

INSTITUT
KURDE
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

N°327

JUNE 2012

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

This bulletin is issued in French and English

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

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

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

- **SYRIA: A KURD APPOINTED HEAD OF THE SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL.**
- **TURKEY: THE INIQUITOUS TRIALS AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS ARE BEING UNCREASED.**
- **IRAQI KURDISTAN: THE ROMS MANT TO TAKE PART IN POLITICS.**
- **IRAN: DEATH OF A KURDISH POLITICAL PRISONER AND ANOTHER ONE IN A CRITICAL STATE OF HEALTH.**
- **HISTORY: MEMORANDUM COVERING A SECRET MEETING BETWEEN KISSINGER AND THE IRAQI FOREIGN MINISTER IN PARIS.**

SYRIA: A KURD APPOINTED HEAD OF THE SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL

In succession to Burhan Ghalioun, a Kurd has taken over the Presidency of the Syrian National Council, considered by the Western and Arab countries as the legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition to the Baath regime. Abdel Basset Sayda, however, is not known as an experienced politician, but is reputed for his integrity. He was, indeed, the only candidate to succeed Burhan Ghalioun.

The latter's resignation is due to the internal quarrels between the various components of this very heterogeneous platform, the stretches from secular Arabs to

the Moslem Brotherhood and including some representatives of Kurdish parties. Burhan Ghalioun was criticised by the on the spot opponents and fighters for ignoring decisions taken and giving too much importance to the Moslem Brothers. Since the Kurds could not be suspected of any collusion with the latter, the choice of Abdel Basset Sayda probably reassured the pro-secular groups and the religious minorities unless the variety of Syrian Arab groupings found it easier to appoint a Kurd as present rather than one of their rivals. This was, after all what happened in Iraq, where Jalal Talabani was chosen as President with the agreement of

the main Sunni and Shiite Arab factions, then involved in their own civil war. Finally this appointment could be seen as a gesture by the Syrian Arabs to the Kurds, many of whom distrust the Moslem Brotherhood and have reservations about any movement supported by Turkey.

Directly addressing his Kurdish compatriots, Abdel Basset Sayda affirmed that his election was "*clear proof that the Syrians have reached a high level of maturity by making citizenship the priority and that they have overcome the sectarian fanaticism and divisions that the regime might try and fuel so as to reach a state of civil war*". However, he also criticised the

past attitude of certain Kurdish groups, which had only managed to marginalise them within the SNC and so strengthen the Moslem Brotherhood group. In an interview given to the *Kurd.net* Internet site, Abdel Basset Sayda recalled that the Moslem Brotherhood was “a component part of (Syrian) society. We cannot purely and simply ignore and exclude them from this process”.

Born in 1956, at Amude, Abdel Basset Sayda is not a member of any political party (which may have favoured his election). His handicap is that he is a pure intellectual, not an experience political figure, a Ph.D. fascinated by ancient civilisations and the author of a number of books on the Kurdish question in Syria. However, according to Anita McKnight, the Al Jazeera chain’s correspondent in Turkey, the new President’s first statements have

impressed people by his determination to include all the trends and participants of the Syrian opposition: “*How has appointed all the principal actors, paid tribute to imprisoned people and those who have died. He has mentioned all the groups and repeated that their dream of Syria for everyone has not been buried*”.

No sooner appointed, the new President of the Syrian National Council called on all the leading officials of the Baathist regime to withdraw from office. He also sent a message to reassure all Syria’s various ethnic and religious minorities, who fear a future Arab and Moslem domination, affirming that there will be no “discriminations”.

In his view, the massacres and bombing carried out by the regime shows that the Syrian Baath is playing its last card and that the Syrian revolt is entering a crucial and “sensitive” phase.

Abdel Basset Sayda has made his declared priority the rallying of other opposition groups to the Syrian National Council and of starting discussions with opposition public figures that are not in the SNC and getting them to join. Indeed, the SNC’s image, especially because of the strong position of the Moslem Brotherhood within it, suffers from a “conservative” image in the eyes of many opposition trends, especially the Syrian youth.

This Kurdish opposition leader has also called on the United Nations for a “decisive action”, not excluding recourse to force, by demanding the member countries to “stop this killing machine”, adding that, in the event of the United Nations failing to agree on this (particularly because of the Russian and Chinese veto) some countries willing to do so could act outside UNO.

TURKEY: THE INIQUITOUS TRIALS AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS ARE BEING UNCREASED

In September 2011, an *Associated Press* report showed that since 11 September 2001, one third of all people accused of terrorism throughout the word were in Turkish jails — namely 12,897 people out of 35,117.

On the fringe of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the BDP member of Parliament for Mersin, Ertugrul Kurkcu, and a member of the European Left there group there, help a Press conference in which he reported on the state of legal and judicial repression in his country. He declared that the number of detention had increased by 250% since 2002 (the year the AKP took office) without any increase

in the capacity of the prisons, which creates serious problems of health and security.

Thus, on 16 June 13 prisoners, aged between 20 and 25, died when their prison, in Urfa, caught fire, and 5 others sent to hospital. This was due to some detainees, to protest at their living conditions there had set fire to their mattresses. On Monday 18 June another incendiary protest in the same prison sent 48 to hospital, including 38 detainees.

Urfa Prison, that has accommodation for 350 detainees, at present has 1,057, and cells designed for 3 people have up to 30 detainees. Water is rationed and the stifling heat of this time of the year is offset by only one fan per cell. Since 19 June 84 prisoners have

been transferred to other provinces, like Elazig or Diyarbakir, sometimes 1,500 Km from their families, making visits virtually impossible for low-income families.

Ertugrul Kurkcu gave the number of people being currently detained for “terrorist activity” as 8,995, including 8 members of Parliament, 16 mayors, 442 members of local councils, 500 students, 100 journalists as well as various intellectuals, academics, publishers and writers.

The number of sentences are multiplying and verge on the absurd if not the surrealistic. Thus on 22 June, the 8th Court of the Adana High Criminal Court sentenced a deaf and dumb man, the father of 6 children, on a charge of “terror-

ist propaganda", accepting as evidence the fact that he had been arrested holding half a lemon in his hand when a demonstration was taking place in the town (the lemon is believed to attenuate the effect of tear gas).

It was in vain that his lawyer tried to show that Mehmet Tahir Ilhan, who was not only a deaf-mute but illiterate, and therefore had extremely limited means of communicating, could not possibly have carried out propaganda for the PKK even if the majority of the population of Adana did know sign language (that the accused himself did not know). However, the Court was unmoved by the defence's argument that of "*physical inability to commit the crime as charged*" and just reduced the sentence from 25 years to 8 years and 4 months.

Throughout the country, over 600 university and a thousands high school students have been arrested and jailed in the last few months or else expelled for their political opinions. This repression directed at student circles has now overstepped another threshold by the arrest of a Kurdish Student of French citizenship who wanted to study in Turkey under the Erasmus programme.

Sevil Sevimli has been detained in Eskisehir Prison since 9 May last for "collusion with a terrorist organisation", namely the Revolutionary Party-Front for the People's Revolution (DHKP-C), an extreme Left Party that is banned in Turkey.

Before going to Turkey, Sevil Sevimli was a student at Lyon-II

University, where she was studying Information and Communication. She was accused of having taken part in a 1st May march (a legal demonstration) and some outings organised by a students association, of having attended a concert by the Yorum group and having stuck up posters calling for free education. Her trial for "terrorism" and collusion with the Revolutionary Party-Front for the People's Revolution will take place in Ankara, without any date having been set.

So far, her lawyers have not had access to her file, which is a procedure special applied in "terrorist" cases, nor has the French Embassy had any more success in its demand for information. Even the mail sent to the young women by her family is seized.

IRAQI KURDISTAN: THE ROMS WANT TO TAKE PART IN POLITICS

W*e don't just sing and dance. We have a rich and ancient heritage and, like all the others, we have contributed to the Region's development and reconstruction".* It is in these terms that Nayef Hamu, and Iraqi Rom, sums up the aspirations of the Roms to be recognised as one of Kurdistan's ethnic minorities calling for a seat in the Irbil Parliament to be reserved for them to be represented there.

Rom presence in Kurdistan dates back to the middle ages and for centuries, they have lived alongside Kurdish tribes, acting as musicians and dancers for festivities and weddings. Their numbers, like those of other minorities, in Kurdistan have increased since 2003 because of the persecutions that have hit religious and ethnic minorities throughout Iraq —

except in the Kurdish Region. Thus in the Adar residential area of Duhok, about 10 Km from the city itself, nearly 250 Rom families have been living since 2008. According to the Aluka Rom Cultural Centre, the total of them throughout Kurdistan could be 31,000.

Questioned by the daily Niqash, Nayef Hammu, who lives in Duhok, explained that the Roms would like to be represented in the parliament and the Provincial Councils so as to be able to deal with specific problems facing Roms — the lack of schools and unemployment, but also the fear of losing their culture.

"We have our own traditions and we observe them", explained Fahima Fattam, who lives at Adar. *"However, many of them, such as our language, clothing and marriage customs, will disappear*

unless we efforts to preserve them. The future of the Rom way of life is uncertain".

The Kurdish Region, which offers freedom of association and expression to minorities, has enabled the Roms to begin to get themselves organised without waiting for help from the government. Thus they have formed a "High Committee", with representatives of their communities in Duhok, Irbil and Suleumaniah. This has sent teams to the three provinces to take a six-month census of their numbers. Yunis Tahir, who runs the Aluka Rom Cultural Centre, considered that there were 31,145 Roms living in these three provinces. If this is right, it shows a marked increase on the Rom population of Kurdistan, which was just 25,000 according to earlier estimates.

According to Yunis Tahir, the

increase in Kurdistan's Rom population is due to two factors: the high death rate characteristic of their community and the flow of refugees fleeing attacks from extremists and Islamist or Arab nationalist militia in other parts of Iraq. This immigration has benefited from the Kurdish government's benevolence and the measures it has taken to welcome them and persuade them to settle in permanent homes.

Hitherto, the Roms who had long been settled in Kurdistan had, if they took part in politics, joined one of the two major Kurdish parties, the KDP or the PUK, as had the majority other minorities in Kurdistan. However, the policy of cultural and linguistic support and even of representation within the political institutions given to Christians and Yezidis by the KRG has given the Roms the idea of organising themselves in the same way.

"The Roms must adapt themselves to the evolution taking place in the world and thus they should enjoy the political changes taking place in Kurdistan", explained Mohammad Birn, another Rom leader living at Adar. *"Our com-*

munity has greatly suffered from its lack of a stable mode of living. This has brought us poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. We are still living as beggars while we see other minority groups in Iraqi Kurdistan enjoying political and economic change".

However, according to Byar Baffi, a sociologist living at Zakho, the Rom people also need to reform their own society so as to improve its situation. Thus certain traditions are harmful such as that of marrying adolescent young people. Moreover it is true that the long periods of persecution they have gone through has kept them down in the lowest levels of society: *"The old Iraqi regime played a part in weakening them economically and socially. The Roms did not have any right to Iraqi nationality which created problems for enrolling in schools or securing government jobs".*

As everywhere else in the world, the Rom's suffer from negative prejudices and stereotypes that continue to so darken their image, although, according to Byer Baffi, they have also undergone profound social changes. The fact that they gather outside the towns and away from other

communities does not help ideas and prejudices about them to change.

However, the Kurds have no objections to the Roms entering the political field, like the other minority groups. Biyar Tahir Doski, who runs the Duhok High electoral Committee states that their participation is welcomed provided it conforms with the *"Iraqi legal electoral framework"*, which means having Iraqi nationality *"and all the official documents needed to take part in elections"*. In view of the discriminatory policies of the old regime, this could create a problem if their situation is not regularised at national level, though the Kurdish government has supplied them with official papers at regional level.

Some local initiatives, indeed, had been undertaken in Kurdistan to improve the Roms' fate. This, in 2010, a primary school was opened in Suleimaniyah for the city's Roms — both adults and children — *"under canvas"* in which some voluntary Kurdish teachers, concerned by their situation, followed their movements round the region with classes.

IRAN:

MORT D'UN PRISONNIER POLITIQUE KURDE, UN AUTRE DANS UN ÉTAT DE SANTÉ ALARMANT

Several Human Rights and democratic organisations in Iran have announced the death, on 4 June last, of Mohammad Mehdi Zalyeh, a Kurdish activist who has been in prison for the last 18 years in Urmiah and Karaj Gohardasht. Suffering from severe lung infections, he had not had access to the necessary medical treatment for several years and was only taken to the Karaj Rajal Prison hospital as he was dying.

In February 2011, some prisoners in Karaj Gohardasht prison had gone on hunger strike to protest at solitary confinement cells and Mohammad Zalyeh was then transferred from his solitary confinement to a high security section.

Moreover, the hunger strike by another Kurdish prisoner, Mohammad Sadiq Kabouvand, sentenced in 2007 to 10 years for *"propaganda against the Islamic Republic"*, has been continuing

since 16 May last. Over 350 political and trade union activists and journalists have appealed to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, to intervene on his behalf. The signatories of this petition stress Mohammad Sadiq Kabouvand's critical state of health. He is a journalist and Human Rights activist and has been on hunger strike since the prison authorities refused him leave to go and see his seriously ill young son. The High Commissioner is also asked to sup-

port Kabouvand's request for temporary leave as well as to allow him access to medical assistance.

Last May the US State Department had called on the Iranian government to release

Mohammad Sadiq Kabouvand as well as 90 other journalists imprisoned in Iran.

HISTOIRE:

MEMORANDUM D'UNE RENCONTRE SECRÈTE ENTRE KISSINGER ET LE MINISTRE IRAKIEN DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES À PARIS

Kenneth W. Stein, Professor of Modern History of the Middle East and of political science, who lectures at the Institute for the Study of Modern Israel at Emory University, and author of *"Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace"* (Routledge, 1999), has published on the Middle East Quarterly Internet site, a memorandum on a meeting dated 17 December 1975, at the Paris Iraqi Embassy, between Sadun Hammadi, then Iraqi Foreign Minister and Henry Kissinger while passing through the French capital.

This contact is a turning point in US policy towards Iraq, although all diplomatic relations had been officially broken off in 1967 following the Six Day War. It should be noted that Henry Kissinger did not mention this meeting in his memoirs, published in 1999, though it is part of the (temporary) reconciliation between the Shah's Iran and the Iraqi Republic regarding their border conflict over the Shatt el Arab. Since Iraq was considered close to Moscow, the CIA and the Shah supported Mustafa Barzani's Kurdish resistance. However, after the agreement between the two countries, the Iran0-american support for the Kurds ceased to be useful.

Henry Kissinger began by affirming US desire to normalise relations with the Arab world, whatever might be their differences. The main obstacle put forward by the Iraqi Minister was the existence of Israel, accused of being "a direct threat" to Iraq because of its

military power and the "sophisticated armament" supplied by the US as well as Israel's nuclear threat to the region.

Henry Kissinger replied that Israel's right to exist was not negotiable for his country but that the Americans could "reduce its size to historic proportions" by abandoning the "Greater Israel" project. He also affirmed that Israel was not a serious threat to the Arab world and predicted that "in ten or fifteen years Israel would be like the Lebanon — struggling for its existence without any influence in the Arab world". He repeated that the US was ready to normalise their relations with all the Arab States, except for Libya and that they wanted Israel to survive but not dominate the region.

Regarding the Palestinian question, Kissinger stated that "Palestinian identity must be recognised" in one way or another, without excluding the existence of a Palestinian state or recognition of the PLO. However, they should be cautious and advance step by step, raising the hostility of many Israelis, and especially the Israeli press, to such a policy.

Sadun Hammadi finally raised the Kurdish question and US support, particularly in arms, of Mustafa Barzani's revolt. Kissinger's reply was quite unambiguous about this help for the Kurds, which he twice attacked as being "of the past":

"Kissinger: When we thought that you were a soviet satellite, we were not opposed to what Iran was doing in the Kurdish region, Now that you and Iran have resolved your conflict, we no longer have any reason to do any-

thing of the sort. I can tell you we are not engaged and will not engage in any action against Iraq's territorial integrity".

Probably unconvinced, before and after having raised the Lebanese question, the Iraqi Minister twice returned to the Kurdish question, which he described as "a vitally important problem" for Iraq, and made Kissinger repeat that US support would cease — which Henry Kissinger confirmed:

" — I can assure you of it. There is nothing to worry about. We cannot act as in the past.

— Not always, replied the Minister" (and the meeting ended with those words).

Commenting on the memorandum of this meeting, Professor Stein points out that this meeting had a "limited" success for Kissinger's policies. The US State Department's efforts to improve relations between Israel and the Arab world and bring it out of its isolation, particularly by including Palestinian participation came up against Iraqi firmness, which played a major role, three years later, in the Arab States' opposition to Anwar Sadat's initiative for recognising Israel.

As for US support for Iran, it was to collapse along with the Shah's regime, which tolled the knell of the Algiers Agreement, for which the Kurds had been abandoned and betrayed, both by the US and Iran. However, in 1980 Iraq tore up the agreement and invaded Iran with US backing for Saddam Hussein against "Iranian theocracy". Once again, with the Anfal campaign, the Kurds paid dearly for US policies regarding Iraq.

L'Irak enlisé dans une crise politique

Éclairage Appels répétés à la démission de Nouri al-Maliki, accusé d'être « un dictateur ».

La crise politique qui accable l'Irak depuis des mois et paralyse l'action de son gouvernement donne des signes d'aggravation. « La crise politique a atteint son niveau le plus aigu depuis qu'elle a commencé, mais elle reste dans le cadre du jeu démocratique », estime l'analyste irakien Ihsan al-Chamari, professeur de sciences politiques à l'Université de Bagdad. « Le pays est paralysé à tous les niveaux et ce blocage est clairement politique », tant au niveau du gouvernement que du Parlement, souligne-t-il, ajoutant que « les gens sont déçus et redoutent les conséquences en matière de sécurité ».

La crise, qui couvait depuis longtemps, s'est déclarée au grand jour en décembre, au moment du retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak. Le bloc Iraquiya, laïc mais dominé par les sunnites, a annoncé un boycott du gouvernement et du Parlement pour protester contre la monopolisation du pouvoir par le Premier minis-

tre Nouri al-Maliki, un chiite. Celui-ci a de son côté tenté d'évincer le vice-Premier ministre Saleh Moutlak, membre d'Iraquiya, qui l'avait accusé d'être « pire que Saddam Hussein ». Le même mois, un mandat d'arrêt a été délivré contre le vice-président Tarek al-Hachémi, accusé d'avoir fomenté des meurtres. M. Hachémi, qui appartient également au bloc Iraquiya, a fui le pays et son procès par contumace est en cours à Bagdad. Les dirigeants kurdes ne sont pas en reste et le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a attaqué à plusieurs reprises le chef du gouvernement ces derniers mois.

Le différend a aussi une dimension économique, avec un bras de fer sur la répartition des recettes pétrolières entre région et autorités centrales. Le chef religieux radical chiite Moqtada Sadr, dont la formation fait partie du gouvernement, de même qu'Iraquiya et les Kurdes, a également rejoint en début d'année les rangs des détracteurs de M. Maliki, qu'il a lui aussi qualifié de « dictateur ». À l'inverse, le grand ayatollah chiite Kazem al-Haïri, qui vit en Iran, a semblé apporter son soutien à M. Maliki en déclarant, interrogé sur la crise politique, qu'il est « haram de voter en soutien à



Le ton s'est sensiblement durci, les détracteurs de Nouri al-Maliki évoquant son éviction du gouvernement. Khalid al-Mousuly/Reuters

une personne laïque ».

Le ton s'est sensiblement durci ces dernières semaines, les détracteurs de M. Maliki évoquant désormais son éviction du gouvernement. Iraquiya a tenté de convaincre le président Jalal Talabani de lancer un vote de défiance. « Si M. Maliki reste Premier ministre, cela menace l'unité nationale et conduira à la division du pays, à la poursuite de la corruption et à plus de violations des droits de l'homme », a accusé samedi le vice-Premier ministre Saleh Moutlak, le

qualifiant de nouveau de dictateur. « Maliki doit changer, ou il sera remplacé », a pour sa part prévenu récemment le chef de cabinet du dirigeant kurde Barzani, Fouad Hussein. L'intéressé a pour sa part affirmé samedi à l'issue d'une rencontre avec des chefs tribaux de la province disputée de Kirkouk que ceux-ci lui avaient apporté leur soutien.

L'étirement en longueur du conflit politique n'est pas sans conséquence sur le travail des institutions qui apparaissent paralysées. Le Parlement n'a adopté aucune loi importante ces derniers mois, à l'exception du budget, laissant notamment de côté un texte sur les hydrocarbures jugé crucial pour l'avenir du pays. Et une grande conférence nationale, envisagée en décembre afin de désamorcer ces tensions, n'a toujours pas eu lieu. L'impact est aussi économique. « L'économie se replie en raison des craintes croissantes des investisseurs », souligne le professeur Chamari. Le président Talabani, qui se dit inquiet de « la gravité de la situation », a renouvelé son appel au dialogue, pour le moment en vain.

(Source : AFP)



Turquie: un homme tué par la bombe qu'il transportait à Istanbul

ISTANBUL, 06 juin 2012 (AFP)

UN HOMME ÂGÉ de 23 ans a été tué par l'explosion de l'engin qu'il transportait à Istanbul, a rapporté mercredi l'agence de presse Anatolie.

L'incident s'est produit dans la nuit dans une zone boisée du quartier populaire d'Esenyurt, sur la rive européenne de la première métropole turque. Les artificiers de la police y ont été dépêchés après que les habi-

tants eurent entendu une explosion, précise l'agence.

Le corps déchiqueté de la jeune victime a été retrouvé sur place et la police pense qu'il a été tué par la bombe qu'il transportait, ajoute Anatolie.

L'agence ne précise pas s'il s'agissait d'un kamikaze ou d'une personne qui se préparait à déposer une bombe

Les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) recourent à des attaques suicides dans les métropoles turques.

Les séparatistes kurdes ont revendiqué fin mai un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée commis dans le centre de la Turquie et qui a coûté la vie à un policier et tué deux des leurs.

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux autres pays. Le conflit a fait plus de 45.000 morts.○

LE FIGARO lundi 4 juin 2012

El-Assad dénonce une « guerre menée de l'étranger »

ARIELLE THEDREL

PROCHE-ORIENT Les condamnations internationales n'ont eu aucun effet sur Bachar el-Assad. Le président syrien s'est exprimé dimanche matin devant le « nouveau » Parlement issu des élections du 7 mai, montrant, selon le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qu'« il continue d'appréhender les problèmes avec une logique autocratique ». À moins, remarque le chef de la diplomatie saoudienne, le prince Saoud al-Fayçal, qu'il ne s'agisse que de « manœuvres » pour « gagner du temps ».

Fort des soutiens russe et chinois, Bachar el-Assad, inflexible ou autiste, a dénoncé une nouvelle fois « un complot terroriste tramé à l'étranger ». La Syrie, a-t-il dit, affronte « un plan de destruction ». À l'en croire, Damas « a essayé tous les moyens politiques » pour sortir de la crise. Mais les terroristes « ne sont pas intéressés par le dialogue ou les réformes. Ils sont chargés d'une mission et ne s'arrêteront que s'ils l'accomplissent ou si nous arrivons à les arrêter ».

Le président syrien, qui s'exprimait pour la première fois depuis janvier, a répété qu'« il n'y aura pas de compromis dans la lutte contre le terrorisme » et a exclu tout dialogue avec le Conseil national syrien, principale composante de l'opposition, qui, lui-même, pose pour



Bachar el-Assad, dimanche, devant le Parlement à Damas. DSK/AFP

préalable à toute discussion un départ du dictateur.

Visiblement embarrassé par le massacre de Houla, qui a fait 108 morts dont 49 enfants le 25 mai, il a qualifié ses auteurs de « monstres » tout en niant une responsabilité de l'armée alors que de forts soupçons pèsent sur les milices supplétives de l'armée régulière.

Affrontements au Liban

La violence et la terreur n'ont pas connu de répit dimanche. À Alep, deuxième ville du pays, une charge a

explosé sur la place Saadallah al-Jabiri, faisant plusieurs blessés. Les combats qui opposaient l'armée régulière aux rebelles dans la région ont fait au moins deux morts. À Douma, près de Damas, un médecin a été tué par des tirs de sniper devant sa clinique. L'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme a fait également état de l'arrestation à Lattaquié d'une de ses militantes, Khansaa Nannoura, dont on est sans nouvelles.

Samedi, la Ligue arabe, réunie à Doha, a demandé à l'ONU de fixer un calendrier pour l'application du plan élaboré par Kofi Annan et de recourir au chapitre VII de sa charte pour imposer une rupture des relations diplomatiques avec la Syrie. Les ministres arabes réclament notamment « une suspension partielle ou totale des relations économiques, des liaisons ferroviaires, maritimes et aériennes ».

Présent à cette réunion, Kofi Annan a reconnu que « la violence a atteint un niveau inacceptable » et que « le spectre d'une guerre totale, ayant une dimension confessionnelle inquiétante, augmente de jour en jour ». La crise syrienne a déjà affecté le Liban. Dimanche, l'armée libanaise a dû se déployer à Tripoli, dans le nord du pays, après des affrontements entre partisans et adversaires de Bachar el-Assad qui ont fait treize morts et des dizaines de blessés. ■



4 juin 2012

Turquie: libération d'un Britannique enlevé par des rebelles kurdes

AFP - Un touriste britannique enlevé samedi par des rebelles kurdes alors qu'il était à bord d'un autocar dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a été libéré tôt lundi dans la même région, a indiqué une source officielle locale à l'AFP.

L'homme âgé de 35 ans est en bonne santé et doit être conduit à Diyarbakir, principale ville du sud-est anatolien peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, pour y être brièvement interrogé, a précisé cette source sous couvert d'anonymat.

Le ressortissant britannique sera ensuite libre de ses mouvements, a-t-on ajouté de même source.



Le touriste avait été enlevé samedi après-midi alors qu'il effectuait un trajet en autocar entre Trabzon (nord-est) et Diyarbakir.

Un groupe du parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) avait arrêté le véhicule pour vérifier l'identité de ses occupants et emmené ensuite le Britannique, dont l'identité et la pro-

fession n'ont pas été précisées.

Lors d'un incident séparé, un soldat a été tué lundi par l'explosion d'une mine, placée par des rebelles, dans la région de Diyarbakir, a-t-on indiqué de source de sécurité locale.

Le PKK qui est en lutte armée contre les forces d'Ankara depuis 1984, n'a pas pour habitude d'enlever des étrangers.

Le rapt survient dans un contexte de recrudescence de l'activité des rebelles kurdes, qui le mois dernier ont enlevé dix villageois dans le village de Bayirli, dans le sud-est. La motivation de cet enlèvement est demeurée inconnue. □

Le CHP et l'AKP s'accordent sur une feuille de route pour essayer de trouver une solution à la question kurde.

Par Jean Marcou

Une délégation du CHP a rencontré une délégation de l'AKP au siège de ce dernier à Ankara, le 6 juin, pour débattre de la question kurde. Cette rencontre fait suite à une initiative récente du CHP. Le 29 mai, alors que la polémique déclenchée par les propos du ministre turc de l'Intérieur, Idris Naim Şahin, sur l'affaire d'Uludere atteignait son paroxysme, le principal parti d'opposition avait proposé un plan en 6 points pour trouver une solution à la question kurde ou tout au moins calmer la tension ambiante. Dans le sillage de cette démarche, le 1er juin, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, le leader du parti kémaliste, avait demandé à rencontrer le premier ministre.

La réunion, qui s'est donc tenue hier, a rassemblé, outre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan et Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, une série de seconds couteaux : Beşir Atalay (vice-premier ministre), Ömer Çelik (vice-président de l'AKP), Mahir Ünal (vice-président du groupe parlementaire AKP), Faruk Loğoğlu, Sezgin Tanrikulu (tous deux vice-présidents du CHP) et Akif Hamzacebi (vice-président du groupe parlementaire CHP). La rencontre, qui a été qualifiée de part et d'autre de très positive, n'a néanmoins duré qu'une heure, et a vu les deux délégations s'accorder sur une feuille de route en 10 points, qui reprend assez largement les propositions récentes du CHP, car elle prévoit notamment la mise sur pied de deux commissions. La première serait une instance paritaire composée de représentants des partis parlementaires (AKP, CHP, MHP, BDP), la seconde serait un groupe de sages, formé de personnalités ayant une compétence et une autorité sur la question.

La balle est désormais, à nouveau, dans le camp du CHP, qui devra convaincre les autres formations d'opposition d'entrer dans le processus. La tâche s'annonce difficile, car si les Kurdes du BDP ont accueilli favorablement l'initiative, les nationalistes du MHP en revanche l'ont rejetée, en rappelant que pour eux il n'y avait pas de question kurde en Turquie. Devlet Bahçeli, le leader de la formation nationaliste, avait d'ailleurs critiqué sévèrement, tant le plan en 6 points du CHP, que les velléités de son leader de vouloir rencontrer le premier ministre. Ce dernier a d'ailleurs fait état de ses doutes quant à l'hypothèse de voir le MHP accepter ce processus de résolution de la question kurde.

L'entreprise apparaît donc périlleuse, pour ne pas dire déjà compromise. Les propos tenus le 23 mai 2012, lors d'une émission sur NTV par le ministre de l'Intérieur, Idris Naim Şahin, ont en effet provoqué des tensions qu'il sera difficile de surmonter en si peu de temps. Revenant sur la bavure de l'armée de l'air à Uludere (cf. notre édition du 31 décembre 2011), Şahin avait tenté de l'excuser, en estimant que les autorités militaires avaient pu avoir des soupçons légitimes à l'égard d'une colonne de villageois qui faisaient de la contrebande, une activité qu'il avait décrite comme «illégal» et de surcroît plus ou moins instrumentalisée par le PKK, en laissant entendre que les victimes étaient ni plus ni moins que «des figurants» de l'organisation rebelle. Les réactions provoquées par cette déclaration avaient amené les ténors de l'AKP à s'en démarquer, sans pour autant parvenir à effacer l'impression première que le ministre avait (comme a pu le dire Can Dündar dans Milliyet)

«manqué de respect à des morts» et que sa réaction n'aurait pas été la même si les victimes avaient été des Turcs (cf. Ahmet Altan dans Taraf). Si l'on ajoute à cela, que peu après, ouvrant une nouvelle polémique sur la limitation de l'interruption volontaire de grossesse, le premier ministre, après l'avoir assimilée à



«un meurtre», était allé jusqu'à la comparer à Uludere (cf. notre édition du juin 2012), on comprend que la blessure est profonde et que le moment n'est pas le mieux choisi pour donner toutes ses chances à l'initiative du CHP. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a en outre réagi froidement à la proposition de Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu d'aller à Uludere pour faire un geste de bonne volonté, et s'est borné à rappeler que son épouse s'était rendue sur les lieux du drame pour présenter ses condoléances aux victimes.

En dépit des déclarations consensuelles qui ont suivi la rencontre du 6 juin, on peut donc penser que l'événement n'est pas exempt de sous-entendus tactiques. Alors même que la formation majoritaire s'est retrouvée dans une situation inconfortable du fait des déclarations malencontreuses de son ministre de l'Intérieur, il était de bonne guerre que le parti kémaliste s'engouffre dans la brèche, en se présentant à l'inverse comme un modérateur capable d'initier des solutions pragmatiques. L'AKP, pour sa part, pouvait difficilement refuser de rencontrer le CHP dans ses conditions, mais en acceptant une initiative d'emblée compromise, il reprend la main en s'offrant l'opportunité de montrer que l'opposition ne réussit pas mieux que lui sur la question kurde. La formation majoritaire n'a pas oublié que le CHP de Deniz Baykal n'avait pas vraiment soutenu son «ouverture kurde» en 2009 (cf. notre édition du 14 novembre 2009), et que la Cour constitutionnelle et l'establishment kémaliste l'avaient même torpillée à l'époque en dissolvant le parti kurde DTP (cf. notre édition du 13 décembre 2009).

Depuis cette tentative malheureuse les tensions ont repris de plus belle. Et même si les activités de la guérilla se sont atténuées depuis la fin de l'an passé, l'interminable enquête des réseaux kurdes KCK et les vagues d'arrestations auxquelles elle donne lieu se chargent d'entretenir la braise. Dans le cadre de cette procédure d'ailleurs le maire de Van, Bekir Kaya (photo), ainsi que 3 de ses collègues qui sont à la tête de municipalités voisines, ont été arrêtés le 7 juin. Une nouvelle qui ne risque pas de donner toutes ses chances à la feuille de route du CHP et de l'AKP...□

A diplomatic duel over Syria hardens

BY J. DAVID GOODMAN

Increasingly frustrated by the violence in Syria, senior U.S. and Arab diplomats on Thursday raised the specter of civil war and pressed Russia and China to back international action against President Bashar al-Assad to avoid the threat that the conflict could draw neighboring countries into a regional war.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton singled out Russia as an obstacle, saying that its refusal to take decisive action could precipitate the very civil war that Russian diplomats have said they want to avoid. Russian and Chinese resistance on the United Nations Security Council has precluded stronger action to stem the violence in Syria, a point Mrs. Clinton underscored on Thursday while stopping short of calling for military action.

"We have very strong opposition from Russia and China — but it is primarily Russia, and that makes it harder to put together an international coalition," she said in taped remarks to students in Copenhagen carried by the BBC. "The Syrians are not going to listen to us, they may listen, maybe, to the Russians, so we have to keep pushing them."

Her comments came as Arab officials meeting in Tunisia urged China to use its influence to bring the conflict to an end.

The massacre of more than 100 people in the town of Houla, which included dozens of children and took place with United Nations cease-fire monitors nearby, has injected new urgency into the 15-month conflict.

But diplomats have sounded increasingly pessimistic about the chances for a political solution to the crisis. Mrs.

Clinton's remarks came a day after Susan E. Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, pointedly raised the possibility of a broad sectarian war spilling over Syria's borders.

Speaking in Istanbul on Thursday, the secretary general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, echoed those fears and said the killings in Houla increased the possibility of civil war. He worried specifically that Lebanon, a country with a similarly complex structure of political and sectarian differences, could be drawn into a broader conflict and pointed to recent episodes of violence in the northern city of Tripoli.

"The massacre of civilians of the sort seen last weekend could plunge Syria into catastrophic civil war — a civil war from which the country would never recover," Mr. Ban said in remarks carried on Turkish television. "The U.N. did not deploy in Syria to bear just with the slaughter of innocents; we are not there to play the role of a passive observer to unspeakable atrocities."

It appears unlikely Mr. Assad will abide by the terms of a peace plan negotiated last month by Kofi Annan, the envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League. A 300-member United Nations observer team has been monitoring a cease-fire as part of that plan only to see it routinely violated.

On Thursday, some Syrian opposition fighters urged Mr. Annan to declare the



Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in Copenhagen on Thursday.

The Annan plan has come to be seen by the Syrian opposition as a ploy aimed at gaining time and international cover to crush the opposition, rather than a means to end the conflict.

At a forum in Tunisia, Arab officials pressed China to use its leverage with the Syrian government to break the violent cycle in Syria that has left some 10,000 people dead.

"We greatly respect the efforts of China to find a solution in Syria," said Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled al-Sabah of Kuwait, according to Reuters. "But we hope it will redouble this effort to stop the machine of violence and death and to put more pressure on the Syrian government to respect its commitments under the Annan plan."

The forum in Hammamet, a resort on the Mediterranean coast, was attended by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi of China.

The violence continued Friday in Syria. Opposition activists said government troops shelled the area around Houla and near the central city of Homs, and attacked with small arms, killing at least one person and sending scores more fleeing for safety.

The Syrian government has prevented journalists from reporting freely in the country, making such reports difficult to independently verify. After a handful of British journalists entered the villages that comprise the town of Houla this week, the Syrian ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Jaafari, urged other journalists not to trust their reports.

Much of the slaughter in Houla was carried out at close range, and activists have blamed pro-government thugs, or "shabiha," for the massacre.

While condemning the massacre, the Syrian government has blamed armed "terrorists," a term often applied by officials to refer to members of the opposition.

The sectarian make-up of the massacre has also stoked fears of a broadening conflict. The town of Houla is a Sunni Muslim community, while three villages around it are mostly Alawite, the religion of Mr. Assad and many in the security forces.



EDLIB NEWS NETWORK, VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In an image provided by a citizen-journalists' network, Syrians gathered this week around a U.N. observers' vehicle during a demonstration in Kfarnebel, Idlib Province.

Baghdad Sells Kirkuk's Oil As Article 140 Stalls

RUDAW EXCLUSIVE

KIRKUK – In Iraq's transitional constitution after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, 43 percent of areas historically claimed by the Kurds were considered "disputed" and tied to Article 58, later to be changed to Article 140 in the permanent constitution. One of these disputed territories is the province of Kirkuk.

Although Article 140 stipulates equal power-sharing between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the central government has the upper hand in running and administering the province. Its powers include controlling the budget of the province, signing oil contracts and exporting oil. The KRG does not have any form of control over the North Oil Company of Kirkuk.

Over the past two years, Baghdad has made exporting oil from the new oilfield of Iraqi Kurdistan a condition for giving the KRG its 17 percent share of the Iraqi budget. However, Baghdad has been exporting Kirkuk's oil as if the Kurds have no share in it, despite it being a disputed region.

There are other regions -- like Khanaqin, Makhmur, Shangar and Shekhan -- that fall within the disputed territories, but their budgets and administration are still controlled by Baghdad.

Najmaldin Karim, the governor of Kirkuk, says, "The stability in this province is tied to the political relations between Baghdad and KRG. When relations are good, so is the situation in the disputed province."

Nuri Talabani, a constitutional expert, attributes the instability in Kirkuk to domestic and external factors. "The United States is the reason why the problem of the disputed areas is still hanging in the balance. The Kurds wanted to immediately annex these regions after 2003, but the U.S. did not allow it," Talabani says.

After the fall of Saddam in 2003, these disputed regions were not under the control of either Baghdad or the KRG, but the KRG was able to seize control in the heat of events.

"The existence of two powers and authorities in the Kurdistan Region -- the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and



The provincial council of Kirkuk during a regular meeting. Photo kirkuknow.org

the Kurdistan Democratic Union (KDP) - and the power struggle between them became the main hindrance to resolving the Kirkuk issue," Talabani believes. "Baghdad has manipulated this weakness until the present day."

Regarding the weakness of Kurdish authorities in Kirkuk, the governor blames the Kurdish officials. "They turned Kirkuk into a disputed area when originally it was not," he says. "Their mistakes of the past are still unchanged. The fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 was a big opportunity for the Kurds, but they missed this chance."

According to Iraqi statistics from 1957, the majority of Kirkuk residents were Kurdish, but after the Arabization process many of them and some Turkmen were forced out and replaced with Arabs from the south and center of Iraq.

"Fifty-four percent of the residents of Kirkuk are currently Kurds," says Governor Karim. In Kirkuk's first provincial elections in 2005, Kurds won 63 percent of the votes.

Now the fate of the city is tied to Article 140, which was supposed to be implemented by the end of 2007 and would have decided whether the disputed areas would join the autonomous region of Kurdistan or remain part of Iraq.

Kurdish officials blame the Iraqi



(Prime Minister Nuri Maliki on his arrival in Kirkuk. Photo AFP)



(Kirkuk Governor Najmaldin Karim. Photo Rudaw)

government for stalling Article 140. But Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki claims he has done his part concerning the implementation of the article and that the rest depends upon the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani.

Adnan Mufti, a senior member of the PUK and former speaker of Parliament, says, "We consider Kirkuk part of Kurdistan; so does the history and geography of this province. At the same time, we abide by the Iraqi constitution to achieve the goal of proving its Kurdish identity."

After the parliamentary elections of 2010, the implementation of Article 140 was one of Kurdistan's conditions for agreeing to join the current Iraqi government. Two years on, the Article is still stuck at its first phase, normalization, which precedes the census and referendum phases.

"The Kurds must seriously reconsider the Erbil Agreement, which had the implementation of Article 140 as its main condition," Governor Karim says.

The Erbil Agreement was an initiative by Kurdish President Massoud Barzani that resulted in the formation of the current Iraqi government. Now Barzani says that he does not trust PM Maliki because he has broken his promise to fulfill the conditions of the agreement and is heading towards totalitarianism.

Abdulfattah Abdulrazzaq, an expert in international law and constitution, says the Kurdish authority in Kirkuk should end based on the constitution.

"According to the Iraqi constitution, Article 110 covers the authority of regions and provinces, and states that the executive, legislative and judicial authority of the KRG to be withdrawn to the borders of April 9, 2003," he says. "This means the KRG has authority only in the three provinces of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimani, but not Kirkuk."

Abdulrazzaq adds, "The Iraqi government has judicial, legislative and executive authority in Kirkuk, but the KRG does not."

However, this line marks the authority of the KRG, not the geographical boundaries of the Kurdistan Region, ➤

➔ and this region has been classified as disputed by the Iraqi constitution.

"These regions have been identified as disputed areas in the Iraqi constitution, which implies that the problems in these areas have not been resolved yet," says Nuri Talabani. "This means that the KRG has the same authority in those areas as Baghdad and the Kurds must have a role and voice in running these areas."

The central government of Iraq and the KRG are in a continuous power struggle in Kirkuk. Sometimes these struggles have reached the level of threatening each other. In May 2011, a large number of Kurdish Peshmerga forces were mobilized to Kirkuk when some Arab groups tried to kick out Kurdish security forces (Asayish).

According to a current agreement between Baghdad and the KRG, the Kurdish 12th Brigade is stationed on the outskirts of Kirkuk along with the Iraqi army. The Kurdish president stated that the cannons of the Iraqi army have been directed at the Kurdistan Region since Maliki's recent visit to Kirkuk province last month.

"The presence of Kurdish Peshmerga in Kirkuk is according to an agreement between the Iraqi Defense Ministry and the Ministry of Peshmerga of the Kurdistan Region," says Karim.



(Adnan Mufti. Photo Rudaw)

During his visit to Kirkuk, Maliki stated that none of the "illegal" forces should remain in Kirkuk, which was rejected from the Kurdish side.

Nuri Talabani advises Kurdish officials "to keep the Asayish forces in



(US, Iraqi and Peshmarga forces manning a checkpoint in Kirkuk. Photo AFP)

Kirkuk and not allow the Iraqi army to enter the city of Kirkuk. They should also work on keeping the Kirkuk airfield under the authority of Kirkuk administration and remove the Iraqi armed forces from it."

According to experts, Kirkuk's oil reserve is estimated to be around 25 billion barrels; 15 billion barrels have been extracted since 1927. The governor of Kirkuk says that 400,000 barrels a day were extracted by the previous regime. Now, 500,000 barrels are extracted daily.

The governor of Kirkuk thinks that exporting more oil is a positive thing. "The more the better for Kirkuk province because we get more petrodollars," he says, a system that gives one U.S. dollar to the province of Kirkuk for each extracted barrel of crude oil.

The revenue from oil and the supervision of oil contracts in Kirkuk are controlled by the Iraqi government, without any consultation with the KRG. For this reason, the KRG has warned some oil companies working in the Kurdistan Region against signing any contracts regarding Kirkuk with Baghdad without their permission.

Hama Jaza Salih, a KRG adviser for oil and gas, says, "Oil extraction from the disputed region should be through a mutual agreement between Baghdad and the KRG, but the Iraqi government exports more than 500,000 barrels of oil without consulting with the KRG."

Adnan Kirkuki, a member of the KDP leadership council in Kirkuk, considers

the one-sided control by Baghdad in Kirkuk to be illegal.

"The Kurds have previously shown their ability to challenge Baghdad by stopping the flow of electricity from Kirkuk to Baghdad," he says. "Now, as a means of political pressure, the Kurds can stop the export of oil. Until the issue of the disputed areas is resolved, the Kurds have as much authority in Kirkuk as Baghdad."

In the provincial council of Kirkuk, and behind the desk of Kirkuk governor, there is only the Iraqi flag. There are no signs of the Kurdish flag in the government institutions of Kirkuk either, as if the province has been stripped of its Kurdish identity or the issue of the disputed area has been resolved in favor of the central government.

"Kurdish flags will be raised in government institutions as soon as Kirkuk becomes part of the Kurdistan Region," says Mufti. "We can see the Kurdish national flag in the other disputed areas such as Khanaqin, Shangar and Makhmur, but the tensions in Kirkuk are different from the ones in other places."

Constitutional expert Abdulrazzaq says the issue of the Kurdish flag is political.

"According to the constitution and laws, the national flag of the Kurdistan Region must be raised only in the Kurdistan Region," he says. "Since Kirkuk is legally not part of the Kurdistan Region, it is not possible to raise the Kurdish flag here. The issue of raising the Kurdish flag is political rather than legal."

For his part, Kirkuk governor says he will abide by any decision made by the Kurdish Parliament as regards the Kurdish flag.

"Let the political powers of the Kurdistan Region and Kurdish Parliament make a political decision to raise the Kurdish flag in Kirkuk and I will be ready to abide by it," he says. "But Kirkuk will not become part of Kurdistan through raising flags; it needs sincere efforts." □



Number of Syrians Fleeing to Northern Iraq Growing

BAGHDAD - June 12, 2012- THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An aid agency says more than 5,000 Syrian refugees fleeing a bloody government crackdown have now crossed into northern Iraq and their numbers are growing. Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region is seeking help in coping with them.

The International Organization for Migration said Tuesday that most refugees are ethnic Kurdish Sunni Muslims, some paying around \$300 to be smuggled into Iraq by car or by foot.

It said a refugee camp has grown to 3,500 in the past month and local officials have sought help with sanitation and supplies. About 800 more are staying in mosques.

Activists say more than 13,000 have been killed in Syria since the uprising began in March 2011. Europe's humanitarian aid commissioner has said there are 95,000 refugees, mostly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. ○

Boom times in Kurdistan

The beleaguered region of Iraq is booming, much to the rest of the country's chagrin



by Susan Mohammad

Five months after the U.S. military quit Iraq, the expression on the faces of foreign visitors landing at Kurdistan's gleaming, new airport for the first time is always the same.

After stepping off one of an increasing number of international flights, being ushered past security, with no visa necessary, toward a duty free shop — where a litre of Grey Goose Vodka costs US\$27 — the most common response is disbelief.

While much of the country is still plagued by insurgent attacks, and a power struggle between Shia and Sunni Arab political factions threatens to push Iraq to civil war, Kurdistan is thriving, thanks to foreign investment and oil wealth. The Kurds are allocated 17 per cent of Iraq's total oil export revenue, an enormous sum in a country with some of the world's largest oil reserves. The semi-autonomous region is governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government, which claimed an eight per cent GDP growth rate last year, nearly topping that of China.

In just a few short years, the region has gone from war-torn and largely ignored by the international community to stable and economically prosperous. Even Canada has taken note. In March, a video of Prime Minister Stephen Harper appeared on local TV, wishing Kurds a happy New Year (it's celebrated on the first day of spring); and in April, Canada's ambassador to Iraq met with Kurdish officials to discuss co-operation.

Cranes dot the skylines of cities like Erbil and Sulaymaniyah; in Erbil, both the Hilton and Marriott chains are building new hotels, riding Kurdistan's budding tourist wave. Because the mountainous region is rich in historical and archeological sites (the ancient citadel of Erbil, perched high above the city, is a major draw), both National Geographic and the New York Times ranked it among their top-rated places to visit last year. In the mountains north of Erbil, plans for a ski resort have been approved.

For most in Kurdistan, daily life is substantially better than when Saddam Hussein was in power. Western-styled malls carrying international brands like Levi's or Mont Blanc are popular with urbanites, and there were long lines to view high-end Mercedes, Range Rovers and Jaguars at a recent auto show in Erbil. Yet this new-found prosperity comes at a time when long-standing feuds with Baghdad over land, identity, oil revenues and power-sharing are at an all-time high. With the region acting more independently as of late, these tensions are fuelling worries that a united Iraq cannot continue to exist.

Kurdistan's president (the region is politically autonomous, though it receives a portion of Iraq's budget) warned leaders in Baghdad recently that Kurdistan would consider holding a referendum seeking independence if Iraq's Shia-dominated government didn't share power with minority Kurds and Sunnis by September.

Not surprisingly, new discoveries of crude in the region are contributing to the deteriorating relationship.

Oil production in Kurdistan is rapidly increasing, yet Baghdad has blocked U.S. oil giant Exxon Mobil, for one, from bidding on new exploration rights—payback for planning work in Kurdistan without Baghdad's consent. (Last October, Kurdish authorities inked a deal allowing Exxon Mobil to explore six areas in Kurdistan without the central government's approval.) Meanwhile, Kurdish leaders are frustrated by long delays in a proposed law to clarify oil revenue sharing.

In April, Kurdistan's president made his frustrations known—not just with the logjams and endless delays, but also with Baghdad's creeping authoritarianism: "What threatens the unity of Iraq is dictatorship and authoritarian rule," said President Massoud Barzani. "If Iraq heads toward a democratic state, then there will be no trouble. But if Iraq heads toward a dictatorial state, then we will not be able to live with dictatorship."

For many Kurds, who are just beginning to recover from the pain they endured under the previous regime, including an Iraqi military campaign that killed 180,000 Kurds, the statement stopped short of what they really want: a separate Kurdistan. Despite frustrations with Baghdad, the Kurdish government is barreling ahead, forging closer ties with the international community. Last year, the U.S. opened a consulate in Erbil, where offices representing 24 nations now operate. Kurdistan's relationship with Turkey has never been easy—Turkish troops invaded Kurdistan as recently as last year—but Turkey is now Kurdistan's largest trading partner. Last year, US\$6-billion worth of goods was traded between the two neighbours.

The 2,000 foreign-owned companies working in Kurdistan—mainly energy and construction firms—include some Canadian firms, like Calgary's Talisman Energy. Some of the generous incentives that have lured them to the region include low corporate tax rates and loans of up to US\$2 million for foreign-owned small and medium enterprises.

"Any foreigner can own land where they set up their projects free of charge, and they are tax exempt for seven years, which may be extended for up to 15 years in some cases," said Fathi al Mudaris, economic adviser to Kurdistan's minister of trade and industry. And investment laws, he adds, allow foreigners to own "100 per cent of the shares," meaning businesses avoid having to partner with a local firm.

Falah Mustafa Bakir, the Kurdish minister of foreign affairs, says Canada is among a number of countries with whom Kurdistan would like to establish closer relations—partly because they see Canada's federal political system as a workable model, according to Bakir.

When asked to reflect on Kurdistan's future regional role, and whether escalated tension between the U.S. and Iran, Kurdistan's neighbour, would affect it, Bakir chooses his words carefully: "We hope we won't be the battleground for settling scores. Our people have suffered enough. This is a part of Iraq," he adds, "but this is a friendly region that considers itself closer to the international community."◆



Hundreds Vow to Stand Behind No-Confidence Vote for Maliki

June 1, 2012

By: Oudai Hatem
al-monitor.com

THE IRAQI List announced that Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, will hand a letter to Speaker Osama Najafi. The letter, which was originally submitted by President Jalal Talabani, calls for the withdrawal of confidence from Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The political party stressed that "over 200 MPs have signed the document."

Simultaneously, local governments in the central and southern governorates, which are controlled by the State of Law Coalition led by Maliki, held a meeting in Basra. This was to prepare for their declaration as a unified province, should confidence be withdrawn from the prime minister.

Meanwhile, meetings were held to seemingly accelerate the process of withdrawing confidence. MP Ahmad al-Masari, head of the Iraqi List, told Al-Hayat that "those meeting in Erbil today [May 31] received the signature of more than 200 MPs who have agreed on the withdrawing confidence from Maliki."

Masri said that "Barzani will hand over the withdrawal of confidence letter to Nujayfi that Talabani submitted."



[Kurdish Regional Government President Massoud Barzani speaks in a meeting with Kurdish envoys abroad in Erbil (photo by

Talabani asked Barzani to keep it until the signatures of 163 MPs were collected. Today, Barzani received the signatures of 200 MPs." This indicates that "those signatures are from lists such as the Sadrist Movement, the Iraqi List and the Kurdistan Alliance, via individual or collective e-mail."

Masari confirmed that "the confidence measures will proceed early next week."

Furthermore, Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr ruled out "the possibility of chaos in Iraq if confidence is withdrawn from Maliki."

In response to a question by one of his supporters, he disagreed with what "some State of Law Coalition MPs are saying about how chaos will prevail if confidence is withdrawn from Maliki." Sadr said. "The withdrawal of confi-

dence cannot lead to chaos, especially since it is a constitutional matter. Or does democracy mean chaos?"

During the last couple of days, meetings were held in Erbil and at a resort in Dukan, Sulaymaniyah. These meetings involved President Jalal Talabani, Kurdistan leader Massoud Barzani, head of the "Iraqi List" Iyad Allawi, Speaker Osama Nujayfi, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq and leaders in the Sadrist Movement Sheikh Mustafa al-Yaaqubi and Sheikh Salah al-Obeidi.

The State of Law Coalition threatened to "resort" to the dissolution of parliament, in accordance with Article 64 of the Constitution, if the political blocs "insist on withdrawing confidence from [Maliki]." This move was interpreted by observers as "an attempt to influence the decision of the blocs to postpone the vote of no-confidence." □

Hurriyet
DailyNews.com

june / 8 / 2012

Gül, TÜSİAD welcome meet over Kurdish issue

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

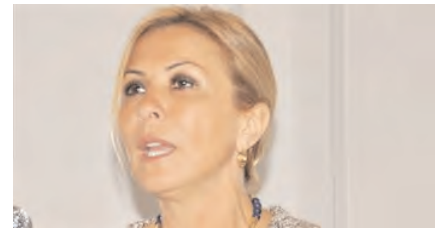
The meeting between the ruling and main opposition party to launch a new political process for the solution of the Kurdish question received appreciation from President Abdullah Gül and Ümit Boyner, the head of the country's leading businessmen association.

"We can overcome problems with our self-confidence. All such meetings are praiseworthy in this sense. I always encourage meetings between politicians and leaders who are worried [about problems]," President Gül told reporters on Thursday in Ağrı, on the eastern

border.

Underlining that big countries always solve national problems in unity and solidarity without highlighting political differences, Gül emphasized the need to improve Turkey's democratic norms and strengthen individual freedoms. "These are all problems of our country. We can solve all of our problems in a self-confident manner," Gül said, adding his opinion that a delay in solving such problems would make dealing with them more difficult for future generations.

Ümit Boyner, the head of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen



Ümit Boyner, the head of the TÜSİAD, welcomes the meeting on Kurdish problem.

Association (TÜSİAD), also welcomed the initiative of the two major political parties. "We are hopeful and pay importance of the meeting between the prime minister and the leader of the main opposition. We wish that the leaders of the other opposition parties will soon become part of this picture as well," she said. ♦

Syrie**Courrier**

Courrier international | n° 1127 | du 7 au 13 juin 2012

Le risque d'une implosion sunnite-chiite

Dans un Moyen-Orient rongé par les haines intercommunautaires, les "printemps arabes" peuvent se transformer en véritables guerres civiles meurtrières.

CounterPunch (extraits)
Petrolia (Etats-Unis)

Dans des pays arabes situés à l'est de l'Égypte – la Syrie et Bahreïn –, les manifestants ont passé des mois à défier leurs gouvernements sans réussir à les renverser. Les raisons de ces échecs sont très différentes, même si elles ont des points communs. En Syrie et à Bahreïn, l'identité communautaire permet d'expliquer la loyauté vis-à-vis du pouvoir en place [en Syrie, c'est une minorité alaouite chiite qui dirige ; à Bahreïn, c'est une minorité sunnite qui gouverne]. Les manifestants [chiïtes] à Bahreïn ont beau insister sur le fait que leur programme est laïc et démocratique, chacun sait qu'un scrutin équitable entraînerait des changements révolutionnaires en propulsant la majorité chiite au pouvoir, en lieu et place de la minorité sunnite. De même, en Syrie, la démocratie verrait les sunnites, qui représentent les trois quarts de la population, remplacer la communauté chiite hétérodoxe des alaouites à la tête de l'Etat. Pour autant, dans ces deux pays les manifestants n'ont pas de programme religieux secret. Les divisions politiques suivent tout simplement déjà les frontières religieuses.

L'homogénéité confessionnelle des élites au pouvoir en Syrie et à Bahreïn empêche les grands fonctionnaires de l'Etat de se débarrasser d'un régime impopulaire pour conserver leur propre pouvoir et leurs privilèges. En effet, les alaouites de Syrie en sont arrivés à la conclusion que, si le président Bachar El-Assad tombait, il les entraînerait dans sa chute.

"Assad va forcément tomber"

La lutte entre ces deux traditions islamiques, si semblable à l'affrontement entre catholiques et protestants en Europe aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, s'intensifie depuis la révolution iranienne de 1979. La guerre Iran-Irak de 1980-1988 et la guerre civile entre chiïtes et sunnites en Irak en 2006-2007 ont renforcé la haine entre ces deux communautés. Saddam Hussein [sunnite] en Irak, le clan Assad en Syrie et la dynastie Al-Khalifa à Bahreïn ont toujours eu intérêt à jouer la carte religieuse

Sunnites et chiïtes au Moyen-Orient



Le choix des Syriens

Un sondage confidentiel a été effectué par l'institut américain Pechter Polls auprès des opposants syriens de l'intérieur et de leurs partisans. A la question : "A quel modèle la nouvelle Syrie devrait-elle ressembler ?", le choix d'un Etat islamiste s'est révélé minoritaire. Si 82 % des sondés ont une opinion favorable de la Turquie, 69 % approuvent le modèle politique américain. Juste derrière sont plébiscités les modèles français, allemand et britannique. Si l'on prend en compte les pays arabes, 32 % des sondés ont une bonne opinion de la Tunisie et seulement 5 % de l'Arabie Saoudite. La Russie et la Chine sont en queue de peloton, juste devant l'Irak, qui ne séduit que 2 % des opposants syriens.

et à s'appuyer sur la solidarité communautaire de ceux qui partageaient leurs croyances.

La rivalité entre sunnites et chiïtes explique en partie pourquoi le "printemps arabe" a réussi en Tunisie alors qu'il piétine à l'est de l'Égypte. L'Arabie Saoudite [à majorité sunnite] et l'Irak [à majorité chiïte] se battent depuis trente ans pour affirmer leur suprématie dans la région. Le régime d'Assad est peut-être isolé, mais pas autant que celui de Kadhafi avant sa chute. L'Irak fera presque n'importe quoi pour maintenir au pouvoir Assad, son allié le plus important du monde arabe. A l'inverse, les nombreux ennemis de l'Irak, dans l'incapacité de renverser le gouvernement de Téhéran, sont déterminés à l'affaiblir en changeant le régime à Damas.

Les rivalités régionales, qui renforcent les divisions entre sunnites et chiïtes, et le mouvement de protestation démocratique communément appelé "printemps arabe" se sont combinés pour apporter tous les ingrédients nécessaires à une crise à long terme. "L'année 2012 sera l'une des plus instables que le Moyen-Orient ait jamais connues", avait prédit un ministre d'un des pays du Golfe. Dans presque tous les Etats arabes, il faut s'attendre à une poussée de violence dans la mesure où aucun vainqueur n'émerge clairement. La Syrie et le Yémen sont au bord de la guerre civile, Bahreïn reste divisé, pendant que des troubles affectent d'autres Etats de la région

[notamment le Liban].

A Bahreïn, les chiites se considèrent non seulement comme politiquement privés de leurs droits électoraux, mais aussi comme des victimes en devenir d'un apartheid social et économique. Les leaders de l'opposition assurent qu'ils ne seraient pas surpris si certains militants se tournaient vers la violence pour affronter la monarchie.

En Syrie, il est évident que l'opposition n'a pas de stratégie efficace pour se débarrasser de Bachar El-Assad et du régime du parti Baas. Elle peut poursuivre ses manifestations et sa propagande, mais ceux qui connaissent le noyau dur du régime de Damas savent qu'il est confiant dans sa capacité à tenir bon. L'opposition est fragmentée et divisée entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur du pays. Le cœur des forces de sécurité syriennes reste uni. Les sanctions [occidentales] font pression sur le gouvernement, mais, comme en Irak dans les années 1990, elles touchent le

peuple – et provoquent un ressentiment populaire – avant de porter atteinte au gouvernement. Les pays voisins répètent comme un mantra qu'«*Assad va forcément tomber*», mais ne savent pas bien comment ni quand.

Fin des espoirs du «printemps arabe»

«*Personne ne sait que faire de la Syrie*», reconnaît un dirigeant du Moyen-Orient. Une partie de l'opposition réclame en vain une intervention militaire étrangère comme en Libye, mais il est peu probable qu'elle se produise. Les militants sunnites extrémistes arabes [d'Al-Qaïda] peuvent voir dans la Syrie un lieu où prendre pied, et il n'est pas vraiment surprenant que les premiers attentats suicides se soient déjà produits à Damas. Les grands espoirs du «printemps arabe» s'évanouissent et les protestations pacifiques ont fait long feu dans la région. Aujourd'hui, la confrontation civile menace de se transformer en guerre civile. **Patrick Cockburn**

Courrier international | n° 1127 | du 7 au 13 juin 2012

En couverture Assad l'assassin

Stratégie

L'ambigu soutien de l'Arabie Saoudite à l'opposition

En réclamant la chute de Bachar El-Assad, Riyad veut surtout affaiblir l'axe des pays chiites de la région. La population saoudienne suit de près les événements en Syrie. Beaucoup souhaitent que le sang cesse de couler. Mais, pour certains, le vrai motif de leur solidarité est d'ordre purement confessionnel [la haine des chiites alaouites syriens]. Les médias saoudiens, et notamment la chaîne satellitaire d'information en continu Al-Arabiya, réclament ouvertement une intervention étrangère sur le modèle de ce qui a été fait en Libye. Cela correspond aux positions officielles de Riyad. Il y a quelques mois, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Saoud Fayçal, a pris des positions étonnamment tranchées. Alors que la diplomatie saoudienne est coutumière de longues hésitations, il s'est mis en colère et a appelé ouvertement à armer l'opposition syrienne. Croyant bien faire, des hommes de religion saoudiens de premier plan ont voulu venir en aide à ceux qui en ont besoin. Ils ont donc pris l'initiative, tout récemment, de collecter des fonds destinés au soulèvement syrien. Mais le renseignement intérieur saoudien leur a demandé de suspendre l'opération et de signer la promesse de ne pas recommencer. Comment se fait-il que Riyad fournisse argent et armes à l'opposition syrienne tout en refusant à ses propres citoyens de faire des dons ? Les Saoudiens n'avaient-ils

pas permis de tels dons en faveur des moudjahidin en Afghanistan dans les années 1980 et des révolutionnaires bosniaques dans les années 1990, pour ne citer que ces deux exemples ? Il y a plusieurs explications. Premièrement, les autorités saoudiennes craignent que cet argent ne tombe entre les mains des mauvaises personnes, c'est-à-dire d'Al-Qaïda. Deuxièmement, elles craignent des désordres financiers. Troisièmement, elles écoutent les mises en garde américaines. Car les responsables saoudiens rechignent à prendre des décisions susceptibles de les mettre en porte-à-faux vis-à-vis des Américains, qui souhaitent garder le contrôle des mesures en faveur de l'opposition syrienne. Par ailleurs, Riyad est quelque peu revenu sur les déclarations musclées de son ministre des Affaires étrangères, en expliquant que celui-ci n'avait jamais dit qu'il allait armer l'opposition, mais qu'il avait simplement invité d'autres à le faire. En privé, certains responsables disent que les Saoudiens auraient hésité à soutenir l'opposition syrienne s'ils avaient su que le régime de Bachar El-Assad allait résister aussi longtemps. La préoccupation de Riyad n'est pas d'instaurer la démocratie en Syrie, ni dans aucun autre pays de la région, mais d'obtenir la chute de l'un des principaux bastions de l'axe chiite, qui va de l'Irak au Hezbollah libanais, en passant par l'Irak. **Al-Quds Al-Arabi** Londres

Apocalypse

Le scénario de la partition

«*La situation s'aggravant, les diplomates occidentaux avertissent que la crise en Syrie appelle une solution politique bien plus complexe que celle du Yémen : obtenir le départ du président tout en maintenant le régime [lire aussi p. 17]. Cela tient à l'intrication des différentes tendances religieuses et au nombre de puissances étrangères qui exercent une influence dans ce pays*», souligne **The Wall Street Journal**. «*Les responsables arabes craignent que la guerre civile en Syrie ne s'enlise, ce qui risquerait de fracturer le pays et de contaminer les pays voisins, continue le quotidien. Et ils envisagent la possibilité de ce scénario : l'Etat syrien, en déroute, sera contrôlé dans le nord par Assad, qui continuera à opérer avec l'Irak et le groupe libanais du Hezbollah, et le reste du pays sera sous la coupe d'éléments d'Al-Qaïda et des Frères musulmans syriens.*»

En couverture Assad l'assassin

Les lignes jaunes de Moscou

La Russie ne soutiendra jamais une destitution forcée du président Assad, ni une intervention militaire en Syrie.

OpenDemocracy (extraits) Londres

Après avoir soutenu pendant des mois le point de vue du président syrien Bachar El-Assad selon lequel l'opposition serait responsable de la poursuite des violences, le représentant de la Russie aux Nations unies a été contraint de reconnaître que les forces gouvernementales avaient utilisé l'artillerie et les chars contre un quartier résidentiel de la ville de Houla et causé la mort de plus de cent hommes, femmes et enfants.

On a pu croire dans un premier temps que la position russe s'était légèrement rapprochée de celle des pays occidentaux. Mais, dès le lendemain de la tuerie, le gouvernement russe a fait marche arrière et le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov, a soutenu que les deux camps étaient à blâmer. Pourquoi la politique syrienne de la Russie est-elle si éloignée de celle de l'Occident ?

Dès son accession à la présidence, en 2000, Vladimir Poutine a poursuivi des objectifs clairs au Moyen-Orient. Il a cherché à ce que la Russie recouvre son influence et améliore sa présence sur les marchés moyen-orientaux. Il a voulu assurer la stabilité d'une région qui peut affecter la sécurité de la Russie, alors que la politique occidentale et le printemps arabe l'en avaient empêché.

Ses efforts pour développer la présence russe sur les marchés du Moyen-Orient n'ont pas été très fructueux. Tout d'abord, la guerre en Irak a ruiné les espoirs de Moscou de récupérer les 8 milliards de dollars que Bagdad lui devait depuis l'époque soviétique. Elle a également mis fin au plan décennal de coopération commerciale, économique, industrielle et scientifique, dont le montant s'élevait, dit-on, à 40 milliards de dollars.

