coalition MP called on Erbil to "either reveal these docu-

ments in a legal manner via the competent authorities or officially apologize to al-Maliki." The secret documents that the Kurdistan Regional government claims to be in possession of pertain to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's agreement with the Kurdistan Region and allegedly reveal how al-Maliki has gone back on his word.

For his part, Kurdistan Region representative to Baghdad, Mohammed Ihsan, told Asharq Al-Awsat "unfortunately, some politicians come out to stand in front of the microphone and think they can say whatever they like without reference to reality." He confirmed that the Kurdistan Region is in possession of documents relating to al-Maliki's position towards the Erbil Agreement, and others, adding that he believes that the time has come for these documents to be published in order to allow the Iraqi people to see the true nature of their leaders, who have failed to adhere to their pledges.

Ihsan also warned that "the behavior of the State of Law coalition will only hurt the National Alliance and Iraqi's Shiite community, and this is why we are calling our brothers in the National Alliance to shoulder their responsibilities and put an end to the attacks being made by some members of the State of Law coalitions towards Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani."

He added "we would hope that those who live in glass houses would refrain from throwing stones, and that the language of reason is utilized rather than the attacks that have been issued by

some...we know that there are some figures within the National Alliance who want to calm the situation and resolve our problems."

The Kurdistan Region representative to Baghdad also informed Asharq Al-Awsat that "the controversial points raised by President Barzani with Baghdad relate to the infrastructure of the Iraqi state, and there is no personal problem between him and al-Maliki, however unfortunately the Iraqi prime minister [al-Maliki] has complicated matters and the issue has reached attacks being made against the Kurdistan Region president" adding "many members of the State of Law coalition have revealed their true natures in a very cheap manner."

Ihsan also commented on al-Maliki's recent television statement, in which the Iraqi prime minister claimed to be more concerned about the Kurdish people than the Kurdish leaders themselves, saying "this reminds us exactly of what Saddam Hussein would say, namely that he was the most concerned about the dear Kurdish people, however everybody knows - particularly the Kurds - that nobody is concerned about the Kurdish people, except their own leaders who have made sacrifices to achieve what has been achieved for the Kurdish people today."

□□□

Fear of Clashes Between Kurdish Groups in Syria

By ADIB ABDULMAJID

rudaw.net

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands – As anti-Assad demonstrations continue to take place across Kurdish areas of Syria, incidences of violence have been occurring between supporters of the Kurdish National Council (KNC) – a coalition of 10 Kurdish Parties – and those of Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Syrian affiliation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

In the last three weeks, the Kurdish city of Qamishli – where Kurds took to the street at the launch of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 – saw unprecedented unrest amongst demonstrators. Tensions arose when PYD supporters began raising the PKK flag and images of its leader Abdullah Ocalan, along with using slogans against the KNC that accused the council of supporting a non-Kurdish agenda.

Qasimo Mosque, a gathering point for Kurdish demonstrators west of Qamishli, saw a few clashes between supporters of the KNC and PYD. The national Kurdish flag was repeatedly burned by PYD protesters, activists reported, which led to a swell in anger amongst Kurds.

According to KurdWatch, an independent Internet portal that reports on human rights abuses against Kurds in Syria, the clashes were led by supporters of the PYD against other Kurdish demonstrators in the city.

"Several people were injured due to attacks by PYD supporters on demonstrators in Qamishli, including Abdussamad Umar, a prominent Kurdish politician and activist," KurdWatch stated in a recently published report.

As a result, the KNC announced a change of location for demonstrators to gather to avoid further possible clashes with PYD protesters.

KNC has also issued a declaration condemning acts of violence and provocation "under any excuse or pretext" towards peaceful Kurdish pro-democracy demonstrators.

"Such practices and acts will never serve the Kurds and their efforts to reach a fair solution for the Kurdish issue in Syria," the KNC declaration reads. "A fragmentation of the Kurds at this point only favors the current tyrannical regime which has constantly attempted to neu-



Kurdish youth marching on the streets of Qamishli in Syria in support of Kurdish rights. Photo: Kurdistan Photos/flickr.

tralize the Kurds from the ongoing pro-democracy movement, but in vain. We will never allow the authorities to take advantage of such things, and we will put all our efforts into overcoming this controversy."

Fuad Aliko, a member of the KNC and chief of the Kurdish Yekiti party in Syria, said that the recent clashes in Qamishli send an alarming message to Kurdish parties to rectify the current situation, "before we reach a level of considerable Kurdish-Kurdish tension and become unable to control the situation, or enter a bitter spiral of violence and confrontation in the entire Kurdish area; nobody would gain any positive results from such tensions except the regime itself."

Aliko added, "The situation requires self-control and rational treatment to overcome the current dispute. PYD supporters are mainly responsible for these clashes and their leadership should try to handle the situation and prevent its recurrence or escalation, because any collision and tension between Kurdish political forces at the moment will basically mean a loss of the Kurdish issue and the rights of the Kurdish people in Syria, and that will primarily serve the enemies of the Kurds."

Shorash Habash, a Kurdish writer and activist, said that Assad's regime had a hand in the recent clashes in Qamishli by motivating PYD supporters to extend their party's control of the largest Kurdish city in Syria by intimidating KNC activists.

"The goal behind PYD's policy of intimidation towards KNC supporters is to stop anti-Assad protests in Qamishli, and that is absolutely what the regime is aiming to," Habash said. "The PYD is

aware that if this Kurdish crisis escalates, the KNC would seek any kind of peaceful compromise to avoid a possible civil war among the Kurds. The regime knows demonstrations in Kurdish areas will continue because a military intervention would not prevent the Kurdish resistance. So, a Kurdish-Kurdish struggle would be the most appropriate way to disperse the Kurds from the hub of their revolution."

Habash added, "The Kurds have to be aware of this, and the only way out is to be a participant in the revolution and a partner in building Syria's future, not on the sidelines."

Hasan Salih, a member of the KNC, told the Washington Institute for Near East Policy that the KNC's activities in Syria aim to overthrow the Assad regime and resolve the Kurdish issue on fair bases according to international conventions.

"PYD is the only Kurdish party which operates outside the KNC, and it is a part of the National Coordinating Body. The main focus of the PYD is to criticize the Turkish role in the Syrian uprising and accuse the rest of the opposition blocs of being loyal to Turkey, rather than trying to overthrow Assad's regime and achieve the hopes of Kurdish people in Syria. As an affiliate of the PKK in Syria, the PYD claims to have the largest popular base, but that is absolutely not true because the vast majority of Kurds aim to topple the current brutal regime and resolve the Kurdish issue democratically, and the PYD has not shown that to be a priority yet," Salih concluded.

On the other side, the PYD recently founded what is known as "Popular Protection Committees," consisting of organized groups of armed Kurdish youth "to protect neighborhoods in different Kurdish towns and villages and check vehicles and entrants."

Many Kurdish politicians and activists see this step of the PYD as a veiled threat to the KNC and all other Kurdish parties and organizations, as the Popular Protection Committees are the only ones armed among Syrian Kurds. The Kurdish Political Movement in Syria, established in 1957, has taken up peaceful methods of struggle for Kurdish rights, a fact which raises the popular fear of a Kurdish-Kurdish civil war if the current rifts and controversies between the PYD and KNC escalate. ■

Iran Not Supporting Kurdish Independence

By WLADIMIR van WILGENBURG
rudaw.net

LONDON, England – In a statement broadcasted on a state news channel on May 8, the Iranian foreign ministry expressed support for the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Ramin Mehmanparast, a spokesman for the foreign ministry, told reporters, "We consider any issue that could affect the territorial integrity of Iraq to be erroneous and to bear a negative impact on regional security. Our clear position is support for Iraq's territorial integrity." Analysts say that Iran fears a Kurdish state in Iraq could inspire Kurds in Iran. Last Tuesday, the Iranian ambassador, Hassan Danaifar, visited Barzani to discuss current developments.

Both Turkey and Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani have been critical of the role Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki plays in Iraq. The Kurdish president and other officials from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) recently visited Turkey. Barzani has hinted in statements that he will consider Kurdish independence if Baghdad does not listen to Kurdish demands.

Barzani supports fugitive Iraqi Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi, who fled to Kurdistan after being accused of involvement in terrorism by authorities in Baghdad, as does Turkey. According to a



Ramin Mehmanparast, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry. Photo ISNA.

TV report by the pro-Iranian station Al-Alam, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan argued that the case of Hashimi was "political rather than legal," and accordingly his country would not hand him over to the Iraq government, even after Interpol issued an international arrest warrant.

Iranian media have been critical of Turkey's support for Hashimi and Barzani against Maliki, and suggested the "enemies of Iraq want to fragment the country." On February 24, Siyaset-E Ruz, a conservative Iranian newspaper, published an editorial by Mohammed Safari that attacked Barzani's statements and suggested he should not dream of ruling a Great Kurdistan supported by Turkey and the United States, as this would be a "big political risk that ends in suicide."

According to Iranian scholar Alireza Nourizadeh, Iran does not support a Kurdish state in Iraq because of the huge number of Kurds in Iran.

Nourizadeh says, "It is the hope of every Kurd to have an independent state, but they also know their limits and their capabilities. At the moment, neither Massoud (Barzani) nor Talabani are thinking of a separate state; what Massoud hinted was only a warning to Maliki. I assure you, if Maliki or people like him continue their current policies, we will get to the point of de-facto separation."

Dr. Marianna Charountaki, an independent scholar and expert on the Kurds, agrees that Iran does not want a Kurdish state in Iraq. "In general, I do not think that Tehran would really like to see that, bearing in mind their own Kurdish population. Do not forget that regional states inhabited by Kurds (namely Iran, Syria, Turkey) are all afraid of a potential 'domino effect.'"

But she adds, "There are other issues at the top of Iranian foreign policy agenda at the moment. In this case, Iran will not reveal its actual Kurdish policy now, be it positive or negative, unless regional developments make it imperative."

Moreover, Charountaki says, "Tehran would not feel comfortable if any other player took control or played a significant part in the resolution of the current political crisis in Iraq, since each regional power struggles for domination. So, if the KRG actively mediates, this automatically means that Iran obviously does not have absolute control over Iraqi politics as exercised by PM Maliki." ■



Iraqi Kurdistan to push ahead with oil export plan

May 20, 2012 - (Reuters) -By Ahmed Rasheed

- * KURDISTAN OUTLINES OIL EXPORT PLANS, DEFIES BAGHDAD
- * KURDISH CRUDE SHIPMENTS STOPPED OVER PAY DISPUTE
- * OIL AT HEART OF CLASH BETWEEN BAGHDAD, ARBIL

ARBIL, IRAQ - Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region said on

Sunday it expects to start exporting its crude oil along a new pipeline to the Turkish border by August 2013, defying Baghdad in a long-running dispute over who controls the country's oil sales.

The Kurdistan region, which has its own government and armed forces, has already clashed with Iraq's central government over autonomy and oil rights, and halted its crude exports in April after accusing Baghdad of not making due payments.

"In August 2013 we will be able to directly export crude from the Kurdish region's fields," Hawrami said at an oil conference in Kurdistan on Sunday. "We will be responsible for exporting oil. It will still be Iraqi oil."

The dispute between Baghdad and the Kurdish capital Arbil is part of a broader political crisis in Iraq, where a fragile government among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs is struggling to overcome deep splits over power-sharing.

Baghdad says only the central government's oil authorities have

the right to control oil exports, and dismisses contracts signed with the Kurdistan Regional Government as illegal, while the KRG says it has the right to develop its own oil fields.

Hawrami said once direct exports begin Kurdistan would take the 17 percent of revenues the region is allowed from Iraq's national budget and pass the rest to the federal government.

The minister said the first stage of the pipeline would be completed by October this year to carry crude from the Taq Taq oil field. The second phase would connect to the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline with a capacity of 1 million barrels per day by August next year though Turkey's port.

He said Kurdistan was also developing plans to build a separate pipeline that could connect to a refinery in Turkey's Ceyhan port by 2014.

"We envisage the building of a new pipeline taking Kurdish oil to Ceyhan port and there will be a large refinery ... Some of the oil will go to that refinery and additional oil will go to interna-

tional market," he said.

Turkey, which shares a border with Kurdistan, has increasingly courted Iraqi Kurds as its relations with the Shi'ite-led central government in Baghdad have soured. Turkey is a major investment and trading partner for Iraq, especially for Kurdistan.

In its war of words with Baghdad, Kurdistan leaders have threatened to consider breaking away from the central government of Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, accusing him of attempting to consolidate power at the expense of the Sunni and Kurdish minorities.

Since the last American troops left Iraq in December the disputed areas between Kurdistan and Baghdad have been seen as a potential flashpoint for conflict as tensions between the two regions simmer without the buffer of a U.S. military presence.

Last month Kurdistan stopped oil exports because it said Baghdad was not fulfilling agreements to pay foreign oil companies working in the region.○

BBC NEWS

22 May 2012

Iraq warns Turkey over Kurdistan pipeline deal

Iraq's government has warned Turkey it needs Baghdad's permission to build new pipelines carrying oil and gas from the Kurdish autonomous region in the north.

Turkey made the deal directly with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on Sunday, without Baghdad's approval.

Relations between Baghdad and Ankara have deteriorated sharply recently.

Instead, Turkey is focusing on closer ties with the KRG, which is locked in a dispute with Iraq's central government over who can sell the country's oil.

'Provocative'

The BBC's Jonathan Head in Istanbul says Turkey's decade-long strategy of building friendly, trade-based relations with all its neighbours is unravelling fast.

It is heavily embroiled in efforts to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a leader it once courted. Its ties with Iran have also cooled, over that country's nuclear ambitions, Syria, and Turkey's decision to host part of Nato's missile defence shield, our correspondent says.

Now its problems with Iraq are multiplying, he adds.

Turkey is sheltering the fugitive Vice-President, Tariq al-Hashemi, the most senior Sunni Arab politician in Iraq, who has been charged with financing death squads.

Ankara has also accused the Iraqi government, which is domi-



Kurdistan Regional Government Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami (R) shakes hands with Turkey's Energy Minister Taner Yildiz (20 May 2012) Since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government has signed several oil deals

nated by Shia parties, of stirring up sectarian tension.

On Sunday, the Turkish government signed a controversial deal to pipe oil and gas directly from Kurdistan in the next 12 months, without the approval of the central government in Baghdad. The KRG also said it planned to barter crude oil with refined petroleum products.

Ali al-Moussawi, a spokesman for Prime Minister Nouri Maliki, criticised the agreement.

"We have no problem with any deals, but they have to be according to the Iraqi constitution and laws that govern relations between Baghdad and the Kurdish region," Mr Moussawi said.

Our correspondent says Turkey certainly needs to diversify its energy supplies away from Iran, which is subject to increasingly strict sanctions.

But, he adds, the pipeline deal is provocative given the KRG is locked in a bitter dispute with Baghdad over who has the authority to sell its oil, and over where pipelines should be built.■

Forte mobilisation régionale contre le barrage turc d'Illisu

L'ouvrage, prévu pour 2016, assécherait la région des Marais mésopotamiens dans le sud de l'Irak

Istanbul

Correspondance

La campagne citoyenne contre la construction du barrage d'Illisu, sur le Tigre, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, abat ses dernières cartes pour faire obstacle au projet. Mi-mai, c'est d'abord l'écologiste Roberto Epple, fondateur du Réseau européen des rivières, qui est allé rendre visite aux habitants d'Hasankeyf. La cité antique au riche patrimoine archéologique est menacée d'inondation si le projet de barrage est mené à bien.

Lundi 21 mai, c'est une délégation d'Irak qui est venue protester contre la construction de la centrale hydroélectrique. Pour la première fois, un groupe de neuf cheikhs, représentants des tribus arabes des marais mésopotamiens, une vaste région marécageuse du sud de l'Irak, s'est rendu de l'autre côté de la frontière avec la Turquie, pour interpellier les autorités sur les conséquences néfastes qu'entraînerait dans leur région le barrage d'Illisu.

« C'est un aspect qui n'a encore jamais été discuté. Les effets du barrage d'Illisu sur les zones géographiques situées en aval ne sont pas étudiés », souligne Ulrich Eichmann, activiste du réseau ECA

Watch (European Credit Agencies Watch) et coordinateur de la campagne européenne contre Illisu.

Les habitants des marais s'inquiètent devant l'avancée des travaux du barrage dont la mise en service est prévue pour 2016. Des tunnels de dérivation modifient déjà le cours naturel du Tigre. Un millier d'ouvriers travaillent vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre sur le chantier, dans une vallée encaissée. « Nous sommes venus pour tenter d'empêcher qu'Hasankeyf ne devienne un lac et que les marais irakiens ne deviennent un désert », explique Abbas Said Srwat, le porte-parole de la communauté des marais et leader de la délégation. « Nous allons demander au gouvernement turc de réduire le niveau d'eau prévu dans cet ouvrage. Il faut ensuite que la Turquie et l'Irak se mettent d'accord pour gérer ensemble la ressource hydrique », poursuit-il.

La région des marais alimentée par les eaux du Tigre et de l'Euphrate fut asséchée dans les années 1990 par Saddam Hussein, ce qui entraîna d'importants déplacements de populations. Mais elle a été l'objet d'un ambitieux plan de réhabilitation. Cette fois-ci, ce sont les barrages construits par la Turquie qui menacent son existence. « Les réservoirs de barrages retien-

draient toute l'eau du printemps, celle de la fonte des neiges. Cela signifie que les 300 000 hectares de marais ne recevraient plus une goutte d'eau fraîche », estime M. Eichmann. En plus de celui d'Illisu, un autre barrage est prévu à Cizre, à la frontière irakienne.

Selon les opposants au barrage, si la profondeur du lac artificiel était réduite de 130 m à 70 m, le site d'Hasankeyf pourrait être épargné et le débit du fleuve

Si la profondeur du lac artificiel était réduite de 130 à 70 m, le site de Hasankeyf pourrait être épargné

demeurerait suffisant pour les territoires situés en aval. Les cheikhs irakiens se satisferaient d'un tel compromis. Jeudi 24 mai, ils devraient signer la Déclaration du Tigre et demander au Programme des Nations unies pour l'environnement (PNUE) de mettre la question à son agenda. La gestion des eaux mésopotamiennes, espèrent-ils, pourrait être évoquée en juin, au sommet de Rio+20 sur le développement durable.

Pour sa part, le gouvernement turc s'est dit déterminé à achever l'œuvre au plus vite et a décidé de financer entièrement les travaux, soit 0,5 milliard d'euros.

L'ouvrage d'Illisu est l'un des vingt-deux barrages du plan GAP (Anatolie du Sud-Est), un projet de domestication du Tigre et de l'Euphrate lancé dans les années 1980. Déjà en 2002, les sociétés britanniques qui soutenaient le dossier avaient jeté l'éponge, cédant aux pressions des associations de défense de l'environnement. Et de nombreuses voix dénoncent régulièrement un « massacre naturel et culturel ».

Le site archéologique d'Hasankeyf, désormais fermé, recevait près de 2 millions de touristes par an. Si le barrage était construit, il serait inondé, et environ 40 000 à 50 000 personnes seraient déplacées de gré ou de force. La rentabilité du barrage est elle-même contestée. La Banque mondiale a émis, en 2008, un rapport critique et, l'année suivante, les agences de crédit européennes qui finançaient le barrage, parmi lesquelles la Société générale, se sont retirées du projet.

Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, mettra lui un point d'honneur à achever le chantier d'Illisu. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le Monde

Mardi 22 mai 2012

Syrie

Carnage dans la région de Hama

BEYROUTH. Au moins 48 personnes ont été tuées, dimanche 20 mai, en Syrie, dont 34 lors du pilonnage par les forces régulières de Sourane, une

localité de la région de Hama (centre), selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, qui a appelé les observateurs de l'ONU à se rendre sur le lieu de ce « massacre ». Quelque 260 observateurs de l'ONU sont en Syrie pour surveiller une trêve continuellement violée. Par ailleurs, à Beyrouth, deux personnes ont été tuées et 18 blessées, dimanche, dans des heurts entre un mouvement libanais sympathisant de la révolte syrienne et un parti favorable au régime de Bachar Al-Assad. — (AFP, Reuters.)



25 MAI 2012



À CHAUD LEYLA ZANA ÉCOPE DE DIX ANS DE PRISON

Une figure kurde condamnée

La députée kurde Leyla Zana a été condamnée hier à purger une seconde décade de prison en Turquie. A 51 ans, la militante, prix Sakharov des droits de l'homme en 1995, a déjà passé dix ans

dans les geôles turques entre 1994 et 2004, pour collusion avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit). Le tribunal de Diyarbakir, dans le sud-est du pays, a estimé hier qu'elle avait violé neuf fois la

loi antiterrorisme en exprimant dans des discours son soutien au PKK et à son chef emprisonné, Abdullah Öcalan. L'organisation armée, qui se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie de la région kurde dans le sud-est de la Turquie, est classée « organisation terroriste » par Ankara, l'Union européenne et les États-Unis. Le conflit qui l'oppose au gouvernement a déjà fait 45 000 morts selon l'armée.

Le 10 mai dernier, un double attentat faisait 55 morts à Damas. La sophistication de telles attaques porte, pour certains, la marque d'al-Qaida. SANA/AP



La Syrie, nouvelle terre d'élection des djihadistes



GEORGES MALBRUNOT
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À TRIPOLI (LIBAN)
gmalbrunot@lefigaro.fr

Vétéran du djihad, cheikh Saadedine Ghia, 50 ans, fait régulièrement l'aller-retour entre sa résidence tripolitaine du Liban-Nord et le champ de bataille syrien, à quelques kilomètres de là. « Avant l'aube, je traverse la rivière qui marque la frontière, déguisé en paysan ; et je reviens à la nuit tombée, après avoir caché mon arme en territoire syrien », raconte cet islamiste sunnite, qui a combattu aux côtés d'al-Qaida en Afghanistan et en Irak. Comme lui, une centaine de salafistes libanais et 300 à 400 autres volontaires non syriens, selon plusieurs sources concordantes, se sont infiltrés en Syrie pour combattre les partisans de Bachar el-Assad, qui répriment un soulèvement populaire depuis plus d'un an. Ils constituent une part encore minime des insurgés, mais en constante augmentation ces derniers mois. Un sujet tabou pour l'opposition, qui nie tout lien avec ces supplétifs encombrants pour l'image de la révolution. « Al-Jazeera (la chaîne qatarienne, proche des anti-Assad, NDLR) n'en parle jamais, regrette Youssef, un activiste de Homs réfugié à Beyrouth. C'est inquiétant, je n'ai pas envie qu'une dictature islamiste succède à une dictature laïque. »

Fin avril, l'annonce de la mort de deux figures libanaises de « la guerre sainte » a brisé l'omerta. Abdel Ghani Jawhar et Walid Boustani sont pourtant loin d'être les seuls étrangers « martyrs » de la révolution anti-Assad. Selon nos informations, une dizaine

Plusieurs centaines de combattants étrangers ont afflué pour renverser le régime de Bachar el-Assad. Parmi eux, des Français, dont cinq ont été arrêtés au Liban. Leur présence fait redouter une implantation d'al-Qaida dans un pays à la dérive.



Entre l'Armée syrienne libre et nous, les choses ne vont pas s'arranger et, au final, ce sera eux ou nous

CHEIKH GHIA, DJIHADISTE

d'autres ont été tués récemment, dont trois Tunisiens, deux Jordaniens et deux Égyptiens.

Tensions avec les rebelles non islamistes

Au siège de l'ONU à New York, l'ambassadeur syrien, Bachar Jaafari, vient de remettre au Conseil de sécurité une cassette vidéo montrant les témoignages de 26 islamistes étrangers, actuellement sous les verrous dans son pays. D'autres sont morts dans les affrontements, notamment en février pendant le siège de Homs, comme ces cinq Tunisiens, originaires de Ben Guerdane, une localité frontalière de la Libye. Avant de pénétrer en Syrie, leurs frères d'armes avaient récupéré leur passeport et noté un numéro de téléphone pour prévenir les familles, en cas de décès. Parmi d'autres djihadistes morts au combat figurent un Français, un Belge et un Britannique. En pleine affaire Merah, en mars, cinq Français sont arrivés à l'aéroport de Beyrouth en vue de gagner la Syrie. Mais la Sûreté générale, proche du Hezbollah et de Damas, les avait repérés. Elle les laissa prendre

la route vers la frontière nord, où les cinq candidats au djihad furent appréhendés, avant d'être remis aux services de renseignements français, qui les renvoyèrent à Paris.