Ensuite, quand le peuple libyen a commencé à se rebeller, la Russie a soutenu la résolution 1970 du Conseil de sécurité imposant un embargo sur les armes à destination de Tripoli, ce qui a représenté un coût économique supplémentaire de 4 milliards de dollars en contrats suspendus ou perdus. La chute de Kadhafi a, elle aussi, porté un coup très dur aux relations commerciales avec la Libye.



→ *Bachar El-Assad.*
Dessin de **Bertrams**,
Pays-Bas.

La politique économique du nouveau gouvernement libyen sera favorable aux pays qui ont contribué à sa victoire, et cela aux dépens des contrats avec des entreprises russes.

Moscou est, d'un point de vue économique, plus lié avec la Syrie qu'avec la Libye. Damas est l'un des principaux clients de la Russie en matière d'armement. Quelque 15 milliards de dollars de contrats ont été négociés au cours de la seule année 2010 et le montant annuel des exportations d'armement devrait se maintenir aux alentours de 10 milliards jusqu'en 2014 au moins. Les relations avec Damas sont tout aussi précieuses dans le domaine énergétique : [les entreprises russes] Gazprom, Tatneft et Stroytransgaz ont d'importants projets en Syrie. Moscou craint que ces liens économiques ne soient compromis en cas de chute d'Assad. Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'Assad et son armée embarrassent les Russes. Il est probable que le président syrien s'est montré aussi fermé aux appels russes [pour modifier sa politique] que son propre père l'avait été face aux pressions soviétiques. Et même si Moscou semble commencer à envisager sérieusement la possibilité d'un départ anticipé de Bachar, il faudra que ce dernier y consente, car la Russie ne soutiendra pas des appels en faveur de sa démission, pas plus qu'elle ne consentira à armer l'opposition ou à approuver une intervention militaire en Syrie.

Margot Light

Turks protest government plans to curb abortion

ANKARA

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Several thousand demonstrators turned out on Sunday in Istanbul to protest plans by the Turkish government to restrict abortion, which critics say will amount to a virtual ban.

About 3,000 women gathered at a square in the Istanbul district of Kadikoy carrying banners that read "My body, my choice" while shouting anti-government slogans. Many were accompanied by husbands and boyfriends. One man carried a placard that read, "My darling's body, my darling's choice."

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called abortion "murder," and his government is reportedly working on legislation to ban the procedure after four weeks from conception, except

in emergencies. Abortion is now legal in Turkey up to 10 weeks from conception.

"They say it is my body, my choice — feminists say this," Mr. Erdogan said Saturday at a rally in southeastern Turkey. "No one has the right to abort a fetus in a body."

Mr. Erdogan is trying to strengthen Turkey's regional power with a large population, analysts say, while facing a high birthrate among the country's Kurds, a source of concern for the government since it is engaged in a bitter fight against Kurdish rebels who want autonomy in the southeast, which is largely Kurdish.

Remarks by members of Mr. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, meanwhile, have also revealed deep-rooted moral and religious concerns. Health Minister Recep Akdag provoked an outcry on Thursday when he said that the government would even look after the babies of "rape victims" if necessary. On Saturday, Mr. Akdag said he did not mean that rape victims could never have an abortion.

Deniz Ulke Aribogan, a professor of international relations at Bilgi University, in Istanbul, wrote on Friday in the newspaper *Aksam* that the government was seeking to use abortion to balance the Kurds' high birthrate, since "ethnic reproduction was used by some organizations as a political tool" — an appar-

ent reference to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., which is fighting for autonomy, and a pro-Kurdish political party also demanding the same.

"The problem is the rapid rise of population in eastern regions, while it has almost come to a standstill in western regions," Ms. Aribogan wrote, adding that the decision had made for political reasons, rather than out of moral or religious concern.

The southeast has the highest birthrate in Turkey with 27.3 births in every 1,000, compared with 11.4 births in the northwest, according to the latest available figures in 2010 by the Turkish Statistical Institute. More than 25 percent of Turkey's nearly 75 million population is under the age of 14, according to a December survey.

Fusun Sirkeci, an obstetrician and gynecologist in London, in an e-mail on Saturday, warned of the dangers of a virtual ban. She said it would lead "some women to terminate themselves, which could potentially be fatal or disabling."

Dr. Sirkeci said any ban would also create an illegal market for abortions and have a huge psychological impact on women. "I feel the danger is very obvious," she said.

Possible new Syria sanctions come with a U.S. hint of military action

WASHINGTON

BY ANNIE LOWREY
AND RICK GLADSTONE

Representatives from more than 55 countries pressing for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria threatened Wednesday to expand drastically their financial pressure on his government because of the violent repression of an uprising there, and the U.S. Treasury secretary suggested that the use of military force was a possibility.

The warning, made at a Washington meeting of the so-called Friends of the Syrian People International Working Group, came as new signs emerged of Western and Arab fatigue with a Syria peace plan negotiated by the special envoy Kofi Annan that has been largely ignored since it officially took effect nearly two months ago.

"Strong sanctions, effectively imple-

mented, aggressively enforced, can help deprive the Syrian regime of the resources it needs to sustain itself and to continue its repression," Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner said. "Strong sanctions make clear to the Syrian business community and other supporters of the regime that their future is bleak so long as the Assad regime remains in power. And strong sanctions can help hasten the day the Assad regime relinquishes power."

Mr. Geithner applauded international financial sanctions against Syria, including those adopted by the European Union, Qatar and the Arab League. He indicated that more sanctions might be necessary.

"We, the United States, hope that all responsible countries will soon join in taking appropriate economic actions against the Syrian regime, including, if necessary, Chapter Seven action in the U.N. Security Council," Mr. Geithner

said. "Absent meaningful compliance by the regime with the Annan plan, that is the direction in which we are soon headed."

A Chapter Seven resolution could authorize further financial sanctions and the severance of diplomatic relations with Syria. Should that prove "inadequate," though, it could authorize the use of military force.

Mr. Annan, the joint representative of the United Nations and Arab League, was expected to brief the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council on Thursday about the lack of progress in advancing his plan, and some diplomats said he was likely to raise new ideas.

"We are not writing off the Annan plan," Mark Lyall Grant, the British ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters. "It may be on life support, but it isn't dead."

In Syria, meanwhile, Mr. Assad reorganized his government Wednesday,

appointing the agriculture minister, Riyad Farid Hijab, as prime minister and ordering him to form a new administration, according to the official SANA news agency. The likely impact of the move was unclear in a situation of increasing polarization between the government and its foes, with violence mounting despite a nominal cease-fire negotiated by Mr. Annan.

According to SANA, Mr. Hijab held a series of positions that would normally indicate a fierce loyalty to the Assad dynasty, serving as head of the ruling

Baath Party in his native Deir al-Zour in eastern Syria and becoming governor of the Quneitra region facing Israel and Latakia on the Mediterranean coast.

The government changes follow parliamentary elections on May 7, which opposition groups boycotted.

As the Syrian leader maneuvered, his two most important big power backers — Russia and China — were attending a security summit meeting in Beijing, where Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov of Russia called Wednesday for a new international forum grouping back-

ers of Mr. Assad with the predominantly Western and Arab states backing his adversaries.

Mr. Lavrov said participants should include Iran, Syria's closest regional ally, among others including Arab, Islamic and European nations. But Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, traveling in Azerbaijan, dismissed the notion of inviting Iran, saying it was "a little hard to imagine inviting a country that is stage-managing the Assad regime's assault on its people," Reuters reported.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2012

Tehran flashes its irritation

As nuclear talks near, Iran senses foot-dragging and may delay meetings

BY RICK GLADSTONE
AND ARTIN AFKHAMI.

Iran has raised the possibility of delaying or canceling the resumption of nuclear talks with the big powers, scheduled in less than two weeks, because of what it called dithering by the other side in holding preliminary meetings aimed at ensuring some success.

The warning, made by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the office of Saeed Jalili, Iran's chief negotiator in the talks, came Wednesday as its ambassador to the U.N. nuclear monitoring agency accused some of its inspectors of espionage.

But, speaking in Istanbul on Thursday, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stressed that Iran must be ready to take concrete action when it meets again with world powers in Moscow on June 18 and 19, The Associated Press reported.

Ms. Clinton said one of the main concerns is Iran's 20 percent enriched uranium, which the West and others say is close to being weapons-grade material, and that the goal of the talks is to begin the work necessary for a diplomatic solution, The A.P. said. "We want them to come prepared to take concrete steps," The A.P. quoted Ms. Clinton as saying at a news conference.

The Iranian messages suggest that Iran's leaders have decided to reduce expectations that the negotiations, which resumed in April after a 15-month suspension, would produce an agreement on the country's disputed nuclear program, or at least lead to an easing of the onerous sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and the European Union. The sanctions are scheduled to turn more severe July 1, when the European Union bans all imports of Iranian

oil, the country's most important export.

The warning of a possible delay in the next round of talks was conveyed by Mr. Jalili in a letter to his counterpart, Catherine Ashton, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief and chief negotiator for the big powers: Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency, which reported the letter, said Mr. Jalili had expressed irritation over what he called "the E.U. failure to arrange experts' meeting led by deputies of the negotiators to draft agenda of the talks." The agency said this had "created an atmosphere of doubt and ambiguity for success of the Moscow talks."

Other Iranian news agencies said that Mr. Jalili's deputy, Ali Baqeri, had sent two letters to his counterpart in Ms. Ashton's office, Helga Schmid, requesting such a meeting and had received no response.

"The success of the Moscow meeting depends on making the necessary preparations and drawing up a comprehensive agenda," the Mehr News Agency quoted Mr. Baqeri's letter as saying.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who was in Beijing for regional cooperation talks, also expressed irritation, saying Ms. Ashton's office had failed to keep its promises.

"We believe that the West is after concocting excuses and wasting time," Mr. Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying by Iran's Press TV Web site.

A spokeswoman for Ms. Ashton, Maja

Kocijancic, said in an e-mailed statement that Ms. Ashton had replied to the letter from Mr. Jalili and that she saw no need for further preparatory meetings.

"We are not against technical meetings in principle, but the time is not right," Ms. Kocijancic said.

Western diplomats said they believed that the Iranian requests for such meetings were part of a deliberate effort to bog down the process. Ms. Ashton and fellow negotiators have said they have no patience for stalling tactics or "talks for the sake of talks."

At the last meeting, on May 23 and 24 in Baghdad, the sides agreed to keep talking after having made no substantive progress in the underlying dispute: Iran's enrichment of uranium in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding a suspension.

Iran has contended that its growing stockpile of enriched uranium is for peaceful energy and medical uses. The United States, the E.U. and Israel have accused Iran of secretly working on the capacity to build nuclear weapons.

The suspicions were reinforced in November in a report by the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, which cataloged questionable activities in Iran, including possible testing of explosives that could be used in nuclear weapons triggers. Agency inspectors have sought access to the site where they suspect the testing took place, but Iran has not allowed it. Further talks on this issue are planned Friday at the agency's Vienna headquarters.

The Iranians have demanded the evidence the agency cited as the basis for its suspicions. They have also complained about what they call the agency's demand for overly intrusive inspections.

Iran's nuclear efforts appeared to suffer a further setback this week with news that the country's Bushehr nuclear power plant, built by Russia, would face indefinite delays in achieving full electricity production. The Islamic Republic News Agency reported.



Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton pushed Iran on nuclear talks Thursday.

A Turkish War of Religion: Kurdish Activists Sense a Conspiracy

By PIOTR ZALEWSKI / DIYARBAKIR

In a widely reported speech last month, Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke about Turkey's seemingly perpetual problem with its largest ethnic minority, the Kurds. He insisted on the indivisibility of the country, describing it as "one nation, one state, one flag and one religion." Erdogan, whose Islamic-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) has ruled Turkey since 2002, would later insist that the religion reference was a slip of the tongue, that he did not mean to bring up religion. Many Kurdish activists drew a different conclusion. To them, the misstatement spoke clearly to the AKP's unspoken policy of using Islam to lure the Kurds into abandoning their struggle for additional rights and a measure of political autonomy. (Like most Turks, including Erdogan himself, the majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims.)

Recently, the lightning rod for such suspicions has been the Gulen movement, the controversial religious group suspected of wielding considerable sway over the Turkish government, business community, and the media. (The movement takes its name from Fethullah Gulen, a Pennsylvania-based Islamic preacher.) The group, many Kurdish nationalists suspect, has been part and parcel of a new government strategy to pacify and assimilate the Kurds. "Someone comes here and tries to teach our people religion," Ahmet Turk, a prominent Kurdish politician, said back in 2010. "And they say in the name of Islam, 'Yes, let us help you improve your belief but forget about your identity.'" Says Vahap Coskun, an assistant professor at Diyarbakir's Dicle University, "Together, the [Gulenists] and the government have been using religion to attain the objective they have in mind -- to build the unity of the state."

The Gulen movement publicly eschews politics. Its main objective in Turkey's Kurdish-majority southeast, key Gulenists insist, is to focus on a long-neglected issue: education. For the region's Kurds, access to quality schooling has always been scarce. A raging 30-year conflict between

Kurdish militants and the Turkish army has made things even worse. The Gulenists -- who run some of the best university preparatory schools in the country -- have gone a considerable way to address governmental neglect. As a Kurdish columnist at one of Turkey's largest papers -- himself a graduate of a Gulen school -- told me in Istanbul, "Most of the people from the southeast, if they're here [in Istanbul] and if they're successful, chances are that at some point they went through the Gulen system."

In Diyarbakir, the biggest city in the Kurdish-majority southeast, I visited with Ali Pehlivan, the principal of Nil Elementary, one of 57 private schools operated by the Gulen movement in the region. Pehlivan was beaming with pride. His school, he told me, had recently placed 73rd nationwide out of 18,000 primary schools -- the first time that a school from Diyarbakir had cracked the country's top 100.

For all their success, schools like Pehlivan's appear to have outworn their welcome among some Kurds. On May 14, the day I arrived in Diyarbakir, a homemade bomb exploded at a Gulen dormitory. At one of the Gulen prep schools I visited the following day, the headmaster, Bulent Ince, reported about 15 attacks against his school -- ranging from Molotov cocktails to broken windows -- over the past three years, the most recent having occurred in early May. In late April, another prep school in Cizre, a town near the Iraqi border, was sprayed with gunfire. Though no casualties were reported in any of these attacks -- most took place at night -- there have been allegations of targeted killings. Two years ago, an imam close to the Gulen movement was killed in Hakkari, about 250 miles east of Diyarbakir.

Most observers are certain the attacks are the work of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a militant group, or of its sympathizers. The PKK sees itself as a champion of Kurdish rights and has waged war against the Turkish army since 1984. To date, the conflict has claimed 40,000 lives. The U.S. and the E.U. have labeled the PKK a terrorist organization.

Contacted by phone, PKK spokesperson Roj Welat denied his group's responsibility for the attacks. He did insinuate, however, that the Gulen movement and its institutions were legitimate targets. "As long as there is a denial and annihilation policy against the Kurdish people," he said, "every human being has a right to defend themselves whenever they are under attack."

Fethullah Gulen's statements on the PKK have done little to allay tensions between his group and the Kurdish militants. In a speech last October, Gulen lambasted the Turkish army for being "unable to finish off a group of bandits in the mountains over the last 30 years." The timing was less than fortunate. Two months later, the military killed 34 Kurdish smugglers in a botched airstrike against what it believed was a column of PKK fighters.

The biggest charge leveled against the Gulenists, however, has little to do with their leader's rhetoric. Since 2009, a series of police operations against the so-called Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), alleged to be the PKK's urban arm, has led to the arrest of several thousand Kurds. Many in the Kurdish movement allege that Gulenists inside the police and judiciary have been a driving force behind the crackdown. The movement's aim, Vahap Coskun suspects, is to imprison and intimidate as many Kurdish activists and politicians as possible -- to the extent that even those opposed to the PKK have landed behind bars. The Gulenists, he says, "want to criminalize and marginalize the Kurdish political movement as a whole."

To Emre Uslu, a columnist and terrorism expert, the recent attacks are directly related to the Gulen movement's unprecedented expansion in the southeast. Aside from schools, Gulenists now run popular prep courses, business associations, and okuma salonu (reading halls), which cater to underprivileged students. These alone, says Uslu, attract approximately 30,000 children each year. The PKK, he says, "feels threatened by these numbers." ➤

> The Gulen movement, he adds, has become the PKK's "number one enemy."

Ironically, individual Gulenists appear to have a more accommodating approach toward the Kurdish issue than successive Turkish governments. Cemal Usak, a longtime associate of Gulen and the Vice President of the Journalists and Writers Foundation, told me in Istanbul that Turkish public opinion has failed to distinguish between PKK violence and the

Kurds' legitimate struggle for social and cultural rights. "Even if the terror comes to an end, the Kurdish problem will remain because 80-90% of it has to do with language and identity." In remarks that would place him closer to the Kurdish movement than to the Turkish political mainstream, Usak argued in favor of introducing Kurdish courses at schools across all of Turkey (the majority of the country's 12 million to 15 million Kurds, having escaped poverty and war, now live outside the southeast),

restoring original names of Kurdish towns and villages, and even, if necessary, negotiating with the PKK.

At an informal meeting of local Gulenists in Diyarbakir, Celal, a physiotherapist, struck an apologetic tone when asked about the recent attacks against the schools. "The attacks are not their fault but ours," he said, referring to the perpetrators. "Because we haven't explained ourselves in the right way."

the guardian 4 june 2012

Bomb hits Shi'ite site in Baghdad, 26 killed

By Kareem Raheem / Reuters

BAGHDAD- A suicide bomber detonated an explosive-packed car outside a Shi'ite Muslim office in central Baghdad on Monday, killing at least 26 people and wounding more than 190 in an attack bearing the hallmarks of Iraq's al Qaeda affiliate.

The bombing on a Shi'ite religious office comes at a sensitive time, with the country's fractious Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs locked in a crisis that threatens to unravel their power-sharing deal and spill into sectarian tensions.

The attacker targeted the Shi'ite Endowment - a government-run body that manages Shi'ite religious and cultural sites - leaving dead and wounded along a main street nearby and blasting part of its headquarters to rubble, police said.

"It was a powerful explosion, dust and smoke covered the area. At first I couldn't see anything, but then I heard screaming women and children," said policeman Ahmed Hassan, who was at a nearby police station when the bomb went off.

"We rushed with other police to help ... the wounded were scattered all around, and there were body parts on the main street," he said.

Violence in Iraq has eased, but Sunni Islamist insurgents tied to al Qaeda are still capable of devastating attacks and often hit Shi'ite targets to stir up the kind of sectarian pressure that pushed Iraq close to civil war in 2006-2007.

Security officials said initial evidence from Monday's blast pointed to a suicide car bomber. They said the bombing appeared to have been carried out by Islamic State of Iraq, al Qaeda's Iraqi wing, which often uses suicide bombers in its attacks.



Firefighters and rescuers search for victims at the site of a bomb attack in the central Bab al-Muadham area in Baghdad, Iraq, Monday, June 4, 2012.

The Shi'ite Endowment has been caught up in a dispute with the rival Sunni Endowment over control of a key Shi'ite shrine in the Sunni stronghold city of Samarra. An attack on the Al Askari shrine in Samarra in 2006 sparked sectarian fighting that killed tens of thousands in the two following years.

Last week, a truck bombing in a marketplace, a car bomb and several roadside explosions killed at least 17 people and broke weeks of relative calm in Baghdad, where daily attacks claimed hundreds of victims at the height of the war.

In mid April, more than 20 bombs hit cities and towns across the country, killing 36 people. Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility for those attacks.

Since the last American troops left Iraq in December, nine years after the U.S.-led invasion, tensions have been running high in Iraqi politics with critics of Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki threatening to seek a vote of no confidence against him.

Many Sunni and Kurdish leaders say they fear Maliki is shoring up Shi'ite power by sidelining them from power-sharing agreements. But Maliki supporters say his critics have long obstructed the work of his government to try to wrestle more concessions from the Shi'ite leader. □

AKP, CHP hopeful on Kurdish meeting as attacks kill 2 troops



Hürriyet Daily News
Hüseyin Hayatsever

ANKARA - Politicians on both sides are optimistic ahead of a planned meeting between Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and main opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu on Kurdish issue, seeing as a ground for dialogue

Both the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the main opposition People's Republican Party (CHP) have expressed optimism on the eve of a meeting between CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to discuss the CHP's new proposed initiative on the Kurdish issue.

"I'm hopeful for the meeting. We see that a ground for dialogue has been building, although the language of the politics is very tense. Conciliation can also occur at times when the politics is tense," the deputy chair of the CHP, Sezgin Tanrikulu, told the Hürriyet Daily News.

The CHP has prepared a 10-point "road-map" to find a solution for Turkey's decades-old Kurdish question, and deputy chairs Tanrikulu and Faruk Loğoğlu submitted it to Parliament Speaker Cemil Çiçek last week. The proposals suggest establishing a joint



The Turkish military starts mobilizing in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır after two soldiers, who were in a rescue operation, were killed in land mine attacks. DHA photo

Societal Conciliation Commission in Parliament, and a group of "wise men" linked to the parliamentary commission.

Kılıçdaroğlu will not insist upon any concrete solution to the issue, Tanrikulu said, instead, he will discuss the possible methods and mechanisms for resolving the problem with Erdoğan.

The prime minister has said he was not prejudiced, and is ready to listen to the CHP's proposals.

Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ also spoke encouragingly about the meeting, praising the CHP's move. Then-CHP leader Deniz Baykal had rejected a request for an appointment from the prime minister to discuss a Kurdish initiative in 2009, Bozdağ said yesterday.

Two killed in mine explosions, tourist freed

DİYARBAKIR - Doğan News Agency

Two Turkish soldiers were killed yesterday in two consecutive mine explosions, while conducting an operation to rescue a kidnapped British tourist in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır's Lice district.

James Masami Miyazaki-Roos, the British tourist who was kidnapped by the PKK over the weekend, was freed in the eastern province of Bingöl's Genç district, Diyarbakır Governor Mustafa Toprak said yesterday.

The first explosion happened early yesterday as security forces conducted an operation against members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who had reportedly kidnapped a British tourist June 2. Thirty-six-year-old special sergeant Abdullah Acı was killed in the mine explosion.

The second explosion took place when another group of security forces were arriving on the scene of the explosion. Thirty-eight-year-old Maj. Ercan Kurt, who was also the gendarmarie commander of Lice, was killed in this second explosion.

President Abdullah Gül condemned the killings and gave his condolences to the families of the soldiers and Turkish Armed Forces yesterday. Funeral ceremonies for the slain soldiers will be held today in their hometowns.

The operation had been launched to rescue Miyazaki-Roos, who was kidnapped June 2. The 32-year-old Briton was described as being in good health after his release and was taken to Diyarbakır for questioning about his ordeal.

The PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

"The CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu has come to the phase of discussing the [Kurdish] issue; this is very important for us. The [Kurdish] initiative that the AKP launched has obviously led to a change and transformation within the CHP."

Kılıçdaroğlu had previously said that he would meet with the leaders of all political parties to discuss his party's proposals. Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu will meet tomorrow at 3 p.m. at the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) headquarters in Ankara.

The opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) has spurned the CHP's invitation. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli said that there was no need for a meeting with the CHP, claiming that the CHP's effort were an attempt to legitimize terrorism. "Our doors will remain closed to anyone who demands such an appointment," Bahçeli said.

CHP urges MHP to contribute to the solution

CHP deputy chair Erdoğan Toprak has criticized the MHP's stance on the issue, and called on Bahçeli to reconsider a possible meeting.

Two soldiers were killed in a mine blast in Diyarbakır yesterday during operations against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Toprak said. "We don't want our children, youths and soldiers to die, and we call on all political parties to make a joint effort to put an end to terror and violence. The people of this country have been dying for 30 years, but unfortunately political party leaders have not come together to find a solution up until now. Kılıçdaroğlu is trying to do something that has never been done in the last 30 years."

Toprak called on Bahçeli "to give up acting with prejudice and to contribute this process," and said: "If political parties do not come together and find a solution for Turkey's most important issue, other actors will step in and impose their own solutions. The CHP is aware of this danger and is acting responsibly. We are ready to pay any price to find a solution and to stop our children from dying." ♦

L'Armée syrienne libre face au piège du sectarisme

Avec les rebelles syriens **Quinze mois**
de conflit ont accentué les divisions religieuses

Reportage

Kabani (nord-ouest de la Syrie)

Envoyé spécial

En un bond, les *thumar* (les révolutionnaires) sont sur la route et braquent leurs kalachnikovs sur la voiture qu'ils ont piégée. Un tronc d'arbre barre la chaussée. Le conducteur terrifié extrait de sa poche une carte d'identité. C'est un chrétien de Conseba. Il pourra repartir. Le soleil tape sur la route entre Kabani et Djebel Ahmar en bordure du djebel Akrad, au nord-ouest de la Syrie. Le trafic est quasi inexistant, une heure passe avant qu'une camionnette chargée de matériel agricole débouche du virage. Arrêt au check-point, vérification, le chauffeur est aussi chrétien. « C'est bien ma veine, peste Abou Hassan. Deux voitures, deux chrétiens. » S'il était tombé sur un alaouite, il aurait confisqué la voiture.

A la fin de la journée, lorsque le combattant de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) relate sa mésaventure, ses camarades éclatent de rire : l'un d'eux, Abou Bakr, a été plus chanceux. Il est tombé sur un alaouite du village de Djebel Ahmar au volant d'un véhicule presque neuf qu'il a aussitôt confisqué. Un des rebelles présents tente de justifier le vol : « Les *thumar* n'ont rien contre les alaouites, ils se battent contre les *chabiha* [les milices prorégime] et contre un régime politique. » Tous autour de la table acquiescent, en buvant leur thé très noir et sucré dans de petits verres renflés. L'un d'eux finit par lâcher : « Les alaouites de Djebel Ahmar sont tous des *chabiha*. Pour preuve, ils étaient présents en appui de l'armée régulière, lors du sac de Kabani en avril. »

Barbe à la mode salafiste

Les 500 habitants du village de Kabani sont tous sunnites ; mais, à 5 kilomètres de là, Djebel Ahmar est à 100 % alaouite, et le bourg de Selma est mixte, alaouite et sunnite. Quant à Conseba, on y trouve des chrétiens, des alaouites et des sunnites. Une mosaïque confessionnelle inextricable. L'ASL a pris ses quartiers dans la région centrale du djebel Akrad, qui compte une quinzaine de villages exclusivement sunnites. Mais elle ne se hasarde pas en périphérie du massif, là où se trouvent les villages alaouites ou mixtes qu'elle soupçonne de complicité avec le régime. En quinze mois, le conflit a érigé un mur en zigzag entre les différentes communautés religieuses. De part et d'autre, la défiance semble irrémédiablement ancrée.

En file indienne, les fidèles

reprennent leurs chaussures après la prière du vendredi, à la sortie de la mosquée d'Akko. Durant son sermon, le cheikh a béni les révolutionnaires et a rappelé que seul Dieu pourrait leur donner la victoire. Son affectation est nou-

velle et il ne parvient pas à s'imposer auprès des jeunes qui lui préfèrent son prédécesseur, plus véhément : « Le sermon d'aujourd'hui était un peu mou », regrette Ahmed, un jeune combattant qui arbore une barbe noire, encore peu fournie.

Sur le perron de la mosquée, des petits groupes se sont formés. Les vieux sont presque tous rasés de près ou arborent une petite moustache, rappelant celle d'Hafez Al-Assad, le père du tyran. Au contraire, les jeunes ont la barbe. « La plupart des *thumar* portent la barbe sans moustache, à la manière des salafistes. C'est presque devenu un signe de reconnaissance », explique Ahmed, dont la barbe est née avec le soulèvement : « La révolution m'a révélé ma foi. J'ai compris l'importance des valeurs morales. Je veux désormais régler ma vie selon les principes de l'islam. »

Il voit dans sa lutte contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad un combat pour faire triompher les valeurs de l'islam. Mais récusé toute influence étrangère : « Mon évolution s'est faite naturellement, en discutant avec les autres combattants. Lorsqu'on a peur, penser à Dieu rassure, et l'on se dit que notre vie ne nous appartient pas. »

Un combattant arrive, la barbe très fournie. Mi-sérieux, mi-moqueurs, les autres l'appel-

lent le cheikh, en raison de sa piété. « Voilà notre terroriste d'Al-Qaida ! », plaisante Hassan, avant de préciser : « Il connaît le Coran mieux que nous, il nous guide lors de la prière. » Abou Mohammed, le cheikh, a forcé le respect de ses frères d'armes en restant calme dans les situations les plus délicates. Mais lorsqu'il les surprend penchés sur l'écran d'un portable qui affiche la photo anodine d'une jeune fille non voilée, sa condamnation est sans appel : « Haram [impur] ! »

Ismail, un jeune informaticien de Kabani, déplore ce manque de tolérance. Durant ses études à Lattaquié, il est tombé amoureux d'une jeune alaouite. Il espérait l'épouser, mais la révolution a bousculé ses desseins. Contraint de quitter Lattaquié, il a rejoint sa famille dans le djebel. « Elle aurait voulu qu'on reste ensemble, mais ma famille n'aurait jamais accepté. » Ismail baisse les yeux, sort de sa poche son téléphone. « Nous nous parlons presque tous les jours. En cachette. Mais un de mes frères m'a surpris, et depuis il se moque de moi. » Jadis courtisées par la jeunesse sunnite, les femmes alaouites sont aujourd'hui raillées pour leur prétendue légèreté.

Vendredi, alors que le cheikh se mêle aux villageois, Ismail profite d'un creux dans les conversations pour lui poser la question qui le dérange. « Épouser une chrétienne, cela ne pose aucun problème », assure son interlocuteur. « Et une femme alaouite ? » Après un silence, le cheikh tranche : « Ce n'est pas conforme à l'islam. » ■

BORIS MABILLARD



Camp des rebelles, dans le djebel Akrad. L'homme en civil (de face) est une jeune recrue de l'ASL qui va bientôt recevoir son équipement militaire. BORIS MABILLARD

Irak

Un attentat meurtrier ravive les tensions chiites-sunnites

BAGDAD. Un attentat suicide à la voiture piégée a détruit lundi 4 juin le siège d'une fondation religieuse chiite à Bagdad, faisant au moins 25 morts. L'explosion s'est produite le jour anniversaire de la naissance de l'imam Ali, une figure centrale de l'islam chiite. L'institution visée était en conflit avec son équivalente sunnite au sujet du contrôle du mausolée chiite Al-Askari de Samarra, une ville majoritairement sunnite située à 110 km au nord de Bagdad. Or, le 22 février 2006, un attentat contre cet édifice religieux de Samarra avait déclenché une véritable guerre civile entre sunnites et chiites, faisant des dizaines de milliers de morts jusqu'en 2009. L'attaque de lundi intervient alors que le pays est plongé dans une grave crise politique qui oppose le premier ministre chiite Nouri Al-Maliki au vice-président sunnite Tarek Al-Hachemi. - (AFP) ■



11 JUIN 2012

LES GENS



SYRIE : UN KURDE À LA TÊTE L'OPPOSITION

Elu samedi soir à la tête du Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale coalition de l'opposition, Abdel Basset Sayda, 55 ans, est un Kurde vivant depuis vingt ans en Suède. Jugé «conciliant», «honnête» et «indépendant», cet expert des civilisations anciennes, auteur d'ouvrages sur la question kurde et la pensée arabe, est un choix de compromis. «Il a de bonnes relations avec tout le monde», souligne l'opposant historique George Sabra, membre du bureau exécutif. Succédant à Burhan Ghalioun, le nouveau président du CNS aura la difficile tâche d'élargir son organisation, dominée par les Frères musulmans, et surtout d'en faire un interlocuteur crédible pour la communauté internationale. PHOTO AFP



8 JUIN 2012

Turquie : une Française arrêtée pour terrorisme

RÉPRESSION Une étudiante originaire de Lyon est en prison depuis un mois au nom d'une loi discrétionnaire.

«C'est vraiment incroyable, il n'y a ni droit ni loi dans ce cas», s'indigne l'avocat Sami Kahraman, pourtant blasé en matière d'atteinte aux droits de l'homme. Sa cliente Sevil Sevimli, 19 ans, étudiante de nationalité française originaire de Lyon en échange Erasmus à l'université Anadolu d'Eskisehir (à 300 km au sud-est d'Istanbul), a été mise en garde à vue par la police turque le 10 mai, accusée d'appartenir à une organisation d'extrême gauche illégale, le Parti-Front de libération du peuple révolutionnaire (DHKP-C).

«Concert». «Je connais le contenu des interrogatoires. Il n'y a aucune preuve démontrant qu'elle est membre d'une organisation. Les policiers et le procureur n'ont posé que des questions étranges: "Étais-tu dans la marche du 1er Mai?" "Est-ce que tu es allée au concert de Grup Yorum [groupe d'extrême gauche dont les concerts rassemblent des milliers de personnes, ndlr]?" "Est-ce que tu as participé aux cérémonies de

commémoration de Deniz Gezmiş [leader étudiant exécuté en 1972]?" Que des questions sur la participation de ma cliente à des activités publiques et légales», explique l'ex-secrétaire général du barreau d'Ankara Sami Kahraman, affirmant que sa cliente «est un peu bouleversée, car elle ne comprend pas pourquoi on l'a arrêtée». En troisième année d'informatique, Sevil Sevimli n'avait sans doute pas compris que «la démocratie avancée turque» tant vantée par le Premier ministre Erdogan, n'était qu'un faux-semblant. La cour d'assises à compétence spéciale d'Ankara, en charge des dossiers de terrorisme, a décidé la «confidentialité» sur ce cas, comme le permet la loi antiterroriste de 2006, très critiquée par les organisations de défense des droits de l'homme. L'avocat n'a donc pas accès au dossier. La cour a plusieurs fois rejeté les demandes de libération de l'étudiante, car «le dossier n'est pas encore complet, l'accusée peut s'enfuir et déformer les preuves».

Plus de 600 étudiants sont en prison en Turquie depuis 2010, selon les statistiques du Collectif étudiant. La majorité d'entre eux ont été arrêtés lors des manifestations contre le Conseil supérieur de l'enseignement (YOK) ou contre le gouvernement. Ils sont la plupart du temps accusés d'appartenir aux séparatistes kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ou aux organisations d'extrême gauche turques.

Echarpe. Le cas le plus emblématique est celui de Cihan Kirmizigul, étudiant de l'université francophone Galatasaray d'Istanbul, accusé en 2009 d'avoir lancé un cocktail Molotov. Une écharpe kurde était la seule preuve de sa prétendue appartenance au PKK. Après presque deux ans de prison, il a été libéré sous la pression de ses camarades et professeurs. Fin mai, une semaine après sa sortie, la cour d'Istanbul le condamnait à onze ans de prison ferme.

De notre correspondant à Istanbul RAGIP DURAN

Turkey cozies up to the Kurdish regional government

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan hopes Kurds will be part of strategy to deal with Syria's Assad regime.

Gonul Tol

WASHINGTON — Turkey's popular and outspoken prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was treated to a hero's welcome recently when he met with Syrian refugees for the first time since Turkey opened its doors to the thousands of people fleeing Bashar Al-Assad's crackdown.

Erdogan's pledge to defend the rights of the Syrian people and his call for Assad's removal, however, fell short of expectations.

Although Erdogan's speech drew some applause, it was also interrupted by shouts of "We want arms for the Free Syrian Army and a buffer zone inside Syria!" The Turkish PM's reiteration of his previous positions seemed to dismay the refugees and some in the international community who hoped he would call for the establishment of a buffer zone or offer other more forceful support.

Thus, Turkey's strategy of seeking regional and international initiatives to increase the pressure on Assad remains intact, but with a twist: Turkey has begun to strengthen bilateral relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a way of making inroads into Syrian Kurdish politics in a post-Assad Syria.

Without a doubt, the stakes are high for Turkey in Syria. The longer the conflict drags on, the costlier it becomes for Ankara. Anxious about the possible spillover effects of Kurdish unrest in a post-Assad era, while at the same time confronting a rise in terrorism from the Kurdish group, PKK, and distrustful Shi'a-led regimes in Baghdad, Tehran and Damascus, Turkey finds itself between a rock and a hard place. The Kurds in Syria could hold the key in the uprising: should they change sides and start supporting the opposition, they could actually tip the balance. But Syrian Kurds remain wary about Ankara's close ties to the Syrian opposition, affording Turkey little leverage with them.

The Turks hope to gain some influence by cultivating ties with the Iraqi Kurds, who enjoy a close relationship with their

Syrian refugees dance and chant slogans before Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's arrival on May 6, 2012 at the Oncupinar Refugee Camp in the border town of Kilis, in southeastern Turkey. (Bulent Kilic /AFP/Getty Images)



Syrian brethren.

In contrast to the increasing tensions between Ankara and Baghdad following the US withdrawal last December, Turkey's relations with the KRG are flourishing. Masoud Barzani, the head of the Kurdistan Regional Government, was given a red carpet welcome last month in Turkey when he met with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Barzani reciprocated the warmth by highlighting Turkey's and the KRG's common position on Syria and signaling to the PKK that if it "goes ahead with weapons, it will bear the consequences."

While the warming of relations between Turkey and the KRG dates back to 2008, the current push for a strategic alliance signals a new era in bilateral relations where cooperation is not only desirable but also necessary, given the unfolding events in the region.

From the Turkish perspective, closer ties to the KRG serve Turkey's strategic interests in Syria. Turkey would like to use the clout of Barzani with the Syrian Kurds to sideline the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the PKK offshoot in Syria, and to gain some influence with the Syrian Kurds in a post-Assad scenario. The Syrian Kurds, however, are skeptical. On several occasions, high-ranking PYD officials have criticized Turkey's involvement with the Syrian opposition, accusing Turkey of trying to turn Syria into a "satellite state" and preventing Kurds from having any role in the country. Although the Kurds in Syria are fragmented, the PYD's stance vis-à-vis Turkey represents the majority attitude.

A key question remains: Will Barzani be willing to side with Turkey against the PKK both in northern Iraq and Syria, in addition to serving as Turkey's entry into post-Assad Kurdish politics? Perhaps, for

two main reasons.

First, following the departure of the Americans, the Iraqi Kurds need Turkey as an ally to help stave off the dominance of Baghdad. Since the last US troops left, relations between Erbil and Baghdad have sharply deteriorated over the issues of the status of oil-rich Kirkuk, the deployment of Kurdish Peshmerga forces, the hydrocarbon law, and power-sharing.

On several occasions, Barzani has openly accused Iraq Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki of being a dictator, and has complained about the perceived lack of good will by Iraqi political actors to resolve their festering disputes. During his visit to Washington, DC in April, Barzani sought US security guarantees for the Kurdish region but the Obama administration reportedly demurred. The Iraqi Kurdish leader sees no resolution of his thorny disputes with Baghdad on the horizon, and therefore appreciates Turkey's helping hand. Turkey might serve both as a conduit for the KRG's oil exports to the West and as a political ally in the fights with the Iraqi central government.

Secondly, the PKK has increasingly become problematic for the KRG. The PKK mounting attacks against Turkey and Iran from northern Iraq invites those countries' retaliation in KRG areas via cross-border operations and the shelling of PKK strongholds, actions the KRG considers a violation of its sovereignty.

At a time when Barzani is speaking more frequently about declaring an independent Kurdish state, he has to demonstrate that he has full control over what is happening within his borders.

The PKK presence also hurts the KRG's economic interests. Turkish and Iranian air strikes destabilize the relatively peaceful northern region, frightening away badly needed foreign investors. The situation ➔

➔ in Syria only adds to the tension between the KRG and the PKK as the two vie for influence over their neighboring kinsmen. There have been heated exchanges between the PKK/PYD and Barzani over the latter's stance toward the Syrian uprising. Indeed, in an attempt to sideline the PKK, Barzani did not invite its affiliate in Syria, the Democratic Union Party (PYD),

to the meeting of Kurds from 32 countries he hosted in Erbil in January.

Faced with the challenges and uncertainties that the Arab Spring has implanted on its southern border, Turkey is struggling to recalibrate its regional policy, forming new alliances and ending others. Closer ties to the KRG forms one of the pil-

lars of this new regional policy. And due to internal factors as much as external, the KRG appears to be welcoming this rapprochement with its powerful patron. ●

Gonul Tol is the director of the Middle East Institute's Center for Turkish Studies in Washington.

Is a Kurdish State on the Horizon?

While a myriad of concerns exist, fresh geopolitical realities are furthering the Iraqi Kurdish cause, writes Daniel Brode.

Middle East Online

While the media is focused on Iranian nuclear talks, the war in Syria, and the elections in Egypt, Iraqi Kurdistan (KRG) is making headways in severing Baghdad's grip over its national ambitions, chiefly the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.

Still, numerous obstacles remain along with plenty of regional and international dissenters, not to mention the task of overcoming a web of Kurdish political rivalries. While a myriad of concerns exist, fresh geopolitical realities are furthering the Iraqi Kurdish cause. Those realities, which have manifested into a new pipeline deal with Turkey, are turning the KRG into an influential and crucial player in the Middle East, which could arguably propel a push for Kurdish independence – sooner rather than later.

While ethnic Kurds are spread out throughout Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, their Iraqi brethren have advanced the most in terms of achieving Kurdish-nationalist goals. Since 2005, Iraqi Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous region, and one that is secured by its own forces, relatively stable, and increasingly able to make unilateral foreign policy decisions - much to the chagrin of Baghdad. Moreover, the defeat of their premier threat, the Iraqi army, by the Americans in 2003, contributed immensely to Kurdish sovereignty. Then America's continued presence fostered a period of internal stability and growth, while the region's preoccupation with a ruthless Sunni and Shiite bloodletting enabled the KRG to entrench itself as a formidable player in Iraqi politics.

With that in mind, the issue of oil remains one of the main obstructions to Kurdish independence in Iraq. As a developing entity, the Kurds rely on their southern Arab neighbor to transfer and ship newly discovered oil reserves to foreign markets. The long running Arab and Kurdish dispute within Iraq continually jeopardizes existing oil agreements, notably leading to a recent halt of all oil traffic from Kurdistan. Iraq realizes that its hold over Iraqi Kurdistan lies mainly in controlling oil infrastructure and the market, thereby limiting Kurdish abilities to sell oil on its own - a major step towards independence from the Arabs.

Then late last month, it was reported that Ankara and Erbil agreed on energy pipelines from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkish terminals, two of which were made without Baghdad's con-

sent. The plan has enraged Baghdad not only for its timing - as Shiite Iraq remains in a diplomatic quarrel with Turkey, but also for its brazen and purposeful meddling in Iraq's internal affairs. But for the Kurds, the pipelines are a strategic breakthrough and likely to alleviate the long term problem of Baghdad's monopoly of infrastructure development in all of Iraq.

Building and securing pipelines in the Middle East is no easy task. Hence, the Turkish-Kurdish plan signals Ankara's faith in the KRG's ability to secure territory and enable the continuous flow of energy to meet Turkey's growing needs. That said, Iraqi Kurds are likely wary of Turkish intent, given the ongoing feud between Shiite Iraq and Sunni Turkey, plus the nature of Middle East power politics. To that point, the Kurds are used to being a chess piece in a region of competing powers, mainly Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria - all fighting for their own geostrategic ascendancy.

With that in mind, Kurdish alliances are often short-term and need-based, thus warming Turkish-Kurdish relations do not mean Turkey wants Iraqi Kurdish independence. Turkey has its own very violent Kurdish conflict, thus cooperation between Turks and Kurds is likely a strategy of increasing Ankara's influence in Iraq by taking advantage of the current political stalemate in Baghdad, while giving a sharp blow to its new regional rival, the Iranian aligned Maliki government. Nonetheless, the pipelines offer them concrete gains in the form of energy infrastructure, thus the Kurds will gladly play along with Turkey as long as their partnership mitigates their most pressing issue - removing themselves from the Iraqi vice.

That vice is widening, as Iraq's ability to control a stable, ethnically homogeneous, and increasingly influential and prosperous Kurdish entity wanes. The pipelines mark an important step forward for Iraqi Kurds; however, no step was possible if they had not laid the foundations that necessitate such a development. These are primarily two: stability within Iraqi Kurdistan and the increasingly hostile relationship between Iraq and Turkey. In the future, Iraq will undoubtedly seek to maintain its influence over its separatist northern regions, however, the Kurds are pressing ahead with independence from Baghdad - with or without their consent.

Daniel Brode is an Intelligence Analyst with Max Security Solutions, a geopolitical risk consulting firm based in the Middle East



Arab-Kurdish Rapprochement in Northern Iraqi Region

Despite recent history of violence, Sunni Arab and Kurdish politicians in Nineveh are beginning to cooperate.

By Ahmed Younis, Khalid Waleed, Mustafa Mohammed – Iraq
ICR Issue 393, 7 June 2012

Residents of Iraq's volatile Nineveh province say they are cautiously optimistic that their lives will get better because Sunni Arab and Kurdish politicians have decided to work with rather than against one another.

After Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was ousted in 2003, this northern province became one of the most dangerous places in the country, despite American, Iraqi and Kurdish efforts to crush the Sunni insurgents and al-Qaeda militants



Mosul, the administrative centre of Nineveh province. (Photo: Ahmed Younis)

who made Nineveh their base.

Security is still a serious issue, along with poor public services and high unemployment, and residents blame many of the problems on continued animosity between local Sunni Arab and Kurdish leaders.

The Arabs have accused Kurdish leaders and their "peshmerga" troops of abuses and discrimination against non-Kurds. They have also accused the Kurdish authorities of seeking to incorporate Nineveh into the Kurdistan Region to the north.

Kurdish politicians argue that it is their community that has been persecuted, and that Sunni Arab insurgents have killed several thousand of them in the provincial capital Mosul in recent years.

Sunni Arabs make up the majority of Nineveh's population, while the Kurds are the largest minority group there.

In the local elections held in 2005, Kurds gained 31 of the 41 seats on the provincial council, giving them control over local politics and security. In the 2009 elections, power swung towards the Sunni Arab population, whose representatives won 22 of 37 council seats.

Kurdish council members subsequently boycotted local government, a move which obstructed development plans for Nineveh.

Despite these frictions, signs emerged last month that relations between the two groups might be improving.

In a step aimed at reducing tension, provincial governor Atheel al-Nujaifi, a Sunni Arab, moved to give Kurdish council members a greater say. While the distribution of council seats will remain the same, decisions will now be reached by consensus rather than a straight vote.

"The differences of the past have disappeared," Nujaifi said. "A positive relationship with the Kurds will be good for Nineveh's people – both groups can now cooperate to provide a better standard of living for the people."

The governor insisted that Sunni Arab interests had not been compromised by the change.

"We have not abandoned the rights of our people," he said.

Dindar Abdullah, the Kurdish deputy head of the provincial council, said everyone in Nineveh stood to benefit from reconciliation.



Iraqi security patrol in Mosul. (Photo: Ahmed Younis)



Rubbish piles up in a corner of Mosul, reflecting the many tasks that face local government, assuming its members can work together. (Photo: Ahmed Younis)

"The interests of the people demand reconciliation among politicians," he said. "This reconciliation will be good for all of the province's citizens, whether they are Arabs, Kurds, Christian or anything else."

Nineveh is one of Iraq's most diverse provinces, and its population also includes Assyrian Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks and other minority groups.

The province is often beset by electricity shortages during the summer months, but in early June the Kurdish Regional Govt announced that it would provide power during this period.

Nujaifi attributed this offer to the political changes on the provincial council.

"This step is a consequence of the good relationship with the Kurds," he said.

Residents of Nineveh representing various ethnic and religious groups expressed hope that officials might now tackle some of the province's other problems.

"Officials will now work on setting up projects in the province instead of being preoccupied with arguments," Younis Saleh, a 34-year-old Sunni Arab shopkeeper, predicted.

Mervat Abdul Qadir, a 27-year-old Kurdish teacher, believes that recent political developments may mark a turning-point in the province's troubled recent history.

"I am optimistic that the time of violence is over. We will probably get better electricity this summer," she said.

Yunadim Tawfiq, a 56-year-old Christian civil servant, said people in Nineveh were able to get along despite ethnic differences, so their elected representatives should learn to do the same, ➔

► “When politicians become peaceful, our lives will become calm,” he said. “We Christians, Kurds and Arabs all live together; let them try to live together like us.”

Tawfiq also warned, however, that divisions among Nineveh’s political leaders could easily resurface.

“Anything could provoke one of them to become frustrated with another of them,” Tawfiq said. “Then what will happen? There will be more tensions and more arguments between them, and much more violence and hard times for

us.”

Some analysts argue that Nineveh has set a precedent for how rival groups in diverse ethnic areas can cooperate.

“Leaders should coexist peacefully and teach their people how to do so,” Osama Murtadha, a Baghdad-based political analyst, said. “Fortunately they have started doing it in Nineveh, although it’s taken a long time for officials there to learn that lesson. Fighting results in nothing but blood, death and destruction, not the prosperity, good standard of living and other things that people dream

of.”

Despite the more optimistic mood, Mosul is still the scene of recurring violence. Two civilians and a policeman were killed in a rocket attack on the city’s police headquarters on June 5, AFP news agency reported. The same day, two Iraqi army soldiers were killed and three civilians injured when an explosion targeted a military patrol in the city’s Rabia area.◆

Ahmed Younis, Khalid Waleed and Mustafa Mohammed are IWPR-trained reporters in Iraq.

The Economist

June 9th 2012

The Kurds and Turkey Massacre at Uludere

The political aftershocks of a killing of Kurds still reverberate

ULUDERE

TURKEY’S treatment of the Kurds has a grim new symbol. On December 28th Turkish warplanes bombed Kurdish smugglers crossing into Turkey from Iraq, killing 34. Most were teenagers; the youngest was 12. All came from a pair of villages in the mainly Kurdish township of Uludere. Their families had trouble separating the remains from mules who died. “We pieced them together the best we could and buried them,” says Abdurrahman Yurek, who lost his 16-year-old son.

The victims were apparently mistaken for militants of the separatist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). In fact, the village men are members of a state-paid Kurdish militia fighting the PKK. Members of a parliamentary inquiry who saw footage from Turkish drones say it shows that none of the villagers were armed and their mules were laden with diesel fuel. People were outraged. “This wasn’t a mistake, it was a planned massacre,” fumed Ertugrul Kurkcu, an MP from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

More likely, it was a horrible blunder. Turkey’s prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, admitted as much when he suggested the army may have suspected there were PKK fighters in the villagers’ midst. Yet many questions remain. Why were civilians targeted, who provided the intelligence and who gave the



orders? “Above all, why hasn’t the government apologised?” asks Hasim Encu, headman of a village where victims were buried.

Turkey’s Kurds feel ever more alienated, and sympathy for both the BDP and the PKK is rising. In a show of defiance, the victims’ headstones are draped with Kurdish banners. The villagers refuse to accept compensation until they get justice. Vahdettin Ozkan, the governor of Sirnak province, says the image of Mr Erdogan’s mildly Islamist AK party has suffered a “terrible blow”. An article in the Wall Street Journal quoted Pentagon officials saying that American drones spotted the caravan and alerted the Turks. American officials offered more surveillance to identify the convoy but

“Turkish officers instead directed the Americans who were remotely piloting the drone to fly it somewhere else.”

Mr Erdogan accused “foreign provocateurs” of exploiting the affair. He said that the BDP and the PKK were “necrophiles” seeking political gain and that journalists were servants of their cause. His message, as Sabah, a pro-government newspaper, put it, was “Shut up.” He has already claimed a victim: Ali Akel, a critic and veteran columnist for another pro-government paper, Yeni Safak, has been fired.

Mr Erdogan has now announced plans to ban abortion, saying that “every abortion is an Uludere”. Outraged feminists have taken to the streets. “The prime minister should stop being the custodian of vaginas,” said Aylin Nazliaka, a female MP from the opposition CHP party. “We used to have faith in the prime minister; now it’s all but dead,” says Mr Encu.

In truth, Mr Erdogan did more than any predecessor to tackle the Kurdish issue, becoming the first Turkish leader publicly to admit that the state made mistakes, and talking to the PKK. But the talks were scrapped last year. Mr Erdogan blames PKK attacks. The Kurds say he was not sincere, pointing to the arrests of thousands, including 38 BDP mayors. Leyla Zana, a BDP MP who spent ten years in jail, has just been sentenced to ten more years. Even Islamists are losing faith in Mr Erdogan. “The women of Uludere did not have abortions, they bore their children,” said Hidayet Sevkati Tuksal, a female theologian. “They ended up gathering their corpses.”◆

La question kurde dans la crise syrienne

par Pierre Fermigier
alliancegeostrategie.org

Pierre Fermigier, étudiant arabisant à Sciences Po Lyon et à l'Université Saint Joseph de Beyrouth (@Scriptio sur Twitter), nous propose son analyse de la position des Kurdes au cœur de la crise que connaît la Syrie depuis mars 2011. L'Alliance Géostratégique le remercie pour sa riche contribution qui permet de mieux comprendre un pan important des événements qui s'y déroulent.

Depuis le début du mouvement de contestation en Syrie, l'attention portée à la question kurde a été particulièrement faible dans la presse française. Pour l'essentiel, elle fut évoquée lorsque le président Bashar al-Assad accorda la nationalité arabe syrienne à plusieurs dizaines de milliers de Kurdes en avril 2011. Pourtant, la question est loin de se limiter à cette seule dimension. Outre l'enjeu de la participation de la population kurde au mouvement d'opposition au régime ba'athiste, les



Kurdes syriens se retrouvent au cœur du jeu des acteurs régionaux et internationaux. Situés principalement dans l'Est du pays, ceux-ci sont beaucoup moins nombreux que les Kurdes de Turquie et d'Irak — 8% de la population contre 20% en Irak. Vivant aux côtés de populations arabes tribales, ils font partie intégrante de l'équation syrienne depuis l'époque du mandat français. Cet article se propose de revenir sur leur situation dans le cadre de la crise qui frappe la Syrie depuis mars 2011.

UN RENOUVEAU DE LA COLLABORATION PKK – DAMAS ?

Le durcissement de la position turque à la fin de l'été 2011 a alimenté de nom-

breuses spéculations à propos d'un renouvellement de l'alliance entre le PKK et le régime syrien. Ce dernier possède une longue expérience de la collaboration avec le mouvement kurde, considéré comme une « organisation terroriste » par de nombreux pays occidentaux. Avant le spectaculaire rapprochement syro-turc des années 2000, les deux pays s'étaient retrouvés au bord la guerre en 1998 en raison du soutien de Damas au PKK. Le mouvement kurde disposait alors de camps d'entraînement dans la Bekaa libanaise et son leader, Abdullah Öcalan, résidait librement dans la capitale syrienne. En sacrifiant cette alliance et en expulsant Öcalan, la Syrie était parvenue à calmer son voisin turc, permettant de la sorte une coopération syro-turque qui s'est perpétuée jusqu'aux premiers mois de la crise.

Désormais, et à la faveur de la montée des tensions entre les autorités turques et syriennes, le PKK a pu être tenté de « repair its old alliance » avec Damas, comme l'écrit Ali Othman, chercheur dans un think-tank basé en Irak. Selon des accusations particulièrement récurrentes dans la presse turque, le mouvement kurde veut tirer avantage du conflit en tentant d'établir un gouvernement kurde autonome en Syrie. Le PKK essaierait en particulier de réunir les tribus kurdes, auxquelles il distribuerait des armes. En novembre 2011, réagissant aux craintes turques, un officiel du bureau des médias du PKK a annoncé que le mouvement kurde ne défendrait pas le « tyrannical bloody regime » du président al-Assad parce que des Kurdes syriens ont également à souffrir de la répression, avant d'ajouter que Damas avait, dans le passé, arrêté des douzaines de membres du PKK pour les livrer à la Turquie. En l'occurrence, la collaboration turco-syrienne contre le mouvement kurde semble s'être prolongée jusqu'en juillet 2011. À cette date, et dans le but de réduire la pression turque, la Syrie avait remis deux activistes du PKK à Ankara.

Malgré les dénégations du PKK, les faits ont semblé confirmer la thèse d'un rapprochement avec Damas. L'aile syrienne du PKK, le Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), a été accusé à plusieurs reprises d'enlèvements d'activistes kurdes syriens.

Le chercheur turc Oytun Orhan considère qu'en collaborant avec le régime, le PKK/PYD a cherché à profiter de sa faiblesse pour augmenter son influence sur les Kurdes syriens. Du point de vue du PYD, les événements qui secouent la Syrie divisent d'abord les Arabes. Saleh Mohammed Muslim, le leader du parti, aurait déclaré que la crise actuelle constituait « une chance historique » pour les Kurdes. De son côté, le régime syrien attendait du PKK/PYD qu'il utilise son influence pour empêcher les Kurdes syriens de participer aux mouvements de contestation. Pour Damas, le PKK est une arme pour se protéger des menaces intérieures comme extérieures. Faire planer la menace d'une autonomisation du Kurdistan syrien fait partie intégrante de son jeu kurde, en particulier vis-à-vis de la Turquie.

Parallèlement à plusieurs attaques ayant visé des figures kurdes syriennes proches de l'opposition, un changement de ton du PKK/PYD par rapport au régime ba'athiste a été observé dès septembre 2011. Peu après, le leader kurde syrien Meshaal Tammo, qui s'était prononcé en faveur de l'opposition, a été assassiné dans des conditions obscures le 7 octobre 2011. Ce respecté fondateur du Kurdistan Future Party était évoqué comme un « collaborateur » dans les communiqués du PKK, à l'instar des autres membres kurdes du Syrian National Council (SNC). Le 31 du même mois, lors d'une manifestation de soutien à Bashar al-Assad à Beyrouth, des drapeaux du PKK et des portraits d'Öcalan ont été brandis. Auparavant, le leader du PYD, Saleh Mohammed Muslim, a été autorisé à faire son retour en Syrie après un exil pluriannuel. Il aurait d'ailleurs participé à une réunion de l'opposition « tolérée par le régime » le 17 septembre 2011.

L'accumulation d'indices ne s'arrête pas là. Durant cette même période, c'est-à-dire au cours des quatre derniers mois de l'année 2011, le régime syrien a autorisé l'ouverture de six nouvelles écoles kurdes et aurait libéré la moitié des 640 militants du PYD jusque-là emprisonnés. Certaines sources locales signalent l'ouverture d'un camp accueillant 150 membres du PKK dans le district de Ra's al-'Ayn, qui jouxte la frontière turque dans la partie orientale de la

Syrie. D'autres rapports émanant du district de 'Afrîn, dans l'Ouest du pays, font état de barrages routiers tenus par les combattants du mouvement kurde le long des routes de campagne. Interrogé sur ce sujet, Aldar Xelil, un important membre du PYD, n'a pas nié l'existence de check-points tenus par le PKK. Le journaliste l'ayant rencontré rapporte que selon Xelil « the PKK also supports the Assad government and is actively exerting pressure on groups that take arms against the regime, including the FSA ». Outre l'assassinat de Meshaal Tammo, une attaque contre un important chef tribal kurde en janvier 2012 n'a fait que renforcer les suspicions. Anciennement proche du PKK, Abdullah Bedro s'était montré de plus en plus critique vis-à-vis de l'administration ba'athiste de la province de Qamishli. Si le PKK a d'abord tenté de nier sa participation, le parti a finalement dû admettre sa responsabilité en raison de la mort d'un de ses responsables au cours de l'attaque.

Dans un premier temps, la Turquie n'a pas été très loquace concernant le « développement de l'alliance » entre le régime syrien et le PKK. Au niveau des déclarations officielles, il semble que les autorités syriennes ont été les premières à ouvrir les hostilités. En octobre 2011, lors d'un entretien avec un journaliste, Bashar al-Assad a implicitement menacé la Turquie en brandissant la menace PKK, déclarant que « hostility will backfire » et que « Turkey could fall into a state similar to ours ». En réaction, le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Ahmet



Davutoğlu, n'a eu de cesse de répéter que Bashar al-Assad n'oserait pas commettre l'erreur de l'instrumentalisation du PKK une seconde fois. Durant son discours à Washington le 9 février 2012, le responsable turc a conjointement condamné le PKK et le régime ba'athiste comme des « outdated regimes and structures » issus de la Guerre froide. Enfin, la rencontre entre Cengiz Çandar, éditorialiste turc reconnu, et un officiel kurde irakien directement en contact avec le gouvernement syrien semble attester une nouvelle fois l'hypothèse d'une collaboration entre le mouvement kurde et Damas. Les interlocuteurs syriens du

responsable irakien lui auraient affirmé : « Playing the Kurdish card is not new for us, we know PKK very well ».

L'IMPOSSIBLE UNION DES MOUVEMENTS POLITIQUES KURDES SYRIENS

Historiquement, le mouvement national kurde en Syrie est caractérisé par sa faiblesse et sa désorganisation. On compte aujourd'hui une quinzaine de partis politiques kurdes syriens. Ce n'est qu'avec « l'intifada kurde » de 2004 que les Kurdes syriens, soit environ 8% de la population syrienne, ont ressenti la spécificité de leur cause par rapport au combat de leurs « semblables » en Turquie. Il est évident que la crise qui secoue aujourd'hui la Syrie possède le potentiel pour accroître le particularisme identitaire des Kurdes syriens. Malgré tout, les divisions demeurent et sont entretenues par des influences étrangères contradictoires. Sur le terrain de la mobilisation, il semblerait que les partis traditionnels ont été débordés par des organisations rassemblant la jeunesse kurde syrienne. Dans une tribune au Guardian, Thomas McGee considérait que le Kurdish Youth Movement (TKY), largement ignoré par les commentateurs, était « the largest Kurdish organisation operating in Syria », ajoutant que ce groupe est très actif depuis mars 2011 via son soutien aux manifestations pacifiques contre le régime. Cette participation populaire n'est pas nécessairement accompagnée par les partis kurdes.

Après un semblant d'union entre avril et octobre 2011, les partis kurdes syriens se sont éclatés en trois tendances. La première tendance, qui a accepté d'intégrer le SNC, à l'instar du parti de Meshaal Tammo, est minoritaire. Le deuxième groupe est incarné par le Syrian Kurdish National Council (KNC). Il a été formé en octobre 2011. Sous la direction d'Abdul Hakim Bashar, il rassemble la majorité des partis kurdes syriens. Sa charte fondatrice supporte la chute du régime, l'établissement d'un système fédéral en Syrie et une limitation de l'ingérence étrangère. Enfin, la troisième tendance se limite désormais au seul PYD, farouchement opposé à la moindre intervention étrangère, spécialement turque. Présent à la conférence fondatrice du KNC, ce parti a finalement rejoint le National Coordination Body (NCB), un groupe d'opposants intérieurs qui accepte le dialogue avec le régime ba'athiste.

DES INFLUENCES EXTÉRIEURES CONTRADICTOIRES

Le PKK et le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien (KGR) rivalisent pour influencer les partis kurdes syriens. Les figures kurdes irakiennes ont historiquement des liens étroits avec les mouvements politiques kurdes de Syrie. Le Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), dirigé par le président kurde de la République d'Irak Jalal Talabani, a été fondé dans la capitale syrienne en 1975 et a maintenu des bureaux à Damas et Qamishli durant trois décennies. Aujourd'hui l'aile syrienne du PUK, à savoir le Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria, est active au sein du KNC. Massoud Barzani, leader du Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) et pré-



sident du Kurdistan irakien autonome, n'est pas en reste. Il a lui-même nommé Abdul Hakim Bashar, leader du KNC, à la tête de l'affilié syrien de son parti. Outre les liens politiques, les liens tribaux et géographiques sont nombreux. De plus, l'effet d'entraînement de l'autonomisation du Kurdistan irakien semble bien réel. Malgré le décret présidentiel d'avril 2011 accordant la nationalité arabe syrienne à environ 200 000 Kurdes de Syrie jusque-là apatrides, les revendications persistent. D'un autre côté, les liens transnationaux entre Kurdes syriens et turcs ont été solidifiés lors de la présence du PKK en Syrie sous Hafez al-Assad. Là aussi, les relations tribales et familiales entre Kurdes syriens et turcs sont nombreuses, ceci s'ajoutant à une forte proximité culturelle autour d'un dialecte commun, le kurmanji. Il n'empêche que pour le PKK, dont plus d'un tiers des membres ont des origines syriennes, il semble que les Kurdes syriens représentent avant tout des bras sans que leurs aspirations ne soient réellement prises en compte dans la stratégie du mouvement.

Pour compliquer un peu plus l'équation, il faut revenir sur les relations entre la Turquie et le KRG. En effet, après s'être montrée très hostile face à l'autonomisation du Kurdistan irakien, Ankara a entamé un profond rapprochement économique et politique avec Erbil à partir de 2007. Pour le KRG, ce fut une aubaine car le Kurdistan

irakien ne produit presque rien et dépend largement des revenus pétroliers transférés par Bagdad. Cependant, l'ouverture commerciale vers la Turquie a créé des obligations politiques pour Massoud Barzani, lui-même réputé très proche d'Israël. Bien qu'ayant préalablement soutenu l'attitude non-interventionniste des responsables politiques kurdes syriens, les élites kurdes irakiennes ont vite réalisé que la jeunesse kurde se montrait de plus en plus critique vis-à-vis des partis établis, une jeunesse que le KRG ne peut s'aliéner durablement. De plus, face à la reprise des activités du PKK et au refus des Kurdes syriens d'intégrer le SNC, Barzani devait faire quelque chose pour satisfaire son allié turc, qui ne veut pas d'un mouvement nationaliste kurde incontrôlable en Syrie. Ainsi, sous l'égide de Barzani, une conférence a été organisée à Erbil en janvier 2012, dans le but de rassembler toutes les forces politiques kurdes syriennes en un



front uni qui accorderait son support au SNC. L'initiative a porté ses fruits et les relations entre le SNC et le KNC ont été pacifiées. Cependant, malgré des contacts persistants entre les deux groupes, l'incapacité des leaders du SNC à garantir le respect de revendications kurdes semble avoir gelé toute tentative de rapprochement.

De son côté, le PKK a adopté une posture critique à l'égard du président Barzani, sous la ligne dure de Murat Karayılan qui dirige le mouvement depuis les montagnes Qandil du Nord de l'Irak. Suite à la conférence d'Erbil, le mouvement kurde a critiqué l'initiative en ces termes : « it is obvious that the main objective is to decrease the impact of PYD, around which masses were organized in Western Kurdistan ». En réponse, les autorités kurdes irakiennes ont tenté de blâmer le PYD, qui aurait renoncé à participer à la conférence à la dernière minute. Contrairement à ce qu'il tente de faire croire aux autorités turques, Massoud Barzani n'est pas entièrement

capable de contenir le PKK dans le territoire irakien et de modérer les revendications des Kurdes syriens. Il est face à un dilemme politique complexe : poursuivre une politique de limitation de l'influence du PKK dans les zones kurdes tout en convainquant les Kurdes qu'il défend leurs droits. En novembre dernier, il avait refusé de participer au combat contre le PKK à la demande d'Ankara, avant d'affirmer ne pas soutenir la lutte armée pour la défense des droits des Kurdes en Turquie. Le rôle de médiateur, que veut jouer Barzani, ressemble de plus en plus à un exercice d'équilibrisme.

ISLAM POLITIQUE ET TURQUIE VS. NATIONALISME KURDE

Avant de revenir sur les craintes des Kurdes syriens face à l'influence croissante de la Turquie sur le SNC, il faut revenir sur les propres craintes des élites kurdes irakiennes. Selon Denise Natali, ces dernières ne sont pas réellement enthousiastes à l'idée d'un changement de régime à Damas. Elles craignent plus particulièrement l'installation d'un gouvernement mené par les Frères musulmans syriens. Cette réticence s'explique en partie par le défi que leur pose l'islam politique, dont l'influence croît sensiblement auprès des Kurdes irakiens. En décembre 2011, des troubles ont impliqué le parti de Barzani et le Kurdistan Islamic Union, illustrant la montée des tensions autour de l'islam politique au Kurdistan irakien. Il n'est pas inutile de préciser qu'un renforcement des sunnites syriens ne serait pas une bonne chose pour les revendications territoriales des Kurdes irakiens. En effet, ces derniers disputent actuellement des territoires aux sunnites irakiens, dont ils tentent de se démarquer via l'insistance sur les racines zoroastriennes des Kurdes et la latinisation de l'alphabet. Tout cela doit être mis en parallèle avec le succès croissant de l'islam politique auprès des Kurdes turcs, comme l'attestent les résultats des dernières élections municipales en Turquie.

Le PYD partage l'inquiétude des élites kurdes irakiennes. Son opposition à la Turquie est en partie motivée par la crainte de voir l'idéologie des Frères musulmans prendre le pas sur le nationalisme kurde en Syrie. Dans un article de mars 2012, le chercheur turc Hamid Ünver a rapporté les propos du chef du PYD qui expliquait que « foreign intervention in Syria will open the door for Turkey and that is only in the best interest of Muslim Brotherhood [...] We won't work



with anyone who supports Turkish intervention in Syria ». Il est relativement difficile de lui donner tort puisqu'un nouveau régime syrien sous patronage turc ignorera vraisemblablement les revendications kurdes. Largement dépendant des investissements turcs pour reconstruire le pays, il n'aura d'autre choix que celui de collaborer avec la Turquie contre les mouvements kurdes. En effet, l'existence d'un deuxième gouvernement kurde autonome est inconcevable du point de vue d'Ankara. Concernant l'éventualité d'une intervention turque en Syrie, le leader du PKK s'est montré particulièrement clair. Après avoir affirmé que la Turquie préparait une intervention en Syrie, il a prévenu que si « the Turkish state intervenes against our people in western Kurdistan, all of Kurdistan will turn into a war zone ». De son côté, le chef du PYD a annoncé que « Syrian Kurds would defend Syria as "Syrian patriots" against a Turkish intervention ». Les menaces ont le mérite de la clarté.

Les craintes d'une marginalisation des Kurdes syriens, malgré la présence de personnalités issues de leur rang au sein du SNC, n'apparaissent pas complètement infondées. Elles ont été étayées par le mauvais traitement infligé par les autorités turques à un activiste kurde syrien, Yilmaz Saeed. Représentant du Kurdish Youth Movement et membre du SNC jusqu'au début de l'année 2012, celui-ci a été arrêté alors qu'il tentait de se rendre à la conférence du « groupe des amis de la Syrie » à Istanbul. Il lui est désormais impossible de se rendre en Turquie pour assister aux réunions de l'opposition syrienne, ce qui lui a fait dire que le SNC « could be worse than the Baath party ». Les récentes déclarations des leaders des différents groupes d'opposition syriens, niant l'existence d'un Kurdistan syrien et refusant l'idée d'un fédéralisme, n'ont rien fait pour dissiper les appréhensions des mouvements politiques kurdes syriens. Dans un très récent rapport, Omar Hossino et Ilhan Tanir écrivaient à propos du Syrian National Council et du National Coordination Body : « Both support what they say is 'a just democratic solution to the Kurdish issue' but both make sure to state that this solution is within the unity of the country's land and people which

does not contradict that Syria is part and parcel of the Arab world ».

Enfin, le PYD aurait précocement entamé des discussions avec Moscou afin d'empêcher une intervention turque en Syrie, dont il craint qu'elle ne mène à une « Turkish dominance over Kurdish areas in Syria similar to the establishment of Turkish influence in the Kurdistan region in post-invasion Iraq ». Selon le leader du parti, la Russie ne serait pas opposée à une forme d'autonomie kurde en Syrie. Le 30 avril dernier, Moscou aurait d'ailleurs envoyé une délégation auprès du PKK à Alep. Depuis 2008, la Russie est devenue un important partenaire commercial d'Ankara, avec qui les relations se sont réellement améliorées. Cependant, dans le passé, les Russes ont su se servir du PKK pour faire pression sur la Turquie, notamment pour empêcher un soutien turc aux insurgés tchétchènes. Dans l'équation syrienne, cet élément ne doit pas être négligé.

ENTRE UNE CONCILIATION AVEC L'OPPOSITION ARABE ET L'AUTONOMISATION DE FACTO DU « KURDISTAN SYRIEN »

À l'issue d'une réunion à Qamishly à la fin du mois d'avril, le KNC a annoncé la suspension d'une partie de ses revendications, notamment celle du droit à l'autodétermination, tout en maintenant la demande d'une reconnaissance constitutionnelle de la nation kurde et de la langue kurde comme langue officielle en Syrie. Selon le journaliste Adib Abdulmajid, il demeure que « the Interim Political Agenda emphasizes the independence of national opposition parties and the need to protect their decisions from the influence of other regional forces — such as Turkey — which might affect the potential democratic transition in Syria ». La coalition kurde a certainement compris que la division de l'opposition ne servait que les intérêts du régime. Toutefois, on peut également faire l'hypothèse que des pressions américaines ne sont pas étrangères à ce revirement inattendu, et qui ne fait pas l'unanimité auprès des activistes kurdes. Quelques jours après cette annonce, une délégation du KNC a été invitée à Washington par le département d'État américain, une première dans l'histoire du mouvement national kurde de Syrie. Menée par Abdul Hakim Bashar, elle s'est entretenue avec des membres du Congrès, mais également avec le conseiller pour la Sécurité natio-



nale, Tom Donilon, et l'ancien ambassadeur américain en Syrie, Robert Ford. Sous l'égide de Washington, il semble qu'une nouvelle « pacification » des relations soit en cours entre le SNC et le KNC. Elle s'est matérialisée après une réunion commune en Bulgarie à la fin du mois de mai, à l'issue de laquelle les deux groupes ont publié un communiqué commun condamnant le récent massacre de Houla. Toutefois, le leader du PYD a récemment évoqué une autre piste pour expliquer cette visite du KNC à Washington. Selon lui, lors des discussions, les autorités américaines « auraient souligné la nécessité d'une union entre les Kurdes » incluant le PYD. En l'occurrence, le chef du gouvernement en exil du Kurdistan occidental, Jawad Mella, a effectivement annoncé la tenue prochaine d'une conférence d'union nationale devant réunir tous les partis politiques et associations kurdes actifs en Syrie.

La présence du PYD à ce rassemblement n'est pas totalement acquise. Malgré l'existence d'un comité du KCN chargé des relations avec le PYD, des affrontements entre des militants des deux organisations ont été signalés au cours du mois de mai dans la ville de Qamishli. Afin d'éviter de nouveaux clashes, le KNC a annoncé le changement du lieu des prochaines manifestations. Bien que certains activistes kurdes accusent le PYD de suivre les injonctions du régime syrien, cela est loin d'être une certitude. En effet, plusieurs incidents meurtriers sont récemment venus contredire, ou au moins amender, la thèse d'une alliance entre Damas et le PKK/PYD. En février, des combats auraient même opposé des membres du PYD aux services secrets de l'Armée de l'air syrienne à 'Ayn al-'Arab. Des officiels du parti kurde ont déclaré que les hommes du régime étaient venus enlever le fils de Saleh Mohammed Muslim. Le journaliste Wladimir van Wilgenburg, qui suit la question kurde, fait l'hypothèse crédible d'une simple alliance tactique entre Damas et le

PKK/PYD. Selon lui, le régime syrien « simply ignores PKK activities from time to time to focus its energies on the Arab opposition ».

Or, des informations concordantes font état d'un développement des activités du PKK et de PYD dans les régions de peuplement kurde en Syrie. Dans les zones désertées par les forces du régime et proches de la frontière turque, il semble que les Kurdes ont commencé à établir leurs propres municipalités. Le 18 mai dernier, le ministre turc de l'Intérieur Naim Şahin mettait en garde contre la perte de contrôle par le régime syrien de plusieurs villes frontalières de la Turquie, désormais gérées par des militants du PKK. Selon certaines rumeurs, le PYD se préparerait lentement à prendre le pouvoir sur les régions majoritairement kurdes, ce qui expliquerait les tentatives du régime syrien pour contrer les activités du PYD et arrêter ses membres. Le journaliste kurde Adib Abdulmajid rapporte la création d'une organisation réunissant des groupes de jeunes kurdes armés par le PYD, dont le but affiché est la protection du voisinage. Cette nouvelle organisation constitue très certainement le plus important groupe armé kurde syrien. Notons tout de même l'existence de l'obscur Free Efrin Military Brigade, dont on ne sait pas si elle fait partie de la Free Syrian Army (FSA) ou si elle résulte d'une scission au sein du PKK. Plusieurs politiciens kurdes voient dans cette création une « veiled threat » contre le KNC et tous les autres partis kurdes. Il est tout à fait probable que le PYD ait décidé de montrer sa force sur le terrain dans l'optique de la prochaine conférence nationale devant réunir les mouvements kurdes syriens.

Quoi qu'il en soit, il faut rester attentif aux réactions du régime ba'thiste et de la Turquie face à cette réactivation de la question kurde en Syrie. L'attitude de Damas face à l'« autonomisation » rampante des zones de peuplement kurde constituera un véritable révélateur de sa capacité à agir loin des centres de pouvoir. Quant à Ankara, il reste à voir jusqu'où les autorités turques sont prêtes à aller pour empêcher la création d'une deuxième base arrière pour le PKK.



Saddam's brutality still haunts Iraqi Kurds

Relatives and friends share their grief as bodies of 730 victims of infamous Anfal campaign are reburied.

Jane Arraf

Chem Chemal, Iraq - In the framed photo Bahar Mohammad holds, her brother Salam is eternally young - smiling against a photo studio backdrop of the Kurdish region's waterfalls, a cartoon bluebird painted in the trees.

Like tens of thousands of other young Kurdish men, his fate was to be shot and buried in the sand - to be unearched 24 years later from a mass grave in the desert of southern Iraq and brought home.

"I feel as if he's among these bodies," said Bahar, as she attended a recent ceremony to rebury 730 bodies brought back from Diwaniya province. But like all the other relatives here, she can't be certain which is his body. A surviving witness from the Qadirqaram district where most of the victims were taken says he saw Salam killed.

"The Kurdish adviser to the regime told him he should surrender and nothing would happen to him," she says. Instead they loaded more than 90 men onto military vehicles and she never saw her younger brother again. Bahar is 57 years old now, but like almost all the survivors, the pain is as fresh as it was two decades ago.

Bodies of Kurds killed during Saddam era found in Iraq

Forensic experts have extracted DNA from the bones of the victims and blood samples from relatives. But matching them is a massive effort, one neither the Kurdish nor Iraqi government has the resources to do.

And the effort to exhume more of the almost 300 mass graves the Kurdish government believes exists is mired in post-war rivalries and ethnic tension.

The unearched bodies were brought to a new monument in Chem Chemal for victims of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's Anfal campaign during the war with Iran.

Estimates of the numbers of Iraqi Kurds killed range from 50,000 from international human rights groups, to the Kurds' own figure of 182,000. Iraqi security forces destroyed thousands of Kurdish villages and displaced more than a million people.

At a recent ceremony in Suleymaniah, relatives of the missing filled in to sit in the hot sun. The sobs of old women in black contained decades of grief. Behind them, elegant young women in sequined abayas and the



An estimated 500,000 Iraqis, many of them Kurds, lie in unmarked graves, but identifying them is a difficult task
[Reuters]

red and white sashes of the Barzani clan dabbed their eyes.

Anfal campaign

In the summer of 1983, Iraqi forces rounded up thousands of Barzanis, took them south and shot them in retribution for tribal leaders' alignment with Iran.

The Anfal campaign that followed was named after a Koranic verse regarding the spoils of war. It also encompassed other minority groups in the north of Iraq, including Assyrian Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, and Sabaeen, but the vast majority of the victims were Kurds. Human Rights Watch estimates that 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds were murdered by Iraqi forces.

Ahmad Ali Hammed was 16 years old and in jail when his mother, two sisters and two brothers were taken away. He wanders among the rows of flag-covered coffins, wearing a long shirt on which he has written their names and ages. His youngest brother was eight years old.

"I'm the only one who survived in my family," Hammed says. He believes the Iraqi government doesn't want the bodies to be recovered because it will be an international reminder of what the Kurds have suffered.

Another young woman, among a line of relatives held back by riot police as the coffins were being driven past, sobbed as she held a framed photo of the father she never knew. She was one year old when he was taken away.

Kurdish authorities are trying to get wider international recognition that the mass killings constituted genocide. Embroiled in a fight with federal government in Baghdad over land and resources, they are also sending the message that they will never be as powerless again.

"Today there are political factions in Iraq making every effort to maintain the impact of Arabisation, Anfal, and massacres. That is why we have to be very vigilant," Nechervan Barzani, the Kurdish prime minister, told those attending the ceremony.

Kurdish authorities say they know of almost 300 other mass graves. Excavating them, though, requires approval from the federal government's ministry of human rights. In addition to returning the bodies to their loved ones, they want to bring former regime officials involved in the massacres to justice.

Saddam Hussein was convicted and hung in an unrelated case before being sentenced to death for the Anfal campaign. His cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, who supervised much of the killing, was convicted of genocide and executed.

"These crimes are committed by someone, and we believe they must be punished to discourage others," said Sabah Ahmed Mohammad, the Minister of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs in the regional Kurdish government. "In other places in the world they found people even after 60 years and brought them to justice."

Matching DNA samples

In addition to former regime officials, among the most controversial cases are Kurdish collaborators with Iraqi security forces whom survivors say are known but have not been arrested.

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) is working with the Iraqi and Kurdish governments on a pilot project that would identify some of the recovered bodies. But properly exhuming the graves, matching DNA samples with living relatives, and creating a co-ordination centre could take years.

"It's an incredibly complicated and

➤ incredibly expensive system," says Jonathan McCaskill, Iraq director for the non-governmental organisation. He says the ICMP has taken a small number of the DNA samples from the 730 bodies recovered recently for testing in Sarejevo. "It will give Iraq a chance to evaluate whether this is something they want to do in the long term."

The Iraqi ministry of human rights estimates that 500,000 Iraqis are buried in mass graves, from the 1980s up to the victims of Iraq's sectarian violence just two years ago. Mass graves near Halabja, where the Saddam regime used chemical weapons against the Kurds, are still contaminated.

In the absence of witnesses, many of the families will likely never know what happened to their loved ones or where they are buried. The bodies unearthed from the



Mahari desert were placed in temporary graves at Chem Chemal, each flag-draped coffin bearing a number as it was lowered into the ground.

The victims will be released to their families if DNA testing confirms any of their identities,

but there are many more bodies believed to be still buried in the same location.

"The thing about Mahari, it's a vast area and there are lots of mass graves located in that area," said McCaskill. □

Thousands of members of the Barzani clan were killed for their tribal leaders' alignment with Iran
[Jane Arraf/Al Jazeera]



17 June 2012

Syrian Kurdish Factions Meet in Erbil to End Hostility

By ADIB ABDULMAJID
rudaw.net

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands – Sponsored by the office of the Kurdistan Region President, a joint meeting between delegations of the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) was held in Erbil on last week.

The main focus of the meeting was a recent rift arising between both parties where their followers came into clashes with each other in Kurdish towns in Syria.

Hamid Derbandi, head of the Public Relations' Office in the President's office and KRG representative in the meeting, emphasized the importance of finding a common ground between the KNC and the PYD whereby the future of the Kurds can be decide in post-Assad Syria.

Abdulhamid Darwish, head of the KNC delegation, said the KNC and the PYD have to form a united Kurdish front to face the challenges of the current phase, "because its consequences will inevitably reflect on the future of the Kurdish issue in Syria."

"The main condition to speed up a convergence between the KNC and the PYD is to get rid of the party ego on both sides; otherwise all the efforts to find the needed common ground between them will be useless and will lead nowhere," Darwish said.

Darwish said that all political divisions among Kurdish protesters in Syria must be prevented, "because if we allow that, this issue might develop and the



Kurdish protesters march in Qamishli in support of a "democratic Syria and self-rule". Photo from PYDROJAVA.NET

clashes could escalate and lead to dangerous paths."

After members of the KNC and PYD clashed with each other earlier this month, leaders of both sides released statements and accused each other of provocations.

"Any agreement must be practically implemented on the ground, instead of issuing theoretical statements after every incident or violation," said Darwish.

For his part, Abdussalam Ahmad, head of the PYD delegation, stressed the need to overcome all obstacles that may prevent the unity of the Kurdish discourse in Syria.

"Overcoming the current rift between the Kurdish political movements is an urgent necessity in this critical and crucial stage of Syria's history," Ahmad said.

At the end of their meeting in Erbil the delegates signed an agreement that calls for the formation of a joint supreme committee to coordinate Kurdish political and diplomatic affairs, and draw plans based

on the national aspirations of the Kurdish people in Syria.

The final agreement read that the plan for the Kurds of Syria is "embodied in ousting the Assad regime and building a new democratic, pluralistic and multinational state, and to achieve the ambitions of our people in a constitutional recognition of the Kurds as an indigenous nation and resolving the Kurdish issue on fair and democratic bases."

The delegates also suggested the creation of local watchdogs to monitor all activities across the Kurdish areas of Syria.

The Popular Protection Committees –PYD's armed youth were involved in a recent shootout with members of the KNC, but the Erbil meeting clearly stated that "Abolishing all kinds of armed manifestations in the Kurdish regions and towns is urgently required. Forming unarmed protection committees in the Kurdish areas will follow that, jointly between the KNC and the PYD."

Yilmaz Saeed, a member of the KNC, told Rudaw that the agreement touches essential points, and is considered an important step.

"This critical stage of the Syrian uprising calls for Kurdish unity," Saeed said. "So we have to overcome the narrow partisan mentality to rise to the level of the aspirations of the Kurdish people."

Saeed said that Kurdish parties should act as a means to fulfill the Kurdish people's legitimate rights in Syria.

"They should also recognize that there is no substitute to the dialogue and negotiations, and this agreement could be considered as the first serious step towards a Kurdish unification in Syria and to obtain federalism for Syria's Kurdistan," Saeed concluded. □

The New York Times JUNE 10, 2012

Syrian Forces Shell Cities as Opposition Picks Leader

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

ISTANBUL — Syrian government forces shelled rebel strongholds across the country on Sunday, opponents of the government said, while the main opposition group in exile, the Syrian National Council, chose a new leader.

The shelling struck at targets in and around Homs in central Syria and near al-Heffa, just east of the port of Latakia, as well as other locations, opposition groups said. The violence continues despite a United Nations-brokered cease-fire, which has so far had little effect on the conflict, and the presence of international monitors.

The new leader of the council, announced on Sunday in Istanbul, is Abdelbaset Sieda, a Kurdish professor of Arabic and philosophy who promised the organization would be overhauled.

“We will expand and extend the base of the council,” he told reporters at a news conference, “so it will take on its role as an umbrella under which all the opposition will seek shade.”

The Syrian National Council, formed last fall, has been plagued by infighting and has been criticized as ineffective, amounting to little more than a front for the long-exiled Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood with little influence inside the country. Its top post was supposed to rotate every three months, but Bourhan Ghalioun, another exiled academic, held on to it until an outcry over his most recent re-election in May, especially from inside Syria, prompted him to step down.

Council members involved in the process hailed Mr. Sieda’s election as proof that the Syrian opposition was committed to upholding democratic principles and the idea of a “leaderless revolution.” He ran unopposed.

“The ideal leadership of the council is not through one person — because no one is elected and has actual legitimacy,” said Bassma Kodmani, a member of the executive committee. Until such time as there are free elections in Syria, she said, the choice of the president of the council should be made by

Syrians looked at the remains of a destroyed military tank on the outskirts of Idlib.



Abdulbaset Sieda *Osman Orsal/Reuters*

consensus.

“The revolution does not want to see a big leader, or one individual who leads everything,” Ms. Kodmani said. “Personalization leads to polarization.”

Still, critics both in the wider membership of the council and outside the group said Mr. Sieda had emerged as the consensus choice precisely because he represents no one, either inside Syria or out. Both the Muslim Brotherhood and liberals in the council concluded that he did not pose a threat or provide an advantage to any bloc within the council, they said, but for the same reasons he will have little real authority, and the bickering will continue.

“The Muslim Brotherhood, especially, does not want a strong person, neither someone with political strength nor a strong personality,” said Hasan Kasem, a young liberal activist.

Mr. Sieda, who turns 56 on Tuesday, has lived in Sweden for the past 17 years, and calls himself an independent. As a Kurd, he belongs to a minority that was oppressed for years by the Syrian government. Most Kurdish opposition groups do not take part in the council because it has not promised to back a federal government structure for Syria that would give Kurdish areas some measure of autonomy.

At the news conference, Mr. Sieda defended his long record of opposition to the governments of President Bashar

al-Assad and his father, Hafez. To counter criticism of the council, he noted that the executive committee had just added three members with experience running local leadership councils who had fled Syria recently. Answering complaints that not enough humanitarian aid was being sent to areas affected by the conflict, Mr. Sieda said the council would soon distribute \$3 million worth of aid inside Syria.

Sunday was the sixth straight day that al-Heffa and neighboring villages were hit with rocket, mortar and tank shelling, opposition groups said. But the official news agency, SANA, gave a different account, saying that “armed terrorist groups” — its label for all opponents of the government — looted and burned public property in al-Heffa and killed residents.

Farther south in Qusair, near the border with Lebanon, activists said an attack by government forces killed at least six people on Sunday. They said that Homs, about 20 miles away, also sustained heavy bombardment for the third straight day, with several dozen people killed in the area over the weekend.

“Each day is more than the next,” said Salim Kabani, an activist reached via Skype. “It is the heaviest since the beginning of the revolution, and includes all kinds of weapons — artillery, mortars, helicopters.”

Mr. Kabani said that all the soldiers at a small military base in a village called Ghanto near Homs defected to the rebel side on Sunday, and that government helicopters bombed the base soon after the soldiers fled.

Claims from either the opposition or the government about events in Syria are difficult to confirm independently, because the Syrian government sharply limits the number of foreign journalists allowed in to the country and where they can go.

Worldview

Fareed Zakaria



TO READ MORE BY
FAREED ZAKARIA, GO TO
time.com/zakaria

The Case Against Intervention in Syria

Regime change is overdue, but a slow squeeze is a smarter solution than war

IN SYRIA, THE BRUTAL REGIME OF Bashar Assad is testing the proposition that repression works. The massacre of civilians in Houla is only the latest example of what appears to be a strategy of making no concessions and using maximum force. To the Assad regime's way of thinking, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi erred by hesitating, emboldening the opposition and sowing doubts among their supporters. So far, Assad's strategy has worked. Kofi Annan's mission, which appears to be based on the idea that Assad will negotiate his own departure, seems utterly doomed. The U.S., the Western world, indeed the civilized world, should attempt instead to dislodge the Assad regime. Is there a smart way to do it?

For a number of reasons, military intervention is unlikely to work in Syria. Start with the geography: unlike Libya, Syria is not a vast country with huge tracts of land where rebels can retreat, hide and be resupplied. Syria is roughly one-tenth the size of Libya but has three times as many people. Partly for this reason, the Syrian rebellion has not been able to take control of any significant part of the country. Nearly half of all Syrians live in or around two cities, Damascus and Aleppo, both of which seem to remain under the regime's grip. Sporadic night attacks in other places recur, but they don't expand.

Nor is it clear that the Syrian opposition is capable of unity. Popular opposition to Assad is neither broad-based nor organized. The Syrian National Council, the umbrella group of organized opposition, appears unable to unify behind a leader, agenda or set of goals. Rima Fleihan, a grassroots activist who escaped from Syria to organize the opposition,

quit the council, telling the *New York Times*, "They fight more than they work."

The geopolitics of military intervention is also unattractive. Whereas in Egypt and even Libya, all the major and regional powers were on the side of intervention or passively accepted it, in Syria that is not the case. Iran and Russia have both maintained strong ties to the Assad regime. Were the Western powers



to intervene, it would quickly become a proxy struggle, with great-power-funded militias on both sides. That would likely result in a protracted civil war with civilian casualties that would dwarf the current numbers. To many observers the situation in Syria looks less like Libya and more like Lebanon, where a decades-long civil war resulted in over 150,000 deaths and a million displaced people.

Also absent in Syria is any sign of high-level dissent. Major defections from

the army, intelligence services or business community are so far nonexistent. The regime was set up by Bashar Assad's father, Hafez Assad. The family is Alawite, a Shi'ite sect that represents only 12% of Syrians, and the key military and intelligence posts belong to Alawites. These loyalists stick with the regime because they know that in a post-Assad Syria, they would likely be massacred. But Assad has also been able to stop defections among the Sunni and Christian members of the ruling elite, presumably with a mixture of threats and bribes.

That's where the regime might be vulnerable. Syria is not an oil state; the regime does not have unlimited resources with which to buy off elites. Were truly crippling sanctions to be put in place, including an embargo on energy, it is likely that the regime would begin to crack. That might result in a brokered exit for the Assad family or a full-scale collapse of the regime. It seems unlikely that the regime could persist without some source of cash.

The Obama Administration is rightly trying to approach this problem with as many allies as possible. It is also correct in trying to persuade Russia, if not to join the coalition, then at least to ease its objections to sanctions. Moscow is unlikely to take that step

until it concludes that the Assad regime is doomed and that Russia is better off positioning itself for whatever comes next. But even without Russia and Iran, real sanctions and embargoes will slowly bankrupt the Syrian regime—and hasten its end.

It would be morally far more satisfying to do something dramatic that would topple Assad tomorrow. But starving his regime might prove the more effective strategy.

ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER MUNDAY FOR TIME; ASSAD: SAJJAH MALKAWI—GETTY IMAGES

« Le CNS doit s'ouvrir à tous les opposants »

Bassma Kodmani, porte-parole du Conseil national syrien, redoute un glissement de la situation vers la guerre civile

Entretien

Le Conseil national syrien (CNS) devait se retrouver samedi 9 et dimanche 10 juin 2012 à Istanbul pour une réunion cruciale destinée à désigner un successeur au président sortant, Burhan Ghalioun, qui avait présenté sa démission en mai à la suite de vives critiques sur son immobilisme. Il devrait être remplacé par Abdel Basset Sieda, un intellectuel indépendant, seul membre kurde du bureau exécutif du CNS.

Alors que massacres et attentats se multiplient, menaçant de plonger la Syrie dans une guerre civile totale et incontrôlable, le CNS, critiqué pour son éloignement du terrain et ses divisions intestines, est à un moment crucial de sa jeune histoire. Son incapacité à incarner une relève risque d'accélérer le processus de désintégration de la Syrie et de sa société. Bassma Kodmani, porte-parole du CNS, s'en explique. **Le Conseil national syrien traverse-t-il une crise grave.**

Nous sommes dans une phase assez difficile. La formule pensée à la naissance du Conseil était relativement équilibrée en termes de représentativité entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur, entre les formations politiques traditionnelles et les mouvements sur le terrain, entre les partis et les personnalités indépendantes. Mais on a construit quelque chose qui ressemblait plus à une structure statique qu'à un moteur qui pouvait s'adapter, s'élargir et intégrer au fur et à mesure que la situation le requiert.

On a trop pensé en termes politiques et pas assez opérationnels. On a passé trop de temps à faire, de savants équilibres entre les uns et les autres et pas assez à dire qui fait le travail et comment on le fait. La révolution n'a pas besoin de jeux politiques partisans, elle a besoin d'assistance humanitaire, d'aide



médicale, d'argent, de bons relais médiatiques, de soutien diplomatique. C'est ce que nous demande la population.

La légitimité du CNS ne viendra pas de sa représentativité, qui reste virtuelle, mais de sa performance. C'est en étant efficace qu'on sera légitime. Il y a beaucoup d'immobilisme. On avance mais bien en deçà de ce qui est nécessaire. Nous sommes même à la traîne.

L'échec du Conseil ne risque-t-il pas de porter un coup fatal à la révolution, faute d'alternative à Bachar Al-Assad ?

Le Conseil est face à une épreuve, un test de crédibilité. La crise que nous avons vécue avec la démission de Burhan Ghalioun est un signe que le CNS doit s'ouvrir et se réformer. Il nous faut créer un cadre plus souple où tous les courants soient représentés et se regroupent autour de missions humanitaires, diplomatiques voire militaires.

Nous allons d'abord nous mettre d'accord sur une personnalité consensuelle pour remplacer Burhan Ghalioun. Mais le vrai défi de ce nouveau président sera de veiller à la restructuration et à la réforme du Conseil, de manière à ce qu'il soit plus efficace et capable d'intégrer des nouveaux venus.

Lesquels ?

Tous. Le Conseil n'appartient à personne. S'il devenait l'apanage de certains, ce serait un échec. C'est

un cadre national dans lequel chacun doit pouvoir trouver sa place. Cela va de certains mouvements de coordination sur le terrain à la Coordination nationale [pour le changement démocratique] en passant par des individus. Tout cela est très récent et fluide.

On reproche souvent au CNS d'être le jouet des islamistes...

Les minorités sont représentées, elles participent à la révolution. Il y a des chrétiens, des druzes, des alaouites, des Kurdes. Mais les Frères musulmans étant les plus organisés au sein du CNS, ils arrivent mieux à influencer sa ligne politique. C'est comme ce qui se passe en Égypte et en Tunisie. Il va falloir que les forces laïques se regroupent pour peser. Or, il y a une réticence à former des blocs politiques tant que la révolution est en cours. Mais peut-être qu'elle va durer.

Où en est-on de la participation des Kurdes au CNS ?

Le Conseil national kurde [CNK] n'a pas rejoint le CNS pour le moment. Il avait des demandes assez radicales comme l'autodétermination ou la décentralisation politique, qui est une forme de fédéralisme. C'était inacceptable pour le CNS qui n'est pas une instance élue et ne peut donc s'engager sur de tels droits portant atteinte à l'intégrité territoriale de la Syrie. Il y a eu des négociations très longues avec le CNK. Elles n'ont pas abouti, mais le terrain d'entente est là. Le CNK est revenu sur l'autodétermi-

nation et il parle désormais de décentralisation administrative.

Ce qu'il reproche au CNS, c'est de ne pas être assez laïque. L'intégration du CNK au CNS est très importante à cause de la question kurde, mais aussi parce que les Kurdes sont très présents dans les grandes villes.

Le massacre d'Houla, le 25 mai [108 morts], marque-t-il un tournant vers la guerre civile ?

C'est l'épisode le plus choquant d'une stratégie que le régime met en œuvre depuis plusieurs mois. Houla marque un tournant par la férocité de ce qui s'y est passé et parce que c'est un village sunnite isolé au milieu de plusieurs villages alaouites : il y a comme une tentative d'épuration afin de créer un territoire homogène.

Ce massacre et ceux qui ont suivi pourraient aussi indiquer une perte de contrôle par le régime de ses forces sur le terrain. On n'est pas encore en guerre civile, mais tout est fait pour que ça bascule. Le régime arme systématiquement et entraîne les minorités qui lui sont proches. Je note qu'il n'y a pas encore eu d'acte de revanche. Combien de temps peut-on l'empêcher ?

Après quinze mois de tueries, désespérez-vous de la communauté internationale ?

La communauté internationale a toujours été en deçà de ce qui était requis. Son absence de détermination dans le discours a toujours été comprise par le régime comme la possibilité de continuer à tuer impunément. Et les mesures coercitives, c'est-à-dire les sanctions, sont efficaces mais lentes et insuffisantes. Le fait que même l'aide humanitaire ne parvienne pas à ceux qui en ont besoin est un message dévastateur pour la population, qui en conclut qu'elle ne peut compter que sur elle et sur Dieu. C'est la porte ouverte à la militarisation et à la professionnalisation.

Où en sont les relations entre le CNS et l'Armée syrienne libre ?

L'apparition des armes est un choix spontané de la population face à la férocité de la répression. En revanche, le Conseil a la responsabilité d'organiser, d'encadrer et de structurer ce mouvement sur le terrain. Autrement dit, savoir qui sont ces groupes, qui les commande, comment on peut coordonner leur action. Sinon, il y a un grand risque de chaos. ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR
CHRISTOPHE AYAD

SYRIE: OÙ EN EST L'OPPOSITION?

Par Catherine Gouëset

Après de 15 mois de révolte en Syrie et des dizaines de milliers de morts, le régime tente de tirer profit des divisions de l'opposition. L'Express fait le point sur les relations entre ses principales composantes: Conseil nationale syrien, Armée syrienne libre et Comité national pour le changement démocratique.

Le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale coalition de l'opposition, a élu samedi à sa tête le Kurde Abdel Basset Sayda, exilé de longue date en Suède, qui a fait le consensus autour de sa personnalité modérée. Il succède à Burhan Ghalioun, critiqué pour avoir permis, au cours de ses neuf mois de mandat, l'hégémonie des Frères musulmans au sein du Conseil et pour le manque de coordination avec les militants sur le terrain. Cette nomination permettra-t-elle au CNS de sortir des divisions qui le secouent depuis plusieurs mois? Quel est la place du CNS dans la mosaïque de l'opposition quinze mois après le début du soulèvement contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad? L'Express fait le point sur l'état des forces de l'opposition.

Le CNS, combien de divisions?

Le Conseil national syrien affirme représenter toute la société syrienne, quelles que soient ses différences ethniques (assyriens, kurdes, turkmènes) ou religieuses (sunnites, alaouites, chrétiens ou druzes).

Les divisions du CNS tiennent en partie au fait qu'il n'est pas un mouvement politique mais "un front, qui réunit de manière temporaire des forces politiques très diverses, avec pour objectif le renversement du régime de Bachar el-Assad", souligne Thomas Pierret, spécialiste de la Syrie, interrogé par France Culture. "La diversité politique au sein de l'opposition et les courants de pensée qui la fractionnent est même un signe de richesse et de refus de se soumettre à l'hégémonie d'une pensée unique" en vigueur depuis 42 ans sous le régime du parti Baath, estime Ziad Majed, chercheur et politologue libanais, fin connaisseur de la Syrie. Le problème de



Le Kurde Abdel Basset Sayda (d) succède à la tête du CNS à Burhan Ghalioun (g). Cette succession permettra-t-elle au CNS de sortir des divisions qui le secouent depuis plusieurs mois? © Reuters

l'opposition se situe en fait dans son incapacité, à ce jour, "à lancer des initiatives politiques, à négocier avec les acteurs internationaux hostiles à la révolution et à construire un corps institutionnel bien organisé autour d'un leadership collégial", explique-t-il à L'Orient le Jour.

Fin mars, la plupart des opposants avaient reconnu le CNS comme le "représentant formel" du peuple syrien, et en avril, les pays "Amis du peuple syrien" l'avaient qualifié de "représentant légitime de tous les Syriens".

L'islamisme est-il à l'origine des dissensions au sein du CNS?

Le CNS est "dominé par les islamistes, qui en occupent environ la moitié des sièges", précise Thomas Pierret sur son blog. "Il compte aussi des libéraux conservateurs qui voient dans le gouvernement turc actuel un modèle ainsi que des nationalistes arabes de gauche", complète le chercheur. Les Frères musulmans sont "les plus organisés au sein du CNS", ils arrivent donc mieux à influencer sa ligne politique", admet Bassma Kodmani, porte-parole du CNS, interrogée par Le Monde. Mais "le clivage entre islamistes et laïcs est un facteur relativement peu important", selon Thomas Pierret.

L'opposition est-elle menacée par ses divisions?

La militarisation du soulèvement est l'un des points de discorde au sein de l'opposition. Le site du CNS revendique

toujours le caractère pacifique de la révolution syrienne et la défense de la souveraineté et l'indépendance. Mais en février, après la martyre de la ville rebelle de Homs durement pilonnée par l'armée, et alors que les affrontements sur le terrain se multiplient avec les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre, le Conseil a créé un bureau militaire chargé de superviser "la résistance armée", de l'ALS.

Une autre ligne de fracture au sein de l'opposition sépare les dissidents en exil depuis de longues années, comme les Frères musulmans, ou des figures comme Burhan Ghalioun ou Bassma Qodmani, selon Thomas Pierret. Les liens de ces derniers avec la société syrienne sont relativement ténus en comparaison de ceux des exilés qui vivaient encore en Syrie au début du soulèvement, en mars 2011. Ayant assumé jusqu'il y a peu les risques de l'activisme en Syrie, ces derniers perçoivent assez mal "les prétentions hégémoniques de ceux qui, depuis des décennies, vivent à Londres, Paris ou Amman", souligne Thomas Pierret.

Par ailleurs, les représentants des Comités locaux de Coordination (LCC), qui fédèrent la contestation à l'intérieur de la Syrie, estiment que le CNS ne leur attribue pas le poids qui leur est dû. Ce sont eux qui ont protesté contre la dernière reconduction de Burhan Ghalioun et provoqué la crise qui a mené à sa démission.

Le soutien de plus en plus marqué de l'Arabie saoudite et du Qatar constitue également un objet de discorde entre ➤

➤ les différents opposants.

Toutefois, le régime "a été incapable de coopter sérieusement même les opposants les plus modérés", relève Thomas Pierret. Certains ont voulu croire aux promesses de réformes du régime, se sont présentés aux élections, mais les habitudes du régime autoritaire l'ont emporté et leurs partis n'ont reçu quasiment aucun siège.

Comment interpréter la nomination d'un Kurde à la tête du CNS?

Depuis le début de la crise, le régime ménage les Kurdes (10% de la population, ils sont très présents dans les grandes villes) alors que cette minorité ethnique a de longue date été marginalisée. "Certains groupes (et certaines villes) kurdes sont aux côtés de la révolution depuis le début, mais d'autres collaborent avec le régime", précise Thomas Pierret. Un clivage oppose la majorité arabe à une partie des Kurdes qui revendiquent leur autonomie, ce qui n'est pas acceptable pour une partie de l'opposition. La nomination du Kurde Abdel Basset Sayda à la tête du CNS est donc "un message lancé aux Kurdes et à toutes les minorités", en particulier chrétiennes, pour qu'elles rejoignent l'opposition", selon Bassma Kodmani.

Quelle est la place des chrétiens dans l'opposition?

Le régime joue depuis toujours sur la peur des chrétiens (10%), des alaouites (la minorité dont est issue le clan du président Bachar el-Assad) et des druzes (16% pour ces deux branches de l'islam) face à la majorité démographique que représentent les sunnites (environ 70%). Le chaos irakien qui a conduit à des persécutions contre les chrétiens d'Irak contribue à faire craindre un changement de régime à leur coreligionnaires syriens. Certains chrétiens sont toutefois

présents dans l'opposition. Les seuls qui le sont sous forme d'organisations spécifiquement chrétiennes sont les mouvements assyriens, explique à L'Express Thomas Pierret. Pour le reste, les chrétiens sont représentés dans l'opposition par de grandes figures comme Michel Kilo (opposant "modéré", basé à Paris depuis peu) et Georges Sabra (issu du Parti Communiste de Ryad Turk). Ce dernier, qui est partisan de la lutte armée, a été pressenti comme président du Conseil National Syrien, il en est aujourd'hui le porte-parole, complète Thomas Pierret.

Quel est le poids de l'Armée syrienne libre?

L'ASL, apparue en juillet 2011, a été créée dans le but de "protéger les manifestations pacifiques". L'ALS est apparue sur une base locale, dans des villages, des quartiers, explique Thomas Pierret, elle n'a pas été créée à l'initiative de l'opposition politique. Les brigades ainsi constituées ont été rejointes par des déserteurs, de plus en plus nombreux. Il s'agit d'une constellation de groupes militaires sans liens structurés entre eux. Des tentatives ont été lancées pour organiser l'ASL, en particulier de la part du colonel déserteur Riad el Assad, basé en Turquie.

Le 24 mai dernier, l'Armée syrienne libre a annoncé s'être dotée d'un statut fixant comme objectifs prioritaires d'"aider le peuple syrien à se libérer" du régime. Dans ce manifeste, l'ASL annonce avoir formé un conseil militaire provisoire composé de hauts officiers ayant rejoint la rébellion. Le chef de ce conseil sera "élu" pour un mandat de trois mois renouvelable.

A l'automne, l'ASL revendiquait quelque 17 000 "soldats libres". Aujourd'hui, selon un officier déserteur qui l'a rejointe, l'ALS compterait 40 000

ET LE COMITÉ NATIONAL POUR LE CHANGEMENT DÉMOCRATIQUE (CNCD)?

Le CNCD, autre grand mouvement d'opposition, dirigé par Hassan Abdel Azim est composé de partis "nationalistes arabes", kurdes, socialistes et marxistes ainsi que des personnalités indépendantes favorables à une solution négociée. Ce qui sépare ce groupe du CNS tient moins au clivage laïcs-islamistes qu'à son rejet catégorique de toute intervention étrangère et à son ouverture à un dialogue sous condition avec le régime. Il réclame au préalable le retrait des militaires des rues, la fin des attaques contre les manifestations pacifistes et la libération de tous les prisonniers politiques.

Le CNCD admet toutefois que les offres de dialogue du régime "ont surtout cherché à gagner du temps pour liquider les forces du soulèvement".

anciens soldats dans ses rangs, selon le Spiegel qui précise que la proportion de civils et d'anciens soldats varie d'une région à l'autre. Le quotidien allemand rapporte que les désertions ne cessent d'augmenter ces derniers mois, les soldats craignant désormais moins des représailles contre leurs familles que les tous premiers déserteurs, alors peu nombreux. "Si j'étais parti plus tôt, les services de sécurité auraient arrêté ma famille ou brûlé ma maison" témoigne l'un d'eux, cité par le Spiegel. Mais maintenant, ils ne viendront pas seulement à cause de moi", explique-t-il, considérant que le nombre important de déserteurs le protège. □



Syrie: la France affirme son "plein soutien" au nouveau chef du CNS

PARIS, 11 juin 2012 (AFP)

LE NOUVEAU CHEF du Conseil national syrien (CNS), le Kurde Abdel Basset Sayda, bénéficie du "plein soutien" de la France, a affirmé lundi le chef de la diplomatie française, Laurent Fabius, à l'issue d'un entretien téléphonique avec l'opposant.

"Je l'ai félicité pour son élection (dimanche) comme nouveau président du Conseil national syrien. J'ai souligné le plein soutien de la France à l'opposition syrienne", a précisé dans une déclaration le ministre, après un appel de son ministère un peu plus tôt à fédérer l'opposition au régime de Damas "dans un esprit d'ouverture et de rassemblement".

"Nous nous sommes accordés sur le caractère crucial du mandat confié au

nouveau président du CNS, qui doit dans un court délai mener les efforts de réforme du CNS et de rassemblement de l'opposition", a insisté Laurent Fabius, en précisant avoir invité son interlocuteur à la réunion des Amis du peuple syrien, le 6 juillet à Paris.

"Il m'a fait part de sa forte inquiétude alors que vient d'être lancée une nouvelle offensive militaire contre Homs. J'appelle solennellement le régime syrien à cesser immédiatement ses exactions. Tout doit être mis en oeuvre pour éviter de nouveaux massacres", a aussi déclaré le ministre français.

Le CNS, principale coalition de l'opposition, a élu ce week-end à sa tête Abdel Basset Sayda, exilé de longue date en Suède, pour succéder à Burhan Ghalioun, qui bénéficiait d'un soutien appuyé de Paris mais qui était critiqué pour avoir permis l'hégémonie des Frères musulmans au sein du CNS et pour le manque de coordination avec les militants sur le terrain.

L'école publique s'ouvre à la langue kurde

Guillaume Perrier

La deuxième langue maternelle du pays pourra bientôt être apprise à l'école publique. La langue kurde majoritaire dans le Sud Est de la Turquie, le kurmandji, sera proposée en cours optionnel dans les écoles secondaires turques, au même titre que les langues étrangères: anglais, allemand ou français.

En annonçant aujourd'hui cette mesure, le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, espère peut-être atténuer un peu la colère des Kurdes,

harassés par les arrestations à répétition de membres supposés du KCK, censée être, selon la justice, l'extension civile du PKK. Depuis le massacre d'Uludere en décembre, pour lequel l'Etat n'a jamais pu prononcer d'excuses, la répression s'est encore accentuée.

La semaine dernière, le maire de Van, Bekir Kaya, et cinq de ses collègues, tous maires élus pour le compte du parti kurde BDP, ont été placés en détention préventive et inclus au dossier tentaculaire du KCK. La justice a également, ce mardi, condamné la députée de la

même région de Van, Aysel Tugluk, à 14 ans de prison pour propagande d'une organisation terroriste, le PKK, s'appuyant sur 14 discours. Depuis plusieurs semaines, l'AKP est poussé par son aile nationaliste vers une position dure. Et la levée de l'immunité des parlementaires élus du BDP a été envisagée.

Mais toute symbolique qu'elle soit, la mesure qui autorise les cours de kurde à l'école devra, avant d'être jugée, d'abord être mise en oeuvre, ce qui n'est pas acquis pour la rentrée prochaine. La création de la

chaîne publique en langue kurde, TRT6, avait également été annoncée longtemps à l'avance mais avait été retardée. Pour le BDP, cette réforme, certes positive, est nettement insuffisante. Le député Hasip Kaplan a jugé que les cours de langue kurde devaient être introduits dès la maternelle.

Et la liberté linguistique ne résoudra pas la "question kurde", dont la solution est politique, et qui se trouve dans l'impasse depuis six mois. □

Challenge

10 JUIN 2012

LE CONSEIL NATIONAL SYRIEN CHOISIT UN KURDE COMME PRÉSIDENT

par Mariam Karouny (Reuters)

ISTANBUL- La principale organisation de l'opposition syrienne, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), a annoncé dimanche avoir élu le Kurde Abdelbasset Sida à sa tête lors d'une réunion à Istanbul.

Abdelbasset Sida, qui est âgé de 56 ans, vit en exil en Suède. Le Kurde était le seul candidat à la présidence du CNS pour cette réunion des 33 membres de son secrétariat général.

Il succède à Burhan Ghalioun, figure de l'opposition laïque, très critiqué pour avoir été constamment reconduit à la tête du Conseil depuis sa création en août dernier alors que le CNS est supposé représenter une alternative démocratique au régime autoritaire du président Bachar al Assad.

Burhan Ghalioun vit en exil à Paris où il est professeur d'université.

Les Frères musulmans, acteurs les plus influents du CNS, avaient d'abord fait savoir qu'ils souhaitaient le maintien de Burhan Ghalioun à la présidence. Ils ont fini par apporter leur soutien à Abdelbasset Sida pour tenir compte des protestations de membres de l'opposition intérieure syrienne après un troisième renouvellement du mandat du



professeur le mois dernier.

Adib al Chihakli, un des membres fondateurs du CNS, avait menacé de démissionner si Burhan Ghalioun restait président.

Dans l'opposition, on souligne que l'élection d'Abdelbasset Sida pourrait permettre d'attirer davantage de Kurdes au sein du CNS.

LEADER DE TRANSITION?

Des mouvements de protestation contre le régime syrien ont lieu régulièrement dans les régions kurdes de la Syrie mais sans avoir l'intensité des manifestations dans le reste du pays.

Cela s'explique en partie par le soutien apporté par Bachar al Assad au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), mouvement armé actif contre la Turquie et soupçonné d'être derrière les assassi-

nats de plusieurs figures de l'opposition kurde anti-Assad depuis le début du soulèvement en mars 2011.

Les membres kurdes du CNS se sont souvent opposés aux autres membres sur la question des droits des Kurdes et sur l'organisation de la Syrie post-Assad en Etat fédéral comme l'Irak voisin.

Le nouveau président du CNS veut développer le Conseil, que certains accusent d'être dominé par les islamistes, et entamer des discussions avec d'autres personnalités de l'opposition pour les y faire entrer.

"La tâche principale maintenant est de réformer le Conseil et de le restructurer", a déclaré Abdelbasset Sida à Reuters.

Bassam Ichak, membre du secrétariat général, souligne qu'Abdelbasset Sida a été élu pour répondre aux demandes au sein du CNS et de l'opposition en Syrie ainsi que des puissances internationales qui veulent rendre le conseil plus démocratique.

Abdelbasset Sida va maintenant devoir convoquer une réunion plénière du CNS pour dans un mois qui élira un nouveau secrétariat général et un nouveau président, ce qui pourrait le faire apparaître comme un dirigeant de transition, souligne Bassam Ichak. ●

Tactics by Assad split his sect

BEIRUT

Some Alawites speak out against the president, but doing so carries risk

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

After Jaber Abboud, a baker from Baniyas, Syria, first lashed out publicly at President Bashar al-Assad for failing to promote real change, his neighbors ignored it.

But Mr. Abboud and most of his community are Alawites, the same religious sect as the president. When the popular uprising broke out, many believed that if the Assad family fell, they were doomed. They closed ranks and turned on Mr. Abboud, boycotting his pastry shop and ultimately forcing him to leave town.

"The neighborhood is split — half are dejected and subservient, the rest are beasts," he said by telephone from the coastal Syrian city of Latakia. "It is depressing to go there; it's like a town full of ghosts, divided, security everywhere."

As Syria's conflict escalates to new levels of sectarian strife, Mr. Assad is leaning more heavily on his religious base for support. The Alawite core of the elite security forces is still with him, as are many Syrians from minority groups.

But interviews with a dozen Alawites indicated a complex split even within their ranks. Some Alawites are frustrated that security forces have not yet managed to crush the opposition, while others say that Mr. Assad is risking the future of the Alawites by pushing them to the brink of civil war with Sunni Muslims.

Mr. Assad's ruling Baath Party professes a secular, pan-Arab socialism, but Sunnis, who make up about 74 percent of the population, have long bridled at what they see as sectarian rule by the Alawites, who are nominally Shiite Muslims and make up only 13 percent of the population.

People like Mr. Abboud say they feel stranded in a no man's land. Blackballed by their own Alawite community, they find that the Islamists who dominate parts of the armed opposition regard them with murderous suspicion. A few with opposition credentials have been killed.

On the other extreme are Alawites who criticize Mr. Assad as being too soft, saying that his father and predecessor as president, Hafez al-Assad, would have quashed the threat by now.

With Alawite youths dying by the hundreds to defend the government, voices are raised at funerals and elsewhere asking questions like "Why is the government not doing enough to protect us?"



Clashes kill dozens Passing by a destroyed tank in Ariha, Syria, on Sunday. At least 38 people were killed in shelling in the central province of Homs in 24 hours.

according to the Alawites interviewed.

There were also anti-Assad chants in Alawite neighborhoods like Zahra in Homs, like: "Bashar became a Sunni!" Mr. Assad's wife, Asma al-Akhras, comes from a prominent family of Sunni Muslims from Homs.

Alawite-Sunni tensions reached a new peak after a spate of mass killings, particularly the May 25 Houla massacre of 108 Sunni Muslims, including 49 children. Survivors from Houla and people living near the slaughter last Wednesday in the farming hamlet of Qubeir said the attackers came from Alawite villages. The United Nations said suspicions in Houla were focused on pro-government militiamen known in Arabic as shabiha. Alawites dominate their ranks.

"For the first time, we began to hear directly from our Sunni neighbors that we should leave Damascus and return to our villages," said Abu Ali, 50, a real estate agent. He said that once the school year ended, he expected a flood of such departures out of fear of revenge attacks.

Fear of reprisals has prompted dire warnings from some Alawites that their future is on the line. Afaq Ahmad, a defector from the air force intelligence branch, posted a 10-minute plea on YouTube saying that Alawites had to stop committing collective suicide. He has gained prominence partly because Alawite defectors are rare.

"Does the family of Bashar al-Assad deserve to be the leaders of the Alawites?" Mr. Ahmad asked. "In the face of crimes like this, we cannot stay silent.

We should stick to our religious and humanitarian principles because otherwise, history will show no mercy."

Officials in the Assad government often say that its secular ideology has preserved the harmony among what it calls the "glorious mosaic" of Syria's many overlapping religions, ethnic groups and tribes. But its critics call that a front for Alawite domination, reversing centuries of fierce discrimination that is reflected in Syrian geography. Scorned as nonbelievers during about 400 years of Ottoman rule and forced to pay a special tax, the Alawites sequestered themselves in impoverished mountain redoubts overlooking the Mediterranean.

The secretive Alawite sect was born in the ninth century and braids together religious teachings from different faiths. They are not considered particularly zealous. Unlike more orthodox Muslims, they believe in reincarnation, for example, and do not consider the Ramadan fast or the pilgrimage to Mecca mandatory. They worship at home or at the tombs of saints, and they lack a clerical hierarchy.

France, as the colonial power, created a separate coastal Alawite state that lasted from 1920 to 1936.

With independence, Alawites were drawn to the military and the secularist Baath Party. The coup that brought Hafez al-Assad to power in 1970 cemented their control, shocking the traditional Sunni ruling class. He stocked the secret police and the military with Alawites, creating such a fear of them

that Syrians talking about the sect in public called them "Germans."

Hafez al-Assad, who died in 2000, formed the elite units, now controlled by his son Maher, that are the main military force of repression. The government showed no forbearance toward its Alawite critics — they were considered traitors, often jailed for twice as long as Sunni Muslims for their role in clandestine political organizations. Now, even watching satellite channels critical of the Syrian government, like Al Jazeera,



is considered treachery in Alawite communities.

The intolerance of dissent means there is no uniquely Alawite opposition movement. (There is a Facebook page,

Alawites in the Syrian Revolution, and the campaign to resurrect nonviolent protests involves many young, urban Alawites.)

The first Alawite joined the executive committee of the Syrian National Council, the main opposition group in exile, only in April. Many others had been deterred by both the Sunni Muslim dominance of the group and concern for family members back home.

In Baniyas, along Syria's roughly 160 kilometers, or 100 miles, of Mediterranean coast, the fate of Mr. Abboud, the baker, at the hands of the community helps explain the reluctance.

Mr. Abboud, 57, a former soccer coach, said he had been arrested three times and badly beaten. Two of his three children received death threats, neighbors tried repeatedly to set fire to his house, and friends he had known since childhood avoided him. Even his three sisters shunned him.

In Damascus in the 1980s, new Alawite communities were formed to ring the capital, which the city's natives sometimes derisively call "settlements." Salam, 28, a businessman, who grew up in one such area, said that early in the uprising, the government distributed automatic rifles there. "They told us, 'The Sunnis are going to kill you,'" Salam said in an interview over Skype.

"They scared us. Of course some people in our community are narrow-minded; they believed them and, unfortunately, many people accepted the weapons."

Amid the siege mentality, however, come occasional glimmers of a different mind-set. Reem, 28, with long, curly black hair, helps organize anti-Assad rallies in Damascus. At the start of the uprising she could not show her face in her village above the port city of Tartus, she said. Eventually she went, prompting catcalls from pro-Assad neighbors.

But on her most recent visit a month ago, no one cursed her activism, said Reem, who gave only one name to avoid recriminations.

"They have begun to understand the real face of the Syrian crisis, that it is a popular revolution against a dictatorship, not against an Alawite regime," she said, describing the shock registered by young people in the village when she described how young Alawites, Sunnis and Druze stand together in anti-government demonstrations in Damascus. "They are amazed to hear that an Alawite woman without a veil and in tight jeans can demonstrate hand in hand with a Sunni woman covered in black."

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Beirut, and an employee of The New York Times from Damascus.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2012

Bring justice to Syria

SYRIA II

The world is making a lot of noise over Syria. But since it does not want war, the only recourse is international justice.

Bernard Kouchner

We are told that we should avoid civil war in Syria, even as it unfolds before our eyes. We threaten, and yet we don't act. We hold international meeting after international meeting, but each delivers only a small batch of sanctions and escalating commentaries. Reading the dispatches from Houla and Al-Kubeir, from Mazraat al-Qubeir and al-Heffa, ministers of foreign affairs, powerless, add their adjectives: The massacres are "despicable," "scandalous," "revolting," even "unacceptable." The horror becomes an exercise in vocabulary. The abuses continue without any visible military preparations to reassure us. Or to alarm us.

In reality, no one wants a war. Americans have memories of Iraq and President Obama faces a difficult election campaign. The Russians strongly support the last secular regime in the region. Europe, embroiled in a severe financial crisis, prefers televised indignation — a facade of political unity and weak popular protests. Only Britain and France show any engagement.

Such reluctance is understandable, given a Middle East that is always ready to burst into flames, especially since this

would be a war between the two great currents of Islam, Shiite and Sunni. Northern Lebanon, around Tripoli, is already involved in confrontations, and all communities are armed. The two allies of Damascus — Hezbollah and Iran — would resort to arms. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states — already indirectly involved in the conflict — would enter the dance of death. Neither Egypt, the largest of the neighboring countries, nor Iraq, would be able to stay away. Nor would Turkey and Israel. Are we prepared, in order to stop a Syrian civil war, for such a conflagration? No.

Without unanimity in the U.N. Security Council, there is no recourse to Chapter 7, no U.N. military cover. And NATO is silent. Only a few brave observers in blue berets rush about to witness the damage, always too late. And they themselves are attacked by Syrian Army rockets. The right to intervene and the responsibility to protect have been part of U.N. doctrine since 1988 and

2005, and they have become popular. Yet human rights have retreated, victims of amateur experimentation and political maneuvering. Humanitarian assistance to Syria does not always arrive, and Kofi Annan's peace plan is dying.

Will a public opinion tired of these massacres remain on alert for long? I do not think so. What then? The urgency of the crisis demands an appeal

to international justice, which is the traveling companion of the right to intervene. This may appear rhetorical, but it is the only path still open for now. We know the International Criminal Court opens cases at the request of the Security Council, and we know that for now Russia and China would block that.

But the U.N. secretary general can recommend an investigation by the prosecutor of the I.C.C. And the victims themselves have the right to refer a case to the court. It is imperative that we support them, that we persist, that we amplify their protests and sound the cries of the families in the corridors of the I.C.C. All witnesses must come forward. All human rights organizations must demand that international justice be satisfied. The I.C.C. must start an investigation.

We did it, successfully, in the Balkans, in Liberia and most recently in Guinea. And the signatories of the Treaty of Rome must support the victims with all the power of their diplomacy.

On the political front, we must encourage Kofi Annan to convene an international conference with the Russians, Chinese and even the Iranians. And let's not feign indignation: We're already talking to Tehran.

At this stage, it is unrealistic and illusory to demand Bashar al-Assad's departure, which would guarantee failure. To make peace, it is always necessary to talk to the enemy.

BERNARD KOUCHNER is a former foreign minister of France and founder of Médecins Sans Frontières.

Iraq's embattled PM retains power for now thanks to divisions among opponents, Iranian support

KARIN LAUB, Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's embattled prime minister has fought off an attempt to push him out of office, aided by divisions among his opponents and Iranian intervention on his behalf.

Nouri al-Maliki's tactical victory averts a potentially destabilizing contest to replace him, at least for the time being, but perpetuates the sectarian-based deadlock that has paralyzed the country for years.

In the latest setback for those trying to unseat al-Maliki, the country's president said Sunday he would not ratify a petition for a no-confidence vote because it lacked the needed number of signatures.

An Iraqi lawmaker who supports the prime minister says Iran is helping him by trying to buy time. Tehran is pushing for a two-month grace period during which al-Maliki, who has close ties with the Islamic Republic, would ostensibly try to appease coalition partners who accuse him of monopolizing power.

At the root of the standoff is the unresolved power struggle between Iraq's three main groups — the majority Shiites and minority Sunnis and Kurds — following the ouster of Saddam Hussein in the U.S.-led invasion of 2003.

Elections in March 2010 were inconclusive. Al-Maliki was able to form a national unity government but its component parties do not trust and in some cases detest each other.

The continued impasse has raised the possibility of renewed sectarian violence and hampered plans for rebuilding the country ravaged by a decade of fighting.

Six months after the departure of the last U.S. forces, hopes seem to be fading that oil-rich Iraq can quickly transform into a functioning democracy.

"It's a sensitive and tense situation and anything could go wrong," analyst Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group said of the ongoing political crisis.

Al-Maliki, a Shiite, is under fire for breaking promises to share power with his partners in a unity government that includes the Sunni-dominated Iraqiya bloc, Kurdish parties and loyalists of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Sunnis who believe he is targeting their leaders with politically motivated prosecutions and Kurds who think he is hostile to their northern autonomy have their own reason to dislike the prime minister.

Al-Maliki's erstwhile partners have been pushing to unseat him with a no-confi-



Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, left, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, chat during a special ceremony at Camp Victory in Baghdad.

dence vote in the 325-member parliament, but appear to be struggling to muster the required 164 votes.

Last week, they said they sent a petition for a no-confidence vote with 176 signatures of lawmakers to President Jalal Talabani — a Kurd with ties to Iran who is apparently reluctant to see al-Maliki replaced. On Sunday, Talabani said the petition only had 160 valid signatures, falling short by four. He said 13 lawmakers told him they were withdrawing or suspending their signatures.

The rebels in al-Maliki's coalition can also force a no-confidence vote without Talabani's help, but it's a longer, more cumbersome process.

After Talabani's ruling, al-Maliki called for more talks to resolve the coalition crisis.

Al-Maliki's main foreign backer, Shiite-ruled Iran, is also trying to keep him in power, according to several Shiite politicians who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of those efforts. Al-Maliki is a key guarantor of Tehran's influence in Iraq and forged close ties with Iran's leaders during two decades in exile there in the Saddam era.

The push to unseat al-Maliki hinges on al-Sadr, whose loyalists have 40 seats in parliament. The mercurial young cleric has a long history of conflict with al-Maliki, but is also particularly vulnerable to Iranian pressure.

Sadr bolted the Shiite political camp several weeks ago to side with Iraqiya and the Kurds. Shortly after that, he was summoned to Tehran, where he was asked to give al-Maliki two more months to work out his coalition problems, according to Shiite lawmaker Humam al-Hamoudi, an al-Maliki supporter.

To add to the pressure, al-Sadr's

Iranian-based spiritual leader issued a religious edict that would rule having al-Sadr side with Sunnis and Kurds.

Al-Sadr's response to the pressure remains unclear.

Al-Hamoudi said he expects al-Sadr will eventually return to the Shiite fold, for fear of losing support among his constituents.

Before departing for Tehran, al-Sadr tried to unify the ranks, asking senior members of his movement and the Mahdi Army militia to sign a loyalty oath to him with a fingerprint dipped in blood, said a senior militia commander, Abu Ali Rubai.

Meanwhile, the push against al-Maliki is likely to continue.

The coalition rebels said in a statement they would "continue to mobilize lawmakers," while al-Hamoudi suggested that a lack of trust will make it hard to solve the coalition's problems.

"The problem is that al-Maliki has signed so many signatures before, but the level of commitment will only be seen in the future," al-Hamoudi said, hinting at broken pledges of the past.

In the original coalition deal, reached after nine months of political wrangling following the 2010 election, al-Maliki made sweeping concessions in a bid to form a government. "What he signed up to was very theoretical and not achievable," said Reidar Visser, a Norway-based analyst who writes for the blog *historiae.org*.

Among other things, al-Maliki promised to set up a body that would have final say on legislation and be headed by the leader of Iraqiya, but later reneged. Al-Maliki also failed to appoint defense and interior ministers, jobs he kept for himself as he tightened control over the security forces.

The deadlock has meant parliament is not passing important bills — key among them those that regulate oil revenue-sharing.

The uncertainty has fed a number of Iraq's ongoing crises, such as the conflict between the autonomous Kurdistan region in the north and the central government in Baghdad over the oil rights.

Hiltermann said Iraq's lack of effective government has been cushioned by its oil riches — an income tens of billions of dollars a year.

He said he expects Iraq to muddle through as long as oil keeps flowing. "It's not a good situation for Iraq," he said. "Just more of the same."



14 JUIN 2012



IRAK UNE QUARANTAINE D'ATTENTATS EN UNE JOURNÉE

Selon un bilan provisoire, 72 personnes ont péri hier dans une vague d'attentats en Irak en pleine célébration d'une fête religieuse chiite, les violences les plus sanglantes depuis près d'un an. Au moins 42 attaques ont été recensées à Bagdad, Hilla, Kerbela, Azizia, Balad, Baqouba, Fallouja, Kirkouk (photo) et Mossoul: 18 à la voiture piégée, 18 à la bombe et 6 à main armée. Le Premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, a mis en garde contre les «conséquences négatives des querelles politiques sur la situation sécuritaire» au moment où le pays est plongé dans une grave crise politique. PHOTO AZHAR SHALLAL. AFP

Le Monde

Jeudi 14 juin 2012

En Syrie, des enfants utilisés comme boucliers humains

Un rapport de l'ONU dénonce les violences infligées aux mineurs par le régime de Damas

New York (Nations unies)
Correspondante

La Syrie a rejoint la « liste de la honte », ce macabre recensement des pays dénoncés par l'ONU pour leur pratique de l'assassinat, du viol et de la torture d'enfants ainsi que de l'enrôlement forcé de mineurs. Pas moins de 10 gouvernements et 42 groupes armés de 11 pays sont mis au ban dans le dernier rapport annuel de l'Organisation sur « les enfants et les conflits armés », publié mardi 12 juin. C'est la première fois que le régime syrien et les milices *chabih* progouvernementales y figurent, à l'instar de partis politiques et d'organisations du Yémen et du Soudan. « Le niveau de violence contre les enfants en Syrie est exceptionnel », souligne au Monde la représentante spéciale de l'ONU

pour les enfants dans les conflits armés, Radhika Coomaraswamy, qui estime n'avoir rien vu de tel « depuis les violences sexuelles systématiques perpétrées durant la guerre en Bosnie-Herzégovine ».