Encouragés par leurs parrains qatariens, les anciens combattants libyens de la guerre contre Kadhafi constituent l'un des principaux contingents aux côtés des Libanais, des Saoudiens, d'Irakiens, de Koweïtiens, de quelques Algériens et même de trois Pakistais, repliés dans le village de Jergénas, près de la frontière turque. Ils ne se mélangent pas avec les dissidents de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), sauf parfois localement, quand ceux-ci sont eux-mêmes salafistes. En début d'année, de nombreux Irakiens se sont infiltrés avec d'importantes quantités d'armes (des lance-roquettes notamment). Mais les tribus des régions frontalières les ont rejetés. Aujourd'hui, les plus nombreux combattent dans la province montagneuse d'Idleb, non loin de la Turquie, où ils bénéficient de l'hospitalité d'une population laissée pour compte par le pouvoir central. « *Les Libyens nous servent de conseillers militaires* », confie via Skype depuis la frontière un salafiste syrien, qui va et vient entre la Turquie et son pays.

Durant le siège de Homs, des moujahidins étrangers avaient dû fuir la ville pour se replier à al-Qoussayr, près de la frontière libanaise. Mais depuis la liquidation de Boustani, les salafistes syriens d'al-Qoussayr n'acceptent plus que des combattants libanais à leurs côtés ou des Palestiniens des camps de réfugiés du Liban. L'itinéraire de ce dirigeant du Fatah al-Islam illustre le pouvoir d'attraction que représente aujourd'hui la Syrie pour la mouvance radicale. Emprisonné près de Beyrouth pour avoir attaqué l'armée libanaise, Boustani s'est évadé l'été dernier avant de rejoindre la région de Homs, mais son comportement a rapidement heurté la population. « *Il prit en otages deux chrétiens, se souvient cheikh Ghia. Il réclama une rançon que leurs familles ne pouvaient pas payer. Le curé et l'ASL s'en mêlèrent. Le ton monta, et Boustani tua deux dissidents.* » Il fut sommairement exécuté par un groupe de rebelles. Loin d'être isolé, cet incident illustre les tensions croissantes entre les djihadistes et la composante syrienne non islamiste de la révolte. « *À Deraa, au sud, poursuit le dirigeant de l'opposition à Paris, Haytham Manna, les djihadistes ont été chassés par la population, après un attentat à la voiture piégée commis par un Koweïtien, qui entraîna des représailles de la part du régime dans lesquelles trois de nos jeunes furent tués.* »

Ces électrons libres ont un tout autre agenda que les dissidents de l'ASL. « *Nos divergences sont idéologiques, insiste cheikh Ghia. Les djihadistes considèrent les membres de l'ASL comme des mécréants, qui s'opposent au projet d'édifier un califat. Entre l'ASL et nous, les choses ne vont pas s'arranger et, au final, ce sera eux ou nous. Mais nous devons être patients : la Syrie est un laboratoire. Avec le chaos qui s'installe, le pouvoir et l'ASL vont s'affaiblir chacun de leur côté. Et à la fin, les gens s'aligneront sur les djihadistes.* »

Un scénario souvent jugé peu réaliste. « *En Syrie, les différentes communautés ont toujours eu l'habitude de vivre ensemble, observe Haytham Manna. Elles ne laisseront pas les djihadistes s'implanter durablement. D'autre part, il n'y a pas, comme en Irak, un occupant pour les fédérer, ni une région intégralement sunnite pour les abriter.* » À court terme, les djihadistes s'emploient à organiser leur « guerre sainte ». « *En Irak, après 2003, se souvient cheikh Ghia, la branche locale d'al-Qaida nous prenait en charge. Mais en Syrie, c'est la pagaille entre les combattants. Les djihadistes veulent*

en profiter pour diriger la bataille. C'est une erreur », poursuit le moujahidin, qui jure ne plus vouloir y retourner. Avec eux, pas question de respecter le cessez-le-feu prévu par le plan Annan. Au contraire, leurs attaques doivent montrer à une population, exaspérée par l'impuissance de la communauté internationale, qu'ils sont les plus féroces ennemis du régime. Frapper par des attentats à la voiture piégée, c'est renforcer leur recrutement hors des frontières et s'assurer de substantielles rentrées d'argent auprès de leurs bailleurs de fonds.

Tripoli, la plaque tournante

Les filières de financement du djihad syrien existent déjà. Avec ses 40 mosquées salafistes, Tripoli est la plaque tournante, grâce à des associations caritatives du Golfe dont la principale est Charity Eid, une ONG chapeauté par son président saoudien, Safr al-Hawali, le vice-président koweïtien, Walid Tabatabaï, et Abdel Rahman Nouaimi, le secrétaire général qatarien. L'argent ne manque pas, mais il y a visiblement de la perte en ligne. « *Lorsque je suis allé en Afghanistan en 1997, rappelle cheikh Ghia, le premier versement payé par les Saoudiens était de 5 000 dollars, après je touchais 800 dollars par mois. En Syrie, si tu fais une opération suicide, tu vas être bien payé, sinon le djihadiste ne touche qu'environ 200 dollars par mois. C'est pourquoi certains pratiquent des razzias dans les maisons d'Alaouites (pro-Assad, NDLR) qu'ils attaquent.* »

Parfois, des émissaires libanais venus du Golfe remettent directement l'argent à des salafistes syriens, dépêchés jusqu'à Tripoli ; sinon des « relais » locaux se chargent de la logistique. Ainsi de cheikh Bilal Daqmak, ancien chauffeur de taxi aujourd'hui propriétaire d'immeubles et, à ses heures, négociateur pour libérer des otages iraniens détenus par des salafistes syriens. « *Nous voulons de l'argent et la libération de certains de nos amis emprisonnés à Damas* », affirme sans détour cheikh Daqmak.

Inquiets de ces dérives, certains pays alliés de l'opposition commencent à mesurer le risque djihadiste. Avant d'être un combattant anti-Assad, Abdel Ghani Jawhar était un dangereux spécialiste en explosifs, qui cherchait à s'en prendre aux Casques bleus français déployés au Liban-Sud, comme l'indique une note de la DGSE du 22 avril 2010.

Depuis plusieurs mois, déjà, des responsables américains mettent en garde contre l'apparition d'un « axe djihadiste » reliant Tripoli à la région d'al-Anbar en Irak, en passant par la Syrie. Un axe favorisé par le régime de Damas, qui libéra de nombreux islamistes au début du soulèvement. « *La révolution prend un vilain tour, souligne un diplomate occidental à Damas. Nous ne pouvons plus prétendre qu'on ne sait pas. Il y eut d'abord la déclaration de Zawahiri (le chef d'al-Qaida, NDLR) appelant les djihadistes à affluer en Syrie. Puis celle de James Clapper, le patron du renseignement américain, imputant à la mouvance al-Qaida la plupart des attentats commis depuis décembre.* » Il y a maintenant les convictions du secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, qui s'est déclaré jeudi « persuadé qu'al-Qaida était derrière » les derniers attentats à Damas, les plus sophistiqués et les plus meurtriers en quinze mois de révolte. ■

Kurdish oil deal stirs Iraqi tensions

Autonomous region's oil minister outlines plans to export oil and gas to Turkey, increasing tensions with Baghdad.

Jane Arraf

Erbil, Iraq - The oil minister for Iraq's Kurdish region has outlined bold plans to export oil and gas directly to Turkey, escalating tensions in a battle with Baghdad for control of the country's fuel exports.

Ashti Hawrami, Kurdish oil minister, told an industry conference on Sunday that a one million barrel per day pipeline from Kurdish fields to an oil facility just a few kilometres from the Turkish border was expected to be completed by the end of next year.

He said a second phase would extend that pipeline across the border to deliver crude oil to the Turkish port of Cihan.

Turkey is also currently extending pipelines from the Cihan port on the Mediterranean to the border with Iraq's Kurdish region.

"We envisage the building of a new pipeline taking Kurdistan's oil, particularly the heavier component part to Cihan," Hawrami said in his first public announcement of the planned project.

Hawrami made the comments while speaking at a conference with Taner Yildiz, Turkish energy minister, on Turkish-Kurdish energy co-operation.

Kurdish officials had been reluctant to publicly talk about the proposed pipeline until Turkey gave a clear sign that it was committed to the project.

He said another pipeline being planned would carry natural gas to Cihan and then on to international markets.

Yildiz reiterated to journalists that any investment in the Kurdish oil industry would benefit all of Iraq.

IRAQ'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Talk of the project threatens to worsen already strained relations between Ankara and Baghdad, which has accused Turkey of interfering in Iraq's internal affairs.

Baghdad's central government maintains that it has the sole right to negotiate contracts and export oil and gas.

Turkish oil officials say the Kurdish region's large and virtually untapped oil and gas reserves and Turkey's huge demand for fuel, make pipelines linking the two almost inevitable.



Kurdistan Regional Government Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami (R) speaks with Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz during a joint news conference in Erbil, Kurdistan region of Iraq on May 20, 2012.

Iraq has now become Turkey's second biggest trading partner, the majority of the trade with the Kurdish region.

Those considerations are outweighing Turkey's traditional opposition to any measures that would give the semi-autonomous Kurdish region even more power than it already has.

"If you look at Turkey, which is the second-fastest growing country in the world, its gas needs which increase significantly every year and then the price of oil," Mehmet Sepil, chairman of Turkey's Genel Energy, tells us.

"I think people realise that Turkey is looking to Iraq - particularly the Kurdish regional government - very carefully because of economics, not because of politics," Sepil said.

The Iraqi government considers illegal contracts such as those signed by Genel, the first of what is now more than 40 oil companies operating in the Kurdish region.

It has moved to ban Exxon Mobile, the world's biggest oil company, from new contracts in Iraq's huge southern oil fields if it carries through with contracts negotiated with the Kurdish government.

While proven oil reserves in the south of Iraq are estimated at 143 billion barrels, the Kurdish regions reserves total 45 billion barrels, the Kurdish government says.

Those figures though are believed to include oil from the disputed Kirkuk oil fields.

SELLING OIL DIRECTLY

Kurdish officials maintain that as long as revenue goes to the central bank and the Kurdish region receives its agreed share of revenue, it can sell the oil directly.

"When we say oil from Kurdistan, it's Iraqi

oil," Hawrami said.

"There is no difference between Iraqi oil or Basra oil from Kurdistan."

The Kurdish government in April, though, stopped exports of oil from its fields to an Iraqi government facility near Kirkuk after a payment agreement broke down. Instead oil companies are selling the reduced production to local markets to cover their costs.

Kurdish rhetoric has become increasingly hard-line recently as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition government remains embroiled in a crisis over charges that the prime minister has reneged on promises made to Kurds, Sunnis and even his own Shia allies.

"Political stalemate in Baghdad, sporadic but intense bouts of violence and sectarian conflict point to an identity crisis," gloated the Kurdish region's annual oil and gas report released on Sunday.

"The stagnating political dynamics between the Sunni and Shia leaderships in Baghdad are positioning the Kurdistan region as a model of political virtue and stability in Iraq."

In another message to Baghdad, Hawrami also told the energy conference that the Kurdish region was planning to "barter" crude oil it produced with other countries for refined fuel. The move would also contravene the principle that only the central government can export Iraqi oil.

To an audience that included the governor of bordering Nineveh province, embroiled in its own dispute with Baghdad,

Hawrami also reiterated the intent to work in oil fields in disputed areas claimed by both the Kurdish and central governments.

☆☆☆

Turkey says US favorable to sale of armed drones

By SUZAN FRASER (AP)

ANKARA, Turkey — President Barack Obama's administration is inclined to sell armed drones to Turkey but has to convince Congress first, Turkey's president told reporters after a meeting with the U.S. leader.

Washington, which is providing technical and intelligence to Ankara in its fight against autonomy-seeking Kurdish rebels, deployed four Predator drones from Iraq to Turkey last year. NATO-ally Turkey is now trying to acquire armed drones — the kind the U.S. has used to target militants in places like Yemen and the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But analysts say some Congress members may oppose the sale of armed Predator drones to Turkey due to its tense relations with Israel, a close U.S. ally. A botched Turkish military airstrike in

December aimed at the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party that killed 34 civilians is also likely to further complicate any sale.

"The administration's position (toward the sale) is favorable," Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency quoted President Abdullah Gul as telling Turkish reporters after a meeting with Obama on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Chicago late Monday. "They are trying to convince Congress."

"President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and their aides are trying their best," he added.

The Turkish president said he told Obama during their discussions that the armed drones are not as lethal as F-16 fighter jets, which Turkey already has in its fleet, or the F-35 fighter jet whose development Turkey is involved in.

"This must be explained to Congress," Gul said. "They must not act begrudgingly toward an important allied country. They have to trust it."

Gul would not say how many armed drones Turkey has requested from the United States.

Last week, the Wall Street Journal said the attack, which struck a group of smugglers



and resulted in one of the highest single-day death tolls in the long-standing conflict between Turkey and the rebels, was based on intelligence provided by a U.S. Predator drone.

U.S. officials reportedly told the newspaper that the Turkish military carried out the attack before more information on the men was obtained, raising questions about how Turkey uses intelligence provided by the Predators.

Turkish officials have dismissed the report, saying the first images of the group were captured by the Turkish military.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, which took up arms in 1984, is labeled a terrorist organization by Washington.

□□□

Turkey says Syria is helping Kurdish rebels by allowing them to work from its territory

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Syria is allowing Kurdish rebels who are fighting Turkish forces to establish bases in Syrian territory, as ties between the two neighboring countries deteriorate, a Turkish minister said Wednesday.

Interior Minister Idris Naim Sahin said Turkish intelligence indicates that Syria is allowing rebels to establish themselves in areas close to the Turkish border. Some Kurdistan Workers' Party rebels have even taken charge of running small Syrian towns, Sahin claimed, describing the development as an apparent act of revenge against Turkey.

Turkey has reacted to the popular uprising in Syria by urging its leader, Bashar Assad, to step down, by accepting some 23,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey, and by playing host to civilian

and military members of the Syrian opposition.

Kurdish rebels have long used bases in northern Iraq to launch attacks in Turkey, but Syria had stopped allowing that.

"Terrorist groupings that were not there a year ago have been spotted," Sahin told private NTV television. "Syria is turning a blind eye to terrorist groupings in areas close to the border to put Turkey in difficulty and perhaps as a way to take revenge on Turkey."

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has been fighting for autonomy in southeast Turkey for decades, has been condemned as a terrorist group by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

Turkish officials have accused Syria of reviving its ties with the Kurdish rebels, and Sahin's statement came a

week after three Turkish military officers were killed in fighting with suspected rebels in the mountainous region of Amanos near the Syrian border. It was the first such clash reported there in several years.

Syria is believed to have stopped harboring Kurdish rebels in 1998, when Turkey threatened military action. Ties between the two countries also improved after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip came to power in 2003, and Damascus was cooperating with Turkey in its fight against the Kurdish rebels until ties soured over Syria's bloody crackdown on civilians.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party rebels took up arms in Turkey in 1984, and tens of thousands of people have died in the conflict. ■



Syria: An Alternative Choice

BY JOSEPH PUDEK

frontpagemag.com

In the midst of the current revolutionary chaos in Syria, there is a clear voice of reason that seeks to create a free Syria that is democratic, Western-oriented and federal in structure. That voice belongs to Sherkoh Abbas, President of the Kurdistan National Assembly of Syria, and his allies in the Syrian Democratic Coalition.

Secretary of State Hilary Clinton met late last year with members of the Syrian National Council; these members in exile are considered to be the opposition leaders by the Obama administration. Unfortunately, most of them were found to be associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Sherkoh Abbas and Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, formidable leaders of the Syrian democratic and secular opposition, were snubbed by Clinton.

Sherkoh Abbas was compelled to leave his native Qamishli, Syria back in the 1980s because he criticized the Hafez Assad regime. Abbas subsequently came to the US as a student and received advanced degrees in Technology, Engineering, and Business.

As Abbas sees it, the current situation can only lead to a civil war between the regular Syrian army, which represents the Alawis and their associates, and the Free Syrian Army composed of Sunni-Arab officers and soldiers. The Kurds, he maintains, are caught between these warring armies without an army of their own. He fears that the Kurds will be the principle victims of the unleashed violence, since the Kurds are also the largest minority. According to Abbas, "The free world has a moral obligation to protect the Kurds of Syria not only because we have been victimized and have been throughout the 20th Century, but because we are natural allies of the West, sharing such values as tolerance and acceptance of minorities, and belief in an open and free democracy."

Asked to opine on what he would like to see in the near future for his Kurdish people: an autonomous region in Syria; joining the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq - which borders the Kurdish region in Syria; or perhaps an even larger Kurdish state, Abbas said,



"The Kurdish people, in all parts of Kurdistan, seek the right to form an independent Kurdish state. We can only achieve this cherished goal with the help of the western democracies, and first and foremost the U.S."

Unlike the Palestinian Arabs who squandered numerous opportunities to assert their self-determination as a "people," (in 1938, the Arabs of Palestine rejected the Peel Commission plan for the division of Palestine into a larger Palestinian state and a much smaller Jewish state. In 1947, they rejected the UN Partition Plan, and they have made a mockery of the 1993 Oslo Accords). The Kurds, a truly distinct people, with their own language and culture, have been cheated out of an autonomous and independent Kurdistan promised to them by the victorious allies (Britain and France) in the Treaty of Sevres (August 10, 1920). The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne replaced the Treaty of Sevres, as the new nationalist Turkey under Kamal Ataturk re-conquered Anatolia and the land that was to have been the Kurdish state.

If an independent Kurdish state is unattainable at this juncture, Abbas would be satisfied with a "democratic and federal system in Syria" in which the Kurdish people would have the right to create their own institutions, and disseminate their cultural heritage - which has been forbidden and outlawed by the "Arabizing" Assad dictatorships. The Kurds reject the legitimacy of the Assad regime and, parenthetically, the Ba'athist influence on the political life of Syria in general and Kurds in particular.

The democratic opposition group that Sherkoh Abbas and Dr. Zuhdi Jasser represent has been sidelined by the Obama administration, which has made its choice for Syria by supporting the Syrian National Council led by Burhan Ghalioun, who is backed by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist government of Turkey. According to Abbas

Obama administration officials are pushing the Kurdish groups to join to Syrian National Council. Only one group has complied thus far.

And how does Sherkoh Abbas see the revolution in Syria ending? "The Muslim Brotherhood, with the support of President Obama and Turkey, will not succeed in controlling all of Syria. The Alawis and Hezbollah backed by Iran, and Russia and China, will not give up power easily." Sherkoh Abbas asserted that the Alawis have been working to establish an Alawi mini-state in the west-



Dr Sherkoh Abbas, a veteran Kurdish politician and the President of the Kurdistan National Assembly of Syria.

ern region of coastal Syria for quite some long time. That area, he pointed out, is where the regime has stored most of its assets and where weapons from Russia are shipped.

Erdogan's Turkey, Abbas maintains, will use the Free Syrian army, currently based in Turkish territory, to control the Kurdish region. The Christians in Syria, numbering more than 10% of the population, have been largely co-opted by the Assad regime, as well as the Druze religious community in southern Syria, who account for 2% of the population. The Muslim Brotherhood does not trust either of these groups because they have, for the most part, refrained from joining the revolution in opposition to the Assad regime.

The New York Times reported on March 8, 2012 that scores of (Syrian) Kurds have begun fleeing into Iraqi Kurdistan in an attempt to escape the Assad regime security forces, and the violence around them. The Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria, "that could potentially shift themomentum" against the Assad regime. According to the Times, "The Kurds have long complained of ■■■

■■■ repression and discrimination by the Assad regime,” but have failed to unify and have declined to join the Muslim Brotherhood, Sunni dominated opposition. The concern of the Kurds and shared by Abbas, is that the post-Assad government led by the Muslim Brotherhood dominated opposition, “may not be better – and may perhaps be even worse.”

The conflict within Syria has had wider ramifications, involving two regional powers: Iran and Turkey. These two powers are currently clashing through their military proxies. Should Sunni (Muslim) Turkey actively intervene in Syria, Shiite (Muslim) Iran will enter the war openly on the side of the Assad regime and unleash the Kurdish PKK and the Alawis

within Turkey against Erdogan’s Turkish government.

What should be the role of the United States in an emerging Syrian civil war? Sherkoh Abbas believes that the U.S. must “find a radical solution for the immediate removal of the Assad regime, and, if necessary, use force to do so.” He argues that a civil war in Syria would adversely impact the entire region. Sherkoh considers active U.S. involvement as essential in preventing “the creation of a hostile regime” in Syria. The U.S., he added, has a moral responsibility to insure freedom and democracy for all Syrians. The alternative, Abbas said, is the frightening prospect of “an Arab nationalist or Islamist regime that would lead to more violence and civil war.”

Sherkoh Abbas concluded by restating his conviction that for Syria, only a democratic federal system supported by the U.S. and the West, could bring peace and tranquility to its people and to its neighbors. A Syrian federal state will guarantee full representation and justice for all ethnic and religious groups in Syria. A federal state would also lead to economic prosperity and growth for all Syrians, and most of all would ensure individual freedom for all citizens. Moreover, since the Assad dictatorship requires an outside enemy (Israel) to stay in power, a Syrian democratic system will benefit Alawites, Christians, Druze and Kurds. It is for these reasons that eventually Kurds and others will join the revolution in full force to affect a regime change.◆

Euro speaker links Kurdish autonomy to EU accession



ISTANBUL
Hürriyet Daily News
Erdem Güneş

The president of the European Parliament has linked the resolution of Turkey’s Kurdish issue to its eventual accession to membership in the European Union.

“My advice is given in the framework Turkey’s of pre-EU accession strategy: We must try to convince both sides that it is possible [to create something] between a sovereign state and [a region]

with a high degree of autonomy while [maintaining] the ... territorial integrity of the country. That is my humble advice,” Martin Schulz, European Parliament president, said yesterday in Istanbul. Schulz was speaking at a ceremony at Bilgi University at which he was awarded an honorary doctorate.

Kurdish problem is Turkey’s domestic issue

The Kurdish problem is a domestic problem for Turkey, Schulz said, but added that the European Union is concerned about the rights and recognition



Schulz recommends the creation of a Kurdish autonomous region in Turkey.
AFP photo

of minorities in its member countries.

Schulz said he was confronted with the Kurdish problem when he was a socialist mayor in Germany. “In the early 80s I had a lot of refugees in my city coming from Kurdistan, and I was immediately confronted with the problems that I had in my city, where among the citizens of Turkish origin, half considered themselves Kurds and the other half Turks. This was my reality. And the first part of my answer to you is that there is a Kurdish problem.” Schulz also mentioned the success of northern Iraq’s Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). “You know that the northern part of Iraq has an autonomous Kurdish government. Mr. [Masoud] Barzani [president of the KRG] is a regional leader, being of Kurdish origin, and considers himself a Kurdish leader. This is not a problem ... for Turkey, and it is not a problem for us or for Iraq.”●

Bağış rejects ‘reform fatigue’

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

EU Minister Egemen Bağış yesterday rejected criticism from European Parliament Speaker Martin Schulz that Ankara has been hit by “reform fatigue,” arguing that the European Union itself is worn down. “There is no fatigue in Turkey concerning reforms. Turkey has not stopped working despite the fact that new chapters are not being opened in the membership negotiations,” Bağış said, speaking at a seminar on preventing fraud in EU-funded projects. In an interview with Germany’s Der Tagesspiegel newspaper this week, Schulz had said that Ankara was suffering from “reform fatigue,” while the EU was hit by “enlargement fatigue.” Bağış said that the country was seeking to make contributions to Europe under the motto “Hang on, Europe! Turkey will come to help you.”

Iranians taking solace in the past

Iran's youth and their elders are praying for progress at the nuclear talks in Baghdad.

Camelia Entekhabifard

Last fall, while reporting on the U.N. General Assembly, I had the chance to meet a number of Iranian journalists accompanying President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on his trip to New York.

At the time, these young Iranian writers told me they were excited about the revolution in Egypt and the possibility of normalized relations between

tion by the Islamic leadership, and endured an eight-year war with Iraq that shattered the Iranian economy and damaged the national psyche.

I was six years old at the time of the Iranian revolution and have some memories of what life was like before the Iranian monarchy was abolished. My brother, born three years after the revolution, is part of a generation of Iranians who have experienced nothing but war, economic malaise and the threat of renewed conflict.

Now Iranians are suffering once again as the world debates their government's nuclear ambitions. The possibility of a military attack against Iran's nuclear installations has left ordinary Iranians — already struggling to deal with the impact of heavy economic sanctions — terrified of a new threat of war. It is this economic misery and constant fear that has left so many Iranians, including those born after the departure of the shah, so nostalgic for the past.