Les enquêteurs des Nations unies citent des cas de filles et de garçons emprisonnés, torturés, exécutés et utilisés comme boucliers humains dès l'âge de 8 ans. La juriste sri-lankaise, que Damas n'a jamais autorisée à se rendre en Syrie, a dépêché, fin avril, une équipe dans la région. Les récits de nombreux enfants ont pu être recueillis dans les camps de réfugiés, aux frontières syriennes.

« Plusieurs d'entre eux, raconte-t-elle, portaient les marques visibles de torture et ont témoigné avoir été fouettés avec des câbles électriques, menacés d'être brûlés à la cigarette, voire soumis à des vio-

lences sexuelles. » Le rapport de l'ONU – rédigé avant le massacre perpétré le 25 mai à Houla, où 49 des 108 personnes tuées étaient des enfants de moins de 10 ans – fait par ailleurs état d'une rafle de dizaines de garçons âgés de 8 à 13 ans, en mars, dans le village d'Ayn Al-Arouz, dans la province d'Idlib.

« Guerre civile »

Ces enfants ont été « utilisés par des soldats et des miliciens, comme boucliers humains, placés devant les vitres des autocars qui transportaient des militaires pour pénétrer dans le village » avant de lancer l'assaut. Certains d'entre eux ont été ensuite assassinés. Selon l'ONG Human Rights Watch, au moins 1176 enfants ont été tués depuis le début de l'insurrection en Syrie, en mars 2011.

Mais les forces régulières ne sont pas les seules à être dénoncées. L'ONU affirme détenir des informations crédibles sur l'utilisation d'enfants-soldats par l'opposition armée, dont l'Armée syrienne libre. « Si les responsables de l'opposition nous assurent que leur politique est d'interdire ce genre de pratique, elle est très courante sur le terrain », explique la représentante spéciale de l'ONU.

La publication de ce rapport intervient alors que les combats entre forces gouvernementales et insurgés, ainsi que les bombardements sur les fiefs rebelles redoublent d'intensité. Le chef des opérations de maintien de la paix de l'ONU, Hervé Ladsous, a estimé, mardi, que la situation en Syrie avait atteint le stade de « guerre civile ». ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE

Un journaliste kurde syrien menacé au Kurdistan irakien par le PKK

REPORTERS sans frontières est très préoccupée par la sécurité du journaliste kurde syrien, Biradost Azizi, originaire de Qamishli (nord-est de la Syrie), réfugié au Kurdistan irakien depuis son expulsion de Syrie en 2004

“Nous demandons aux autorités de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien d’ouvrir des enquêtes sur les événements passés, et prendre toutes les mesures nécessaires afin de garantir la sécurité de Biradost Azizi. Le PKK doit quant à lui condamner ouvertement les menaces proférées à l’encontre du journaliste ainsi que la tentative d’assassinat dont il a été victime”, a déclaré l’organisation.

En 2011, Mohamed Abdu Hamu, plus connu sous le nom de Biradost Azizi, a réalisé de nombreux sujets sur la révolution syrienne en général, et sur le positionnement des Kurdes de Syrie dans le soulèvement syrien en particulier, pour la chaîne de télévision KNN et la radio Nawa. Contacté par Reporters sans frontières, il déclare avoir été menacé régulièrement au cours des sept derniers mois par téléphone.

Ce journaliste est connu pour ses prises de position en faveur de la révolution syrienne, notamment du mouvement révolutionnaire dans les régions kurdes de Syrie. Il a réalisé de nombreux reportages sur les activités des milices de la branche syrienne du PKK, le PYD.

Début 2012, Biradost Azizi a cosigné



des communiqués et déclarations d’intellectuels et d’activistes kurdes, dénonçant les exactions commises par le PKK dans les régions kurdes de Syrie. En janvier, sa signature figure au bas d’une déclaration condamnant l’assassinat de trois membres d’une même famille à Qamishli le 10 janvier 2012

<http://www.welateme.info/erebi/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=11333>. Le 7 février dernier, il désigne le PYD comme responsable, avec l’aide des services de renseignements syriens, des exactions commises à Afrin après la manifestation populaire pacifique du 3 février 2012, organisée par le Conseil national kurde en Syrie et les Jeunes de la révolution à Afrin.

Le 8 mai 2012, il a interviewé Saleh Muslim, leader du PYD, qui dénonçait la manipulation des manifestations d’opposants au régime à Qamishli par les salafistes et les islamistes, reprenant à son compte les prises de position publiques du régime de Bashar Al-

Assad.

Suite à la diffusion de cette interview, une campagne de dénigrement a été lancée à l’encontre du journaliste sur Facebook. Des menaces de mort ont été proférées, notamment après la publication, sur la BBC en langue farsi, d’un article dans lequel un journaliste citait ses déclarations sur la situation des Kurdes et le rôle du PKK en Syrie.

Depuis, Biradost Azizi a posté, le 15 mai dernier, un article sur sa situation personnelle, intitulé : “Déclaration avant la liquidation ... Pour l’opinion publique syrienne et kurde”, dans lequel il déclare être menacé par le PKK et sa branche en Syrie. Il désigne nommément des personnes comme étant de potentiels responsables de sa probable liquidation. Une plainte pour diffamation a été déposée contre lui. Le procès s’est ouvert le dimanche 10 juin 2012, devant le tribunal de première instance de Suleimanieh.

La veille de l’audience, le journaliste a échappé à une tentative d’assassinat alors qu’il regagnait son domicile. Selon Biradost Azizi, joint par Reporters sans frontières, ses activités journalistiques et ses prises de position contre le régime de Bashar Al-Assad expliqueraient cette tentative d’assassinat.

Reporters sans frontières exprime de sérieuses craintes pour sa sécurité. □

Le Point 5 juin 2012

Irak: report sine die d'élections provinciales au Kurdistan

"ILS (LES AUTORITÉS KURDES) ont repoussé les élections indéfiniment, et ils annonceront une nouvelle date lorsqu'ils seront parvenus à un accord sur la loi des conseils provinciaux", a déclaré mardi le chef de la Commission électorale indépendante de l'Irak (IHEC), Faraj al-Haidari, lors d'une conférence de presse à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan.

Une partie de la loi prévoit que les chrétiens ne peuvent voter que pour des candidats issus de leur communauté, ce qui

représente une limitation de leurs droits et ne correspond pas aux normes électorales internationales, a-t-il expliqué.

Les élections dans les trois provinces composant le Kurdistan étaient initialement prévues le 27 septembre 2012. Les dernières élections de ce type dans la région autonome remontent à 2005.

Le reste de l'Irak (à l'exception de la province de Kirkouk, que revendiquent à la fois le Kurdistan et les autorités centrales) a tenu des élections provinciales en



Les élections provinciales prévues en septembre dans la province autonome du Kurdistan irakien ont été reportées sine die en raison de difficultés autour d'une loi locale jugée restrictive pour les droits de la minorité chrétienne.

janvier 2009, avec 14 provinces concernées. ♦

Syrie: pourquoi le régime durcit la répression

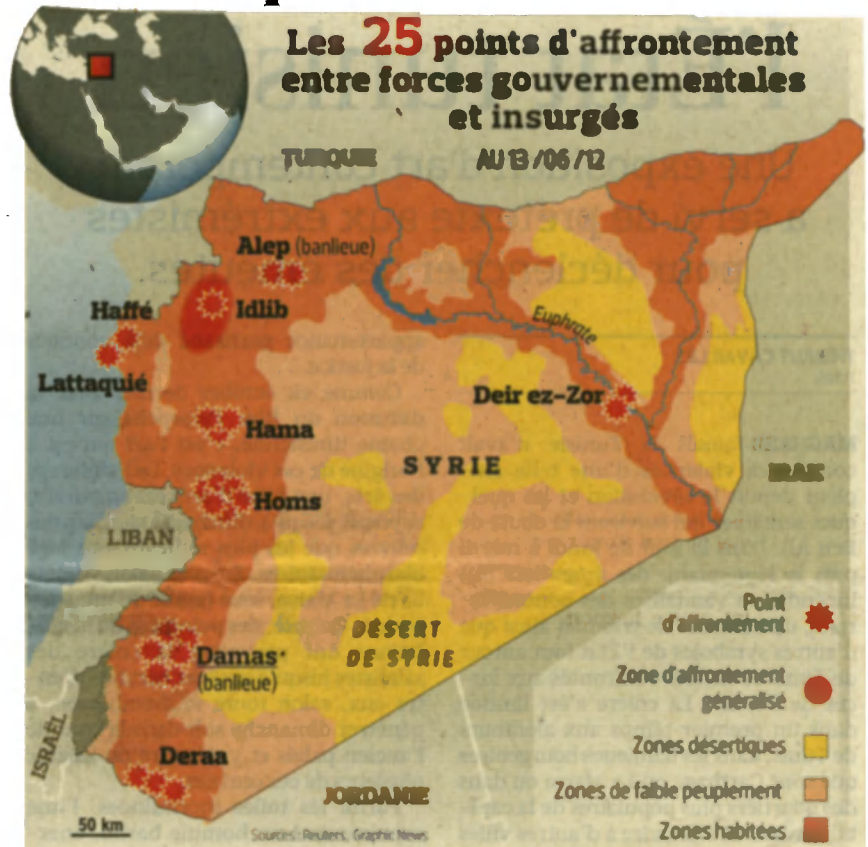
GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Après quinze mois de violences qui ont fait plus de 14 000 morts, le conflit change dramatiquement de nature. La guerre civile a commencé. Massacres et enlèvements sont désormais monnaie courante dans les zones mixtes, entre opposants sunnites et alaouites partisans du régime. Le niveau des violences a augmenté encore. Pour la seule journée de mardi, 80 personnes ont été tuées, et 18 autres mercredi, tandis que les forces gouvernementales entraînent à Deir ez-Zor et pilonnent certains quartiers de Homs, alors qu'à quelques dizaines de kilomètres à l'ouest, 200 rebelles préféreraient se retirer de Haffé, une ville sunnite entourée de villages alaouites, soumise à des bombardements répétés.

Cette intensification de la répression s'expliquerait par « la panique du régime à l'idée de voir ses alliés russes modifier leur position », affirme un diplomate membre de la mission de Kofi Annan, le médiateur mandaté par l'ONU et la Ligue arabe pour trouver une issue négociée à la crise. Sans annoncer le moins du monde une rupture avec Bachar el-Assad, Moscou a toutefois affirmé son intention de convoquer une conférence internationale avec tous les acteurs du conflit en vue d'amorcer une transition politique. « Assad tient à arriver en position de force à cette conférence internationale », analyse un homme d'affaires alaouite en contact avec la hiérarchie sécuritaire syrienne. Mais la nomenklatura serait divisée sur la tactique pour y parvenir. Les plus impliqués dans la répression – ceux qui n'échapperont pas à la justice internationale – militent pour une éradication de l'insurrection par tous les moyens. Conscients que l'option militaire est vouée à l'échec, d'autres souhaitent au contraire faire émerger une direction issue de la révolte, avec laquelle ils pourraient négocier dans le cadre du forum préconisé par leurs alliés russes. « Le problème, ajoute l'homme d'affaires, c'est que personne parmi les opposants de l'intérieur n'est prêt à jouer ce jeu, sauf si les Russes leur fournissent des garanties que Bachar ne sera pas candidat à sa succession dans le cadre d'une élection présidentielle anticipée », c'est-à-dire avant 2014, l'échéance prévue par la Constitution.

Défendre « le pays utile »

Sans véritable alternative, le régime semble s'engager dans une « stratégie à



l'algérienne», c'est-à-dire un combat de longue haleine contre ses ennemis de l'intérieur. Un rapport initial des observateurs de l'ONU déployés en Syrie indique que 40 % du territoire habité échappent au pouvoir central, soit environ un tiers environ de la superficie totale du pays. « Le problème pour l'opposition, ajoute une source proche des observateurs, c'est que ce gros tiers de la Syrie ne constitue encore qu'un réseau d'îlots de résistance que les insurgés ne parviennent pas à relier entre eux ». Impossible d'en faire une zone libérée à partir de laquelle l'opposition rassemblerait ses forces. Les insurgés manquent cruellement de moyens de communication sécurisés. « Le régime garde le contrôle des points stratégiques, comme les routes et les autoroutes », souligne un responsable de l'opposition. Depuis décembre, le nombre des points d'affrontements avec les forces loyales à Assad reste également à peu près le même. Selon un décompte du Comité de coordination nationale, une formation de l'opposition, il s'établissait à 24 mardi soir, dans huit secteurs du pays: 6 dans la banlieue de Damas, 6 à Homs et sa périphérie, 3 à Hama et sa proche région, 2 à Lattaquié, 2 dans la banlieue d'Alep, 2 à Deir ez-Zor et 3 à Deraa. À ce tableau, il convient d'ajouter l'en-

semble ou presque de la région d'Idlib – en particulier le Djabal Akrad – où l'État n'exerce plus qu'un très faible contrôle. En termes de population, 30 % des Syriens participeraient aux manifestations et à la lutte armée contre le pouvoir, selon un responsable militaire de l'opposition.

Face à la persistance de la guérilla, Assad aurait opté pour une stratégie de défense de la « Syrie utile », c'est-à-dire des trois plus importants bassins de population: autour de Damas, d'Alep et de Homs (là où sont rassemblés la majorité des 70 % de Syriens encore passifs). Ce repli tactique ne concerne pas, en revanche, la région Nord, au-delà d'Idlib, limitrophe de la Turquie, où se sont repliés de nombreux opposants armés. D'où la pression exercée ces derniers jours sur Haffé, pour couper les liaisons des rebelles avec la Turquie. Pour ceux-ci, le temps presse. D'où de récents approvisionnements en armes antitank plus sophistiquées, des RPG 9 notamment. « Il nous faut rééquilibrer le rapport de forces, si jamais on devait prochainement négocier face au régime », prévient un cadre de cette opposition impliqué dans son armement. ■

Turquie

L'obsession nataliste d'Erdogan

Le Premier ministre multiplie les déclarations hostiles à l'avortement. Ces propos rappellent les phobies de l'extrême droite européenne.

Radikal Istanbul

Les Etats qui recherchent la puissance accordent traditionnellement de l'importance à leur démographie. Alors que les pays réellement puissants n'affichent pas de fierté particulière quant à l'importance numérique de leur population, ceux qui aspirent à cette puissance ont tendance à mettre en avant leur dynamisme démographique. Outre la possibilité d'avoir une armée forte, une population numériquement importante débouche également sur une croissance économique significative. C'est ainsi que la croissance économique et l'accroissement de sa population ont permis à la Turquie de faire partie depuis dix ans du G20, même si en revenu par habitant elle est beaucoup moins bien classée.

Les projections démographiques peuvent aussi être utilisées comme une menace. Elles constituent d'ailleurs le fonds de commerce principal de l'extrême droite européenne. Le journaliste américain Christopher Caldwell, source d'inspiration de ce mouvement, défend ainsi la thèse douteuse selon laquelle les musulmans

seraient en train d'envahir l'Europe en utilisant l'arme démographique.

La Turquie n'échappe pas non plus à cette phobie démographique. Celle-ci est agitée par des Turcs racistes pour lesquels la menace est incarnée par les Kurdes. La revue emblématique des kémalistes radicaux et ultranationalistes turcs *Türk Solu* [Gauche turque] décrit ainsi par le menu sur son site la façon dont se déroulerait l'"*invasion démographique des Kurdes*", qui aurait pour conséquence que les Turcs, dont le taux de natalité est inférieur à celui des Kurdes, deviendraient minoritaires dans leur propre pays dans le cadre d'"*un complot ourdi par les forces internationales visant à soumettre les Turcs*".

A côté de cela, il y a aussi ceux qui rêvent que la Turquie compte 130 à 140 millions d'habitants [environ 75 millions aujourd'hui], ce qui lui permettrait dès lors de devenir une



véritable puissance mondiale. Et ceux-là sont nombreux au sein de l'AKP [le parti islamiste modéré au pouvoir]. Le Premier ministre Erdogan est d'ailleurs l'un d'entre eux. C'est dans ce contexte qu'il a récemment déclaré : "*Nous savons qu'il existe un plan sournois pour rayer la Turquie de la scène internationale.*" Selon lui, ce plan se distingue par le recours à "*la planification familiale et à l'avortement*". "*Afin que la nation turque puisse grandir, il n'est pas question d'encourager ce genre de pratique.*" Si le complot qu'Erdogan évoque semble à l'opposé de celui ressassé par l'extrême droite européenne, ils sont en réalité de même nature. Et c'est bien cette proximité qui est remarquable. Ils constituent en effet les deux faces d'un même état d'esprit. Nous avons donc d'une part une pensée obnubilée par la paranoïa d'une invasion démographique des musulmans, et de l'autre celle des gens qui sont obsédés par l'idée qu'il existerait un plan visant à faire en sorte que les musulmans, ou les Turcs, fassent moins d'enfants. Dans les deux cas, les individus sont considérés comme les petits soldats d'une cause, chaque enfant étant regardé comme un simple pion censé contribuer à la volonté de puissance d'un Etat, d'une société ou d'une communauté idéologique. **Ahmet Insel**

← Dessin de Springs paru dans le **Financial Times**, Londres.

Le Point 21 juin 2012

Ankara annule les sanctions liées au génocide contre la France

ANKARA (Reuters) - La Turquie a décidé d'annuler toutes les sanctions prises en décembre 2011 à l'encontre de la France à la suite du vote par l'Assemblée nationale d'une loi pénalisant la négation du génocide arménien, a annoncé jeudi le chef de la diplomatie turque Ahmet Davutoglu.

Ankara avait alors rappelé son ambassadeur à Paris et annoncé l'annulation de toutes les rencontres politiques, économiques et militaires avec la France ainsi que de l'autorisation accordée aux avions de chasse et bâtiments de guerre français d'atterrir ou de mouiller en Turquie.

La loi pénalisant la négation des génocides reconnus par la France, dont celui des Arméniens par les Turcs en 1915, a été censurée en février par le Conseil constitutionnel, mais les sanctions étaient maintenues.

S'exprimant à la télévision turque, Ahmet Davutoglu a indiqué que le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait ordonné la levée des sanctions après une rencontre positive avec le président François Hollande en marge du sommet de Rio sur le développement durable.

"En raison de la nouvelle attitude de la France, ces sanctions seront annulées",

a déclaré Davutoglu sur CNN Turquie, sans plus de détails.

Le chef de la diplomatie turque a précisé qu'il se rendrait le 5 juillet à Paris pour des rencontres bilatérales où seront évoquées d'autres "mesures positives" à prendre dans le futur.

L'Arménie, soutenue par de nombreux historiens et parlements mondiaux, estime à 1,5 million le nombre de victimes des massacres de 1915, qu'elle considère comme le fruit d'une politique délibérée de l'Empire Ottoman dans ce qui est aujourd'hui l'est de la Turquie.

Ankara affirme de son côté qu'il ne s'agissait pas d'un génocide et que de nombreux Turcs musulmans et Kurdes ont également été tués lors de l'invasion des troupes russes en Anatolie orientale, parfois avec l'aide de milices arméniennes. ■

Turkey: A midwife for a Kurdish state?

Ankara has willy-nilly helped the Kurdish genie escape from the bottle and it will be very difficult for Turkey to push it back inside.

By OFRA BENGIO

If there is one country that has helped build a Kurdish entity in Iraqi Kurdistan it is Turkey. This assertion seems paradoxical in view of Ankara's traditional opposition to such an eventuality in Iraq and the well known pressures it applied on its allies, especially the United States, not to lend any support to the Kurds of Iraq because of the possible spillover effects on its own restive Kurds. Turkey's new stance appears even more paradoxical against the backdrop of the latest upheavals in the region and their contagious effects both on its own Kurds and those of Syria.

How is one to explain these paradoxes? First let us have a quick look at the facts on the ground. Since the 1991 Gulf War and much more so after the 2003 Gulf War Turkey has turned itself, slowly but surely, and against its better judgment, into the lifeline for Iraqi Kurdistan, which is led by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the euphemism for a Kurdish state in the making.

The slow change in Ankara's policy towards the KRG was not due to any altruistic considerations but for very pragmatic, down to earth ones. Immediately after the 1991 Gulf War and the crushing of the Kurdish uprising which ensued, Turkey was confronted with the problem of a million Kurdish refugees on its border. Unwilling to burden itself with another million Kurds, Turkey devised with the Allies the "Provide Comfort" project for the fleeing Kurds to enable them to go back to their homes.



Kurdish nationalists rally north of Baghdad, Iraq Photo: REUTERS

This plan, together with "the no-fly zone" where the Iraqi army could not act against the Kurds, as well as the ruptured relations between Ankara and Baghdad due to the war, set in motion the schizophrenic relations that would develop between Turkey and the KRG.

On the one hand Turkey was extremely apprehensive of the possible contagious effects of the KRG on its own Kurds, hence Ankara's attempts to thwart any political and diplomatic gains by the KRG. On the other hand Ankara did its best to reap the fruits of its relations with the emerging state. This approach turned the Kurdistan Region into a huge investment area for Turkish companies whose number reached around 900 by 2012 and amounted to half of the companies acting in the KRG.

To this list one should add other large business, cultural and social ventures which turned the KRG into an undeclared Turkish sphere of influence. The net result was that no less than seven percent of Turkish exports went to the KRG.

Ankara's thirst for oil and gas and the pressure brought

to bear on it to stop importing from Iran go a long way to explain the surprising pipeline deal it cut with the KRG on May 20, 2012, without the approval of the central government in Baghdad. If it materializes, the deal, which envisaged the building of two oil pipelines and one gas pipeline from the Kurdistan Region to Turkey, might give further boost to Kurdish aspirations for independence.

Interestingly, the Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Taner Yildiz, declared on that occasion that "Turkey should also be considered as the Regional Kurdish Government's gateway to the West."

A second important aim for developing these relations was the hope that the KRG would help in solving Turkey's own acute Kurdish domestic problem, namely the ongoing attacks which the armed Turkish Kurdish PKK continued to launch against Turkish state targets.

However, Ankara's hope that the KRG would fight against, or at least contain the PKK, whose bases are found in Iraqi Kurdistan, was not fulfilled. The third and perhaps most important consideration was Ankara's need to attune itself to the region's

changing geostrategic map, which pushed it to act according to the dictum "my enemy's enemy is my friend."

The geostrategic considerations gathered momentum in the past two years due to several developments, all of which impacted negatively on Turkey's environment and its foreign policy configurations.

Before analyzing these changes it must be stressed that the stance of the AKP government toward the Kurdish domestic issue as well as towards the KRG underwent slow transformation, which distinguished the AKP from earlier Kemalist governments.

The geostrategic changes were quite drastic, including the "Arab Spring," which accelerated the collapse of the Turkish-Iranian-Syrian axis. Furthermore, the revolution in Syria not only turned Ankara and Damascus into sworn enemies once again but also raised the specter of the influx of Syrian refugees. Worse still, it opened the Pandora's box of Syrian Kurds and their possible collaboration with their brethren in Turkey, not to speak of the PKK card which Damascus started to employ once again against Ankara.

The withdrawal of the American forces from Iraq in November 2011 and the vacuum left thereby was another very worrying development for Turkey, as it enhanced its competition with Iran for filling this vacuum.

Lastly, one should note the deteriorating relations between Ankara and Baghdad against the background of the Sunni-Shi'ite rivalry in the region, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's growing tilt toward Iran and his support for Syrian president

►► Bashar al-Assad, as well as the growing personal antipathy between Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and Maliki.

All this weakened Ankara's "commitment" to the almost sacred notion of Iraqi unity and emboldened it in its bilateral ties with the KRG, the most challenging of which for Baghdad was the oil pipeline deal mentioned above.

Turkey's changing policy towards the KRG and its president Masu'd Barzani found

its expression on the symbolic level as well.

Barzani's April visit to Turkey was a case in point. While in the past Ankara treated Barzani as a mere "head of tribe," in this most recent visit it accorded him a welcome befitting a head of state, thus turning him into one of its important allies in the region. Moreover, in this visit Barzani reiterated publicly the Kurds' right to self-determination but, interestingly enough, Turkish officials and the

media chose to turn "a deaf ear" to this declaration.

Turkey is facing now a Kurdish problem on all three fronts, which has multiplied its dilemmas but which has moved it, so it seems, to adopt a flexible and non-conventional policy: Embracing the KRG so as to contain its own Kurds and Syria's as well. Should Turkey decide to give Barzani the green light, he would not hesitate to go the extra mile and declare independence. One thing is cer-

tain: Turkey has willy-nilly helped the Kurdish genie escape from the bottle and it will be very difficult for Ankara to push it back inside. □

Prof. Ofra Bengio is head of the Kurdish Studies Program at the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University and author of The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State.

The Boston Globe JUNE 12, 2012

Turkey to introduce elective Kurdish lessons

By SELCAN HACAOLU,
The Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey on Tuesday announced plans to introduce elective Kurdish language instruction in schools, a step aimed at easing tension that Kurdish minority activists argued didn't go far enough.

Kurdish politicians and activists have been aggressively promoting official use of Kurdish in recent years as part of their growing demands for regional autonomy — a goal shared by rebels whose fight has killed tens of thousands of people so far.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has long realized that it can't end the conflict through military measures alone, and has already allowed for Kurdish-language institutes and private Kurdish courses, as well as Kurdish language television broadcasts.

Erdogan on Tuesday said his government would allow elective Kurdish-language lessons in lower-level education along with some other languages and dialects.

"For example, if enough students come together, Kurdish can be taken as an elective lesson, it will be taught and it will be learned," Erdogan told his lawmakers in Parliament. "This is a historic step."

But, activists and Kurdish politicians



Mr Erdogan has already allowed for Kurdish language institutes and private courses, together with television broadcasts

insisted on full Kurdish education in schools. Pinar Dalkus, a 26-year-old lawyer with the independent Human Rights Association in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir, said introducing elective Kurdish lessons would not meet their needs.

"We all had problems in school and I don't think elective lessons can solve it," Dalkus said by telephone. "We think education in Kurdish would be more useful."

Dalkus said some school children were even having difficulty in telling that they need to go to bathroom when they start school.

"Some families teach Turkish to their children at home to prepare them for school," she said. "But some others insist they learn their mother tongue first."

Kurds make up roughly 20 percent of Turkey's 75 million population. Most

of them live in the southeast, though many have migrated to Istanbul and other western cities to escape war and poverty in past decades.

Gulten Kisanak, deputy chairman of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, told a meeting of her party in Parliament that allowing only elective language lessons for people whose "mother tongue is Kurdish amounts to oppression."

Turkey says the country was indivisible and that no attempt at challenging the official Turkish language will be accepted. Turkey's constitution says the official language is Turkish and prosecutors are opening investigations into direct challenges to the law.

The EU, which Turkey is striving to join, has pushed the Turkish government to grant more rights to the Kurds. But EU countries also have urged Kurdish lawmakers to distance themselves from the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the main opposition party, has sought national consensus to try to end the fighting. Erdogan said his party was open to dialogue with all parties, including the pro-Kurdish party, for a solution.

Devlet Bahceli, leader of a nationalist opposition party, however, said Tuesday that his party would not negotiate any concessions to the rebel group, which is branded as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union.

Kurdish rebels killed two Turkish soldiers in separate clashes along the Iraqi border in the latest reported violence on Tuesday, the state-run Anadolu Agency said. ♦

A Sleeping Dragon Awakes: Kurds Take Center Stage in West Asia



James Dorsey

As popular uprisings and post-revolt transitions change the political, economic and social structures of the Middle East, the struggle for Kurdish rights, including autonomy if not independence, moved center stage in the past week with a Syrian Kurd becoming head of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), Iraqi Kurdistan hosting an international tournament for nations that world soccer body FIFA refuses to recognize, and the hardening of attitudes of Turkish Kurds.

The election of Abdelbasset Sieda, a Sweden-based Kurdish activist and historian, is intended to unite Syria's fractured opposition as the country reels from mass murders of civilians believed to be by militias loyal to embattled President Bashar al-Assad and teeters on the brink of civil war. The attacks on civilians and mounting armed opposition have all but stymied the joint United Nations-Arab League mediator Kofi Annan's efforts to put an end to the 16-month bloodshed in Syria.

Uniting Assad's opponents is no easy task. The SNC, unlike the Libyan National Council on which it was modeled, has not been able to build a consensus among a myriad of opposition groups. Nor has it succeeded in bridging the gap between Assad's opponents in Syria and those in exile. As a result, the SNC has failed to project itself as a credible alternative to Assad's government despite backing from the United States, the European Union, the Arab League and Turkey. Critics claim that the SNC is dominated by Islamists, which has allowed Assad to either garner support from the country's religious and ethnic minorities or ensure their neutrality.

By electing Seida, the SNC wittingly or unwittingly has moved the struggle of the 26 million Kurds, who are spread over Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, into the spotlight. For much of their post-World War history the various Kurdish communities have campaigned for greater political and cultural rights rather than for independence from their host countries. Even the Turkish Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the only major group to have called for a pan-Kurdish state, has lowered its sights, calling for greater freedom for Kurds in Turkey who account for up to 20 percent of the population.

For its part, Iraqi Kurdistan has flourished under the U.S. air umbrella that shielded it from deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's wrath for 12 years and has since the fall of Saddam in 2003 become a country-in-waiting as it puts all the building blocks of a state in place. Kurdistan last week demonstrated its ability and intention to conduct a foreign policy at odds with that of Baghdad with its hosting of a World Cup for nations that world soccer body FIFA refuses to recognize. It was significant that Morocco protested against the inclusion of the disputed Western Sahara in the tournament to the Kurdish department of foreign relations rather than the Iraqi foreign ministry, and negotiating a deal under which the Saharans were not allowed to fly their flag during ceremonies and matches.

Sieda's election offers the SNC an opportunity to draw the Kurds, Syria's largest minority who account for nine percent of the country's population, into the anti-Assad front. They have been straddling the fence until now because the Syrian leader's opponents have been unable and unwilling to make Kurdish rights a part of their vision for Syria's future. Winning Kurdish support would deal a significant blow to the Assad regime that until now has been able to rely on the neutrality or support of the country's minorities who make up an estimated 45 percent of the Syrian minority population.

Syria's minorities -- Alawites, Christians, Druze and Kurds -- have remained on the side lines of the revolt because of fear of what Syria may become in a post-Assad era. The opposition's inability to set aside internal differences and form a united front has heightened minorities' sense of risk and uncertainty. Alawites, the religious sect to which Assad belongs, fear a cycle of sectarian violence and revenge if the Syrian leader were forced out of office. Christians are concerned that their relative secure status would be undermined in a post-Assad Syria that would likely be dominated by Islamist forces.

The opposition has so far been unable to convince Kurds, Syria's most disenfranchised minority, that it would adopt a policy that recognizes the group's minority rights by, for example, promising to redefine Syria as a multiethnic, rather than an Arab, state. Iraqi Kurds have advised their politically divided brethren not to take sides in the Syrian insurrection until the opposition takes Kurdish concerns into

account.

Winning the support of the Kurds whose grievances include the stripping of hundreds of thousands of Kurds of their citizenship in 1962, clashes with security forces in 2004 after an incident in a soccer stadium in Qamishli that left 60 people dead and 160 wounded, and last October's assassination of a prominent Kurdish opposition leader Mashaal Tammo, would significantly strengthen the revolt against Assad. Tammo's son Faris warned at the time of his father's death that "my father's assassination is the screw in the regime's coffin."

The Syrian president sought to prevent Kurds from joining the revolt last year by promising to reinstate Syrian citizenship for those who were made stateless. However, only several thousand of the more than 300,000 Kurds who were deprived of their citizenship have seen it restored in the past year.

Even if Sieda's election fails to enable Faris to make good on his promise to nail the regime's coffin, Syrian Kurds may well see their opportunity approaching soon. With no end to the violence in sight, the likelihood that Syria will further fragment politically and the possibility that the revolt will eventually undermine the country's territorial integrity, Syrian Kurds could well see a chance to carve out a political entity of their own on the model of Iraqi Kurdistan.

That would not go unnoticed in predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey where attitudes are hardening after last year's break-off of talks between the government and the PKK and the killing of 34 mostly-teenage Kurds last December in a Turkish air force strike that was supposed to target Kurdish guerrillas. Similarly, it would likely reignite fervor for autonomy in Kurdish-populated areas of Iran just across the border from Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus the rise of a Kurdish leader from the Kurdish diaspora could awaken the sleeping dragon of Kurdish nationalism across West Asia.

.....
James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, author of the blog, The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer, and a consultant to geopolitical consulting firm Wikistrat. This article first appeared on The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer and as an RSIS Commentary.

Exclusive: Arab states arm rebels as UN talks of Syrian civil war

Saudi Arabia and Qatar 'supplying weapons' to anti-Assad forces, while fears mount for civilians

Justin Vela / Istanbul

Syrian rebels are being armed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, The Independent has learnt, in a development that threatens to inflame a regional power struggle provoked by the 15-month-old uprising against the Assad regime.

Rebel fighters from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) have received weapons from the two Gulf countries, which were transported into Syria via Turkey with the implicit support of the country's intelligence agency, MIT, according to a Western diplomat in Ankara. Opposition fighters in Syria have hitherto been handicapped by a reliance on an old and inadequate arsenal, while the regime in Damascus has been able to rely on a supply of arms from Russia and Iran. Moscow is arming Syria with attack helicopters, Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, claimed yesterday. "We are concerned by the latest information we have that there are attack helicopters on the way from Russia to Syria, which will escalate the conflict quite dramatically," she told a conference in Washington.

Since the start of the uprising, anti-regime activists have only smuggled small quantities of weapons, purchased on the black market, from Hatay in southern Turkey into Syria's Idlib province.

However, three weeks ago, members of the loose assortment of rebel groups that comprises the FSA said they had received multiple shipments of arms including Kalashnikov assault rifles, BKC machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and anti-tank weaponry from Gulf countries and that Turkey was assisting in the delivery of the weapons.

"The Turkish government helped us to be armed," said one member of the FSA living in the Turkey-Syria border area. He claimed that the weapons had arrived at a Turkish port via ship and were then driven to the border without interference from Turkish authorities.

Saudi officials have in the past made clear their feeling that the rebels should be armed, with Saudi King Abdullah saying dialogue was "futile".

An Ankara-based Western diplomat, who



spoke on a condition of anonymity, confirmed that the delivery of "light weapons" to the rebels was a "recent development", one that involved unmarked trucks transporting the weapons to the border for rebel groups. "There are arms coming in with the knowledge of the Turks," he said. The Syrian National Council (SNC), the main umbrella organisation of groups opposed to the regime, vetted the consignment.

The SNC is seen as having lost nearly all of its legitimacy with Syrian activists inside the country after failing to unite the fractured opposition. Yet, it appears that Turkey insisted the SNC vouch for the specific FSA groups that would receive the weapons before allowing the arms to cross the border.

"Officially, they are not going to admit it," the diplomat said. However, the SNC are "their guys", he said, referring to MIT. The vetting process was aimed at preventing the weapons from falling into the hands of Islamic extremists. Yet, the diplomat voiced concerns that, in practice, the weapons have only been delivered to rebels sympathetic to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the dominant group within the SNC. "Only Muslim Brotherhood groups are getting weapons," he said. Activists along the border not affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood said they had not heard of the weapons being delivered until just a few days ago

However, the true strength of the Muslim Brotherhood inside Syria is still debated. The diplomat added that the SNC was "finished" due to pervasive in-fighting and that the rebels – who have become the dominant force in the revolution – "might grow a

beard" to attract the attention of wealthy religious benefactors for a conflict he characterised as a "civil war".

Saudi and Qatari officials did not return requests for comment. At a "friends of Syria" conference in Tunisia in February, the Saudi delegation walked away from proceedings, warning that firmer action was needed. Before leaving, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, described the arming of the Syrian rebels as "an excellent idea".

A Turkish official said: "Turkey is not providing arms to anybody, nor sending armed elements to any neighbouring country, including Syria." He also reiterated that Western countries were still only providing "non-lethal" aid.

While it has hosted members of the FSA in refugee camps in Hatay, Turkey has been hesitant to directly involve itself in the conflict. However, following several cross-border shootings and reports that the regime is supporting Kurdish militants who have engaged in a 30-year conflict with Turkey, the country is changing course, said Andrew Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"Assad did not implement the Annan plan at all, that's the biggest thing," he said. "Turkey can see exactly the hurricane that is gathering."

Mr Tabler said videos uploaded to the internet showed more regime tanks were being destroyed, but cautioned that the weapons would not decisively turn the tide of the conflict. "These weapons are helping harass the regime forces, but these alone are not enough to bring down the regime," he said.

A rebel officer said their forces now control much of Bab al-Hawa, a Syrian town with a border gate to Turkey, and that having received the weapons and communications equipment, were preparing for an offensive in the coming days.

Middle East: Where they stand on Syria

LEBANON

The uprising against Assad has spilled into Lebanon several times this year, raising fears of renewed sectarian and ethnic strife in ⇨

⇒ Syria's smaller neighbour which for decades has been the battleground for a proxy war that pits Iran and Syria against Israel.

SAUDI ARABIA

The kingdom seems to reckon that toppling the Assad regime in an effort to curtail Iranian influence is worth the risk of intervention. Riyadh led efforts to create a formalised pay structure for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and is now understood to be shipping arms to the rebels.

QATAR

Another anti-Iran Gulf state, Qatar also calculates that the benefit of removing Assad outweighs the risk of intervening. Along with Saudi Arabia, the country is now understood to be shipping weapons to the rebels. Syrian expatriates living in Doha are also said to be funnelling millions of dollars to the FSA.

TURKEY

Erstwhile ally Turkey turned on President Assad's regime last August after repeated

calls for reform and dialogue with the rebels went unheeded. Turkey closed its embassy in Damascus in March and began co-ordinating diplomatic support for the Syrian opposition movement in April.

IRAN

Syria's closest ally in the region denies that it is aiding Assad's forces with advisers, riot gear and surveillance equipment, but last month a top Iranian general, in an apparent slip-up during an interview, seemed to unwittingly reveal that crack Iranian troops had entered the country.

IRAQ

Baghdad voted to expel Syria from the Arab League despite its links to the pro-Assad government in Tehran. In an inversion of events during the US occupation of Iraq, weapons and militants are travelling north into Syria as refugees flood south.

ISRAEL

Israel broke a year of official silence this week to condemn the state-sponsored "geno-

cide" in Syria and called for Assad to go, despite fears that his regime's arsenal of chemical weapons could fall into the hands of anti-Israel extremists.

EGYPT

Street action in Egypt helped inspire Syrian protesters last spring but Egypt has been too pre-occupied with its own revolution to be a major player in regional affairs. It withdrew its ambassador in February to signal to Damascus its "dissatisfaction" with the Assad regime's crackdown.

JORDAN

King Abdullah II was the first Arab leader to call on Assad to step down, but his government fears that the rise of Islamist groups within Syria and the influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan could destabilise his country.

Chicago Tribune

June 16, 2012

Al-Qaida claims Iraq bombings of Shiite pilgrim processions that killed 72 this week

by: SINAN SALAHEDDIN , Associated Press

BAGHDAD Al-Qaida's affiliate in Iraq has claimed responsibility for a wave of car bombs that targeted Shiite pilgrims this week, killing 72 people in what was one of the deadliest days in the country since American troops withdrew six months ago.

The Islamic State of Iraq posted messages on militant websites saying it was behind the bombings of the annual pilgrimage marking the eighth-century death of Shiite Imam Moussa al-Kadhim. The commemorations culminate on Saturday with hundreds of thousands converging on the Baghdad shrine where al-Kadhim is buried.

Al-Qaida describes the attacks as a "blessed Wednesday invasion" and says they were a blow to the Iraqi government led by a Shiite prime minister in coalition with Sunnis and Kurdish parties. Wednesday's bombs also hit Kurdish political offices and army patrols.

The violence also risks escalating tensions among the Shi'ite, Sunni Muslim and Kurdish blocks in the government as Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki fends off attempts at a vote of no confidence against him.

Many Sunni Iraqis, who once dominated the Shi'ite majority under dictator Saddam Hussein, fear Maliki is consolidating his power at their expense by ignoring pledges to share power among the country's sectarian and ethnic mix.

Kurdistan, an autonomous Kurdish area in northern Iraq reliant on the central government's budget, is also chaffing against Maliki's authority in a long-running feud for control over oil and areas disputed by ethnic Kurds and Iraqi Arabs.◆



Firefighters wash the site of a bomb attack in Baghdad June 16, 2012)



Kurdish security personnel inspect the site of a car bomb attack in Kirkuk, 250 km (155 miles) north of Baghdad, June 13, 2012. Simultaneous early morning attacks in the northern Iraqi oil-rich city of Kirkuk on Wednesday killed one person and wounded 14 others, police and hospital sources said. They said that all the three attacks targeted headquarters of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) of the Kurdish President Massoud Barzani. REUTERS/Ako Rasheed (IRAQ - Tags: CONFLICT POLITICS)

Pendant que les diplomates tergiversent, la Syrie s'enfonce dans la guerre

Le groupe de contact voulu par l'émissaire Kofi Annan suscite des tractations entre Russes et Occidentaux à propos de l'Iran. Les livraisons d'armes russes à Damas accroissent la tension

Au-delà des cris d'indignation que suscite le cortège d'atrocités en Syrie, la diplomatie des Occidentaux peine à masquer leur désarroi et leur impuissance. Dans les chancelleries revient comme un refrain ce commentaire, déjà entendu en mars, lors d'une conférence de presse conjointe du président des Etats-Unis, Barack Obama, et du premier ministre britannique, David Cameron : le dossier syrien est « *tellement frustrant* ».

Avec un bilan évalué à 13 000 morts et des dizaines de milliers de suppliciés en prison, depuis mars 2011, le basculement de la Syrie dans une « *guerre civile* » – une formule employée par un responsable français à l'ONU et reprise par le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius, mercredi 13 juin – s'accompagne d'un florilège de réflexes diplomatiques consistant apparemment à sans cesse vouloir reconfigurer les enceintes dans lesquelles le « cas » de la Syrie est discuté. Mais sans que, pour autant, une solution concrète au drame parvienne à émerger.

L'idée d'un groupe de contact lancée par Kofi Annan, l'émissaire des Nations unies et de la Ligue arabe, occupe désormais le centre des débats – non sans reprendre une terminologie qui rappelle le traitement de la crise des Balkans, au début des années 1990. La France, comme l'a confirmé mercredi M. Fabius, lors d'une conférence de presse convoquée en urgence pour réagir à un rapport accablant de l'ONU sur les sévices infligés aux enfants par les forces syriennes, appuie ce nouveau format.

Mais tout le problème est d'en fixer les contours. Voyant que la participation de l'Iran était rejetée par les Occidentaux, la Russie a fait savoir qu'elle refusait, en conséquence, que l'Arabie saoudite soit incluse. M. Fabius, dans un commentaire qui mettait en exergue l'« *imbroglio* » des dossiers du Moyen-Orient, a estimé que l'Iran, si on lui offrait pareille tribune,



Hillary Clinton a reçu Kofi Annan au département d'Etat, à Washington, le 8 juin. G. CAMERON/REUTERS

l'utiliserait aussitôt comme un levier sur le dossier nucléaire. Auquel cas, a observé le ministre, « *non seulement on n'avancera pas sur la Syrie, mais on n'avancera pas non plus sur la question de l'armement nucléaire* ». Il n'a pas évoqué

une autre analyse, qui circule discrètement : la Russie, en insistant sur une prise en compte de l'Iran, grand allié de Damas, chercherait le moyen de détourner une partie des reproches qui lui sont adressés par les Occidentaux sur le dossier syrien. Si l'Iran est incluse, elle cesse d'apparaître comme la seule cause de paralysie collective...

« Scénario à la yéménite »

L'administration Obama semble de son côté tiraillée. Entre, d'une part, l'ambition de rallier Moscou à un « *scénario à la yéménite* » en Syrie – qui impliquerait une mise à l'écart négociée du président Bachar Al-Assad, peut-être par un exil en Russie, pays dont les « *intérêts* » en Syrie seraient en échange préservés – et, d'autre

part, la mise à l'index... du même « *partenaire* » russe en raison de la poursuite de ses livraisons d'armes au dictateur syrien.

Alors que Barack Obama et le président russe, Vladimir Poutine, doivent prochainement se rencontrer au Mexique, en marge du G20, le rôle de critique est endossé par la secrétaire d'Etat, Hillary Clinton, qui accuse publiquement Moscou d'attiser la guerre civile en livrant des hélicoptères de combat à Damas au moment même où le régime s'est mis à utiliser de tels engins contre la population. On observe cependant que M^{me} Clinton n'est guère suivie, sur ce terrain, par les responsables du Pentagone, qui ont à l'esprit les routes « *nordiques* » d'évacuation du contingent américain d'Afghanistan, pour lesquelles le bon vouloir russe est indispensable...

« *Il y a des livraisons d'armes, et il y en a vers les deux côtés* » du conflit en Syrie, commente pour sa part M. Fabius, qui a assuré devant la presse que si d'aventure des équipe-

ments militaires français vendus à la Russie se retrouvaient en Syrie, « *cela nous amènerait à réagir immédiatement* ». La veille, des militants des droits de l'homme avaient dénoncé un contrat de la société Thales destiné à équiper des tanks russes en caméras thermiques. La France demande l'arrêt complet des fournitures d'armes au pouvoir syrien, comme cela avait été fait en avril, lors d'une réunion internationale sur les sanctions, organisée à Paris.

Les responsables français semblent en tout cas beaucoup plus sceptiques que certains, à Washington, à propos de l'avènement d'un « *scénario yéménite* » en Syrie. Les Russes sont-ils seulement capables de réaliser pareille « *évacuation* » politique d'Assad? Lors de son entrevue avec le président François Hollande, le 1^{er} juin à l'Elysée, Vladimir Poutine n'a, à aucun moment, cherché à faire croire que ce serait chose assurée. Il a répété à ses interlocuteurs, à Paris et à Berlin, qu'il ne portait pas particulièrement le diri-

geant syrien dans son cœur, mais que tout le péril était dans « l'après-Assad », anticipé côté russe comme un basculement du pays aux mains d'extrémistes islamistes.

La Russie, pour autant, refuse toujours de se joindre au groupe

des Amis du peuple syrien, qui doit se réunir à Paris le 6 juillet, avec comme thème central la consolidation de l'opposition syrienne pour en faire une « *alternative crédible* ». Moscou aimerait convoquer sa propre conférence internationale.

Alors que la France plaide désormais pour que le plan Annan fasse l'objet d'une résolution de l'ONU sous chapitre VII, afin de rendre sa mise en œuvre « *obligatoire, sous peine de sanctions très fortes* », le spectre d'une extension régionale

du conflit semble s'amplifier. Selon une source occidentale haut placée, le régime de Bachar Al-Assad a fait venir en Syrie, en guise de renforts, des combattants du Hezbollah libanais. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

L'emploi de la force n'est pas une menace crédible

Analyse

La diplomatie sur la Syrie ne manque pas de motivation, côté occidental, à en juger par les qualificatifs employés pour décrire le pouvoir de Bachar Al-Assad, dont les crimes viennent d'être à nouveau documentés par un rapport, accablant, de Amnesty international, intervenant après celui que vient d'établir l'ONU, à propos de l'instrumentalisation des enfants comme « *boucliers humains* » par les forces gouvernementales syriennes. Un « *régime de mort et de sang* », dirigé par un « *prébendier à la tête d'un groupe d'assassins* », fustigeait Laurent Fabius, mercredi 13 juin, devant la presse.

Mais lorsqu'il lui fut demandé si une zone d'exclusion aérienne était envisageable, et que le ministre français a répondu, « *oui, cela fait partie des possibilités* », le ton semblait soudain moins percutant. La réalité est que depuis des mois, l'option de l'intervention militaire fait figure, pour les Occidentaux, d'épouvantail absolu. A tel point que des diplomates et responsables de ministères de la défense confient en privé : « *si on obtenait une résolution d'emploi de la force au Conseil de sécurité,*

on serait bien embêté ! »

Ces réticences n'ont pas que de mauvaises raisons. D'abord, la « *faisabilité* » d'une action militaire pose de grosses questions : impossible par exemple de créer des « *zones protégées* » sans engagement militaire au sol.

Surtout, le contexte régional dans lequel se situe la Syrie rassemble des éléments explosifs. A l'inverse des interventions qui avaient fini par se produire contre les troupes serbes dans les Balkans, dans les années 1990, le « *cas* » syrien ne pourrait jamais être contenu géographiquement, juge-t-on, alors que le drame bosniaque ne débordait par ses frontières de l'ex-Yougoslavie.

Non moins négligeable, il faut aussi tenir compte de l'extrême réticence de l'administration Obama à se lancer dans la moindre expédition armée, dans un contexte de campagne électorale américaine où le mot d'ordre de la Maison blanche semble être : « *surtout, pas de nouvelle crise* ». La coopération d'une Russie outrée par la guerre de Libye est recherchée, pour cause de dossier nucléaire iranien, et d'impératifs en Afghanistan.

L'option militaire est ainsi

brandie de façon occasionnelle, et purement rhétorique, presque pour apaiser les opinions publiques quand un massacre relance l'indignation. Le fameux « *effet CNN* » mentionné à l'époque des Balkans ne peut en effet être totalement écarté. Mais l'intention « *d'y aller* », militairement fait bien défaut. Ce qui n'est évidemment pas passé inaperçu à Damas, où le pouvoir a pu se sentir carte blanche du fait, aussi, du rôle que s'est taillé la Russie sur ce dossier.

L'option militaire est brandie de façon occasionnelle, et purement rhétorique, presque pour apaiser les opinions publiques

Dans les Balkans, c'est seulement lorsque Milosevic et ses acolytes ont senti la menace armée extérieure, venue après trois ans d'hésitations de l'administration Clinton, qu'une conférence (à Dayton) a pu mettre fin à la guerre civile.

Mais la « *couverture* » russe

offerte à Damas présente aussi un sérieux danger de boomerang. En 1999, Milosevic avait refusé tout arrangement sur le Kosovo à la conférence de Rambouillet, ce qui avait conduit à la guerre de l'OTAN, et cela précisément parce que la Russie lui avait assuré que jamais les Occidentaux ne surmonteraient son veto à l'ONU pour agir.

Les outils privilégiés sur la Syrie sont les sanctions, la menace de poursuites judiciaires pour crimes de guerre afin d'encourager des membres du régime à « *quitter le navire* », et l'espoir que Moscou se retourne contre Al-Assad. Mais se pose aussi la question de l'impunité qu'un scénario d'exil, à la « *yéménite* », impliquerait pour le dictateur syrien. Les Etats-Unis s'abstiennent, contrairement à la France de mentionner un projet de saisine de la Cour pénale internationale. Leur logique : il faut laisser une échappatoire au tyran si l'on veut favoriser une issue politique.

On continue aussi de miser, côté occidental, sur une progression des forces de l'opposition, qui contrôlèrent selon certaines estimations 40 % du territoire. ■

N. No.

AFP

Bagdad déconseille aux compagnies pétrolières françaises des contrats kurdes

BAGDAD, 20 juin 2012 (AFP)

LE VICE-PREMIER ministre irakien à l'Energie a de nouveau prévenu les compagnies françaises que tout contrat avec Bagdad serait annulé si elles signent d'autres contrats avec des autorités locales ou régionales, après que le Kurdistan (nord) a fait affaires avec des compagnies étrangères.

Hussein al-Chahristani "a prévenu les compagnies françaises travaillant dans le secteur pétrolier en Irak qu'elles ne devaient signer avec personne d'autre que le gouvernement irakien", au cours d'une réunion avec l'ambassadeur de France Denis Gauer, selon un communiqué du cabinet de M. Chahristani.

Le responsable irakien a demandé à l'ambassadeur de faire savoir au gouvernement français que si une compagnie française signe "un contrat avec la région du Kurdistan ou tout autre gouvernement local sans l'approbation du gouvernement fédéral, cela signifiera la fin de son contrat en Irak", a déclaré son porte-parole Faisal Abdallah à l'AFP.

La compagnie pétrolière française Total irait à l'encontre de la loi irakienne si elle signait des contrats pétroliers avec la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, avait averti début avril M. Chahristani, alors que le groupe s'est dit intéressé.

Le PDG de la compagnie pétrolière française Christophe de Margerie avait

auparavant déclaré que le groupe était entré en discussions en vue de décrocher des contrats pétroliers au Kurdistan irakien mais n'avait signé aucun accord à ce sujet pour le moment.

Le gouvernement de Bagdad ne reconnaît que les accords signés avec le ministère du Pétrole, et a jusqu'à présent interdit à toute compagnie pétrolière ayant un contrat avec le Kurdistan de participer à des appels d'offres dans le reste du pays.

Le Premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, estime qu'un contrat passé entre la major pétrolière américaine ExxonMobil et la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien pourrait conduire à "la guerre" et "mettre fin à l'unité de l'Irak", a affirmé mardi son porte-parole, Ali Moussaoui dans un entretien avec l'AFP.

ExxonMobil a signé un accord d'exploration pétrolière avec la région du Kurdistan dans six zones, dont deux sont revendiquées à la fois par les autorités régionales kurdes et par le gouvernement central de Bagdad.

M. Maliki "a envoyé un message au président américain Barack Obama la semaine dernière l'exhortant à intervenir pour empêcher ExxonMobil de poursuivre son action", a dit le porte-parole.

Cette crise s'ajoute à de nombreux contentieux entre le Kurdistan et le gouvernement central. La semaine dernière, les dirigeants kurdes ont pris part à un vote de défiance à l'encontre du Premier ministre. ○

L'IRAK ENTRE VIOLENCES ET IMPASSE POLITIQUE

Par Georges Malbrunot

Dix-neuf morts à Hilla. Dix-huit à Bagdad. Sept à Taji et quatre autres à Baqouba. Au total, pas moins de 29 attaques particulièrement meurtrières - dont douze à la voiture piégée - ont été perpétrées mercredi à travers l'Irak, rappelant à la communauté internationale que si les feux de l'actualité ne sont plus braqués sur l'ancienne Mésopotamie, la situation y demeure des plus fragiles, tant sur le plan sécuritaire que politique.

Toutes les cibles étaient des membres de la majorité chiite, qui célèbre l'anniversaire de la mort de Moussa al-Kazem, le septième des douze imams vénérés par les descendants d'Ali. Il faut remonter au 20 mars dernier pour trouver des attaques aussi meurtrières. Elles n'ont pas été revendiquées, mais tout porte à croire qu'elles ont été commises par des extrémistes sunnites liés à la mouvance locale d'al-Qaida. «Sa stratégie est claire, a affirmé au Wall Street Journal le vice-ministre de l'Intérieur, Ahmed al-Khafaji. Al-Qaida cherche à provoquer une guerre confessionnelle entre chiïtes et sunnites.»



Malgré les derniers attentats, des milliers de chiïtes affluent en pèlerinage à Bagdad.

Cette flambée de violence intervient alors que l'Irak est plongé dans une profonde crise institutionnelle. Accusé de pratiques dictatoriales dignes de Saddam Hussein, le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki est à la merci d'un vote de défiance du Parlement, où ses nombreux adversaires veulent sa peau. Parmi ceux-ci, les 40 députés du leader chiïte Moqtada al-Sadr, qui a appelé al-Maliki à «démissionner pour le bien du pays». Ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard si leur protégé a été convoqué à Téhéran la semaine dernière. Ce sont ces mêmes Iraniens qui avaient contraint les «sadristes» à soutenir al-Maliki au poste de premier ministre après les élections législatives de mars 2010.

Depuis, l'accord de partage du pouvoir, arraché en décembre suivant par les Kurdes, a volé en éclats. Le cabinet d'union nationale est inefficace dans un pays à reconstruire, où la majeure partie de la population vit toujours dans la pauvreté. Depuis le retrait militaire américain d'Irak en décembre, le gouvernement est en permanence au bord de la rupture, si bien qu'aujourd'hui Kurdes et «sadristes», alliés au bloc sunnite de l'ancien premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, ont la capacité de rassembler une majorité de députés contre al-Maliki.

LE RÔLE DE L'IRAN

Mais l'inoxydable chef du gouvernement depuis 2006 n'a pas dit son dernier mot. Face à des

blocs kurde et sunnite fragmentés, il reste le seul à rassembler un tant soit peu autour de sa personne. Quitte à user de méthodes expéditives, comme en avril lorsqu'il ordonna l'arrestation du président de la commission électorale, le Kurde Faraj al-Haidari, soupçonné de corruption. D'autre part, il n'est pas dans l'intérêt du voisin iranien d'ordonner à ses amis «sadristes» de lâcher al-Maliki, au moment où un autre allié de l'Iran dans la région - la Syrie de Bachar el-Assad - vacille.

Actuellement, Téhéran a au contraire intérêt à un Irak stable. Au final, estiment de nombreux observateurs, al-Sadr pourrait utiliser cette crise pour arracher de nouvelles concessions à son rival al-Maliki sur les principaux litiges toujours pendants: le partage des pouvoirs, l'utilisation de la rente pétrolière et le sort de Kirkouk et des territoires disputés autour de la ville pétrolière du Nord.

Est-ce un hasard? Trois régiments d'artillerie viennent d'être envoyés à Kirkouk. «Pour quoi faire?», s'interroge un expert en sécurité à Bagdad. Le Parlement sera convoqué le 21 juin afin d'examiner une éventuelle motion de censure anti-al-Maliki. D'ici là, sur le terrain, la violence risque de resurgir à tout moment. ●



La rébellion syrienne appelle les Kurdes à rejoindre ses rangs

BEYROUTH, 19 juin 2012 (AFP)

L'ARMÉE SYRIENNE LIBRE (ASL), force d'opposition armée mise sur pied par des soldats syriens ayant fait défection, a appelé mardi ses "frères kurdes" à rejoindre la rébellion contre le régime du président Bachar al-Assad.

"Le commandement interarmées (...) en appelle à nos frères kurdes, soldats comme civils, et les invite à rejoindre les rangs de l'ALS", a déclaré le porte-parole de cette force, le colonel Kassem Saadeddine, dans une vidéo mise en ligne lundi soir.

L'opposition syrienne, surtout le Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale coalition de l'opposition dont la direction est en exil, est accusée de margi-

naliser les groupes religieux et ethniques minoritaires en Syrie.

Le CNS a choisi le 10 juin comme nouveau chef le militant kurde Abdel Basset Sayda, notamment pour rassurer les minorités syriennes.

Les Kurdes représentent près de 9% des 23 millions de Syriens et se plaignent depuis des décennies d'être discriminés sous le régime Assad.

Dans son communiqué, l'ASL affirme que les Kurdes seraient "membres à part entière de l'ASL aux côtés de leurs frères syriens de toutes origines", pour défendre "notre pays" et soutenir "notre révolution".

"Travaillons ensemble pour transformer l'ASL en une institution nationale militaire qui soit une alternative à l'armée des criminels au pouvoir", a déclaré le colonel Saadeddine, souhaitant "construire un état civil, et une démocratie pluraliste".

De nombreux Kurdes syriens se sont réfugiés en Irak, où selon l'agence de l'ONU pour les réfugiés, 1.500 d'entre eux sont logés dans un camp de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.



Quatre rebelles kurdes tués dans le sud-est de la Turquie

DIYARBAKIR, 15 juin 2012 (AFP)

QUATRE rebelles kurdes ont trouvé la mort jeudi lors d'un accrochage avec les forces de sécurité turques dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a indiqué le bureau du gouverneur local.

L'échange de tirs s'est produit lorsque les forces gouvernementales ont surpris quatre rebelles en train de traverser la frontière venant de Syrie, et se dirigeant vers la localité d'Alakamis, dans la province de Sirnak, a-t-il précisé.

Les quatre insurgés, des cadres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, illégal) ont été tués après qu'ils eurent refusé de se rendre, a-t-on souligné de même source.

Les accrochages avec les rebelles du PKK s'intensifient souvent au printemps, après la fonte des neiges notamment dans les régions montagneuses de la frontière turco-irakienne. ○



17 juin 2012

Au Kurdistan irakien, excision et violences domestiques résistent aux lois

En juin 2011, le Kurdistan irakien votait une loi révolutionnaire criminalisant l'excision et les violences domestiques: un an plus tard, les militants des droits des femmes sont exaspérés par les ratés de sa mise en application.

Dans cette région très conservatrice, le texte avait été salué par les ONG comme une avancée majeure, obtenue au bout de plusieurs années de lutte.

La loi sanctionne les violences physiques, sexuelles et psychologiques commises dans le cadre familial, protège les victimes et prévoit la création de tribunaux spécialisés. Elle punit de peines de prison et d'amendes la promotion et la pratique de mutilations génitales féminines.

Le Kurdistan, bien que faisant partie de l'Irak, est largement autonome (il dispose de ses propres institutions politiques et de son armée) et bénéficie d'une situation sécuritaire et économique bien meilleure que celle du reste du pays.

Les mutilations sexuelles sont l'un des principaux problèmes: bien que souvent considérées comme une "maladie africaine", elles sont très répandues au Kurdistan, souligne l'ONG allemande Wadi dans une étude publiée en 2010 sur la base d'entretiens avec près de 1.700 femmes vivant dans la région.

Selon ses conclusions, 72,7% des femmes (hors province de Dohouk) en avaient subi, avec des taux atteignant "quasiment 100% dans certaines zones".

Plus de la moitié (51,1%) d'entre elles étaient analphabètes, souligne l'ONG qui note un "lien manifeste" entre ces phénomènes.

Sujets hautement tabous

L'adoption de la loi prohibant ces violences fut donc "une grande victoire", résume Suzan Aref, directrice de l'ONG Women Empowerment Organization. "Au moins à présent, on parle" de ces sujets hautement tabous dans la société irakienne, souligne-t-elle.

Pakhshan Zangana, secrétaire générale du Haut Conseil pour les Affaires des Femmes, un organisme rattaché au gouvernement kurde, est du même avis: "La société a reconnu que les violences domestiques sont des crimes. C'est très important. Dans d'autres sociétés, c'est considéré comme un droit de la famille".

Mais toutes deux s'accordent à dire que la partie ne sera pas gagnée tant que la loi ne sera pas appliquée.

"C'est un gros problème", soupire Mme Aref. "On ne peut pas dire que le nombre (de mutilations sexuelles) recule grâce à la loi car personne ne la connaît", dit-elle, déplorant le manque de suivi par les autorités et appelant à une "campagne" pour la populariser.

La police montre peu d'empressement à enquêter sur les violences et les "suicides" de femmes, et qui sont en réalité "pour la plupart des crimes d'honneur", dit-elle. Nombre de femmes, constatant que la loi n'a



Une vendeuse de vêtements d'occasion dans la ville d'Arbil, au Kurdistan irakien le 16 juin 2012 (AFP)

rien changé, "perdent espoir", déplore-t-elle.

Ramziya Zana, directrice d'une autre ONG d'Erbil, le Gender Studies and Information Center Organization, est plus directe: "Cela fait un an que la loi est passée, elle n'est toujours pas appliquée. C'est un désastre. Il faut donc soit la renvoyer au Parlement, soit l'appliquer", dit-elle.

Nombre de magistrats et de religieux font obstacle. "La plupart des juges pensent qu'elle est nuisible à la famille" et ceux qui l'appliquent se comptent "sur les doigts d'une main", explique-t-elle. Quant aux religieux, "rien dans la loi ne leur plaît" et beaucoup voudraient l'amender.

Mme Zangana admet l'existence de ces difficultés, notamment pour la création des tribunaux spécialisés, mais compte beaucoup sur un plan d'application actuellement en cours d'élaboration avec l'aide des Nations Unies.

Elle plaide pour la patience:

"C'est nouveau pour une société comme la nôtre, avec une culture traditionnelle. (Le progrès) ne peut pas se mesurer en mois".

Elle juge aussi "très dangereux" un nouveau vote dans le contexte actuel de poussée de l'islamisme dans le monde arabe. "Nous ne vivons pas dans une île à part et la première chose que font les islamistes et les conservateurs, c'est attaquer les droits des femmes", souligne-t-elle.

Mme Aref se dit elle aussi optimiste sur la tendance de fond, mais regrette qu'on ne s'attaque pas aux racines du problème. "Il y a quelque chose qui mène aux crimes d'honneur, aux suicides, comme le mariage forcé ou prématuré, l'analphabétisme..."

Sur tous ces sujets, les études manquent, déplore-t-elle: "Vous pouvez voir combien la société est incapable d'accepter (de parler) des problèmes des femmes". (AFP) □

Scores die in attacks across Iraq

BAGHDAD

Bombings target Shiites, leaving more than 70 dead and 260 wounded

BY TIM ARANGO

In what appeared to be the deadliest day in Iraq since the withdrawal of the U.S. military in December, a terrifying series of explosions that mostly targeted Shiite Muslims on Wednesday amounted to an emphatic demonstration of the potent capabilities of the Sunni insurgency and a reminder of the instability left behind by American forces.

Shortly after midnight, a homemade bomb exploded here in the capital, a harbinger of what was to come. About 5 a.m., a truck bomb exploded in Khadam-iyah, a Baghdad neighborhood where Shiite pilgrims had begun to gather to commemorate the life and death of a revered imam who was the Prophet Muhammad's great-grandson. From then on, reports of other attacks flooded in from around the country — Samarra, Kirkuk, Mosul, Falluja, Ramadi, Hilla — and by midday officials said that more than 70 people were dead and at least 260 people wounded.

The only large cities spared were the southern port city of Basra and the holy city of Najaf.

The attacks were a deadly reality check for a country that has made substantial steps to reclaim a sense of normalcy. One article on the front page of a local newspaper on Wednesday heralded the return of women to local movie theaters. Lately, new red double-decker buses have begun operating in Baghdad, and checkpoints and blast walls have been dismantled, providing some relief to the city's notorious traffic delays.

But after the first attacks struck on Wednesday morning, security forces closed off roads, lending a sense of siege to the capital that will continue over the next several days leading up to the culmination of the Shiite religious festival on Saturday. In the afternoon, the government declared that Thursday would be a day off so that the army and the police could secure the city. And on Thursday morning, local papers will again be filled with reports of death and destruction.

Helicopters buzzed the skies over Baghdad, and in hospitals, familiar and bloody scenes of grief unfolded. Among

the victims in Khadam-iyah were those who had set up tents, including some Sunnis, to serve water and food to the pilgrims.

"The explosion was large enough to tell us that the target is all Iraqis, not



The northern Iraqi city Kirkuk was struck by four car bombings on Wednesday. Two of the attacks happened near Kurdish political offices.

just Shiites, because I had two Sunni friends helping me serve the pilgrims," said Ali al-Baydhani, 39, who was operating a food stand.

An Interior Ministry official said five parked cars detonated across Baghdad, aimed at Shiite pilgrims celebrating the eighth-century martyrdom of Imam Musa Kadhim. The pilgrimage reaches its peak on Saturday, raising the specter of further violence as more pilgrims descend on Baghdad in the coming days. In Baghdad, at least 29 people were killed and about 80 people wounded.

In Hilla, a predominantly Shiite city south of Baghdad, two car bombs left at least 20 people dead and nearly 40 wounded. One attack struck a restaurant near the local police academy, and many of the dead were recruits eating breakfast, a local official said. Also, Shiite mosques in the Hilla area were damaged by homemade bombs, although there were no casualties in those explosions. And in a village east of Karbala, a famous Shiite shrine city, a bomb struck a group of day laborers as they gathered for work.

Numerous other smaller attacks and assassinations were reported across the Iraq on Wednesday morning. In Kirkuk, four car bombs exploded, two near Kurdish political offices. In Balad, a largely Shiite city north of Baghdad, two car bombs detonated, killing 5 and

wounding 30, a security official said. In Diyala Province, a spate of assassinations by gunfire and homemade bombs killed 5.

While the casualty reports suggested that Wednesday was the deadliest day since the U.S. military left, two other days since then were similarly deadly: In late December, at least 63 people were killed in Baghdad, and in early January an estimated 68 people were

killed across the country.

Wednesday's attacks followed a deadly sectarian attack last week on an important Shiite religious office in Baghdad that is in charge of overseeing mosques and cultural sites.

Late December marked the withdrawal of the last American forces, and violence spiked in the immediate aftermath of their departure. But in more recent months, overall violence has appeared to decline, according to statistics released by the Iraqi government.

But every few weeks, significant attacks, mostly aimed at Shiites — the public gatherings to mark religious rituals are frequent targets, as they have been for years — still occur at the hands of a lethal Sunni insurgency.

Zaid Thaker, Duraid Adnan and Yasir Ghazi contributed reporting from Baghdad. Other employees of The New York Times contributed reporting from Baghdad, Hilla, Mosul, Kirkuk, Samarra, Falluja and Ramadi.



14 June 2012

The Making of Kurdistan: Oil, Investment and a Turkish Gamble

By Jen Alic
oilprice.com

As tensions rise among Iraqi Kurds in the country's north, Sunnis in the south and the Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad over the distribution of natural resources, Turkey is setting its sights on an unconventional alliance with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This is a gamble Ankara is willing to take, despite the potential implications it could have for Kurds on its own territory. Indeed, as recently as 2009, Ankara had a very different view on the KRG, going as far as to label its leader, Masoud Barzani, a "bandit" who was turning a blind eye (at best) to Kurdish militants using Northern Iraq as a base to launch cross-border attacks on Turkey. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been fighting the Turkish government for more rights for decades.

So when Ankara began announcing a series of bilateral deals with the KRG (deals that went above Baghdad's head), everyone's first question was why would Turkey want to align itself with an Iraqi Kurdish leadership that is clearly making a play to create a sovereign Kurdish state?

According to intelligence analysts at Jellyfish, this is not such an unexpected or even illogical development from Turkey's standpoint. "It is important to understand that Northern Iraq is a major market for Turkish exports and that oil and gas from coming Iraqi Kurdish territory is moved on to worldwide markets through Turkey," Jellyfish President Michael Bagley told Oilprice.com.

"From a financial and logistical standpoint, an Ankara-Erbil marriage is one of exceptional convenience. From our standpoint, Northern Iraq stands to be one of the next great investment areas in the Middle East, and so far, the KRG has managed to out-play Baghdad in the natural resources and investment game."

Last October, the KRG signed a highly controversial deal with ExxonMobil to explore for hydrocarbons in Northern Iraq. The deal was signed without Baghdad's consent, and without even consulting Baghdad, which perceives the deal as illegal. In May, Baghdad attempted to auction off another set of exploration blocks, but none of the big international players bid, balking at (among other things) clauses forbidding anyone to deal exclusively with the KRG.

Also in May, as reported on Oilprice.com, the KRG and Turkey announced plans to build a pipeline connecting Ceyhan, Turkey, with northern Iraq and that this pipeline could carry one million barrels of oil per day and could be completed as early as August 2013. A second addition to the pipeline would connect it directly to the existing Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline by 2014. The KRG plans to export crude oil to Turkey, which will be refined in Turkey and re-exported to Northern Iraq.

A highly significant but oddly underreported development that will boost the KRG's power play for autonomy in Northern Iraq was the expression of support, in early June, by the governor of Ninewa (Ninevah) province for the KRG's deal with ExxonMobil.

Ninewa province Governor Atheel Nujaifi--from his seat in the provincial capital of Mosul--officially aligned himself with the KRG's oil rights moves against Baghdad, tipping the balance of power in the KRG's favour over the issue. The Ninewa seal of approval also bodes well for Exxon as it signifies that there will be less violent opposition from local leaders over its move to court the KRG.

Here again, Baghdad loses out. Ninewa today is one of the last bastions of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and its blessing of the KRG-ExxonMobil deal is significant in terms of security.

Iraq's oil is Iraq's oil, as far as Baghdad is concerned, and the KRG does not have the authority to sign any export deals on its own, even if it plans to divert revenues from sales to the Iraqi central authority.

The KRG, however, has a number of major power players behind it--from Ankara to Brussels and Washington, all of whom would very much like to see Iraqi oil and gas find an easy way to Western markets.

In the end, Turkey's stance on Northern Iraq may seem like a paradox, but it is a logical move on many levels. With Syria in a state of violent upheaval, militant Kurds that threaten Turkey from across that border are no longer a focal point or indeed even a threat by comparison. And Ankara's burgeoning relationship with the KRG has noticeably softened Kurdish militancy aimed at Turkey in the last couple of years.

Economics has played the greatest role in forging these new relations and Northern Iraq has become a new sta-

ging ground for Turkey companies and investment, with Turks owning an estimated 50% of all major businesses operating under the KRG-controlled territory.

Furthermore, the pipeline deal announced between Ankara and the KRG in late May was in part a reaction to pressure to reduce imports from Iran, but it also follows a logical path in the Turkey-Northern Iraq relationship.

Turkey knows that the pipeline deal and other energy deals forged with the KRG will set the stage for the creation of an independent Kurdish state. But in the meantime, Turkey has made such a heavy footprint in Northern Iraq that its level of influence there is and will continue to be immense. As such, Ankara will wield much control over any potential sovereign Kurdish state.

As for the KRG, it shows no signs of backing down in the face of threats from Baghdad, and is hedging its bets that the combination of its natural resource wealth and Western power brokers on its side will give it the advantage. On 11 June, the KRG told a gathering of potential investors at a business convention in the northern capital Erbil that it expected to quadruple oil production in the next three years, and that today's 250,000 bpd would be up to 300,000 bpd by the end of this year. The KRG is already translating this into a boom for other sectors beyond energy.

Jen Alic is a geopolitical analyst, co-founder of ISA Intel in Sarajevo and Tel Aviv, and the former editor-in-chief of ISN Security Watch in Zurich.

Hope of Zana, hope for Kurdish issue



Columnists
MERVE BÜŞRA ÖZTÜRK

Unlike most of the pessimistic and critical statements we typically hear from Kurdish politicians, Leyla Zana, an independent pro-Kurdish deputy from Diyarbakır, had hopeful and constructive things to say about a recent meeting between Turkey's ruling party and the main opposition party to discuss a solution to the country's Kurdish issue.

Zana told the *Hürriyet* daily on Thursday that she believes Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will solve the Kurdish issue and that she had never lost hope and faith in him.

Bugün's Ahmet Taşgetiren said Zana's statements are as significant as the "historic" meeting between the two parties. The columnist also highlighted some of Zana's suggestions -- including using Kurdish as the main language of instruction in schools in some regions, house arrest for terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan and an acknowledgement of a Kurdish nation in the new constitution being drafted -- which he felt were reasonable and worth considering.

Sabah's Nazlı Ilıcak, on the other hand, argued that while Zana's statements are all reasonable, it is difficult to forget that the woman we are applauding today was once sentenced to 10 years in prison for making statements such as, "The PKK is not a terrorist organization, it is only struggling for freedom and democracy" and "Öcalan is the leader of the Kurdish people." Regardless of the content of her statements, the fact that an individual was imprisoned just for expressing views that are contrary to those of the state indicates a big problem with our laws, Ilıcak said.

Cevdet Aşkın from *Radikal* wrote that when he read Zana's interview he felt it would cause a break in Kurdish politics. Soon after, pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) leader Selahattin Demirtaş told reporters that "if anyone has hopes for the prime minister, that is merely naïveté," proving the columnist right. Aşkın says Zana's faith in the prime minister in solving the Kurdish issue indicates that she is ready to take a risk and part ways with the BDP, the PKK and the Democratic Society Congress (DTK). But the PKK will not agree to Zana's suggestions and the BDP will



Kurdish independent lawmaker Zana says PM Erdoğan, has the power to solve the Kurdish issue. 'Now we should all make him feel that we support him,' Zana says. AFP photo

not risk opposing the PKK either.

However, Aşkın said, at a time when even US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has pledged continued US support to Turkey in its fight against the terrorist PKK gaining hold over southeast Turkey, and the PKK has escalated its attacks and violence toward not only soldiers but civilians as well, Zana's statements should not be regarded only as "a Kurdish politician's faith and hope in politics," but a sincere call from an individual who only wants peace in her country.

Yalçın Akdoğan from the *Star* daily highlighted parts of Zana's interview and interpreted them. Zana earlier said "Turks and Kurds are one big family," implying that unlike the BDP, she believes in the Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) discourse of brotherhood amongst all those living in Turkey. "The government's initiative of setting up the country's first Kurdish-language TV channel has reminded Kurds of their own language and culture," Zana said, indicating that she recognized the government's positive approaches towards the Kurds. Her statement, "The BDP should show that it can serve everyone in Turkey and not only one region -- the Southeast," shows an accurate evaluation of the BDP's policies. Lastly, Akdoğan said that Zana's optimistic stance on the Kurdish issue, criticism of the BDP, the PKK and the ruling party, acknowledgement of the positive moves made by the government as well as suggestions toward solving the issue all show the Kurdish politician to be objective and fair. ■

BDP leader criticizes Zana

Hürriyet Daily News

HAKKARİ/ANKARA- To be hopeful on the AKP is naïve says Co-leader of the BDP Demirtaş. AA photo

The co-leader of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Selahattin Demirtaş has criticized the comments of Kurdish politician and independent deputy Leyla Zana, who recently said that Prime Minister Erdoğan could solve the Kurdish issue.

Commenting on Zana's words,

Selahattin Demirtaş said it was the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) that had run the harshest assimilation policies toward Kurds in Turkey's history.

"The person who has the most power can stop this issue. I believe it is the head of the government, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who will solve this issue. I haven't given up my hopes about this. Now, we should all make him feel that we support him," Zana said in an interview with daily *Hürriyet* printed on June 14.

"They have realized political genocide and military operations and have taken the Kurdish issue back 100 years," Demirtaş said, adding that to be hopeful on the AKP was naïve.

"Demirtaş also added that those who were aiming to divide the BDP would not



To be hopeful on the AKP is naïve says Co-leader of the BDP Demirtaş. AA photo

reach their aims.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said he appreciated Zana's words. "I do hope that other BDP deputies can have the same perspective," he said. ●

Russian lays out risks of Syria intervention

MOSCOW

Chief of weapons exports describes the arsenal that West would face

BY ANDREW E. KRAMER

Russian arms now being shipped to Syria could be used to shoot down airplanes or sink ships if the United States or other Western nations tried to intervene to halt the spiral of violence, the head of Russia's state-controlled arms exporters said Friday.

Recent criticism of Russia's arms sales to Syria, including by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton this week, has focused on whether the government of President Bashar al-Assad could use the weapons to repress the opposition or fight the Free Syrian Army, the out-gunned rebel group.

Russia has denied that its arms can be used in this way — but in a manner that could also be interpreted as a sharp warning to the West against attempting the type of military action that ousted Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi from Libya. That type of intervention is something that President Vladimir V. Putin viewed as a breach of sovereignty and says he does not want repeated.

The prospect of the United States or NATO acting unilaterally has become a more frequently discussed option among those seeking to resolve the Syrian crisis, given Russia's adamant refusal to authorize more aggressive action by the United Nations.

While insisting that they are providing only defensive armaments, Russian



POOL PHOTO BY MIKHAIL KLIMENTYEV

Vladimir V. Putin views unilateral intervention in Syria as a breach of sovereignty.

officials have pointedly laid out exactly what they are supplying: a panoply of defenses against attack from planes or ships, fresh from Russian factories.

"Threats are for politicians," Anatoly P. Isaykin, the general director of Rosoboronexport, the state-controlled

weapons exporter that sells the systems, said in an interview Friday. "I don't want to use those terms."

"I would like to say these mechanisms are really a good means of defense, a reliable defense against attacks from the air or sea," he said. "This is not a threat — but whoever is planning an attack should think about this."

Among the weapons being shipped now, he said, are the Pantsyr-S1 air defense system, a radar-guided missile and artillery system capable of hitting airplanes at altitudes well above those typically flown during bombing sorties, and up to 20 kilometers, or 12 miles, away.

Rosoboronexport and other Russian arms purveyors, Mr. Isaykin said, are also filling orders for Buk-M2 anti-aircraft missiles, an up-to-date system capable of striking airplanes at even higher altitudes, up to 82,000 feet, and at longer ranges.

Under current contracts, he said in a rare interview by such a senior Russian weapons export official, Russia is also providing Bastion anti-ship missiles that can fire at targets 290 kilometers from launchers on the coast.

The openness about missile sales comes as President Barack Obama and Mr. Putin are expected to meet next week on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit meeting in the Mexican resort of Cabos. Mr. Obama is coming under pressure from Republicans to act to halt the violence in Syria.

Elevating the pressure on Moscow this week, Mrs. Clinton accused the Russians of shipping attack helicopters to Syria despite the repeated denials of providing weapons that could be used in the civil conflict — and explanation of what is being sent.

On Friday, Russia offered its most direct rebuttal so far to Mrs. Clinton. A statement posted on the Foreign Ministry Web site confirmed that Moscow had refurbished helicopters for the Syrian military but denied shipping new models.

"There are no new deliveries of Russian military helicopters to Syria," the Russian statement said. "All arms industry cooperation with Syria is limited to a transfer of defensive arms. Regarding helicopters, there were previously planned repairs of military equipment delivered to Syria many years ago."

The helicopters turned out to be only marginally significant militarily, both U.S. and Russian officials say. A State Department spokeswoman, Veronica Nuland, said Thursday that Mrs. Clinton referred to three helicopters refurb-

ished in Russia that were being returned to Syria's arsenal.

In the interview, Mr. Isaykin said Rosoboronexport had signed a contract with Syria to overhaul helicopters in 2008, received the machines the following year and completed the work this spring.

The repair agreement, he said, was never secret and had been reported to international organizations. "It was an absolutely routine contract," he said.

To demonstrate the absence of weapons that can be used in a civil conflict, Mr. Isaykin went on to detail what his company is sending.

The Russian formulation of its denial, like a good chess move, has more than one purpose.

Aleksander Golts, an independent military analyst in Moscow, said the Russians' discussion of defensive weapons shipments "undoubtedly" served as a warning to Western countries contemplating an intervention.

"Russia uses these statements as a form of deterrence in Syria," he said. "They show other countries that they are more likely to suffer losses."

Other military analysts question the effectiveness of Russian air defenses in the Middle East after their quick failure in earlier conflicts.

Ruslan Aliyev, an authority on military affairs at the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies in Moscow, said the Russian official commentary on anti-aircraft weaponry was intended principally as a political statement. Moscow has in fact, he said, declined to supply Syria with a long-range missile system, the S-300, of a class that is considered the most lethal Russia's quiver of air defense missiles.

"As far as I understand, Syria is not able to defend itself from NATO, just like it failed to defend its nuclear facility from Israel's September 2007 airstrike," Mr. Aliyev wrote in an e-mailed response to questions. "Russian armaments are unlikely to be significantly helpful, I'm afraid."

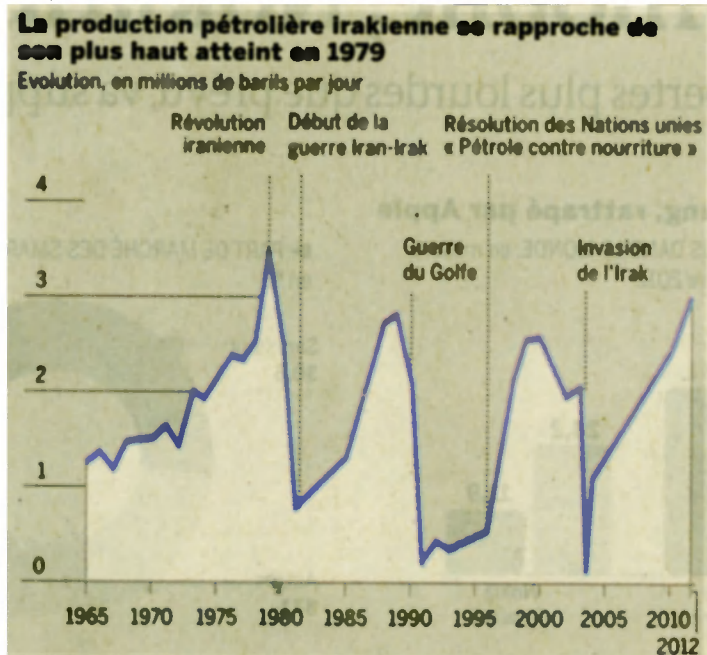
Syria has spent about \$500 million annually in recent years on Russian weaponry, Mr. Isaykin said in the interview, an order book that amounts to about 5 percent of Rosoboronexport's business.

Rosoboronexport, Mr. Isaykin said, has for nearly a decade not filled a Syrian order for rifles, ammunition, ground-to-ground rockets, helicopters and their onboard weapons or armored vehicles — the basic tools of the conflict that is escalating into civil war.

Andrew Roth contributed reporting.

L'Irak est en train de reprendre sa place au sein des poids lourds de l'OPEP

Le pays produit près de 3 millions de barils par jour, mais rémunère mal les majors étrangères



SOURCES : BP STATISTICAL REVIEW, AGENCE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ÉNERGIE



Après trois décennies de guerres et de sanctions internationales qui ont ruiné son industrie des hydrocarbures, l'Irak redevient une grande province pétrolière. Il a donné un dernier signe de son ambition retrouvée, jeudi 14 juin, en présentant la candidature de Thamer Ghadhban, 67 ans, au poste de secrétaire général de l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (OPEP). Comme pour rappeler que c'est à Bagdad que le cartel fut créé en 1960 avec cinq autres pays pétroliers.

D'autres signes de ce retour ne trompent pas. Depuis trois ans, les dirigeants des compagnies internationales ont pu mesurer à quel point le pays cherche à tirer le meilleur prix de ses richesses. Le quatrième round d'enchères organisé les 30 et 31 mai à Bagdad, pour confier l'exploration de 12 blocs à des groupes étrangers a démontré que le nationalisme pétrolier est plus vivant que jamais. Le ministère du pétrole a maintenu des conditions qui, selon les majors, sont très peu intéressantes et seulement 3 blocs ont trouvé preneurs.

Certes, il s'agissait surtout de contrats d'exploration de gaz, moins lucratif que le pétrole, et dans des régions pauvres en infrastructures de transport, souligne le spécialiste Ruba Husari sur son

site www.iraqoilforum.com. « Nous n'avons pas pu convaincre le gouvernement irakien d'accorder des conditions plus intéressantes que lors des trois rounds précédents, regrette le dirigeant d'un groupe européen. Ils se sentent en position de force, ils ont durci les conditions au fil des rounds. Mais ils sont allés trop loin. »

Les dirigeants irakiens savent que les grandes compagnies étrangères ne peuvent pas être absentes de ce pays qui détient les troisièmes réserves mondiales de brut conventionnel (115 milliards de barils). Les chinois CNPC et Cnooc, le malaisien Petronas et les russes Loukoil ou Gazprom s'y précipitent, comme Shell, BP, Total ou ENI. Bagdad sait aussi manier le bâton : pour punir ExxonMobil d'avoir signé un contrat de partage de production avec la province du Kurdistan, il a interdit au géant américain de participer au dernier round d'enchères et a suspendu un de ses projets de désalinisation d'eau, destiné à améliorer la récupération du pétrole.

Facteur de division

La production irakienne, qui assure plus de 90 % des recettes budgétaires, continuera de progresser au cours des prochaines

années. En 1979, à la veille de la guerre contre l'Iran déclenchée par Saddam Hussein, elle atteignait 3,5 millions de barils par jour. L'Irak devrait retrouver ce niveau en 2013. Et le gouvernement fait miroiter la barre des 10 millions dès 2017, la production actuelle des Saoudiens ou des Russes, même si aucun pays n'a su gérer une telle envolée. « Il est plus raisonnable de parler de 6 à 7 millions de barils », nuance Arnaud Breuillac, directeur exploration-production de Total au Moyen-Orient. Un dirigeant de Shell évoque une fourchette de 6 à 10 millions de barils au début de la prochaine décennie.

De lourdes hypothèques pèsent encore sur l'avenir : infrastructures insuffisantes (ports, routes, oléoducs...), manque de travailleurs qualifiés, attentats récurrents (plus de 500 morts depuis le départ des troupes américaines), bureaucratie dépassée par l'afflux de demandes (permis, visas)... En l'absence de loi pétrolière prévoyant une répartition claire de la manne pétrolière entre les régions (chiite, sunnite et kurde), l'or noir est aussi un facteur de division.

Le surcroît de production de l'Irak sera particulièrement bienvenu, à partir du 1^{er} juillet, quand l'em-

Vives dissensions sur les quotas au sein du cartel

Les ministres de l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (OPEP), réunis jeudi 14 juin à Vienne, devaient maintenir le plafond de production de 30 millions de barils par jour, fixé en décembre. Face à une baisse des prix de 22 % du « panier OPEP » depuis fin mars, certains pays (Iran, Venezuela, Equateur) ont réclamé une baisse de l'offre, qui a atteint 31,86 millions de barils en raison d'une forte production de l'Arabie saoudite. Ils accusent celle-ci d'avoir déstabilisé le marché. Riyad justifie la hausse par les difficultés de l'économie mondiale et le recul de la production iranienne.

bargo sur le pétrole iranien décrété par les Occidentaux fera sentir ses effets. Handicapé par la baisse des investissements et le repli des exportations, l'Iran a déjà réduit son offre de 300 000 barils par jour entre janvier et fin avril, à son plus bas niveau depuis vingt ans. Avec le retour de l'Irak, le redressement de la production libyenne et le soutien de l'Arabie saoudite, le marché mondial devrait encaisser le « choc iranien ». ■

JEAN-MICHEL BEZAT

Syrie: la « Montagne des Kurdes », prochaine zone martyre de la révolte ?

Par **FABRICE BALANCHE**

Directeur du Gremmo, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée

La « Montagne des Kurdes » (Jebel Akrad) sera-t-elle le lieu du prochain massacre en Syrie ? Avec les deux tueries de Houla et de Qoubayr, la communauté internationale a compris que la Syrie était désormais au bord d'une guerre civile généralisée, car plusieurs indices indiquent qu'elles ont des causes communautaires.

Houla et Qoubayr sont situés sur la frontière entre territoires alaouites et sunnites et, s'il est prouvé que ce sont bien les milices alaouites du régime qui ont commis les massacres, cela signifie que le processus de fragmentation territoriale de la Syrie est bien avancé.

Dans cette logique de confessionnalisation du conflit, on peut prévoir le lieu de nouveaux massacres, qui s'apparentent à de l'épuration ethnique. Le Jebel Akrad, dans l'arrière-pays de Lattaquié, pourrait être la prochaine zone martyre de la révolte syrienne, pour des raisons stratégiques à l'échelle nationale, mais aussi en raison des tensions communautaires au niveau local. Jebel Akrad signifie la « Montagne des Kurdes » en arabe. Au XIII^e siècle, des tribus kurdes furent installées au nord de la montagne alaouite, lors de la reconquête musulmane sur les croisés, pour contrôler les populations alaouites insoumises. Aujourd'hui, cette population est complètement arabisée et ne garde le souvenir de son origine kurde qu'à travers la toponymie. Les habitants du Jebel Akrad sont musulmans sunnites à l'exception du bourg de Kansaba, qui comporte une minorité chrétienne grecque orthodoxe.

Il n'existe pas de villages mixtes alaouites - sunnites, car les haines ancestrales ne sont pas éteintes. Les villageois des deux communautés préfèrent mettre de la distance entre eux, la topographie hachée de la région leur en fournit merveilleusement l'occasion. Sur le plan administratif, le Jebel Akrad se situe dans la province de Lattaquié et dépend de la préfecture de Haffeh. Cette dernière, est une petite ville sunnite enclavée dans une campagne alaouite qui lui est

hostile. Durant la révolte des Frères musulmans en 1979-1982, Haffeh et le village sunnite de Babanna s'étaient soulevés contre le régime d'Hafez al-Assad. La répression s'était abattue violemment car l'opposition politique se doublait d'une contestation de la suprématie des alaouites. L'enclave sunnite fut alors privée d'investissements publics jusqu'à une date récente, poussant ses élites économiques à partir vers Lattaquié, Damas ou Alep.

Depuis quelques semaines, les rebelles syriens se sont emparés de Haffeh et du Jebel Akrad, provoquant des combats meurtriers avec l'armée syrienne. Le régime concentre ses efforts sur les grandes villes et les axes stratégiques, abandonnant les campagnes à l'insurrection faute de troupes. Cependant nous sommes ici dans une zone stratégique à l'échelle nationale. Les rebelles sont en mesure de couper la route Lattaquié - Alep, ce qui contribuerait davantage à isoler la métropole du nord, l'autoroute Alep - Damas n'étant que partiellement sécurisée à la sortie d'Alep. Par ailleurs le Jebel Akrad se trouve à proximité de la province turque du Hatay où l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) tient ses quartiers. Cette zone pourrait devenir le premier territoire syrien libéré par l'ASL avec l'aide de la Turquie, d'autant que les cantons voisins de Baer et Bassit sont peuplés en grande majorité par des

Turkmènes, de confession sunnite qui ont toujours refusé l'arabisation imposée par le régime baasiste.

Les efforts de l'armée syrienne pour contrôler la région de Jesser Shoghur, au printemps 2011, témoignent de l'importance stratégique de cette zone qui pourrait devenir un « corridor humanitaire » sur le modèle de Benghazi. Dans la perspective de la création d'un réduit alaouite, qui s'étendrait de la frontière turque au Liban et de la Méditerranée à l'Oronte, il est clair que le passage à la rébellion du Jebel Akrad pose un grave problème stratégique au régime de Bashar al-Assad. D'une part les populations alaouites du nord du Jebel alaouite, fidèles au régime, se sentent menacées et réclament une intervention de l'armée. D'autre part, le Jebel Akrad et Haffeh sont des



points d'appuis pour la constitution d'un axe sunnite entre la ville rebelle de Jesser Shoghur et le port de Lattaquié. Rappelons que Lattaquié compte environ 200 000 sunnites, la moitié de sa population, majoritairement en faveur de l'opposition, tant la haine des alaouites est forte. Une partition de la Syrie entre la côte «alaouite» et l'intérieur «sunnite» priverait la nouvelle Syrie d'un débouché maritime, sauf si elle contrôlait le «corridor de Lattaquié».

L'attaque étant la meilleure des défenses, les troupes de Bachar al-Assad devraient bientôt lancer une offensive dans cette région pour éviter

ce scénario. Même si le réduit alaouite est la dernière solution envisageable pour le régime qui conserve toujours l'espoir de rétablir son contrôle sur l'ensemble du territoire syrien, il ne doit pas négliger la sécurité de sa base arrière. La proximité de la frontière turque est peut-être le seul élément qui puisse retenir une violente offensive, car un massacre de grande ampleur dans cette zone frontalière pourrait finalement déclencher une intervention étrangère, au moins sous la forme d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne. C'est peut-être justement ce que recherchent les rebelles qui s'infiltrèrent dans cette zone ?

Le Monde

Mardi 19 juin 2012

La Russie érigée en acteur incontournable sur le nucléaire iranien et la crise syrienne

Moscou, qui accueille les discussions sur l'atome iranien, joue la carte chiite au Moyen-Orient

La coïncidence des calendriers est frappante : lundi 18 juin, le jour où la reprise des discussions entre les grandes puissances et l'Iran sur le nucléaire doit avoir lieu à Moscou, le président russe Vladimir Poutine aura, au Mexique, en marge du sommet du G20, son premier entretien avec le président Barack Obama depuis son retour au Kremlin.

La crise syrienne et le dossier nucléaire iranien, au menu de cette rencontre, apparaissent liés de multiples manières, bien que les Occidentaux s'efforcent de les dissocier pour ne pas prêter le flanc à une tactique iranienne désormais rodée : Téhéran cherche à détourner l'attention de ses activités scientifiques en brandissant ses divers leviers d'influence au Moyen-Orient, en particulier sur la Syrie.

Dans un Moyen-Orient agité par les tensions sunnites-chiïtes, en particulier en Syrie, où plane le spectre d'un conflit à caractère confessionnel, la Russie a clairement opté pour un affichage aux côtés du pouvoir alaouite (branche dissidente du chiïsme) de Damas, allié de l'Iran. Les réticences russes à sacrifier le dirigeant syrien Bachar Al-Assad sont ainsi interprétées, côté occidental, non seulement comme le refus d'une ingérence extérieure, mais comme une façon pour Moscou de conforter ses cartes auprès de l'Iran.

La Russie n'a certes pas envie de voir le régime de Téhéran s'approcher trop d'une capacité nucléaire militaire, mais elle partage avec l'Iran une hostilité prononcée vis-à-vis de toute présence américaine dans le Golfe ou sur les flancs sud de l'ex-URSS.

Le message envoyé aux Russes par plusieurs capitales occidentales, notamment par Paris, qui a dépêché une délégation de diplomates à Moscou les 14 et 15 juin, consiste à mettre en garde contre un engrenage dangereux. « On leur dit : "Voulez-vous que les Occidentaux se rangent définitivement derrière les Arabes sunnites et l'Arabie saoudite, dans un conflit d'ampleur régionale ?" », résume un diplomate européen.

Ce contexte tendu représente un test de plus pour la politique de *reset* (relance des relations bilatérales avec Moscou) affichée par M. Obama. Un des conseillers de la Maison Blanche, Ben Rhodes, cherchait, le 15 juin, devant la presse, à en défendre le bilan : « La Russie a été avec nous pour envoyer un message clair à l'Iran, qui doit respecter ses obligations internationales. »

A propos de la Syrie, « des différences substantielles » existent, mais les Russes « ont joué un rôle dans le plan Annan [l'émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe] qui prévoit une transition politique ». Washington, a insisté M. Rhodes, « ne cherche pas à mettre fin à toute influence russe en Syrie ».

A l'approche des discussions de Moscou sur le nucléaire, le ministre russe des affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov, s'est rendu à Téhéran, où il a publiquement salué la « convergence de vues » entre la Russie et l'Iran à propos de la Syrie. En tant qu'hôte du nouveau round de discussions sur l'atome iranien, la Russie aimerait éviter un échec semblable à celui qui avait été enregistré lors des pourparlers précédents, à Bagdad, en mai.

Les contreparties que Moscou espère engranger font l'objet de spéculations

Tout l'enjeu est d'obtenir de la délégation iranienne un engagement à suspendre les activités d'enrichissement d'uranium à 20% – des travaux qui, s'approchant du seuil militaire, motivent la relance des menaces israéliennes de frappes aériennes.

La capacité russe à « faire bouger » à la fois le régime de Téhéran (sur le nucléaire) et le régime de Damas (sur la transition politique) est loin d'être considérée comme acquise par les Occidentaux, mais, dans les deux cas, la nécessité pressante de prévenir un dérapage vers des interventions militaires extérieures agit comme une motivation puissante : s'en remettre aux Russes est devenu le « plan B ».

Dans l'affaire nucléaire, cela se combine avec l'effet de sanctions financières et pétrolières sans précédent orchestrées par les Occidentaux et qui doivent entrer en vigueur à la fin du mois de juin. L'Iran, appuyé sur ce point par Moscou, exige un effacement de certaines sanctions avant de concéder le moindre geste s'agissant de ses sites nucléaires.

S'étant positionnée comme acteur incontournable sur des dossiers où elle pense reconquérir un rôle de puissance, la Russie peine cependant à exposer une stratégie de sortie de crise, constatent les diplomates occidentaux. Les contreparties que Moscou espère engranger en échange de sa bonne volonté font l'objet de spéculations.

A quelques jours de son entrevue avec Barack Obama, le président Poutine a sans doute fourni un indice en réaffirmant tout le mal qu'il pensait du projet de bouclier antimissile de l'OTAN. La Russie y voit en effet non pas une protection contre les missiles iraniens, mais une atteinte à sa défense nationale.

En mars, M. Obama avait fait passer le message aux Russes qu'il aurait, sur cette question, « plus de flexibilité » une fois passé le cap de l'élection présidentielle américaine de novembre. Lundi, Vladimir Poutine pourrait fort bien lui demander de préciser sa pensée. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Kurdistan welcomes Syrian Kurds

Syrian Kurds of all persuasions find refuge in Iraq's Kurdistan after escaping discrimination, oppression in Syria.

Middle East Online

By W.G. Dunlop - DOMIZ CAMP, Iraq

S Syrian Kurds of all persuasions, from soldiers who did not want to kill their own countrymen to those seeking to escape the violence, have found refuge across the border in Kurdistan in north Iraq.

Most had to be smuggled across the border, avoiding Syrian security forces, after facing what they said was discrimination and oppression in Syria.

But they say they have been welcomed by Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, which hosts the Domiz refugee camp in Dohuk province, where some 1,500 of them are now housed.

Abu Samir, a 56-year-old from Qamishli in northeast Syria, left his hometown for Iraqi Kurdistan in order to protect his son, a soldier who had deserted from the Syrian army.

"Either he kills women, boys and children or he himself would be killed," Abu Samir said. "He did not kill and he escaped."

Abu Samir then had a choice.

"Either I hand him over to authorities and they kill him in front of me, or we escape together."

He chose the latter option, travelling by vehicle with seven other family members until they were near the border, then sneaking past guards to cross by night.

"The Kurdistan region welcomed us and we are grateful," Abu Samir said.

"Because I am Kurdish, I preferred the Kurdistan region and I am comfortable here," he said. "I do not consider myself a refugee. I feel that I am among my family here, I do not feel I am a stranger."

"The situation of Kurds in Syria is desperate and there is racism," he said.

Kurds are mainly spread across four countries -- Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. While Iraq's Kurdistan region is autonomous, there is no independent Kurdish state.

Abu Samir and his family now live in the Domiz camp, with its dirt roads and long lines of dusty tents set up on concrete pads.

It is home to some 1,500 Syrians who have sought shelter in Kurdistan, according to Claire Bourgeois, Iraq representative of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

The number of people there now looks set to rise, at least temporarily, with Bourgeois saying a new Kurdistan government policy requires Syrian refugees elsewhere in the region to move to Domiz.

Mohammed Abdullah Hammo, a refugee official from the Kurdistan interior ministry, said the regional government wants all the refugees to be registered in Dohuk, although they could later live elsewhere.

The United Nations says that more than 86,000 Syrians have fled to surrounding countries to escape a brutal crackdown by President Bashar al-Assad's regime on an uprising against his rule, although only around 5,400 have ended up in Iraq.



International organisations such as the UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration, local NGOs and the Kurdistan government are assisting the refugees in Domiz, most of whom are Syrian Kurds.

Kurdistan currently provides electricity and food for the camp, though the World Food Programme will provide aid from next month, Bourgeois said.

Some areas of the camp are strewn with rubbish, but conditions are generally good for a refugee camp, and better than the slums where many Iraqis who were forced from their homes by threats or violence still live.

Life in Domiz is also far preferable to what awaited the refugees had they stayed in Syria, they say.

Jamal, who asked to be identified only by his first name, was a sergeant in the Syrian army stationed in Hama, a city that has been the site of frequent protests against Assad and clashes between rebels and government forces.

The orders "were for us to open fire on people in demonstrations," he said, adding that anyone who violated them "would be immediately executed or detained, and no one will know where he is."

Jamal did not return to Hama after going on leave in April, instead heading to his home town of Malkiya near the border with Kurdistan.

He described the journey as "scary," with numerous checkpoints along the way. To get through without a pass, he pleaded that his mother and father were sick, and eventually got home.

A smuggler then helped him and nine others across the border at night to the safety of Kurdistan.

"I do not have the soul and conscience to kill my brothers in the street," Jamal said. "I cannot kill a woman or old man, I could not bear that, and I came here."

A 21-year-old university student from Qamishli, who asked not to be identified, said he was a protester and had been detained and beaten.

"I went to the demonstrations demanding freedom and against the miserable regime," he said.

"The Syrian regime detained me once or twice, they threatened me and they beat me several times," he said, also alleging that Syrian forces had fired on a funeral in Qamishli.

Despite tight security measures in Qamishli, he was able to escape, and paid a smuggler \$400 to bring him to Kurdistan with a group of about 20 people.

He found a job at a cafe in Kurdistan's capital Arbil, but he said the wages were poor given the long hours.

"I want to live in a democratic country and I want rights like any other Syrian citizen," he said. "I will stay in Kurdistan until the fall of the regime." □

PKK AND TURKISH TROOPS IN DEADLY CLASHES

At least 8 soldiers and 10 Kurdish fighters killed in attacks in southeastern Turkey, officials say.

Turkish soldiers and Kurdish fighters clashed in the most intense battles of the separatist conflict this year, with 18 people killed in three army outposts in the southeast, Turkish officials and security sources say.

Up to 100 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) fighters launched simultaneous attacks at dawn on Tuesday on the three military observation points in Hakkari province near the mountainous border with Iraq, killing eight soldiers and wounding 16, the sources said.

In subsequent clashes Turkish troops killed 10 PKK fighters, the Hakkari governor's office said.

The attacks came at a time of new efforts in Turkey to address the grievances of the Kurdish minority to end a conflict that has scarred the region for



Turks hold national flags as they march in Ankara, Turkey to protest the killings of soldiers, Wednesday, June 20, 2012, a day after Kurdish rebels attacked Turkish military units with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades in the Daglica area of Hakkari province which borders northern Iraq Kurdish areas in southeastern Turkey, sparking clashes that killed eight soldiers and 18 rebels. (Burhan Ozbilici/AP Photo)



Eight Turkish soldiers were killed and 16 wounded in PKK attacks on three army outposts in the southeast [EPA]

three decades.

"I curse this treacherous attack," President Abdullah Gul said in a statement. "The terrorist group wants to sabotage the atmosphere of trust and stability and is continuing its inhumane bloody attacks."

'END HOSTILITIES'

The head of Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), whose members are frequently accused of ties to the fighters, made a striking call for the PKK to halt hostilities.

"The PKK should stop all kinds of armed activity. The government should also halt [military] operations. Let them give a political solution a chance," Selahattin Demirtas, BDP chairman, told a meeting of the party's parliamentary group.

"This war must end. The deaths must stop. We can't stand by and watch the youngsters kill each other."

The PKK fighters began the co-ordinated attacks with rocket launchers and rifles on the outposts and operations were continuing against the armed group, the sources said.

The fighters were believed to have crossed the border from northern Iraq.

Several thousand PKK fighters are based in mountain hideouts in northern Iraq, from where they regularly launch attacks on state targets in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey.

General Necdet Ozel, Turkish armed forces chief, rushed to the region, along with the commanders of the ground forces and paramilitary gendarmerie, Turkish media reported.

The interior minister and a deputy prime minister also headed there.

KURDISH STRUGGLE

Government and state officials met to

discuss the fighting on Tuesday afternoon in Ankara in the office of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, who was attending the G20 summit in Mexico.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and European Union, launched its separatist insurgency in 1984.

More than 40,000 people have been killed.

In his efforts to resolve the conflict, Erdogan has told parliament that Kurdish language lessons could be offered in schools.

He also suggested he was prepared to hold talks with prominent Kurdish politician Leyla Zana after she said she believed he was capable of ending the Kurdish troubles.

Bulent Arinc, deputy prime minister, raised the possibility at the weekend of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan being put under house arrest if the fighters were to lay down their weapons.

However other leading government figures, pointing to nationalist sensitivities over such a radical move, dismissed the idea and Erdogan said it was only Arinc's personal view.

Concerns about the PKK struggle have been exacerbated by the conflict in Syria, which also has a Kurdish minority.

PKK fighters have launched sporadic attacks in recent months near the Syrian border in Hatay province, where thousands of Syrians are housed in refugee camps.

One Turkish soldier was killed on Monday night in Hatay in a clash with PKK fighters, the governor's office there said. ♦

How the Assads spun the Western media

Syrian leader and wife burnished their image with help of P.R. firms

BY BILL CARTER AND AMY CHOZICK

For some journalists, Syria has been one of the least hospitable countries in the Middle East, a place where reporters — if they can get in — are routinely harassed and threatened as they try to uncover the repression that has propped up the Assad government for decades.

For other journalists, Syria has until recently been a country led by a cultivated, English-speaking president, Bashar al-Assad, who, along with his wife, Asma, beautiful and British-born, was helping usher in a new era of openness and prosperity.

That second impression is no accident. With the help of high-priced public relations advisers who had worked in the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Mr. Assad and his family have sought over the past five years to portray themselves in the Western news media as accessible, progressive and even glamorous.

Magazines and online outlets have published complimentary features about the family, often focusing on fashion and celebrity. In March 2011, just as Mr. Assad and his security forces initiated a crackdown on political opponents that has led to the death of an estimated 10,000 Syrians, *Vogue* magazine published a flattering profile of Mrs. Assad, describing her as walking “a deter-

mined swath cut through space with a flash of red soles,” a reference to her Christian Louboutin heels.

Fawning treatment of world leaders — particularly attractive Western-educated ones — is nothing new. But the Assads have been especially determined to burnish their image, and hired experts to do so. The family paid the Washington public relations firm Brown Lloyd James \$5,000 a month to act as a liaison between *Vogue* and Mrs. Assad, according to the firm.

This web of politics and public relations recently ensnared Barbara Walters, the broadcast journalist. After she conducted an aggressive interview with Mr. Assad on ABC News in December, she offered to provide recommendations for Sheherazad Jaafari, the president’s press aide and the daughter of the Syrian ambassador to the United Nations; she was applying for a job at CNN and admission to the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

Ms. Walters issued a statement on June 5 expressing regret for her actions, which she called “a conflict.”

Ms. Jaafari, 22, who has been accepted by Columbia, had worked as an intern at Brown Lloyd James. Last year, she expressed her feelings about the Assad family in an e-mail to Mike Holtzman, a partner at the firm who, according to his online profile, advised the Clinton administration on trade issues and worked in the State Department during the Bush administration.

“I have always told you — this man is loved by his people,” Ms. Jaafari wrote in the e-mail, which was obtained by *The Guardian*, the British newspaper.

Mr. Holtzman replied: “I’m proud of you. Wish I were there to help.” Mr. Holtzman did not respond to numerous requests for comment.

The Assads were in many ways ripe for celebrity treatment by the news media. Mr. Assad, who was trained as an ophthalmologist, received part of his education in Britain, where he met Asma, a Briton of Syrian descent who grew up in London and worked as an investment banker in New York.

Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria expert with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who once worked for a charity sponsored by Mrs. Assad, summed up the appeal the Assads had for some news outlets: “He speaks English, and his wife is hot.”

The campaign to make the ruling family the face of a more Westernized and open Syria began in 2006, when Mrs. Assad approached the public relations firm Bell Pottinger in London. Tim Bell, who is a co-founder of the firm and was a media adviser to Mrs. Thatcher, the former British prime minister, said Mrs. Assad had contacted the firm after several first ladies, including Laura Bush, began to hold annual meetings and conferences. “She wanted to be a part of that club,” Mr. Bell said in a telephone interview.

Bell Pottinger did not set up interviews for Mrs. Assad directly, but advised her on how to set up a communications office in Damascus to help shape her image.

A few years later, positive articles began to appear. *Paris Match* called Mrs. Assad an “element of light in a country full of shadow zones” and the “eastern Diana.” *French Elle* counted her among the best-dressed women in world politics, and, in 2009, *The Huffington Post* published an article and fashion slide show titled “Asma al-Assad: Syria’s First Lady and All-Natural Beauty.”

None of the articles about Mrs. Assad struck a nerve quite like the 3,200-word March 2011 profile in *Vogue* titled “A Rose in the Desert.” In it, the writer, Joan Juliet Buck, called her “the freshest and most magnetic of first ladies.”

Ms. Buck said by telephone that shortly after the profile was published, she began “steadily speaking out against the Assad regime,” including in an interview with Piers Morgan on CNN and elsewhere. In April, on National Public Radio, Ms. Buck said she regretted the headline that *Vogue* had put on the article. But she said Mrs. Assad was “extremely thin and very well dressed, and therefore qualified to be in *Vogue*.”

This spring, the magazine removed the article from its Web site. On Sunday, Anna Wintour, the editor of *Vogue*, issued a statement about the article saying, in part: “Like many at that time, we were hopeful that the Assad regime would be open to a more progressive society. Subsequent to our interview, as the terrible events of the past year and a half unfolded in Syria, it became clear that its priorities and values were completely at odds with those of *Vogue*. The escalating atrocities in Syria are unconscionable and we deplore the actions of the Assad



ROB WALLACE/ABC, VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Bashar al-Assad being interviewed in Syria by Barbara Walters, whose offer of help to the daughter of a Syrian diplomat has cast a shadow on the interview.

regime in the strongest possible terms.”

Even among the world's most repressive governments, Syria stands out in its treatment of journalists. The only way for many reporters to cover news emerging from the crackdown on dissidents is to sneak into the country — often putting their lives at risk.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least nine reporters have been killed in Syria since November, including Marie Colvin, a veteran war correspondent. (Anthony Shadid of The New York Times died of an asthma attack during a clandestine reporting trip to Syria.) Syrian officials have denied targeting journalists, but state news media outlets have said that foreign reporters killed in Syria “must be spies or have links to terrorist organizations.”

Ms. Walters, who has a lifetime of experience chasing and winning interviews with world leaders, said she had spent six years establishing a relationship with the Syrian ambassador to the

United Nations, Bashar Jaafari, including once dining at his home.

The connection eventually paid off.

“Assad decided he would do an interview — according to the ambassador, he had requests from all over the world,” Ms. Walters said by telephone last week. “And he chose to do it with me, based on the recommendation of the ambassador, and also because I had been to Syria twice before and knew something of its background and history.”

Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, says this kind of interview is highly sought.

“In a strange way,” Mr. Simon said, “political leaders, presidents and prime ministers who are highly repressive and restrictive are good ‘gets’ for these types of interviews, precisely because there’s no fair media coverage in their countries.”

Ms. Walters’s interview, broadcast in December, made worldwide news, with Mr. Assad issuing claims that he was

not responsible for the Syrian military and that people were not being killed by his government.

Ms. Walters said, “I went to Syria and conducted what was a very tough and strong interview that President Assad did not like.”

But her offer of help to the ambassador’s daughter has cast a shadow on that interview. Two people close to Ms. Walters said she had reacted to a plea from Ms. Jaafari because Ms. Jaafari was being removed from her position as a media adviser to the Syrian president.

Mr. Tabler, the Syria expert, said that he did not “find it surprising what Walters did for her.” The issue, he said, was the timing.

“At that point, how many had been killed — 7,000?” he said. “This is an attractive young woman, and she speaks English. Maybe you help her with an introduction. To get beyond that is a little difficult to swallow.”

Le Monde

Mercredi 20 juin 2012

Expulsé de Syrie, le Père Paolo Dall'Oglio redoute un risque de « somalisation »

Le jésuite italien, qui a vécu trente ans en Syrie, affichait sa solidarité avec les révolutionnaires

Témoignage

Beyrouth

Correspondance

On ne verra plus la silhouette de géant du père Paolo Dall'Oglio au monastère de Mar Moussa, dans le désert de Nebek (nord de Damas). Ce jésuite italien, fondateur d'une communauté mixte engagée dans le dialogue islamo-chrétien, s'est vu ordonner par son supérieur hiérarchique, sous la pression du régime, de quitter la Syrie où il vivait depuis près de trente ans.

Car, menacé d'expulsion par Damas depuis novembre 2011 pour ses critiques contre la répression, le père Paolo est sorti de la réserve qu'il avait adoptée pour pouvoir rester dans le pays. D'abord, par une lettre ouverte adressée en mai à Kofi Annan, l'envoyé spécial de

l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe en Syrie, dans laquelle il plaidait pour une plus grande implication internationale. Ensuite, en se rendant fin mai à Qusair puis à Homs, villes insurgées proches du Liban.

Sa visite n'est pas passée inaperçue. « J'ignorais que la décision de m'expulser avait déjà été prise, mais je sentais que l'étau se resserrait. J'ai eu le besoin moral de faire cette descente aux enfers pour me prouver que je suis radicalement solidaire avec le peuple syrien », explique-t-il depuis Beyrouth, première étape de son exil, entamé le 16 juin.

Parti à Qusair à l'appel de familles pour y négocier la libération de chrétiens kidnappés, le père Paolo y passe huit jours et subit, comme ses hôtes, le pilonnage de la ville. « Dans un hôpital de fortune, deux personnes ont été tuées sur le lit où je m'étais allongé,

une heure plus tôt, pour donner mon sang », raconte-t-il. Il rencontre, dans ce bastion insurgé, les « forces révolutionnaires », tel qu'il nomme les rebelles — un terme qu'il n'emploie jamais. Il observe aussi l'émergence de groupes islamistes, qui, selon lui, échappent au contrôle des rebelles et sont ancrés dans une lecture confessionnelle de la crise, contrairement aux habitants de la ville.

Aujourd'hui, le religieux de 57 ans est inquiet et plus révolté que jamais. Inquiet du « risque de somalisation de la Syrie » généré, selon lui, par l'attentisme occidental. « La révolution ne s'arrêtera pas », mais la militarisation face à la répression a pris le pas sur les manifestations pacifiques, estime-t-il : « Plus on attend, plus on risque de voir la Syrie s'installer dans une guerre civile prolongée le long de l'Oronte [fleuve traversant Homs, Hama et Jouxant Idlib] et dans des massacres entre sunnites et alaouites, et plus on laisse du terrain aux éléments djihadistes. »

Et le père Paolo Dall'Oglio se dit révolté par « l'Occident qui continue de faire la sourde oreille, en s'abritant derrière le veto russo-chinois. La situation est très délicate, dans trois mois, elle sera intenable ». Révolté aussi par ceux qui « ne savent rien voir dans le printemps arabe qu'un complot » — une allusion à la partie du clergé syrien qui soutient le régime et « s'inscrit dans une logique suicidaire ». Le père Paolo, qui veut représenter « l'Eglise des jeunes chrétiens engagés pour le changement », redoute que ceux-ci se retrouvent coincés entre deux extrémismes : « celui du régime, et celui de la violence djihadiste ». « L'extrémisme et les vio-

lences vont chasser les chrétiens hors de Syrie », professe-t-il.

« Plus on attend, plus on laisse du terrain aux éléments djihadistes »

Le Père Paolo Dall'Oglio

L'annonce de la suspension des activités des observateurs des Nations unies en Syrie, le 16 juin, a accentué le pessimisme du prêtre d'a. Le chef de la mission, le général Robert Mood, devait s'exprimer, mardi 19 juin, devant le Conseil de sécurité. « Si le retrait des observateurs devait être décidé, cela pourrait jeter la Syrie dans une phase encore plus difficile », s'alarme le religieux. Favorable à l'initiative diplomatique de Kofi Annan, le père Paolo juge que « la communauté internationale n'a jamais été sérieuse pour que le plan soit appliqué : ce n'est pas 300, mais au moins 3000 observateurs qui devraient être déployés sur le terrain, avec 30 000 « accompagnateurs » de la société civile ».

Ce parfait arabophone, qui a longtemps refusé une intervention militaire étrangère, estime aujourd'hui que des opérations ponctuelles, à côté d'une initiative non violente, protégeraient la population dans les zones les plus exposées, « pourvu qu'il ne s'agisse ni d'une guerre généralisée, ni d'une occupation ». « Même parmi les Syriens les plus pacifiques, opposés à toute intervention, beaucoup ne voient plus d'alternative à une victoire militaire sur le régime », affirme-t-il. ■

LAURE STEPHAN



18 JUIN 2012

Des Kurdes de Syrie, fuyant la violence, se réfugient en Irak

AFP - Du soldat ayant refusé de tirer sur des manifestants au civil qui a fui la violence, des milliers de Kurdes de Syrie ont traversé clandestinement ces derniers mois la frontière pour se réfugier au Kurdistan irakien.

Ils se disent satisfaits de l'accueil que leur ont réservé leurs frères kurdes en Irak, alors qu'ils affirment avoir été victimes dans leur pays de "discrimination et d'oppression".

Après la Première Guerre mondiale et l'effondrement de l'empire ottoman, les Kurdes ont été partagés entre quatre pays: la Turquie, l'Irak, l'Iran et la Syrie.

Originaire de Qamishli (nord-est de la Syrie), Abou Samir, 56 ans, a fui sa ville natale pour protéger son fils, un déserteur qui "a choisi de ne pas tuer et s'est enfui".



Du soldat ayant refusé de tirer sur des manifestants au civil qui a fui la violence, des milliers de Kurdes de Syrie ont traversé clandestinement ces derniers mois la frontière pour se réfugier au Kurdistan irakien.

Entre "remettre mon fils aux autorités, qui l'auraient tué devant mes yeux, ou m'enfuir avec lui", Abou Samir explique avoir choisi cette dernière option et avoir franchi la frontière de nuit avec son épouse et ses six enfants.

"Nous sommes reconnaissants de la manière dont le Kurdistan nous a accueillis. Comme je suis Kurde, j'ai opté pour le Kurdistan (irakien) et je m'y sens bien", explique Abou Samir. "Je ne me considère

ni comme un réfugié, ni comme un étranger. J'ai plutôt le sentiment d'appartenir à la même famille alors qu'en Syrie, les Kurdes sont confrontés au racisme".

Dans la province de Dohouk, le camp Domiz, formé de tentes poussiéreuses posées sur des carrés de ciment, accueille environ 1.500 Kurdes syriens, selon Claire Bourgeois, représentante en Irak du Haut commissariat de l'ONU aux réfugiés (HCR).

Mais elle affirme que leur nombre devrait grossir, le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan irakien voulant y regrouper tous les réfugiés syriens disséminés sur son territoire.

Selon l'ONU, environ 86.400 Syriens ont fui les violences dans leur pays, dont 5.400 ont choisi l'Irak.

Les autorités kurdes fournissent au camp électricité, nourriture et eau alors que le Programme alimentaire mondial (PAM) doit commencer le mois prochain la distribution de rations alimentaires, assure Mme Bourgeois.

Même si les conditions ne sont pas idéales, certaines parties du camp étant recouvertes d'ordures, un terrain de jeu avec des bascules, des balançoires et des toboggans a été aménagé pour les enfants. Il est également prévu d'ériger une école.

Sergent dans l'armée syrienne, Jamal, qui refuse de révéler son patronyme, était stationné à Hama, un haut lieu de la contestation anti-régime dans le centre de la Syrie.

"Nous avons l'ordre de tirer sur les manifestants et quiconque refusait était aussitôt exécuté ou disparaissait en prison", confie-t-il. Il a donc décidé de ne pas retourner en avril à Hama et est reparti dans son village, Malkiya, près de la frontière avec le Kurdistan irakien.

Le voyage a été "effrayant", raconte-t-il, et pour passer les nombreux points de contrôle, il a prétendu que ses parents étaient



Dans la province de Dohouk, le camp Domiz, formé de tentes poussiéreuses posées sur des carrés de ciment, accueille environ 1.500 Kurdes syriens, selon Claire Bourgeois, représentante en Irak du Haut commissariat de l'ONU aux réfugiés (HCR).

malades. Un contrebandier a réussi à le faire passer avec neuf autres fugitifs au Kurdistan irakien.

"Je n'avais ni l'esprit, ni le coeur, à tuer mes frères. Je suis incapable d'abattre une femme ou un vieillard. Cela m'était insupportable, c'est pour cela que je suis venu ici", explique-t-il.

"Les conditions sont bonnes ici et je resterai jusqu'à la chute du régime", ajoute-t-il.

Un étudiant de 21 ans originaire de Qamishli, qui ne veut donner ni son nom, ni son prénom, affirme avoir été incarcéré et battu pour avoir manifesté. "J'ai participé à des manifestations pour la liberté et contre ce régime misérable. J'ai été détenu et frappé à plusieurs reprises", assure-t-il.

Il a réussi à s'enfuir en payant 400 dollars à un contrebandier qui l'a conduit en Irak avec un groupe de 20 personnes. Depuis, il est serveur dans un café à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien.

"Je veux vivre dans un pays démocratique et je veux jouir de droits comme les autres citoyens syriens", dit-il. D'ici là, il restera dans le nord de l'Irak. □

Turquie: 8 soldats et 10 rebelles tués dans l'attaque d'un poste militaire au Kurdistan

belga.be

Une attaque visant un poste militaire à proximité de la frontière irakienne a fait 18 morts, parmi lesquels des soldats turcs et des rebelles kurdes.

Huit soldats turcs et dix rebelles kurdes ont été tués lors de l'attaque tôt ce mardi d'un poste militaire situé dans l'extrême sud-est de la Turquie (province de Hakkari). Les auteurs de l'attaque sont des membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), a annoncé le gouvernorat local.

Seize militaires ont été blessés en outre dans l'attaque qui a visé le poste de Yesiltas, à proximité de la frontière irakienne, souligne un communiqué en ligne.

Un groupe de rebelles, qui s'est probablement infiltré en Turquie à partir de bases installées dans le nord de l'Irak, a attaqué le poste avancé, selon les chaînes de télévision.

Troupes au sol et hélicoptères contre les assaillants



La chaîne d'information NTV a rapporté que des troupes au sol et des hélicoptères de combats étaient à pied d'oeuvre pour traquer les assaillants.

Cette région très montagneuse de Turquie, à l'intersection des frontières irakienne et iranienne, est souvent le théâtre de violents combats entre les forces de sécurité et les rebelles kurdes qui multiplient les attaques en territoire turc l'été. Généralement, l'aviation turque bombarde les posi-

tions du PKK en Irak, où se trouve le commandement de ce mouvement armé, en riposte aux attaques de ce genre.

Le PKK qui a lancé un conflit armé en 1984 est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays. Son chef, Abdullah Öcalan, purge depuis 1999 une peine de perpétuité dans une prison de Turquie. ■

Le Premier ministre Maliki craint une guerre liée au pétrole

Irak Le Premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, estime qu'un contrat passé entre la major pétrolière américaine ExxonMobil et la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien pourrait conduire à « la guerre », a déclaré mardi son porte-parole dans un entretien avec l'AFP.

ExxonMobil a signé un accord d'exploration pétrolière avec la région du Kurdistan dans six zones, dont deux sont revendiquées à la fois par les autorités régionales kurdes et par le gouvernement central de

Bagdad. Le gouvernement central affirme que tous les contrats pétroliers doivent lui être soumis et considère comme illégaux ceux qui ne le sont pas.

« M. Maliki estime que ces accords représentent une initiative très dangereuse qui pourrait provoquer une guerre » et « mettre fin à l'unité de l'Irak », a affirmé le porte-parole, Ali Moussaoui. Le Premier ministre est prêt à utiliser tous les moyens dont il dispose « pour préserver la richesse nationale

et la transparence nécessaire dans les investissements concernant les ressources des Irakiens, en particulier dans le domaine pétrolier », a déclaré M. Moussaoui. M. Maliki « a envoyé un message au président américain Barack Obama la semaine dernière l'exhortant à intervenir pour empêcher ExxonMobil de poursuivre son action ». Une vive polémique avait surgi après la signature à la mi-octobre par ExxonMobil d'un accord d'exploration pétrolière avec le Kurdistan. En mars, Bagdad a affirmé que la major américaine avait suspendu son contrat, ce qu'a démenti le gouvernement du Kurdistan.

Le contrat signé par ExxonMobil couvre des zones disputées, situées dans la province de Ninive, voisine du Kurdistan. Le gouverneur de la

province de Ninive, Athil al-Nujaifi, a d'ailleurs estimé que sa région devait « être partie prenante à cet accord ».

« Nous avons les mêmes prérogatives que le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan. Dans la Constitution, il n'y a aucune différence entre les provinces et les régions », a-t-il dit dans une interview accordée à un site Internet d'informations, Iraq Oil Report.

Le gouverneur a ajouté avoir rencontré des représentants d'ExxonMobil.

Cette crise s'ajoute à de nombreux contentieux entre le Kurdistan et le gouvernement central. La semaine dernière, les dirigeants kurdes ont pris part à un vote de défiance à l'encontre du Premier ministre.

(Source : AFP)

New SNC Leader: Talk of Federalism Causes Fear and Anxiety

RUDAW EXCLUSIVE

A few weeks ago, the Syrian National Council (SNC) – the largest Syrian opposition group – elected Dr. Abdulbasit Sieda, a Kurd, as its new chief. Born in 1956 in the Kurdish town of Amude, northeast Syria, Sieda is a philosophy professor and prominent opposition figure, known for his political activism. He was one of the founders of the SNC, and as leader has emphasized the importance of unifying Syrian opposition groups against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. He picked up this theme in a conversation with Rudaw.

Rudaw: Did you ever believe that one day you or another Kurd would be leading this council?

Abdulbasit Sieda: Yes, because when we first created the council, members were talking about me then as a possible leader. Some people might wonder how a Kurd could become leader, but the council is past this stage now and all Syrian citizens have the right to be chosen as leader.

Rudaw: Who is in charge of making decisions and choosing the policies of this council, the leader of the council or the members?

Abdulbasit Sieda: The role of the leader is to assign duties and direct the council. There are many organs within the council such as political parties, organizations, youth movements and committees, and they all speak before making decisions so that they are made collectively.

Rudaw: After the Syrian National Council refused to accept the right to self-determination for Kurds, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) criticized them. How did they (KNC) receive your selection as leader?

Abdulbasit Sieda: I believe that stage is in the past. We are currently going through a new stage and the Kurdish Council recently met and released a new document regarding their vision for solving the Kurdish issue. The Syrian National Council has also released a new document and both of these documents have brought the two sides closer and instigated talks between us. Now relations between both councils are good and the stance of the Kurdish Council



Abdulbasit Sieda, the new leader of the Syrian National Council (SNC). Photo Rudaw.

towards our new vision is positive.

Rudaw: The Kurdish National Council is emphasizing the right to self-determination for Kurds. Do you believe that the Syrian National Council will accept this demand?

Abdulbasit Sieda: The issue of self-determination is not a demand but a principle, and the Kurdish National Council has addressed this issue in its recent announcements.

Rudaw: Burhan Ghalioun, the former leader of SNC, previously told Rudaw in an interview that there was no such thing as Syrian Kurdistan. As a Kurd, how do you validate this statement?

Abdulbasit Sieda: No, these statements were not right. At the time, I released a statement which clarified that these were not the views of the Syrian National Council. Such statements create tensions between the parties and they need to be dealt with differently. Those statements were not right but I believe this is something from the past and relations inside the Syrian National Council have improved.

Rudaw: A delegation from the Kurdish National Council has been in Turkey for some days and I believe they are there to talk with the Syrian National Council. Have the two made any agreements?

Abdulbasit Sieda: They went to Turkey to take part in a meeting in Istanbul which would pave the way for another general meeting to take place in Cairo. I find their participation to be a very positive step and they have contributed well. The talks went well and I hope to meet with them again soon in Cairo and serve the interests of Syrians in general and Kurds in particular. Our plan is to make a Syria for all nations including Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians and Turkmen. No one should be afraid in the

new Syria.

We know that the Kurdish issue in Syria is an important one as they have been oppressed for many years. The oppression against Kurds in Syria has two layers. One layer is manifested by denying Kurds their right to have citizenship, and the second layer is the violation against their land and property, changing the names of their villages and cities into Arabic names and taking away the right to education in their mother tongue. Our youth cannot benefit from police or military colleges and they are not allowed to receive higher education. These issues need to be solved in a democratic way within the framework of Syria.

Rudaw: In some cities in Syrian Kurdistan, there were slogans demanding federalism for Syrian Kurds. Do you listen to people's demands?

Abdulbasit Sieda: I can tell you frankly that discussion of federalism requires a different time. Sometimes these talks create fear and anxiety as people ask questions about where they may lead. It is difficult at the moment but what is more important is to solve the Kurdish issue in a democratic manner and eradicate the injustices against them. Then in another phase, other outstanding issues like federalism can be solved more easily.

Rudaw: You mentioned the rights of Kurds several times. What rights you believe are important for Kurds?

Abdulbasit Sieda: Cultural rights, political rights, administrative and social rights. The routes to achieve them need to be discussed.

Rudaw: The PYD (Democratic Union Party) is an important part of the Syrian opposition. Do you believe that one day they will join the Syrian National Council? Have you made any efforts in this direction?

Abdulbasit Sieda: I hope they will join us and bring a part of the Kurdish opposition with them. I believe some colleagues are working on this and all of us need do our part to achieve this unity. At the same time, we should never allow confrontations among Kurds. Issues need to be solved peacefully.

Rudaw: Are those who are carrying out talks with the PYD from the Syrian National Council or the Kurdish National Council?

Abdulbasit Sieda: I believe more talks are

carried out by the Kurdish National Council.

Rudaw: Does it mean that the Syrian National Council has not moved in that direction yet?

Abdulbasit Sieda: I do not know, but I find any steps in that direction to be positive. I am not against it, especially when our views merge and they start to consider themselves part of the Syrian revolution.

Rudaw: Do you support military interven-

tion in order to stop the bloodshed in Syria?

Abdulbasit Sieda: We have never said that there should be intervention in Syria, but we do say that the world must act as the daily killings in Syria are intolerable. It should be within the United Nations' framework and under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter to reach a solution that would force the Assad regime to stop its aggression against the Syrian people.

Rudaw: So this means you do not want a

repetition of what happened in Libya in Syria?

Abdulbasit Sieda: No, the situation in both countries is different, but we find it necessary that the international community stands up to its responsibilities in order to stop the war in Syria and give the Syrian people their rights to democracy, freedom and justice. □



23 JUNE 2012

Oil key to any Iraqi Kurdistan independence bid

AFP - Iraqi Kurdistan's efforts to ramp up its oil production and export capabilities increase the viability of independence as an option for the region, which is in a months-long standoff with Baghdad.

The dispute has seen Kurdistan president Massud Barzani launch a series of attacks against Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, while the region cut off oil exports to Iraq in a payment dispute and also refused to hand over a fugitive Iraqi vice president who is wanted for allegedly running a death squad.