The first, second and now third generations of young Iranians born after 1979 have no memory of the country's pre-revolutionary era. All they hear are stories from parents or family friends describing how "during the time of the shah" Iranians could travel anywhere they wanted and never had to line up for hours outside foreign embassies to beg for visas, like so many young people do today. These young Iranians — roughly 70 percent of the population — now listen with pride as their elders talk of the country's once-strong national currency and regional prowess.

And so, more than 30 years after his death, the shah's strong nationalistic sensibility has made him more popular than ever. The post-revolution generations have only heard their country referred to as part of an "axis of evil" that supports terrorists and deserves to be bombarded. They have come to idealize Iran's era of monarchy, associating the shah and his wife with social freedom, economic stability and regional power.

Today, life in the Islamic Republic is more difficult than it has been since the eight-year war with Iraq. International economic sanctions, the harshest since the 1979 revolution, have squeezed the struggling middle class even further. Ordinary Iranians live in constant fear that Israel — one of Tehran's strongest political allies before 1979 — may soon decide to bomb them. So many of the country's best and brightest students have left Iran to study abroad, and are certainly not willing to come back.

Yet talk to any ordinary Iranian, and you will find the vast majority still admire President Barack Obama. In spite of the Obama administration's tough financial sanctions, the public places

much of the blame for their economic distress on the government in Tehran.

Every day, at the end of her Islamic prayers, a friend's mother — a 67-year old resident of north Tehran — prays for President Obama's good health and re-election. For her, as for many Iranians, the U.S. president represents the final barrier between Iran and a potential Israeli attack.

A year and a half since the breakdown of talks over Iran's contested nuclear program and the imposition of devastating economic sanctions, Iran has returned to the negotiating table. After the first round of nuclear talks in Istanbul last month ended on a positive note, Iranians are hopeful that Wednesday's discussions between the P5-plus-1 countries (the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany) and Iran in Baghdad will pave the way for further progress. For them, the outcome of the nuclear talks is more important than ever.

If talks go well and P5-plus-1 negotiators agree to perhaps lift sanctions against the Iranian Central Bank in exchange for Iran's suspension of higher grade uranium enrichment, then ordinary Iranians can breathe a little easier.

A favorable outcome will certainly boost Obama's strong popularity on the streets of Iran. But if negotiations over Iran's nuclear program break down and the European Union follows through with an oil embargo set to start in July, life for the post-revolutionary generations of Iranians will become even more miserable.

In the meantime, the Iranian people will continue to find solace in remembering their country's pre-revolutionary past. All they can do is keep praying for a better future, and hope that after 33 years of revolution, they may finally be able to sleep in peace, without fear.

CAMELIA ENTEKHABIFARD, the author of "Camelia: Save Yourself by Telling the Truth — a Memoir of Iran," is a journalist reporting on Iranian and Afghan affairs.



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Cairo and Tehran. They were eager to hear about my travels in Egypt, a country they had never seen, and were especially interested in learning about the tomb of Iran's last monarch in Cairo.

To my surprise, my revelation to them that Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's tomb inside a mosque is quite humble was greeted with sighs of sadness. "May he rest in peace," one young journalist told me. "We enjoyed such respect during his reign. Now the world treats us like thieves!"

Since Iran's 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian public has lived in a state of perpetual stress. Besides the violence of the post-revolutionary era, Iranians witnessed the humiliating hostage crisis with the United States, suffered a systematic purge of the political opposi-



Un rebelle syrien dans une zone de combat. Les Syriens ne pourront pas se libérer du régime d'el-Assad sans aide extérieure.

DÉCRYPTAGE/NADIM SHEHADI

Syrie : appliquer les leçons de l'Irak

LONDON
Il va sans dire que l'expérience de la guerre en Irak ne doit pas être répétée. Cette conviction est le moteur de la politique vis-à-vis de la Syrie, mais l'Occident n'a pas retenu de l'exemple irakien les leçons qu'il fallait. L'intervention militaire américaine de 2003, le chaos et les vagues de meurtres motivés par le sectarisme qui ont suivi, hantent l'Occident. Ils le rendent hésitant, et des dommages irréparables sont infligés à la société syrienne.

Le monde entier regarde sans rien faire la violente répression du soulèvement, qui augmente les tensions sectaires et le radicalisme, tandis que les sanctions affaiblissent l'économie et la classe moyenne. Plus cela dure, plus la société syrienne risque de voir se réaliser la prophétie du président Bachar el-Assad : la chute de son régime serait dix fois "pire que l'Afghanistan".

Il y a une autre leçon à tirer de la politique vis-à-vis de l'Irak avant 2003, cette période de relations suivies avec Saddam Hussein : allié de l'Occident il a combattu l'Iran et a été maintenu au pouvoir, même après avoir envahi Koweït, par crainte de ce qu'entraînerait sa chute.

De 1991 à 2003, l'Occident a permis au parti Baas de Saddam Hussein de renvoyer la société irakienne à l'âge de pierre, et sa politique d'endiguement a contribué au processus. Les sanctions ont touché le peuple et renforcé le régime. Grâce au programme pétrole contre nourriture, le tyran a prospéré, distribuant des coupons de pétrole à ses partisans dans les pays

arabes et finançant ses lobbyistes en Occident. La dévaluation de la monnaie a paupérisé la classe moyenne, et les plus chanceux ont émigré.

Pendant la guerre du Golfe en 1991, les arguments contre une entrée dans Bagdad et contre la déposition de Saddam Hussein après la libération du Koweït étaient similaires à ceux qui sont utilisés aujourd'hui pour ne pas intervenir en Syrie. C'est la peur des conséquences de sa chute qui a maintenu Saddam Hussein au pouvoir, les Occidentaux espérant en secret qu'il soit assassiné ou renversé de l'intérieur grâce à un coup d'État militaire. Les Irakiens ont été encouragés à se soulever contre le régime. Quand ils l'ont fait, croyant avoir le soutien des États-Unis, l'Amérique a détourné le regard pendant que des dizaines de milliers de chiites et les Kurdes étaient massacrés. Ceci a aggravé les tensions ethniques et sectaires, et l'extrémisme.

Une transition vers la démocratie en Irak aurait été beaucoup plus aisée en 1991, même si le pays sortait de deux guerres. Les politiques précédentes envers Bagdad comprenaient l'établissement de relations avec le régime et un soutien dans le conflit Iran-Irak. Quand il était un allié de l'Occident, Saddam Hussein a été autorisé à gazer et à massacrer Kurdes et autres minorités. Les cauchemars de la campagne d'Anfal contre les Kurdes, et Halabja - où plus de 5 000 Kurdes sont morts dans une attaque au gaz - hantent le monde entier et participent de l'héritage auquel l'Irak doit faire face. Le régime a survécu toutes ces années en massacrant la population, en affaiblissant ses institutions et en réduisant la société civile à une coquille vide. À partir de 1980, les relations de l'Occident avec Saddam Hussein et le soutien qui lui a été apporté ont fait

souffrir deux générations entières d'Irakiens.

Garder une dictature au pouvoir se paye, et la renverser aussi. Même s'il y avait moins de victimes avant 2003 qu'après, ces tueries ont profondément marqué la population. L'Irak après 2003 devait non seulement se remettre d'une invasion, mais aussi de 24 ans passés sous le joug d'un régime brutal et dictatorial. Ne rien faire pour la Syrie aura des conséquences similaires.

Sans le soutien international, les Syriens ne parviendront pas à se libérer du régime d'el-Assad. Il ne reculera devant rien pour rester au pouvoir. N'oublions pas que la Syrie, avec l'Iran et d'autres pays de la région, a contribué au chaos irakien après 2003 en soutenant l'insurrection. Elle a également facilité l'infiltration de terroristes de la mouvance d'al-Qaïda. Mais après Bachar el-Assad, la Syrie ne sera pas confrontée aux mêmes défis régionaux. La culture politique a radicalement changé depuis l'époque où Saddam Hussein, Hosni Moubarak, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Ali Abdallah Saleh, Mouammar Kadhafi et autres despotes prospéraient grâce à l'extorsion et au chantage. Aucun de ces régimes n'avait intérêt à une réforme de l'Irak. Le président syrien lui-même s'était vanté que son pays était indispensable à la stabilité de la région, car il pouvait aider à résoudre les problèmes qu'il avait créés lors des conflits irakiens, libanais et palestiniens.

Pendant ce temps l'illusion demeure que les négociations avec Damas conduiront à une transition pacifique et que le régime coopérera. Or celui-ci va continuer ses manipulations et tenter de gagner du temps, dans l'espoir que le vent tournera à nouveau en sa faveur et qu'il parviendra à réprimer la révolte.

Nadim Shehadi est chercheur à Chatham House, l'Institut royal des affaires internationales à Londres. Envoyez vos commentaires à : intelligence@nytimes.com.

Nucléaire : les grandes puissances veulent relancer les négociations avec l'Iran

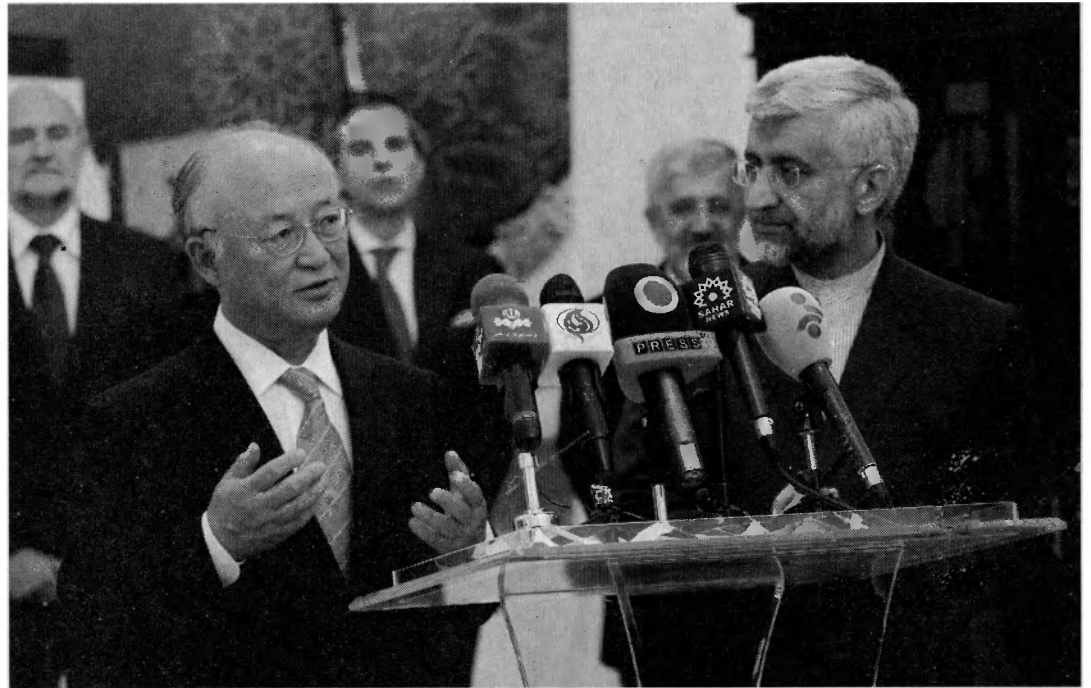
L'objectif est double. Franchir l'année 2012 sans qu'Israël, au-delà des débats politico-militaires qui agitent l'Etat juif, opte pour des frappes militaires contre des sites iraniens. Eviter aussi que les tensions dans le Golfe provoquent une flambée des prix du pétrole, scénario cauchemardesque pour une Europe financièrement mal en point, ainsi que pour le président américain, Barack Obama, qui veut se faire réélire en novembre.

L'Iran, quant à lui, se montrerait plus désireux de parler de son programme nucléaire parce qu'il sent douloureusement l'effet de sanctions, dont les volets pétrolier et financier sont en passe de s'intensifier, le 1^{er} juillet, avec l'entrée en vigueur de l'embargo pétrolier décidé par l'Union européenne (UE). Le pétrole iranien se vend mal, y compris en Asie, l'inflation grimpe, le rial a chuté...

Ces éléments forment la toile de fond des discussions qui doivent s'ouvrir à Bagdad, mercredi 23 mai, sur le contentieux nucléaire. Le choix du lieu est lourd de symbole, six mois après le retrait militaire américain de l'Irak. Les Occidentaux ont accédé à cette demande de l'Iran, en se disant que la suite des pourparlers pourrait se dérouler en terrain neutre, à Genève.

Autour de la table, on retrouvera les mêmes qu'à Istanbul, où le processus de dialogue avait repris, à la mi-avril. D'un côté, le négociateur iranien Saïd Jalili, représentant spécial du Guide Ali Khameneï. De l'autre, les émissaires des Six (Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Russie, Chine et Allemagne) qui, avec leur coordonnatrice, la représentante européenne, Catherine Ashton, sont convenus d'une stratégie « étape par étape », basée sur la « réciprocité ».

Ce qui se joue à Bagdad, c'est un premier pas vers la délicate élaboration d'un accord intermédiaire entre l'Iran et les Six. Un accord qui, à défaut de résoudre le fond du contentieux nucléaire, demeuré inextricable depuis bientôt dix ans, réussirait à faire baisser la tension. La recette : un paquet de « mesures pour établir la confiance ». L'espoir est d'y parvenir à l'été, après une série de rencontres, notamment entré « experts ».



Le directeur de l'AIEA, Yukiya Amano (à gauche), en compagnie de Saïd Jalili, le négociateur iranien sur le dossier du nucléaire, lors de sa visite surprise en Iran, lundi 21 mai. ADEL PAZZYAR/AP

Cette stratégie pourrait aussi poser les jalons d'un ambitieux aggiornamento diplomatique : l'espoir d'un vaste marchandage entre l'Iran et les Etats-Unis si l'administration Obama remporte un second mandat. Après l'accord intermédiaire, un virage historique à portée de main ? Les « faucons » et autres tenants d'un froid réalisme observent surtout que, si cet échafaudage théorique s'effondre, le recours à l'option militaire n'en sera que plus légitime.

Mais dans l'immédiat, on est dans la gestion de crise : l'urgence dicte les demandes qui pourraient être faites à l'Iran. Celles-ci sont de trois ordres, selon des sources proches du dossier. D'abord, cesser la production d'uranium enrichi à 20 %, proche des niveaux des programmes militaires. Elle se déroule pour l'essentiel sur le site de Fordow, creusé dans une montagne à l'abri de tout bombardement. L'invulnérabilité de ce site alimente la nervosité israélienne, qui y voit une « zone d'immunité » dont l'Iran ne doit à aucun prix bénéficier. On ne sait si, comme le réclame Israël, le démantèlement de Fordow sera exigé.

Deuxième demande des Six : l'Iran devrait faire un geste à pro-

pos de son stock d'uranium enrichi à 20 %, qui atteint 140 kilogrammes alors qu'il faut environ 250 kg pour fabriquer, dans des délais brefs, la matière fissile d'un engin nucléaire. L'évacuation de ce stock vers l'étranger priverait Téhéran de l'option d'une fuite en avant vers la bombe.

Troisième élément : l'Iran doit donner des gages de coopération avec l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), le bras

Téhéran voudra, pour faire passer la pilule en interne, se prévaloir de concessions arrachées aux Occidentaux

de vérification de l'ONU. La visite surprise en Iran, lundi 21 mai, du directeur de l'AIEA, Yukiya Amano, avait valeur de test, sans résultat immédiat, mais donnant l'impression d'un dialogue relancé.

Optimisme ? La question centrale demeure la capacité du système au pouvoir à Téhéran de faire le choix d'une négociation approfondie avec, en face, le « Grand Satan »

américain. Le régime iranien voudra, pour faire passer la pilule en interne, se prévaloir de concessions arrachées aux Occidentaux. Mais la levée de sanctions n'est pas, à ce stade, à l'ordre du jour. Les Six envisagent plutôt des gestes symboliques : offre d'assistance pour la « sécurité » de la centrale électronucléaire iranienne de Bouchehr, apparemment située en zone sismique. Tout au plus pourraient-ils s'engager à ne pas accroître les sanctions si l'Iran faisait, de son côté, des gestes concrets sur les sujets litigieux.

Une astuce possible est évoquée : sans revenir sur l'embargo pétrolier, l'UE pourrait, à la demande du Royaume-Uni, reporter de six mois des mesures visant les contrats d'assurances pour les exportations de brut iranien. Les Iraniens obtiendraient ainsi un allègement de sanctions maquillé, côté européen, en simple prise en compte des intérêts de la City de Londres... M. Obama, pour sa part, ne peut se permettre aucun geste sur ce point, en raison du poids du Congrès, qui a joué un rôle central dans le vote d'une législation extraterritoriale frappant la Banque centrale iranienne. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Turquie: 2 morts, 16 blessés dans une attaque suicide contre un commissariat

Une attaque suicide contre un commissariat de Kayseri, dans le centre de la Turquie, a tué vendredi deux policiers et blessé 16 autres personnes, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie citant des sources officielles qui ont imputé l'attentat aux rebelles kurdes.

Les assaillants ont tout d'abord approché du commissariat à bord de leur véhicule en le mitraillant puis l'un d'eux a déclenché des explosifs qu'il portait sur lui, ont rapporté plusieurs chaînes de télévision, évoquant d'après témoins trois personnes à bord de la voiture.

Un policier est mort sur le coup et un autre a succombé à ses blessures peu après, a indiqué le ministre de l'Intérieur Idris Naim Sahin, cité par Anatolie.

Seize civils, dont plusieurs enfants, qui se trouvaient à proximité ont également été blessés, a-t-il ajouté.

Le ministre a mentionné deux assaillants, qui auraient tous deux péri dans l'attaque.

"Pour autant qu'on puisse voir dans

le véhicule, il y avait deux kamikazes. Ils sont maintenant en morceaux, tout comme la voiture", a-t-il déclaré, selon Anatolie.

M. Sahin a expliqué que le véhicule utilisé pour l'attentat avait échappé plus tôt dans la matinée à un contrôle effectué par la gendarmerie à Kahramanmaras (sud) et a estimé que le commissariat n'était sans doute pas l'objectif initial des assaillants, mais plutôt une cible choisie en dernière minute.

Il a imputé l'attentat aux rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

"Nous constatons que l'organisation terroriste continue ses actions insensées, qu'elle ne s'est pas arrêtée", a-t-il dit, utilisant le vocable habituel de l'administration turque pour désigner le PKK.

En mars, l'explosion d'une bombe au passage d'un car de police a fait 16 blessés dont 15 policiers à Istanbul, mais les attaques suicides sont plutôt rares en



Turquie.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée, depuis son déclenchement, en 1984, par le PKK dans le sud-est du pays, peuplé en majorité de kurdes. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux autres pays. ■

Turquie: trois rebelles kurdes tués dans des combats

ISTANBUL, 23 mai 2012 (AFP)

TROIS REBELLES kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués mardi soir lors de combats avec les forces de sécurité dans l'est de la Turquie, a rapporté mercredi l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les forces de sécurité sont entrées en contact avec un groupe de rebelles vers 19H00 (16H00GMT) mardi alors qu'elles effectuaient une opération de ratissage dans une zone rurale proche d'Ovacik, dans la province monta-

gneuse de Tunceli, a affirmé Anatolie, citant un communiqué du gouvernorat de Tunceli.

Trois rebelles ont péri dans les combats survenus après que le groupe a refusé de se rendre, selon l'agence.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée, depuis son déclenchement, en 1984, par le PKK dans le sud-est du pays. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux autres pays. ○

LE FIGARO Vendredi 25 mai 2012

Pilonnage de localités syriennes kurdes

BEYROUTH, (AFP) — Des hélicoptères de l'armée syrienne ont bombardé vendredi pour la première fois des localités kurdes hostiles au régime de Bachar al-Assad près de la frontière avec la Turquie, faisant de nombreux blessés, rapporte l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

Au moins quatre policiers ont été tués par ailleurs dans des combats avec des rebelles à

Kansebba, dans cette même zone.

"C'est la première fois que cette zone, désignée sous le nom de la montagne des Kurdes, est la cible de bombardements aériens. Il s'agit d'une zone montagneuse très escarpée où les chars n'accèdent pas facilement", a indiqué à l'AFP le président de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane, qui fait état d'une vingtaine de blessés

parmi les habitants.

"Auparavant, les hélicoptères survolaient la zone. Aujourd'hui, c'est l'opération la plus violente" contre les villages de Kansebba, Kabbané, Marj al-Zawiya, Doueirké et Eido, qui se situent entre 6 et 25 km de la frontière turque précisé M. Abdel Rahmane.

"Avec leurs mitrailleuses lourdes, les hélicoptères visent des cibles précises pour tenter

de nettoyer la zone en vue de permettre aux transports de troupes de lancer un assaut terrestre et déloger les rebelles", ajoute-t-il.

Au moins 28 personnes, en majorité des civils, ont été tués au total vendredi dans des violences à travers la Syrie alors que la trêve entrée en vigueur il y a plus d'un mois est quotidiennement violée. □

Syrie: Ghalioun renonce à diriger l'opposition

Proche de Paris, le sociologue jette l'éponge face aux islamistes.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Maintes fois annoncée au cours des derniers mois, la démission de l'universitaire syrien, naturalisé français, Burhan Ghalioun, 67 ans, a finalement été officialisée tard mercredi par le Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale organisation de l'opposition à Bachar el-Assad que cet enseignant à la Sorbonne présidait depuis sa création en août 2011.

Un successeur devrait lui être désigné lors d'une réunion du secrétariat général du CNS, prévue les 11 et 12 juin en Turquie, l'un des principaux parrains du Conseil aux côtés de la France, du Qatar et de l'Arabie saoudite. Au fil des

Ghalioun était devenu otage des différents groupes qui composent le Conseil national syrien

mois, Ghalioun était devenu otage des différents groupes, qui composent le CNS, en premier lieu des tout-puissants Frères musulmans, qui l'avaient propulsé à la tête du Conseil, à son insu l'an dernier. Pour mieux le manipuler, estimaient ses détracteurs qui se sont toujours étonnés de voir un laïque comme lui s'allier avec les islamistes, ses ennemis de toujours.

Face à une répression du régime toujours plus sanglante, Ghalioun ne craignait pourtant pas de manifester publiquement ses réserves sur la militarisation de l'opposition syrienne,

option vivement soutenue par ses rivaux intégristes. « Au CNS, la lutte pour le pouvoir est telle qu'une fois au moins, les Frères musulmans ont fait échouer un convoi d'armes qui devait parvenir clandestinement par la mer aux combattants laïcs », confie un ancien proche de Ghalioun au Conseil.

Ses détracteurs lui reprochaient également son manque de coordination avec les insurgés sur place en Syrie, et notamment les Comités de coordination, qui ont fini par se désolidariser de la direction du CNS, accusée de ne pas en faire assez pour les aider.

Chantage islamiste

« J'en ai le vertige », confiait récemment Burhan Ghalioun à un vieil ami, diplomate arabe en poste à Paris. « Je ne sais plus qui dirige le Conseil », ajoutait, un brin amer, le sociologue, qui venait pourtant d'être réélu à la tête du CNS pour un troisième mandat de trois mois « En février et en mai, les Français ont insisté pour le prolonger à la tête du CNS », affirme un opposant en exil à Londres, au fait des arcanes du Conseil. « En mai, ajoute-t-il, les Américains et les Turcs étaient moins chauds, mais ils ont finalement laissé faire. À chaque fois, en revanche, les Frères musulmans invoquaient les statuts du CNS pour le remplacer. Avant d'accepter finalement le maintien de Ghalioun, mais à la condition de renforcer leurs pouvoirs sur les instances du CNS ».

Le départ de Ghalioun est une mauvaise nouvelle pour Paris, qui misait sur lui pour avancer ses pions dans la Syrie de demain. Cette démission intervient dans un contexte délicat pour le CNS,



Burhan Ghalioun s'adresse à la presse, le 15 mai à Paris, lors d'un rassemblement, un an après le début de la révolution syrienne.

BENJAMIN GIRETTE/IP3 PRESS/MAXPPP

qui n'est pas parvenu à se faire reconnaître par la communauté internationale, et est toujours incapable de rassurer les minorités à l'intérieur de la Syrie, notamment les chrétiens et les alaouites qui soutiennent encore le pouvoir de Bachar el-Assad. « Le CNS, c'est une plaisanterie », déplore un responsable d'un centre de recherches du Golfe, proche de l'opposition syrienne « Mais que peut-on faire ? Pas grand-chose. Nous ne pouvons pas le dissoudre car c'est nous qui l'avons créé et il faudrait en reconstituer un autre, ce qui donnerait un avantage au pouvoir syrien », concède cet expert.