The autonomous region in northern Iraq has not made any overt moves towards independence, although Barzani has said he could resort to a referendum on its future if the crisis with Baghdad drags on.

Kurdistan has its own government, security forces, borders and flag, but it is economically dependent on the Iraqi government, which is required to pay 17 percent of the national budget to Kurdistan.

The region has signed dozens of contracts with foreign oil firms aimed at boosting its oil sector in recent years, and said it intends to build pipelines that would give it an independent export capability -- moves that could give it financial independence.

The Iraqi government, which says all oil contracts must go through Baghdad and regards any that do not as illegal, has strenuously opposed such deals.

"It is becoming increasingly clear that the Kurds see expansion of (Kurdistan's) oil sector as the key to future independence," said Reidar Visser, an Iraq analyst and editor of the www.historiae.org website.

"By signing those deals, the Kurds are looking at the long term, when it would be in their favour to split from Iraq proper by



Kurdish president Massud Barzani, seen in Arbil in March. Iraqi Kurdistan's efforts to ramp up its oil production and export capabilities increase the viability of independence as an option for the region, which is in a months-long standoff with Baghdad.

being financially independent," said Ruba Husari, the editor of www.iraqoilforum.com.

Iraqi Kurdistan does not currently have the ability to independently export oil, but the region has said that two pipelines, one for oil and another for gas, are planned.

A statement posted on the Kurdistan government website in May said that natural resources minister Ashti Hawrami had spoken about "plans for a new gas pipeline to supply Turkey's BOTAS gas grid... and in the next 12 months, a million-barrel oil pipeline to connect to the Ceyhan pipeline" that feeds an export terminal on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

"A pipeline from Kurdistan to Turkey would allow the Kurds to export crude independently of Baghdad and cash the proceeds directly," Husari said.

"The Kurds are acting independently in everything but the name," said Visser.

But he noted that the position of Turkey, with which Kurdistan has important economic ties, is key, saying: "It is conceivable that Turkey may prefer to maintain the nominal unity of Iraq."

Baghdad has pushed back against Kurdistan's oil deals, especially an exploration contract the region signed with US oil giant ExxonMobil last October.

"Maliki views these deals as representing a very dangerous initiative that may lead to the outbreak of wars" and "breaking up the

unity of Iraq," the premier's spokesman Ali Mussawi said.

The premier "sent a message to American President Barack Obama ... urging him to intervene to prevent ExxonMobil from going in this direction," Mussawi said.

And Iraq's deputy premier for energy affairs issued a warning to French companies that any contracts with Baghdad would be scrapped if they signed deals with local or regional governments in Iraq.

Baghdad "has been blacklisting companies from doing projects in Iraq proper," if they sign deals with Kurdistan, Husari said.

"There is little it can do with past contracts, but all future contracts will have a clause saying that federal government approval is required for any project in the oil sector," she said.

But production-sharing contracts that are offered by Kurdistan are a major draw for companies, as they are more lucrative than the service contracts the federal government has awarded, which offer a fixed fee per barrel of oil.

The region's prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, told AFP in Arbil that Kurdistan is committed to the Iraqi constitution, but also said that the Kurdish people have a right to self-determination.

"It's a question about people. Of course, as a nation, yes, we have that right, but now we are dealing with reality," Barzani said.

Iraq asks Obama to halt Exxon's Kurdish deal

By Ahmed Rasheed and Peg Mackey

BAGHDAD/LONDON (Reuters) - Iraq has asked U.S. President Barack Obama to stop Exxon Mobil (XOM.N: Quote, Profile, Research) exploring for oil in its autonomous Kurdistan region, saying the U.S. company's actions could have dire consequences for the country's stability.

An aide to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told Reuters of a letter the premier had sent, seeking Obama's intervention, as Kurdistan said on Tuesday it would sign more deals with majors to raise its output five-fold.

Turkey also signalled it was prepared to import oil directly from Kurdistan, potentially defying Baghdad, which has a long-running dispute with Kurdistan over oil export controls.

Exxon angered Baghdad last year by signing an exploration deal with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north, which the central government deemed illegal.

"Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki explained to President Obama in the letter sent this month the dire consequences of the Exxon deal and its negative impact on Iraq's stability," Maliki's media adviser Ali al-Moussawi said.

Since the last U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq in December, disputed areas between Kurdistan and Baghdad have been seen as a potential flashpoint for conflict as tensions between the two regions rise, without the buffer of a U.S. military presence.

Iraq's oil minister said in April that Exxon had written to Baghdad informing it that it had suspended work in the Kurdish region.

"Despite Exxon's letters about the freezing of their work in the region, we still receive information that suspicious work is going on relating to their exploration activities," Moussawi said.

"The point of the message was clear. The U.S. administration must intervene," he added.

KURDISTAN SAYS OIL MAJORS CIRCLING

Kurdistan announced in November the signing of a deal for six exploration blocs with Exxon, the first major oil company to deal directly with the Kurds in

northern Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdistan, which has its own government and armed forces, has already clashed with the central government over autonomy and oil rights, and halted its crude exports in April after accusing Baghdad of not making due payments.

On Tuesday, Kurdistan's natural resources minister said it expects more oil majors to follow Exxon in the next few months and that oil shipments would resume.

"The market is very buoyant in Kurdistan. We have a lot of majors circling around looking at new PSCs (production-sharing contracts) and certainly mergers and acquisitions," Ashti Hawrami told an energy conference in London.

"So in the next few months, we expect to see another two or three major companies coming and working in Kurdistan."

Exxon is one of the oil majors participating in massive projects in central Iraq, which is due to become the biggest source of additional oil for world markets in the next decade.

But as exploration terms with the central government look less and less attractive, companies begin to look at Kurdistan.

Exxon is keeping a low profile in Kurdistan but industry sources said the company had already issued a tender for drilling rigs while French rivals Total (TOTF.PA: Quote, Profile, Research) and Norway's Statoil (STL.OL: Quote, Profile, Research) are also looking at exploration blocks there.

Exxon was not available on Tuesday to comment on Maliki's letter. Total and Statoil have previously declined to discuss their plans in Kurdistan.

The KRG halted oil exports in April due to a payment dispute with Baghdad. Before then, contractors in Kurdistan were producing and exporting about 200,000 barrels per day (bpd).

"The oil will flow ... regardless of an agreement, and I infinitely prefer an agreement," said Hawrami. By 2014 to 2015, output should grow to 1 million bpd, he said.

"When you have 1 million barrels a day stranded, it will find its way to the market despite the political haggling."

"We expect more discoveries this year to bring us to our new target of 2 million



Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki speaks during the opening ceremony of the Defence University for Military Studies inside Baghdad's heavily-fortified Green Zone June 17, 2012. (REUTERS/Thaier al-Sudani)

barrels per day by 2019."

PIPELINE TO TURKEY

Kurdistan has started plans to begin exporting its crude oil along a new pipeline to the Turkish border by August 2013.

Turkey signalled on Tuesday that was prepared to import oil directly from Kurdistan despite Baghdad's stance that it has the sole right to exports.

"Turkey cannot stay indifferent to developments in the energy sector of Iraq, including those in the KRG," Berris Ekinci, Deputy Director General for Energy, Water and Environment at Turkey's ministry of foreign affairs, told the London conference.

"The most important thing will be the market drivers," she said in reference to Turkey's potential purchases of Kurdish oil.

Small scale deliveries are expected to commence in coming weeks, when Kurdistan starts up a crude-for-products swap with Turkey, she told Reuters.

Industry sources say the KRG is gearing up to move crude by tanker truck to Turkey - possibly as part of the arrangement. Kurdistan is short of key products, including diesel and kerosene. It receives only 15,000 bpd of fuel from southern Iraq.

"The volume (from Turkey) will increase incrementally," said Ekinci. "But neither the start date nor the volume has been set yet."

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. ■

Le pétrole, un atout clé pour l'indépendance du Kurdistan irakien

AFP

Le Kurdistan irakien, en conflit depuis des mois avec Bagdad, cherche à augmenter sa production pétrolière et ses capacités d'exportation, un atout clé sur le chemin de l'indépendance.

Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, a multiplié ces derniers mois les attaques contre le Premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, tandis que la région cessait ses exportations pétrolières vers l'Irak en raison d'un contentieux financier.

Le Kurdistan a également refusé de livrer à Bagdad le vice-président irakien Tarek al-Hachémi, accusé d'avoir fomenté des meurtres.

Si la région a pour l'instant évité tout mouvement franc vers l'indépendance, M. Barzani a indiqué qu'il pourrait décider d'un référendum sur cette question en cas de détérioration de la crise avec Bagdad.

Et le Premier ministre de la région, Nechirvan Barzani, a déclaré à l'AFP que le peuple kurde avait le droit à l'indépendance, même si le Kurdistan respectait la Constitution irakienne. "Nous devons faire face à la réalité", a-t-il reconnu.

Le Kurdistan a son gouvernement, son drapeau et ses propres forces de sécurité, mais d'un point de vue économique, il dépend du gouvernement irakien, qui a obligation de lui verser 17% du budget national.

Pour diminuer cette dépendance en développant son secteur pétrolier, la région a signé des dizaines de contrats avec des compagnies étrangères.

"Il est devenu très clair que les Kurdes voient l'expansion de leur secteur pétrolier comme crucial pour leur future indépendance", souligne Reidar Visser, un expert irakien, rédacteur en



Un garde à la raffinerie de Tawke, dans le Kurdistan irakien Ali al-Saadi *afp.com*

chef du site www.historiae.org.

"En signant ces contrats, les Kurdes pensent au long terme, quand une séparation de l'Irak sera en leur faveur", estime Ruba Husari, qui dirige le site spécialisé Iraq Oil Forum.

CONTRATS ATTRACTIFS

Actuellement dépendant de Bagdad pour exporter son pétrole, le Kurdistan prévoit aussi la construction d'un gazoduc pour alimenter le réseau du turc BOTAS, de même que d'un oléoduc pour relier celui de Ceyhan, en Turquie.

"Un oléoduc du Kurdistan à la Turquie permettrait aux Kurdes d'exporter du brut de façon indépendante de Bagdad et d'encaisser les recettes directement", souligne Mme Husari.

Le gouvernement irakien, qui estime que tout contrat pétrolier doit passer par Bagdad, s'est opposé vigoureusement aux contrats passés directement avec le Kurdistan, qu'il juge illégaux.

"M. Maliki estime que ces accords représentent une initiative très dangereuse qui pourrait provoquer une guerre" et "mettre fin à l'unité de l'Irak", a affirmé son porte-parole, Ali Moussaoui, en évoquant en particulier un contrat signé par la major américaine ExxonMobil en octobre.

M. Maliki a même envoyé un message au président américain Barack Obama pour l'exhorter à intervenir auprès d'ExxonMobil, qui a été écarté en avril d'une nouvelle session d'enchères pour des contrats d'exploration en Irak.

Les autorités irakiennes ont d'ailleurs rappelé mercredi aux compagnies pétrolières françaises que tout contrat avec Bagdad serait annulé si elles signaient d'autres contrats avec des autorités locales ou régionales du pays.

Bagdad "place sur liste noire les entreprises" signant des contrats avec le Kurdistan, souligne Mme Husari.

Selon M. Visser, la position de la Turquie, avec qui le Kurdistan a d'importantes relations économiques, sera déterminante, car il est "concevable" que les autorités turques, confrontées elles aussi aux revendications d'une forte minorité kurde, "puisse préférer l'unité de l'Irak".

Mais pour les compagnies pétrolières, les contrats de partage de production proposés par le Kurdistan sont très attractifs, car beaucoup plus lucratifs que les contrats de service du gouvernement fédéral, qui offrent un prix fixe par baril de brut. □

Le plan Annan en Syrie plus fragilisé que jamais

La mission des observateurs de l'ONU, cibles à plusieurs reprises de tirs et d'explosions, est suspendue

En annonçant, samedi 16 juin, la suspension des opérations des Nations unies qu'il commande en Syrie, le général norvégien Robert Mood place la communauté internationale au pied du mur, à la veille d'échéances diplomatiques importantes.

Sans une implication accrue des grandes capitales, à même de conduire à une décrue de la violence et à un redéploiement des observateurs, le plan de paix de Kofi Annan, émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, qui est le seul espoir de sortie de crise en Syrie et dont la mission onusienne est le principal pilier, pourrait toucher le fond.

La décision de Robert Mood est d'abord motivée par l'intensification des violences – qui ont encore fait au moins 50 morts et des centaines de blessés dimanche – et des dangers qu'elles font courir à ses hommes. Les convois des casques bleus ont été à plusieurs reprises visés par des tirs et des explosions ces dernières semaines.



À Damas, des observateurs des Nations unies accueillent leurs camarades de retour de mission à Al-Haffa, dans le nord du pays, le 16 juin. BASSEM TELLAOUÏ/AP

« Proche du désastre »

Les représentants des 42 pays qui ont fourni des soldats à la mission ont fait part de leurs craintes lors d'une réunion, mercredi, au siège de l'ONU, la plupart refusant d'exposer plus avant leurs militaires non armés. « Ils sont à un engin explosif du désastre », faisait

remarquer récemment Susan Rice, l'ambassadrice des États-Unis aux Nations unies.

La mission reste donc « à 100 % opérationnelle », dit-on à l'ONU, mais ses activités ne reprendront que lorsque la situation sera jugée suffisamment sûre. Tous les diplomates actifs sur le dossier syrien

ont cependant à l'esprit le sort qu'a connu la première mission d'observation, menée sous pavillon de la Ligue arabe, durant l'hiver. Sa suspension temporaire, décidée fin janvier du fait des entraves que Damas posait à son fonctionnement, était très vite devenue définitive.

L'annonce de Robert Mood, à laquelle Kofi Annan et Ban Ki-moon, le secrétaire général des Nations unies, ont été sans nul doute associés, s'apparente donc à un coup de semonce. Elle intervient, avec un à-propos sûrement calculé, en amont de deux rendez-vous diplomatiques : la rencontre Obama-Poutine, prévue mardi en marge du G20 organisé au Mexique, et la première réunion du Groupe de contact sur la Syrie, attendue le 30 juin à Genève, qui devrait regrouper les grandes puissances occidentales et la Russie.

Deux occasions où la mise en stand-by des casques bleus pour-

rait servir à accentuer les pressions sur le Kremlin. En fidèle allié de Damas, Moscou n'a aucun intérêt à ce que la mort du plan Annan soit officiellement actée, car un tel constat d'échec relancerait le débat sur le recours à la force, dont les Russes ne veulent pas entendre parler.

Faute d'une évolution de la position russe, l'opposition syrienne espère que la crise en cours aboutira au moins à muscler la mission des casques bleus. « Il faut tripler le nombre d'observateurs sur le terrain, plaide Haytham Al-Manna, un opposant en exil à Paris. Il faut recruter des experts en médecine légale, en explosifs, des enquêteurs capables d'agir rapidement. Le renoncement à la mission serait une catastrophe car il n'y a rien d'autre sur la table que le plan Annan. Ce serait le vide, c'est-à-dire la confrontation hors de tout contrôle. » ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE, AVEC ALEXANDRA GENESTE (A NEW YORK)

Les mouvements d'opposition tentent de s'unifier

L'opposition au régime de Damas tente de surmonter ses divisions. Une conférence regroupant la totalité de ses composantes, des Frères musulmans à la gauche marxiste, se tiendra dimanche 24 et lundi 25 juin, à Bruxelles. Elle aura pour but de réfléchir à l'après-Bachar Al-Assad. Organisée par des ONG de défense des droits de l'homme, en coopération avec l'Union européenne, cette réunion sera la première du genre depuis l'échec des initiati-

ves visant à unifier l'opposition syrienne au printemps et à l'été 2011. « L'écart entre les différentes factions de l'opposition se rétrécit, se félicite Georges Sabra, dirigeant du Conseil national syrien, la principale coalition de l'opposition. Nous espérons nous mettre d'accord sur les modalités de la transition. » Une démarche qui fait écho aux réflexions en cours au sein de la communauté internationale, sur la question de l'après-Assad.

Syrie, une pluie d'armes sur un champ de guerre totale

La rébellion et le régime, tous deux massivement alimentés en matériel par l'étranger, se livrent à des combats toujours plus intenses et meurtriers.



Des membres de l'Armée syrienne libre dans les environs d'Idlib. PHOTO AP

REPÈRES



«C'est en premier lieu au gouvernement syrien qu'incombe la responsabilité de changer la donne et d'appliquer le plan Annan.»

Ban Ki-moon secrétaire général de l'ONU, hier

- » Un cargo russe, le **MV Alced**, transportant des hélicoptères de combat **Mi-25** à destination de la Syrie, a été contraint de rebrousser chemin après que son assureur a suspendu le contrat sur cette cargaison violant l'embargo européen.
- » Le sénateur républicain américain **John McCain** s'est prononcé pour une intervention militaire aérienne américaine en Syrie, affirmant que les forces du régime recourent de plus en plus à des hélicoptères d'attaque pour mater la rébellion.
- » La Jordanie a renforcé hier ses contrôles à la frontière avec la Syrie pour empêcher des infiltrations de partisans du régime d'Al-Assad qui pourraient mener des actions de sabotage.

Par **JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN**

Le régime a beau le nier avec la dernière énergie, une partie de l'opposition aussi, la Syrie a plongé dans une guerre civile généralisée qui s'étend désormais à l'ensemble du territoire syrien. «[Le pays] a commencé sa descente aux enfers», reconnaissait la semaine dernière M^r Mario Zenari, le nonce apostolique en Syrie. Plus encore que les massacres de populations civiles, c'est le nombre de soldats tués au combat qui témoigne de ce que l'opposition armée et les forces loyalistes se livrent à présent à de véritables batailles. A Haffé, près de Qardaha, la ville du clan Assad située dans le nord-ouest du pays, les affrontements pour le contrôle de cette maigre bourgade ont duré huit jours. «Des centaines de soldats ont été blessés ou tués» au cours d'intenses combats, indiquait dernièrement le directeur de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), Rami Abdel Rahmane. Selon lui, ce sont 751 soldats qui ont été tués dans tout le pays entre le 13 mai et 13 juin. Un chiffre sans précédent. «Au cours du dernier mois, il y a eu une escalade des affrontements entre les forces du régime et les troupes rebelles, [notamment] des bombardements, ce qui

a provoqué une forte hausse du nombre des victimes», a aussi expliqué l'OSDH.

LANCE-ROQUETTES. Une raison majeure à cette intensification des combats : l'afflux d'armement, aussi bien à destination du camp du régime que de celui de la rébellion. «Nous n'avons jamais reçu autant d'armes qu'à présent. C'est par véhicules entiers qu'ils entrent en Syrie. Ils passent par la frontière turque, beaucoup plus que par le Liban. Des quantités énormes sont arrivées jusqu'à Hama [qui est aujourd'hui un des épicentres de la révolte, ndlr] et même, à l'autre bout de la Syrie, jusqu'à Deraa [près de la frontière jordanienne, ndlr]», reconnaît un opposant qui a requis l'anonymat. «Impossible que le régime ne soit pas au courant de ces livraisons, pas plus que les États-Unis ou la France. Pour nous, celles-ci sont devenues un vrai appui international», poursuit-il. Avec un gros bémol, cependant : «On nous livre essentiellement des kalachnikovs et des lance-roquettes. Ceci peut nous permettre de mener une guerre ouverte contre le régime, mais pas de le renverser.» Néanmoins, la livraison de ces armes, dont on peut suspecter la Turquie d'en être à l'origine, avec un financement du Qatar et de l'Arabie

saoudite, et l'appui probable des États-Unis, a permis à la guérilla de se développer. Ce sont précisément les lance-roquettes antichars qui ont donné un avantage certains aux rebelles, l'armée craignant désormais d'engager ses blindés dans la reconquête des villes. Dorénavant, «le gouvernement syrien a perdu au profit de l'opposition de grandes parties du territoire et plusieurs villes», indiquait dernièrement le chef des opérations de maintien de la paix de l'ONU, Hervé Ladsous. Autre souci du régime : l'étirement des lignes d'approvisionnement de l'armée, afin de pouvoir contourner les zones qui lui échappent. ■■■

Damas, lui aussi, reçoit des armes en abondance. Elles lui ont permis de se lancer à la reconquête des villes perdues et de procéder à des pilonnages massifs. Cette fois, c'est Moscou qui est montré du doigt. D'où la colère d'Hillary Clinton, qui s'est adressée la semaine dernière au Kremlin en des termes qui n'avaient pas été utilisés depuis la chute du Mur, lui reprochant de fournir à Bachar al-Assad des hélicoptères d'assaut – ils jouent un rôle important dans la reconquête des villes. La secrétaire d'Etat américaine a même qualifié de «notoirement faux» les démentis opposés par la Russie. La réplique est venue de son homologue russe, Sergueï Lavrov, qui, depuis Téhéran, a accusé à son tour sèchement Washington de fournir en armes les insurgés syriens.

Ainsi, derrière le conflit entre le régime d'Al-Assad et l'opposition, commence à se dessiner la carte d'une confrontation plus vaste. Celle-ci implique, bien sûr, les pays voisins de la Syrie – Liban, Turquie, Arabie Saoudite, Irak... – et reflète la coupure du monde musulman

entre sunnites et chiïtes. «L'Arabie saoudite et le Qatar seraient prêts à financer n'importe quelle opération militaire visant à renverser Bachar. Pour eux, c'est une question de survie. Car, s'ils perdent en Syrie, ce sera pour eux le début de la fin», analyse un politologue qui ne veut pas être cité.

«GROZNY». Mais le conflit syrien perce également sur la scène internationale. En atteste l'animosité de plus en plus vive entre Washington et Moscou, avec des relents de guerre froide. Même si, lors de leurs discussions hier à Los Cabos, au Mexique, Vladimir Poutine et Barack Obama ont cherché à donner le change, les relations russo-américaines restent empoisonnées par la question syrienne (lire ci-contre). Dernier épisode de cette confrontation Est-Ouest : Moscou se prépare à envoyer deux navires de guerre amphibies de la flotte de la mer Noire, avec à bord des fusiliers marins – les services occidentaux les estiment à quelque 250 par bateau – vers le port syrien de Tartous, seule base navale russe en Méditerranée. Le commandant adjoint des forces aériennes russes a même déclaré que des avions étaient prêts à protéger les navires de

guerre. Officiellement, il s'agit d'évacuer les citoyens russes de la zone de conflit et les équipements installés à Tartous. Mais comment ne pas voir aussi dans ce déploiement la volonté du Kremlin de montrer que la Syrie, quoi qu'il arrive, est une chasse gardée et que les Occidentaux n'y sont pas les bienvenus. «N'oublions pas que des officiers russes conseillent toujours, comme à l'époque de l'URSS, l'état-major syrien, et qu'ils sont probablement aux côtés des officiers qui bombardent Homs, laquelle ressemble d'ailleurs de plus en plus à Grozny [capitale de la Tchétchénie, anéantie par l'armée russe, ndlr]. Pas plus tard que le week-end dernier, le ministre syrien de la Défense était à Moscou», souligne le même expert qui requiert l'anonymat.

A elle seule, la Syrie est donc un triple champ de bataille : domestique, régional et international. On voit même les relations se tendre entre Moscou et Doha, ainsi qu'avec Riyad, comme le montre bien l'annulation d'un récent forum économique entre les deux pays prévu pour se tenir à Djeddah. ◆

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

MONDAY, JUNE 18, 2012

U.N. suspends its mission as violence in Syria rises

CAIRO

BY DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK
AND DAVID E. SANGER

The United Nations suspended its observer mission in Syria because of escalating violence, the most severe blow yet to months of international efforts to negotiate a peace plan and prevent Syria's descent into civil war.

The United Nations said Saturday that the monitors would not be withdrawn but were being locked down in Syria's most contested cities, unable to conduct patrols. While the decision to suspend their work was made chiefly to protect the unarmed monitors, the unstated purpose appeared to be to force Russia to intervene to assure that the observers are not the targets of Syrian forces or their sympathizers. Russia has opposed Western intervention and, by some accounts, continues to arm the forces of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

For President Barack Obama, the suspension of the observers' activities — unless it is reversed quickly — could signal the failure of the latest effort by the West to reach a diplomatic solution and ease Mr. Assad from power.

But Mr. Obama's choices are no better than they were when the uprising in Syria began nearly a year and a half ago. A bombing campaign like the one conducted last year by NATO in Libya with strong U.S. and Arab League support is not feasible in Syria: The battle is being waged in crowded cities, with little chance to attack the Syrian Army without the risk of high civilian casualties.

Mr. Obama, other NATO leaders and the Arab League have never wanted to send in a ground force, which would probably face heavy casualties in what many fear is emerging as a civil war.

The Syrian uprising has become one of the most intractable and deadly conflicts of the Arab Spring, with reports of at least four massacres in recent weeks, including accounts of killings of as many as 78 civilians, many of them women and children.

Syrian troops intensified shelling of rebel-held neighborhoods in the center of the city of Homs on Sunday, The Associated Press reported, quoting activists. Conditions are growing more dire and the evacuation of 1,000 endangered families and dozens of wounded people who

can't get adequate medical care is urgent, the activists told The A.P.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an activist group that is based in the United Kingdom, and the Local Coordination Committees, another activist group, said the shelling in Homs killed at least one person Sunday. The two groups also reported clashes between rebels and troops in the Damascus suburb of Mleiha, according to The A.P.

Rebels attacked an army checkpoint in central Hama Province killing at least three soldiers, the Observatory said. Both groups also reported violence in the northern provinces of Idlib and Aleppo as well as the eastern region of Deir el-Zour and the southern province of Dara'a. The L.C.C. reported at least 20 people killed Sunday while the Observatory put the number at 14, The A.P. said.

The observers had been the foundation of a six-point peace plan that Kofi Annan, the former U.N. secretary general, had sought to hammer out with the consent of Mr. Assad and his foreign sponsors, including Russia and Iran.

David E. Sanger reported from Washington. Neil MacFarquhar, Hwaida Saad and Dalal Mawad contributed reporting from Beirut.



Can a Moderate Kurd Unite Syrian Revolution?

by David Arnold

voanews.com

The Syrian National Council (SNC) announced earlier this month the selection of Abdulbaset Sieda, a little-known moderate Kurd from Uppsala, Sweden, to - for the next three months - lead the opposition group of mostly Syrian exiles in its effort to dislodge the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Islamist-dominated council, the largest coalition of political groupings opposed to the Syrian regime, has been deemed unable by some to provide effective support for the country's disparate opposition: the political activists who daily risk their lives in street protest, the pockets of Free Syrian Army armed resistance to the regime, and the Kurds and other Syrian minorities who are reluctant to join the uprising. Other exile opposition groups, such as the National Coordination Board for Democratic Change, are smaller and, unlike the SNC, have not gained the endorsement of France, Britain, the United States and other countries supporting regime change in Damascus.

In replacing the controversial Paris-based academic, Burhan Ghalioun, Sieda will lead a troubled organization whose turnaround could determine the future of the increasingly bloody 15-month-old revolution, the success or failure of the attempt to put an end to the Assad regime, and help replace it with a democratic alternative.

Can Sieda lead a restructuring of the council to increase its cohesion and efficacy? Can he create a larger umbrella for Syrians representing the disparate political, ethnic and religious interests of the nation?

Sieda's stated mission is to reshape the floundering council to unify the membership, chart a course of action, and to appeal to a broader base both within Syria and international community. The task falls to a Syrian intellectual expatriate who has remained in the background of a young organization that has been dominated by his predecessor, Ghalioun, and by Islamists.

Where did the SNC's new leader come from?

In his first few days in office, Sieda has



The new president of the Syrian National Council, Abdulbaset Sieda, speaks during a news conference in Istanbul, Turkey, June 10, 2012.

publicly repeated most of the positions the council has become known for: do not negotiate with Assad, continue to request foreign intervention through the establishment of a no-fly zone and a humanitarian corridor to ultimately unseat Assad and replace his dictatorship with a "democratic and pluralistic state."

Sieda was born in a small town in Hasaka, Syria, a rural Kurdish region in the northeast, surrounded by Acadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Byzantine and Islamic ruins. After receiving a doctorate in philosophy from Damascus University he taught in Libya for three years, then moved in 1994 with his wife and children to Sweden, where about 125,000 Kurds - mostly from Iraq - now live in exile. He teaches philosophy at the University of Uppsala in Stockholm and elsewhere in the capital.

"Since the creation of the Syrian National Council 11 months ago, Sieda has served on the small executive committee until recently headed by Ghalioun. The council describes him as a man of integrity and independence.

His brief biography on the SNC web site indicates that he serves on a preparation committee and in his academic life has published many papers on Syrian public affairs. SNC spokesperson Bassma Kodmani said he has also written extensively on Kurdish issues. Kodmani emphasized that Sieda is an independent and does not represent any single party or political interest on the 300-member council.

His selection to head the organization was made among a handful of the council's leaders at a June 9-10 meeting in Istanbul. As with many of their decisions, the choice was based on what Kodmani described as "consensus," rather than a

democratic vote by the membership.

Will Syria's minorities follow Sieda's lead?

The day he was chosen, Sieda told a reporter for the Kurdish online newspaper, Rudaw, that he has invited the Kurdish National Council (KNC) to join the Syrian umbrella group. The KNC leadership expressed some optimism that the two groups would work together. KNC leadership praised Sieda for his patriotism but added that success will be determined by his effectiveness as "a bridge of communications to improve relations."

Kurdish issues loom large in that conversation. Kodmani said the SNC opposed discrimination against Kurds, supports citizenship for all Kurds, and endorses compensation payments for some of the grievances they have against the Assad regime. But she said the SNC cannot endorse other demands such as Kurdish autonomy or federalism without the consensus of the council.

Syrian Kurds generally do not trust the SNC because they see it as a political group created by and in Turkey, says Ayub Nuri, the editor of Rudaw. "The council he leads right now is not liked by many Syrians: Arabs, Christians, Kurds and the other Syrian minority groups."

Uniting these opposition groups will be a major challenge, said Nuri. "They are deeply divided. They don't like each other. So anyone, no matter how experienced or how loyal or how hard-working, will have the challenge of satisfying all of these different groups, which I think is impossible."

Nuri also described the majority of Syria's Kurds - approximately 10 to 15 percent of Syria's total population of an estimated 22.5 million - as disengaged from the revolution. Most are unemployed and very poor. They tend to avoid violence because their own struggle with the Assad regime in 2004 ended in the deaths of hundreds of Kurds. "Now, they say the others should do it: 'We are tired of bloodshed and imprisonment.'"

Can Sieda restructure the Syrian National Council?

Critics of the SNC say future success will be determined not by who is chosen to lead the organization but whether the council is prepared for a structural reorganization on many fronts.

The SNC's Kodmani said reorganization is taking place, but others are skeptical that significant improvements will be made. ➤

➤ “These problems include issues of transparency, decision-making, how finances are managed, and the lack of a clear vision,” said Amr al-Azm, a Syrian American who teaches archaeology at Shawnee State University in Ohio. A Sunni whose father is a recognized opposition figure and who remains in the SNC, al-Azm was invited to the organizational meetings of the group but declined to join.

“One of the key problems I have with the council is that it is dominated by Islamists, not just members of the Muslim Brotherhood,” said al-Azm. Others have said that Ghalioun - who is a Christian - was put forward by the Brotherhood to downplay their Islamists image. Al-Azm said the Brotherhood supported Sieda for the same reason.

Another member of the SNC, George Sabra - a Christian with close links to Syria’s street activists - was in the running for the leadership position, said Al-Azm. But Sabra was perceived as a threat to the status quo of the leadership, Al-Azm said.

“The Muslim Brotherhood refused to let him take that seat because he is independent-minded. He can make decisions and I think that, in itself, may have interfered with the current balance of power in the SNC,” he said.

SNC’s short history

The short history of the SNC includes charges of the failure of Ghalioun to consult the membership before making important decisions, as well as the failure of the executive to call for votes among the membership. Three months ago, Gulf newspaper Al Arabiya reported that three of the SNC’s founders - a former judge, a human rights lawyer and opposition leader Kamal al-Labwami - complained about Muslim Brotherhood dominance, the council’s failure to arm the rebels. Having charged the leadership with corruption, they left the council. Two have since returned.

“They lurch from crisis to crisis,” said al-Azm. “I don’t see how expanding the SNC to include a few more members of the minorities will fundamentally address the core problems of the SNC, the issues

of transparency, leadership and a clear vision.”

Al-Azm is concerned that time is running out for the SNC.

“There is no connection left anymore between the SNC as a sort of political entity and the street which has moved beyond and is not protesting and acting totally independent of such a leadership.”

As the new leader of Syria’s opposition umbrella group, Sieda now presides over a restructuring of the Syrian National Council and a major outreach not only to the nation’s minorities suspicious of the SNC, but to thousands of Syrian activists and fighters in Homs, Hama, Idlib and other centers of revolution. The SNC’s goal remains to refashion the rebel force that could turn an escalating war into a successful toppling of what much of the world perceives as a brutal dictatorship and to become midwife to a new government in Syria. And Sieda has only three months before the executive committee selects his successor. ●



Iraqi Kurdistan sees oil output at 2 mln bpd by 2019

ISTANBUL, June 5, 2012 (Reuters) -By Ayla Jean Yackley

IRAQI KURDISTAN aims to increase lift oil production to 2 million barrels per day (bpd) by 2019 and wants companies to build pipelines so the fuel can reach foreign markets, Energy Minister Ashti Hawrami said on Tuesday.

The semi-autonomous region expects output to reach 1 million bpd by 2015, Hawrami told a panel at a World Economic Forum meeting in Istanbul, but did not say which companies or projects would help it achieve those targets.

Output in Kurdish-run northern Iraq has fallen sharply to an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 bpd after exports were halted in March amid a dispute with the central government in Baghdad over oil-revenue sharing.

“We think we can go to 2 million by 2019,” Hawrami said.

Another 1 million bpd from neighbouring Iraqi provinces could also flow through Kurdistan to export markets, he said.

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.

The dispute is part of a broader political crisis in Iraq, where a

fragile government composed of Shi’ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs is struggling to overcome deep splits over power-sharing.

“If Iraq is serious about reaching 8 million bpd of exports, at least 3 million of it will come from the north,” Hawrami said. “Within a couple of years there will be additional infrastructure to get the isolated crude of Kurdistan to market.”

The existing pipeline from Kirkuk’s oilfields to the Turkish port of Ceyhan has maximum capacity of about 1.5 million bpd, though only about a third of that flows through the aging link, often the target of attacks by insurgents in Iraq and Turkey.

Hawrami said his administration wants the private sector to build a new pipeline link that would solely carry the heavy crude extracted from Kurdish fields within two years.

“This is not an alternative to Kirkuk-Ceyhan, but additional capacity, and it is not really a pipeline to bypass current infrastructure,” he said.

Kurdistan aims to double export capacity by next year from the current 300,000 bpd or so and then lift it to 1 million bpd, he said.

Exports by the end of 2012 are seen at 175,000 bpd, the Kurdistan Regional Government has said.

As for natural gas, the Kurdish region will be ready to export it within a couple of years, Hawrami said.

Turkey will be the primary destination, and excess gas will be shipped on in whatever facilities exist, he said.

Turkish trade with the Kurdish region of Iraq is about \$8 billion, but as energy exports increase, Kurdistan could become Turkey’s top trading partner, he said. □

How America can help Turkey and Israel reconcile

**Michael Herzog
Soner Cagaptay**

WASHINGTON It has been more than two years since the confrontation over a Gaza-bound flotilla plunged Israeli-Turkish relations into a deep crisis. Left to their own devices, Turks and Israelis have been unable to overcome mutual suspicion to bridge their differences. These days, there is a degree of openness in both Israel and Turkey to the idea of reconciliation.

However, there are still tensions, especially because of recent Turkish indictments against senior Israelis involved in the June 2010 flotilla episode — during which Israeli commandos attempting to enforce the Gaza blockade boarded a Turkish vessel, leading to a melee in which nine Turks were killed and many others, including Israeli soldiers, were injured. A rapprochement will therefore probably require American mediation.

President Obama has a unique opportunity to help rebuild a strategically vital relationship between these two U.S.

allies. While their relationship is unlikely to return to past levels of strategic cooperation, normalizing it could advance important U.S. interests in Syria, Iran and the eastern Mediterranean.

The Arab Spring provides a strong incentive for Turkish-Israeli reconciliation. Middle East unrest has challenged Turkey's "zero problems with our neighbors" policy, casting Turkey and Syria as adversaries. At the same time, the region's revolutionary tremors have shaken the cornerstones of Israel's national security, even raising doubts about the future of its peace agreement with Egypt as the possibility of a Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Cairo becomes more real.

Moreover, both Israel and Turkey fear that a powerful Iran could fill the void in the region. The Turks are worried about what they regard as an Iran-sponsored Shiite axis spanning the region. The Israelis feel that their window to stop Iran's nuclear program is closing.

The situation in Syria could seal a reconciliation deal. The two countries share a desire to see Bashar al-Assad out of power. There is broad consensus among Israeli officials that the end of the

Assad government would deal a blow to Iran and could dissolve the anti-Israeli axis binding Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, the Shiite militant group in Lebanon.

After a decade of warming to Syria's ruler, Turkey has begun to confront Syria: Turkey not only hosts the opposition to the Assad regime, including the civil-

Obama has a unique opportunity to rebuild a strategically vital relationship between two key allies.

ian Syrian National Council, but is also arming parts of it, like elements in the Free Syrian Army. Ankara has made it clear that Mr. Assad has to go. But it needs U.S. support to play a more assertive role in the coalition against Mr. Assad by bolstering the Syrian opposition, both politically and militarily.

However, because Turkey fears that it might be left alone in conflict, it has shied away from deeper engagement, like setting up safe zones that might invite direct confrontation with Syria. That is, in part, a result of Washington's own cautious Syria policy, which has relied on U.N. diplomacy rather than direct mea-

asures to support the armed opposition.

Turkey seems interested in intervention inside Syria only if America and NATO back such an endeavor. A Turkish-Israeli dialogue on Syria could bolster Israel's interest in regime change and enlist Israel to generate American support. A normalized Turkish-Israeli relationship would also open opportunities for cooperation against the Assad government, with the Turks taking the political and regional lead and the Israelis providing intelligence and additional practical assets. The parties could also address shared concerns over the fate of the huge suspected chemical weapons stockpiles in Syria.

Any Israeli contribution would, of course, have to be invisible in order not to create a sense that Israel was behind the Syrian uprising. This makes cooperation even more valuable, for it would allow Israel to provide untraceable assets to support Turkey's efforts to undermine the Assad government.

But Turkey is unlikely to pursue reconciliation unless Israel satisfies its demand for an apology for the flotilla episode. A compromise formula — an Israeli apology for operational mis-

takes — was rejected mainly because Israel didn't feel it had secured a firm Turkish commitment to refrain from legal action against Israelis involved in the raid and a clear path to normalizing relations. Rather, it was concerned that Turkey might merely pocket the Israeli apology, use it to bolster its domestic standing ahead of elections and continue to publicly criticize Israel.

Today, the situation has changed. The confluence of interests in Syria provides an opportunity; both sides stand to gain from a compromise that leads to normalized diplomatic ties.

A successful reconciliation process could begin with Israel's offering an apology for operational mistakes and expressing remorse for the loss of life. Israel has already agreed in principle to provide compensation to the families of the Turks killed in the incident. Turkey would refrain from indicting any Israelis involved in the operation. These steps should open the door to an immediate upgrade in bilateral ties, including reinstalling ambassadors and commencing a strategic dialogue on Syria and other pressing regional issues.

Apologizing to Turkey is a highly sensitive topic in Israel because most Israelis see Turkey as responsible for provoking the flotilla clash. But now that Israel's national security establishment is firmly in favor of a reconciliation initiative and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has expanded his governing coalition, Israel is better positioned to pursue normalized ties. Indeed, the influence of the loudest cabinet voice opposing the initiative — Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman — has been diluted by the inclusion of former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's Kadima Party in the governing coalition. If Mr. Netanyahu believes that a deal is in Israel's interest, he has the votes to make it happen.

The United States should actively push its friends to reconcile. It would bring two of its closest Middle East allies back together, a welcome boost for Washington's efforts to confront widespread upheaval in the Middle East.

MICHAEL HERZOG, a former chief of staff to Israel's minister of defense, and **SONER CAGAPTAY**, the author of "Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey," are fellows at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



Workers recovering a body after a car bomb in Kirkuk. More than 150 Iraqis have been killed in the past week. At the same time, temperatures have soared to 49 degrees Celsius.

A new, grim norm settles in Iraq

BAGHDAD

Citizens respond stoically in the face of attacks, political stasis and heat

BY TIM ARANGO
AND DURAJD ADNAN

On Saturday, a young Shiite man, bloodied from bombing wounds to his arms and head, was lying on a hospital bed when his cellphone rang.

"I remember visiting my friend in the hospital when he was wounded from an explosion," said the man, Sahir Talib, 23, who was wounded in a suicide car bombing during a religious festival here. "He just called to tell me it's his turn to visit me in the hospital."

Pausing a moment, he added, "Our life will never change."

Just last month, a poll showed that for the first time in almost two years, a plurality of Iraqis felt that the country was going in the right direction. Now, that measure of hope, nurtured by a lull in violence that some had begun to believe could last, is being tested by the return of some painfully familiar miseries for Iraq: bloodshed, insufferable heat and political struggle.

Over the past week, more than 150 Iraqis have been killed, and hundreds more have been wounded, in an escalation of sectarian violence that included the country's deadliest day in nearly

two years. At the same time, temperatures have soared to 49 degrees Celsius (120 Fahrenheit) while intense sandstorms have kept Iraqis from sleeping on their roofs — a critical escape from the heat at a time when electricity to power air-conditioners is working for only a couple of hours a day because of the strains to the Iraqi power grid.

The government, meanwhile, remains paralyzed as Sunni and Kurdish rivals to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki push hard for his ouster, though diplomats and analysts say he seems likely to weather the crisis.

In times like these, a particularly Iraqi character trait — part stoicism, part defiance — comes through.

"Iraqis have gotten used to this situation," said Ali Husain, the editor in chief of the newspaper Al Mada. "It's part of life. You have your breakfast, then there's a car bomb, and then lunch after that."

But even as Iraqis insist that they are managing just fine, this grim stretch has driven home the reality that, for the first time after years of U.S. occupation, they must manage alone.

Not only has it been six months since the departure of the U.S. military, but the United States, which is without an ambassador to Iraq, is also largely disengaged politically. The State Department is slashing the size of its embassy here, and the Obama administration's nominee to lead the mission, Brett H. McGurk, who has worked in Iraq since the George W. Bush administration, withdrew on Monday in the face of Re-

publican opposition.

This month, a local news agency reported that Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. would arrive in Baghdad "within days" to resolve the tensions surrounding Mr. Maliki. At the time, that did not seem to be a stretch: Iraqis have become accustomed to seeing American officials rush to the scene of their latest political drama. But this time, Mr. Biden never came.

"It seems the Iraqis — not without some sort of loud cheering from the Turks and the Iranians — will be sorting this one out themselves," wrote Reidar Visser, a blogger and a historian of Iraq.

At the same time, the recent violence, mostly against Shiite religious pilgrims, has raised new questions about the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces. While the police and military forces are generally regarded as well trained, there are still concerns about loyalties and corruption.

In one common scheme, absent soldiers pay half of their salaries to their officers. "This phenomenon exists, and I call on officers in the Interior and Defense Ministries to investigate," Mr. Maliki said in a statement released on state

"It's part of life. You have your breakfast, then there's a car bomb, and then lunch after that."

television Monday. "This is treachery."

Also, at checkpoints in Baghdad, soldiers still use wandlike devices that they believe can detect bombs but that have been determined by researchers to be useless and have led to fraud accusations against the British company that makes them.

Still, Iraqi defiance is in evidence. Even after dozens of attacks last week left more than 90 people dead, flatbed trucks were still seen throughout Baghdad, carrying away the beige blast walls

that have come to dominate the look of the city. Even the walls that protect Parliament are being removed, and one lawmaker said in the local media that it was time that the politicians “share with the people the danger of terrorist attacks.”

Politically, the enthusiastic and quixotic effort by Mr. Maliki’s rivals to push him from power has actually seemed to help him. Recent polls show that the crisis has cemented his popularity among his Shiite political base, and even some Sunni tribes are warming to him.

Meanwhile, the Sunni and Kurdish opposition has become more divided — and in some cases less popular among the groups’ constituencies — as the challenges to Mr. Maliki have created a legislative logjam. (One issue that the government has discussed recently is a

ban on celebratory gunfire, which probably has as much chance to succeed as a ban on public smoking that Parliament passed late last year, and that has gone nearly totally unobserved.)

Mr. Maliki has also received some political cover from the Iranian government. After calls by the cleric Moktada al-Sadr, Mr. Maliki’s sometime ally and perpetual rival in Shiite politics, for Mr. Maliki to step down, Iranian officials summoned Mr. Sadr to Tehran and urged him to ease up.

Although the summons seemed to have little effect on Mr. Sadr’s stance — over the weekend, he insisted again that opposing Mr. Maliki was God’s will — it was a clear message to the Iraqi public that Iran still backed the prime minister.

In that, Iran and the United States ap-

pear to be in agreement, even if American officials have seemed to try to maintain some distance from Mr. Maliki and what is seen as his taste for authoritarian behavior.

To many Iraqis, however, that streak in Mr. Maliki’s character — evident in power grabs in recent years over the security forces and the justice system — is more expected than alarming. His popularity in polls has generally risen as he has moved to solidify his authority, signaling that Iraqis still value strength and resilience as critical to weathering the crises that face the country.

“I think he’s the only one who cares,” said Karrah Ali, the owner of a men’s suit shop in the capital whose clients include members of Parliament and their bodyguards. “He’s interested in working and doing something.”

Le Monde
Jeudi 21 juin 2012

Les trois guerres civiles de Syrie

C'est désormais officiel puisque les Nations unies le disent : la Syrie est entrée en guerre civile. Hervé Ladsous, chef des opérations de maintien de la paix, qui a brisé le tabou lexical, est un diplomate chevronné. Pendant des mois, les Occidentaux ont mis en garde contre une guerre civile annoncée comme « imminente », sans trouver la formule magique permettant de conjurer le sort.

Pourquoi de telles précautions sémantiques ? L'usage du mot entraîne-t-il une obligation d'intervenir que tout le monde préférerait éviter tant le conflit syrien est lourd d'implications géopolitiques et régionales ? Ou, au contraire, l'entrée de la Syrie en guerre civile signifie-t-elle une forme de point de non-retour à partir duquel plus rien ne peut être fait pour sauver ce pays de l'enfer dans lequel il s'enfonce ? Ni l'un ni l'autre : l'usage du mot guerre civile, destiné à frapper les esprits, n'a aucune implication légale en termes de droit international. Mais que recouvre-t-il au juste ?

Trois types de guerres sont à l'œuvre en Syrie aujourd'hui. Tout d'abord une guerre contre les civils, qui a débuté au début du soulèvement en mars 2011. Dès les premières manifestations, qui ne demandaient pas la chute du régime mais la libération d'enfants arrêtés et torturés à Deraa, le pouvoir syrien a fait le choix des armes, ordonnant de tirer à balles réelles sur des manifestants désarmés chantant des slogans et brandissant des pancartes.

Malgré des milliers de morts et la lassitude, cette révolution pacifique se poursuit dans la banlieue de Damas, à Alep et dans des dizaines de localités, où les habitants continuent de descendre dans la rue vendredi après vendredi. Les Syriens ne veulent pas renoncer à ce qui a fait l'essence même de leur révolution. Ces manifestants à mains nues n'ont pas fait tomber le régime, mais ils ont ébranlé ce qui était jusque-là sa principale force : le mur de la peur. Si ces manifestations venaient à cesser, le régime de Bachar Al-Assad pourrait enfin à juste titre prétendre — comme il le fait depuis le début — n'être confronté qu'à des bandes armées.

Analyse

CHRISTOPHE AYAD
Service International

Depuis la fin de l'été 2011, une autre guerre est venue s'imposer sur le terrain : il s'agit du conflit inégal mais meurtrier entre les unités d'élite de l'armée régulière et des groupuscules armés locaux formés de civils et de déserteurs, essentiellement des conscrits ayant fui leur unité pour rejoindre leur village d'origine. Ces groupes d'autodéfense se sont unis sous le label Armée syrienne libre (ASL), mais cette appellation ne masque pas la grande autonomie des unités locales.

Dernier conflit à l'œuvre, la guerre de tous contre tous : il s'agit des massacres, comme celui commis dans le village sunnite d'Houla, où quelque 110 civils dont 49 enfants ont été tués

L'ASL est loin de menacer une armée régulière bien plus aguerrie et mieux équipée, mais sa tactique de guérilla, son implantation locale et les armements qu'elle commence à recevoir en font une source d'inquiétude de plus en plus importante pour le régime. Des maquis s'installent, notamment à Rastan, dans les environs d'Homs ou dans le djebel Akrad, près de la frontière turque. L'ASL n'est pas en mesure de contrer les offensives de l'armée, mais le terrain perdu est aussitôt réoccupé dès que les tanks gouvernementaux partent s'attaquer à un nouveau foyer. Selon des sources onusiennes, 40 % du territoire national échapperait au pouvoir central. Pour compliquer les choses, cette guérilla est rejointe, voire infiltrée, par une composante djihadiste.

Dernier conflit à l'œuvre, la guerre de tous contre tous : il s'agit des massacres, comme celui commis dans le village sunnite d'Houla, où quelque 110 civils dont 49 enfants ont été tués, certains à l'arme blanche, par des miliciens prorégime (les *chabbiha*) des villages alaouites alentours. Là est la pire crainte de la communauté internationale. Autre signe inquiétant : à plusieurs reprises, les observateurs de la mission Annan ont été empêchés de se rendre sur les lieux de massacre ou d'offensive de l'armée, comme à Al-Koubeir et à Haffé, deux autres localités sunnites, par des villageois alaouites qui sont allés jusqu'à attaquer leurs véhicules.

Ces massacres ne sont pas les premiers, mais leur multiplication éloigne de plus en plus toute perspective de règlement politique et d'intervention internationale dans le conflit syrien. « Le défi n'est plus aujourd'hui la guerre entre le président Assad et l'opposition, mais une guerre de tous contre tous », résume Fawaz Gerges, directeur du Centre sur le Moyen-Orient à la London School of Economics.

En enrôlant massivement dans la communauté alaouite, cette branche dissidente du chiisme dont sont issues la famille Assad et une bonne partie des cadres de l'appareil sécuritaire, le régime a confessionnalisé le conflit et l'espoir de rallier les minorités (alaouites, mais aussi chrétiens, druzes, voire Kurdes) craignant l'avènement d'une hégémonie sunnite. Il espérait se placer au-dessus de la mêlée en étant garant d'un Etat civil et protecteur des minorités.

De fait, sa stratégie risquée de le conduire, à terme, à se replier dans son réduit de la montagne alaouite. Pour que la sombre prédiction de Fawaz Gerges se réalise, il manque un élément essentiel : la réciprocité. Des actes de vengeance confessionnels ont visé des familles alaouites, notamment à Homs, mais jusqu'à présent, fait remarquer à juste titre l'opposition syrienne, les massacres de sunnites n'ont pas été suivis de massacres de masse en retour. Pour combien de temps ? ■

ayad@lemonde.fr

Washington au lance-Flame contre le nucléaire iranien

Un virus informatique créé par les Etats-Unis et Israël a été détecté par Téhéran. Deux ans après la révélation de Stuxnet, la cyberguerre fait rage.

Par **FABRICE ROUSSELOT**
Correspondant à New York

En attendant de nouvelles sanctions contre l'Iran, l'Amérique s'est engagée dans un drôle de bras de fer avec le régime de Téhéran et a choisi d'intensifier ce qu'elle appelle même sa «*cyberwar*», une guerre électronique. Plusieurs officiels viennent ainsi de confirmer cette semaine que les Etats-Unis et Israël avaient développé un virus informatique baptisé Flame, dont on a appris l'existence le mois dernier, pour attaquer les ordinateurs centraux du programme nucléaire iranien. «*Il s'agit de préparer le champ de bataille pour un autre type d'action secrète*, a précisé un membre des services secrets américains au *Washington Post*. *Notre cyberguerre contre l'Iran est déjà très avancée.*» A en croire les différentes sources citées dans la presse, le logiciel Flame est capable de provoquer d'énormes dysfonctionnements dans les infrastructures informatiques des centrales nucléaires. Il peut s'introduire dans les réseaux et y collecter des milliers d'informations, comme la copie de codes secrets, de mails ou de données confidentielles, et passer outre les logiciels de sécurité. Flame avait été découvert fin avril par les Iraniens eux-mêmes, alors qu'Israël avait apparemment décidé de l'utiliser de façon unilatérale dans une attaque ciblée contre le ministère du Pétrole iranien. «*C'est un outil ultra-performant qui permet, par exemple, de récolter de nombreuses données et de les falsifier pour saboter toute une architecture informatique*», précise cet expert des attaques électroniques qui a collaboré un temps avec le gouvernement américain.

SABOTAGE. Ces nouvelles informations témoignent de la campagne de guérilla électronique d'envergure lancée par les Etats-Unis contre l'Iran. Début juin, dans son livre *Confront and Conceal* – dont un long extrait est paru dans le *New York Times* –, le journaliste David Sanger révélait que, dès ses premiers mois à la Maison Blanche, Barack Obama avait ordonné secrètement d'accroître les attaques contre les systèmes informatiques iraniens gérant les usines d'enrichissement d'uranium, dans une vaste entreprise de sabotage électronique. Flame serait ainsi l'une des pièces maîtresses d'une opération de cybersabotage baptisée «*Olympic Games*», qui avait commencé sous le mandat de George W. Bush. A l'époque, Washington et Tel-Aviv étaient tombés d'accord pour collaborer afin de recueillir le plus d'informations électroniques possibles sur le fonctionnement du programme nucléaire iranien. Mais

c'est en 2008, avec l'arrivée d'Obama à la présidence des Etats-Unis, que le programme serait passé en phase opérationnelle, et aurait été placé sous le contrôle direct de la CIA et de la NSA (Agence nationale de sécurité).

Le virus Flame daterait d'il y a au moins cinq ans, et aurait le même code informatique et le même mode opératoire qu'un autre ver qui répond au doux nom de Stuxnet, dont la presse avait révélé l'existence en 2010. Stuxnet s'était introduit dans les logiciels de contrôle de l'usine d'enrichissement d'uranium de Natanz, au sud de Téhéran, et avait déréglé pendant plusieurs semaines plus de 1 000 centrifugeuses. «*La décision a clairement été prise de s'en remettre de plus en plus à ces techniques informatiques comme une façon de traiter le dossier du nucléaire iranien*, confirme Paul Pillar, un ancien analyste de la CIA, actuellement au Center for Peace and Security Studies de Georgetown University.

Etant donné que la diplomatie ne marche pas, il y a là une possibilité de repousser indéfiniment la capacité iranienne à produire une arme nucléaire.»

CONSTAT D'ÉCHEC. A Washington, plusieurs élus républicains se sont néanmoins interrogés sur l'efficacité de cette cyberguerre, en soulignant que toutes ces «*révélations*» apparaissaient en pleine campagne pour la présidentielle, «*à un moment où Barack Obama a besoin d'apparaître comme un commandant en chef sûr de lui*». Pour les experts, la question est de savoir si les attaques informatiques coordonnées des Etats-Unis et d'Israël peuvent permettre d'éloigner un potentiel conflit et l'hypothèse d'une intervention militaire. Les pourparlers engagés en début de semaine à Moscou entre les négociateurs occidentaux et Téhéran se sont en effet achevés sur un constat d'échec. L'Iran a refusé d'arrêter l'enrichissement d'uranium à 20% et les Occidentaux ont exclu d'abandonner les sanctions économiques, alors que doit entrer en vigueur le 1^{er} juillet un embargo pétrolier de l'UE, qui va encore accroître les tensions. «*Dans ce contexte, difficile de dire quel est l'effet de ces attaques dans le cyberspace*, estime Paul Hugues, un ancien militaire qui a travaillé sur le nucléaire iranien. *Mais cela met la pression sur l'Iran, et cela montre toute la détermination américaine sur le nucléaire, tout en infligeant de sérieux dégâts.*»

«*L'un des autres problèmes, c'est que nous sommes quand même dans une véritable guerre d'Etat à l'Etat, même si elle passe par des ordinateurs*, relève encore Paul Pillar. *On pourrait estimer que ce genre d'actions, à l'image des attaques de drones par exemple, pourrait être discuté de façon plus concertée au plus haut niveau politique et au Congrès. Ne serait-ce que pour mieux informer l'opinion publique.*»

REPÈRES

«Le virus a pénétré [...] nos ordinateurs, notamment dans le secteur pétrolier. Mais nous avons pu contrôler l'incident.»

Gholam Reza Jalali un officiel iranien chargé de cybersécurité

STUXNET

Ce virus informatique a été créé en 2009 par les Etats-Unis et Israël. Conçu sous l'administration Bush et développé sous celle d'Obama, il a pour but de freiner l'évolution du programme nucléaire iranien.

1000

C'est, au moins, le nombre de centrifugeuses de l'usine d'enrichissement de Natanz mises un temps à l'arrêt, en 2010, après une attaque par le virus Stuxnet.

«Si les pourparlers se poursuivent comme cela a été décidé, nous devrions assister à des discussions sans fin.»

Mohammad Saleh Sedghian analyste indépendant, au sujet des négociations sur le nucléaire

le Parisien

VENDREDI 22 JUIN 2012

RUSSIE

Moscou admet fournir des armes à la Syrie

La Russie a défendu hier son droit de livrer des armes à Damas. Alors que la Syrie est sous le coup d'un embargo, le cargo russe « MV Alaed » avait été intercepté mardi au large de l'Ecosse avec des hélicoptères d'attaque Mi-25, destinés au régime de Bachar al-Assad. Moscou, grand allié de la Syrie depuis de nombreuses décennies, affirme qu'elle ne contrevient pas à l'embargo sur les armes puisqu'elle s'est contentée de remettre en état de marche ces appareils vendus du temps de l'URSS, selon le journal

britannique « Daily Telegraph ». Or, des Mi-25 ont été utilisés dans la répression menée par le président Bachar al-Assad ces quinze derniers mois. Par ailleurs, un pilote de chasse syrien a atterri hier en Jordanie, où il a demandé l'asile politique. Si des milliers de soldats syriens ont déserté depuis le début de la révolte — qui a fait 15 000 morts en plus de quinze mois —, c'est la première fois qu'un pilote de chasse fait défection avec armes et bagages, en l'occurrence un MiG-21.

Le Monde

Mardi 26 juin 2012

La Russie courtisée pour son influence sur Damas

Moscou apparaît comme le seul architecte possible d'une transition en Syrie

La Russie suivra assurément avec attention les « consultations » qui doivent avoir lieu mardi 26 juin à Bruxelles, à l'OTAN, à la demande de la Turquie, qui a réagi ainsi à la destruction d'un de ses avions militaires par la Syrie, le 22 juin. L'activation par la Turquie de l'article IV du traité de l'Atlantique Nord, sans pour autant déclencher un mécanisme de solidarité pouvant entraîner une intervention de l'Alliance — idée d'ailleurs exclue par Ahmet Davutoglu, le ministre des affaires étrangères turc — accroît subitement la dimension internationale de la crise syrienne.

L'affaire est d'autant plus sensible que le tir visant l'avion turc a, selon toute vraisemblance, impliqué des éléments de défense aérienne livrés à la Syrie par... la Russie, son premier fournisseur d'armes. Mais après cet incident, l'attitude de la Turquie frappe aussi par sa relative modération — surtout si l'on compare avec les envolées furieuses qui avaient suivi l'incident de la flottille turque au large d'Israël en 2010.

C'est dans ce contexte que la diplomatie russe semble redoubler d'efforts pour capitaliser sur sa « politique syrienne », en s'efforçant d'obtenir la convocation d'une sorte de conférence de paix qui lui conférerait un rôle majeur. Prévue le 30 juin à Genève, la réunion d'un « groupe de contact » voulu par

Kofi Annan, l'émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, — mais dont la composition n'a pas encore été annoncée — fournit une occasion en or à la Russie pour apparaître indispensable, après des mois de blocages diplomatiques à l'ONU.

L'une des priorités russes est la reconnaissance de l'Iran comme acteur incontournable sur ce dossier. Une stratégie qui, tout en se réclamant d'une quête d'efficacité pour contraindre M. Assad en misant sur son allié iranien, revient à conforter un certain axe Moscou-Téhéran-Damas, dessinant ainsi un rapport de force régional où, selon la vision russe, le Kremlin et ses appuis chiites feraient face, au Moyen-Orient, à un Occident aventuriste et naïf, solidaire des sunnites, y compris des plus extrémistes.

Devant plusieurs interlocuteurs occidentaux, des officiels russes se sont mis à évoquer les limites de leur influence à Damas, pour valoriser la nécessité de parler avec l'Iran. Leur message, en substance : « Nous ne pouvons pas orchestrer une transition politique à Damas seuls, mais nous pouvons le faire si les Iraniens sont pris en compte. » Une demande jugée irrecevable par les Etats-Unis, suivis par la France : ce serait introduire une confusion dangereuse avec le dossier du nucléaire, juge-t-on. Mais l'idée a recueilli le soutien du secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban

Ki-moon, et de M. Annan, convaincus que seule une approche régionale large a des chances d'aboutir.

La Russie, tout en s'en défendant publiquement, indique en coulisses qu'elle commençait à explorer les voies d'une mise à l'écart de Bachar Al-Assad. Au profit, suggèrent des sources diplomatiques, d'un « général syrien sunnite » au profil encore bien hypothétique. La capacité des Russes à orchestrer une transition politique ne convainc pas tout le monde mais elle a fini par apparaître comme le seul recours, en cette année d'élections aux Etats-Unis et de tourments financiers en Europe.

Une rencontre est prévue le 28 juin à Saint-Petersbourg entre la secrétaire d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton et son homologue russe Sergueï Lavrov. Le 19 juin, au Mexique, le président russe, Vladimir Poutine, avait prétendu, après son entretien avec Barack Obama, avoir trouvé « de nombreux points d'accord » sur la Syrie. A propos d'un scénario « à la yéménite » offrant à M. Al-Assad un sauf-conduit vers l'étranger ? Un changement de dirigeant sans changement radical de régime ?

Côté français, où la « piste russe » semble prudemment retenue, on évoque la possible combinaison, en Syrie, de deux scénarios, aussi complexe l'un que l'autre : un arrangement politique qui s'inspirerait à la fois des accords de Taëf de 1989 ayant mis fin à la guerre civile au Liban, et de ceux de Dayton qui avaient conclu la guerre de Bosnie en 1995. D'emblée, cela soulève la très épineuse question d'un redécoupage des institutions étatiques syriennes selon des critères ethniques ou confessionnels — voire, d'une création de territoires « autonomisés ».

Les Russes réfléchiraient donc, selon des diplomates, aux moyens d'apporter des garanties de sécurité à la minorité alaouite dès lors que celle-ci perdrait sa tutelle absolue en Syrie. Selon cette version, en dépêchant des navires militaires

L'avion turc abattu était dans l'espace international

La Turquie a donné des précisions, dimanche 24 juin, sur la disparition d'un avion de guerre turc après un tir de missile syrien, le 22 juin. « D'après nos conclusions, notre avion a été abattu dans l'espace aérien international, à 13 milles nautiques de la Syrie », a déclaré à la télévision le ministre des affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu. Il a insisté sur le fait que le F-4 Phantom, clairement identifié comme turc, ce que dément Damas qui a reconnu le tir, volait seul, vendredi, et n'avait « aucune mission, pas même de collecte d'informations, au-dessus de la Syrie ».

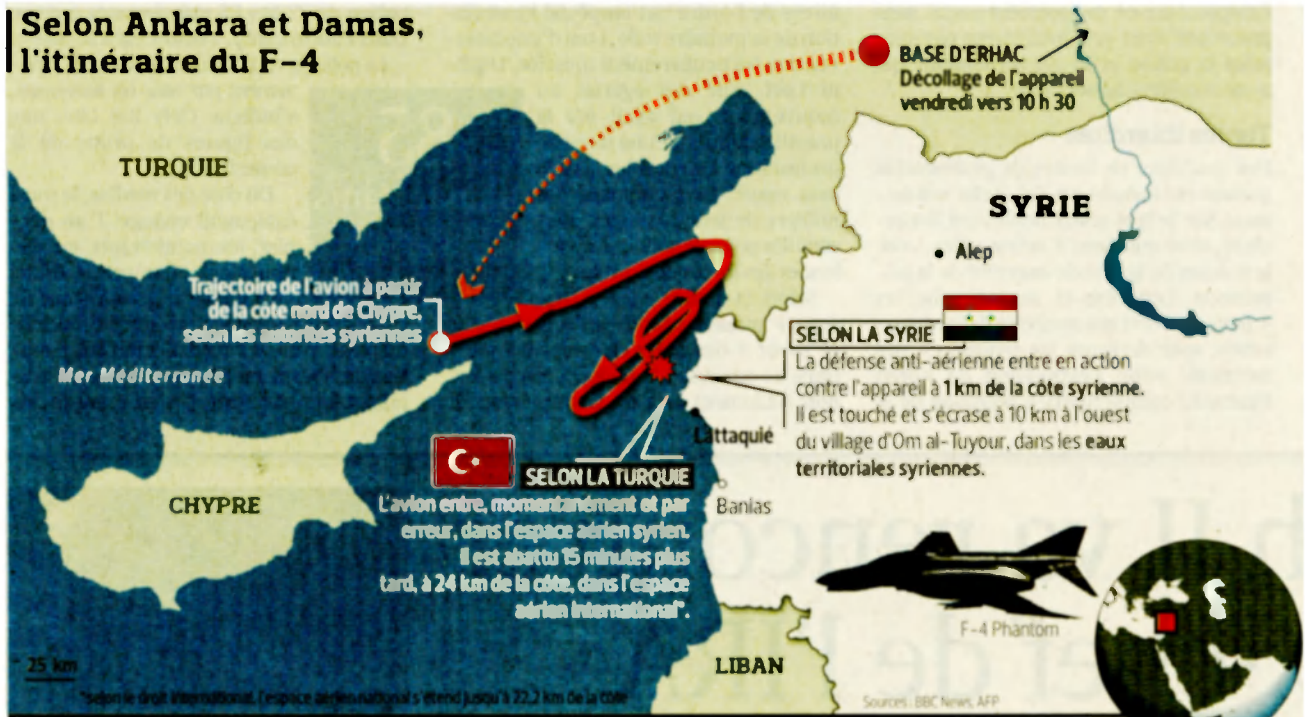
M. Davutoglu a reconnu que l'appareil, qui effectuait sans armes une mission d'entraînement et de test d'un système radar en Méditerranée, était entré un moment dans l'espace syrien, mais a déclaré qu'il avait été détruit quinze minutes après cette violation involontaire, sans avertissement au préalable. La disparition de l'avion et de ses deux pilotes a été jugée « inacceptable » par les Etats-Unis et par la France. — (AFP.)

vers sa base navale de Tartous, située dans ce qui fut historiquement le « réduit alaouite » en Syrie, la Russie chercherait à envoyer un message de puissance « protectrice » pour les minorités religieuses, et de garante d'un éventuel règlement négocié. A moins, ce que personne n'exclut non plus, à ce stade, que l'argument ne soit qu'un écran de fumée pour masquer la poursuite d'un appui à Damas, où le régime disposerait encore de ressources pour tenir, dans une guerre civile où le rapport de force reste à son avantage ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Le ton monte entre la Turquie et la Syrie

Après la destruction d'un de ses avions de chasse, Ankara en appelle à l'Otan qui va se réunir mardi.



ARIELLE THEDREL

PROCHE-ORIENT La crise en Syrie vient peut-être de prendre une nouvelle dimension. La Turquie l'a accusée dimanche d'avoir abattu vendredi l'un de ses avions de combat, un F-4 Phantom, dans l'espace international et non dans l'espace syrien comme l'affirme Damas. À la demande d'Ankara, le Conseil de l'Atlantique Nord se réunira mardi à Bruxelles pour évoquer cet incident.

Le gouvernement turc a reconnu que l'avion était entré momentanément dans l'espace aérien syrien, mais qu'il avait ensuite été abattu sans avertissement préalable par les Syriens alors qu'il se trouvait dans l'espace aérien international, à 13 milles nautiques des côtes syriennes. Selon Ankara, l'avion effectuait

La Turquie accueille sur son sol 32 500 réfugiés syriens ainsi que des chefs de l'Armée syrienne libre

sans armes une mission d'entraînement et de test d'un système radar en Méditerranée. S'exprimant à la télévision, le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ahmet Davutoglu, a mis en garde Damas : « Personne ne peut se permettre de mettre à l'épreuve les capacités (militaires) de la Turquie. » Damas a affirmé pour sa part qu'il s'agissait « d'un incident et non d'une agression ». « Nous avons exercé notre droit de défense. Il n'y a pas d'animosité entre nous et la Turquie, mais une tension politique. » Selon la chaîne de télévision turque CNN-Türk, l'épave du chasseur turc a été localisée dimanche en Méditerranée, à 1300 mètres de profondeur. Ses deux pilotes étaient toujours portés disparus.

Les relations entre Ankara et Damas, pays alliés avant le mouvement de contestation, se sont tendues ces derniers mois. La Turquie a appelé au départ d'el-Assad et accueille sur son sol 32 500 réfugiés syriens ainsi que des chefs de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). Selon plusieurs médias anglo-saxons, la Turquie fournit également des armes aux rebelles en coordination avec la CIA et plusieurs pays arabes, ce que dément Ankara. En avril dernier, après des tirs des forces syriennes contre un camp de

réfugiés syriens situé sur le territoire turc, la Turquie avait prévenu qu'elle ne tolérerait aucune action considérée comme une violation de sa sécurité et qu'elle n'hésiterait pas à demander une intervention de l'Otan au nom de l'article 5 du traité fondateur de l'alliance qui stipule qu'une attaque contre l'un des alliés revient à attaquer tous les autres.

Une centaine de morts par jour

Dans le même temps, la violence a franchi un nouveau palier en Syrie avec un bilan qui approche une centaine de morts chaque jour. En près d'une semaine, 646 personnes ont péri dans des combats, des assauts donnés par le régime et des bombardements de bastions rebelles, selon les chiffres fournis par l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Sur le plan politique, un nouveau gouvernement a été annoncé à Damas qui inclut pour la première fois un portefeuille de la « réconciliation nationale ». Le « faucon » de la diplomatie syrienne, Walid el-Mouallem, le ministre de l'Intérieur Mohammad Ibrahim al-Chaar ainsi que son homologue à la Défense Daoud Rajha, sous le coup de sanctions américaines pour son rôle présumé dans la répression, restent toutefois en place. ■

Une guerre civile sans fin s'installe en Syrie

Malgré un nombre de victimes toujours plus élevé, aucun camp ne semble en mesure de l'emporter sur l'autre

Vendredi 22 juin, à la sortie de la prière hebdomadaire, des dizaines de milliers d'opposants au régime de Bachar Al-Assad ont défilé dans les villes de Syrie. Pacifiquement, courageusement, comme ils ont l'habitude de le faire depuis quinze mois. Dans la banlieue d'Alep, les forces de sécurité, fidèles elles aussi à leurs pratiques, ont ouvert le feu sur l'un de ces cortèges, tuant neuf personnes, dont un enfant. Mais qui entend encore la voix de ces obstinés ? Qui croit encore au pouvoir de la rue ? La violence et la généralisation de la répression, l'afflux d'armes en provenance de l'étranger et la manipulation de vieilles tensions communautaires ont peu à peu détourné la révolution syrienne de son cours initial. Une guerre civile est désormais à l'œuvre entre les groupes armés rebelles réunis sous l'appellation d'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et les forces régulières aux ordres de Damas, épaulées par les chabiha, les milices pro-régime.

L'issue de cette confrontation inter-syrienne paraît impossible à prédire. « Je ne vois pas comment le régime pourrait gagner, à moins de raser des villes entières, confie le politologue Thomas Pierret, spécialiste de la Syrie. Et je ne vois pas non plus comment l'opposition pourrait s'imposer compte tenu de la faiblesse de ses moyens et de l'aide militaire pour l'instant limitée qui lui parvient. On se dirige vers une guerre d'usure. »

Jeudi 21 et vendredi 22 juin, 250 personnes ont été tuées, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), notamment à Homs, la grande ville du centre,

Les insurgés ne se contentent plus de se défendre, ils multiplient les attaques, jusque dans le centre de Damas

pilonnée sans répit. C'est l'un des bilans les plus lourds depuis le début du soulèvement, en mars 2011. La moyenne de morts par jour est remontée au niveau

d'avant le cessez-le-feu, proclamé le 12 avril, dans le cadre du plan de paix du médiateur international Kofi Annan et qui, bien que violé en permanence, avait entraîné une légère décade de la violence. L'OSDH recense de nouveau de 50 à 100 morts par jour, avec des pics au-delà, comme jeudi, où il estime que 170 personnes, dont 104 civils, ont péri.

Avec la suspension de la mission d'observation des Nations unies, annoncée le 16 juin pour des raisons de sécurité, Damas peut estimer avoir le champ libre. « On est parti pour des centaines de morts par jour, pronostique Fabrice Balanche, spécialiste de la Syrie à l'université de Lyon. Le plan Annan est mort. Le régime veut écraser l'opposition. Il veut reprendre la main avant les élections américaines de novembre car il craint de rencontrer davantage de résistance après cette échéance. »

A la mi-juin, l'épisode de Haffé, une enclave sunnite en pleine zone alaouite (la communauté dont est issue la famille Assad), où l'ASL avait réussi à s'infiltrer et dont elle n'a été délogée qu'au prix d'intenses bombardements, a eu l'effet d'un électrochoc dans les cercles du pouvoir. « C'est une bourgade à une vingtaine de kilomètres de Kardaha, le berceau de la famille Assad, où se trouve le mausolée de Hafez et de Basel », le père et le frère de l'actuel chef de l'Etat, souligne Fabrice Balanche. « Le régime ne peut pas accepter que son fief soit touché, poursuit-il. D'autant que certains de ses partisans commencent à l'accuser de mollesse. Il se doit de réagir. »

La différence avec la période d'avant le cessez-le-feu, c'est qu'en face les insurgés ne se contentent plus de se défendre. Ils multiplient les attaques, jusque dans le centre de Damas. A la stratégie d'écrasement du régime, ils opposent une

tactique de harcèlement, caractéristique des mouvements de guérilla. Parmi les 52 morts dénombrés vendredi par l'OSDH figurent ainsi 26 chabiha, tombés dans une embuscade. Les autorités syriennes contestent cette version et soutiennent que les victimes sont de simples villageois, originaires de Darat Izza, dans le nord du pays, qui ont été kidnappés avant d'être exécutés. Jeudi, toujours selon l'OSDH, une cinquantaine de soldats ont perdu leur vie dans des combats, signe que la capacité d'action des insurgés s'accroît.

Les raisons de cette évolution : la poursuite des défections, mais aussi la réception d'armes en provenance de Turquie. Des AK-47 et des RPG principalement, mais aussi quelques roquettes antichars. Des responsables américains, cités jeudi dans le *New York Times*,

affirmaient que des agents de la CIA sont stationnés à la frontière entre les deux pays, avec pour mission d'organiser l'acheminement de cet arsenal, vraisemblablement financé par des pays arabes, comme l'Arabie saoudite et le Qatar.

Pas de quoi cependant bouleverser l'échiquier militaire. Le retrait de l'ASL de Haffé montre qu'elle n'a toujours pas les moyens de résister à un assaut frontal des forces loyalistes. Mais, de l'autre côté, la reprise des bom-

bardements sur Homs, une ville que Damas était censé avoir « libérée » en février, prouve que l'armée syrienne n'a pas la capacité de maintenir l'ensemble du territoire sous sa tutelle. « Le régime compense son manque d'effectifs par une puissance de feu accrue, analyse Thomas Pierret. Sa principale tactique consiste à bombarder, encore et toujours. » Comme s'il préférerait détruire la Syrie que de l'abandonner à son ennemi. ●

BENJAMIN BARTHE

Syria downs Turkish jet, Ankara to act decisively

*** Syria downs Turkish war-plane, says it was over its waters**

*** Turkey warns it will respond decisively**

*** Annan says Iran should be part of solution in Syria (.)**

By Jonathon Burch and Oliver Holmes - (Reuters)

ANKARA/BEIRUT- Syria shot down a Turkish warplane over the Mediterranean on Friday and Ankara warned it would respond decisively to the incident that threatened to open a new international dimension in the 16-month revolt against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Syria said the Turkish aircraft was flying low, well inside Syrian territorial waters when it was shot down.

With the second biggest army in NATO, a force hardened by nearly 30 years of fighting Kurdish rebels, Turkey would be a formidable foe for the Syrian army which is already struggling to put down a 16-month-old revolt.

But Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's initial comments and subsequent statement on the downing of the F-4 jet were measured in tone. He said Turkish and Syrian forces were working together to search for the two missing crew of the aircraft.

"As a result of information obtained from the evaluation of our concerned institutions and from within the joint search and rescue operations with Syria, it is understood that our plane was brought down by Syria," Erdogan's office said in a statement.

"Turkey will present its final stance after the incident has been fully brought to light and decisively take the necessary steps," the office said after a two-hour emergency meeting between prime minister, the chief of general staff, the defence, interior and foreign ministers, the head of national intelligence and the commander of the air force.

Turkish media had reported earlier that Syria had apologised for the incident, but Erdogan made no mention of any apology.

Violence raged unabated inside Syria, which appears to be sliding into a sectarian-tinged civil war pitting majority Sunni Muslims against Assad's minority Alawite sect. Turkey fears the fighting if unchecked could unleash a flood of refugees over its own border and ignite regional sectarian conflict.

Ankara, which had drawn close to Syria before the uprising against Assad, turned against the Syrian leader when he responded violently to pro-democracy protests inspired by popular upheavals elsewhere in the Arab world. Turkey now gives refuge to the rebel Free Syrian Army on its frontier with Syria.

Erdogan, whose enmity with Assad has assumed a strongly personal nature, gave no hint what action he might contemplate.

A statement by the Syrian military said the Turkish plane was flying low, just one kilometre off the Syrian coast, when it was hit by anti-aircraft fire. The plane fell in Syrian waters 10-kms (seven miles) west of the village of Um al-Touyouur.

"The navy of the two countries have established contact. Syrian naval vessels are participating along with the Turkish side in the search operation for the missing pilots," it said.

Turkish state television interviewed witnesses on the country's Mediterranean coast, near the Syrian border, who said they saw two low-flying fighter jets pass overhead in the morning in the direction of Syrian waters but only one return.

Ankara has previously floated the possibility of setting up some kind of safe haven or humanitarian corridor inside Syria, which would entail military intervention, but has said it would undertake no such action without U.N. Security Council approval.

Turkey has said however that Assad must go.

Turkey hosts about 32,000 Syrian refugees and allows the rebel Syrian Free Army to operate from its territory. The opposition Syrian National Council meets in Istanbul.

It was unclear why the Syrians had shot down the aircraft, which, having left a base in Malatya, was flying close to a corridor linking Turkey with Turkish forces on Northern Cyprus.

"The Syrian military may have taken a calculated gamble by downing the Turkish plane, which could boost the morale of Assad's loyalists after increased defections from the military we have seen," Yasser Saadeldine, a prominent pro-opposition Syrian political commentator, said.

"A Turkish retaliation would fit into the fantasy he (Assad) is peddling that the uprising is a foreign conspiracy."

Russia and China, Assad's strongest backers abroad, have fiercely opposed any outside interference in the Syrian crisis,

saying envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan is the only way forward.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said after talks with his Syrian counterpart that he had urged Syria to "do a lot more" to implement Annan's U.N.-backed proposals, but that foreign countries must also press rebels to stop the violence.

Lavrov said the Syrian authorities were ready to withdraw troops from cities "simultaneously" with rebels. A Syrian military pullback and a ceasefire were key elements in Annan's six-point peace plan, most of which remains a dead letter.

"DESTRUCTIVE COMPETITION"

Annan hit out at some countries he said had taken national initiatives that risked unleashing "destructive competition".

He told a news conference in Geneva that he wanted states with influence on both sides of the conflict to be involved in the peace process, including Iran, Assad's closest ally.

The U.N.-Arab League envoy was speaking a week before a planned Syria crisis meeting that is in doubt because of Western objections to the Islamic Republic's participation.

Rebels killed at least 25 members of a mainly Alawite pro-Assad militia, and in a separate incident troops turned heavy machineguns on opposition demonstrators in the northern city of Aleppo, killing 10, opposition activists said.

"Armed terrorist groups committed a brutal massacre against 25 citizens in Darat Azzah," state TV reported, saying more were missing from the village in Aleppo province.

Several men covered in blood and piled on top of each other on a roadside, some in army fatigues and some in t-shirts, could be seen in a video link sent by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, apparently showing the aftermath of the same incident.

The British-based opposition watchdog said 26 men believed to be pro-Assad "Shabbiha" militiamen had been killed.

Assad's foes have accused troops and Shabbiha militiamen of perpetrating many abuses against civilians, including mass killings, in the uprising that began in March last year with peaceful protests against four decades of Assad family rule.

In Aleppo, Syria's business hub, thousands of demonstrators were marching toward the central Saadallah al-Jabiri Square when four armoured vehicles fired on them, activists told Reuters by telephone. Two of them said they were speaking from Aleppo.

"The wounded were taken to houses and are trapped there. They cannot be transported to hospitals because troops and Shabbiha are surrounding the neighbourhood," one of them said.

☞ Aleppo, along with central Damascus, had stayed relatively quiet in the early months of the revolt that engulfed many other provincial cities, but unrest has gradually spread there too.

Activist video footage showed a large crowd of protesters, some draped in revo-

lutionary flags, running along a street as heavy gunfire cracked out. Another video showed a man whose chest was covered in blood being dragged along the road.

FOUR OFFICERS DEFECT

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported heavy government shel-

ling on opposition strongholds in Idlib, Deraa and Homs provinces, as well as fighting between troops and rebels in the eastern city of Deir al-Zor on Friday, a day when anti-Assad protests often erupt after

□

NEW YORK POST

JUNE 16, 2012

Kurds could be key to saving Syria



By **BENNY AVNI**
Columnists

They're one of the wild cards in the Middle East that could provide a turning point in the Syrian war: the Kurds.

The largest Syrian opposition group has picked a Kurd as its new leader — which might help the rebels gain critical mass.

Meanwhile, Syrian despot Bashar al-Assad is trying to use the Kurds against Turkey. That might prompt Ankara to send troops across the border, further escalating the war — though for now Ankara is instead allying itself with other Kurds in the region.

Good move. So should we.

Yes, divisions and competition among Kurdish leaders (whose homeland is split among Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran) makes relying on them an iffy proposition. But for generations this non-Arab ethnic group has been an American ally (when we didn't desert them) — and a marked rise in Kurdish power is one legacy of our wars with Saddam Hussein. Renewing and tightening this alliance could help us navigate the treacherous Mideast transitions.

Last week the Syrian National Council named Abdulbaset Sieda, a Syrian Kurd exiled in Sweden, as its new leader. The clear hope is that the mild-mannered scholar will unite the opposition's many ethnic, religious and political factions, which now push in all directions.

And also win more support in the West. Sieda isn't a Kurdish activist. As Kani Xulam of the American-Kurdish Information Network, tells me, he "became a consensus leader of the opposition because of his democratic credentials, rather than because he's a Kurd."

Yet the move might move the Kurds off the sidelines in the 14-month-old uprising, which pits mostly Sunni Arabs (the majority in Syria) against a regime dominated by members of the obscure Alawite sect.

Syrian Kurds are shocked by Assad's murderous ways, but

suspicious of the Sunni majority — and of Turkey's intentions.

Turkey's Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) for decades waged a violent struggle against the Turkish government (which refused to even acknowledge that Kurds in Turkey were Kurds); many deem the PKK a terrorist group.

And PPK leader Abdullah Ocalan fled to Damascus in 1978, where Assad's father sheltered him for 20 years. Hafez al-Assad also favored Syria's Kurds during that time — a status that ended when Turkish military and political pressure forced him to expel Ocalan in 1998.

But since the uprisings began, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Recep Erdogan has become a vocal supporter of Assad's overthrow and hosted opposition leaders.

In response, Bashar Assad has allowed the PKK to reopen its bases in Syria. Ankara fears that the next step will be intensified attacks against its citizens and troops.

To date, Erdogan's counter has been to cultivate to Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani (who visited Ankara in April), in hopes he'll blunt anti-Turkish sentiments among Syria's Kurds — or even dismantle PKK camps in Iraq's Kurdistan.

Prospering and democratic (by regional standards, anyway), Kurdish Iraq has emerged as leader of all the region's Kurds, says Ofra Bengio of Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center for Mideast Studies.

That's why everyone in the region (including Israel) is now seeking Kurdish ties. But Iraq's Kurds owe much of their good fortune to America, which protected them from Saddam.

The Kurds would be useful allies not only in the current fight against Assad, but the larger struggle with his Iranian sponsors and jihadists across the Mideast.

A promise of limited autonomy, like that enjoyed by Iraq's Kurdistan, could bring Syria's Kurds into the opposition, moderating it and pushing the next Syrian government toward the West.

Yes, once more in the Mideast, it's time to play the Kurd card.

7sur7

27 juin 2012

4 soldats turcs tués dans des combats avec les rebelles kurdes

Anthony Fino / belga.be

Quatre soldats turcs ont été tués mercredi dans des combats avec les rebelles sépa-

ratistes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on indiqué de source de sécurité locale.

Trois soldats ont été tués à l'aube dans une embuscade tendue par des membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à Eruh, dans la province de Siirt, a-t-on précisé de même source.

Dans un incident séparé qui s'est produit également à Eruh, un soldat a perdu la vie et un autre a été blessé lors d'une attaque des rebelles kurdes, a-t-on ajouté.

Huit soldats turcs ont été tués la semaine dernière lors de l'attaque de leur poste avancé situé à proximité de la frontière irakienne. Une trentaine de rebelles ont été abattus dans les opérations qui ont suivi.



Homage rendu aux soldats turcs morts lors des combats contre le PKK (20 juin) © epa.

Des avions de l'armée turque ont aussi bombardé des repaires des rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, en représailles à cette attaque meurtrière..

SYRIAN FORCES SHOOT DOWN TURKISH JET

By **JOE PARKINSON** And
AYLA ALBAYRAK

ISTANBUL—Syria said its defense forces shot down a Turkish military jet over Syrian waters, in an unprecedented incident between the two former allies that raised the threat of armed conflict.

The Syrian Defense Ministry said the Turkish plane was hit over Syria's territorial waters Friday after it crossed into its territory about half a mile offshore, Syrian state media reported. The ministry said it discovered the plane was Turkish only after it had been shot down.

Syrian officials characterized the shooting down of the jet as a protocol response to a violation of airspace, not an act of aggression against Turkey.

Turkey on Saturday appeared to be weighing its response, but gave little clue on what that might be. President Abdullah Gul said Ankara could not ignore the incident and pledged that the government would do "everything required" once the facts became clear, Turkey's state-run Anatolian news agency reported.

Speaking to reporters in central Anatolian city of Kayseri, Mr. Gul did not spell out what action Turkey might take, but he said the Turkish jet's action was not provocative, stressing that it was "routine" for jets to briefly cross into foreign airspace. A probe into the incident would look at whether in fact it was downed while in Turkish airspace, Mr. Gul said. Syria has said the Turkish aircraft was flying low and well inside Syrian territorial waters when it was shot down.

The Turkish and Syrian navies continued a joint search for the crew of the missing aircraft, an F-4 warplane, which Syria said fell into the Mediterranean Sea about six miles west of the Syrian village of Umm al-Tuyour.

During a news conference Saturday in Baghdad, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said the incident showed how explosive the Syrian conflict could be for the region, the Associated Press reported. "This is a serious escalation," he said. "It is a security matter for Europe. It is a concern for the region and that is why we called for a calculated, well-drawn, democratic political transition. We do not want to see chaos in the



region."

Relations between Turkey and Syria, which share a 565-mile border, began to dissolve last year when Turkish officials began to criticize Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for refusing to end the crackdown against domestic opposition to his regime.

The incident puts Turkey under intense pressure to take action against Syria after Ankara's increasingly harsh statements against the crackdown.

Some analysts in Turkey said the incident could give Turkey the right to take action against the Assad regime, if Ankara chooses. "I believe that it is Syria who will get in trouble because of this," professor Mesut Casin from Yeditepe University said in a late-night debate on the incident on Turkish TV channel NTV, adding he expected the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would have to get involved.

The U.S. Defense Department declined to comment on the incident.

In April, when Turkey accused Syrian forces of firing at dissidents inside Turkey, Mr. Erdogan raised the prospect that NATO member Turkey could call on the military alliance to protect Turkey's border against incursions by Syrian forces. The incident didn't prompt NATO military action.

How the downing of the jet plays out could depend in large part on Syria's response, analysts said. "If Syria assumes all responsi-

bility and agrees to pay compensation, for example, this may affect" Turkey's reaction, Nihat Ali Ozcan, of Turkish TEPAV research institute, commented on NTV.

While Ankara has become one of the countries spearheading efforts to force Mr. Assad's ouster, it has been wary of being pressured to lead military action.

Turkish cabinet ministers have openly debated the idea of creating a buffer zone inside Syrian territory after thousands of refugees sought haven on Turkish territory. Turkey now hosts Syria's opposition Syrian National Council in Istanbul, and the leadership of the rebel Free Syrian Army in the southern province of Hatay.

Syrian opposition fighters and activists slip in and out of Syria through Turkey, using the porous border to smuggle in weapons and aid supplies. Turkish officials deny arming the opposition or allowing arms through their border.

On Friday, the Turkish government initially withheld comment on whether Syria was responsible for the jet's crash, with Mr. Erdogan telling a news conference that it was too soon to know what had happened.

Then, after a two-hour emergency meeting at Mr. Erdogan's home in Ankara, the prime minister's office issued a statement saying Syria was behind the downing of the jet.

Syria subsequently confirmed the account. A Syrian military spokesman said Syrian airspace was breached Friday morning "by an unknown air target flying very low and at high speed," Syrian state media reported. "It turned out later that the air target was a Turkish military plane that had breached our airspace and it was dealt with in accordance with the procedures applicable in such cases," the report said. "It turned out later that the air target was a Turkish military plane that had breached our airspace and it was dealt with in accordance with the procedures applicable in such cases," the report said.

Syrian foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi said "there was no aggression" in the incident, in a post on his Twitter account.

The incident took place in a region around eight miles outside the Syrian town of Latakia, said Mr. Erdogan.

→

⇒ Latakia is on the Mediterranean coast town around 25 miles from Turkey's southeastern border.

The presence of a Turkish jets over Syrian waters raised questions about what they were doing there.

"I'm not sure what the planes were doing there but it will feed accusations that the Turks are helping the rebels with surveillance flights," said Atilla Yesilada, a political analyst with Istanbul Analytics, a political risk consultancy.

Turkish armed forces have intensified their

activities in the country's eastern and southeastern regions after a raid by Kurdish rebels on Tuesday killed eight Turkish soldiers in the eastern province of Hakkari.

Turkey's government in recent months has repeatedly expressed fears that Damascus is allowing Kurdish militants to operate inside Syrian territory, in a replay of the 1990s, when President Assad's father, Hafez, offered haven to the leader of the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and its leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

For years, Ankara invested heavily in strengthening ties with Mr. Assad's admin-

istration in a bid to boost trade and help foster reform in its Syria, and potentially weaken Damascus's dependence on Iran, for centuries Turkey's main regional rival.

Turkey and Syria improved relations, increased trade and agreed on a bilateral visa exemption for their citizens.

Messrs. Assad and Erdogan even met on a holiday in Southern Turkey's coast, a relationship that has soured since the crackdown on the Syrian opposition, in which activists estimate more than 14,000 people have been killed. ●



June 27, 2012

Turkish policy takes a dangerous turn



Deutsche Welle / Baha Güngör of DW's Turkish service

FOLLOWING the shooting down of a Turkish plane by Syria, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has begun rattling a few sabers. DW's Baha Güngör thinks this only adds to the risks the region is facing.

For a few days, the world was astonished at Turkey's moderate reaction to the shooting down of one of its military reconnaissance planes by Syria. But diplomatic ties between the two neighbors soon returned to their default state - increasing tension.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan bowed to the pressure from his domestic opposition, and his militaristic threats don't augur well for the future. As of now, if a single Syrian helicopter crosses into Turkish airspace somewhere along the two countries' 800-kilometer (500-mile) border, it can expect to be shot down without mercy.

A direct military conflict between Turkey and Syria will perform

lead to NATO's involvement. If Turkey, a member of NATO since 1952, were to come under serious threat, it would be able to make a claim for support from the alliance - as it did in 2003 at the start of the Iraq war. Then as now, the Turkish request would provide a justification for NATO to station its air-borne radar system AWACS and its Patriot anti-missile missile system on Turkish soil.

But the conflict is not just a bilateral one between Turkey and Syria. President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Damascus is under serious international pressure and is trying to win time for itself with the help of Russia and China. The attempt is unlikely to succeed. As a result, Erdogan's saber-rattling considerably increases the level of risk in the region.

CHAIN OF DANGERS

Turkey has been at war with the Kurdish separatists based in Northern Iraq for the past 18 years. That means that Turkey would have to open a second front against Syria - making the total length of the border it needs to defend well over 1,000 kilometers.

No-one can say right now how Iran - that other international problem child - will behave. It's hardly likely that Iran will simply stand by while AWACS planes hover overhead and Patriot rockets are deployed in Anatolia. It's a chain of risk with incalculable consequences that would stretch well beyond Iraq to Israel and the Arab states.

Erdogan's threats make it less likely that the Assad regime will soon collapse so the world can breathe a sigh of relief. And they do not do Turkey any good - it has done well economically throughout the international financial crisis, but it seems now to be putting its credibility to the test. The two Iraq wars caused Turkey serious economic damage from which the country only recovered with difficulty ◆

Nucléaire : l'Iran réclame une levée des sanctions internationales avant de faire la moindre concession

A Moscou, la méfiance paraît totale entre l'émissaire iranien et les représentants des « six »

Saïd Jalili, le négociateur iranien sur le nucléaire, dont le profil politique semble en phase ascendante à Téhéran, où le Guide Ali Khamenei envisagerait de le mettre en piste pour l'élection présidentielle de 2013, depuis que Mahmoud Ahmadinejad est tombé en disgrâce, a intrigué les représentants des grandes puissances réunis dans un hôtel de Moscou, lundi 18 juin, pour la reprise des discussions sur l'atome iranien.

Non pas sur le fond, car ce qu'il avait à dire ne comportait rien d'encourageant pour les Occidentaux présents dans la salle, mais dans la forme. Car l'émissaire de Téhéran, équipé d'un projecteur, s'est lancé dans une présentation Powerpoint dont les images, sur l'écran, défilaient à grande vitesse, pour détailler ce qui apparaît comme la réponse iranienne à l'offre des « Six » (Etats-Unis, Russie, France, Royaume-Uni, Chine, Allemagne).

Celle-ci vise à sceller avec l'Iran un accord intermédiaire censé réduire le danger de scénario militaire, brandi par Israël. La demande centrale faite aux Iraniens est

de cesser la production d'uranium enrichi à 20 %, en particulier dans le site de Fordow, creusé dans une montagne, dont le démantèlement est exigé. Les « Six » voudraient aussi que l'Iran évacue vers l'étranger le stock déjà accumulé de cette matière. En échange de quoi, l'Iran obtiendrait du combustible pour un réacteur de recherche, des aides dans le nucléaire civil, et des pièces détachées pour des avions.

Dans sa présentation, Saïd Jalili a clairement indiqué que cet ensemble de mesures, déjà présenté lors de la réunion de Bagdad tenue en mai, demeurerait insuffisant, et que le passif entre les parties concernées exigeait plus de garanties pour être surmonté. Il a insisté sur un acte de « reconnaissance » par les grandes puissances d'un « droit » de l'Iran à enrichir l'uranium, la prise en compte d'une « fatwa » iranienne contre les armes de destruction massive, et la levée de sanctions internationales – mesure qui serait justifiée, à ses yeux par une relance (hypothétique) de la coopération entre

l'Iran et l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), le bras d'inspection des Nations-unies.

On ne sait si le dîner qu'a eu, lundi soir, à l'issue de ces échanges peu concluants, Saïd Jalili en compagnie du négociateur russe, Sergueï Riabkov, et le chef du Conseil de sécurité nationale russe, Nikolai Patrouchev, pouvait déboucher, mardi, au second jour de ce round de discussions, sur un assouplissement de la position iranienne.

« Diplomatie du bazar »

Les espoirs de percée semblent ténus, mais personne, pour l'heure, ne parle de rupture. Nul ne semble capable d'établir si les demandes iraniennes constituent des lignes rouges absolues, ou bien un simple point de départ dans ce qu'une source occidentale décrit comme « la diplomatie iranienne du bazar », l'art millénaire du marchandage.

Les Occidentaux apparaissent décidés à ne pas relâcher la pression des importantes sanctions pétrolières et financières devant entrer en vigueur à la fin du mois,

car elles sont perçues comme la principale raison ayant conduit l'Iran à revenir à la table des négociations en avril, à Istanbul, après quinze mois d'interruption.

L'administration Obama veut entretenir un processus de discussions qui permettrait de franchir sans crise majeure l'étape de la présidentielle-américaine en novembre, mais elle doit composer avec la pression du Congrès, dominé par les républicains. Au Mexique, où il venait de s'entretenir avec son homologue russe, Vladimir Poutine, le président Obama a déclaré qu'il restait « du temps et de l'espace pour la diplomatie ».

Le pouvoir iranien, aux prises avec de sérieuses difficultés sur les marchés pétroliers en raison des sanctions, devrait logiquement, lui aussi, avoir intérêt à sortir de l'impasse diplomatique. Mais la méfiance réciproque demeure intacte, tandis que la crise syrienne complique la donne. Le Guide Ali Khamenei a récemment fustigé « l'arrogance déplacée » des « ennemis » de l'Iran. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune JUNE 28, 2012

'Zionists' control worldwide drug trade, Iran contends

TEHRAN

BY THOMAS ERDBRINK

The Iranian first vice president has delivered a baldly anti-Semitic speech at an international anti-drug conference here, saying that the Talmud, a central text of Judaism, is responsible for the spread of illegal drugs around the world.

European diplomats in attendance Tuesday expressed shock. Even Iranian participants in the conference, co-sponsored by Iran and the United Nations, privately wondered at their government's motive for allowing such a speech, even given its longstanding antagonism toward Israel. More than 25,000 Jews live in Iran, and they are recognized as a religious minority, with a representative in Parliament.

The speech by First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi seemed bound to isolate Iran further just days before a new set of onerous Western economic sanctions, notably a European embargo on Iranian oil, is set to be enforced because of the long-term dispute over the Iranian nuclear program.

Mr. Rahimi, second in line to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said the Talmud teaches to "destroy everyone who opposes the Jews."

The "Zionists" are in firm control of the illegal drug trade, he said. "Zionist" is Iran's term for Jews who support the state of Israel.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will pay for anybody who can research and find one single Zionist who is an addict," Mr. Rahimi said. "They do not exist. This is the proof of their involvement in drugs

trade."

What made his remarks even more striking is that Iran's fight against illegal drugs is one of the few issues on which the Islamic Republic can count on Western sympathy. Iran's battle to stop the flow of drugs coming in from neighboring Afghanistan is a potential field of cooperation during negotiations over the country's nuclear program.

Mr. Rahimi told stories of gynecologists killing black babies on the orders of the Zionists and claimed that the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was started by Jews.

A European diplomat said afterward: "This was definitely one of the worst speeches I have heard in my life. My gut reaction was: Why are we supporting any cooperation with these people?"

But the diplomat, who declined to be identified, defended his presence at the conference. "If we do not support the United Nations on helping Iran fight drugs, voices like the one of Mr. Rahimi will be the only ones out there," he said.

C.I.A. agents reported helping arm Syria rebels

WASHINGTON

Agents' secret operation is aimed partly at keeping weapons from terrorists

BY ERIC SCHMITT

A small number of C.I.A. officers are operating secretly in southern Turkey, helping allies decide which Syrian oppo-

sition fighters across the border will receive arms to fight the Syrian government, according to U.S. officials and Arab intelligence officers.

The weapons, including automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries, including the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and paid for by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, the officials said.

The C.I.A. officers have been in southern Turkey for several weeks, in part to help keep weapons out of the hands of fighters allied with Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups, one senior U.S. official said. The Obama administration has said it is not providing arms to the rebels, but it has also acknowledged that Syria's neighbors would do so.

The clandestine intelligence-gathering effort is the most detailed known instance of the limited U.S. support for the military campaign against the Syrian government. It is also part of Washington's attempt to increase the pressure on President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who has recently escalated his government's deadly crackdown on civilians and the militias battling his rule. With Russia blocking more aggressive steps against the Assad government, the United States and its allies have, instead, turned to diplomacy and aiding allied efforts to arm the rebels to force Mr. Assad from power.

By helping vet rebel groups, U.S. intelligence operatives in Turkey hope to learn more about a growing, changing opposition network inside Syria and to establish new ties. "C.I.A. officers are there, and they are trying to make new sources and recruit people," said one Arab intelligence official who is briefed regularly by U.S. counterparts.



U.S. officials and retired C.I.A. officials said the administration was also weighing additional assistance to rebels, like providing satellite imagery and other detailed intelligence on Syrian troop locations and movements. The administration is also considering whether to help the opposition set up a rudimentary intelligence service. But no decisions have been made on those measures or even more aggressive steps, like sending C.I.A. officers into Syria itself, they said.

The struggle inside Syria has the potential to intensify significantly in coming months as powerful new weapons are flowing to both the Syrian government and opposition fighters. President Barack Obama and his top aides are seeking to pressure Russia to curb shipments of arms, like attack helicopters, to Syria, its main ally in the Middle East.

"We'd like to see arms sales to the Assad regime come to an end, because we believe they've demonstrated that they will only use their military against their own civilian population," Benjamin J. Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, said after Mr. Obama and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir V. Putin, met in Mexico on Monday.

Spokesmen for the White House, the State Department and the C.I.A. would not comment on any intelligence operations supporting the Syrian rebels, some details of which were reported last week by The Wall Street Journal.

Until now, the public face of the administration's Syria policy has largely been diplomacy and humanitarian aid.

The State Department said Wednesday that Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton would meet with her Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov, on the sidelines of a meeting of Asia-Pacific foreign ministers in St. Petersburg next Thursday. Part of the private talks are

likely to focus on the crisis in Syria.

The State Department has authorized \$15 million in nonlethal aid, like medical supplies and communications equipment, to civilian opposition groups in Syria.

The Pentagon continues to fine-tune a range of military options, after a request from Mr. Obama in early March for such contingency planning. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told senators at that time that the options under review included humanitarian airlifts, aerial surveillance of the Syrian military and the establishment of a no-flight zone.

The U.S. military has also drawn up plans for how coalition troops would secure Syria's sizable stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons if an all-out civil war threatened their security.

But senior administration officials have underscored in recent days that they are not actively considering military options. "Anything at this point vis-à-vis Syria would be hypothetical in the extreme," General Dempsey said this month.

What has changed since March is an influx of weapons and ammunition to the rebels. The increasingly fierce air and artillery assaults by the Syrian government are intended to counter improved coordination, tactics and

"Rebels are starting to crack the code" on taking out tanks.

weaponry among the opposition forces, according to members of the Syrian National Council and other activists.

Last month, those activists said, Turkish Army vehicles delivered anti-tank weaponry to the border, where it was then smuggled into Syria. Turkey has repeatedly denied it is extending anything other than humanitarian aid to

the opposition, which it supplies mostly via refugee camps near the border. The United States, the activists said, was consulted about the weapon transfers.

U.S. military analysts offered mixed opinions on whether the arms had offset the advantages held by the superior Syrian Army. "The rebels are starting to crack the code on how to take out

tanks," said Joseph Holliday, a former U.S. Army intelligence officer in Afghanistan who is now a researcher tracking the Free Syrian Army for the Institute for the Study of War in Washington.

But a senior U.S. officer who receives classified intelligence reports from the region compared the rebels' arms to

"peashooters" against the government's heavy weaponry and attack helicopters.

Neil MacFarquhar contributed reporting from Beirut. Souad Mekhennet also contributed reporting.

Courrier

27 juin 2012

TURQUIE-SYRIE • L'épreuve de force

Après la destruction d'un avion turc par la Syrie, Erdogan a évoqué la possibilité d'une "réplique sévère". Jusqu'où compte aller Ankara ? s'interroge la presse turque.

Pierre Vanrie

Courrier international

"**Désormais** Assad ne pourra plus dormir tranquille". Dans un article de Milliyet, Asli Aydintasbas se demande ce que pourrait être la "réplique sévère" dont le Premier ministre turc Erdogan a parlé pendant un discours prononcé devant le Parlement le 26 juin, suite à la destruction d'un avion militaire turc par la Syrie. "Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'aller pleurer auprès de l'Otan et des Nations-Unies. Je pense qu'il ne faudra pas s'étonner si dans les jours qui viennent, les postes-frontières situés côté syrien passent aux mains des insurgés. Le régime syrien éprouve d'ailleurs beaucoup de mal à contrôler le nord-ouest du pays. Il y a déjà des territoires libérés aux alentours d'Idlib. Cette ville pourrait aussi bientôt échapper au régime permettant ainsi la formation d'une zone-tampon allant de la frontière turque jusqu'à Alep. La Turquie n'hésitera plus dans ces conditions à abattre les hélicoptères s'approchant trop près de la frontière turque. Les services de renseignements turcs ont des réseaux bien implantés jusqu'à Damas même. Il est loin le temps où Bachar El Assad pouvait se vanter de faire visiter Damas à Erdogan dans sa propre voiture. Désormais, il vit dans le stress d'un attentat qui pourrait se produire à tout moment".

Pour Cengiz Candar dans Radikal, "en tout cas, ce qu'il était raisonnable d'attendre de l'Otan [suite à la consultation demandée par la Turquie et qui a eu



▲ Dessin de Bleibel, Liban.

lieu le 26 juin], c'est qu'elle affiche sa détermination à se tenir aux côtés de la Turquie et c'est ce qu'elle a fait [l'Otan exprimé sa solidarité avec la Turquie]. Cette prise de position claire met implicitement un terme définitif aux rumeurs faisant état de la soi-disant volonté de la Turquie de s'éloigner de l'axe pro-occidental. Au début de la crise libyenne, la première réaction d'Erdogan avait été de dire "Qu'est ce que l'Otan va faire en Libye ?!" Aujourd'hui, la Turquie se réjouit du soutien affiché par l'Otan. On mesure le chemin parcouru. Il n'aura pas fallu changer de gouvernement pour en arriver là".

Sedat Ergin dans Hürriyet dénonce toutefois les propos du Premier ministre turc qui s'en est pris aux journalistes turcs critiquant la politique extérieure de l'AKP en les traitant de 'vendus' ou mettant en doute leur attachement à la patrie. "Si la Turquie est une démocratie" écrit Sedat Ergin, "il faut pouvoir critiquer la politique externe de son gouvernement. Ceux qui ont reproché à Erdogan d'être un moment trop proche

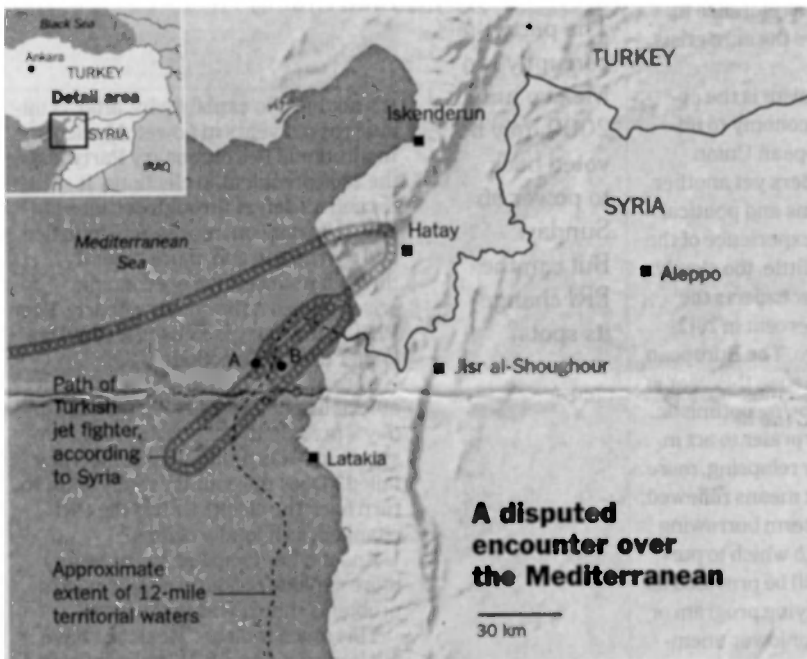
de Bachar El Assad avaient-ils tort finalement ? En démocratie, les dirigeants politiques supportent les critiques, c'est précisément ce qui distingue la Turquie d'un régime comme celui de Assad".

Pour Ali Bayramoglu, éditorialiste du quotidien pro-gouvernemental Yeni Safak, cette crise témoigne du changement du rôle diplomatique de la Turquie dans la région. "Il faut admettre que jusqu'au début des années 2000, la politique extérieure de la Turquie n'était pas axée vers les pays de la région, elle était passive et limitée parce que complètement dépendante des problèmes de politique intérieure (Chypre, contentieux avec les Grecs en Mer Egée, question kurde...). Avec l'AKP, la diplomatie turque a radicalement changé d'orientation et la Turquie est ainsi devenue un acteur s'ingérant activement sur la scène régionale, que ce soit par rapport à la Libye, la Palestine, Israël ou l'Irak. Prise dans les tensions entre l'Ouest et l'Iran, entre le chiïsme et le sunnisme, la Turquie tient à rester un acteur régional de premier plan. Toutefois, maintenir la paix et la stabilité tout en voulant s'imposer sur la scène régionale suppose des contradictions qui peuvent s'avérer dangereuses. Même si l'axe d'une telle politique est la paix et la démocratie, établir des rapports de force dans une région aussi conflictuelle que le Moyen-Orient, rend parfois inévitable l'usage de la force. C'est dans ce contexte qu'il faut analyser la crise actuelle avec la Syrie". ♦

Turkish version of downing questioned



The prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a training aircraft Wednesday in Ankara. Mr. Erdogan said any Syrian military units near the border would be seen as targets.



Syrian and Turkish government officials gave conflicting stories of last Friday's incident at their borders.

SYRIAN VERSION

State television broadcast this flight path of a Turkish F-4 fighter. As the plane flew at low altitude toward the coast, land-based Syrian anti-aircraft batteries fired at it with cannons that have a maximum range of less than 2.5 kilometers. Syrian salvage workers recovered wreckage from the jet showing cannon damage.

TURKISH VERSION

The jet "mistakenly entered" Syrian airspace over the Mediterranean, but left after Turkish radar operators warned the crew. There was no warning from Syria. Nine minutes later, the jet was struck by a heat-seeking missile at a point 13 nautical miles, or 24 kilometers, from the Syrian coast (A). The jet turned toward shore and crashed at this point (B).

Sources: Syrian Arab News Agency; Turkish officials

WASHINGTON

Experts wonder if plane might have been spying or testing Syrian defenses

BY ERIC SCHMITT AND SEBNEM ARSU

U.S. and allied officials are privately raising questions about the actions of the Turkish military plane shot down by Syrian air defenses last week, including whether it was on a spy mission.

While the U.S. and allied officials emphasized that some intelligence reports flowing in since the downing Friday were murky and often conflicting, they said a preliminary analysis of the available data suggested that there may have been more to the aircraft's mission than just a routine training exercise to test Turkey's air defenses. Some experts suggested the plane might have been testing Syrian defenses.

The officials pointed to several unanswered questions about the episode, including why, given the tensions between the two countries, Turkey was flying an unarmed reconnaissance plane so close to the Syrian border, where the aircraft was struck, and whether it received any warnings to leave Syrian airspace.

Syria maintains that the plane was brought down by anti-aircraft fire well within its airspace. But Turkey says the plane was attacked over international waters after straying into Syrian space.

U.S. military and NATO officials said they were examining these claims as well as radar tracks and other classified information to understand what happened.

But the officials said they were loath to publicly challenge an ally's version of the downing, which the White House and the State Department have condemned as unjustified and have cited as an example of the recklessness of the security forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

"On a political level, NATO is taking the Turks at their word," said a senior U.S. official who has reviewed classified reports of the incident.

One senior NATO diplomat said that even if the Turks were spying, it should not alter the international reaction. "When this happens between neighboring countries, you give a warning and then send up interceptors," said the official, who was not authorized to speak for publication. "You don't just shoot down the plane."

The deputy prime minister of Turkey, Bulent Arinc, acknowledged on Monday that the aircraft — a two-seat RF-4E Phantom, an unarmed reconnaissance version of the F-4 fighter jet — is equipped for spying. But he strongly denied it was doing so on this particular mission. The RF-4E has the ability to gather high-resolution imagery about 100 kilometers, or 60 miles, from the target, aviation experts said.

"If it had had a reconnaissance mission as claimed, our plane should have

been accompanied by other warplanes for security purposes and the maneuvers required as part of such a mission could have been clearly seen on the radar screens," Mr. Arinc said Monday, as quoted by the semi-official Anatolian News Agency.

That assertion, however, did not dispel doubts among officials in Washington, in allied capitals and even in the blogosphere, that the flight included reconnaissance or was an effort to test Syria.

"Was the RF-4E shot down off Syria flying a mission to probe the Damascus air defense system similar to those flown (quite regularly) in the Aegean Sea to probe Greece's air defenses?" the Aviationist, a blog covering military and civilian aviation, asked Tuesday.

Turkey and Syria have given sharply differing accounts of the downing.

The Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, has told the state-owned TRT television network that the aircraft was struck by anti-aircraft fire outside Syrian air space. "Our plane was hit in

international airspace," he said, "13 nautical miles out of Syria, when Syrian territorial space is 12 miles." A nautical mile is 1.15 statute miles or 1.85 kilometers.

But the Syrian Foreign Ministry said Monday that the airplane was brought down by an anti-aircraft weapon with a range of 2.5 kilometers.

The nature of the weapon that brought down the plane has also not been clearly established.

On Monday, Jihad Makdissi, the Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman, claimed that the wreckage of the downed Turkish jet "shows holes in the tail-end of the plane which confirm that it was shot down by a ground-based machine gun, not missiles."

"Had the aircraft been over territorial waters, we would have used missiles, not a land-based anti-aircraft machine gun with a maximum range of 2.5 kilometers," he said. "All of this confirms the falsity of the allegations that the aircraft was shot down outside Syrian territorial waters."

The source of the spokesman's version was not immediately clear. It contradicted accounts offered by Turkey, which had said the wreckage of the plane was in deep water far offshore and had yet to be recovered. On Monday, Turkey accused Syria of firing on a second reconnaissance plane.

In an unusually detailed account on the Web site of SANA, the official Syrian news agency, Mr. Makdissi said coastal anti-aircraft artillery stationed on Syrian beaches had opened fire on the Turkish jet as it flew toward the Syrian coast at a speed of about 800 kilometers an hour.

Syria's information minister, Omran al-Zoebi, was quoted as telling the Turkish news channel A Haber by telephone Wednesday that his country's forces may have mistaken the Turkish plane they shot down for an Israeli one. He said his country did "not want a crisis between Turkey and Syria," The Associated Press reported.

Sebnem Arsu reported from Istanbul.

22 killed in wave of attacks across Iraq

BAGHDAD

June death toll passes 200 as violence against Shiites rises sharply

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bombings and shootings around Iraq killed 22 people and wounded more than 50 on Thursday, the authorities said, as a spike in violence made June the bloodiest month in Iraq in almost half a year.

The attacks in Shiite neighborhoods and on security forces underscore how deadly Iraq remains, even though violence has dropped dramatically since a few years ago, when the country appeared about to descend into civil war. Over the past month, more than 200 Iraqis have been killed in attacks.

The deadliest strike Thursday came about 9:30 a.m. in the Shiite Muslim neighborhood of Washash in western Baghdad, where eyewitnesses said a taxi exploded outside a local market. Eight people died and 26 were wounded, the police and hospital officials said.

Bombings are generally a hallmark of Sunni Muslim insurgents linked to Al Qaeda, and Shiites remain one of their main targets. Earlier Thursday, a roadside bomb in a Shiite neighborhood in

southern Baghdad exploded as a police patrol was passing by, killing one person and wounding six.

Two more attacks on Shiite enclaves in northwestern Baghdad wounded five more people, the police said.

And in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, about 115 kilometers, or 70 miles, west of Baghdad, another car bomb wounded seven people in the parking lot of the provincial council. The largely Sunni province's deputy governor, Dhari Arkan, said the explosion early in the morning was designed to shake confidence in the government.

"The message of the terrorists is that no place is safe in Iraq," Mr. Arkan said.

The spokesman for the Baghdad operations command, Col. Dhia al-Wakil, said no overall conclusion about Iraq's security could be drawn from the Thursday attacks, which he said were believed to be unrelated. He described Iraq's security as "generally stable, and these attacks by no means should be taken as an indication that the terrorists are able to defy our security forces."

He said security forces had defused several car bombs recently and arrested people suspected of being behind this month's wave of violence. He declined to give further details.

While Shiite neighborhoods and ceremonies are a favorite Qaeda target, Sunnis affiliated with the government and

security forces also frequently come under attack.

In the Sunni city of Taji, just north of Baghdad, two cars parked about 100 meters, or 325 feet, from each other exploded outside the office of the local mayor at dawn, the police said. The mayor was not in his office at the time, but the blast killed five people and wounded 18, leaving craters in nearby homes.

Taji is home to a military base and is about 20 kilometers north of Baghdad. Police officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information.

In the province of Diyala, gunmen walked into a butcher shop in the provincial capital of Baqouba and shot and killed two former Sunni militiamen who had fought against Al Qaeda. A separate attack on a checkpoint killed two more militia members and two police officers.

A police official, Maj. Ghalib Al-Karkhi, said the gunmen used pistols fitted with silencers to assassinate the former members of the Sahwa or Awakening militia, which broke away from the insurgency to join U.S. troops in fighting Al Qaeda at the height of the war. Sahwa members are frequent targets of the insurgents, who consider them traitors.

Two more Sahwa members were shot and killed while manning a checkpoint in the central city of Samarra, 95 kilometers north of Baghdad, the police said.

Six months after US withdrawal, surge in violence spurs fears Iraq will be unstable

by: LARA JAKES and KAY JOHNSON
Associated Press

BAGHDAD - A half year after the U.S. military left Iraq, dire predictions seem to be coming true: The country is mired in violence and the government is on the verge of collapsing. With no relief in sight, there's growing talk of Iraq as a failed state as al-Qaida's local wing staged near daily attacks that killed at least 234 people in June.

Iraq no longer suffers widespread retaliatory killings between Sunni and Shiite extremists that brought the country to the brink of civil war. But the spike in violence heightens fears that Iraq could limp along for years as an unstable and dangerous country.

June was the second-deadliest month since U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq in mid-December as insurgents exploited the political struggles between the country's ethnic and sectarian factions. More significant than the numbers was the fact that insurgents appeared able to sustain the level of violence over a longer period than usual. There was a major deadly bombing or shooting rampage almost every three days, many targeting Shiite pilgrims.

The violence has brought the weakness of Iraq's security apparatus into sharp focus even as deepening political divisions dim the prospects that the country will emerge as a stable democracy after decades of war and dictatorship.

"The state is almost paralyzed and dysfunctional due to political feuds. In such circumstances, the security forces also will be paralyzed and the insurgents groups are making use of this chaos," Haider al-Saadi, the Shiite owner of internet cafe in eastern Baghdad, said Saturday. "I do not think that al-Qaida is getting any stronger — it is the state that is getting weaker."

The situation deteriorated shortly after American troops left Iraq on Dec. 18, following failed negotiations to stay beyond a year-end withdrawal deadline that was cemented in a 2008 security agreement.

The next day Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government issued terror charges against Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, one of Iraq's highest-ranking Sunnis, who fled Baghdad and remains on the lam. Sunni

lawmakers briefly boycotted parliament and al-Maliki's cabinet in protest. By spring, leaders of the self-ruled Kurdish northern region joined the Sunni-dominated Iraqiya political coalition against al-Maliki, whom they accused of refusing to share power.

And last week, in the first major defection by an influential Shiite leader, anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr said he would direct his followers to join efforts to oust al-Maliki if a power-sharing agreement is not reached.

Al-Maliki, who won a second term in 2010, followed with a threat to call for early elections that would dissolve parliament if government infighting does not stop.

In calling for an early election, al-Maliki is betting he would win with enough widespread support to gain undisputed power. His political coalition fell short of winning the most seats in parliament in 2010 elections and back-room dealing among political parties delayed a new government from taking over for nine months.

Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh agreed Saturday that the political crisis has fueled June's violent surge.

"The insurgents are making use of the political differences in the country, and the recent attacks are the result of this political strife," al-Dabbagh said.

Violence has been steady across Iraq so far this year, but the levels of attacks in June soared beyond the occasional, if spectacular, wave of bombings that is al-Qaida's usual pattern. Victims mostly have been Shiite pilgrims, government officials and security forces — three of al-Qaida's favorite targets.

Al-Qaida front group the Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility for a June 13 wave of nearly two dozen bombings nationwide that killed 72 Iraqis. The coordination, sophistication and targets of several other attacks also bore the hallmarks of the terror network.

Iraqi and U.S. intelligence officials long have said that al-Qaida's resources in Iraq — including money, weapons and a stable of suicide bombers — have dwindled to the point where the insurgent group can only carry off a few attacks each month.

Many experts believe the turmoil in neighboring Syria is stoking the violence, saying the success of the Sunni-led opposition against President Bashar Assad's regime is emboldening Iraqi Sunnis to attack government targets.

"As the edifice in Syria weakens, the more space for violence is going spill over to the Sunni areas in Iraq," said Kamran Bokhari, a Canadian-based expert on Mideast issues for the global intelligence company Statfor.

Some analysts believe Iraq is turning into a failed state. This month, the U.S.-based Fund for Peace ranked Iraq No. 9 on its annual Top Ten list of failed states worldwide. The nonpartisan research group ranked 178 nations and blamed the persistent security problems in Iraq on the inability to overcome long-standing ethnic and sectarian tensions.

Despite the continued bombings and other attacks, Iraqis have not returned to the sectarian warfare that killed tens of thousands of people as violence peaked in 2006-2007. Shiite militias have shown restraint even as a spate of bombings targeted Shiite pilgrims, shrines and government leaders.

And as al-Sadr, an anti-U.S. cleric whose militias were responsible for some of the bloodiest attacks of the war, seeks to secure his status as a major political player in Iraq, it's doubtful he will unleash his followers in widespread violence that would undermine his credibility across the mostly-Sunni Arab world.

Even al-Maliki's opponents speak only of ousting him in a parliamentary vote, not by force.

"People now know that violence will breed violence and sectarian killings will lead to more counter-sectarian killings," said Omar al-Jubouri, a Sunni lawmaker from the Iraqiya bloc.

Underscoring the continued dangers, however, the month ended with a pair of bombings Saturday in the northern, Sunni-dominated Nivevah province, killing two soldiers on separate security patrols, local officials said.

Many Iraqis lament the withdrawal of U.S. forces, saying it was premature.

ES

"The U.S. pullout was a mistake because the country is still in need for their intelligence and military capabilities," said Mohammed Salam, a Sunni government employee in Baghdad. "The Iraqi government should have kept some several thousands of U.S. troops in order to help Iraq forces maintain a reasonable level of security."

The international community spent billions of dollars to stabilize Iraq since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that ousted Saddam Hussein. Nearly 4,500 U.S. troops were killed during the war.

But the U.S. currently has limited influence in Baghdad: A June 14 statement by the top national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden that urged Iraqi officials to "alleviate current tensions in order to refocus

energy on critical state-building challenges" produced few, if any, signs of progress.

Nor do most Iraqis expect any.

"I think Iraq will see worse days in the future if the politicians continue their destructive feuds and keep following their personal ambitions," Salam said.

TODAYS ZAMAN

27 June 2012

Inclusion of Kurdish language in education system



Columnists
CENGİZ AKTAR

On June 12, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced: "Our students will have the opportunity to learn local languages and dialects, under the heading of existing languages and dialects, within the scope of the law on instruction in different languages and dialects. For instance, when enough students are gathered, the Kurdish language could be taught as an elective course."

The initiative has obviously started a new discussion on education in one's mother tongue. The bill he referred to was one of the last laws of the military period, enacted in 1983. The title and two articles of the law were amended in 2002 and 2003 in accordance with EU harmonization. These amendments made the teaching of different languages and dialects in Turkey possible.

In its current form, the bill restricts the teaching of the Kurdish language or any other language to elective courses within the education system. Article 2a of the bill offers only private courses on these languages. However, it is critical to teach languages in public schools.

The same article mirrors Article 42 of the Constitution, which reads, "No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institution."

All of this indicates there is still a long way to go in terms of legal changes before Kurdish and other native tongues are inserted into the education system.

But there are also practical issues on how to insert these languages into the education system. One of them concerns the difference between education in a mother tongue and teaching a mother tongue. Teaching a mother tongue refers to a single course. However, education in a mother tongue involves the entire curriculum. When the approach is limited to teaching a mother tongue and its treatment as some sort of foreign language, it is only normal that private or elective courses appear as a remedy. However, even Kurdish parents who voted for the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) ask for education in their mother tongue.

But the idea is not to replace the Turkish national education system with a Kurdish national education system, either. The aim

is to introduce a multilingual system wherein children are allowed to learn modern tongues. A child can learn three to four languages at the same time between the ages of 3 and 5.

Use of the Kurdish language in a monolingual country like Turkey would make huge contributions to the modernization of our education system -- which shapes young brains, according to Kemalist dogma -- to our understanding of each other and even to learning the Turkish language better. Goethe said, "He who does not know foreign languages does not know anything about his own." If Kurdish, Greek and Armenian children grow up bilingual or multilingual, others could as well.

Linguists confirm that bilingual and multilingual people are intellectually more developed than those who rely on one language alone. Their brains are more extensively used for the storage of different words and their pronunciation. It is further argued that multilingual people have a greater capacity for perception and learning and yet are open to change and diversity. Monolingual people have limited capacity to understand others and are prone to be more aggressive.

The issue of education in Kurdish has been studied for a while. I have noted the following: works of the İstanbul Kurdish Institute; proceedings of a symposium on education in a mother tongue by Eğitim-Sen; the textbook "Kurdish Language and Literature in Secondary Education" by the History Foundation; a report by the Education Reform Initiative on bilingualism and education in Turkey; and the studies by the Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DİSA).

Şerif Derince of DİSA recently wrote: "We have held workshops that were attended by teachers and experts at which we considered the demands of parents and students. We have drafted a report offering multilingual education models that could be used in the education of Kurdish students with different needs and characteristics in Turkey. ... Students would be able to learn the Zaza and Kurmanji dialects of Kurdish, Turkish and another language during a nine-year education period."

There is no Turkish institution that offers education in the Kurdish language yet. On the other hand, the Antep-based Dünya TV offers a program that provides serious Kurdish language training. But such education in schools exists elsewhere. The main curriculum, as well as history, geography and literature courses, in Iraqi Kurdistan is offered in Kurdish at schools affiliated with the Hizmet movement, while science classes are taught in English; Turkish is taught as a foreign language. Kurdish has also been taught for decades in the Netherlands and in Sweden. All this represents significant experience. What is missing in this picture is the presence of experts in the national education system and, without this, no solution is possible. ○

Syrie

Surprise à la tête de l'opposition

Les islamistes ont préféré un Kurde laïc à la présidence du CNS plutôt qu'un chrétien ou une femme. Un choix qui s'écarte du nationalisme arabe borné.

Al-Hayat Londres

L'arrivée du Kurde Abdel Basset Sayda à la tête du Conseil national syrien (CNS) a été une surprise. [Il succède à Burhan Ghalioun, qui a dû se retirer face aux critiques internes.] Non moins surprenant a été l'accueil favorable des forces politiques kurdes de Syrie, telles que le Conseil national kurde et l'Union des forces démocratiques kurdes. Seule l'Union démocratique, affiliée au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan [PKK], que dirige Abdullah Ocalan [en prison en Turquie], a fait exception, lançant une virulente campagne médiatique contre Sayda et l'accusant d'être un "agent des Turcs".

Toutefois, le choix de Sayda ne signifie pas que le CNS se soit débarrassé de la tentation d'imposer la domination tyrannique de la majorité ethnique et confessionnelle [arabe et sunnite]. Il est encore trop tôt pour dire que l'opposition syrienne s'est convertie à l'idée d'un Etat national civil et démocratique qui transcende les clivages de la société. Il n'en reste pas moins que ce choix mérite d'être salué tant au niveau local qu'international. Curieusement, les Européens et les Américains, attachés à la défense des minorités et au pluralisme, n'ont pas réagi avec une ferveur débordante.

Quel sens donner à ce choix ? Premièrement, il n'a pas été refusé par les Turcs. Ceux-ci auraient pu craindre que cela constitue un pas vers la reconnais-

sance des quelque 3 millions de Kurdes de Syrie en tant que minorité nationale, la Turquie ne voulant pas se retrouver dans l'obligation de faire de même avec sa propre minorité kurde, qui compte environ 20 millions de personnes. Du côté des Frères musulmans syriens, le choix de Sayda leur

permet de ne pas apparaître sur le devant de la scène, mais de continuer de peser en coulisses. D'autre part, les Frères n'étaient pas prêts à soutenir la candidature des favoris de l'Occident : le chrétien laïc George Sabra ou Basma Kodmani [une universitaire syrienne vivant en France, également laïque].

Ces deux candidats auraient été en contradiction trop flagrante avec l'idéologie islamiste, selon laquelle un chrétien ou une femme ne peuvent occuper un tel poste qui préfigure en quelque sorte la présidence du pays dans l'attente de la chute du régime de Bachar El-Assad. Pour les Frères, Sayda est un moindre mal. Il leur permet de dire qu'ils ont donné leur assentiment au représentant d'une minorité, laïc et libéral qui plus est, mais il s'agit malgré tout d'un homme, musulman et sunnite.

On peut craindre qu'en fin de compte les Frères ne tirent bénéfice de Sayda pour consolider leur influence au sein de l'opposition, car ils pourront lui imputer tout échec futur du CNS. Cette crainte est d'autant plus légitime qu'un regard critique sur les expériences islamistes montre que les

Frères musulmans se sont souvent servis des personnalités laïques pour mieux contrôler les rouages du pouvoir.

Quoi qu'il en soit, l'arrivée de cet homme à la tête de la principale coalition de l'opposition syrienne est un acquis non seulement pour les Kurdes, mais également pour toutes les minorités nationales de Syrie, des Assyriens aux Arméniens, en passant par les Turkmènes et les Tchérkesses. Au niveau politique, culturel et médiatique, cela pourrait préparer l'opinion publique à renouer avec l'unité nationale des années 1950, quand on ne se demandait pas à quel groupe ethnique ou confessionnel appartenait le président ou le Premier ministre.

Ainsi, Farès Al-Khoury (chrétien) a formé trois gouvernements et Fawzy Selu (kurde) a été président de 1951 à 1953. Cette ère a vu son déclin s'amorcer avec le projet nationaliste nassérien en 1958, lors de la République arabe unie entre l'Egypte et la Syrie, et s'est achevée en 1963 avec le coup d'Etat baasiste.

La désignation de Sayda signifie également aux Kurdes qu'ils ont intérêt à se poser comme une composante stratégique à Damas, à Alep et partout ailleurs en Syrie plutôt que de rester repliés dans leurs régions d'origine. Il appartient aux élites politiques et culturelles kurdes d'encourager ce pas en avant, quelles que soient les divergences sur les orientations politiques de Sayda. **Husheng Ousi**



BULENT KILIC/AP PHOTO

← L'opposant syrien Abdel Basset Sayda.



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le Premier ministre turc, hier devant le Parlement. PHOTO UMIT BEKTAS. REUTERS

Pour Ankara, la Syrie devient une « menace »

L'Otan a condamné hier la destruction d'un avion turc par les forces de Damas, vendredi. Face au risque d'escalade, la Turquie se cantonne à une riposte verbale.

Par **MARC SEMO**
Envoyé spécial à Ankara

Les autorités turques haussent le ton face à Damas, mais restent dans le vague sur ce qui pourrait être leur riposte à la destruction vendredi d'un de leurs avions, un F-4 Phantom, par la défense aérienne syrienne. Les 28 pays de l'Alliance atlantique ont affiché, hier à Bruxelles, leur solidarité avec la Turquie. « Nous considérons cet acte comme étant inacceptable et nous le condamnons dans les termes les plus forts », a dé-

RÉCIT

claré le secrétaire général, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, rappelant que « la sécurité de l'Otan est indivisible ».