Georges Sabra, un chrétien qui quitta la Syrie l'an dernier pourrait lui succéder à la tête du CNS, à condition qu'il reçoive lui aussi la bénédiction des Frères musulmans. ■



Car bomb in central Turkey kills 3, wounds 18

ISTANBUL - May 25, 2012 (Reuters) -By Ece Toksabay

TWO MILITANTS set off a bomb inside their car by a police headquarters in the central Turkish province of Kayseri on Friday, killing themselves and one policeman and wounding 18 others, Turkey's interior minister said.

Kurdish separatists, Islamist militants - including al Qaeda - as well as groups on the far left and right have all carried out bomb attacks in Turkey, but there was no immediate claim of responsibility for Friday's blast.

Turkish Interior Minister Idris Naim Sahin said security forces had followed the car from Goksun district in Kahramanmaraş province to Pinarbasi - about 100 km (60 miles) - after it passed a checkpoint in the road without stopping.

Police opened fire as it passed the police headquarters in the town of Pinarbasi and the bomb went off, Sahin said. Pinarbasi lies east of the city of Kayseri, which is about 325 km (200 miles) southeast of the capital Ankara.

It was not immediately clear why police did not stop the car sooner, and Sahin said investigators did not think, as yet, that the target was the police station.

"From what can be seen inside the vehicle, there are two suicide bomber militants inside. They are of course in pieces and the car is destroyed. This is a sad event," Sahin told reporters from the Aegean city of Izmir.

"We were not expecting the terror organization to stop. We have seen how they continue to carry out crazy acts," Sahin said, using a common term to describe the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), who are waging a war against the state.

Sahin said one policeman had been killed in the explosion and that 18 others had been wounded, eight of them seriously.

Turkish media earlier reported that the car had tried to drive into the police station moments before the blast and that security forces were hunting for a third militant who had managed to escape.

"HUGE BLAST"

A civil servant at the Pinarbasi district governor's office, said: "We

heard a huge blast even though our office is 2 km away from the police station. We saw a big cloud of smoke rising but we don't know about the number of dead or injured."

"We heard that it was a car which attempted to drive into the police station and then an explosion occurred," Hasan Gumus told Reuters by telephone minutes after the explosion.

Television footage showed frantic scenes around the police station with fire engines and ambulances rushing to the scene.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Bomb attacks in Kayseri are almost unheard of with most raids occurring further east in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast, although militants have carried out isolated attacks in Ankara and western cities.

PKK guerillas vowed to step up their fight against the Turkish state last year and have launched a series of attacks against Turkish security forces, killing scores of people.

Speaking hours after the blast, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan vowed to continue fighting the PKK.

"The fight against the separatist terror organization will continue with determination, as it has until now. I wish health to those who are wounded, and God's mercy for our martyrs," he told reporters in Ankara.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the PKK insurgency since the group took up arms against the state in 1984. The PKK is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Separately, 10 people, including one woman, were kidnapped by suspected PKK militants in southeastern Turkey this week, security sources said on Friday.

The sources did not know the whereabouts of the 10 villagers and said they had been unable to contact them since Thursday evening. Firat, a news agency with close links to the outlawed PKK, said the abductions had taken place on Tuesday.

The PKK has not claimed responsibility for the kidnappings but the incident comes only two weeks after an official from the ruling AK Party was abducted in the region. Turkish security forces say they have launched a large-scale search operation for the missing official.



Turkish soldier killed in clash with Kurdish rebels; PKK claims car bomb attack

ANKARA, Turkey - May 27, 2012 - Associated Press

STATE-RUN television says Kurdish rebels have killed a soldier in a clash in southeast Turkey, prompting the military to launch a large-scale offensive in the area.

TRT television said the soldier was killed in fighting in Sirnak province, which borders Iraq, on Sunday.

The rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, meanwhile, claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack in central Turkey two days ago that killed a policeman and wounded 17 people.

Firat News, an agency close to the PKK, said Saturday the May 25 bombing was carried out in retaliation for a botched Turkish military airstrike in December that was aimed at the rebels but killed 34 civilians instead.

The PKK is fighting for autonomy in southeast Turkey. Tens of thousands have died since it took up arms in 1984.

Oil explorer WesternZagros heads for Kurdish tie-up

By Peg Mackey / Reuters

LONDON: WesternZagros is about to join forces with a large European oil company in Iraqi Kurdistan, the company's chief executive said, enhancing the Canadian explorer's ability to expand production and reserves in the year ahead.

Simon Hatfield, speaking to Reuters on Wednesday, said WesternZagros's giant Garmian block was part of a major Kurdish oil play by the European company, which he declined to identify.

Industry sources say the company is most likely Total. The French oil major has said it is considering possible investment in the semi-autonomous region, after ExxonMobil signed up for six exploration blocks late last year.

"Our Garmian block would be the single biggest piece," Hatfield said. "We're relying on getting about \$55 million in back costs from the large European partner we're about to get, which will give the company funding through next year."

A new Kurdish deal with Total would fan the flames between Arbil and Baghdad, locked in a long-running feud over oil and land. Total, like Exxon, is also developing a major oilfield in southern Iraq. Baghdad says any contract signed by Arbil is illegal.

The assets of Kurdistan-focused WesternZagros - the Garmian and Kurdamir blocks near the border with Iran - could potentially contain reserves of 5 billion barrels.

It holds a 40 percent stake in each block's production sharing contract and operates Garmian. Arbil now holds the remainder and has been negotiating with the European party for the past six months over a 40 percent stake, said Hatfield.

The veteran oil explorer



Nechiroan Barzani, prime minister of Kurdistan Regional Government, speaks during the first International Energy Arena Erbil, in the Kurdish regional capital Arbil, on May 20, 2012. (AFP PHOTO/SAFIN HAMED)

expects the deal to be finalised in the next month for Garmian, which potentially holds recoverable oil reserves of 1.7 billion barrels and is producing up to 6,000 barrels per day (bpd) from the Sarqala-1 well.

Shares of Calgary-based WesternZagros were trading at 88 Canadian cents, down 3.3 percent. The stock has risen from 67 cents at the end of 2011.

The unidentified European major will eventually take over as operator, Hatfield said.

"They had their lawyers in Calgary last week doing their final legal due diligence with our lawyers," he said. "But ours is not the only deal this company is looking at - that's why it's taking so long."

As many as six blocks could be included in the package the European major wants to present to its executive committee.

"It's a big company and they want a material position," said the chief executive. "There's not a lot left, so they've got to piece it together."

On the ground in the northern region since 2004, WesternZagros says the neighbouring Kurdamir block potentially contains recoverable oil reserves of 1.5 billion barrels.

"We were part of the early movers in Kurdistan and now it's a very crowded space," said

Hatfield.

As a result, there's a high price to pay for entry.

Arbil is asking for a bonus of close to \$100 million for Garmian, plus a percentage - believed to be around 20 percent - of the European company's profit oil allocation that will be dedicated to infrastructure development.

KURDISH PROMISE

Until the end of last year, Kurdistan had been a no-go area for oil majors with mega-contracts to develop Iraq's supergiant southern oilfields who feared the wrath of Baghdad.

But Kurdistan's potential and attractive contracts are coming up in boardroom discussions as the central government's oil programme gets bogged down in red tape and infrastructure bottlenecks.

"There are a number of other large European companies looking very hard at Kurdistan - they're all a little bit late," said Hatfield.

"Like ExxonMobil, they all held off now they're seeing the contracts in the rest of Iraq are not working out that well and the contracts in Kurdistan are actually working out quite well - although the export issue has to be resolved."

An intense wrangle between Iraq's central government and the Kurdish region over export rights for Kurdish oil has kept many of the world's top players away from the region.

Hatfield said WesternZagros, which has a market capitalisation of \$330 million, would push ahead with development regardless.

"Either this gets resolved the way it should - the federal petroleum law gets passed and the Kurdish region gets open access to exports through the federal system. Or the Kurds will go alone with the support of Turkey," he said.

For now, the company has had no issues with payment for its sales of Sarqala crude, which netted \$12.9 million last year. And a \$25.9 million target for the first quarter of this year was met.

"We have had no issues meeting the targets and no issues selling our oil on the domestic market," said Hatfield. The company sells the light crude on monthly contracts and gets paid in advance by the local refineries.

"We monitor where our oil goes and it goes to local topping plant in Kurdistan where they take off the light ends - and that's worked very smoothly," he said.

Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain al-Shahristani has said most of the oil produced in Kurdistan is being smuggled across borders, mainly to Iran, instead of fulfilling its export obligations.

Hatfield said the company was looking to further develop its Kurdish assets and was not looking be bought out. The Abu Dhabi National Energy Co bought a 19.9 percent stake in the explorer late last year.

"We're funded to carry on. We believe the next few wells we're going to drill will not only dramatically increase production, but dramatically increase the proven reserves that we have," he said.

"Now is not the time to sell the company."

□□□

Iraqi Kurdistan plans oil pipeline to Turkey

By Robert M Cutler

MONTREAL -The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq has announced a plan to construct an oil pipeline to Turkey with a volume of 1 million barrels per day (bpd), move hinting at tectonic shifts in the geo-economics and associated geopolitics of greater Southwest Asia. The oil is intended to be sold onto international markets.

The central Iraqi government in Baghdad asserts that the project is illegal, but Turkey's Energy Minister Taner Yildiz is fully on board with the idea, having endorsed it at the conference in Irbil where it was announced by KRG Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami. Last December, Hawrami estimated that the Kurdish region contained between 3 and 6 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and 45 billion barrels of oil.

The central Baghdad government has never been able to pass a new law, foreseen in the constitution, governing new oil and gas ventures. A draft law, never adopted, has no legal weight. The Iraqi constitution has specific provisions only concerning concessions existing at the time of its adoption.

As a result, specialized international law experts tend agree that the "Oil and Gas Law of the Kurdistan Region" holds authority in the matter of new energy concessions there, moreover since its provisions mostly correspond

with other pertinent articles of the federal constitution.

Hawrami specifically told the conference, as quoted by Reuters: "Export[ed] crude from the Kurdish region's fields will still be Iraqi oil." He added that the KRG would take 17% of the revenues (as allowed by the Iraqi national budget) and pass the rest along to the federal center in Baghdad and the Iraq Central Bank.

According to Hawrami, the pipeline's first stage would be completed within five months and carry crude oil from the Taq Taq field. The 1 million bpd capacity would come online by August next year when the second phase would connect to the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. Reports from the conference also discuss a second oil pipeline from Kirkuk to Ceyhan that would open in 2014.

Ceyhan is already the terminus for the 1 million bpd Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil export pipeline from offshore deposits in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. Turkey has long sought to develop further the Ceyhan oil terminal so as to make the city a "pole of attraction" for industrial growth in Adana province.

The failure to hold a referendum on the status of Kurdish regions within four Iraqi governates (specifically to decide whether they become part of the Iraqi Kurdistan region and therefore subject to the just-mentioned "Oil and Gas Law") provided for in Article 140 and now five years overdue

has also played its role in leading the KRG to take such initiatives.

The new agreement hardly marks the first time that the KRG has unilaterally undertaken new cooperation in the energy sector with international partners. Last December, ExxonMobil signed an agreement with the KRG to explore for energy deposits in regions of Nineveh province that would be subject to such referenda.

The city of Kirkuk is probably the best known of such disputed areas under KRG control. One of the results of the new agreement will likely be increasing attempts by the Basra governate in southern Iraq to assert greater authority over deals in its own region.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry has been working in the past few weeks to define the new "Eurasian" direction of the country's policy in specific terms. This agreement in principle with the KRG appears to be one of the first tangible results of the reorientation of Turkey's foreign policy away from the discredited "zero problems" doctrine that blew up in Ankara's face when Tehran refused to allow it to have zero problems, most notably but not only in Syria.

The Alawite minority to which the Assad clan belongs is part of the Shi'ite wing of Islam, while the Sunni Kurds are cooperating with the Sunni Turks and periodically threaten to reveal documents embarrassing to the Shi'ite Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

However, pure economics also drives the deal. Iraq is already Turkey's number two trading partner, and most of that trade is with the territory under KRG control. Ankara is determined to become an energy hub, and its domestic economy also requires increasing amounts of gas, not all of which demand may be satisfied by the recent deal with Azerbaijan over the Caspian Sea offshore Shah Deniz Two field.

Turkey is an attractive market for firms developing not only oil but also gas resources in Iraqi Kurdistan, not least because the KRG has a zero-flaring policy in respect of the associated gas that is naturally liberated in the course of developing the given oil reservoirs. Energy demand and electricity demand in Turkey have grown at a 7% annual rate recently, and this may continue. ○

Dr Robert M Cutler (<http://www.robertcutler.org>), educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and The University of Michigan, has researched and taught at universities in the United States, Canada, France, Switzerland, and Russia. Now senior research fellow in the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Carleton University, Canada, he also consults privately in a variety of fields.

Dreams of Kurdistan

In a new shift, Kurds in Turkey are gradually giving up on independence. So why is the Turkish government so worried?

BY YIGAL SCHLEIFER

From the outside looking in, the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurds seems stuck in a kind of gruesome holding pattern. Articles written months and years apart are virtually indistinguishable from one another: "Three Turkish Soldiers Reported Killed In PKK Clash In Southeast" reads a headline from May 17, 2012 -- but it could just as easily have been from two decades ago.

But, beneath the headlines, the defining narrative of this long-running conflict -- which has claimed tens of thousands lives since the late 1980s -- may finally be changing for the better. The shift became apparent last July, when some 850 politicians, community activists, and civil society leaders gathered in the eastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir for a meeting organized by a pro-Kurdish umbrella group called the Democratic Society Congress (DTK). At the end of the gathering, the DTK's leadership -- veterans of Turkey's Kurdish political parties -- boldly announced that the organization was declaring what it called "democratic autonomy" for Turkey's predominantly-Kurdish southeast region.

"We, as Kurdish people, are declaring our democratic sovereignty, holding to Turkey's national unity on the basis of an understanding of a common motherland, territorial unity and the perspective of a democratic nation," the congress's declaration read. "We invite everyone who lives in our lands to introduce themselves as a democratically autonomous Kurdistan citizen."

On the one hand, this critical moment was once again overshadowed by a spasm of violence: That same day, July 14, clashes only a few hours' drive away between Turkish security forces and rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) resulted in the deaths of 13 Turkish soldiers and seven PKK fighters. As the deadly clash that day -- and a seemingly endless string of flare-ups since then -- made clear, the PKK's use of violence, which has been the defining element of the Kurdish issue since the 1980s, is still very much in the picture.

Still, the July "autonomy" declaration helped make something else apparent: After decades of violence, there has been an important shift within Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement toward emphasizing the civil aspect of their struggle and fighting the battle over the Kurdish issue in the political sphere. It's a new approach borne out not only by last July's declaration, but also by an increase in political and cultural activity by Kurdish civil society organizations and by municipalities run by Turkey's pro-Kurdish party over the last few years.

For decades, the dream of the Kurdish movement was the establishment of an independent state in territory now belonging to Turkey (as well as Iran, Iraq, and Syria). But the failure of armed struggle and the success of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in making inroads among Kurdish voters has forced the PKK and the wider Kurdish movement in Turkey to modify their nationalist aspirations. This shift has been bubbling under the surface for some time, but it has become more pronounced in recent years. Turkish Kurd politicians and activists in the southeast have begun speaking more openly about their vision for a politically and culturally autonomous -- rather than merely separate -- Kurdish region within Turkey, which runs on a highly centralized state structure dominated by Ankara.

Though the definition of this autonomy remains fuzzy, talk of it is now being accompanied by action. Some of the moves have been small: the opening of Kurdish language and cultural institutions, an increasing use of Kurdish in the delivery of municipal services, even the development of ideologically driven cooperative agricultural communities (Kurdish *kibbutzim*, if you will). Other steps -- such as the creation of a cadre of Kurdish imams who pointedly hold services and preach outside the state-sanctioned mosque system -- pose a more direct challenge to Ankara's rule. Put all these new initiatives together, though, and what you have is a picture of a Kurdish movement that -- partly by design, partly organically -- is laying the groundwork for the creation of a distinct political and cultural regional entity within Turkey, not a separate country.

"When you look at the discourse of the last year, they are increasingly pushing the envelope, talking about Kurdish education, talking about local administration," says Henri Barkey, professor of international relations at Lehigh University and an expert on Kurdish affairs. "They are creating all these organizations in order to ... be able to have a strong set of cards in their hands when they bargain with the state. They can say, 'Look, you may not be ready to give us autonomy, but we already have it.'"

This shift is being fueled by a number of developments. The electoral success of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which now runs city halls in most of the southeast's major cities, has given Kurds a more powerful political voice and the ability to test the boundaries of their political power. At the same time, political reforms introduced by the Turkish government in the last decade -- mostly as a way to shore up its European Union membership bid -- have created an increasingly larger space for Kurdish civil society organizations to grow. A good example of this change is Diyarbakir, the political and cultural capital of the southeast, which today has a flourishing civil society scene that's far more vibrant than those in most other Turkish cities, save for Istanbul and Ankara.

"After 2000 there was a real shift toward developing a civil society component to open up more space for Kurdish politics," says Dilan Bozgan, coordinator of the Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA), a year-old institution that is among a handful of newly established think tanks in the southeast devoted to Kurdish affairs. "Kurdish civil society has really become larger, both in terms of its rhetoric and its numbers. It really has created a new space for politics, instead of violence."

Interestingly, this shift toward the politicization of the Kurdish issue is one that the Turkish state appears to find as threatening, if not more so, than an armed insurgency. Since the autonomy move has begun, the AKP has instituted a severe crackdown against Kurdish politicians, municipal officials, and activists, arresting thousands of them as part of an investigation into the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), an umbrella organization -- alleged to be a PKK front -- that is a driving force behind a large part of this quasi-state building. Although there is no clear figure, Kurdish officials claim more than 6,000 people are currently on trial as part of the KCK investigation -- most ⇨

⇒ of them charged under Turkey's vague anti-terrorism laws, which give prosecutors the ability to accuse almost anyone of assisting or being part of a terrorist group.

Indeed, for officials who fear the Kurds' demands for recognition of their culture and believe that their calls for increased power on the local level mask more ambitious goals, the crackdown makes a certain amount of sense.

"The state and the police, especially those who went to study in the United States, realized and understood how a nation is built, and they understood the KCK network is an attempt to build a nation. This is quite threatening," explains Emre Uslu, a former official with the counterterrorism department of the Turkish national police force and a professor of political science at Istanbul's Yeditepe University.

The KCK operation, which started in early 2009, has certainly cast a wide net, ensnaring a number of figures whose main crime appears to have been simply getting too close to the pro-Kurdish political movement. Among the several thousand prisoners currently awaiting trial are the head of Diyarbakir's leading human rights organization, a municipal official who was collecting data about mass graves and disappearances in the region during the 1980s and 1990s, and a noted professor of political science from Istanbul who was teaching members of the BDP about constitutional law.

"The people who were supposed to make this grassroots autonomy move happen are now in prison," Bozgan says. "From the state's perspective, the KCK operation has been a success."

But what makes the severity of the government's KCK crackdown puzzling is that it comes at the same time that Ankara itself is working to move away from a strictly military-based approach to the Kurdish issue. This shift became clear in the summer of 2009, when the AKP announced the launch of what was then popularly referred to as the "Kurdish Opening," a reform package that was supposed to pave the way for finally resolving the Kurdish issue and convincing the PKK to lay down its arms.

Not unlike the Kurds' concept of "democratic autonomy," the Kurdish Opening was vaguely defined and quickly floundered, with its first act -- the repatriation of a group of PKK fighters living in Iraq -- ending up also being its final one. After the BDP commandeered the event and turned it into a kind of victory party (one that was broadcast live on Turkish television), the

AKP, fearing further political fallout, put an end to the process.

By the time Turkey was approaching the 2011 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had actually reverted to the sort of harsh Turkish nationalist rhetoric not heard since the 1990s. Asked by an interviewer last summer what his party would have done had it been part of the coalition government when now-jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured in 1999, Erdogan answered, "Either he would have been executed or we would have resigned." Ocalan's original death sentence was commuted to life in prison after the government that preceded the AKP abolished the death penalty in 2002, as part of its EU-oriented reforms.

In recent months, Turkish officials have suggested that another Kurdish initiative is in the works. A renewed effort would sideline the PKK -- with which the government had conducted secret talks in the past -- and focus instead on the BDP as an interlocutor, according to reports in the Turkish press. There has also been the suggestion that Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, who recently paid a two-day visit to Turkey, could be asked to act as a mediator between Ankara and the PKK. But any new government effort could very well be undermined by the anger created among Kurds over the KCK mass arrests, and by the fact that so many of the civilian Kurdish leadership with whom Ankara would conduct a dialogue are currently either in jail or facing terrorism charges.

Complicating the issue is the increasingly volatile regional picture, particularly with regard to the deteriorating situation in Syria. Ankara fears embattled President Bashar al-Assad and the PKK are reviving an old alliance in order to dissuade Turkey from more forceful intervention in Syria. In remarks made in March, PKK leader Murat Karayilan warned that if Turkey invades Syria, "all of Kurdistan will turn into a war zone." But the prospect of Syria's Kurds, who have so far conspicuously avoided joining the protests against Assad, joining the opposition to the regime, and in the process giving a further boost to the Turkish Kurds' autonomy push, could be equally threatening for Ankara.

"In Syria, you see the Iraqi Kurds are putting pressure on the [Syrian] Kurds to stay out of the uprising," Barkey says. However, he says, the Kurds could indeed be enticed to join the revolt if it gains further momentum -- and they will ask for some sort of autonomy in return. With two autonomous Kurdish regions along Turkey's border, "It will be harder to explain to Turkey's Kurds: If the Kurds in Iraq and Syria have [auton-

omy], why don't they?"

One way or another, it appears that if Ankara wants to move forward on resolving the Kurdish issue, it has to take into account the Kurds' "autonomy" movement. In a recent survey taken in Diyarbakir by the Center for Political and Social Research (SAMER), another Kurd-centric think tank, nearly 50 percent of the respondents said they wanted "democratic autonomy" for their region; only 19 percent said they preferred "independence."

In many ways, the Kurds' shift has already changed the nature of the conflict, forcing the Turkish state to adopt political responses instead of purely military ones. After the BDP started intensifying the "Kurdish imams" program and called for a boycott of state-run mosques, the Turkish government fought back by offering sermons in Kurdish. In response to BDP-run municipalities in the southeast increasingly using Kurdish in public services and signs, state-appointed governors in the region -- whose duty in decades past was to suppress the use of Kurdish -- have started putting up their own billboards in Kurdish (albeit ones that frequently stress the unity and fraternity of the Turkish people).

Still, even as the Kurdish issue in Turkey turns civil, there is the distinct possibility that it could erupt once again into bloody tit-for-tat violence. The disappointment created among many Kurds by the government's failure to deliver on its promised "Kurdish Opening," combined with the resentment caused by the state's aggressive effort to quash the nascent Kurdish autonomy movement through the KCK arrests, could set the stage for another violent flare-up of the Kurdish conflict in the coming years -- one that would have repercussions well beyond Turkey's southeast region.

"There is a consensus among Kurds that the current status within Turkey is not doing well for us and it has to change," Bozgan says. "There's a lot of frustration right now, and it's hard to see where this is going. We will just wait and see what happens in Syria and what Erdogan will do regarding the Kurdish issue. It's a shaky moment, unpredictable." ■

Yigal Schleifer is a Washington-based journalist and analyst covering Turkey. He is also the author of "The Turko-File," a blog about Turkish foreign and domestic affairs on Eurasianet.org. He was based in Istanbul between 2002 and 2010, where he worked as a correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor and the English-language service of the German Press Agency (DPA).

Iran begins fervent courtship of Lebanon

TANNOURINE, LEBANON

Worried about Syria, Tehran seeks a new close ally in the Arab world

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

The Islamic Republic of Iran recently offered to build a dam in this scenic alpine village, high in the Christian heartland of Lebanon.

Farther south, in the dense suburbs of Beirut, Iranian largess helped to rebuild neighborhoods flattened six years ago by Israeli bombs — an achievement that was commemorated this month with a rollicking celebration.

“By the same means that we got weapons and other stuff, money came as well,” the Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, exclaimed to roars of approval from the crowd. “All of this has been achieved through Iranian money!”

Iran’s eagerness to shower money on Lebanon when its own finances are being squeezed by sanctions is the latest indication of just how worried Tehran is at the prospect that Syria’s leader, Bashar al-Assad, could fall. Iran relies on Syria as its bridge to the Arab world, and as a crucial strategic partner in confronting Israel. But the Arab revolts have shaken Tehran’s calculations, with Mr. Assad unable to vanquish an uprising that is in its 14th month.

Iran’s ardent courtship of the Lebanese government indicates that Tehran is scrambling to find a replacement for its closest Arab ally, politicians, diplomats

and analysts say. It is not just financing public projects, but it is also seeking to forge closer ties through cultural, military and economic agreements.

The challenge for Iran’s leaders is that many Lebanese — including the residents of Tannourine, the site of the proposed dam — squirm in that embrace. They see Iran’s gestures not as a show of good will, but as a stealthy cultural and military colonization.

“Tannourine is not Tehran,” groused Charbel Komair, a city council member.

The Lebanese have largely accepted that Iran serves as Hezbollah’s main patron for everything from missiles to dairy cows. But branching out beyond Hezbollah is another matter.

“They are trying to reinforce their base in Lebanon to face any eventual collapse of the regime in Syria,” said

Marwan Hamade, a Druse leader and Parliament member, noting that a collapse would sever the “umbilical cord” through which Iran supplied Hezbollah and gained largely unfettered access to Lebanon for decades.

“Hezbollah has developed into being a beachhead of Iranian influence not only in Lebanon, but on the Mediterranean — trying to diffuse Iranian culture, Iranian political domination and now an Iranian economic presence,” Mr. Hamade said. “But there is a kind of Lebanese rejection of too much Iranian involvement here.”

That has not stopped Iran from trying. Mohammad-Reza Rahimi, Iran’s first vice president, arrived in Beirut a couple of weeks ago with at least a dozen proposals for Iranian-financed projects tucked under his arm, one for virtually every ministry, Lebanese officials said. The size of the Iranian delegation — more than 100 members — shocked government officials. Lebanese newspapers gleefully reported embarrassing details of the wooing; in their haste to repeat their success in forging closer ties with Iraq, for example, the Iranians forgot to replace the word Baghdad with Beirut in one draft agreement.

Iran offered to build the infrastructure needed to carry electricity across Iraq and Syria into Lebanon. It offered to underwrite Persian-language courses at Lebanon’s public university. Other proposals touched on trade, development, hospitals, roads, schools and, of course, the Balaa Dam in Tannourine.

Yet virtually no substantial new agreements were signed. The Iranian ambassador, Ghazanfar Roknabadi, reacted like a spurned suitor, grumbling publicly that Lebanon needed to do more to carry out agreements. The embassy in Lebanon rejected a request for an interview, but Iran’s state-run Press TV quoted Mr. Roknabadi as saying, “The Iranian nation offers its achievements and progress to the oppressed and Muslim nations of the region.”

Therein lies the rub. Syria, run by a nominally Shiite Muslim sect, fostered its alliance with Iran as a counterweight to Sunni Muslim powers like Saudi Arabia. The alliance was built more on confronting the West and its allies than on any sectarian sympathies.

In Lebanon, a nation of various religious sects, many interpret Iran’s reference to “Muslim” as solely “Shiite Muslim.” Hezbollah insists that is not the case, that the money comes with no strings attached and is for the good for all Lebanese.

“The Iranians say, ‘If you want factories, I am ready, if you want some elec-

tricity, I am ready,’ and they do not ask for any price in return,” said Hassan Jishi, the general manager of Waad, the organization that rebuilt the southern suburbs. (The name means “promise” in Arabic, referring to Mr. Nasrallah’s promise to reconstruct the area.) It cost \$400 million to build apartments and stores for about 20,000 people, Mr. Jishi said.

Half the money came from Iran, Mr. Nasrallah said in his speech, adding that he had telephoned the country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to ask for reconstruction aid even before the August 2006 cease-fire with Israel. Both Ayatollah Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad responded generously, he said.

“We owe a special thanks to the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to the government, to the people, because without Iranian funding, we could not even have begun to achieve what we did,” Mr. Nasrallah said.

In the southern suburbs, what was once a jumble of haphazard construction is now neat rows of handsome tangerine-and-rose-colored apartment blocks with elevators, generators and parking. But anarchic power lines still crisscross the streets like so many cobwebs, because the electricity supply remains hit-

“There is a kind of Lebanese rejection of too much Iranian involvement here.”

or-miss. Lebanon suffers from a chronic shortage of electricity, generating just 1,500 megawatts against a peak summer demand of 2,500 megawatts.

Iran’s project to finance the dam appeared to be aimed at addressing such problems — and winning hearts and minds by meeting a need the government has so far failed to address.

Here in Tannourine, the sound of rushing water ricochets off the high valley walls, riven with caves where the first Christian monks sought sanctuary from prosecution centuries ago. Restaurants built over the Joze River draw a weekend crowd from Beirut, 70 kilometers, or 45 miles, south, for long lunches of meze and shish kebab washed down with smooth, locally made arrack. Local springs feed one of Lebanon’s most popular bottled-water brands, called Tannourine.

The idea of a dam proved popular among the 35,000 inhabitants because it would both generate electricity and provide for irrigation, said its mayor, Mounir Torbay. The dam was included in Lebanon’s 2012 budget and the contract was awarded to a Lebanese company, the mayor said. Then it got embroiled in local politics.

A prominent Christian politician trying to one-up his rivals asked the Islamic Republic for \$40 million for the dam, and Iran agreed last December, provided an Iranian company built it. Most of the solidly Christian area’s population was horrified by the prospect that the Iranians would move in, said Mr. Torbay, most likely bringing their

mosques, their wives and perhaps even their missiles. Many suspect some company with links to the Revolutionary Guards will get the contract.

"We want the dam badly but we don't want an Iranian company to build it," the mayor said. "They are from a different religion, a different social condition."

There are still about 70 churches in Tannourine, 22 of them dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and most Christians feel that their culture and tradition face enough threat already throughout the Middle East, residents said.

"One of the dreams of Iran is to gain a foothold over the mountains," said the mayor. "It is important for them to oversee the Mediterranean. So Lebanon is a full part of their strategy."

The fate of the project remains uncertain. The cabinet is inclined to accept the \$40 million, not least because most foreign aid has dried up since a Hezbollah-dominated alliance formed the government last year.

As to Iranian plans to prevail in Lebanon, many Lebanese point out that the Christians and Sunni Muslims have

failed at that endeavor before.

"I think the Iranian project to control Lebanon is a candidate for failure, too," said Sejaan M. Azzi, vice president of the Lebanese Forces, a political party and once a Christian militia. "We don't have confidence in Iranian economic aid, we consider it part of a political, security, military project."

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2012

No progress in talks with Iranians, but more are set

BAGHDAD

BY STEVEN ERLANGER
AND RICK GLADSTONE

Iran and six world powers ended two days of difficult talks on Iran's disputed nuclear program on Thursday with no clear signs of progress, but they agreed to reconvene for more negotiations in Moscow next month.

Catherine Ashton, the European Union's top foreign policy official and the lead negotiator for the six powers, said at a news conference after the meeting here in Baghdad that "significant problems remain" in the talks with the Iranian side, but she declined to specify them.

"What we have now is some common ground, and a meeting in place where we can take that further forward," Ms. Ashton said. She then departed with her delegation to leave Baghdad before a sandstorm closed the airport.

The next round of talks is to be held on June 18 and June 19 in Russia, one of the six powers. The others are the United States, China, Britain, France, and Germany.

Addressing reporters after Ms. Ashton's delegation had left, the lead Iranian negotiator, Saeed Jalili, described the climate of the talks as good but said they were "incomplete" and he expressed hope that further negotiations would produce results. He also said Iran had insisted to the six powers that it had the right to enrich nuclear fuel — a position that was not accepted

by the six powers and appeared to remain a basic source of disagreement.

A senior American official said the six powers had never expected to reach an agreement with Iran at the Baghdad talks, the second meeting between both sides since the talks were resumed in Turkey last month after a 15-month lapse.

The American official described the Baghdad discussions as difficult and said that the Iranians had pushed hard to have their right to nuclear fuel enrichment recognized. Iran was also known to be unhappy with proposals the six powers made concerning its nuclear program because they did not include an agreement to postpone punishing sanctions against Iran that are due to take effect in July, according to diplomats on both sides.

The Iranians had said the new sanctions ran counter to the atmosphere of progress that both sides were trying to develop, in what the West hoped would be detailed negotiations to clear up questions about whether the Iranian program is peaceful as Iran insists or is really a cloak for the ability to make nuclear weapons.

During the Baghdad talks the six powers exchanged proposals with the Iranian side, which presented what Iranian news reports described as a five-point plan containing both nuclear and nonnuclear elements.

As the second day of discussions began on Thursday, Press TV, a state-financed satellite broadcaster in Iran, quoted unidentified sources close to Iran's negotiating team as saying the prospects for success in the negotiations were "vague and under question" if the powers rejected the Iranian plan.

Several accounts in Iran's state-controlled news media compared the posi-

tions taken by the world powers in Baghdad to those of Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, which considers Iran's nuclear program an existential threat.

The most important part of the six-power proposal called for stopping enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity, which is a short technical step away from highly enriched uranium that can be weaponized.

But the six powers rejected Iranian calls for an immediate easing of the economic sanctions that have been imposed on Iran, a position that clearly appeared to disappoint the Iranian side. Senior Western diplomats also said harsher American and European Union sanctions on oil exports and banking transactions, scheduled to go into effect in July, would not be postponed.

Western diplomats said the proposal presented to Iran was meant partly to buy more time for more comprehensive and detailed negotiations with Iran on the nature of its nuclear program. Their priority was to cap Iran's growing stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent. Iran says the uranium is for fuel for medical reactors, but Western diplomats say the Iranians already have many times more than they need, furthering suspicions about Iran's motivations despite its repeated assertions that the enrichment program is peaceful.

The six powers also want Iran to export its current stockpile of 20 percent uranium and, down the road, to dismantle the Fordo enrichment plant, buried deep inside a mountain near the holy city of Qum, that is producing it.

Rick Gladstone reported from New York. Alan Cowell contributed reporting from London, and Thomas Erdbrink from Tehran.

"What we have now is some common ground."

Syrie: la stratégie de l'horreur



Le massacre de Houla, samedi, semble témoigner de la fébrilité d'un régime qui se sent menacé.

Par **JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN**

Dès le début de l'insurrection syrienne, en mars 2011, l'une des tactiques du régime de Bachar al-Assad a été de s'attaquer aux enfants dans les régions dissidentes. C'est ce qui s'est passé samedi à Houla, près de Homs, témoigne que, même sous le regard de la communauté internationale, il n'a en rien renoncé à cette pratique. Cette fois, ce sont plus de 32 enfants de moins de 10 ans qui ont été tués. Un chiffre annoncé par le chef des observateurs de l'ONU, le général Robert Mood, qui a indiqué aussi que plus de 80 adultes ont péri dans les bombardements de cette ville et de sa région. *«Cet usage disproportionné de la violence est inacceptable et impardonnable. L'as-*

ANALYSE

«Cette recrudescence des atrocités intervient alors que l'on assistait à un retour en force des manifestations pacifiques.»

Ziad Majed politologue

«Le sassinat d'enfants innocents et de civils doit cesser», a insisté l'officier au cours d'une conférence de presse à Damas.

LINCEULS. Epouvantables, les vidéos postées sur YouTube ont montré les crânes fracassés et les visages ensanglantés d'enfants serrés les uns contre les autres dans une morgue improvisée, ainsi que des dizaines de linceuls blancs alignés dans une fosse commune. Elles ont provoqué un sursaut d'indignation de la communauté internationale, qui, depuis plusieurs semaines, manifestait un intérêt des plus lûnés pour la Syrie.



Pas la moindre mesure concrète, cependant, mais un appel de Londres à une réunion d'urgence du Conseil de sécurité *«dans les prochains jours»*, tandis que Paris entamait des contacts pour réunir le *«groupe des pays amis du peuple syrien»* (Etats-Unis, plusieurs pays européens et de la Ligue arabe). Des réactions qui ne sont pas à la mesure du massacre de Houla, alors que celui-ci a été dûment constaté par des observateurs civils et militaires de l'ONU, qui *«ont confirmé [...] l'usage d'artillerie tirée depuis des chars»*, a précisé l'officier. Au-delà de la *«tragédie brutale»* qu'elle représente, la tuerie perpétrée *«à l'arme lourde»* contre les enfants pourrait encore accroître le risque, déjà très fort, de guerre intercommunautaire.

«Ceux qui utilisent la violence pour leurs propres objectifs pourraient créer plus d'instabilité et conduire le pays à la guerre civile», a reconnu l'officier. Mais les intentions du régime ne sont-elles pas justement de provoquer un tel conflit ? *«Quelqu'un veut à tout prix que la rage s'impose dans tout le pays, souligne le politologue Ziad Majed. Cette recrudescence des atrocités intervient alors que l'on assistait à un retour en force des manifestations pacifiques. Pour chacun de*

108

C'est le bilan, hier soir, des personnes tuées à Houla, dont plus de 32 enfants de moins de 10 ans, selon le chef des observateurs de l'ONU.

Au moins 9 183 civils, 3 072 membres des forces gouvernementales et 794 déserteurs ont péri dans la répression, les combats et les attentats qui secouent la Syrie, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Depuis le cessez-le-feu, le 12 avril, au moins 1 881 personnes, dont 1 260 civils, ont été tuées.

ces trois derniers vendredis, on a compté autour de 850 rassemblements sur 647 points, soit 200 de plus qu'en janvier. Avec de nouveaux slogans et une conscience politique que la lutte pacifique et le combat mené par l'Armée syrienne libre [ASL, ndlr] peuvent aller de pair.» *«Le régime a aussi concentré ses attaques contre tous ceux qui peuvent redonner une bonne image à l'insurrection : les classes moyennes urbaines, c'est-à-dire éduquées, les laïcs...»* ajoute-t-il. Dernier épisode : l'attaque par des voyous liés au régime du romancier Khaled Khalifa et d'un chercheur alors qu'ils se rendaient aux obsèques d'un ami musicien tué. Les *chabbiha* ont battu l'auteur de *Eloge de la haine* et lui ont cassé le bras.

«BRIGADES.» De son côté, l'opposition extérieure est lassée d'attendre une action du Conseil de sécurité. *«J'appelle*

le peuple syrien à mener la bataille de la libération et de la dignité en comptant sur ses propres forces, sur les rebelles déployés à travers le pays et sur les brigades de l'ASL», au cas où la communauté internationale n'assumerait pas ses responsabilités, a lancé hier le chef démissionnaire du Conseil national syrien, Burhan Ghalioun, au cours d'une conférence de presse à Istanbul. L'ASL a pour sa part estimé n'être plus tenue par son engagement au plan du médiateur Kofi Annan, un mois et demi après avoir accepté le cessez-le-feu prévu. C'est donc vers le pire que s'avance la Syrie. Avec le massacre de Houla, le ré-

gime donne d'ailleurs l'impression de le chercher.

EMPOISONNEMENT. D'où l'hypothèse qu'il soit sous la pression de dissensions internes, ce que pourraient refléter plusieurs rumeurs. Le politologue Khattar Abou Diab chercheur à Paris-II, en a recensé deux, plus ou moins crédibles : une tentative d'empoisonnement dont aurait été victime Assef Chawkat, le beau-frère de Bachar, et la Cellule centrale de gestion des crises, un organisme secret chargé de la répression ; c'est le domestique d'une personnalité du régime, Mohammed Saïd Bakhitan,

qui en serait l'auteur et serait réfugié en Turquie. La seconde concerne un attentat raté contre Maher, le frère cadet de Bachar, alors qu'il circulait en convoi ; elle aurait été suivie d'une vague d'exécutions. «Aucune preuve tangible ne permet d'accréditer l'une ou l'autre de ces rumeurs, même si Assef Chawkat ne se montre toujours pas. Ce que l'on peut dire, c'est que le régime est à un tournant. On le voit à plusieurs signes. Ainsi, pour la première fois depuis que le parti Baas est au pouvoir en Syrie, le président, Bachar, n'était pas présent à l'ouverture du nouveau Parlement», souligne le même chercheur. ◆

Le Monde

Samedi 26 mai 2012

La réunion de Bagdad entre les grandes puissances et l'Iran se conclut sans résultats

Les émissaires iraniens se sont refusés à la moindre concession sur leur programme nucléaire. Une nouvelle rencontre est prévue à Moscou

Bagdad

Envoyée spéciale

Après deux jours de discussions qui semblaient par moments proches de la rupture, il n'y a pas eu d'accord, à Bagdad, entre les grandes puissances et l'Iran, à propos d'une voie de règlement du dossier nucléaire.

Ce qui a été convenu, c'est de continuer de se parler. Le prochain rendez-vous entre l'émissaire iranien Saïd Jalili et les représentants des six pays mobilisés sur ce dossier (Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Russie, Chine et Allemagne) est fixé à Moscou, les 18 et 19 juin. «Nos positions et celles des Iraniens sont vraiment très éloignées. Je ne sais pas si cet exercice [de pourparlers] peut porter des résultats», confiait, assez désabusé, un haut responsable occidental.

L'épuisement se lisait sur les visages, les discussions ayant pris une tournure de marathon, jeudi 24 mai, en raison d'une tempête de sable sur Bagdad clouant les avions des délégations au sol.

Un officiel américain cherchait à relativiser l'absence de résultat concret, en se disant «peu surpris» que la partie iranienne n'ait rien cédé, s'agissant de ses activités d'enrichissement d'uranium à

20%. Celles-ci ont tout au plus été identifiées, lors des pourparlers de Bagdad, comme le sujet central... de la réunion de Moscou, en juin.

L'Iran déploie un art consommé du marchandage, faisant monter les enchères pour obtenir une levée des sanctions économiques occidentales. Américains et Européens font valoir, en retour, que ce calcul est fallacieux, car la pression extérieure ne fera que s'accroître, avec l'entrée en vigueur, le 28 juin puis le 1^{er} juillet, de mesures radicales, américaines et européennes, sur le pétrole iranien. Les revenus en devise de l'Iran pourraient chuter d'un tiers.

A Bagdad, l'émissaire iranien Saïd Jalili n'a paru disposer d'aucune marge de manœuvre, contraint par des instructions très précises de sa capitale. La mise austère et l'apparente rigidité de ce membre des pasdarans, ancien combattant de la guerre Iran-Irak, au cours de laquelle il a été amputé d'une jambe, cacheraient aussi de complexes calculs politiques. «C'est une potiche du Guide suprême, Ali Khameneï», décrivent des officiels occidentaux, «et ce dernier envisage pour cette raison d'en faire son candidat à la présidentielle de 2013 prévue en Iran.»

Le Guide iranien chercherait,

sans abandonner les capacités nucléaires iraniennes, à consolider son assise de pouvoir à l'heure des luttes de factions à Téhéran. Les difficultés économiques, accentuées par les sanctions internationales, lui feraient

L'Iran déploie un art consommé du marchandage, faisant monter les enchères pour obtenir une levée des sanctions

craindre une reprise de la contestation de rue survenue en 2009, et cela, en dépit de l'ampleur de la répression.

La perception des Occidentaux est la suivante : seul le sentiment qu'une lourde menace pourrait planer sur le régime poussera Ali Khameneï à décider d'une inflexion stratégique sur le nucléaire.

L'Iran déploie un argumentaire reposant sur une lecture voulue pointilleuse du Traité de non-prolifération de 1968, jugeant qu'il lui accorde un droit inconditionnel à l'enrichissement de l'uranium. Il cherche aussi à plaider l'impossibi-

lité «religieuse» de fabriquer la bombe nucléaire, en évoquant une fatwa (décret) du Guide suprême à cet effet.

Il reproche aussi aux Occidentaux de n'avoir pas su récompenser suffisamment sa décision, prise en 2003, de suspendre (cela dura deux ans) ses activités d'enrichissement d'uranium. L'Iran manie aussi l'art du flou. Saïd Jalili a présenté à Bagdad une «contre-offre en cinq points» de l'Iran, qui a paru d'une grande vacuité aux représentants des grandes puissances. Le fait qu'il insiste longuement pour que cela soit le cœur de discussions a failli conduire à la rupture – mais il a finalement reculé.

L'administration américaine semble déterminée à pousser le plus loin possible la recherche d'un compromis, mais l'équipe de Barack Obama, en pleine campagne électorale, doit aussi gérer la relation avec Israël, qui met en garde contre des pourparlers sans résultats tangibles. Aussitôt après la fin des discussions à Bagdad, Washington annonçait l'envoi de son émissaire, Wendy Sherman, à Tel-Aviv, «pour réaffirmer notre engagement inébranlable envers la sécurité d'Israël». ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Annan, in Syria, pushes to save his peace plan

BEIRUT

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

Kofi Annan, the U.N. special envoy for Syria, began two days of negotiations in Damascus on Monday, seeking to shore up his peace plan, which appeared more precarious than ever after the massacre of at least 108 civilians.

Mr. Annan began his visit by urging the Syrian government to be more forthcoming in implementing the six-point plan it agreed to in March, which includes not only a cease-fire but also a political dialogue with the opposition and freedom for Syrians to demonstrate.

"I urge the government to take bold steps to signal that it is serious in its intention to resolve this crisis peacefully, and for everyone involved to help create the right context for a credible political process," Mr. Annan said. Creating the right climate for progress was the responsibility of not only the government

"I urge the government to take bold steps to signal that it is serious in its intention to resolve this crisis peacefully."

but "everyone with a gun," he added.

Questions about the viability of the plan were thrown into sharp relief by the massacre, which happened on Friday in Houla, a village near Homs in west-central Syria. The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously on Sunday to condemn the massacre and, while not assigning blame, censured the Syrian government for using heavy artillery.

Getting the support of Russia, which has a veto in the Security Council, was essential. Moscow has typically rejected any international effort to support the Syrian opposition in a way that might repeat the NATO military intervention in Libya, and despite strong statements, the West has avoided getting further embroiled in the Syria fighting out of fear of the long-term consequences.

In Moscow on Monday, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, and his British counterpart, William Hague, agreed on the need to fully implement the Annan peace plan.

Mr. Hague stressed that Russia, a major ally of Syria, had a special role in pressuring the Damascus government to implement the plan, while acknowledging some differences over Syria. "The absolute urgent priority is to have

the Annan plan implemented," Mr. Hague said at a joint news conference, particularly getting a political process started.

Mr. Lavrov stressed that while Russia was not tied to President Bashar al-Assad's staying in power, there must be a transition that the Syrians themselves pilot.

"It is not the most important thing who is in power in Syria, what regime has power," Mr. Lavrov said. "For us, the main thing is to put an end to the violence among civilians and to provide for political dialogue under which the Syrians themselves decide on the sovereignty of their country."

Without naming any countries, he also said Syria's immediate neighbors who opposed the Assad government were not helping the situation by pushing regime change.

"We do exert pressure on the Syrian government daily," Mr. Lavrov said, adding that supporters of the opposition should do the same in pushing toward a political solution.

Mr. Annan said whoever was responsible for the massacre had to be held accountable.

"I am personally shocked and horrified by the tragic incident in Houla two days ago, which took so many innocent lives, children, women and men," Mr. Annan said in brief remarks from the lobby of his hotel.

The aftermath continued to reverberate in Syria. Shops stayed shut as part of an opposition-led call to observe three days of mourning, including the Hamadiyeh Bazaar of Damascus, opposition activists and residents said. They said government agents forced some stores to reopen, particularly in the famous nut bazaar, by prying open their metal shutters.

Mr. Annan, the envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, comes with a new mandate from the Security Council to implement his plan. The council requested that the investigation into the Houla attacks proceed, he said, and noted that Syria has said it had also appointed a committee to look into the attacks.

Mr. Annan, a former secretary general of the United Nations, said he would meet with Mr. Assad and his foreign minister, Walid Mouallem. He is also to meet with a variety of other people on the trip, which was scheduled before the massacre, including opposition figures.

Mr. Assad has repeatedly shown him-

self to be impervious to international pressure. From the beginning, his plan has been given slim chances of success, but it was seen as an acceptable means to try to bridge the differences over Syria between the West and the Arab states, on one side, and Russia, China and Iran on the other.

Some Syrian opposition figures have criticized Western efforts to push the cease-fire when it was clear that the government held it in contempt, and a few threatened vengeance against Alawites.

In Istanbul, Burhan Ghalioun, the president of the Syrian National Council, the main opposition group in exile, called on the international community to honor its commitment to protect Syrian civilians, saying if it did not, members of the opposition would have no choice other than to take matters into their own hands.

In a three-page letter issued before the Security Council voted Sunday, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon demanded a concrete attempt to censure Syria and endorse the cease-fire.

In his letter, Mr. Ban skated close to blaming Syrian government shelling for at least some of the deaths in Houla while carefully noting that the cause had not been completely determined. United Nations monitors "observed shotgun wounds and wounds consistent with artillery fire." The Syrian government has denied any tie to the massacre.

The Russians seemed to be swayed by the arguments that it made little sense that the opposition, which is heavily Sunni Muslim, or even extremist jihadist elements would kill so many of their own faith in cold blood, said one Security Council diplomat, speaking anonymously about a closed-door session.