Demandée par Ankara au titre de l'article 4 du traité de l'Atlantique Nord, évoquant « une menace sur l'intégrité territoriale, l'indépendance ou la sécurité d'un membre de l'Alliance », cette réunion était la seconde du genre depuis la création de l'Otan en 1949. En 2003, déjà à l'initiative d'Ankara et peu avant l'intervention américaine en Irak, les pays de l'Alliance avaient notamment décidé de déployer des avions de surveillance Awacs. Cette fois, ils se sont contentés de mots: Depuis le début de la crise syrienne, l'Otan a exclu toute intervention militaire en raison, notamment, de la complexité de la donne dans une région hautement explosive et de l'absence de toute résolution des Nations unies autorisant un recours à la force, comme cela avait été le cas pour la Libye.

« **RISQUE.** Les alliés sont prudents face au risque d'engrenage. La Turquie l'est encore plus, même si elle ne peut rester sans réagir, alors que, selon sa version officielle, cet appareil, après avoir brièvement pénétré par erreur dans l'espace aérien syrien, a été abattu à 24 kilomètres des côtes, au-dessus des eaux internationales. Selon des experts

russe cités par l'agence d'Etat, Ria Novosti, le F-4 Phantom abattu testait la défense antiaérienne syrienne pour le compte de l'Otan et sa destruction a montré l'efficacité des systèmes russes dont est équipée la Syrie.

« Le régime de Bachar al-Assad est une menace claire et proche pour la sécurité de la Turquie comme pour celle de son propre

peuple », a martelé le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, parlant hier devant les députés de l'AKP, le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir depuis 2002. Il a aussi annoncé un changement des règles d'engagement des forces turques déployées sur les 800 km de frontière entre les deux pays: « Tout élément militaire qui posera un risque et un danger de sécurité à la frontière turque venant de la Syrie sera considéré comme une cible. »

Erdogan n'avait jamais employé de tels mots, même si depuis un an, et après quelques mois de flottement, les autorités turques ont pris fait et cause pour la rébellion, aussi bien en soutenant le Conseil national syrien, la principale organisation politique de l'opposition, que les combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), dont le matériel militaire arrive en grande partie par le territoire turc. « J'annonce au monde que la Turquie va choisir le moment et la méthode pour répondre à cette injustice, mais dans le respect de la légalité internationale »,

REPÈRES



Vendredi, un avion turc a été abattu sans mise en garde ni sommation par l'armée syrienne. L'incident s'est produit au-dessus de la Méditerranée, à la limite de l'espace aérien syrien. Le chasseur F-4 Phantom avait décollé de la base turque de Malatya et volait au large de la ville de Lattaquié, à 13 milles nautiques (24 km) des côtes syriennes.

« **Les conditions ne sont pas propices à une reprise des opérations [en Syrie].** »

Hervé Ladsous chef des opérations de maintien de la paix de l'ONU, hier devant le Conseil de sécurité

« **[Le régime de Bachar al-Assad] est devenu une menace claire et proche pour la sécurité de la Turquie comme pour son propre peuple.** »

Recep Tayyip Erdogan Premier ministre turc, hier, lors d'un discours devant le Parlement

15 000

C'est le nombre de morts en Syrie depuis le début du conflit, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Les combats entre l'armée et les rebelles syriens durent depuis quinze mois.

➤ a-t-il ajouté dans un des effets de manche dont il est coutumier, afin de rassurer une opinion publique aussi inquiète qu'indignée par la destruction de l'avion. «Celle-ci est ressentie comme une véritable humiliation alors que le gouvernement répète sans cesse que la Turquie est devenue un leader régional, voire global», explique Kadri Gürsel, éditorialiste de politique étrangère au journal libéral Milliyet.

«FRACASSANTES». Les marges d'action d'Ankara restent pourtant limitées. «Jamais dans l'histoire de la République un gouvernement turc ne s'était à ce point engagé, par des déclarations fracassantes mais aussi des gestes concrets, pour un changement de régime dans un pays voisin: c'était trop et trop vite, maintenant les dirigeants turcs ne peuvent pas faire grand-chose de plus», souligne un diplomate occidental. Une riposte ponctuelle comme la destruction d'une batterie de défense antiaérienne, voire de missiles

Selon des experts russes, le F-4 testait la défense antiaérienne syrienne pour le compte de l'Otan, et sa destruction a montré l'efficacité des systèmes russes dont est équipée la Syrie.

sol-air, au risque de tuer aussi des conseillers russes, est hasardeuse. «Cette affaire a montré que le système de défense aérien syrien est parfaitement opérationnel et la perte d'un autre appareil, voire plus, dans une opération de représailles serait catastrophique», analyse Soli Ozel, éditorialiste au quotidien Haber Turk, spécialiste de relations internationales. Pilier du flanc sud-est de l'Otan et second effectif de l'Alliance, après celle des Etats-Unis, l'armée turque manque de capacités de projections autant que de matériel adapté pour un tel type de frappes. En outre, elle a été désorganisée par les enquêtes menées ces dernières années sur de présumés complots à

l'entente du gouvernement islamiste, qui ont mené à l'arrestation de centaines d'officiers et officiers supérieurs.

Le vice-Premier ministre, Bülent Arınç, dur parmi les durs de l'AKP, a évo-

qué hier comme possible rétorsion l'interruption des exportations d'électricité vers la Syrie, «même si cela pourrait encore aggraver la situation des populations civiles». Mais c'est un jeu dangereux: quelque 80% du gaz naturel consommé par la Turquie proviennent d'Iran et de Russie, les deux principaux alliés et protecteurs du régime syrien. ◆



26 JUIN 2012

Tensions entre la Turquie et la Syrie: «Les Turcs n'entreront pas dans un conflit sans l'Otan»

INTERVIEW - Le spécialiste de la Syrie Fabrice Balanche fait le point sur les relations entre la Syrie et la Turquie...

Quatre jours après que les Syriens ont abattu un avion turc, et alors que les tensions diplomatiques entre les deux pays sont à leur comble, comment peuvent évoluer les relations turco-syriennes? Joint par 20 Minutes, Fabrice Balanche, maître de conférences à l'université de Lyon 2 et directeur du Gremmo, apporte son éclairage sur la situation.

Historiquement, quelles sont les relations entre la Turquie et la Syrie?

Il y a eu des tensions historiques entre les deux pays tout au long du siècle dernier, qui datent de 1939, quand le Sandjak d'Alexandrette, une province appartenant à la Syrie, est passée sous le contrôle turc, ce qui a créé des problèmes pendant des décennies. De plus, pendant la guerre froide, la Syrie était du côté des Soviétiques et la Turquie, qui est dans l'Otan depuis 1951, était du

côté des Américains. Ça a créé des hostilités. Enfin, la Syrie a appuyé les rebelles du PKK [séparatistes kurdes opposés au pouvoir turc, NDLR] jusqu'à la fin des années 1990. Mais dès qu'ils ont arrêté ce soutien et que l'abcès kurde a été percé, il y a eu un réchauffement des relations, des accords de libre circulation et de libre-échange, surtout depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir en 2002 de l'AKP d'Erdogan et sa politique pro-musulmane qui a éloigné la Turquie d'Israël.

Depuis quand les relations son-elles redevenues tendues entre les deux pays?

Quand la crise a frappé la Syrie, les Turcs ont cru que, comme ça s'est vu ailleurs, le pouvoir syrien allait s'écrouler rapidement. Ils y ont un intérêt. La Turquie avait de grandes ambitions pour la région, mais ils sont isolés au sud, à l'est et au nord notamment par un axe Syrie-Irak-Iran soutenu par la Russie, et à l'ouest par leurs mauvais rapports avec le monde grec. Ce qu'ils veulent, c'est faire sauter le verrou syrien, car si Bachar al-Assad

tombe, ils peuvent espérer voir s'installer un régime sunnite pro-saoudien, pro-occidental et donc pro-Turc. Là, la Turquie retrouverait un rôle régional.

Du coup, risque-t-on de voir un nouvel incident escalader en conflit armé?

Il est clair que les Turcs ont envoyé cet avion pour tester les défenses syriennes. Maintenant ils sont prévenus: s'ils en renvoient un, les Syriens tireront dessus. Or les Turcs ne veulent pas y aller seuls, et l'Otan ne veut pas intervenir, car les Américains sont en campagne électorale et ne souhaitent pas participer à un nouveau conflit armé. Le conflit syrien va durer encore au moins plusieurs mois: c'est une stratégie de long terme que la Turquie veut établir, en accumulant les pièces à charge contre la Syrie à destination de l'Otan. Autant profiter de l'incident du F4 pour impliquer un peu plus l'Otan en vue, après la présidentielle américaine, d'une plus grande fermeté occidentale face à la Syrie. □

**Propos recueillis par
Nicolas Bégasse**

Syrian Kurds Trade Armed Opposition for Autonomy

By: **Mohammad Ballout**
 Publisher: *As-Safir (Lebanon)*

The Kurdish region in northern Syria remains impenetrable as it confronts both Turkey and the Free Syrian Army. Thus far, there have been 2 failed attempts to drag the Kurdish opposition into battle against Syrian Army forces and to break the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's [PYD] control over the Kurdish areas. The Kurdish areas under PYD control extend for 848 km from Al-Malikiyah (also known as Dayrik) in northern Iraq to Efrin, which is north of Aleppo. This western Kurdistan region also coincides with the Syrian-Turkish border.

The PYD, headed by Salih Muhammad Muslim from al-Qamishli District, is considered one of the most important parties in the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change. It is also an armed group, which is worth noting given that the committee officially opposes the militarization of the conflict.

It is especially because of this favorable political environment — one that favors both the regime and the opposition — that the PYD is able to show off its armaments without actually having to use them. The first attempt failed after 1,800 Syrian Kurdish soldiers discharged from a training camp in Iraqi Kurdistan, near Irbil, in order to seek livelihood.

The military camp was established three months ago with the support of the Democratic National Union of Kurdistan, which is affiliated with Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq.

A leading Syrian Kurdish opposition figure told *As-Safir* that Barzani, who had hosted two conferences for the Kurdish opposition figures in Erbil in December and May of 2011, had urged the National Kurdish Council [NKC] — which is comprised of 11 Kurdish parties and does not include the PYD — to unify their ranks. He also called upon them to establish a military arm to compete with the PYD, which is the Syrian arm of the Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK] in Turkey.

According to this Kurdish opposition leading figure, the camp was closed down after Barzani realized that harmony did not exist



Demonstrators hold Kurdistan and Syrian opposition flags during a protest against Syria's President Bashar al-Assad at Kobani near Aleppo June 23, 2012. Photo: Reuters.

among the divided ranks of the NKC. The components of the NKC have divided their allegiances between Barzani, who used to pay \$400 a month for every Syrian Kurdish soldier, and his KRG rival Jalal Talabani. Those affiliated with Barzani are led by Hakim Bashar, the head of the NKC and the Kurdish Democratic Party [KDP] in Syria. Abd-al-Hamid Darwich, the leader of the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party, leads the faction that is affiliated with Talabani.

Mustafa Juma'a leads a third group that is closely tied with Salah Badr-al-Din from the Kurdish Azadi Party. Badr al-Din supports extending the operations of the Free Syrian Army into the Kurdish area. For example, there was a plan to infiltrate the Kurdish defensive wall at Efrin before heading toward the main target of Aleppo.

90 percent of Efrin's population is Kurdish. The Kurds, the PYD, and the popular committees control this strategic gateway to Aleppo. Kurdish sources say that over the last year, the PYD has transported around 4,000 to 4,500 Kurdish Syrian fighters from their stronghold in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq to the Syrian north.

The PYD has infused thousands of its supporters into the popular committees. Approximately 220 Kurdish checkpoints are set up on the road that links Efrin to Aleppo. These checkpoints were the reason why the Free Syrian Army failed to infiltrate Aleppo, even though they had been working towards that goal for three months. Two months ago a demonstration was staged by the Muslim Brotherhood in Rifa'at Hill, marching toward

Efrin. The demonstration aggravated the checkpoint of the popular committee and led to a clash between the two sides. This led to the committee's decision to prevent gunmen and outsiders from entering the area. According to Kurdish sources, one week ago the Turks had urged Badr-al-Din's group to test and divide the popular committees by attempting to drag them into a Kurdish-Kurdish conflict.

A few days ago, a group of Kurdish demonstrators reached the checkpoint of Basoutah village near Efrin and clashed with female forces, who later arrested 11 men.

Also, there have been rumors regarding the arrival of suicide bombers who were planning on carrying out suicide attacks in al-Qamishli District. Simultaneously, the "macho" men of al-Antaziyah neighborhood in al-Qamishli staged a demonstration protesting the PYD's influence in the area. The National Council of Western Kurdistan and other Kurdish parties had agreed to end the conflicts by halting armed manifestations. This move thwarted all attempts to open the road between Efrin to Aleppo.

The PYD has successfully established a delicate balance between their clear opposition to the Syrian regime and their prevention of the Free Syrian Army from infiltrating into their territory. They joined and preside over the opposition's coordination committee and regulate military operations, but they also avoid clashes with the Syrian army and the regime's security forces. Meanwhile, the PYD is able to keep the Free Syrian Army from turning their region into a battlefield to fight the regime's factions or using the region as a route to transfer Turkish, Qatari and Saudi weapons into Syria.

With the exception of sporadic clashes, Syrian army battalions in the Kurdish area do not hinder the activities of the elected "Popular Council of Western Kurdistan." Also, the security services did not obstruct the elections for the local administration, in which a quarter million northern Syrian Kurds participated under the supervision of the Kurdish PYD.

The party successfully formed popular committees, some of which are armed, in order to provide security in the Kurdish area. In response, the Syrian regime dealt with this phenomenon pragmatically, allowing them to manage their affairs in return for relative calm in the Kurdish regions. The regime's army is focused on its operations in other areas and is spared from confrontations with the Kurds. Also, the Syrian regime is no longer concerned with the security agreements that it signed with Turkey. In 2011, the Syrian ■■■

■■■ security apparatus released 640 prisoners that were affiliated with the PYD, and most of them returned to the north to protect the Kurdish region. The local administration and the PYD forces in this region are also protecting the strategic Turkish-Syrian passageways to prevent Turkish infiltration.

The Syrian Kurds have been reluctant to join the revolution after the Arab opposition abandoned them in 2004. At that time, especially during the Al-Qamishli uprising, they staged mass demonstrations and solely confronted the Syrian army and its violent suppression tactics.

Even so, the mostly peaceful Kurdish demonstrations support the Syrian National Council and call for the fall of the regime and the implementation of Kurdish demands.

The title of their Friday demonstrations,

except Azadi Friday, allowed them to distance themselves from the Fridays of the Syrian revolution. It is likely that Free Syrian Army leadership's call for the Kurds to join their ranks will not be echoed among Kurdish circles, because it will threaten their privileges of self-administration.

The Kurds are significantly betting that western Kurdistan will achieve self-administration rights within Syria, regardless of the outcome of the revolution. It is still uncertain if the Syrian regime will regain its full authority as its influence is diminishing amid the security crackdown.

Even if the regime was able to come out of the revolution unscathed, it will not succeed in controlling western Kurdistan. In any case, the region will not be one of the regime's priorities due to the long list of its enemies that are now present throughout Syria's cities. It will not be easy for

Damascus to impose its authority over the area. It is also better to maintain the status quo in the Kurdish area, even though the Kurds are rebelling against the regime, in order to confront the common Turkish threat.

On the other hand, if the revolution succeeds and the opposition assumes power in Damascus, it will not be able to swiftly impose its control over western Kurdistan or destroy the self-administration that is already present there. Any new regime requires years to establish its power. The only way that the next authority will be able to destroy the Kurdish wall in northern Syria is if the revolution accepts Turkey's blatant interference in Syria and hands the reins over to the Turkish army. ♦

al-monitor.com

AL ARABIYA NEWS

June 30, 2012

First-ever Miss Kurdistan pageant held in Kurdish capital

Reuters / Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region has crowned the first-ever Miss Kurdistan, though the beauty contest took place without bikini-clad women and with journalists and their cameras kept at bay.

Twelve women competed in the beauty pageant held recently in Arbil, capital of the autonomous region in northern Iraq, organised by a Lebanese company and attended by foreign diplomats, singers, actors and officials.

Reporters and photographers were allowed to enter the hall where the ceremony was held in the Rotana Hotel for speeches by the organising company and Kurdistan tourism officials.

But after a performance of traditional Kurdish music and dance, the contestants presented themselves and the media was then asked to wait in the reception area of the hotel until the pageant was over.

When journalists asked why they were told to leave, a supervisor said the rights for the pageant itself had been sold to a media company that planned to broadcast it later.

Shene Aziz Ako, an 18-year-old from Sulaimaniyah, was the winner.

"We organised the festival in a way that suits Kurdish traditions and habits; you will not see the bathing suites but you will see sports clothes and decent evening dress, which does not underplay the beauty of the girls," Roy Shalala, an official from the organizing company, told journalists.

He said the winner would have a year-long schedule working for a cause of her choice and that "we will put all our abilities into the success of the mission of the girl who will hold the crown," who had to be an Iraqi Kurd living in Kurdistan or abroad.

Ako's cause was not immediately clear.

The judges included actor Yusef al-Khal, singer Dina Hayek, plastic surgeon Nader Saab, all from Lebanon, and former Kurdistan parlia-



ment member Shokriyah Rasool, beauty expert Farhad Birbal and various beauty contest winners.

A flashier Miss Lebanon pageant, involving far more revealing outfits, is held each year.

Plastic surgeon Saab said he was encouraged to participate because he is "very close to Kurdish beauty" from operating on Kurdish women in Beirut.

"Of course the standards here match the international standards, but beauty is still relative because Kurdish beauty is different from Lebanese, African or French beauty," Saab said.

"We must respect the traditions and customs, but this does not prevent there from being a Miss Kurdistan," he said. "We focus on the beauty and culture, and beauty consists of a number of aspects."

Omar Dizay, a Kurdish artist, said that "selection of Miss Kurdistan, is a new phenomenon," and a first for the region.

Beauty pageants have been absent from Iraq for decades. During the time of the monarchy, which was overthrown in 1958, they were held in social clubs, especially in the southern port city of Basra.

Kurdistan is a conservative region where women still face restrictions, though it is far safer than the rest of Iraq. □

L'OTAN joue l'apaisement après la destruction d'un avion turc par la Syrie

Pour les observateurs, l'incident traduit la nervosité croissante du régime syrien

L'option d'une intervention militaire internationale continue d'être tenue à l'écart dans la crise syrienne, quelques jours après la destruction d'un avion turc par la défense aérienne syrienne.

Mardi 26 juin, les ambassadeurs de l'OTAN ont entendu le rapport de leur collègue Tacan Ildem lors d'une consultation réclamée par Ankara sur la base de l'article 4 du traité de Washington, qui peut être invoqué quand un membre de l'Alliance juge que son intégrité territoriale ou sa sécurité sont menacées.

L'OTAN a exprimé sa solidarité avec la Turquie dans un bref communiqué, tout en restant d'une grande prudence. La destruction d'un chasseur biplace F4 Phantom, le 22 juin, a été condamnée « dans les termes les plus forts », mais aussi jugée « inacceptable » et contraire aux « normes internationales », car l'armée syrienne a tiré sans semonces sur l'avion alors que celui-ci s'éloignait de ses côtes. Le secrétaire général Anders Fogh Rasmussen n'a pas précisé quelle serait la réaction de l'OTAN si un tel épisode se répétait.

Des questions restent ouvertes sur les circonstances de l'agression. Selon nos informations, l'avion a été abattu d'un tir de missile sol-air SA-8 (un système de fabrication russe). Il aurait survolé un site très sensible à Mar Takla,

M. Assad appelle à « la victoire dans cette guerre »

Le président syrien a déclaré, mardi 26 juin, que la Syrie vivait « dans un véritable état de guerre à tous égards », ajoutant que « toutes nos politiques doivent être [mises] au service de la victoire dans cette guerre ». Pour l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, au moins 116 person-



dans une région alaouite, la communauté dont est issue la famille du président Bachar Al-Assad. Le site est protégé par deux brigades disposant de systèmes SA-8.

Mission d'entraînement

Le F4 est tombé alors qu'il volait à une altitude moyenne de 2 000 pieds et à une vitesse de 360 nœuds. Son attitude et ses trajectoires ne sont pas jugées agressives par les spécialistes. L'avion ne pouvait pas ne pas être détecté par les radars syriens.

Selon les autorités turques, il avait quitté dans la matinée de vendredi la base militaire d'Erhac, dans l'est du pays. Non armé, il était en mission d'entraînement pour tester des nouveaux systè-

mes de radars installés au service de l'OTAN, à Kurecik. Le contact a été perdu à 11 h 58. L'avion est tombé juste en dehors des eaux territoriales syriennes, à 13 milles nautiques au large de Ras Al-Basit, après avoir effectué plusieurs « passes ». La Turquie a reconnu que l'appareil avait écorné l'espace aérien syrien « durant cinq minutes », au-dessus d'une bande de territoire débordant sur la mer, une « erreur » aussitôt signalée par son contrôleur aérien à la Syrie.

Des experts russes ont affirmé qu'il s'agissait plutôt de tester les systèmes de protection (russes) des forces syriennes. Une analyse reprise par certains spécialistes turcs de la stratégie. Dans une de ses versions, l'appareil est un avion de reconnaissance très performant. La mission pourrait avoir eu pour but de forcer l'armée syrienne à activer ses radars et dévoiler une partie de ses modes opératoires.

Les sources occidentales s'accordent sur la nervosité grandissante du régime de Bachar Al-Assad, dont l'appareil militaire donne des signes de fragilité. Lundi 25, c'est un CASA turc participant aux opérations de recherche de l'équi-

page du F4 qui a été engagé par l'artillerie syrienne. La désertion d'un pilote de MIG-21 en Jordanie, jeudi 21 juin, a certainement placé la défense antiaérienne sous pression et donné lieu à des ordres de tir plus fermes.

Alors que Bachar Al-Assad a appelé mardi ses appuis à « remporter la guerre », la désorganisation du pays semble affecter la chaîne de commandement et rend les liaisons entre Damas et les états-majors côtiers plus difficiles. Treize généraux auraient fait défection, le dernier s'étant réfugié en Turquie dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi. L'un d'eux aurait indiqué que 60 % du territoire était désormais hors du contrôle de l'armée.

La demande turque d'un soutien a poussé les dirigeants alliés à évoquer leur « grande préoccupation » à l'égard de la situation sur la frontière sud-est de l'OTAN. La probable implication d'Ankara dans les livraisons d'armes à l'opposition syrienne – avec l'aide de la CIA, comme l'a indiqué récemment le *New York Times* – est un autre facteur qui implique indirectement l'OTAN dans la crise. Mais M. Rasmussen rappelle la nécessité d'une résolution du conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. Dans l'Alliance, « tout sera fait pour ne pas accrédi-ter l'idée que quelque chose est faisable militairement », indique une source française.

La volonté d'apaisement était manifeste mardi. « Il est important que cet incident ne soit pas considéré comme une provocation ou un acte intentionnel et qu'il ne conduise pas à une déstabilisation de la situation », a indiqué dans un communiqué le ministère russe des affaires étrangères. ■

NATHALIE GUIBERT ET
JEAN-PIERRE STROOBANTS
(BRUXELLES, CORRESPONDANT)

Rebels hit high-profile targets in Damascus

BEIRUT

BY ROD NORDLAND
AND HWAIDA SAAD

Syrian insurgents struck at high-profile targets in the Damascus region on Thursday for the third time this week, demonstrating their increasing effectiveness and reach in the conflict.

At the same time, regional tensions ticked upward as Turkey, a former ally, reinforced its border with Syria as diplomats prepared for a weekend meeting in Geneva to revive stalled peace efforts. The political opposition planned a weekend meeting in Cairo in an effort to begin to show some of the momentum that the armed opposition seems to be establishing.

The latest insurgent attack was a double bombing: one in the parking garage of the Palace of Justice in central Damascus, according to Syrian state television, and the other at a city police station, according to local residents.

The day before it was an attack that destroyed a pro-government television station, and late Monday it was a Free Syrian Army strike on the barracks of the elite Republican Guard, next to the palace of President Bashar al-Assad.

These assaults followed a wave of high-level military defections from the military and a visit by a prominent opposition figure, Burhan Ghalion, to what he called "liberated territory" in Idlib, a Syrian city near Turkey.

While none of these developments are militarily decisive, they helped build a public perception that the opposition, while still clearly underdogs fighting a huge military machine, was finally making some headway.

Even President Assad, who has repeatedly belittled the Syrian insurgency as an insignificant and unpopular movement led by what he calls foreign-backed terrorists, has tacitly acknowledged the tenacity of his opponents, telling his cabinet Tuesday that the government was engaged in a war.

But many of the rebels' victories so far have been at best qualified. The blasts in Damascus on Thursday wounded only a few people, according to the Syrian authorities. The attack on the television station on Wednesday disabled its broadcasts for less than a day, and while seven guards and media workers were reported killed, the deaths also brought international condemnation for an attack on journalists.

Rebels initially sought to present the perpetrators of the attack on the televi-



Free Syrian Army rebels standing guard at Mareh, near the northern city of Aleppo. The insurgents are demonstrating growing reach and effectiveness with attacks on Damascus.

sion station as a defecting unit of the elite Republican Guard assigned to the television station, but local residents told journalists that the only guards there were local security guards, not military units. The attack on the Republican Guard base earlier in the week was described by the rebels themselves as only a probe by a small unit of fighters.

And the opposition has been far less successful off the battlefield at creating any impression of forward movement.

A bewildering array of groups claim to speak for the opposition, including public figures who still cooperate with the Assad government and members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. The Syrian National Council, for one, an umbrella organization of expatriate dissidents, chose its leader in a compromise that everyone could agree on: Abulbaset Sayda, from the Kurdish minority in Syria. Mr. Ghalion, who disclosed his visit to Idlib on Wednesday, is a former head of the Syrian National Council.

All of Syria's nongovernment opposition forces are expected to come together at a meeting convened by the Arab League in Cairo on Sunday. That such a gathering is happening for the first time in the 16-month uprising is telling.

"There's consensus on the essentials," said Fayey Sara, a prominent opposition figure who has remained inside Syria. "The regime has to be removed."

Beyond that, however, differences are

rife. Mr. Sara said he had not yet even decided if he would attend the Cairo conference.

The conflict has long since moved past government attacks on unarmed opposition groups holding demonstrations. Now in cities throughout Syria, including the capital, Damascus, and the largest city, Aleppo, the opposition has coalesced around armed groups identifying themselves as elements of the Free Syrian Army.

From bases in refugee camps on the Turkish side of the border, the flow of weapons, medical supplies and money has increased. And this all comes at a time when the authorities in Turkey, a former ally of Mr. Assad's, have stepped up their militarization of the border in response to the Syrian downing of a Turkish jet last week.

Turkey's TRT state broadcaster showed convoys of military trucks carrying anti-aircraft guns, multiple rocket launchers and troops toward several border areas near Hatay Province, where thousands of Syrians have taken refuge. Others were deployed further east near the border settlement of Suruc, joining units close to the frontier post at Mursitpinar, TRT said. Reinforcements were also moved in from the coastal town of Iskenderun.

Violence has ratcheted up especially since the U.N. monitoring mission sus-

pended its activities June 16. It has remained hobbled in Damascus and other major cities. As a result, Kofi Annan, the special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, has convened an international conference in Geneva for Saturday of major powers and Syria's neighbors, many of them pushing for a political solution that would involve the removal of President Assad.

That would make the conference of Syrian opposition figures even more important, but sniping among them has already begun. A statement released Thursday by the Syrian National Coalition, a group headed by Ammar Qurabi, a Syrian human rights activist, said the Syrian National Council should be considered only one of many factions.

Even the Syrian National Council is a

mixture of many different factions, and Free Syrian Army officers have yet to acknowledge any particular political leadership. The Free Syrian Army commander, Col. Riyad al-Asaad, and other rebel officers have at times been openly critical of the Syrian National Council.

On the ground in Syria, fighters have been exultant about their recent successes, however Pyrrhic they appear to be. Moaz, an activist from Damascus who was interviewed by telephone, said he recently visited Hama in central Syria and was stunned to see that entire city under the complete control of the Free Syrian Army. "I couldn't believe my eyes, there was no presence of government forces or regime people," he said. There were also, however, no residents left.

The rebels still face a military ma-

chine half a million strong, and their lack of political unity makes it difficult for international backers to focus their support. "Even if we have 1,000 F.S.A. soldiers, that is nothing compared to the government's military force," Mr. Sara said. "This is not yet a large-scale military conflict."

That makes the political cohesiveness of the opposition all the more important, he said. "I don't deny that we have our differences," he said, "but the opposition today is much better than yesterday."

Dalal Mawad contributed reporting from Beirut, an employee of The New York Times from Damascus, Sebnem Arsu from Istanbul, and Alan Cowell from London.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

FRIDAY, JUNE 29, 2012

Syria's threatened Christians

Ousting Assad is a global moral obligation. But so is protecting Syria's minorities.

**Daniel Brode
Roger Farhat
Daniel Nisman**

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL Earlier this month, reports came from the Syrian city of Qusayr of an ominous warning to the town's Christians: Either join the Sunni-led opposition against Bashar al-Assad or leave. Soon after, thousands of Christians fled the town.

After decades of protection by a secular-leaning dictatorship, the Qusayr ultimatum warned of a dark future for Syria's Christian community. As the 15-month conflict rages with no end in sight, Syria's many minorities have come face to face with the emerging threat posed by radical Sunni Islamists. These elements have established themselves as a key factor in Syria's future, backed by immense political and economic support from the Arab world and indifference from the West.

Throughout the years, Christians, like many other minorities in the region, have lent their support to those regimes that have guaranteed their security and religious freedom. In Iraq, Christians rose to the highest levels of society under Saddam Hussein's regime, while in Egypt, Coptic Christians were protected from ultraconservative Salafists under Hosni Mubarak. As secular leaders from the secretive Alawite sect, the Assad dynasty largely preserved Christian life, protecting Syria's minorities from what was perceived as a collective threat from the country's Sunni majority.

Watching their once-shielding dictators fall like dominos across the region, Christians have suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of history. Faced by a rising tide of radical Sunni

Islam, Christians in Iraq and Egypt have fled by the thousands. In Syria, concern over Christian repression has fallen on deaf ears, drowned out by popular support for the country's opposition in the face of the Assad regime's brutal crackdown.

This March, months before the Qusayr ultimatum, Islamist militants from the opposition's Faruq Brigade had gone door to door in Hamidiya and Bustan al-Diwan neighborhoods of Homs, expelling local Christians. Following the raids, some 90 percent of Christians reportedly fled the city for government-controlled areas, neighboring countries or a stretch of land near the Lebanese border called the Valley of Christians (Wadi al-Nasarah). Of the more than 80,000 Christians who lived in Homs prior to the up-

rising, approximately 400 remain today.

The cleansing of Homs' Christian neighborhoods occurred as the Syrian military bolstered the Sunni opposition stronghold of Baba Amr, naturally focusing the international media on stories of children maimed by Assad's artillery shells and sniper bullets. At the United Nations, Assad's opponents could not afford to highlight Christian persecution in Homs, as they risked catering to a Russian-led campaign to preserve the dictator's rule by delegitimizing the Syrian rebels for their atrocities.

As rebel forces continue to chip away at Assad's control over the country, Syria's Christians continue to be expelled or held at the mercy of an increasingly extremist Sunni opposition.

For the newest generation of Sunni jihadists, Syria has become the latest front in the struggle to wrest control of the region from rival religious sects and

foreign occupation. Many of these fighters hail from the vast reaches of North Africa and the Gulf, arriving in Syria with weapons, funds and a radical ideology.

Inside Syria, the reluctance of the international community to thwart Assad's onslaught has left the Sunni population with feelings of isolation and abandonment, driving large swathes of youth into the arms of radical clerics. This uncompromising ideology leaves little place in Syria's future for the country's many minorities — including Christians.

Saving Syria's Christian community is coherent with Western strategic interests. If the experiences of Iraq and Egypt are any indication, religious intolerance breeds insecurity and volatility. The Syrian case is no different. Assad's opponents on both sides of the Atlantic must prevent radical Islamists from embedding themselves in the Syrian opposition and should adopt a firm stance against their patrons in the Gulf.

As Kamal Jumblatt, the former leader of Lebanon's Druze minority, once said, "In the Middle East there is space for all men, just not their ambitions." Jumblatt himself was eventually assassinated at the hands of Hafez al-Assad, but his words ring true to this day.

The ousting of the Assad regime has become a global moral obligation, but so has the duty to ensure that Syria's future holds a place for all minorities.

DANIEL BRODE, ROGER FARHAT and DANIEL NISMAN are intelligence analysts at Max-Security Solutions, a geopolitical risk consulting firm based in the Middle East. They specialize in Syrian-Lebanese affairs.

Assad lets Kurdish PKK rebels operate against Turkey from inside Syria

The two countries nearly went to war over the PKK in the late '90s. Now, with border tensions rising, Assad is risking confrontation again

By Mitch Ginsburg

Syría has been offering citizenship to ethnic Kurds and allowing the Kurdistan Workers Party, familiarly known as the PKK and considered by the US State Department to be a terror organization, to operate against Turkey from within Syrian territory, further fueling the conflict between the neighboring countries.

"After years of no ties between them, Assad has once again welcomed the PKK in Syria," said Dr. Ely Carmon, a Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) in Herzliya.

The uprising in Syria, and the brutal response by Bashar Assad's regime, have strained ties between Turkey and Syria and pushed them to the brink of armed conflict.

Tension escalated late last week when Syrian troops shot down a reportedly unarmed Turkish military jet that briefly crossed over Syrian skies. Ankara responded with a troop deployment to the 550-mile border. Syria responded in kind, sending some 170 tanks to the area.

The two countries, allied for 18 years, nearly went to war in the late '90s over Syrian support of the PKK.

The organization was established in 1978, in Lebanon, a country ruled by Syria at the time. The PKK launched cross-border raids into Turkey and was supported by both Damascus and Moscow – the former as part of a territorial dispute and the latter as part of Cold War maneuvering against Turkey, a key NATO country. Syria continued to host the PKK and its leader Abdullah Ocalan until the late '90s, when Turkey threatened war. The Assad regime relented, ousted Ocalan and signed a treaty with Turkey.

This has changed drastically over the



A Turkish military truck transports a mobile missile launcher to the Syrian border, in Iskenderun, Turkey, on Wednesday. Turkey is deploying anti-aircraft units along its border with Syria following the downing of one of its warplanes by Syria. (photo credit: AP Photo)



Kurdish PKK rebels flag at Syrian Kurdistan border. Photo: DHA

past 17 months of uprising in Syria.

The Sunni Muslim leadership in Turkey was quick to condemn the bloodshed in Syria. It opened the border to tens of thousands of Syrian refugees and has allegedly been providing military assistance to the Sunni guerrilla units fighting against the Alawite regime. Damascus responded with two moves that relate to the stateless, Kurdish-minority living in northwestern Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

The first is internal. According to an article written by Soner Cagaptay, Director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Studies, in late 2011 Assad offered "Syrian Arab" citizenship to 300,000 ethnic Kurds and allowed Kurds in Syria to open six Kurdish language schools in the region. They were permitted, for the first time, to teach students in their language and fly their flag. Cagaptay and others interpreted the move as an attempt to placate a potential foe in the roiling, multi-ethnic state of Syria.

In addition, beginning in March 2012, Assad welcomed the PKK back to Syrian soil. Cagaptay reported that some 1,500-2,000 PKK troops moved from the Qandil enclave along the Iran-Iraq border to Syria.

After three Turkish officers were killed in an attack near the Syrian border in May, Turkish Interior Minister Idris Naim Şahin confirmed to the Turkish Zaman Times that "terrorist grouping that were not there a year ago have been spotted."

The PKK, according to Carmon, is being used as a double-edged sword — "mostly against Turkey, to try and deter them from aiding the opposition," Carmon said, "but also internally."

A UNHCR report, authored by Emrullah Uslu in April, confirmed this suspicion, claiming that the PKK has been smothering resistance to the Assad regime by assassinating Kurdish leaders who want to join the armed opposition within Syria.

As a response to these developments, the Turkish national security council has been discussing the establishment of a Turkish security zone within Syria.

"This could be the trigger for those plans," said Carmon.

Turkish PM Erdoğan, Zana to meet to discuss Kurdish issue

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will meet independent Kurdish lawmaker Leyla Zana on June 30 to discuss the Kurdish issue, two days after the National Security Council (MGK) said terrorism would not hold back commonsense efforts to solve the Kurdish question.

"Terror activities will not be able to sabotage commonsense steps that will be taken to establish social peace and resolve the [Kurdish] question," the MGK said in a declaration issued after a June 28 meeting.

Zana, a symbolic figure in the Kurdish movement and an independent deputy from Diyarbakır, said in an interview with daily Hürriyet on June 14 that Erdoğan could solve the Kurdish issue and that she had never lost her hopes that he would do so. She requested a meeting with Erdoğan after her remarks were welcomed by high-ranking officials from the ruling party.

Zana was elected as a deputy in the 2012 elections from the bloc backed by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), but she cannot become a party member until 2014 because of a political ban

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, center, his deputy Besir Atalay, right, meet with Leyla Zana, an independent Kurdish lawmaker from southeastern Kurdish city of Diyarbakir (Northern Kurdistan), in Ankara, Turkey, Saturday, June 30, 2012 Turkey's prominent outspoken Kurdish



rights advocate Leyla Zana, former Kurdish MP in Turkey Zana spent a decade behind bars (between 1994 and 2004) in Turkey for speaking Kurdish in the Turkish Parliament after taking her parliamentary oath. She was the first Kurdish woman to be elected to Turkey's parliament. Photo: AP

against her. In 2009 the Constitutional Court banned the BDP's predecessor, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), and the party's founders, including Zana, from participating in politics for five years.

The BDP was cool to Zana's remarks, with party co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş saying it was naïve to hope the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) would be able to solve the Kurdish issue. He later said it was pointless to expect an intraparty argument with the BDP, praising Zana as "invaluable."

Zana's meeting with Erdoğan has

nevertheless raised eyebrows within the BDP. Demirtaş said the prospective meeting was not with party consent, while one anonymous party senior said, "She had said 'Weapons are insurance for Kurds' [in January], and now she sings Erdoğan's praises, what has changed within a couple of months?"

Alluding to Zana's remarks, Erdoğan speculated that there could be a breakup within the BDP, but the party played down Erdoğan's speculation as "wishful thinking." ●



La première reine de beauté du Kurdistan irakien élue dans la tradition

Erbil (Irak), 29 juin 2012 (AFP)

PAS DE BIKINI ni de cohue médiatique: la toute première reine de beauté du Kurdistan irakien a été élue lors d'une cérémonie respectueuse des traditions, durant laquelle les candidates ont fait valoir leur atours dans des robes aux manches longues et des tenues de sport.

Douze femmes ont participé au concours organisé jeudi soir à Erbil, chef lieu de la région autonome irakienne du Kurdistan, sous le regard de diplomates étrangers, de chanteurs, d'acteurs et de responsables locaux.

Photographes et journalistes ont été autorisés à assister aux discours des organisateurs libanais et de responsables du tourisme au Kurdistan dans l'hôtel où s'est déroulée la cérémonie.

Mais après un spectacle de danse et de musique traditionnelles kurdes, il a été demandé aux médias d'attendre à la réception de l'hôtel jusqu'à ce que le concours soit terminé, les droits de diffusion ayant été vendus à un média.

Shene Aziz Ako, une jeune femme de 18 ans originaire de Souleimaniyeh, a été élue Miss Kurdistan.

"Nous avons organisé ce festival de manière à ce qu'il convienne aux traditions et aux coutumes kurdes. Vous ne verrez pas de maillots de bain mais des tenues sportives et des robes de soirée décentes, ce qui n'amoindrit pas pour autant la beauté des filles," a déclaré aux journalistes Roy Shalala, un responsable de la société organisatrice.



La gagnante doit être kurde irakienne et pourra travailler pendant un an pour la cause de son choix.

Il n'y avait plus eu de concours de beauté en Irak depuis plusieurs décennies. A l'époque de la monarchie, renversée en 1958, ils étaient organisés par des associations locales, en particulier dans le sud de l'Irak et la cité portuaire de Bassora.

Le Kurdistan, bien plus sûr que le reste de l'Irak, est une région conservatrice où les droits des femmes demeurent limités.○

Le régime syrien, de plus en plus menacé, décrète la « guerre totale »

Les défections s'amplifient, alors que les signes d'affaiblissement du clan Assad se multiplient

Mardi 26 juin, pendant qu'il prononçait le discours d'investiture du nouveau gouvernement, Bachar Al-Assad pouvait entendre le bruit des tirs échangés entre les insurgés et les unités de la garde présidentielle dans les environs de Damas. Devant les ministres au grand complet, le président syrien a déclaré : « Nous vivons une véritable situation de guerre (...) Toutes nos politiques et tous les secteurs doivent être mis au service de la victoire. » Un message adressé, entre autres, à ceux qui, dans la communauté alaouite dont est issue la famille Assad, au pouvoir depuis 1970, reprochent à l'actuel président son incapacité à venir à bout du soulèvement armé et commencent à craindre pour leur avenir.

La guerre en question, les Damasçènes en ont eu une nouvelle confirmation, mercredi matin, en découvrant que la chaîne d'information officielle Al-Ikhbariya avait été attaquée, dans des circonstances qui restent mystérieuses, par un commando qui a fait sauter les locaux et tué sept personnes, trois journalistes et quatre gardiens, selon l'agence officielle de presse SANA. Le même jour, les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) ont attaqué un aéroport militaire près d'Alep. Trois jours après le départ d'une dizaine d'officiers de haut rang pour la Turquie, la chaîne Al-Jazira annonçait la désertion du directeur de l'école de l'armée de l'air. D'après l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), un hélicoptère de combat a été abattu par les insurgés.

Ultime humiliation pour le régime, Burhan Ghalioun, l'ex-président du Conseil national syrien (CNS), principal rassemblement d'opposition, a effectué un séjour clandestin de quarante-huit heures dans le nord de la Syrie. Selon de hauts gradés ayant quitté le pays récemment, l'armée ne contrôle

que 40% du territoire.

« Depuis deux à trois semaines, estime le politologue Joseph Bahout, il est clair que la terreur a changé de camp. Par endroits, ce sont les unités d'élite du régime, comme la garde républicaine à Damas, qui sont assiégées et bombardées dans leurs casernes toutes les nuits. » La dégradation accélérée de la situation pousse le régime à jouer son va-tout en décrétant une guerre totale qu'il préfé-

rait nier jusque-là, se contentant de parler de campagne terroriste téléguidée depuis l'étranger.

« Lorsque Bachar Al-Assad demande aux ministres de remporter la guerre, il ne fait qu'entériner un état de fait, explique une source bien informée en Syrie. Surtout, il adresse un message à tous ceux qui seraient tentés de se sauver avant qu'il ne soit trop tard : si vous ne combattez pas avec nous, vous serez considérés comme des traîtres et des ennemis. »

« Depuis deux à trois semaines, il est clair que la terreur a changé de camp »

Joseph Bahout
politologue

Les rumeurs sur de possibles défections de haut niveau vont en effet bon train. A Damas, on évoque même la multiplication de règlements de comptes entre services de renseignement concurrents : « C'est un régime fondé sur l'instabilité et la méfiance de tous envers tous. Quand la tête de l'Etat s'écroule, chaque service, chaque échelon se met à agir pour son compte de manière anarchique. » Plusieurs officiers de renseignement prendraient ainsi des gages

pour l'avenir auprès des insurgés, tandis que d'autres puniraient ceux suspectés de trahison dans l'appareil d'Etat.

Le départ, le 21 juin, d'un pilote, Hassan Mehri Hamadeh, avec son Mig 21 pour la Jordanie voisine, où il s'est vu immédiatement accorder l'asile politique, a été un électrochoc. Cette déconvenue est d'ailleurs l'une des explications de la décision d'abattre, le 22 juin, un avion de l'armée de l'air turque entré quelques minutes dans l'espace aérien syrien.

L'armée de l'air, le corps d'origine d'Hafez Al-Assad, le père de l'actuel président, a toujours été le corps le plus choyé du régime et les services de renseignement de l'armée de l'air, la plus puissante des agences de moukhabarat, ont été créés pour surveiller les pilotes, souvent d'origine sunnite. Si le régime ne peut pas utiliser son aviation, à l'exception des hélicoptères de combat servis majoritairement par des officiers alaouites, il ne dispose plus d'un avantage décisif dans un conflit asymétrique où il ne parvient plus à tenir et à occuper le terrain face à une guérilla fondue dans la population et de mieux en mieux équipée.

La Commission d'enquête internationale indépendante missionnée par le Conseil des droits de l'homme de l'ONU a déclaré mercredi que, « dans certaines

régions, les combats ont les caractéristiques d'un conflit armé non international ».

Incapable de réoccuper la ville rebelle d'Homs malgré des offensives aussi violentes que répétées, l'armée a été contrainte, la semaine dernière, de se retirer de Deir ez-Zor, dans l'est de la Syrie. « Il y a peu, l'armée tenait la ville le jour et se faisait tirer dessus la nuit, explique une source syrienne. Mais elle a été contrainte de se retirer. Désormais, elle assiège Deir ez-Zor, qu'elle bombarde à l'arme lourde. » Plusieurs témoignages, impossibles à corroborer, indiquent que l'on ne peut ni entrer ni sortir de la ville. Le CNS dénonce un « génocide » ayant fait « des centaines de morts et de blessés ».

Pendant que le conflit armé évolue à toute allure, la communauté internationale reste paralysée. Alors que son plan de sortie de crise est au point mort, le médiateur Kofi Annan a annoncé une réunion, samedi à Genève, rassemblant les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité (Etats-Unis, Russie, Chine, France et Grande Bretagne), la Turquie, l'Union européenne et la Ligue arabe, représentée par le Qatar, le Koweït et l'Irak. En revanche, l'Iran, proche allié de Damas, n'a pas été invité, alors que Moscou et M. Annan souhaitaient sa participation. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD



Les locaux de la chaîne d'information officielle Al-Ikhbariya, à Damas. Son attaque a fait sept victimes. AFP

Syrie : le sort d'Assad débattu à Genève

Le médiateur de l'ONU, Kofi Annan, réunit « un groupe d'action » pour préparer la transition à Damas.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Bachar el-Assad peut-il rester à son poste de président durant une phase de transition politique en Syrie ? Ses alliés russes soutiennent que oui. Les Occidentaux et les rebelles, eux, s'y opposent catégoriquement. Ce différend a sérieusement perturbé les préparatifs de la rencontre voulue et confirmée par Kofi Annan ce samedi à Genève autour des ministres des Affaires étrangères des pays du « groupe d'action » impliqués dans le règlement de la crise. Une réunion préparatoire d'experts vendredi a échoué à surmonter les différences.

La veille, le médiateur international avait fait parvenir aux ministres un document résumant « les principes et directives d'une transition menée par les Syriens ». Sa pierre angulaire est la mise en place d'un « gouvernement d'union nationale », exerçant de « véritables pouvoirs exécutifs » et pouvant inclure « des membres du gouvernement actuel, de l'opposition et d'autres groupes ». En seraient écartés, en revanche, ceux dont la présence « pourrait nuire à la crédibilité de la transition et mettre en danger la stabilité et la réconciliation ».

Pour Paris, Washington et certaines capitales arabes, cette clause implique un départ d'Assad dès le début de la transition, et il leur semblait entendu que Moscou soutenait cette idée. Mais, souligne un proche d'Annan, « les Russes ont changé de position en affirmant que c'était aux Syriens eux-mêmes de décider des résultats d'un dialogue national et du sort d'Assad ».

Sous-entendu lors d'une élection présidentielle dont la date reste à fixer. D'où les tractations engagées vendredi pour éviter un échec à Genève. « Pas question qu'une solution soit imposée de l'extérieur », a rappelé Moscou, après un entretien téléphonique entre Kofi Annan et Sergueï Lavrov. Et le chef de la diplomatie russe d'accuser les Occidentaux d'avoir fait fuiter dans la presse de fausses informations sur l'acceptation russe du document Annan. Puis, après un entretien dans la soirée avec Hillary Clinton, Lavrov évoquait de « très bonnes chances » de progresser samedi. « J'ai senti une évolution dans la position de Hillary Clinton. Il n'y avait pas d'ultimatum,



Les négociateurs de Genève s'opposent sur la participation de Bachar el-Assad (ici mardi à Damas) au gouvernement de transition.

pas un mot sur le fait que le document en discussion à Genève était intouchable. »

Un premier ministre sunnite

« Les Russes sont d'accord sur un gouvernement d'union nationale, précise le proche d'Annan, mais ils demandent que Bachar reste au pouvoir avec des garanties internationales pour lui et sa famille jusqu'à l'échéance de son mandat en 2014. » Ce qui est inacceptable pour les autres pays invités à Genève. Une divergence de fond également au centre de la rencontre, vendredi soir à Saint-Petersbourg en Russie, entre la secrétaire d'État américaine, Hillary Clinton, et Sergueï Lavrov.

Pour Mme Clinton, les discussions de Genève doivent se focaliser sur les modalités de la transition. L'équipe de Kofi Annan l'a conçue sur le modèle irakien, avec un président aux pouvoirs réduits, issu des minorités (alaoïte ou chrétienne par exemple), et un premier ministre

membre de la majorité sunnite de la population – celle-là même qui fournit les gros bataillons à l'opposition à Assad – et qui jouirait de la réalité du pouvoir. « On recherche un profil d'expert économique pas mouillé avec le régime », souligne-t-on à Genève. Parmi les noms avancés, celui de Haytham Jezaïri, un homme d'affaires établi à Londres.

Compte tenu des divergences persistantes, le pessimisme prévalait avant cette rencontre cruciale. Alors qu'à la frontière turque le régime syrien amasse des troupes et que, sur le terrain, la violence continue (200 morts depuis jeudi), le Conseil national syrien, principal groupe de l'opposition, rappelle son hostilité à toute transition avec Assad. « On espère que ses parrains du Qatar lui mettront la pression », dit-on dans l'entourage d'Annan. Quant aux Russes, « ils ne céderont du terrain qu'en échange du désarmement des opposants à Assad », veut croire un ténor de l'opposition, proche de Moscou. ■

DECLASSIFIED
AUTHORITY: NND009029
DATE: 7/27/00 (3)

MEMORANDUM

CLASSIFIED BY FRANK WISNER
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED AT TWO-
YEAR INTERVALS AND DECLASSIFIED ON
DECEMBER 31, -----

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SECRET

PARTICIPANTS: Sa'dun Hammadi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq
Falih Mahdi 'Ammash, Iraq Amb. to France
_____, Aide
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
Isa Sabbagh, PAO, Amembassy Jidda
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff *PWR*

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, December 17, 1975
12:20 - 1:18 p.m.

PLACE: Iraqi Ambassador's Residence
Rue d'Andigne
Paris XVI

Kissinger: Our two countries have not had much contact with each other in recent years, and I wanted to take this opportunity to establish contact. I know we won't solve all our problems in one meeting. It will take at least two. [Laughter] I thought a brief exchange of views would be helpful and I appreciate your courtesy in receiving me.

Hammadi: I am glad to see you, Your Excellency. We haven't had contacts, for reasons that you know and we know. It is always useful to exchange views.

Kissinger: Our basic attitude is that we do not think there is a basic clash of national interests between Iraq and the United States. For a variety of reasons, Iraq and the United States have been on opposing sides. But we have managed to normalize relations with most of the other Arabs. On purely national grounds, we see no overwhelming obstacles on our side. Maybe you have a different view.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

CLASSIFIED BY Henry A. Kissinger
EXEMPT FROM GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
EXEMPTION CODE: 25X(1), (7)
DATE OF REVIEW: _____
DATE OF DECLASSIFICATION: Imp. to det.

SECRET/NODE

DECLASSIFIED

NND009029

2

Hammadi: We of course have different views, and I will tell you why. Iraq is part of the Arab world. We believe the United States has been the major factor in building up Israel to what it is today.

Kissinger: True.

Hammadi: It was created in 1948 and could not have lived up to this day without the United States.

Kissinger: The Soviet Union was active then too.

Hammadi: True. That is why there were some strained relations with the Soviet Union. Our good relations with the Soviet Union are only more recent. The Communists were not popular with the masses then.

But the difference is you believe Israel is there to stay. We believe Israel was established by force and is a clear-cut case of colonialism. Israel was established on part of our homeland. You don't believe that.

But that is not the whole story. Israel is now a direct threat to Iraq's national security.

Kissinger: How to Iraq?

Hammadi: Israel has built up to a military power that can threaten Iraq, especially with the recent news that we read of the US supplying sophisticated weapons. So it is not only the Arab world that is threatened, and Iraq being part of the Arab world, but Iraq itself. We think the US is building up Israel to have the upper hand in the area.

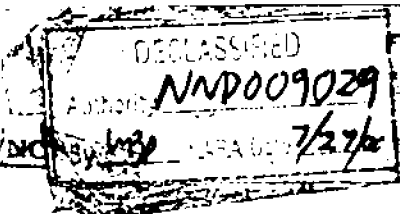
Even Lebanon -- they say it affects Israel's security. A strong, powerful nuclear Israel with the upper hand in the area. Whatever happens in the Arab world is interpreted as a threat to Israel. Even a change of government in Iraq would be interpreted that way.

Kissinger: My impression is if you change your government in Iraq, they won't object. [Laughter] I understand your problem.

Hammadi: This is my painting of the picture now -- up to 1980. You say the United States is bringing all its weight to bring about a settlement. But this is a settlement, not peace. A new wave of troubles and clashes will start, because Israel is not a state to stay within what they are. Because if there is an opportunity, they will expand. The record shows it. And they are supported by the biggest power in the area. What the United States is doing is not to create peace but to create a situation dominated by Israel, which will create a new wave of clashes.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NO



3

Kissinger: I understand what you are saying. When I say we are willing to improve relations with Iraq, we can live without it. But it is our policy to move toward better relations.

I think, when we look at history, that when Israel was created in 1948, I don't think anyone understood it. It originated in American domestic politics. It was far away and little understood. So it was not an American design to get a bastion of imperialism in the area. It was much less complicated. And I would say that until 1973 the Jewish community had enormous influence. It is only in the last two years, as a result of the policy we are pursuing, that it has changed.

We don't need Israel for influence in the Arab world. On the contrary, Israel does us more harm than good in the Arab world. You yourself said your objection to us is Israel. Except maybe that we are capitalists.

We can't negotiate about the existence of Israel but we can reduce its size to historical proportions.

I don't agree Israel is a permanent threat. How can a nation of three million be a permanent threat? They have a technical advantage now. But it is inconceivable that peoples with wealth and skill and the tradition of the Arabs won't develop the capacity that is needed. So I think in ten to fifteen years Israel will be like Lebanon -- struggling for existence, with no influence in the Arab world.

You mentioned new weapons. But they will not be delivered in the foreseeable future. All we agreed to is to study it, and we agreed to no deliveries out of current stocks. So many of these things won't be produced until 1980, and we have not agreed to deliver them then.

Our policy is to move our policy towards peace and to improve relations with the Arab world. Iraq is not a negotiator, but I think the policy of Egypt and Syria to improve relations with us helps us to bring pressure for a settlement.

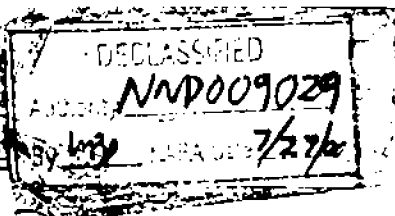
The Israelis like you better than Sadat, because they like to put it in terms of a US-Soviet problem. We don't want you to have unfriendly relations with the Soviet Union; we don't interfere in your relations with the Soviet Union. But basically, the Israelis prefer radical Arabs.

If the issue is the existence of Israel, we can't cooperate. But if the issue is more normal borders, we can cooperate.

We have moved toward normalization with others -- except Libya. South Yemen we will move towards.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NOI



4

Hammadi: We are on the other side of the fence. We have the right to ask many questions.

Kissinger: Please.

Hammadi: Given the record, what can make us believe the United States won't continue the policy of the last twenty years of giving unlimited support.
Kissinger: It depends on what you mean by unlimited support. One important change in America...

Sabbagh was with me when I saw Faisal for the first time. I told him it would take a few years; we would have to move slowly. I have told all the Arabs this. It has now reached the point in America where attitudes have changed. When I testify to Congressional committees, I face increasingly hostile questions about Israel. No one is in favor of Israel's destruction -- I won't mislead you -- nor am I.

But the support in the 1960's was \$200-300 million. Now it is \$2-3 billion. That is impossible to sustain. We can't even get it for New York. It is just a matter of time before there is a change -- two to three years. After a settlement, Israel will be a small friendly country with no unlimited drawing right. It will be affected by our new electoral law, strangely enough. So the influence of some who financed the elections before isn't so great. This has not been so noticed. It will take a few years before it is fully understood.

So I think the balance in America is shifting. If the Arabs -- if I can be frank -- don't do anything stupid. If there is a crisis tied to the Soviet Union, groups in America could make it an anti-Communist crusade.

Hammadi: So you think the US policy after a settlement wouldn't be the same?

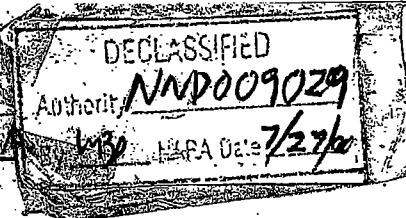
Kissinger: We want the survival of Israel, but not dominating the area. No one can conquer the Arab world. Even if they take Damascus, Cairo and Amman, you will be there, and Libya will be there. So if Israel wants to survive as a state like Lebanon -- as a small state -- we can support them.

Hammadi: What is the Israeli thinking?

Kissinger: First, they want to get rid of me. Because I made them go back. Second, in 1976 they want to provoke the Arabs -- in Lebanon, in Syria -- because they think if there is war they can win and create great

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET



5

turmoil. Third, they want to pass legislation in America to antagonize as many Arabs as possible. So we get the anti-boycott, anti-discrimination, anti-arms sales legislation. They hope the Arabs will go back to a situation like 1967-1973, when the Syrians and Egyptians adopt an anti-American line. So they can say they are the only American friend in the Middle East. What they want is what you predict -- that they be the only friend. We want other friends, to reduce that argument.

Aide: Your Excellency, do you think a settlement would come through the Palestinians in the area? How do you read it? Is it in your power to create such a thing?

Kissinger: Not in 1976. I have to be perfectly frank with you. I think the Palestinian identity has to be recognized in some form. But we need the thoughtful cooperation of the Arabs. It will take a year or a year and a half to do it, and will be a tremendous fight. An evolution is already taking place.

Aide: You think it will be part of a solution?

Kissinger: It has to be. No solution is possible without it. But the domestic situation is becoming favorable. More and more questions are being asked in Congress favorable to the Palestinians.

Hammadi: Do you think a Palestinian state is possible?

Kissinger: We don't exclude it as a matter of principle. You can't do it now.

Hammadi: What about the Palestinians who are now refugees? The Palestine area is now crowded -- Gaza and the West Bank.

Kissinger: They should have a choice, either to stay where they are or go to a Palestinian state.

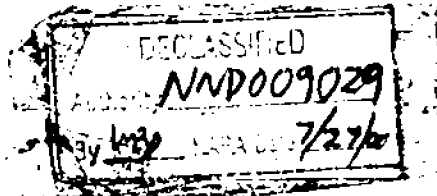
Hammadi: You think some in, say, the Galilee area might choose to leave Israel and join the new Palestinian state?

Kissinger: In Galilee?

Hammadi: Arab Israelis.

Kissinger: I have told friends that peace isn't a final end. Wars begin elsewhere between countries that are at peace. Only in the Middle East do wars begin between countries that are at war.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS



SECRET / NODIS / XGDS

6

But we support the existence of Israel. We draw the line at the destruction of Israel.

Aide: The Palestinians already put aside this idea. This is my personal view. Because the Israelis are trying to buy land in the Galilee area and there is resistance. The Communist Party in the area is using it in the municipal elections. Is this because the Israelis are looking to the creation of a Palestinian state and want to buy this land?

Kissinger: It could be in their minds. I am not familiar with it.

Aide: This is being used by the Communist Party in the area. The Israelis know you Americans are behind the idea of a Palestinian state.

Kissinger: We have to be careful and move gradually. The Israeli press accuses me. I have said we can't move to the Palestinians until they accept the existence of the State of Israel and Security Council Resolution 242. I have never excluded the recognition of the PLO; I have always tied it to recognition of Israel and 242. The implication is we will do something if they do recognize Israel and 242.

Aide: Kadduni says: "How can we recognize Israel if they don't recognize the PLO?"

Kissinger: With all respect, what Israel does is less important than what the United States does.

Hammadi: Your Excellency, your and our points of view are different. You are for the existence of Israel; we are not. So on this point I don't think we can agree.

Maybe we can talk of other aspects.

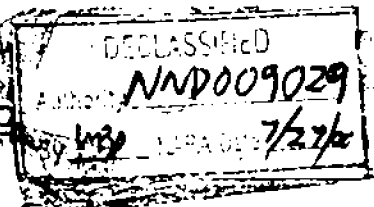
We are not against improving relations with any state, even states with whom we have basic differences.

We read in the newspapers the United States was providing weapons to the Kurdish movement in the north of Iraq. Our attitude is not based on that; we have a reason to believe the US was not out of this. What is your view?

Kissinger: When we thought you were a Soviet satellite, we were not opposed to what Iran was doing in the Kurdish area. Now that Iran and you have resolved it, we have no reason to do any such thing. I can tell you we will engage in no such activity against Iraq's territorial integrity, and are not.

SECRET / NODIS / XGDS

SECRET/NO



7

Hammadi: This is a result of that agreement? That you think we are not satellites?

Kissinger: We have a more sophisticated understanding now. We think you are a friend of the Soviet Union but you act on your own principles.

Hammadi: Next year, if we sign an economic agreement with the Soviet Union, will you go back to the other view?

Kissinger: I wouldn't be here if we were not willing to have a new relationship with Iraq. If you have an economic relationship with the Soviet Union, that is your business. We don't interfere. It is our view that you are pursuing your own policies. We don't like what you are doing on your own. [Laughter]

We are moving towards more complex relations with the Arabs. Our policy now we don't think is inconsistent with the integrity and the dignity of Iraq.

Hammadi: We have different concepts. We have relations with the Soviet Union; we import arms from the Soviet Union. That led the United States to intervene and encourage a movement that would cut our country to pieces.

Kissinger: That goes too far. We were not the principal country involved there.

Hammadi: But the United States contributed arms in a way.

Kissinger: In a way.

Hammadi: And the Kurds wanted to cut Iraq to pieces.

Kissinger: There is no purpose discussing the past. I can only tell you what our intentions are. I understand what your concerns and suspicions are. We can wait. We need not draw any practical conclusions from this meeting.

Hammadi: Our concern is, has the United States really changed its position? What would insure that this would not be repeated in the future? Any time any country exercises its sovereign right, the United States gets involved in an activity that goes to heart of its integrity?

Kissinger: Take Syria. Syria gets all its arms from the Soviet Union. The Syrians will confirm we have never interfered in their affairs and never

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/SEN

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: NND009029

By: [signature] DATE: 7/27/00

8

interfered in their military relationship with the Soviet Union. We have made diplomatic attempts to influence their policy, which is normal. So with more mature relations with the Arabs, that is excluded.

Hammadi: What about Lebanon?

Kissinger: We have stayed out of Lebanon. We have done nothing in Lebanon. My view is that the Moslem weight will have to increase. We have had many talks with the Syrians and the Saudis but we have not engaged in any intelligence activities. That I can tell you. I mean, we collect information but not arms.

Hammadi: The United States is not in favor of dividing the country?

Kissinger: We are opposed.

Hammadi: The United States is not involved but would oppose.

Kissinger: We have not been asked, but if we were, we would oppose. I have made repeated public statements in favor of the integrity of Lebanon.

Hammadi: I am glad to hear it because we in Iraq are very sensitive to territorial integrity. Why are you opposed?

Kissinger: Because we believe the basis for peace in the Middle East is the integrity of the States in the area. Then you would have two more fragments. A Christian state would have to find outside support and a Moslem state would have to find outside support. It would add instability. You must know we are for the unity of Lebanon.

Hammadi: We were concerned about Israeli intervention.

Kissinger: We have strongly warned Israel about it. It would only gain them another few 100,000 Arabs and make a settlement impossible.

Hammadi: Is anyone internationally favoring a split?

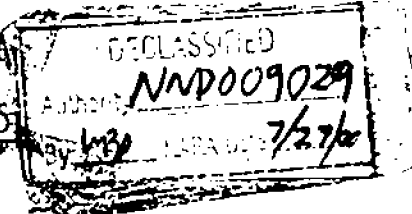
Kissinger: No one I can see.

Hammadi: None of the big powers?

Kissinger: The Europeans like to play without risk. In the Middle East you can't play without risk. I tell you flatly, we won't support it.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NOB



9

We are prepared to cooperate to support the unity of Lebanon. We are only afraid that if we become active, the Soviet Union will become active. We have talked to Syria and Saudi Arabia and Egypt and Algeria.

Hammadi: I would like to sum it up -- our concern in our bilateral relations. We differentiate between political and other kinds of relations. A few years ago we lumped them all together. Economically, technically, Iraq is not closed to the United States. There is no objection to developing relations with the United States on the economic and cultural level. Only on the basis of noninterference in internal affairs. There are some U.S. companies in Iraq and they are assured they are treated fairly.

On the political level, we broke relations for a reason and we think the reason stands.

Kissinger: Leaving aside diplomatic relations -- and you will want to think about it -- if we want to exchange views, we could send somewhat more senior people to the Interest Sections in each other's capital.

Hammadi: But the higher the level of representatives, the closer we are getting to diplomatic relations.

Kissinger: But how do we do it? Through the UN mission? Or your people in Washington?

Hammadi: We can do it on a case-by-case basis.

Kissinger: All right. When you come to New York, we can meet. We can do it on a case-by-case basis.

You will see: Our attitude is not unsympathetic to Iraq. Don't believe; watch it.

Hammadi: We are a small state. We have to be more careful.

Kissinger: Things will evolve. We can stay in touch through Washington or New York.

Hammadi: Finally, I would like to say this Kurdish problem is of vital importance to us.

Kissinger: I can assure you. There will be no concern. One can do nothing about the past.

Hammadi: Not always.

[The Foreign Minister escorted Secretary Kissinger and his party to the door.]