One of the reasons that the Security Council had to act firmly, Mr. Ban said, is that ordinary Syrians are blaming the unarmed U.N. observers for not doing more to stop the violence, even if there are misconceptions about their role.

Hwaida Saad in Beirut and Ellen Barry in Moscow contributed reporting.

Premier acts to push curb on abortions in Turkey

ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU

Calling abortion an act of murder and an insidious plan to reduce the Turkish population, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday called for legislation to restrict women's access to the procedure.

Since 1983, abortion has been legal in Turkey as long as 10 weeks after conception, with emergency abortions allowed for medical reasons after that. New legislation proposed by Mr. Erdogan would reduce the window to eight weeks of pregnancy and outlaw any abortions not medically necessary, the private news television station NTV reported.

"There is no difference in killing the fetus in a mother's womb or killing a person after birth," Mr. Erdogan said Tuesday, echoing comments he made on Friday at the opening of a hospital in Istanbul and on Saturday to a group of female politicians in Ankara.

Mr. Erdogan also called for limits on Caesarean births, asserting that they were "nothing more than a procedure to restrict and square a nation's population" because women who choose them cannot have more than two children.

His remarks, which rekindled concerns about the intentions of an Islamic-rooted government, prompted reactions from various rights groups, including the Female Party Initiative, which organized a protest in Istanbul on Tuesday.

"It is strictly the woman to decide how she would give birth, or whether she would give birth at all or not — not the prime minister," said Benal Yazgan, who leads the Female Party Initiative.

Medical experts acknowledge high rates of Caesarean births in Turkey but emphasize that better health care and education would reduce these figures. Restricting abortions, on the other hand, could lead to more deaths among women, they warn.

On Saturday, Mr. Erdogan also likened abortion to a military airstrike that mistakenly killed 34 civilians in December in Uludere, a village in the southeast, where Turkish forces are engaged against separatist Kurdish rebels.

M. Erdogan, « gardien du vagin des femmes turques »

Critiqué de toutes parts pour ses excès d'autoritarisme, le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a ouvert un nouveau front, cette fois avec les organisations féministes, qui manifestent mardi 29 mai, dans la capitale Ankara. Vendredi, M. Erdogan a violemment pris position contre l'avortement, le comparant à « un meurtre », devant les sections féminines de son parti à Istanbul.

Pour lui, l'avortement relève même de la conspiration contre les intérêts de la Turquie. « Je m'oppose aux naissances par césarienne et aux avortements, et je sais que c'est pratiqué à dessein. Ce sont des mesures destinées à empêcher la population de ce pays de s'accroître. Je vois l'avortement comme un meurtre. (...) Chaque avortement est un Uludere », a-t-il déclaré, faisant allusion au raid aérien turc qui a tué 34 contrebandiers kurdes, à Uludere, en décembre 2011, et pour lequel son gouvernement est mis en cause ces jours-ci.

M. Erdogan avait déjà pris l'habitude d'intervenir pour exhorter les femmes à « faire trois enfants », afin de relancer la natalité turque. L'indice de fécondité est tombé à 2,09 en 2011. Mais c'est la première fois qu'il s'en prend publiquement à l'avortement, légalisé en Turquie depuis les années 1980. « Il doit cesser de se comporter comme le gardien du vagin des femmes turques. Le régime totalitaire en est arrivé au point où il intervient dans la vie privée », a protesté la députée du parti républicain du peuple (CHP, opposition), Aylin Nazliaka. « Dans un congrès consacré aux femmes, le premier

ministre aurait dû parler de chômage, de violence domestique, ou de leur place dans la vie politique, plutôt que de faire de la politique sur le corps des femmes », estime pour sa part, Canan Güllü, la présidente de la fédération des associations féministes.

Modèle de société

Mais la lutte contre l'avortement est un vieux cheval de bataille au sein de la mouvance islamiste turque, dont M. Erdogan est issu, qui constitue le socle de l'AKP. Ainsi, Sare Davutoglu, obstétricienne et épouse de l'influent ministre des affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu, milite activement au sein d'une fondation anti-avortement. La ministre de la famille Fatma Sahin l'a confirmé en prenant la défense du premier ministre : « Il est hors de question que nous transigions sur le droit à la vie en tant que principe politique », a-t-elle affirmé.

La gauche turque et les milieux laïcs s'inquiètent du nouveau modèle de société promu par le parti islamo-conservateur, au pouvoir depuis près de dix ans. Peu de temps avant cette diatribe, M. Erdogan était parti en guerre contre les théâtres et leurs programmations « obscènes », menaçant de les privatiser, ce qui souleva la réprobation des milieux artistiques... En avril, le gouverneur d'Afyon, petite ville de l'ouest a décrété l'interdiction de consommation d'alcool dans les lieux ouverts pour lutter contre la criminalité. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER
(ISTANBUL, CORRESPONDANCE)

"Every abortion is an Uludere," he told female members of his Justice and Development Party in Ankara — comments that opposition parties called an effort to divert public attention away from the investigation into the attack, which provoked a nationwide outcry.

Mr. Erdogan, who advocates that every married couple have at least three children, dismissed criticisms and maintained that abortion and Caesarean births were an unspecified plot aimed at a growing Turkey, which

now has nearly 75 million people.

"We know that this is a sinister plan to eradicate this nation from the face of the world," he said Saturday. "We should not rise to the bait of these games, so that this nation can multiply. Our only goal is to elevate this country above the levels of developed civilizations for which we need a young and dynamic population."

Turkey, Kurdistan and the future of Iraq: Time for Washington to tune back in

BY JOHN HANNAH

With last week's headlines dominated by Egypt's presidential elections, negotiations on Iran's nuclear program, and fresh atrocities in Syria, it would have been easy to miss a major development out of Iraq that in time could have equally momentous consequences for the future of the Middle East. I'm referring to the announcement that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Turkey have agreed -- in principle at least -- to build a series of pipelines that will allow the Kurds to export oil and gas directly to Turkey and, from there, onward to the rest of the world. The U.S. should be paying close attention.

Until now, the KRG's ability to develop its substantial energy riches has been held hostage to its dependence on export pipelines controlled by the central government in Baghdad. To get any oil to international markets -- and, in turn, to get its fair share of revenue from those sales -- the KRG has largely been at Baghdad's mercies.

Iraq's oil ministry has sought to exploit its position of strength to coerce concessions from the KRG on a long-stalled national hydrocarbons law. In particular, Baghdad has demanded veto power over exploration and development contracts that the Kurds are negotiating with international oil companies. At least 40 such contracts have already been signed over the central government's vociferous objections -- including a breakthrough agreement late last year with the global energy giant, Exxon Mobil.

Baghdad has struck back on multiple fronts. Companies signing contracts in Kurdistan have been black-balled from competing for concessions in the mega-fields of southern Iraq. Kurdistan's access to Iraq's pipelines has been restricted. And as often as not, the central government has simply withheld payments that foreign operators are owed under their Kurdish deals. The latest row over compensation led the KRG in April to suspend exports alto-

gether, which were scheduled to be as high as 175,000 barrels per day in 2012.

The oil dispute, of course, is at the center of a much larger argument, still unresolved, about the very nature of the new Iraqi state. The Kurds, scarred by a brutal history of subjugation at the hands of Arab rulers in Baghdad, are determined that their survival -- political, economic, and, yes, physical -- will never again be subject to the central government's diktats. Yearning in their hearts for independence, the Kurds since 2003 have reluctantly bowed to geo-political realities and agreed to work toward a unified Iraq -- but only on the condition that the country evolve toward a truly federal state, with Baghdad's authority strictly limited by constitutional guarantee and the Kurdistan region's autonomy assured. Having primary say over the fate of its energy resources, and a reliable, equitable claim on Iraq's revenue stream, are for the KRG essential elements of any durable national compact.

Baghdad, needless to say, has had a much different view. Under Prime Minister Maliki, the inclination has clearly been to revert to the modern Middle Eastern norm of a strong, centralizing state, where all political, economic, and security issues of consequence are directed by the national government. From this perspective, full-blown federalism is no recipe for stability, but rather a prescription for weakness, chaos, and fragmentation. Lebanon at best; the former Yugoslavia at worst. The KRG's oil contracts are perceived as a dagger aimed at the heart of the Iraqi state: disrupting policy with respect to the nation's most important resource; undermining the authority of the central government; and ultimately intended to underwrite a future Kurdish dash for independence that would rip the country asunder.

It's not hard to see how these conflicting visions, left unmediated, could trigger an unvirtuous action-reaction cycle. And the dynamic has only been exacerbated in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq last December, as Maliki's bent for concentrating power is increas-

ingly viewed -- by Kurds, for sure, but by many other Iraqis as well -- as veering dangerously in the direction of a new authoritarianism. Political opponents have been targeted for arrest, including Iraq's Sunni vice president. More than 18 months into his second term, Maliki -- in contravention of a power-sharing agreement -- has yet to yield personal control over the defense, interior, and intelligence ministries. He has further been accused of politicizing Iraq's judiciary and central bank, while subverting the army's chain of command and turning its best equipped, best trained units into his own praetorian guard. And the list goes on.

This is the fevered context for assessing the recent pipeline deal with Turkey. At an energy conference in Kurdistan's capital, Erbil, the KRG oil minister (standing alongside his Turkish counterpart) unveiled construction plans that, by 2013, could allow up to one million barrels of oil per day from Kurdish-controlled fields to be exported directly to Turkish ports and refineries. Similarly ambitious plans exist for delivery of Kurdish gas. Rather than flowing first through Iraq's central treasury, all revenues from these exports would come directly to the KRG -- which, according to the oil minister, would take its fair cut before sending the remainder on to Baghdad.

The potential significance is not hard to calculate. Under current arrangements, the Kurds are supposed to receive 17 percent of Iraq's national budget -- about \$10 billion this year. At current oil prices of approximately \$100 per barrel, the pipeline deal with Turkey could eventually have more than three times that amount flowing annually into the KRG's coffers. Once that happens, the Kurds' vulnerability to Baghdad's economic coercion disappears, replaced by a financial model more than adequate to sustain any KRG bid for independence.

Of course, none of this can be lost on Turkey, which for decades has struggled to deal with the grievances of its own quite sizable Kurdish minority -- including a devastating 30-year →

⇒ war against the terrorist PKK. Indeed, fear about the possible spillover effect on Turkish territorial integrity has long made opposition to Kurdish autonomy in Iraq a cornerstone of Ankara's national security policy.

Yet increasingly that assumption has been thrown into question. The last several years have witnessed a genuine sea-change in Turkish-KRG relations. Turkish companies make up the largest group of foreign investors in Kurdistan. Iraq is now Turkey's second biggest export market, with Kurdistan responsible for the bulk of that activity. Should direct energy sales commence, the KRG could well become Turkey's most important economic relationship.

Strategically, Turkey is clearly placing a growing premium on the valuable contribution Kurdistan could make to its energy security. Not unlike China and India, Turkey's fast growing economy (as much as 7 percent per year) cannot be sustained without huge additional energy inputs. Its current situation of heavy dependence on supplies from Russia and Iran is obviously sub-optimal -- not least because new sanctions threaten to cut Turkey off from the U.S. financial system unless its imports from Iran can be significantly reduced. Ensuring that Kurdistan's ample energy supplies flow through Turkey would certainly help address that dilemma, as well as dramatically advance Ankara's aspiration of becoming one of the world's most vital oil and gas transport hubs, particularly for exports to Europe. In short, a special patronage relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan -- and its estimated reserves of 40-50 billion barrels of oil and 3-6 trillion cubic meters of natural gas -- could carry huge benefits for Turkey.

Perhaps even more important, however, is the security angle. For years, Iraqi Kurdistan was viewed in Ankara as an integral part of Turkey's PKK problem, serving as the terrorist group's strategic depth and staging ground. Today, the KRG is increasingly viewed as part of the solution to Turkey's most pressing national security threat, a potential ally in delegitimizing PKK violence and encouraging a broader political accommodation that fully reconciles the Turkish state and its disgruntled Kurdish populace.

A second component to Turkey's

changing security calculus concerns Iran, of course, and the intensifying regional rivalry between Ankara and Tehran, laden by a long history of conflict and Sunni-Shiite antagonism. Most acute in Syria -- where Iran stands as the Alawite regime's main champion and Turkey its chief opponent -- the brewing cold war is also being played out fiercely on the Iraqi front. Especially in the wake of Maliki's targeting of his Sunni vice president, Turkey seems more convinced than ever that the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad has fallen to Iran's orbit. Personal recriminations between Maliki and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan reached a boiling point earlier this spring, culminating in Turkish flags being burned at a demonstration in Basra. In this environment, a stable, secure (and mostly Sunni) Iraqi Kurdistan, pre-disposed to favor Turkey over Iran, and engaged in a showdown of its own against Baghdad, looks like a natural ally to Ankara, a potentially vital buffer on an otherwise dangerous southern border.

Exactly how far Turkey is prepared to go in its new relationship with the KRG remains to be seen. For many experts on Turkey, as well as U.S. officials, it's difficult to imagine the current dalliance with Erbil as anything more than a tactical play to secure economic benefits and gain leverage over Iran and Baghdad. In this view, independence for Iraqi Kurdistan remains a bright red line that Ankara will never cross.

Perhaps. But it's increasingly hard not to consider that the ground may be shifting in very significant ways. The fact is that few of the experts would have predicted the extraordinary warming of relations that's occurred in just the past few years. The sight of Erdogan visiting Erbil in 2011, with Turkish flags flying side-by-side with Kurdish flags, was truly remarkable. So, too, the red-carpet treatment that Turkey granted visits by KRG President Masoud Barzani this past April, and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani just a few weeks ago. The fact is that last week's pipeline announcement was no impulse development, no quixotic response to the latest flare up with Baghdad or Tehran. On the contrary, it was the product of several years of careful deliberation and discussion, in which Erdogan was intimately involved. Rest assured that the Turks realize full well the kind of boost they

are providing a possible independence narrative out of the KRG. Whatever Ankara's ultimate purpose in doing so, it appears increasingly possible that the dramatic advances in relations with the Kurds could be the harbinger of a much more important strategic transformation to come in southwest Asia.

At a minimum, U.S. policymakers would be wise to take seriously the prospect of a fundamental paradigm shift in Turkey's relations with the KRG. The implications for the security and stability of Iraq and the broader region could be huge, with equally important consequences for U.S. interests. Unfortunately, the Obama administration appears for now more or less oblivious to developments, at best an irrelevant spectator to the high-stakes geo-strategic game now playing out in the region.

It's imperative that Washington gain a much better understanding of Turkey's strategic direction with respect to Kurdistan and Iraq, and do everything possible to develop a common approach -- or at least avoid unpleasant surprises. And if in fact a truly federal, democratic and unified Iraq that puts as much oil as possible onto world markets remains an important U.S. interest -- as it should, especially in light of the current squeeze on Iranian oil sales -- then helping the KRG and Baghdad resolve their intensifying political conflicts, including over the national hydrocarbons law, should again become a top priority for American diplomacy. While the Obama administration might like indulging the fiction that their hands-off approach to Iraq is encouraging its politicians to solve their own problems, the reality is that outside actors -- be it enemies in Iran or allies in Turkey -- are aggressively pursuing their own national interests and deeply involved in determining not only Iraq's future, but potentially the map of the Middle East. That's a game that America very much needs to be in, the sooner the better. ■

«Le massacre de Houla est un tournant dans la crise syrienne»

Le cessez-le-feu préconisé par Kofi Annan n'est pas respecté par le régime, qui poursuit ses bombardements, notamment à Houla, où 108 personnes ont été massacrées ce week-end. Jean-Pierre Perrin, journaliste au service Monde de «Libération», a répondu à vos questions.

Marcel. Pékin et Moscou pourraient-ils enfin infléchir leur position ? Qu'en pensez-vous ? Sous quelles conditions ?

Jean-Pierre Perrin. Oui, Moscou peut infléchir sa position, mais la partie n'est pas gagnée. D'abord, discuter avec Moscou signifie faire des concessions, céder à ses marchandages, bref, passer sous ses fourches caudines. Si les Occidentaux sont prêts à offrir ce que demande Poutine sur le bouclier antimissiles, sur la question nucléaire iranienne, peut-être voudra-t-il alors infléchir sa position. Mais la partie ne sera pas pour autant gagnée, car il veut engager un bras de fer avec l'Occident pour bien montrer qu'il est incontournable, et qu'il n'est pas question de lui faire une seconde fois le coup de la Libye. Mais si la situation devenait totalement incontrôlable en Syrie, à ce moment-là, sa position syrienne pourrait évoluer sous peine de tout perdre dans la région.

Gigi. Plusieurs capitales occidentales ont renvoyé les ambassadeurs syriens, cette expulsion diplomatique sert-elle à quelque chose ?

J.-P.P. Cette expulsion est purement symbolique. Elle traduit surtout l'impossibilité pour les diplomates occidentales de mener une politique vraiment efficace à l'encontre du régime syrien. Cependant, pour l'opposition c'est toujours un encouragement dans son combat. Un inconvénient cependant, les pays européens se privent d'un interlocuteur en cas de problème de prises d'otages, de journalistes capturés, etc.

Emilie. Une intervention militaire des Nations unies est-elle inéluctable ?

J.-P. P. Rien n'est inéluctable. Mais si les massacres continuent, si le régime syrien ne cède sur rien, et une fois les élections terminées aux Etats-Unis, on peut imaginer que face à l'intolérable, la communauté internationale se sentira obligée de réagir. Pour le moment, les Etats-Unis préfèrent une solution à la yéménite, c'est-à-dire le départ de Bachar, mais la



survie d'une partie du régime. Rien n'indique que cette solution puisse marcher en Syrie.

Phil. Où en est l'enquête sur les tueries de Houla ?

J.-P. P. Le seul avantage de la mission de l'ONU, c'est qu'elle a pu se rendre sur place et déterminer qui étaient les responsables de la tuerie. On sait à peu près ce qui s'est passé, l'artillerie du régime, montée sur des chars, a pulvérisé des quartiers de la ville. Puis des miliciens sont venus achever les blessés. La responsabilité du régime dans le massacre ne laisse donc aucun doute. Il est possible que ce massacre soit d'ailleurs un tournant dans la crise syrienne.

Gabriel. La crédibilité de Kofi Annan est-elle remise en cause ?

J.-P. P. Il est certain que Kofi Annan ne va pas sortir grandi de l'aventure. Il a cautionné l'idée que le régime pouvait transiger et se réformer, alors que quasiment tous les observateurs estiment qu'il ne peut se réformer sous peine de s'écrouler. Il aurait fallu que la mission de l'ONU puisse aussi visiter les prisons, constater les tortures, permette aux convois humanitaires d'acheminer des vivres dans les villes assiégées... En tout état de cause, la mission Annan a permis au régime de gagner du temps. Cela dit, pour le moment, il n'y a pas d'autres alternatives.

Boris2. En quoi, dans cette guerre civile, est-il plus moral de soutenir un camp plutôt qu'un autre ?

J.-P. P. Au départ, toutes les manifesta-

tions étaient pacifiques. Les mots d'ordres étaient : non-violence, refus des ingérences extérieures, et refus des affrontements intercommunautaires. La réponse du régime a été la violence systématique. Toutes les occasions ont été bonnes pour le régime de tuer, de torturer. Il est donc plus moral de soutenir l'opposition que le régime, même si des exactions graves ont été commises par certains opposants.

Boris2. L'Irak est plutôt pour Assad ou pour l'autre camp ?

J.-P. P. Pour Assad, à 100%.

Lazare. Que font les Turcs ? Ils laissent faire les insurgés ? Ils laissent passer les armes, en partie ?

J.-P. P. Les Turcs parlent beaucoup mais agissent peu. A l'évidence, ils voudraient tirer profit d'un changement de régime en Syrie. Mais, en même temps, ils ne sont pas prêts à prendre des risques. Une première raison : la communauté kurde en Syrie est en partie contrôlée par la branche syrienne du PKK, qui a des moyens d'action à l'intérieur de la Turquie. Les dernières attaques kurdes dans l'est de la Turquie lui sont imputables, et visaient à montrer à Ankara qu'il ne devait pas trop s'engager au profit des rebelles. Le soutien kurde à l'opposition syrienne existe bel et bien, mais il reste limité et il est difficile de savoir si des quantités importantes d'armes à destination des rebelles passent par le territoire turc.

NS. Qui sont les «rebelles» ?

J.P. P. L'opposition est évidemment hétéroclite. Elle comprend des partis d'opposition traditionnels, qui vont des communistes aux islamistes (Frères musulmans et salafistes). Elle compte aussi nombre d'officiers, en général d'un grade intermédiaire qui ont rejoint la rébellion. Elle compte enfin les opposants qui n'appartiennent pas aux partis traditionnels et qui se sont révoltés au fur et à mesure que le régime réprimait, ce sont surtout les comités locaux de coordination qui maintiennent la révolte à l'intérieur, et organisent coûte que coûte les manifestations. Ces comités sont très disparates, et leur composition varie d'une ville à l'autre. Ce sont eux cependant le moteur de l'opposition, elle-même divisée entre celle de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur. ■■■

■■■

Clok. Quelle est la proportion des pro-Assad en Syrie ?

J.-P. P. L'un des aspects du régime Assad est sa nature clientéliste. Il est donc évident que les clientèles du pouvoir le soutiennent. La bourgeoisie commerçante d'abord, une partie des fonctionnaires, dans un pays qui en compte beaucoup, les officiers de l'armée qui ont été choyés par Damas. Sans compter les minorités qui voient dans le régime la garantie qu'ils pourront survivre, alors qu'elles sont inquiètes par la perspective d'une prise du pouvoir par les islamistes qui se ferait à leurs dépens. Cela dit, plus les

semaines passent, plus cette clientèle du régime commence à s'effriter. On voit de plus en plus de manifestations à Alep, ville qui était jusqu'à présent considérée comme l'un des bastions du régime.

Cinna. A quelle évolution peut-on s'attendre, notamment dans les pays voisins comme le Liban ?

J.-P. P. Si le régime sent qu'il perd la partie, il va chercher à régionaliser le conflit pour bien montrer au camp occidental et aux Russes, d'une part, sa capacité de nuisance, et, d'autre part, qu'il est le seul pays de la région à pouvoir maintenir l'ordre dans celle-ci. Dans ce cas de figure, il est évident que le petit Liban où

le régime syrien compte de puissants alliés serait la première victime de cette régionalisation du conflit, tout ce qui s'y passe actuellement se lit à la lumière des événements syriens. Jusqu'à présent, les troubles sont demeurés limités à Tripoli, et de temps à autre à Beyrouth. Une question : est-ce que le Hezbollah qui, jusqu'à présent, restait relativement calme, prendra le risque de provoquer une guerre civile au Liban pour défendre le régime d'Assad ?

Merci de tout l'intérêt que vous portez au conflit syrien, vos questions sont très nombreuses, on reviendra vers vous très bientôt...□

L'EXPRESS 30 mai 2012

Les compagnies étrangères se déchirent pour le pétrole irakien

Par Charles Haquet,

A Bagdad, les autorités mettent aux enchères une série de contrats d'exploration pétrolière. Un casse-tête pour les compagnies étrangères, qui se heurtent au chaos d'un Etat fracturé. Mais la promesse, à terme, d'un jackpot dans un pays qui regorge de réserves.

Foi d'Irakien, la foire d'empoigne promet d'être fameuse. Car la quarantaine de compagnies pétrolières qui se retrouvent à Bagdad, en cette fin mai, sont prêtes à tout pour emporter la mise. En l'occurrence, l'une, voire plusieurs des 11 concessions mises aux enchères par le gouvernement irakien. Des zones situées dans le centre du pays, dont les sous-sols regorgeraient de gaz et d'huiles lourdes. Jolis jackpots en perspective.

C'est la quatrième fois, en deux ans, que le gouvernement irakien organise ce type d'appel d'offres. La méthode est toujours la même. Réunis dans une pièce, les négociateurs étrangers doivent remettre une proposition : quel est leur plan de production ? Et combien de dollars veulent-ils gagner sur chaque baril produit ? Ensuite, on dépouille les résultats et on retient les mieux, ou, plutôt, les moins-disants...

"Lors des précédents rounds, c'était un

joyeux bazar, car les règles du jeu changeaient tout le temps, raconte un proche du pouvoir et conseiller d'une major occidentale. Le gouvernement avait par exemple décrété, quelques heures avant l'ouverture des enveloppes, que ceux qui demanderaient une marge supérieure à 2 dollars par baril seraient éliminés d'office." Panique chez les candidats, qui se précipitent sur leurs calculatrices. Tractations, rebuffades... Les compagnies refusent d'abord en bloc. Puis les Chinois abattent leurs cartes. Ils y vont. Dans la foulée, le groupe britannique BP craque. Un troisième flanche. Des alliances se nouent à la hâte, les émissaires se font des promesses, bluffent...

Finalement, tous, à l'exception de Total, cèdent au diktat irakien. Et tant pis si personne ne gagne d'argent sur ces contrats : le principal est de prendre pied sur le marché le plus prometteur de ces prochaines années, l'eldorado aux 200 milliards de barils. Des réserves supérieures, dit-on, à celles de l'Iran. Et, peut-être, de l'Arabie saoudite.

Il y a tant de pétrole que, parfois, c'en est trop. Dans le sud du pays, lorsque les gardiens de chèvres déplacent leurs troupeaux, leurs bêtes s'engluent les pattes dans les ruisseaux noirs, à l'odeur entêtante, qui coulent à la lisière des champs. Quant aux maçons de Bassora, ils n'ont qu'une hantise : que l'or noir jaillisse du sol lorsqu'ils creusent les fondations d'un immeuble. Car il est partout. A fleur de



Les Kurdes sont accusés par Bagdad d'écouler en douce du pétrole vers l'Iran et la Turquie (ici, dans la région de Haj Omran, à la frontière avec l'Iran).REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

sol dans les plaines qui bordent le golfe Arabo-Persique. Tapi plus en profondeur, dans les montagnes du Nord-Est. Et quand, vraiment, on n'en trouve pas, c'est qu'il y a une poche de gaz...

Ce n'est que récemment que les grands groupes étrangers se sont tournés vers les plaines mésopotamiennes. Plus exactement à la fin de 2009, avec la signature des premiers contrats de production. Trente ans de guerres, d'embargo puis d'occupation américaine avaient plongé le pays dans un tel chaos qu'il était, auparavant, impossible d'y travailler. La plupart des installations, comme le "pipeline stratégique" qui traversait le pays du nord au sud, avaient d'ailleurs été détruites. Aujourd'hui, une page se tourne.

Certes, la situation politique du pays ⇒

⇒ reste très tendue. La gouvernance entre les partis chiite, sunnite et kurde, telle que définie dans les accords d'Arbil, en 2010, marche mal. Les sunnites reprochent au Premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, leader du parti chiite, de refuser de partager les pouvoirs, comme il s'y était pourtant engagé. On craint le point de rupture. Les trois factions s'accordent cependant sur un point : le pétrole est une priorité. Et la relance de la production sortira le pays de l'ornière.

RESTE À VAINCRE L'INERTIE DE L'ADMINISTRATION

Exsangue, endetté, l'Irak est en ruine. Routes, hôpitaux, transports, il faut tout reconstruire. Il manque 1 million de logements, 5 000 éco-les... Le coût de la reconstruction dépasserait les 500 milliards de dollars. Un coût astronomique, que les recettes pétrolières pourraient aisément financer. Quelques chiffres pour s'en convaincre : l'Irak, dont la courbe de production remonte lentement, extrait chaque jour plus de 3 millions de barils, soit le niveau de 1980, avant la guerre avec l'Iran. Pour le seul mois d'avril, les exportations de brut lui ont rapporté 9 milliards de dollars. Si, comme les experts le prédisent, le pays parvient à doubler sa production d'ici à quatre ans, plus de 200 milliards de dollars entreraient chaque année dans les caisses de l'Etat. Ce n'est donc qu'une question de temps.

Encore faut-il, dès maintenant, passer à la vitesse supérieure. C'est l'obsession

Les tensions sont si vives entre le Kurdistan et Bagdad que les autorités kurdes ont cessé de participer aux exportations irakiennes

des majors : "pousser" la production afin de compenser leurs faibles marges par du volume. Reste à vaincre l'inertie de l'administration irakienne... Un négociateur occidental, habitué des couloirs ministériels, raconte l'épreuve : "Les ministères du Pétrole et des Finances se tirent dans les pattes, car ils ne sont pas de la même couleur politique. Nos interlocuteurs locaux sont terrorisés, ils font tout valider dix fois avant de prendre la moindre décision. Tout prend du retard." D'autant que l'encadrement est insuffisant pour

gérer tous ces appels d'offres, car de nombreux hauts fonctionnaires ont fui à l'étranger durant les années Saddam Hussein. Ils ne sont pas revenus. Le déficit de compétences est tel que le gouvernement a dû demander aux fonctionnaires en âge de prendre leur retraite de rester en poste afin de traiter les dossiers...

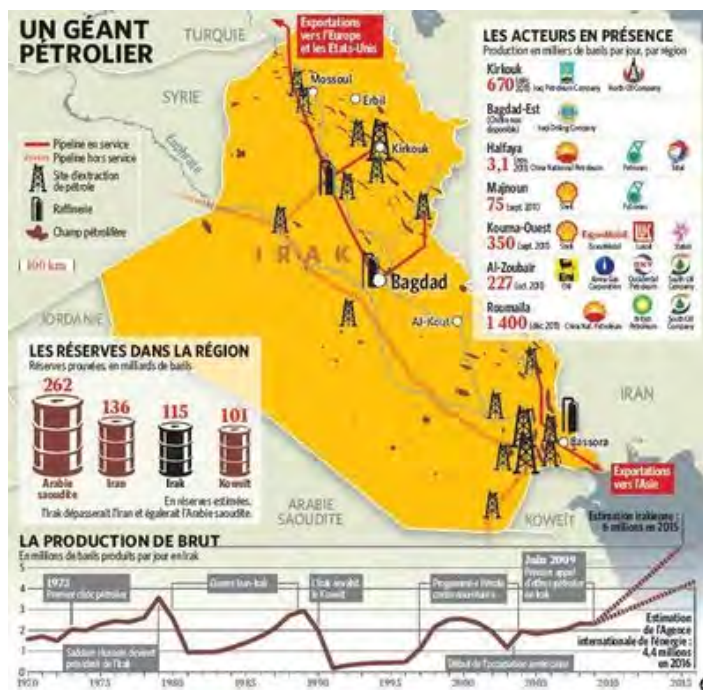
Le flou législatif n'arrange pas les choses. La loi sur le pétrole, censée régir le secteur, est en discussion depuis cinq ans. Elle bute sur un sujet sensible : les relations entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan, province du Nord qui dispose d'un statut autonome. Pour le pouvoir central, il n'y a pas de doute : seul le ministère du Pétrole est habilité à mener les négociations avec les étrangers. Et c'est Bagdad qui, via une société d'Etat, la Somo, collecte les recettes et les redistribue aux provinces, en fonction de leur poids démographique. Le Kurdistan reçoit ainsi 17% du budget fédéral, soit 17 milliards de dollars cette année.

Mais les Kurdes, qui cachent de moins en moins leurs velléités indépendantistes, pensent pouvoir faire mieux et négocient directement avec les majors. La Constitution, selon eux, leur en donne le droit. Ils ont, déjà, signé une trentaine de contrats, consentant aux étrangers des conditions bien plus avantageuses que Bagdad. L'américain Exxon, notamment, a conclu un accord, à la fin de 2011, soulevant l'ire du gouvernement central. Et ce n'est pas tout. Bagdad accuse les Kurdes de mener des trafics clandestins de pétrole, par camions-citernes, vers la Turquie et l'Iran. Chaque jour, 25 000 barils de

brut, revendus 30 dollars environ, passeraient ainsi la frontière du Nord-Ouest. Démenti des Kurdes. C'est pourtant un secret de polichinelle : les Turcs auraient même publié une réglementation pour fixer les droits de douane des camions...

Bref, le torchon brûle entre les deux communautés. Les tensions sont si vives que les autorités kurdes ont brusquement cessé, en avril dernier, de participer aux exportations irakiennes de pétrole. En représailles, Bagdad menace de couper le robinet financier. Mais le Premier ministre, chiite, prendrait un risque : faire basculer les Kurdes dans le camp des sunnites, ce qui le fragiliserait sur le plan politique.

Le symbole le plus fort de ces affrontements, c'est Kirkouk, ville du Nord, dont Bagdad et les Kurdes se disputent la souveraineté. Ces derniers tentent, par tous les moyens, d'y attirer des compagnies pétrolières pour montrer qu'ils ont la main sur la région. De leur côté, les autorités centrales y négocient avec certaines majors (on parle d'Exxon, de BP et de Total) afin de moderniser leurs installations. Pour les étrangers, le jeu est subtil. Faut-il travailler avec les Kurdes, plus "généreux", au risque de se couper de Bagdad et des gisements du Sud ? Ou garder l'atout kurde dans sa manche, pour, comme le fait Shell, négocier de meilleures conditions avec Bagdad ? Tout le monde se surveille, à l'affût de la meilleure stratégie. Oui, la foire d'empoigne ne fait que commencer. ♦



Iraq: A satellite state of Iran?

How much influence does Iran wield in Iraq? This question has long been debated, with US withdrawal even more relevant.

By **AYMENN JAWAD AL-TAMIMI**

How much influence does Iran wield in Iraq? This question has long been a matter of debate and in light of the US troop withdrawal has become all the more relevant, especially with rumors of Iranian plans to have Mahmud Shahrudi, who is an Iraqi-born member of Iran's Guardian Council and advocates clerical involvement in government, succeed the quietist Ali al-Sistani in Najaf.

Unfortunately, partisan politics on the left and right have precluded serious analysis on the subject.

In any event, we can begin by noting that Iraq has close economic ties with Iran. According to the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, quoted in a report by the Tehran Times, trade transactions between the two countries over the past Iranian calendar year (ending on 19th March 2012) amounted to more than \$11 billion.

He also noted that around 1.2 million Iranian pilgrims visited the Shi'a holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in that same year. In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, a lifting on import tariffs by the Coalition Provisional Authority led to an influx of cheap goods from Iran, and shopkeepers in Karbala have not been unaware of the increase of Iranian products on sale in their stores.

Nor is there a shortage of signs in Farsi advertising accommodation for pilgrims, and many Iraqis in the city have now learnt the Persian language. Unsurprisingly, these developments have provoked suspicions of Iranian cultural infiltration.

When there was a US troop presence in Iraq, Tehran provided backing for small Shi'a militant organizations known as the "Special Groups." These militias came into increasing conflict with the central government as the sectarian civil war began to subside in 2007-8.

Nonetheless, after the American withdrawal, the Special Groups have had no casus belli, and so it is that they have either disbanded or turned to the political process.

A case-in-point is the League of the Righteous, led by Qais Khazali, who is at odds with Muqtada al-Sadr and his followers that comprise an important part of the ruling coalition. By backing the groups that can give rise to internal Shi'a rivalries, Iran can increase its own influence by playing a role as mediator, adviser and kingmaker.

Linked to this point is the fact that in

the aftermath of the 2010 elections, which entailed a prolonged stalemate among Iraq's political factions, the Sadrists and the strongly pro-Iranian Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq [ISCI] eventually joined the current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law bloc on Iran's advice.

Thus, it cannot be denied that the Iranian influence exists economically and politically.

Oddly enough, both the US and Iran backed Maliki for a second term as prime minister following the 2010 elections, but of the two countries, it was Iran that showed a degree of influence on the political process in advising the Sadrists and ISCI to unite with Maliki. The US in contrast had no role in suggesting or facilitating coalition-shuffling.

Yet it does not follow that the Iraqi government simply subordinates what it perceives to be its own interests to those of Iran. Iraq is still a leading customer for US arms, despite Iranian disapproval, and will probably remain so over the coming years.

It is also notable that the negotiations over the question of an extension of the US troop presence were conducted in such a way as to exclude the Sadrists from the Iraqi government's decision-making.

The reason the discussions broke down was because of a universal consensus among Iraq's political factions that no legal immunity could be granted to US troops; otherwise all agreed on a postponement of the withdrawal deadline. The voices of pro-Iranian factions were completely irrelevant.

Further, while the Iraqi government has generally not come out in support of the Syrian uprising (with the Sadrists declaring Bashar Assad to be a "brother" solely by virtue of his supposed Shi'a identity), it is not necessarily the case that this stance is due to Iranian influence, for it is clear that the Iraqi government is also keen to avoid actively aiding the Assad regime, as evinced by Baghdad's warning to Tehran in March that it would not permit arms shipments to Syria to pass through its territory or airspace.

This announcement came partly in response to American concerns that Iraq was in violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1747 that bans arms exports from Iran.

What then of the rumors that Iran is aiming to have Shahrudi succeed Sistani in Najaf? If this were to happen, it would

indeed have a profound impact on Iraqi politics, shifting the country towards a much more decisively pro-Iranian alignment.

Nevertheless, there are numerous obstacles that render the prospect of Shahrudi acquiring a position of dominance in Najaf unlikely, primarily because such a move would probably encounter stringent opposition from the Dawa party that is led by Nouri al-Maliki and is the most powerful Shi'a political faction in Iraq (far more so than either the Sadrists or the ISCI).

The Dawa party, unlike the Sadrists or ISCI but in keeping with the consensus in Najaf that itself hinders the possibility of a Shahrudi takeover, has generally not embraced Khomeini's doctrine of velayat-e-faqih (governance of the jurist).

Besides, al-Maliki and his bloc, whose greatest concern has always been consolidation of their own power base, are aware of Sunni Arab and Kurdish anxieties about shifting towards an Iranian model of government, and accordingly, as analyst Reidar Visser notes, have been working with al-Iraqiya – the main opposition bloc – and the Kurds to block attempts by ISCI and the Islamic Virtue Party – a branch of the Sadrist movement – to introduce clerical veto in Iraqi law, such as is practiced in Iran.

In short, Iraq is not a satellite state of Iran. In general, the Iraqi government thinks it is in its best interests to maintain good relations with both Iran and the United States. Although Iranian influence in the country is undoubtedly present economically and politically, it does not follow that Iraq complies with Tehran's wishes.

When it comes to Iraqi politics, what matter more than any foreign influence are the rivalries between and within the various factions, often entailing personal power struggles going back many years.

In the end, the formation of the current Iraqi government as per the Arbil compromise struck by Massoud Barzani had nothing to do with the US or Iran, but was rather rooted in the problem of the personal animosity between Maliki and Ayad Allawi, who is leader of the opposition bloc but like Maliki a Shi'ite and has many Shi'a groups in his bloc such as the White Iraqi National Movement. □

The author is a student at Brasenose College, Oxford University, and an adjunct fellow at Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum.



THE NEW IRAQ (OIL) WAR

Turkey is positioning itself to be the transit country for energy due its location at the crossroads of east and west.



Pepe Escobar

Hong Kong, China - Iraq has virtually disappeared from the news cycle - displaced by the Arab Spring/Winter seesaw and the ongoing tragedy in Syria.

But when Ashti Hawrami, oil minister of semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, delivered a particular explosive bit of news over a week ago at the regional capital Irbil, one could feel the tectonic plates of Pipelineistan rippling all across the Middle East - and beyond.

Hawrami, alongside Turkey's energy minister Taner Yildiz, announced that essentially Iraqi Kurds would build a one-million-barrel-a-day oil pipeline to Ceyhan, in Turkey, to reach the border by August 2013. Then a second phase would connect it to the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, and a second pipeline would open in 2014.

Pipelineistan followers will remember that Ceyhan is the gigantic terminal for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline - a pet geopolitical project of the Clinton administration in the US. BTC also carries 1 million barrels of oil a day.

Iraqi Kurdistan is an energy paradise. In December 2011, Hawrami estimated it held between 3 and 6 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and 45 billion barrels of oil.

Iraqi Kurds dream of profiting from this bonanza without consulting Baghdad. Now imagine, as a comparison, if Turkish Anatolia decided to build a pipeline with Iran, for its own needs, without bothering to tell Ankara.

And this happened after Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki had characterised Turkey - previous practitioner of a "zero problems with our neighbours" diplomacy - as on the way to becoming a "hostile state", and Turkish flags had been burned in Basra.

Baghdad, of course, may veto the whole adventure. It has already branded the pipeline as "illegal", even though Hawrami said, "Export[ed] crude from the Kurdish region's fields will still be Iraqi oil." The KRG [Kurdish regional government] would take 17 per cent of the cut and the rest would go to Baghdad and the Iraq Central Bank.

"The Maliki government and Iraqi Kurds

[relations] are close to poisonous... Turkey in its complex neo-Ottomanism lite offensive courting Sunnis all across the Middle East."

It doesn't help that relations between the Maliki government and Iraqi Kurds are close to poisonous. Because of - what else - money, the KRG threatened to "cease exports" to Baghdad. Last year, the KRG and ExxonMobil made a direct deal, bypassing Baghdad.

And then, there's all the geopolitical drama. The Erdogan administration in Ankara also has tremendous problems with Maliki.

Turkey - in its complex neo-Ottomanism lite offensive courting Sunnis all across the Middle East - accuses Shiite Maliki not only of sectarianism inside Iraq, but also of blindly following Iran to prop up Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Ankara has been a vocal advocate of regime change in Syria. As much as the AKP in power in Ankara has sealed an alliance with Sunnis all across the Middle East, they see Iraqi Kurds as much better allies than a pro-Tehran Maliki.

For his part, Maliki mercilessly blasts Ankara for giving protection to fugitive Iraqi vice-president Tasheq al-Hashemi, accused by Baghdad of running Sunni death squads, according to evidence Turkey insists was obtained by torture.

No problem, as long as we profit from it

This website (subscription only) has been closely following the oil angle of the Kurdistan-Turkey partnership. But it's an incredibly messy story, mired in myriad contradictions.

"Ankara's position towards a possible balkanisation of Iraq is like smoke coming out of a shisha."

Turkey's second-biggest trading partner is now Iraq. Most of the trade comes from the KRG - to the delight of Turkish companies. Yet for Ankara the key of the equation is to use the KRG to subdue the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which is essentially based in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Ankara's position towards a possible balkanisation of Iraq is like smoke coming out of a shisha. Officially, Ankara always stresses Iraq's "territorial integrity". Thus, in thesis, it would prefer a pipeline approved by Baghdad.

Ankara very well knows that any possible moves towards an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would give a wealth of ideas to Turkish Kurds. That's its number one priority; "sanitise" cross border Kurdish nationalism. Thus it's not exactly a good policy to antagonise Baghdad as much as Turkish business interests may need - and crave - Iraqi oil.

Now for the facts on the ground. Irbil does not decide Iraq's oil exports; Baghdad does. The Maliki government is actually juggling between the north (Kurdistan) and the south. Production in Basra is going up. This means Kurdistan ceases to be crucial.

In strictly Pipelineistan terms, the fog of uncertainty mirrors the Europeans trying to deal with unpredictable gas republic Turkmenistan. Investors in this potential pipeline will note there's absolutely no guarantee that the KRG, by itself, can actually supply 1 million barrels of oil a day.

Iraq still does not have a national hydrocarbons law - foreseen in the constitution, with specific provisions related to concessions. It's on the way - albeit slowly. The KRG will have to be accounted for. Meanwhile, it's our (Baghdad) way or the highway.

And it's all bound to remain extremely murky while there's no referendum - postponed for five years now - on the status of Iraqi Kurdistan. Crucial Kirkuk is still being disputed. And Basra also wants near to full authority over its own energy deals.

Turkey, though, is in a tremendous hurry. It has been painstakingly positioning itself to Europe, in terms of a transit country for energy, as the indispensable crossroads between East and West.

A KRG-Turkey pipeline would do wonders as a PR move expanding Turkey's role in providing oil and gas to Europe - now that the interminable Nabucco pipeline opera seems to be condemned to the dustbin.

And geopolitically, the EU and NATO would be delighted to finally have an alternative to reduce Russia's Gazprom stranglehold on the European energy market.

This is all inbuilt in the Turkish Foreign Ministry's new "Eurasian" policy. It looks like the "zero problems with our neighbours" doctrine is being replaced by "a few problems we can profit from". □

Pepe Escobar is the roving correspondent for Asia Times. His latest book is named *Obama Does Globalistan* (Nimble Books, 2009).

Syria Massacre Victims In Houla Executed, Says UN

By ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY

BEIRUT — Eyewitness accounts from the Syrian massacre emerged Tuesday, describing shadowy gunmen slaughtering whole families in their homes and targeting the most vulnerable in poor farming villages. Western nations expelled Syrian diplomats in a coordinated move against President Bashar Assad's regime over the killing of more than 100 people.

U.N. special envoy Kofi Annan met with Assad in Damascus to try to salvage what was left of a peace plan, which since being brokered six weeks ago has failed to stop any of the violence on the ground.

Survivors of the Houla massacre blamed pro-regime gunmen for at least some of the carnage as the killings reverberated inside Syria and beyond, further isolating Assad and embarrassing his few remaining allies.

"It's very hard for me to describe what I saw, the images were incredibly disturbing," a Houla resident who hid in his home during the massacre told The Associated Press on Tuesday. "Women, children without heads, their brains or stomachs spilling out."

He said the pro-regime gunmen, known as shabiha, targeted the most vulnerable in the farming villages that make up Houla, a poor area in Homs province. "They went after the women, children and elderly," he said, asking that his name not be used out of fear of reprisals.

Assad's government often deploys fearsome militias that provide muscle for the regime and carry out military-style attacks. They frequently work closely with soldiers and security forces, but the regime never acknowledges their existence, allowing it to deny responsibility

for their actions.

U.N. peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous said there are strong suspicions that pro-Assad fighters were responsible for some of the killings, adding that he has seen no reason to believe that "third elements" – or outside forces – were involved, although he did not rule it out.

The Syrian regime has denied any role in the massacre, blaming the killings on "armed terrorists" who attacked army positions in the area and slaughtered innocent civilians. It has provided no evidence to support its narrative, nor has it given a death toll.

Following his meeting with Assad, Annan called on the government and "all government-backed militias" to stop military operations and show maximum restraint. He also called on the armed opposition to stop all violence.

"We are at a tipping point," Annan told reporters in Damascus. "The Syrian people do not want the future to be one of bloodshed and division."

Cranking up the pressure on Assad, the Obama administration gave Syria's most senior envoy in Washington, the charge d'affaires at the Syrian Embassy, 72 hours to leave the United States. Britain, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria also expelled Syrian diplomats.

"We hold the Syrian government responsible for this slaughter of innocent lives," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in Washington. "This massacre is the most unambiguous indictment to date of the Syrian government's flagrant violations of its U.N. Security Council obligations."

The massacre in Houla could prove to be a watershed moment in the Syrian crisis, which began in March 2011 with



Victims of the Houla massacre (Photo AP)

peaceful protests inspired by the wave of uprisings sweeping the Arab world.

Nearly 15 months later, the country is in many ways unrecognizable from the days before the revolt. Assad, once considered a potential reformer in a region filled with aging dictators, is a global pariah. A country that once boasted it was the safest in the Middle East is riven with violence, some of it reminiscent of the worst days of the Iraq war. The economy is in tatters. Syrians are facing price increases for basic goods and endure regular power cuts.

And in some haunting cases, neighbors who have lived side by side for years are turning on each other, driven by sectarian hatred that so many months of violence is laying bare.

According to witnesses, the massacre, which began late Friday in an area about 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of the city of Homs, had dangerous sectarian overtones.

The victims lived in the Houla area's Sunni Muslim villages. But the shabiha forces allegedly behind many of the killings came from an arc of nearby villages populated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Most shabiha fighters belong to the Alawite sect, to which the Assad family and the ruling elite also belong. This ensures the gunmen's loyalty to the regime, built on fears they will be persecuted if the Sunni majority gains the upper hand.

Sunnis make up most of Syria's 22 million people, as well as the backbone of the opposition. Even as much of the opposition insists the movement is entirely secular, disturbing reports from the ground suggest religious tensions are boiling over.

• The volatile sectarian divide makes civil war one of the most dire scenarios.

Activists say as many as 13,000 people have been killed in the uprising. The U.N. put the toll at 9,000 as of March – one year into the revolt – but many hundreds more have died since.

On Tuesday, the U.N.'s human rights office said most of the 108 victims of the Houla massacre were shot at close range. The U.N. report indicated that most of the dead were killed execution-style, with fewer than 20 people cut down by regime shelling.

Deaths from heavy artillery can be blamed on regime forces with relative confidence because rebel fighters do not have such weapons. But it is more difficult to determine who is behind the close-range killings – particularly as Syria sharply restricts media access.

Still, the U.N. cited survivors and witnesses blaming the house-to-house killings on shabiha. Witnesses also told the AP that shabiha were behind the attacks.

"What is very clear is this was an absolutely abominable event that took place in Houla, and at least a substantial part of it was summary executions of civilians, women and children," said Rupert Colville, spokesman for the U.N. High commissioner for Human Rights.

"At this point, it looks like entire families were shot in their houses," he said.

It is not clear what touched off the convulsion of violence. Houla activists reached by Skype said government troops shelled the area after anti-government protests on Friday and clashed with local rebels. Later, shabiha from nearby villages swept through the

area, stabbing residents and shooting them at close range.

Videos posted online by anti-regime activists show explosions in Houla and dismembered bodies in the streets, then row upon row of the dead laid out before being buried in a mass grave. Some videos showed dozens of dead children, some with gaping wounds.

According to the state-run news agency, SANA, Assad on Tuesday blamed terrorists and weapons smugglers for scuttling the peace plan, which called for a cease-fire and dialogue with the opposition. The regime denies there is any popular will behind the country's uprising, saying foreign extremists and terrorists are driving the unrest.

Although Damascus has remained largely impervious to international condemnation over the course of the uprising, Tuesday's diplomatic squeeze will increase pressure on Syria's remaining allies, including Russia.

Russia has provided a key layer of protection for the Syrian government in the uprising. Russia and China have used their veto power to block U.N. resolutions against Assad. But Russia has grown increasingly critical of Damascus in recent months, and the Houla massacre has prompted some of the strongest condemnations yet from Moscow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is traveling to Germany and France this week and is likely to come under even greater criticism for his support of the regime.

"We have to continue our work with the Russians," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said. "We will continue to discuss this with Russia. Russia has particular leverage on the regime and

therefore has a particular role in this crisis."

Despite some shift in Russia's stance recently, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Tuesday the Houla massacre must not be a pretext to push for military intervention from outside. Instead, he urged all sides to focus on the Annan plan.

Hague said that the situation in Syria is more complicated than what international powers faced in Libya last year, when a U.N. resolution ushered in NATO military intervention against dictator Moammar Gadhafi's regime.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the Obama administration remains opposed to military action, reasoning that it would lead only to more carnage. He said the U.S. will continue offering non-lethal assistance to the Syrian people and said Tuesday's coordinated move to expel Syrian diplomats was a signal of the international community's "absolute disgust" with Assad's rule.

Assad still commands a strong army that has proven largely unwilling to turn on him. The entire structure of the state has been built to preserve Assad's power, with the military, the police and security services – even the economy – tied up with the survival of his presidency.

But as the violence engulfs the country, many see Assad's departure as the only way out.

Fawaz Zakri, a member of the opposition Syrian National Council, urged action by the U.N. Security Council, saying the world body "must do something to save the Syrian people's souls." ●

TheNational MAY 29, 2012

Border tensions rise as Turkey says Syria is giving PKK free rein

Thomas Seibert

ISTANBUL // Turkish authorities say they have evidence that Kurdish militants enjoying increasingly free rein in Syria brought 40 kilograms of plastic explosives across the border into Turkey to stage a major attack last week.

The claim is a new sign of tension between the two countries that could trigger a

military escalation at the border, analysts said yesterday.

"Tensions will rise further, and even an armed confrontation is possible," Ihsan Bal, an anti-terrorism expert at the International Strategic Research Organisation (Usak), a think tank in Ankara, said yesterday.

According to officials quoted by Turkish media, two Kurdish militants who crossed from Syria into Turkey carrying plastic

explosives were travelling through Anatolia in a car they collected from accomplices in Turkey last Friday. They panicked when they realised they were being followed by police after driving through a checkpoint in the south-east province of Kahramanmaraş.

The militants triggered the explosives after entering a police compound in the town of Pinarbasi, in the province of Kayseri, and coming under fire by police there. The two Kurds and a policeman died, while another 17 people were wounded.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, said the militants were probably on their way to stage a major attack in a metropolitan area.

"Had the military police not followed >

➤ and stopped that car, there might have been a much bigger disaster in one of our big cities," Mr Erdogan said in a Twitter message.

The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - a rebel group fighting for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey since 1984 and labelled a terrorist organisation by Turkey and the West - confirmed that two of its members were in the car that exploded.

A PKK statement quoted by the ANF news agency, which is close to the rebels, said the militants had died "a heroic death".

Sinan Ulgen, the chairman of Economics and Foreign Policy Research (Edam), an Istanbul-based think tank, said Turkey was likely to boost its troops on the border.

"Turkey will need to give a strong signal to Syria that this is unacceptable," he said about the reported infiltration by Kurdish militants from Syria.

Mr Ulgen said he did not expect military clashes between the two countries, but added that troop reinforcements were possible because Ankara needs "to appease public opinion and go beyond the war of words" with Syria. Turkey is increasingly concerned that the violence in Syria is des-

tabilising the region along the joint border, which stretches 900 kilometres from the Mediterranean to Iraq.

Last month, Ankara accused Syrian troops of firing across the border at a camp for Syrian refugees.

After the shooting, Mr Erdogan raised the possibility of asking Nato to step in under a rule of the alliance that calls on action by all 28 countries of the bloc in case of an attack against one of its members.

During a decade of warm Turkish-Syrian relations that ended last year, Damascus was careful not to allow the PKK to stage attacks in Turkey from Syria.

But the Turkish government says the crisis in relations following Ankara's outspoken criticism of the Syrian government's clamp-down may have prompted Damascus to change its position and allow the PKK to operate in Syria.

Shortly before the incident in Pinarbasi, Idris Naim Sahin, Turkey's interior minister, used a television interview to accuse the Syrian government of supporting the PKK to harm Turkey.

"In an effort to take revenge on Turkey, they close their eyes to the terrorist organisation moving into northern parts [of Syria] and taking over several villages there," Mr

Sahin said about the Syrian authorities.

Syria has not commented on the accusation that the regime is tolerating the PKK.

A day after the explosion, Mr Sahin said four people had been arrested for helping the bombers.

"Their connections, including cross-border connections, have been uncovered by police," he said.

According to Turkish media reports, two of the arrests were made in Suruc, a town near the Syrian border. The four arrested men are accused of having met the bombers after they crossed the border from Syria late last Thursday and of having supplied them with the car, according to the reports.

Speaking about a possible troop increase at the border, Mr Ulgen said Turkey had used the method of a military build-up before.

In 1998, Ankara sent tanks to the border with Syria to pressure Damascus to throw out the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who was living in the Syrian capital at the time.

Following the Turkish move, Ocalan had to leave Syria and was arrested by Turkey several months later. He has been serving a life sentence in a Turkish prison since 1999. □



MAY 31, 2012

Six blasts across Baghdad kill at least 17

By Kareem Raheem

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Six explosions hit neighborhoods across Baghdad on Thursday, killing at least 17 people and wounding dozens more in the most deadly attacks on the Iraqi capital in more than a month.

The attacks - a truck bomb in a market, a car bomb and roadside explosives - broke weeks of relative calm in Baghdad just as Iraq's government, shared among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs, wrangles over a crisis that risks reigniting sectarian tensions.

In the largest blast, a bomber detonated a vegetable delivery truck packed with explosives near a restaurant in a market, killing at least 13 people and wounding 38 in the mainly Shi'ite Shula district, police and witnesses said.

"The pickup truck came into the market and the driver left it saying he was going to get people to unload vegetables," said Haider Fadhil, one of the wounded. "It was a huge explosion, I was knocked out and woke up in a car on my way to hospital."

A car bomb exploded near the vehicle of one of Prime Minister Nuri al-



Maliki's advisers, killing one civilian and wounding three in western Baghdad, police and hospital officials said. It was not clear whether the adviser was targeted.

Two roadside bombs also exploded in Amiriya district, killing two people and wounding four more, while roadside bombs killed one and injured 15 more people in other mixed neighborhoods in western and southern parts of the capital.

Violence in Iraq has fallen sharply since the height of the sectarian slaughter triggered a few years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that ousted Saddam Hussein. Suicide bombings and blasts claimed hundreds of lives daily in 2006-2007.

In the last major attacks, 20 bombs hit cities and towns across the country in mid-April, killing 36 - including 15 people in mainly Shi'ite areas in Baghdad - and raising fears of renewed sectarian strife.

Since the last U.S. troops pulled out in December, Sunni Islamists have often targeted local security forces and government buildings, but have also sought out Shi'ite victims in an attempt to stir sectarian tensions.

Many Iraqi Sunnis say they fear Maliki wants to shore up Shi'ite power by sidelining Sunni leaders from the power-sharing government set up over a year ago after inconclusive 2010 elections.

Al Qaeda's local affiliate, Islamic State of Iraq, claimed responsibility for April's attacks, saying they were in response to detentions and confiscations it said the Shi'ite-led government had carried out in Sunni areas.

A Sunni vice president, Tareq Hashemi, has fled to Turkey after a court sought his arrest on charges he and his bodyguards ran a death squad. Hashemi says the charges are political, but Maliki's supporters say it is just a criminal case. □

Des forces iraniennes présentes en Syrie

Le vice-commandant d'une unité d'élite de Téhéran a annoncé que ses hommes étaient présents en Syrie pour "empêcher les massacres de civils".

Par Armin Arefi

Ce n'était jusqu'ici qu'une rumeur. C'est désormais une quasi-certitude. La République islamique est bel et bien présente en Syrie au côté de Bachar el-Assad. Accusé jusqu'ici de fournir uniquement un soutien logistique aux forces de sécurité syriennes, l'Iran aurait dépêché sur place des éléments de sa brigade al-Qods, des forces spéciales chargées des opérations clandestines à l'étranger. C'est ce qui a été confirmé par le vice-commandant de l'unité Qods en personne, le général Esmail Ghani, selon une information rapportée par le blog du Monde.fr Nouvelles d'Iran.

"Si la République islamique n'avait pas été présente en Syrie, le massacre de la population aurait été beaucoup plus catastrophique", a affirmé Esmail Ghani à l'agence officielle iranienne Irna. "Avant que nous arrivions en Syrie, le nombre des Syriens massacrés par les insurgés était plus important. Mais la présence de la République islamique, de manière physique ou non, a empêché de grands massacres de civils", a précisé le haut responsable iranien.

DÉPÊCHE DISPARUE

Étonnamment, la dépêche a très vite été retirée du site de l'Irna (mais le lien cache de Google existe toujours, NDLR). Signe de l'embarras de Téhéran, le chef des forces armées, le général Hassan Firouzabadi, a tenté de nuancer les propos de son collègue en assurant au site entekhab que l'aide était "uniquement morale et logistique". Mais, comme le remarque le blog Nouvelles d'Iran, il n'a pas démenti la présence de forces iraniennes en territoire syrien. Selon le général, celles-ci ont simplement pour but d'"établir la sécurité" dans le pays. En



"Si la République islamique n'avait pas été présente en Syrie, le massacre de la population aurait été beaucoup plus catastrophique", a affirmé Esmail Ghani, vice-commandant de l'unité Qods

janvier dernier, de hauts responsables américains ont fait état de la présence à Damas du général iranien Qassem Soleimani, commandant de l'unité Qods (force spéciale des Gardiens de la révolution).

Selon Mohammad-Reza Djalili, professeur émérite à l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement, ces agents iraniens ne seraient pas des combattants, mais plutôt des conseillers. "Le régime syrien, qui repose sur une armée qui lui est majoritairement restée fidèle, n'a pas besoin d'une aide physique", souligne le chercheur. "Ainsi, ces agents sont probablement présents pour former les forces syriennes, fournir du matériel de répression et apporter une expertise dans la cyberguerre contre les sites d'opposition", ajoute-t-il. D'autres forces spéciales, cette fois françaises, auraient déjà été envoyés en Turquie, fin 2011, pour former les soldats dissidents de l'Armée syrienne libre. Paris avait également dépêché ses agents l'été dernier en Libye, pour aider les rebelles du CNT à renverser Muammar Kadhafi.

ENVOI D'ARMES

Ce n'est pas la première fois que le nom de la brigade al-Qods est associé à la Syrie. En août dernier, l'Union européenne avait sanctionné l'unité d'élite iranienne, l'accusant d'avoir "fourni aux services de sécurité syriens

une assistance technique, du matériel et un soutien pour réprimer les mouvements de contestation civils". Ces forces spéciales appartiennent au corps des Gardiens de la révolution, l'armée idéologique de la République islamique. Elles sont notamment présentes en Irak, où elles soutiennent les mouvances chiites et combattent les rebelles kurdes du Parti pour une vie libre du Kurdistan (PJAK), ou encore au Liban, où elles entraînent les combattants du Hezbollah (allié chiite de Téhéran au Liban, NDLR).

Justement, pour étayer ses propos, Mohammad-Reza Djalili explique que l'Iran, s'il voulait vraiment envoyer des soldats en Syrie, aurait tout intérêt à faire appel à des combattants libanais, parlant l'arabe et pouvant ainsi se fondre bien plus aisément au sein de la population. Avant cette révélation iranienne, les Occidentaux s'étaient contentés d'accuser à plusieurs reprises l'Iran de fournir des armes et des experts à Damas pour l'aider à réprimer la révolte, ce que Téhéran a démenti à chaque fois.

TÉHÉRAN ÉBRANLÉ

En janvier, le ministère français des Affaires étrangères révélait qu'un panel d'experts des Nations unies sur l'Iran avait relevé plusieurs cas de violation, en lien avec la Syrie, de l'embargo d'armes à destination ou en provenance de la République islamique, mis en place par les résolutions 1747 et 1929 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies. En avril, c'est l'hebdomadaire allemand Der Spiegel qui annonçait qu'un cargo allemand avec des armes iraniennes à destination du régime syrien avait été stoppé à 80 kilomètres au large du port syrien Tartous.

"Maintenir le régime syrien demeure une nécessité absolue pour l'Iran", insiste Mohammad-Reza Djalili. "La chute de l'alaouite (secte proche du chiisme, NDLR) Bachar el-Assad signerait l'échec de trente ans de politique étrangère levantine de l'Iran, basée sur l'axe chiite Téhéran-Damas-Beyrouth, note le chercheur. À l'inverse, l'arrivée au pouvoir d'un régime sunnite (confession majoritaire en Syrie, NDLR) favoriserait les monarchies pétrolières du Golfe, la Turquie, mais aussi l'ensemble de l'Occident." □

Soutien limité pour une action armée en Syrie

La Russie, la Chine, mais aussi plusieurs pays occidentaux rejettent l'éventualité évoquée mardi par François Hollande.

ALAIN BARLUET

DIPLOMATIE Intervenir militairement en Syrie avec l'aval de l'ONU ? L'hypothèse a été explicitement évoquée par François Hollande qui ne l'a « pas exclue » dans son interview à France 2, mardi soir. Si le mot a été lâché cette fois, l'esprit de cette déclaration s'inscrit dans le droit fil des propos tenus par les prédécesseurs, Nicolas Sarkozy et Alain Juppé. Ce dernier avait évoqué, en avril, des discussions sur une résolution « sous chapitre 7 » de la charte des Nations unies, c'est-à-dire incluant un possible recours à la force. Cette continuité avec l'ancien gouvernement a conduit Jean-François Copé à accorder à François Hollande un satisfecit sur la Syrie. « C'est une position (...) qui me paraît conforme aux valeurs qui sont les nôtres », a dit mercredi le secrétaire général de l'UMP, tout en mettant en garde le chef de l'État contre une « atteinte aux crédits budgétaires de la défense nationale ».

La détermination affichée par François Hollande, l'émotion très considérable suscitée par le massacre de Houla (108 morts, dont 49 enfants) et la poursuite des atrocités, les obstacles rencontrés par la mission de Kofi Annan, l'épuisement des sanctions : autant de facteurs qui contribueraient plutôt à crédibiliser une intervention armée. L'urgence mise en avant par certains, tel Bernard-Henri Lévy, comme naguère à Benghazi, va dans le même sens.

Cette nouvelle phase de dramatisation ne préfigure pas pour autant une option militaire. Les paramètres de la crise qui a éclaté en Syrie en mars 2011 n'ont pas fondamentalement changé. La Russie est venue rappeler ces constantes de géopolitique régionale, mercredi, en ne déviant pas d'un pouce de ses réticences habituelles. Moscou a ainsi jugé « prématurée » toute nouvelle action de l'ONU contre la Syrie et condamné le renvoi « contre-productif » des ambassadeurs syriens décidé par plusieurs capitales occidentales. Andreï Denissov, vice-ministre russe des Affaires étrangères, a jugé les propos de François Hollande davantage dictés par les « émotions poli-

tiques » que par les « évaluations et l'analyse ». Une intervention extérieure ? « Il faut se poser la question : et après ? » a dit M. Denissov en résumant la position de la Russie, hostile à toute initiative qui remettrait en cause son influence en Syrie (à travers sa base navale de Tartous notamment) et dans la région. Pour s'opposer à toute nouvelle initiative, les Russes continuent d'invoquer la résolution 1973 sur l'intervention en Libye, qu'ils se seraient fait arracher et dont le mandat aurait été, selon eux, outrepassé. La question sera au menu des entretiens qu'aura, vendredi à l'Élysée, François Hollande avec Vladimir Poutine. « À moi, à d'autres, de convaincre Russes et Chinois et aussi de trouver une solution qui ne serait pas forcément militaire », a dit mardi soir à la télévision le président français, une façon d'indiquer que la voie diplomatique demeure la plus plausible. « Le message du

chef de l'État, vendredi, sera qu'il faut faire bloc autour de Kofi Annan et de son plan » induisant une transition politique à Damas, insiste-t-on à l'Élysée. Avec Vladimir Poutine, qui avait reproché au président d'alors, Dmitri Medvedev, son *nihil obstat* à l'intervention en Libye, la confiance sera à établir à l'occasion du premier contact personnel avec François Hollande. La Syrie aura valeur de test. Le nouvel occupant de l'Élysée fera valoir à son visiteur que le président syrien est un « problème ». Il a néanmoins franchi une ligne rouge aux yeux de Moscou en déclarant, mardi soir, qu'il fallait « chasser le régime de Bachar el-Assad ». Or, si les dirigeants russes ont affirmé qu'ils ne se sentaient pas liés à Bachar, tout ce qui ressemble de près ou de loin à un changement de régime provoqué de l'extérieur leur hérissé le poil.

Pas de plan à l'Otan

L'option diplomatique a la faveur de toutes les capitales. Berlin a rappelé mercredi ne voir aucune raison de « spéculer sur des options militaires ». La démarche tentée récemment par Washington auprès de la Russie pour amorcer une transition « à la yéménite » témoigne de la priorité américaine en faveur du dialogue. On voit mal Barack Obama, briguant sa réélection, se lancer, après l'Irak et l'Afghanistan, en Syrie. Le terrain y est autrement plus compliqué qu'en Libye, compte tenu de l'équation communautaire et démographique, des combats urbains et de la forte défense antiaérienne. Sans parler des répercussions régionales, jusque sur le dossier du nucléaire iramien. L'Otan n'est pas davantage partante : le sujet n'a même pas été abordé à Chicago. ■

Nouveau massacre près de Deir ez-Zor, dans l'est du pays

AU MOINS 13 civils ont été liquidés dans la région de Deir ez-Zor, à l'est de la Syrie, selon l'Observatoire des droits de l'homme, basé à Londres. Le chef des observateurs de l'ONU en Syrie, le général Robert Mood, s'est dit « profondément perturbé » par cette nouvelle découverte macabre, quelques jours après le massacre de Houla, où 108 personnes ont été tuées, dont 49 enfants, la plupart sommairement exécutées par des miliciens prorégime (shabiha). À Deir ez-Zor, « tous les corps avalent les mains liées derrière le dos, et certains semblent avoir été tués d'une balle dans la tête à bout portant », selon

un communiqué publié par le général Mood. Mercredi, le Japon et la Turquie ont emboîté le pas à de nombreux pays occidentaux en annonçant l'expulsion des diplomates syriens de leurs capitales, en représailles au carnage de Houla. Damas a riposté en ordonnant le départ, sous 72 heures, de la chargée d'affaires des Pays-Bas, une des rares diplomates occidentales encore en poste en Syrie. Pour sortir de l'impasse actuelle, l'opposition estime qu'un « départ d'Assad est le seul moyen de sauver le plan Annan et de trouver une issue politique, faute de quoi la situation risque d'exploser et menacera toute la région ». (AFP)

L'ONU impute aux milices pro-Assad la responsabilité du massacre d'Houla

Selon les Nations unies, la plupart des 108 victimes ont fait l'objet d'exécutions sommaires

Un massacre à la kalachnikov et au couteau. Des familles entières exécutées ou égorgées dans leur propre maison, par les hommes de main du régime de Bachar Al-Assad. Un bain de sang systématique et ordonné. C'est ce qui ressort de l'enquête conduite par l'ONU dans la bourgade de Houla, en Syrie, où 108 personnes ont été tuées vendredi 25 mai, dont 49 enfants et 34 femmes.

« Il est tout à fait clair qu'un acte vraiment abominable a été perpétré à Houla comprenant des exécutions sommaires de civils, femmes et enfants », a déclaré mardi 29 mai Rupert Colville, le porte-parole du Haut Commissariat aux droits de l'homme (HCDH) des Nations unies. « Il y a de forts soupçons que les chabiha [miliciens pro-régime] soient impliqués dans cette tragédie à Houla », a estimé pour sa part Hervé Ladsous, le secrétaire général adjoint de l'ONU, en charge des opérations de maintien de la paix et qui supervise le travail des casques bleus actuellement déployés en Syrie. *Je ne vois pas de raison de croire qu'une troisième partie soit impliquée*, dans le massacre, a-t-il ajouté.

Pour l'ONU, le bilan de 108 morts est encore loin d'être définitif. *D'après certaines informations, il y aurait d'autres victimes*, a précisé M. Colville. *Près de la moitié de celles dont nous sommes jusqu'ici au courant sont des enfants - ce qui est totalement impardonnable - et il y a aussi beaucoup de femmes.* Selon le porte-parole du HCDH, des témoins et des rescapés ont déclaré aux enquêteurs que la plupart des victimes avaient été tuées à la suite de deux vagues d'exécutions sommaires commises vendredi par des chabiha, des miliciens pro-régime, dans la localité de Taldaou, voisine d'Houla. *On pense qu'à ce stade, et je dis bien que nous en sommes à un stade préliminaire, moins de 20 des 108 victimes au total peuvent être attribuées à des tirs d'artillerie et de blindés*, a-t-il déclaré.



A Houla, l'enterrement des victimes du massacre du 25 mai. SHAAM NEWS NETWORK/HO/AFP

Ces informations préliminaires proviennent des enquêteurs des Nations unies présents sur place ainsi que d'autres sources que le porte-parole du HCDH a refusé d'identifier. Poursa part, le gouvernement syrien a imputé la tuerie, qui a suscité une vague d'indignation dans les chancelleries, à des insurgés islamistes.

Les Nations unies ont invité mardi les autorités syriennes à

François Hollande a annoncé l'expulsion de l'ambassadrice syrienne

accorder « un accès immédiat et sans entrave en Syrie » aux membres de la commission d'enquête qu'elles soutiennent, dirigée par l'expert brésilien Paulo Pinheiro. Cette commission, qui n'a jamais été autorisée à faire son travail en Syrie, accuse, dans un récent rapport, les forces loyales à Bachar Al-Assad d'exécuter des familles

entières chez elles, souvent en faisant irruption dans une localité avec une liste de suspects toute prête.

En réaction au massacre d'Houla, les pays occidentaux ont lancé mardi une offensive diplomatique concertée contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad. A Paris, le président François Hollande a annoncé en fin de matinée l'expulsion de Lamia Chakkour, l'ambassadrice syrienne qui est également la représentante de Damas auprès de l'Unesco. L'Allemagne a officialisé à son tour en début d'après-midi, l'expulsion de l'ambassadeur de Syrie en poste à Berlin.

La Grande-Bretagne, l'Italie, l'Espagne ou bien encore le Canada ont fait de même. Le chargé d'affaires syrien en poste aux Etats-Unis, Zouheir Djabbour, devait lui aussi être renvoyé dans son pays dans un délai de soixante-douze heures. Il est le principal diplomate syrien encore en poste à Washington depuis le rappel de l'ambassadeur, Imad Moustapha, à la fin 2011.

Pendant ce temps à Damas, Kofi Annan, émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, a prévenu Bachar Al-Assad que la Syrie se trouvait à « un tournant » et que la patience de la communauté internationale avait des limites. « Une intervention armée n'est pas exclue à condition qu'elle se fasse dans le respect du droit international, c'est-à-dire par une délibération du Conseil de sécurité » de l'ONU, a estimé François Hollande, lors d'une interview télévisée, sur France 2.

Pour l'instant cependant, toute condamnation de Damas au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, semble impossible, du fait de l'opposition de Moscou et Pékin, fidèles alliés du régime syrien.

La litanie des exactions commises par les forces pro-Assad risque donc de continuer. Pour la journée de mardi, l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme a ainsi recensé 98 morts, dont 61 civils, 9 rebelles et 28 soldats gouvernementaux. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE