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SYRIA: THE KURDS ARE LIBERATING THEIR REGIONS

At the beginning of July the Syrian opposition rejected the UN peace plan proposing a "*political transition*" and a provisional government so as to ends the acts of violence. This plan had been put forward by Kofi Annan and accepted by the United Nations some days earlier, during an international conference at Geneva. However, the revolting Syrians consider that negotiating with Bashar al-Assad or any member of his "*murderous*" government would be just a waste of time, especially as Russia insisted that any future agreement should not totally dismiss the present Syrian President from office

while the United States considered that it would not let Bashar el-Assad play any part in Syria's political future. The Americans finally gave way faced with Russia's stubbornness.

For his part, Bashar al-Assad has constantly repeated that it was his duty to eliminate "*terrorism*" and rejects any foreign interference in Syrian affairs.

Meanwhile, in Cairo, Nabil al-Arabi, the leader of the Arab League, called on the Syrian opposition, meeting in the Egyptian capital, to unite "*most urgently*", setting aside their differences of opinion that, so far, had prevented them from

putting forward a creditable political organisation capable of replacing the Baath in office without plunging Syria into insurrectional chaos or civil war. Nabil al-Arabi stated, before the 250 Syrians meeting there, that this conference was an opportunity that should not, in any circumstances, be lost by factional quarrels (AFP).

Nasser el-Kidwa, representing the United Nations, also insisted on the fact that unity of the Syrians opposed to the Baath was not "*an option but a necessity*".

The differences and the multitude of political platforms are, in fact, a reflection of the very het-

erogeneous character of Syria, which is split up into a mosaic of ethnic, religious and political groupings — unlike Egypt, Tunisia and even Libya, whose populations are much more homogeneous. Moreover, the contacts between the insurgents in Syria and the dissidents in exile are very difficult and there is often little co-ordination between on the spot military action in Syria and external initiatives. Consequently the principal fighting force in the field was not represented in Cairo.

As for the Kurds, they also seem divided over certain political choices. Thus on 4 July, Saleh Saleh Mohammad, leader of the Democratic Union Party (the Syria affiliate of the PKK) considered, contrary to the rest of the opposition, both Kurdish and Arab, that Kofi Annan's plan of a transition government supported "the people's wishes, since this set up would include all the social circles in Syria" and that his party, consequently, supported the decisions taken in Geneva:

"We Kurds will also take part in this government, since the Kurdish opposition has already taken it place within the general opposition in Syria".

However the PYD was alone amongst the Kurds in wishing to spare the Syrian government as long as possible, without clearly choosing between the Ba'ath and the Free Syrian Army. From the start of the revolt it has tried to set up more or less autonomous areas in towns it controlled and where it imposed either neutrality of a non-aggressive line between the Kurds and the government's armed forces.

Other Kurdish parties are considering whether to ally themselves more clearly with the Arab opposition while others

want to lay down non-negotiable conditions for this such as recognition of a Kurdish entity in the future Syrian constitution. This is just the issue that proved a stumbling block to any project of unity in Cairo, since a Kurdish group withdrew when faced with the refusal of the Arab opposition to consider such a Kurdish entity in Syria. Thus, one of the members of the National Kurdish Council in Syria, Morshid Mashouk, declared that he would not return to this conference and that this decision was irrevocable: *"We are a people, we have one language, one religion and everything that defines a people"*.

The final statement of the Cairo Conference reaffirmed that the fall of Bashar al-Assad was the necessary pre-requisite for any political solution to the Syrian Crisis. *"Civil peace and national unity"* are objectives on which the opponents were able to agree (once the Kurdish parties had left!). Apart from that, the opposition leadership seemed to resist any attempt at unification — indeed they were hesitant about letting any single leadership control all their forces. Thus the proposal for a committee, which would consolidate all the actions of dissident parties, was rejected by the principal political body, the Syrian National Council. This was criticised by others, who saw this as a refusal by the SNC both to give up its leadership and to act as the coordinator itself.

The Cairo Conference expressed the wish for a *"republican, democratic"* Syria and for a *"civil and plural system"*. The dissolution of the Ba'ath Party is envisaged but its former members would not be excluded from all political participation so long as *"they do not have blood on their hands"*.

This last point can be explained

by the fact that, as in Iraq in Saddam's era, many members of the Baath had joined more from opportunism or to secure jobs than out of conviction and that the American error in 2003 of driving all Iraqi "Baathists" out of any public office or the army was a powerful factor in increasing the ranks of the insurgents.

While the general Syrian opposition is having difficulty in uniting, an important step, on the contrary, was taken by the Kurds on 12 July when the two principal blocks of Kurdish opponents, the PYD and the Kurdish National Council of Syria, who had hitherto adopted antagonistic positions on the attitude to adopt regarding Baath, finally announced that they had reached an agreement. They decided to form a common front after final negotiations at Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. President Massud Barzani attended the meeting.

While the contents of the agreement have not been made public, the effects were soon apparent since, as of 20 July the Syrian Kurds announced that they had launched an operation to "liberate the Kurdish regions" and had already taken over the town of Kobane (in Aleppo governorate) stating that the government forces had withdrawn. Videos quickly circulated on Internet showing that some official buildings were flying the Kurdish flag. PKK flags were also visible and the picture of Ocalan was seen side by side with that of Massud Barzani (very popular in Syrian Kurdistan) in demonstrations that seem to confirm a common strategy of Syrian Kurds. They also show to what extent State borders are totally irrelevant when it is a matter of defining the various trends within the Kurdish national movement.

These actions, in any case, mark a turning point in the PYD's policy, which has hitherto tried to discourage the other Kurdish movements from joining the Arab revolts because of its Turkish sponsor. Thus the PYD leader announced the formation of "civil defence committees" that would administer the liberated areas, For his part Nuri Brimo, spokesman for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, stated to the daily paper Rudew that, on the strength of the Irbil agreement, the town of Kobane would be jointly administered by the PYD and the Kurdish National Council and that this was just the first step in the liberation of "Western Kurdistan".

An announcement from the Kurdish Party of Progress made the point that the Baath's authority was greatly reduced in the Kurdish regions as a whole and that some of them were now completely free of it.

It is hard to say how far this new agreement between these Kurdish organisations will last or hit snags, but it is certain that one of the most important factors cementing this alliance is the common determination of the Kurds not to let their towns be taken over by the the "Free Syrian Army" by themselves freeing them. Thus the PYD, the only armed group, has been for some months been preventing the FSA from entering Syrian Kurdistan and has again prevented its militia from entering Kobane by announcing its liberation. Moreover the other Kurdish parties support it in this.

Here too, the recent history of Iraqi Kurdistan, that freed itself from Saddam Hussein in 1991 and then joined the new Iraq of its own accord in 2003 on the strength of its now ten-year-old

autonomy and laying down its own conditions and, even today, refusing any presence of the Iraqi Army on its soil must have carried some weight in the choice of this strategy.

A few days after the liberation of Kobane, it was the turn of the towns of Efrin and Amude then of Dêrik to fall into Kurdish hands as well as certain neighbourhoods of the big city of Qamishlo.

It should be noted that, so far, the Kurds have been spared the violence suffered by the Arab towns and that these acts of "taking power" have visibly taken place without clashes between the Kurdish forces and the Syrian Army. It is true that the Baath forces and the paramilitary militia are foreign forces in the Kurdish regions and that, unlike the rest of Syria, there has not been any war between pro and anti-regime Kurds.

Indeed, each time a Kurdish town was "liberated" the Kurdish parties announced that a Syrian "withdrawal" or the surrender of militia without it being possible to know the situation on the spot, but never any shelling or street fighting. In any case, the Kurds on the spot do not seem to fear any reprisals from the regime and to distrust more the other Syrian rebels, who are backed by Turkey. Should one conclude that the Baath has decided of its own accord to withdraw from the Kurdish regions and concentrate their action of the Arab provinces so as to avoid fighting on several fronts, while putting off the "Kurdish question" to be dealt with later? This is the explanation put forward by Nuri Brimo, who points out that other regions had been emptied of troops. He even states that Damascus had advised the PYD of this withdrawal so that the Kurdish fighters only had

to occupy the abandoned areas, virtually without firing a shot. It is only at Qamishlo that clashes seem to have taken place between the Kurdish "People's Defence Union" and Baath militia.

It remains to be seen whether Damascus was caught unawares by the Irbil agreement or whether there the Alawis are anticipating the future collapse of this agreement and hope to win back both the lost Kurdish regions and its alliance with the PYD. Abdul Bassit Sayda, the SNC president, does not share the apparent confidence of the Kurds in the Baath's neutrality and fears a bloody thirsty return of the Syrian Army to Syrian Kurdistan once it has succeeded in crushing the revolt in the Arab towns.

The power sharing and balance between the Kurdish movements is fragile. The Kurdish National Council insists so often about the necessity of observing the terms of the Irbil agreement that its fear is evident that the PYD might not do so. However, it must be recalled that the Kurds have a horror of civil war ever since the one that nearly caused the collapse of the Iraqi Kurdistan in the 90s. Even though the rivalry between the PYD and the other Kurdish platforms has often been sharp and given rise to acts of violence, it has never gone so far as to degenerate into bloody conflicts. Having said this, only the PYD, so far has any armed forces, the other Kurdish factions being political movements. The new forces being trained in Iraqi Kurdistan may change this situation.

Moreover, the Syrian conflict issues regarding the Kurds in Syria is being exported to Iraq and is aggravating relations between Irbil and Baghdad,

since the Kurdish President supports the Syrian movement of revolt and is regarded by the Syrian National Council as a major representative and partner, on the same level as Turkey. Thus Abdul Bassit Sayda, the (Kurdish) president of the SNC has indicated that he is in contact with the Kurdistan regional Government regarding events in Syria and even secretly visited Irbil before the agreement. The Baghdad government, on the other hand, supports Syria (with the support of Iran) and seems

inclined to support the Damascus regime and balks at opening its borders to the floods of refugees.

Massud Barzani has been accused by political circles and papers close to the Iraqi Prime Minister of sending his own troops in to liberate Syrian Kurdistan, which he denies, though pointing out that Kurdish troops that had deserted the Syrian Army and sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan were being trained by the Peshmergas

to serve in the liberation forces.

This a "moral and financial" support has been given to the Syrian Kurds on condition that they agree on the common management of the towns taken over from the Baath. This has been admitted by Nuri Brimo, the Kurdistan Democratic Party's spokesman, thus confirming and strengthening, along with the Irbil agreement, Barzani's position as "godfather" or even arbiter of the Kurdish cause in the Middle East.

IRAQI KURDISTAN: A TURCO-KURDISH EXPORT AGREEMENT AROUSES BAGDAD'S IRE

Relations between the Baghdad central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government have further deteriorated since the announcement of an agreement between Irbil and Ankara regarding the export of Kurdish natural gas to Turkey that bypasses Baghdad's authorisation.

For years past the Iraqi central government has been struggling against any autonomous management of the Kurdish region's natural resources and its determination to make its own agreements without going through Baghdad. Thus the announcement of a gas pipeline between Turkey and Kurdistan, that would enable the latter to sell its gas directly to its Northern neighbour is a hard blow both to the Maliki government and to its relations with Ankara.

Speaking at the Forum on the Caspian gas question that was taking place in Istanbul in July, Ashti Hawrami, the Minister for Fuel and Power of the Kurdistan Regional government let it be understood that this agreement could take effect in about 18 months to two years — and

without needing Iraqi approval. *"Even if there is no consensus with Baghdad, we will continue to sell our natural gas and oil to Turkey. We plan to sell 10 billion cubic metres of gas to Turkey and, eventually to Europe"*.

Pointing to the disastrous neglect and economic state in which Iraq finds itself, compared with the development of Kurdistan, the Kurdish Minister added that if they depended on Baghdad to attract foreign investors, nothing would be possible.

On 8 July, an AFP despatch confirmed from official sources that the Kurdistan Regional Government had started to export oil produced in its territory without waiting for central government approval. For its part, the Telegraph stated that trucks transporting crude oil were crossing the Turkish border pending the construction of a pipeline planned for 2013, following an agreement between Irbil and Ankara.

While on a visit to Brazil, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan explained that Iraq, in recurring conflict with

the Kurds, had ceased to export fuel and oil derived products to Iraqi Kurdistan. *"They therefore asked us for fuel and we accepted"*.

From the Kurdish side, Seerwan Abubaqr, a KRG adviser to the Ministry of Natural Resources, confirmed that they had started exporting "limited quantities" of crude oil that would be refined in Turkey "and would return" to Kurdistan.

"If necessary, we would export oil to Iran" added Seerwan Abubaqr. *"We will continue to export oil until the central government supplies us with oil derived products. It is the central government that is pushing us into this"*.

The Iraqi Oil Minister denies these allegations while his predecessor, Hussein Al-Sharistani (who now heads all fuel and power questions in Iraq) repeats, through his spokesman Faisal Abdullah, that only the Oil Minister has the right to decide on exports.

Kurdish sources have reported that "only" four trucks a day, while the Fuel and Power Minister, Taner Yildiz, spoke of 5 to 10 trucks of crude a day on 13

July while hoping that this would shortly increase to between 100 and 200 trucks a day.

The Iraqi government spokesman, Ali Dabbagh, then directly addressed Turkey, ordering it to stop these "illegal" transfers of crude oil by the Kurds at the risk of damaging bilateral relations, particularly economic ones.

On 17 July, Hussein Sharistani's office reported a loss of 8 and a half billion dollars due to the freezing of deliveries of crude oil by the Kurds. In retaliation the Iraqi government threatened to freeze the 17% of its annual budget due to be allocated to the Kurdish region.

Turkey is not the only, or even the first, country to arouse the anger of the Iraqi government for having dared to sign contracts with the KRG without Baghdad's approval. The United States, through Exxon, and France, through Total, were attacked several months ago by Iraq.

The latter, having once again protested to the White House over

an agreement reached between Exxon and Irbil, led President Barack Obama once again to try an appease his Iraqi ally with sweet words about the Iraqi Constitution and its laws, without talking of any concrete measures or pressures on this American company.

This has not stopped the Iraqi Prime Minister's Office from declaring that, on the strength of this encouragement by the US government, it was going to take "all necessary measures for applying the law" and preventing foreign companies from dealing directly with the Kurds.

Exxon, for its part, has not made any comment, and indeed, the only retaliatory measures that Iraq can really carry out are to cancel the operating contracts under way with foreign companies that might contravene its policy of centralisation. Baghdad has not spared itself making such threats, whose effects do not seem to have impressed foreign investors. Thus Chevron, another American giant, has been banned from working in the non-Kurdish regions of Iraq for having

bought 80% of two operating fields in Iraqi Kurdistan on 19 July.

However, the sanction imposed on Chevron did not dissuade Total, which announced on 31 July the signing of an operating agreement in the Kurdish region: its 35% participation in two fields, Harir and Sageen, that it has bought from Marathon Oil.

The Kurds aim to supply, by 2015, 1 million barrels a day, and 2 million by 2019, according to Michael Howard, an advisor of the Minister of Natural resources Ashti Hawrami. Present production is about 300,000 barrels.

Agreements have been signed with about fifty foreign companies, including Norway's Statoil ASA (STL), Exxon Mobil Corp Chevron Corp, and Total SA (FP) to name the most important ones.

As for pipelines that the KRG is at present building following an agreement reached directly between the Kurds and the Turks, they should have a capacity of 200,000 barrels a day, according to an executive of Genel Energi.

TURKEY:

THE START OF A MASS TRIAL OF 205 PEOPLE ACCUSED OF "TERRORISM"

A mass trial began at the beginning of July with 205 people in the dock accused of links with terrorism and propaganda on behalf of a terrorist organisation, on the basis of their membership, whether real or suspected, of the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK) which Turkey considers an affiliate of the PKK".

Among those charged are a considerable number of intellectuals, journalists and academics as well as members of the Pro-Kurdish BDP party. Some of the accused cannot seriously be con-

sidered to have engaged in "terrorist actions" or even of membership of a Kurdish political organisation. They have been jailed because of the contents of their publications, covering such "sensitive" subjects as the Kurdish question or the Armenian genocide like Busra Ersanli, an academic and research worker or Ragip Zarakolu, a publisher who have long been targets of the Turkish legal system for the simple reason of their work, although undertaken completely legally.

The spectacular extent of this trial is, however, providing the

Kurds with an international platform for their linguistic and political demands. Thus many of those accused have demanded the right to speak in their mother tongue although any remarks made in Kurdish in a court is recorded as "having been expressed in an unknown language". This time, however, the Court's Chairman has recognised, in writing, that since the Kurdish language was used by one of the accused his remarks could not be understood — which at least means that recognition of the existence of the Kurdish language has been written into the archives of the

Caglayan High Court even if not, at present, mentioned in the Turkish Constitution.

On 3 July the accused Kudbettin Yazbaşı and Mümtaz Aydemir, members of the BDP party were greeted in Court with shouts of "Berxwedan jîyan" (Resistance is Life) and the Judge had to warn the public against any attempts at applause, boos or any other "extravagant behaviour".

When two of the accused, Kudbettin Yazbaşı and Mümtaz Aydemir, were asked to give their names and identities, they again did so in Kurdish and this time the Court President recognised that they had spoken in a language "other than Turkish". Mehmet Emin Aktar, who is head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, objected to the fact that a language spoken by 20 million people was not legally recognised by the Court and asked for translators for the accused. Far from granting this request, the Court authorities switched off the microphones as soon as any remarks were made in Kurdish.

Another lawyer, Meral Daniş Beştaş, challenged the Court's jurisdiction for trying members of the BDP, arguing that only the constitutional court had the right to try political parties. She thus demanded that 3 experts examine the BDP's political activities and decide whether there was a need for opening an enquiry. Should that be the case, the case

should be transferred to the High Court of Appeals. However, the Prosecutor, Ramazan Saban, rejected this demand as well as the right to plead in Kurdish.

The lawyers then withdrew from the Court in protest.

On 13 July, 16 of the accused were released after passing several months in detention. Amongst them was Busra Ersanli, who lectures at Marmara University and for whom the prosecution had called for a 15-year sentence for "membership of a terrorist organisation". This academic, who is a member of the BDP, had spent 8 months in jail awaiting her trial.

Three days later, on 16 July, 50 other accused, 46 of whom were lawyers, appeared charged with membership of the KCK. Seven of them face 22 and a half years jail for "having formed and led an armed organisation". The others face 15 years jail for being members of this organisation.

The defence had demanded the suspension of all proceedings against them and their immediate release, which the Court refused. The demands to plead in Kurdish as well as that of hearing Ocalan as a witness (in the case of Ocalan's lawyers, accused of transmitting the PKK leader's orders) were, unsurprisingly also rejected.

Although the Courtroom chosen

was the largest in this brand new Law Court, the lack of room was evident because of the great media coverage of this trial. In addition to the family and sympathisers of the accused, it was packed with journalists, foreign observers, and members of NGOs who were forbidden to take photos.

This time the accused did not proclaim their support for resistance but did reply present in Kurdish: "Ez li vi rim" when the court asked them for their names. Doğan Erbaş, a lawyer accused of acting as an intermediary between Ocalan and the PKK described their working conditions and how the Turkish State could be unaware, in this case of such facts.

The whole of the accusation is based on our meetings with Abdullah Ocalan. All these meetings, from the first to the latest, took place with the authorisation and under the surveillance of the State. All was predetermined by the law — there was no room for chance or initiative in these meetings. In such circumstances it would have been impossible to manage the "leadership committee" mentioned in the charge sheet.

Finally, after three days of hearings, only nine of the lawyers were released but they remained on probation. The hearings were postponed to 6 November 2012 and will take place at the Silivri Special Assize Court.

CULTURE: THE UBISOFT COMPANY DORCED TO BACKTRACK FACED WITH KURDISH ANGER

The Kurdistan Department for Foreign relations wrote a letter of protest to Ubisoft, a French firm that has become the world's 3rd largest publisher

of video games and so obliged it to retouch a graphic element in the next section of one of most famous video games "Splinter Cell".

The publisher of "Prince of

Persia", "Assassin's Creed", and "splinter Cell" is due to bring out a new episode of Tom Clancy's adventures in 2013: "Splinter Cell Blacklist" that begins with a terrorist group

preparing a series of attacks in the United States.

While looking at the trailer some Kurds were infuriated at seeing that the terrorist stronghold surrounded by American commandos was flying Kurdistan's historic flag, which is also that of the present Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Kurdistan Region's Foreign Minister, Falah Mustafa Bakir, even wrote a letter of protest to the Communication Department of Ubisoft (US).

Questioned about this the artistic Director of Ubisoft, in

Toronto, gave the following explanation: the scenes' graphics were inspired by present day villages in the rural Kurdistan mountains. *"The terrorists has driven out the villagers and used this township as a base, since its "natural camouflage" makes it an ideal secret training camp. If the terrorists have retained the Kurdish flag in a visible position, it is to preserve their 'camouflage'"* insisted Scott Lee, explaining that he had wanted to place side by side heavy weapons and military elements in a "civilian" décor.

This, however, did not convince the Kurds, who opened a

protest page in Facebook, which pointed out that *"being the largest nation without its own State did not necessarily make it a terrorist nation. One could otherwise think that its alliance with the USA in the war against Iraq in 2003 made it a rogue nation"*, recalled Falah Mustafa Bakir, in his letter.

The Director of the Communications department of Ubisoft, Michael Burk, has promised that the flag will be removed in the final version and that they had never intended to confuse people's minds by making the Kurdish flag a symbol of terrorism.

Kurdes

Les oubliés du « printemps arabe »

ANALYSE

2 JUILLET | PROCÈS À ISTANBUL DE 193 MILITANTS KURDES

Près de 35 millions de personnes forment le plus grand peuple sans Etat, écartelé entre la Turquie, l'Irak, l'Iran et la Syrie. Après la vague des révolutions au Moyen-Orient, les Kurdes de la région attendent, eux aussi, un réveil démocratique

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Istanbul, correspondance

En Turquie, on ne badine pas avec les symboles. Le réseau social Facebook a récemment adopté des règles de censure sur mesure pour le pays d'Atatürk. La publication d'une carte du Kurdistan ou l'apologie d'Abdullah Ocalan, leader emprisonné depuis 1999 du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), peuvent, par exemple, entraîner la suppression immédiate du compte d'un utilisateur. Cette crispation pourrait prêter à sourire si elle n'était pas le reflet d'une longue relation conflictuelle entre l'Etat turc et sa minorité kurde. Le PKK, d'obédience marxiste-léniniste, mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre l'Etat turc pour obtenir une autonomie politique ainsi que des droits culturels et linguistiques pour les Kurdes de Turquie. En près de trente ans, le conflit a fait plus de 45 000 morts et 1 million de personnes déplacées.

L'impasse est devenue criante à la lumière des « révolutions arabes ». Les Kurdes sont venus rappeler à la Turquie que, pour prétendre à un rôle de modèle démocratique dans la région, il lui fallait d'abord régler cette question interne.

Les armes sont jusqu'à présent la seule réponse. Les récents combats qui ont fait au moins 26 morts près de Daglica le 20 juin, à la frontière entre la Turquie et l'Irak, dont 8 soldats turcs et 18 rebelles du PKK, selon le décompte officiel, ont replongé la Turquie dans un cycle de violences immuable depuis trente ans : attentats et embuscades du PKK, raids de représailles de l'armée, funérailles des martyrs, révoltes, montée du natio-



Les monts Kandil, dans le nord de l'Irak, se situent dans la zone contrôlée par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Diyar, 22 ans, est venu d'Irak rejoindre la guérilla kurde.

JULIEN GOLUSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES

nalisme, arrestations... En fait, la colère n'est pas retombée depuis décembre 2011 et le drame d'Uludere, village frontalier désormais synonyme de massacre : une colonne de contrebandiers qui revenaient d'Irak y a été prise pour cible par les F-16 de l'armée turque, au moment de traverser la frontière. Bilan : 34 morts et une émotion

considérable dans le pays.

Officiellement, Ankara craignait une infiltration d'un groupe de « terroristes » du PKK. Mais l'image des corps de ces adolescents, enroulés dans des couvertures et alignés le long d'une route, ajoutée au silence du gouvernement, incapable de prononcer un mot d'excuse, a durablement dis-

crédité le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans sa volonté de sortir du cercle vicieux. Pour les Kurdes de Turquie, c'est un traumatisme de plus.

La perspective d'une solution durable à ce conflit avait pourtant été entrevue après l'arrivée au pouvoir, en 2005, de l'AKP, un parti islam-conservateur, et le lancement par M. Erdogan d'une politique d'« ouverture démocratique » en direction des Kurdes. Quelques gestes symboliques ont suivi : la création d'une chaîne de télévision d'Etat en langue kurde (TRT6), l'ouverture de départements de kurdologie dans des universités...

Mi-juin 2012, le gouvernement a aussi annoncé que la langue kurde serait proposée en cours optionnel

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à l'école publique. Cette détente a permis à des réfugiés politiques, comme le poète Kemal Burkay, en exil depuis trente et un ans, de rentrer au bercail.

Sur le plan politique et militaire, les progrès ont été beaucoup plus timides. Les représentants des services secrets (MIT), dont leur chef, Hakan Fidan, très proche du premier ministre, avaient tout de même entamé des négociations, en 2010, à Oslo, avec les chefs militaires du PKK.

Mais le cycle de la violence a vite repris le dessus. Le PKK a relancé attentats et embuscades. Abdullah Ocalan, son chef historique, est confiné en prison, sans qu'aucune visite lui soit autorisée, depuis de longs mois. L'armée bombarde quasiment chaque semaine les camps des rebelles situés dans le nord de l'Irak - c'est encore le cas depuis le 20 juin.

Surtout, les vagues d'arrestations menées dans tout le pays depuis avril 2009, dans le cadre de l'enquête sur le KCK (Union des communautés du Kurdistan), une structure civile de soutien au PKK, sorte d'administration fantôme indépendantiste, ont éteint le mouvement et attisé la colère.

Plusieurs milliers de personnes ont été arrêtées : six députés élus en 2011, une trentaine de maires, dont celui de la grande ville de Van, des fonctionnaires municipaux, des syndicalistes, des centaines d'étudiants, des dizaines de journalistes, les avocats d'Abdullah Ocalan... Mais aussi des intellectuels et des défenseurs des droits de l'homme jugés pro-Kurdes, tels que l'éditeur Ragıp Zarakolu et l'universitaire Büsra Ersanlı, deux figures du monde intellectuel. Le premier a été libéré après plusieurs mois de détention, la seconde, professeure de sciences politiques, reste sous les verrous. Les prisons débordent, des mutineries et des grèves de la faim politiques y sont déclenchées. L'industrie pénitentiaire tourne à plein régime. Une maison d'arrêt géante est en construction à Diyarbakir, la « capitale » des Kurdes de Turquie.

La déception est d'autant plus grande que le gouvernement islam-conservateur de l'AKP semblait « armé » pour rompre avec la traditionnelle politique d'assimilation des Kurdes. Le déni d'identité qui avait conduit l'Etat à élaborer des théories pseudo-scientifiques, présentant les Kurdes comme des « Turcs des montagnes », a fait long feu. Mais le gouvernement de M. Erdogan n'a pas renversé le dernier tabou : la reconnaissance d'une autonomie politique

Le PKK au cœur du jeu diplomatique régional

Assad pense qu'il va pouvoir m'utiliser, mais c'est moi qui l'utiliserai. » Ces paroles, rapportées à Istanbul par l'un de ses anciens compagnons de lutte, ont été prononcées par Abdullah Ocalan dans les années 1970, à Damas. « Apo », qui fonda le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en 1978, près de Diyarbakir, s'installa dès l'année suivante en Syrie. Pendant vingt ans, son organisation opéra sous la protection du régime baasiste, installant ses camps d'entraînement dans la plaine de la Bekaa, au Liban. Cette alliance prit fin en 1999. Sous la pression de la Turquie, qui n'hésita pas à menacer de réduire le débit du fleuve Euphrate pour faire entendre raison à son voisin syrien, Damas se résolut à expulser Ocalan et son état-major. Après une longue cavale et une traque digne d'un film d'espionnage, le chef du PKK fut finalement capturé à Nairobi, au Kenya, avec l'aide du Mossad israélien. Il est, depuis treize ans, détenu et isolé sur une île, Imrali, en pleine mer de Marmara.

La Syrie pourrait de nouveau offrir un refuge à la guérilla du PKK. La Turquie craint en effet que Bachar Al-Assad ne cherche à utiliser la rébellion kurde comme moyen de pression et qu'il tolère la présence de camps d'entraînement et de chefs politiques du mouvement sur son territoire. « Les forces de sécurité ont noté une augmentation du nombre de groupes de combattants du PKK entrant en Turquie par la Syrie », a mis en garde le ministre turc des affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoglu, en mars. De nombreux Syriens garnissent déjà les rangs du PKK, tel Bahoz Erdal, l'un de ses chefs militaires. Ankara est également persuadé que l'attaque contre ses soldats à Daglica, le 20 juin, à la frontière entre la Turquie et l'Irak, est à mettre en lien avec la détérioration de ses relations avec la Syrie.

Pour la rébellion, un repli dans le nord-est de la Syrie présenterait des avantages. La zone des

monts Kandil, dans le nord de l'Irak, qui abrite les dirigeants militaires et plusieurs milliers de combattants, est devenue dangereuse. La Turquie y envoie régulièrement ses avions pour bombarder les camps et les villages, quand ce ne sont pas des troupes qui franchissent la frontière. L'Irak a fait de même en 2011 et serait ainsi parvenu, selon certains rapports du renseignement turc, à capturer Murat Karayilan, principal commandant du PKK, avant de le remettre en liberté.

Le PKK se retrouve une nouvelle fois au cœur d'un jeu diplomatique régional complexe. Le mouvement fondé par Abdullah Ocalan s'appuie sur ses antennes régionales : le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD) en Syrie, le Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan (PJAK) en Iran, le Parti pour une solution démocratique au Kurdistan (PCDK) en Irak... Il maintient sur le sol irakien, avec le camp de réfugiés de Makhmour, 12 000 habitants, un véritable vivier de combattants...

Profitant du chaos en Syrie, la branche syrienne tente de mettre la main sur la région kurde et de s'y aménager une forme d'autonomie. Damas, mais aussi Téhéran, avec qui le PKK a conclu un cessez-le-feu, semblent prêts à fermer les yeux. Au contraire, pour le président de la « région autonome kurde » Massoud Barzani, qui a développé des liens économiques très forts avec la Turquie, devenue son meilleur allié dans la région, la présence du PKK sur son territoire est de plus en plus gênante. Le 21 juin, sur la chaîne d'Etat turc TRT, désormais diffusée à Erbil, M. Barzani a condamné les attaques du PKK et a appelé l'organisation à déposer les armes. « Ces attaques font souffrir les Kurdes », a-t-il déclaré. Les Etats-Unis, qui fournissent des renseignements à l'armée turque, et les pays européens se montrent plutôt coopératifs avec la Turquie. Le PKK figure sur la liste des mouvements terroristes de l'Union européenne. ■

GU.P.



En avril 2011, le Conseil électoral turc invalide la candidature de plusieurs représentants kurdes aux élections législatives. Le 19 avril, à Istanbul, en réaction, des manifestants agitent le portrait d'Ocalan, chef emprisonné du PKK. MUSTAFA OZER/AFP

pour les Kurdes afin de parvenir à une trêve. Les Kurdes attendent toujours le printemps.

En Irak, plus au sud, l'onde de choc du « printemps arabe » se fait davantage sentir. Il n'y a certes pas eu de révolution à Bagdad : la chute du dictateur Saddam Hussein avait déjà eu lieu, en 2003. Mais c'est dans la région kurde, dans le nord de l'Irak, que le mouvement a pris le plus d'ampleur. A Souleimaniyé, fief de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Jalal Talabani, des dizaines de manifestants ont planté leurs tentes sur une place rebaptisée « Tahrir », qu'ils ont occupée pendant plusieurs semaines en 2011. Les affrontements avec les forces de sécurité y ont fait au moins quatre morts. Ce mouvement, dit « du 17 février 2011 », entendait dénoncer le mode de gouvernance autocratique des vieux leaders kurdes, la

corruption endémique et l'absence de services publics. Un an plus tard, une nouvelle manifestation a été interdite. Le problème reste entier.

Car, vingt ans après avoir obtenu l'autonomie de facto, en 1991, après la première guerre du Golfe, les Kurdes d'Irak attendent toujours qu'elle s'accompagne d'une démocratisation en profondeur. Les deux chefs historiques, Massoud Barzani, l'héritier de Mustafa Barzani, et Jalal Talabani, se partagent la région. L'un règne sur Erbil, l'autre sur Souleimaniyé, l'un sur le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), l'autre sur l'UPK... Chacun dispose de son armée, de sa police politique, de ses médias, de sa compagnie de téléphonie mobile et d'un trésor de guerre faramineux tiré des revenus pétroliers.

Cependant, les libertés individuelles n'ont guère progressé. Les menaces qui pèsent sur les journalistes indépendants, la révélation de l'existence de prisons secrètes, les agissements du Parastin, les services secrets du PDK dirigés par Masrou, le fils de Massoud Barzani... dressent un sombre tableau. L'un des hommes les plus puissants du Kurdistan est aujourd'hui Nechirvan Barzani, neveu de Massoud, un riche homme d'affaires qui, après quelques années en retrait du pouvoir, vient de reprendre les rênes du gouvernement régional d'Erbil. La société kurde est régie par un ordre tribal.

C'est contre cette fatalité que s'élève la jeune génération de Kurdes irakiens. Des partis contestataires ont émergé en 2009, avec les élections régionales, en faisant campagne contre la corruption : le mouvement Goran (« changement »), du dissident Nawshirwan Mustafa, et l'Union islamique du Kurdistan, proche des Frères musulmans. Mais, en dirigeant habile, M. Barzani a toujours réussi à lâcher un peu de lest quand cela devenait nécessaire. Et à jouer sur l'éternelle rivalité Kurdes-Arabs pour renforcer sa légitimité, en s'opposant au gouvernement central, non moins autoritaire, de Nouri Al-Maliki.

En Iran, les Kurdes se sont tenus en retrait de la grande vague de manifestations du « mouvement vert », qui a précédé l'élection présidentielle de juin 2009. Après la révolution de 1979, qu'ils ont soutenue pour mettre fin au régime du chah, ils ont rapidement déchanté et ont été exclus des débats sur la nouvelle Constitution. A la fin des années 1980, le Dr Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, figure intellectuelle et leader du Parti démocratique kurde iranien

(PDKI), fut assassiné à Vienne. Depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, en 2005, les partis kurdes restent marginalisés.

Plusieurs leaders de la communauté ont ainsi été écartés par les autorités avant les dernières élections législatives du 2 mars. Le Conseil des Gardiens de la révolution a rejeté la candidature de représentants du Front kurde uni. De plus, les condamnations à mort de prisonniers politiques kurdes se sont multipliées ces dernières années. En mai 2010, 16 d'entre eux ont été pendus, ce qui a provoqué des émeutes dans les régions kurdes.

En Syrie, même si elle est, en nombre, la moins importante, la minorité kurde est, ces temps-ci, la plus observée. Quelle attitude va-t-elle adopter face à la répression du régime de Bachar Al-Assad? Dès les premières semaines de révolte, les Kurdes ont défilé spontanément, notamment dans la grande ville de Kamechliyé, à la frontière turque. Mais l'un des premiers gestes de Damas fut de rétablir la citoyenneté syrienne pour environ 300 000 Kurdes qui en étaient privés depuis cinquante ans. Même s'ils ont a priori peu de sympathie pour le régime, dont ils furent aussi victimes, notamment en 2004 et 2005, les partis kurdes syriens ont rapidement exprimé leurs inquiétudes devant les objectifs supposés de l'insurrection. Quels seraient leurs droits dans la Syrie de l'après-Assad?

Une dizaine de petites formations kurdes ont bien pris part aux premières réunions du Conseil national syrien (CNS), fondé en Turquie fin 2011, avant de s'en retirer pour créer le Conseil national kurde (CNK). Les Kurdes ne veulent pas d'une autre république « ara-



Le dignitaire chiite irakien Moqtada Al-Sadr (à droite) est accueilli par le leader des Kurdes d'Irak Massoud Barzani à Erbil, le 26 avril. La rencontre a pour objectif d'apaiser les tensions entre le « Kurdistan autonome » et Bagdad.

HAMED SAFIN/AFP

Les Kurdes de Syrie ne veulent pas d'une autre république « arabe », autoritaire et centralisée

« arabe » syrienne, autoritaire et centralisée. Mais, début juin, le CNS a envoyé un message fort en nommant à sa tête, à Istanbul, le Kurde indépendant Abdelbasset Sayda. Pour tenter de rallier les Kurdes à la cause de la révolution.

La principale force politique kurde de Syrie reste le PYD (Parti de l'union démocratique), la « filiale » syrienne du PKK qui, elle, n'a pas appelé à la chute du régime. Pour éviter une confrontation, Bachar Al-Assad a multiplié les gestes d'apaisement, autorisant le PYD à ouvrir des écoles en langue kurde et des centres culturels et permettant le retour d'exil du chef politique Salih Muslim. Cette alliance de

circonstance est aussi un moyen pour la Syrie de maintenir la Turquie à distance. Si Ankara passe à l'offensive en utilisant l'Armée libre syrienne (ALS), à laquelle elle fournirait des armes, Damas est prêt à en faire autant avec la rébellion kurde. Une stratégie de dissuasion déjà employée dans les années 1990 par Assad père.

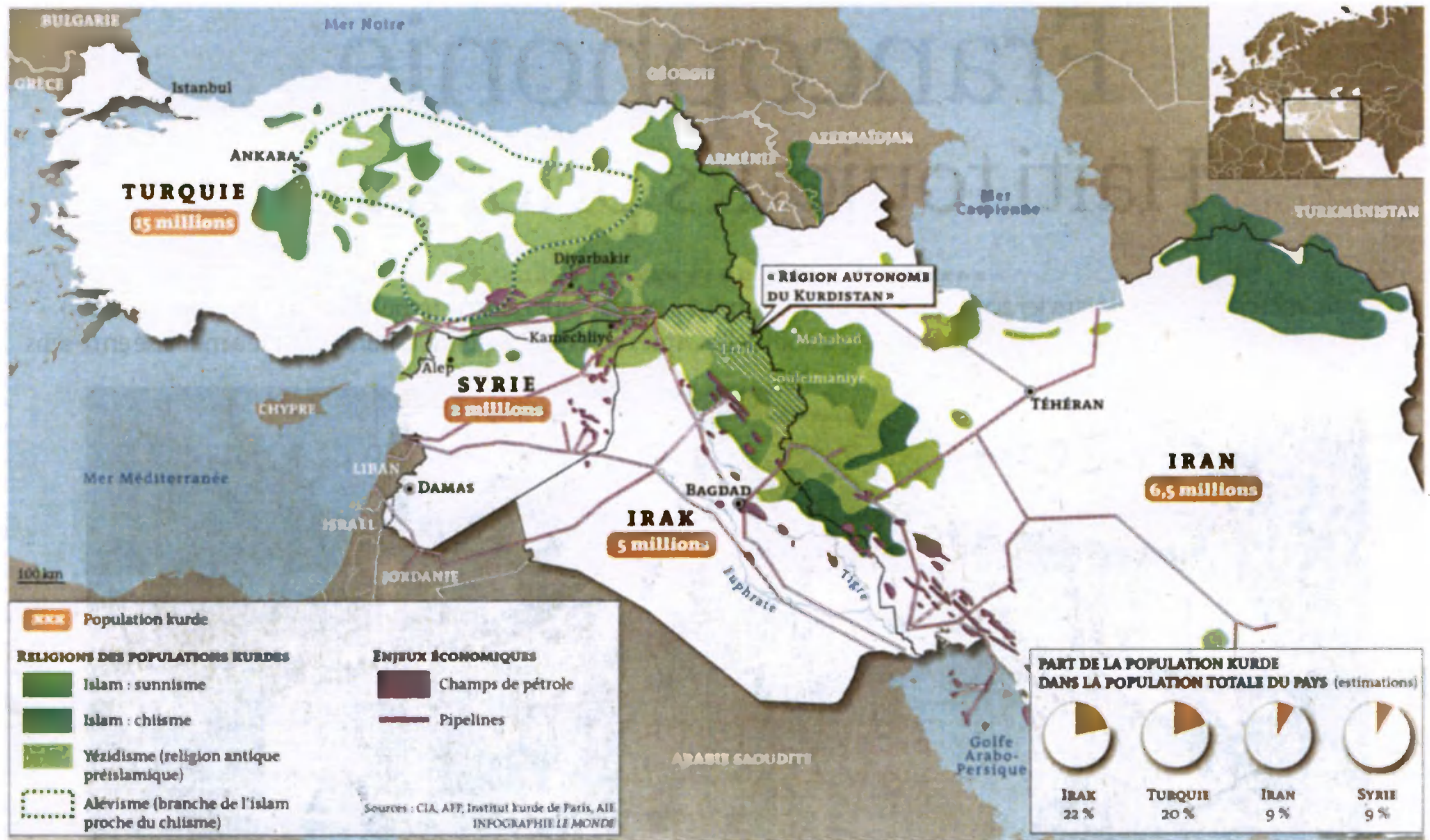
Si les appareils hésitent, la rue et les organisations de jeunesse soutiennent le changement de régime. L'assassinat de Mechaal Tamo, opposant virulent à Assad, tué en octobre 2011 à Kamechliyé, avait déjà provoqué des réactions de colère. Début mars, des artistes kurdes populaires, comme les chanteurs Sivan Perwer et Ciwan Haco, ont pris fait et cause pour la révolution, appelant les partis kurdes de Syrie à ne pas rester silencieux.

L'administration kurde irakienne de Massoud Barzani joue aussi de son influence pour tenter de fédérer l'opposition kurde. Le Kurdistan irakien a accueilli des réfugiés syriens et accordé l'asile, début mars, à une trentaine de déserteurs kurdes de l'armée syrienne. En janvier, 18 partis kurdes syriens s'étaient réunis à Erbil et, cet été, M. Barzani projette d'organiser une grande conférence kurde, réunissant toutes les sensibilités politiques. Loin d'être uni, le monde kurde est plus que jamais traversé par des luttes d'influence. ■



Les funérailles de 35 civils kurdes tués lors d'un raid aérien turc dans la province de Sîrnak, près de la frontière irakienne, fin décembre 2011.

BULENT KILIC/AFP



Un peuple, plusieurs langues et religions

● **En Turquie**, ils sont quelque 15 millions, soit 20 % de la population. Près de 3 millions vivent à Istanbul, la plus grande « ville kurde ». L'installation dans les agglomérations de l'ouest du pays est le résultat d'une émigration dans les années 1980-1990. La majorité des Kurdes de Turquie reste concentrée dans les provinces d'Anatolie de l'est et du sud-est, aux frontières de l'Iran, de l'Irak et de la Syrie. Les Kurdes turcs parlent essentiellement le kurmandji, principal ensemble linguistique kurde, qu'ils écrivent en alphabet latin. Les Kurdes de Turquie ne sont pas légalement reconnus comme une minorité par Ankara et ne disposent d'aucune forme d'autonomie. Le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP) joue le rôle de vitrine politique du PKK, mouvement clandestin armé. Le BDP dispose de 35 députés au Parlement turc et détient la majorité des grandes municipalités dans les zones kurdes.

● **En Iran**, Environ 6 millions à 7 millions de Kurdes y vivent (de 8 % à 10 % de la population), principalement le long des frontières avec la Turquie et l'Irak (provinces du Kurdistan, de Kermanschah, d'Azerbaïdjan occidental...). Une communauté kurde s'est établie également dans le Khorassan, à la frontière avec le Turkménistan. Une partie des Kurdes iraniens se réfèrent au chiisme majoritaire, tandis qu'environ deux tiers d'entre eux suivent le rite sunnite et constituent donc une double minorité, ethnique et religieuse. Leur langue maternelle est le sorani. Les Kurdes peuvent généralement s'exprimer dans leur langue et vivre leur culture mais ne bénéficient d'aucune autonomie politique. Depuis 2005, des émeutes ont régulièrement éclaté dans les régions kurdes et une sévère répression politique a conduit à l'exécution de plusieurs militants.

● **En Irak**, Les Kurdes irakiens sont au moins 5 millions : 1 million à Bagdad et plus de 4 millions dans le nord du pays (22 % de la population). Les provinces de Duhok, Erbil et Souleimaniyé constituent une « région autonome du Kurdistan » depuis 1970. Celle-ci dispose de son propre président, Massoud Barzani, élu depuis 2005, de son gouvernement régional et de son Parlement, qui siège dans la capitale, Erbil. En revanche, les provinces mixtes de Kirkouk, Mossoul et Diyalra, revendiquées par les Kurdes, sont sous le contrôle du gouvernement central. On y parle le sorani, un dialecte kurde qui s'écrit en alphabet arabe. Majoritairement musulmans et sunnites, les Kurdes d'Irak comptent aussi environ 500 000 adeptes du yézidisme, une religion antique. Depuis 2005, l'ancien chef de guerre Jalal Talabani, leader de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) est président de l'Irak.

● **En Syrie**, on compte environ 2 millions de Kurdes (9 % de la population), concentrés dans la région de la Djezireh, dans le nord-est du pays, et qui sont aussi présents dans les villes d'Alep et de Damas. Les Kurdes syriens sont majoritairement sunnites et parlent le kurmandji. Depuis 1960 et l'arrivée au pouvoir du parti Baas, ils ont subi une intense politique d'arabisation, des restrictions sur l'utilisation de la langue et l'expression de leur identité. En 1962, à la suite d'un recensement de population controversé, environ 300 000 Kurdes se sont vus privés de la nationalité syrienne et se sont retrouvés apatrides dans leur propre pays. Ce n'est qu'en avril 2011 que le régime syrien a mis fin à cette situation en « [octroyant] à des personnes enregistrées comme étrangères dans le gouvernement d'Hassaké la citoyenneté arabe syrienne ».

Gu.P.



JULY 1, 2012

Syrian opposition rejects new international plan

BEIRUT (Associated Press)— Syria's main opposition groups rejected on Sunday a new international plan that calls for a transitional government because the compromise agreement did not bar President Bashar Assad from participating.

Their reaction held out little hope for an end to more than 15 months of carnage on a day when the main opposition group said 800 people were killed in violence in the past week alone.

Opposition activists groups say more than 14,000 people have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar Assad's authoritarian rule began in March 2011, or on average about 900 a month. That would make last week's toll alone almost as high as the monthly average as government forces furiously pounded rebellious towns and cities with helicopters, tanks and artillery in an offensive aimed at recovering rebel-held territories.

World powers at a conference in Geneva on Saturday accepted a U.N.-brokered plan calling for creation of a transitional national unity government with full executive powers in Syria. But at Russia's insistence, the compromise agreement left the door open to Assad being part of the interim administration. It could also include members of Assad's government and the opposition and other groups. The transitional government would oversee the drafting of a new constitution and elections.

However Syria's fragmented opposition has long opposed any solution that involved negotiating with Assad or allowing him to cling to power.

Bassma Kodmani, a Paris-based spokeswoman for the main opposition group, the Syrian National Council (SNC), said the agreement is "ambiguous" and lacks a mechanism or timetable for implementation. She said there were some positive elements in the plan, which implies that all members of the Security Council were in agreement that the transition period must not be led by Assad. But she said this needs to be more explicit.

"We cannot say that there is any positive outcome today," Kodmani said.

The regime did not react to the plan. But Assad has repeatedly said his government has a responsibility to eliminate terrorists — his term for those fighting the regime — and will not accept any non-Syrian model of governance.

Fayez Sayegh, a prominent lawmaker and member of the ruling Baath party, expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the conference, saying participants left it up to the Syrian people to decide their fate and form of governance.

"The conference ... did not discuss matters that have to do with the president as Western countries would have wished," Sayegh told The Associated Press.

The need for a solution to the Syrian crisis is growing more urgent by the day with the



U.N.-Arab League special envoy Kofi Annan speaks Saturday in Geneva. A plan would allow a transitional government in Syria to include members of the current regime.

sharp escalation in violence and deaths and the conflict threatening to spill across borders. Syria shot down a warplane from neighboring Turkey on June 22 and Turkey responded by setting up anti-aircraft guns along the frontier. Turkey said Sunday it scrambled fighter jets to its border after Syrian helicopters flew too close to the frontier.

But any hopes for a quick breakthrough were dashed by the opposition's rejection to the brand new initiative, likely relegating it to the latest in a series of failures by the international community to unify and stop Assad's crackdown on dissent.

At the Geneva conference, the U.S. backed away from insisting that the plan should explicitly bar Assad from any role in a new government, hoping the concession would encourage Russia to put greater pressure on its longtime ally to end the violence.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton insisted on Saturday that Assad would still have to go and France's foreign minister echoed the demand on Sunday.

It is now "incumbent on Russia and China to show Assad the writing on the wall" and help force his departure," Clinton said, addressing the two countries that have shielded Assad's regime from U.N. Security Council resolutions condemning the crackdown.

The SNC criticized the plan as too ambiguous though it said it contained some new, positive elements. Other opposition groups called it a waste of time and vowed as they always do not to negotiate with Assad or members of his "murderous" regime.

"Every day I ask myself, do they not see how the Syrian people are being slaughtered?" veteran opposition figure Haitham Maleh asked. "It is a catastrophe. The country has been destroyed and they want us then to sit with the killer?"

Maleh described the agreement reached in

Geneva as a "farce" and of "no value on the ground."

"The Syrian people are the ones who will decide the battle on the ground, not those sitting in Geneva or New York or anywhere else," he said by telephone from Cairo, where opposition groups are to meet Monday.

The Local Coordination Committees, a key activist network, said it was "very concerned" over the vague language used in the agreement.

"This provides yet another opportunity for the regime's thugs to play their favorite game in utilizing time in order to stop the popular Syrian revolution and extinguish it with violence and massacres," it said in a statement.

The U.N. plan was brokered by special envoy for Syria Kofi Annan, who in March submitted a six-point peace plan that he said the Assad regime accepted. It led to the April 12 ceasefire that failed to hold. U.N. observers sent to monitor the ceasefire suspended their patrols in Syria on June 16 due to a spike in violence and have been confined to their hotels since.

Moscow had refused to back a provision that would call for Assad to step aside, insisting that outsiders cannot order a political solution for Syria and accusing the West of ignoring the darker side of the Syrian opposition. The opposition has made clear it would not take part in a government in which Assad still held power.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov underlined that the plan does not require Assad's ouster, saying there is "no attempt in the document to impose on the Syrian people any type of transitional process."

Even as the international powers met to find a solution, the death toll mounted on Saturday. Activists said dozens were killed and wounded in a powerful explosion Saturday evening that hit a funeral procession in a suburb of the capital Damascus. Details of the blast in Zamalka were still murky on Sunday. But amateur videos showed gruesome images of bodies, some with their limbs torn, lying on the ground as people walked about dazed in a cloud of smoke.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 30 people were killed, while the LCC said it had documented the names of 40 of the dead and that residents were unable to identify an unknown number of remaining bodies.

Activists blamed government forces for the explosion, which they said was likely the result of a car bomb detonated near a mosque where the funeral of an activist killed by regime gunmen was being held.

The SNC did not explain how it arrived at the death toll of 800 for the past week. But it said in a statement that most of the dead were killed in indiscriminate tank and helicopter →

➔ shelling by regime forces on residential areas throughout Syria.

Death tolls are virtually impossible to verify in tightly-controlled Syria, which imposes severe restrictions on journalists.

But Khalil Al Haj Saleh, a member of the Local Coordination Committees activist network, said the 800 figure appears to be "realis-

tic" in light of the past week's carnage.

The LCC and the Observatory have reported an average of around 100 Syrians killed in the past week.

Turkey scrambled its jets days after it said it would treat any Syrian military unit approaching its border as a direct threat in response to the downing of a Turkish reconnaissance

plane by Syrian forces. Turkey has also reinforced its border with anti-aircraft guns and other weapons.

The military said the two helicopters flew as close as 4 miles (6.5 kilometers) to the border province of Hatay on Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon. □

Rudaw

5 July 2012

Kurdish Parties Walk out of Syrian Opposition Conference in Cairo

By ADIB ABDULMAJID
rudaw.net

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands – Syrian opposition groups held a conference sponsored by the Arab League on July 2 and 3 in Cairo.

The goal of the conference was to unify the opposition and agree on an agenda and vision for a post-Assad Syria.

The Kurdish National Council (KNC) actively participated in the conference, but divisions arose when Arab participants refused to include the term "Kurdish Nation" in the meeting's final declaration.

Kurdish groups angrily withdrew from the conference and Arab opposition groups were accused of marginalizing them and refusing to resolve the Kurdish issue in Syria per international conventions.

Arab oppositionists said they reject the term "Kurdish Nation" because of the consequences it might have. For Kurds, this signified the possibility of a new era of persecution against them in the future.

The two documents discussed during the conference -- the National Charter and the Transitional Stage in Syria -- didn't include any terms concerning the Kurdish issue in Syria.

Immediately after their withdrawal from the Cairo conference, Kurdish participants issued a statement.

"The Arab opposition documents exclude Kurdish rights, even that the Kurdish language be considered an official language in the Kurdish areas of Syria in the future. This means a total marginalization to this indigenous nation and its historical existence on its own land," the statement read.

The KNC had provided a document listing Kurdish demands at the start of the conference, but it wasn't discussed by

Syrian
opposition
summit in
Cairo,
July 2, 2012
Photo AFP.



participants.

The document demanded constitutional recognition of the Kurdish people in Syria and the democratic resolution of the Kurdish issue according to international conventions. It also proposed the recognition of the Kurdish language as an official language in Syria, and decentralized rule in Syria, without specifying whether this was to be administrative or political.

Prominent Kurdish opposition figure Murshid Al Khaznawi was one of the participants at the conference and the first to protest the Arab opposition's refusal to discuss Kurdish rights or use the term "Kurdish Nation."

Leaving the conference, Khaznawi said, "If this is the mentality of the opposition, then Bashar al-Assad himself would be better at dealing with the issue. We will not change our position until we see full recognition of the rights of Kurdish people in the National Charter."

Khiidir Abdulkarim, a Syrian Kurdish writer and activist, commented on the Arab opposition's position on the Kurdish issue by saying, "For over 16 months, the Syrian opposition couldn't unify its ranks and provide a clear vision for Syria's future. When Arab opposition groups met at one table, they couldn't agree on overthrowing Assad, but their common hostility against the Kurds uni-

fied them to overthrow the Kurdish people and exclude their legitimate rights."

During the conference, a prominent Syrian Arab activist and member of the General Commission of the Syrian Revolution in Homs, Khaled Abu Salah, said that all Syrian people support the Kurdish right to self-determination and a decentralized state.

"This is the message of revolutionaries in Homs, and we will keep supporting our Kurdish brothers because their freedom is part of Syria's freedom, and their rights in Syria are as legitimate as Arab rights."

Sarbast Nabi, a Syrian Kurdish philosophy professor at Erbil University, said that the time has come for Kurds to unify and end any hostility among one another "in order to put all the Kurdish effort to the service of facing our enemies, both the Syrian regime and the Arabist opposition."

"Kurdish unity and a consolidated political plan are urgently needed at the moment, and the Kurdish political movement in Syria needs to bear its responsibilities to the Kurdish people, because we are facing a dangerous Arabist opposition which might declare jihad against the Kurdish people if we keep demanding our legitimate rights without a clear alternative political plan," Nabi concluded. □

Erdoğan-Zana talks dismissed by PKK

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

A meeting between the country's prime minister and a prominent Kurdish politician with the prospect of finding a peaceful way to solve the decades-old Kurdish question was put down by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which dismissed these efforts saying, "They have entered into a military-solution process."

Independent member of Turkish Parliament Leyla Zana spoke at a press conference at Parliament on July 1 following her 1.5-hour long meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Saturday. She called on the government to restart stalled talks with Kurdish militants following much-anticipated talks with the prime minister while calling it "unrealistic" to expect an end to the Kurdish conflict merely by asking militants to disarm.

"The only way which has not been followed is a sustainable negotiation," Zana, who is a legendary figure in the Kurdish political movement, said yesterday.

"In this regard, I said the Oslo meetings were a threshold, and that these talks should restart," Zana said, referring to talks between the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and PKK representatives abroad between 2009 and 2011 in a series of meetings publicly known as the "Oslo talks." The talks collapsed after a PKK attack killed 13 soldiers near Silvan, Diyarbakır in July 2011.

During the June 30 meeting, Zana said she told Erdoğan that the security-based policies which have been employed for years in an attempt to resolve the Kurdish issue had borne no fruit.

Zana also suggested that transferring imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan to house arrest could help reach a solution. "I emphasized that this country, which broke a taboo like [abolishing] the death penalty, could put Mr. Öcalan under house arrest and that this has vital importance," she said. While welcoming the government's announcement to introduce Kurdish

Labeled as 'historic peace meeting,' Prime Minister Erdoğan (R) meets with a leading Kurdish politician Leyla Zana, who calls for talks between the PKK and the state. AA Photo



elective lessons in public schools in the coming school year as "a positive development," Zana said the courses would be far away from meeting the Kurdish people's demands for education in their mother tongue. "No people in the world learn their mother tongue by paying money for it."

PKK REJECTION

However, the meeting between Erdoğan and Zana was put down by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which dismissed these efforts saying, "They have entered into a military-solution process." "The AKP [Justice and Government Party] government lost the war it staged against the Kurds and Kurdish freedom movement in the last year," Duran Kalkan, one of leaders of the PKK, said yesterday in an interview with Fırat news agency.

Kalkan challenged Zana's description of Erdoğan as the sole person who can solve the problem, asking why the prime minister did not try to do so in the last 10 years. "Everyone has to be realistic about this issue. Realities should not be ignored in the name of some simple approaches or gains. Everyone should be serious, realistic and consistent," Kalkan said.

POSITIVE MESSAGES FROM BDP

Ahmet Türk, another independent deputy who served as the co-leader of the BDP before the 2011 elections, said the roadmap announced by Zana was no different from theirs. In response to some circles' criticism of Zana for her statement that the problem could only be solved by Erdoğan, Türk said "Reactions against Zana were not

because she said peace should prevail, but because she took the initiative without consulting her friends."

Speaking later yesterday in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır, BDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş said his party would positively approach any contribution to finding a solution despite earlier saying the Zana-Erdoğan meeting would not be conducted with party consent.

"God willing, [the meeting] will be good," Demirtaş said, noting that a good outcome would depend upon Erdoğan's approach to the "İmralı-Oslo protocols." İmralı is the name of the island in the Marmara Sea where Öcalan is serving his life sentence.

"The approach to the protocols is a sincerity test. I hope that the prime minister takes these chances offered to him. As the BDP, we will positively approach all kinds of contributions. It has been a long time since the ball has been in the prime minister's court," Demirtaş said.

Erdoğan however repeated his calls to BDP lawmakers to distance themselves from the terror organization and denounce terrorism. "Can you hear from one of these party officials that this is a terror organization? No, you cannot. They cannot. Westerners even admit that this is a terror organization," the prime minister said in his address to his party's Kayseri branch congress.

"Those who see the ugly face of terror do courageously speak about the realities. We want right-minded people to stand and talk about it at this very critical period," Erdoğan said. ○

Iraqi Kurds to sell gas directly to Turkey

Ashti Hawrami says we plan to sell 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Turkey.

By Evrim Ergin |

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region may begin selling natural gas directly to Turkey within two years, its energy minister said on Tuesday, a move likely to anger the central government and further strain Baghdad's ties with Ankara.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north of the country and Baghdad have rowed for years over issues including late payments for crude, the legality of the regional government's oil deals and disputed territory.

Baghdad accuses the Kurds of smuggling their oil abroad, mainly to Iran, and wrecking the central budget by denying it revenue.

"Even if there's no consensus with Baghdad, we will continue to sell natural gas and oil to Turkey," KRG Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami told the Caspian Gas Forum in Istanbul.

"We plan to sell 10 billion cubic



Kurdistan
Regional
Government
Minister for
Natural Resources
Ashti Hawrami in
Erbil, Kurdistan
region of Iraq.
Photo: Reuters

meters of natural gas to Turkey, and later Europe in the long-term," he said, adding that sales were expected to begin within 18 months to two years.

The KRG is obliged to attract investment from abroad, he said. "If we left everything up to Baghdad this would not work."

Once the poorest region of Iraq, Kurdistan is now at its most prosperous, having been largely insulated from the insurgency and sectarian violence in the south, and the regional government has increasingly become less reliant on Baghdad.

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

as yet untapped.

While there are no official figures for gas reserves in Kurdistan, Iraq as a whole has the world's 10th-largest reserves at 112 trillion cubic feet, according to U.S. Department of Energy data.

Most Kurdish oil is still pumped into the national pipeline system. One pipeline carrying about 60,000 bpd already feeds directly from Kurdistan's Tawke oilfield into the main pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

The move to bypass Baghdad could further strain ties between the central Iraqi government and Turkey, which has forged solid political and trade ties with Iraq's Kurds in recent years.

Iraq is currently the second-biggest market after Germany for Turkish exports, amounting to more than \$8 billion last year. But according to Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan, about 70 percent of Turkey's exports to Iraq are to the north.

If the Kurdistan region were a country, it would still be Turkey's eighth-biggest export market, according to his estimates.

Turkish officials have been locked in a war of words with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki since December, when he ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, based on allegations that he ran death squads.

Turkey, the majority of whose people are Sunnis, has accused Shi'ite Maliki of stirring ethnic tension. The Iraqi prime minister has accused Turkey of meddling in its affairs.

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



Le Kurdistan irakien fait raffiner son pétrole en Turquie, Bagdad furieux

Erbil (Irak), 8 juillet 2012 (AFP)

LA RÉGION AUTONOME du Kurdistan irakien fait raffiner une partie de son pétrole brut en Turquie voisine, à la colère du gouvernement irakien, qui dit se réserver cette prérogative, a-t-on appris dimanche de sources gouvernementales.

"Nous avons commencé à exporter du pétrole brut vers la Turquie en quantités limitées il y a quelques jours", a expliqué à l'AFP Sirouan Aboubakeur, conseiller au ministère des Ressources naturelles du Kurdistan.

Le brut est envoyé vers la Turquie, y est raffiné, puis acheminé de nouveau vers le Kurdistan sous forme de produits pétroliers (essence, gaz, huile...).

"Si le besoin s'en fait sentir, nous exporterons du pétrole vers l'Iran", a ajouté M. Aboubakeur. "Nous continuerons à exporter du brut jusqu'à ce que le gouvernement central (irakien, ndr) fournisse notre région en produits pétroliers".

"Personne n'a le droit d'exporter du pétrole, du gaz ou tout autre produit issu du pétrole vers l'étranger. Seul le ministère irakien du Pétrole a le droit d'exporter du pétrole et des produits pétroliers", a tonné Faïçal Abdullah, porte-parole du vice-Premier ministre irakien chargé de l'Énergie Hussein Chahristani, en réaction aux déclarations de M. Aboubakeur.

Le pétrole est au centre d'un conflit entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan, région autonome du nord de l'Irak, depuis plusieurs mois.

Le Kurdistan accuse le gouvernement de Bagdad de ne pas le livrer produits pétroliers, ce que le ministère irakien du Pétrole dément. Et la région a récemment cessé ses exportations pétrolières vers l'Irak en raison d'un contentieux financier.

Fin juin, le ministère à l'Énergie a prévenu les compagnies françaises que tout contrat avec Bagdad serait annulé si elles signaient d'autres contrats avec des autorités locales ou régionales, après que le Kurdistan a fait affaires avec des compagnies étrangères.○

La Turquie ouvre le procès de l'union des communautés du Kurdistan

Delphine Nerbollier

● **Le KCK est accusé d'être une organisation terroriste et d'avoir favorisé une insurrection dans l'Est et le Sud-Est anatoliens.**

● **Des opposants dénoncent la militarisation du régime et l'application de la loi antiterroriste.**

C'est un nouveau procès-fleuve qui a débuté hier au tribunal de Silivri, à 80 km d'Istanbul. Celui de l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK) accusée d'être la branche politique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en lutte armée depuis près de trente ans contre Ankara. Quelque 193 personnes y seront entendues, dont 51 accusées de diriger une organisation terroriste, les autres sont soupçonnées d'en être membres ou d'avoir apporté leur aide.

Selon l'acte d'accusation, le KCK chercherait à « remplacer les institutions officielles dans l'Est et le Sud-Est anatoliens » et à « favoriser une insurrection dans ces régions ». Au milieu des

années 2000, à la demande du chef du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, des assemblées de villes et de quartiers ont en effet été créées, réunissant avocats, universitaires, journalistes, représentants de la société civile, maires et membres du parti pro-kurde (BDP), du Parlement à Ankara.

Très actifs durant les élections municipales de 2009 qui ont permis la victoire du BDP dans le Sud-Est, ces acteurs sont devenus la cible de la justice. Comme Busra Ersanli, professeur de sciences politiques et membre du BDP, Ragip Zarakolu, éditeur d'ouvrages sur les questions kurde et arménienne. Ils sont accusés d'être intervenus au cours de l'université d'été du BDP.

35 MAIRES POURSUIVIS PAR LA JUSTICE

« Busra Ersanli est une universitaire respectée. Son arrestation est un message à tous ceux qui pensent et produisent des idées hors normes », estime Fusun Ustel, l'une de ses collègues. L'affaire du KCK est décriée par une partie de l'opposition. Le BDP estime en être la cible directe avec 193 de ses membres élus et 35 maires poursuivis par la justice.

Les syndicats sont aussi visés, comme celui des fonctionnaires (KESK). L'intellectuel Ahmet Insel écrit dans le quotidien Radikal que cela « permet de faire d'une pierre deux coups : briser les bases syndicales d'activités politiques kurdes et se débarrasser d'organisations qui résistent aux politiques du gouvernement ».

L'avocate Eren Keskin met en cause la militarisation du système et la législation antiterroriste qui prend dans ses filets des personnes non impliquées dans des actes de violence. « Dans les années 1990 (NDLR : au pire des combats entre le PKK et l'armée turque), les gens étaient tués. Aujourd'hui, ils sont arrêtés », juge-t-elle.

L'affaire KCK n'est pas la seule à révéler les excès de cette loi antiterroriste. Les étudiants aussi en sont victimes, comme la Franco-Turque Sevil Sevimli. Vivant à Lyon mais en échange Erasmus en Turquie, elle est soupçonnée de « collusion avec une organisation terroriste » pour avoir assisté au concert d'un groupe connu pour son activisme contestataire. □

Série d'attentats anti-chiites meurtriers en Irak

Au moins 38 personnes ont péri mardi en Irak dans plusieurs attentats, dont 25 lors de l'explosion d'un camion piégé dans un marché au sud de Bagdad, attaque qui "porte la marque d'Al-Qaïda", selon le gouverneur de la province.

Ces attaques n'ont pas été revendiquées, mais leurs auteurs visaient clairement la communauté chiite, majoritaire en Irak, qui s'apprête à commémorer vendredi la naissance du Mahdi, une figure centrale du chiisme.

Les violences en Irak ont

considérablement diminué par rapport aux terribles années 2006 et 2007 mais demeurent courantes dans le pays en proie à une grave crise politique et à des tensions confessionnelles.

Cette nouvelle vague de violence ravive ainsi la crainte de voir ressurgir des tensions confessionnelles dans le pays où chiites, sunnites et Kurdes peinent à surmonter leurs divergences politiques depuis le retrait de l'armée américaine en décembre 2011. (AFP) ■



Irak, explosion sur un marché, le 3 juillet 2012. Irak, explosion sur un marché, le 3 juillet 2012. | AFP



Al Qaeda Members Crossing From Iraq Into Syria, Say Iraqis

BAGHDAD, July 5, 2012 (Reuters)

IRAQ SAID on Thursday that it believed militants loyal to al Qaeda were crossing from Iraq into Syria to carry out attacks.

"We have solid information and intelligence that members of al Qaeda terrorist networks have gone in the other direction, to Syria, to help, to liaise, to carry out terrorist attacks," Iraqi Foreign



Minister Hoshiyar Zebari told a news conference in Baghdad.

Syria says that a 16-month-old uprising against President Bashar al-Assad is not a popular revolt but a "terrorist" conspiracy funded and directed from abroad, not least by the wealthy Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.



8 July 2012

Danger of Kurdish Civil War in Syria



WLADIMIR van WILGENBURG
rudaw.net

One of the first casualties in a war is the truth, and rumors can contribute to tensions and even escalate conflict. The different strategies of Kurdish political parties in Syria could result in more violence.

Recently, tensions between Kurdish groups allegedly associated with the Syrian Free Army (FSA) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) affiliated People's Defence Committees (TEV-DEM) resulted in destruction of property, arrests and the deaths of between three and five people in Efrin on July 3.

According to a statement from TEV-DEM, members of the Kurdish National Council (KNC) complained to the Syrian Free Army that the Democratic Union Party (PYD) was suppressing anti-Assad demonstrations and kidnapping Kurdish activists.

In response, the FSA allegedly attacked PYD checkpoints and targeted the group in its speeches.

At the end of June, the PYD arrested Mustafa Juma of the Kurdish Freedom (Azadi) Party, releasing him after an apparent request from Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani. The PYD claimed Juma had been in touch with the Turkish intelligence service and the FSA with a view to plot against the PKK in Syria.

The PYD claims elements within the KNC are cooperating with Turkey to target them; anti-PYD groups claim the PYD is working with the PKK and Assad to suppress demonstrations. The PYD says this is Turkish propaganda, while other Kurdish parties claim that the PYD is not tolerant to non-PKK organizations.

With up to 4,500 fighters trained in the Qandil Mountains, the PYD in Syria cannot be easily challenged by the KNC. It's possible the Azadi Party tried to work with the FSA in order to confront them.

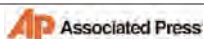
of these claims, it is clear that the different policies and propaganda attacks could lead to more violence. Being a tribal people, Kurds often rely on revenge as a way to deal with opponents. On June 13, for example, a whole family was massacred in a village near Efrin. Some say the Assad regime was responsible, others that it was Kurds looking for revenge.

It was for this very reason that the KNC and PYD signed an agreement on June 11 to prevent further tensions. But despite the promises, violence has continued.

PYD leader Salih Muslim and People's Council co-chairs Abdulsalam Ahmed and Sinem Mihemed met with Barzani and the Kurdish Council on July 5 in Erbil in order to ease the tensions. This is because the majority of the Syrian Kurds do not want conflict between Kurds.

But one little spark can cause a fire. Just look at what happened in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1990s. □

While it is difficult to assess the truth



3 Kurdish rebels, 1 soldier killed in eastern Turkey

ANKARA, Turkey / July 9, 2012 / The Associated Press

STATE-RUN television says three Kurdish rebels and one soldier have been killed in eastern Turkey.

TRT television says Monday that the rebels died in a clash with Turkish troops close to Mount Tendurek on the Iranian border. It says the Friday clash came after the rebels burned down about a dozen trucks at a roadblock in eastern Agri province.

TRT says one Turkish soldier was killed and another one was wounded in a mine blast in Tunceli province, further west, early Monday.

The rebels have stepped up their attacks as they seek autonomy in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated eastern and southeastern provinces amid renewed efforts by some Kurdish politicians and the government to try to find a solution to the conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people. □

Le Monde
Mardi 3 juillet 2012

Syrie : la Russie impose ses vues aux Occidentaux

L'accord sur la « transition » politique syrienne trouvé à Genève renvoie dos à dos le régime Assad et les insurgés

Sergueï Lavrov, le ministre russe des affaires étrangères, est sorti « ravi », samedi 30 juin, de la réunion des grandes puissances à Genève, sur une « transition politique » en Syrie. De son point de vue, il y avait de quoi. Après de longues heures de discussion, la Russie a imposé ses vues au sein du « Groupe d'action » voulu par l'émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, Kofi Annan. Les Occidentaux, en particulier les Etats-Unis, représentés par la secrétaire d'Etat Hillary Clinton, ont préféré céder aux demandes russes plutôt que de se séparer sur un constat de désaccord.

Le document validé à Genève est centré sur l'idée de mettre en place une « entité gouvernementale provisoire » en Syrie qui « exercerait les pleins pouvoirs exécutifs », et « pourrait inclure des membres du gouvernement actuel et de l'opposition », choisis sur la base d'un « consentement mutuel ». Mais cette feuille de route ne contient aucun élément contraignant ni accusatoire pour le pouvoir syrien : c'est la porte ouverte aux manœuvres dilatoires. Les recules des Occidentaux apparaissent, de fait, nombreuses dans ce texte.

Le départ du pouvoir du président syrien Bachar Al-Assad n'est pas exigé. Aucun calendrier n'est imposé pour le changement politique. Le régime syrien et l'opposition sont renvoyés dos à dos. Une équivalence est établie entre les parties en conflit. Il n'est plus demandé aux troupes progouvernementales de déposer les armes en premier dans le cadre d'une trêve. La répression armée gouvernementale contre des civils n'est pas évoquée, encore moins condamnée. Rien, non plus, à propos d'une résolution du Conseil de sécurité sous chapitre VII, c'est-à-dire pouvant contenir des pénalités si la « transition » n'a pas lieu.

La justice internationale ? Passée sous silence, de même que l'idée d'un embargo sur les livraisons d'armes à la Syrie.

Ces « omissions » reflètent en tous points la lecture russe de la crise, qui fait abstraction de la campagne de terreur menée depuis seize

mois par M. Assad contre son propre peuple au prix de 15 000 morts et privilégie le prisme d'une guerre civile où les responsabilités se confondraient. La Russie a obtenu, en particulier, le retrait d'une formule qui excluait du gouvernement provisoire toute personne dont la « présence continue porterait atteinte à la stabilité (...) et à la réconciliation » en Syrie – autrement dit, des officiels ayant trop de sang sur les mains.

La phrase était censée, du point de vue occidental, barrer la route à Bachar Al-Assad. Hillary Clinton, interrogée par des journalistes sur ce qui apparaît comme une victoire russe, a cherché à nier tout renoncement : « Assad devra toujours partir. Il ne passera jamais le test du consentement mutuel », a-t-elle expliqué. Le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius, a développé le même argument à la télévision.

Mais pour M. Lavrov, le gain était notable. Les Occidentaux essaient de présenter le départ de Bachar Al-Assad comme une exigence immédiate, puisqu'ils en faisaient l'aboutissement d'une transition à laquelle le régime était censé consentir... L'émissaire de Moscou a enfoncé le clou : « Le document n'exige pas la démission de Bachar Al-Assad », cela serait « contraire aux normes des Nations unies sur la non-ingérence dans les affaires intérieures des Etats ».

Sous le couvert de l'anonymat, dimanche, des sources européennes commentaient que l'arrangement bancal conclu à Genève trouvait son explication dans la volonté de l'administration Obama de maintenir à tout prix un processus diplomatique sur le dossier syrien, quitte à ce que celui-ci tourne à vide. Une absence d'accord à Genève aurait porté un coup fatal à la mission Annan, qui, tout en ayant échoué à obtenir la moindre trêve sur le terrain, reste considérée comme le seul recours.

Le président Obama a la hantise d'un nouvel engagement militaire américain dans le monde arabo-musulman et ne veut surtout pas

Des opposants syriens voient dans l'accord de Genève une forme de capitulation, de « farce », permettant au dictateur de gagner du temps

d'une rupture avec Moscou, qui discréditerait sa politique de reset (« relance des relations bilatérales ») en pleine campagne électorale. D'autant que la coopération russe est requise sur d'autres dossiers pouvant perturber ses chances d'être réélu, en cas de crise majeure : le nucléaire iranien et les routes d'évacuation des troupes d'Afghanistan.

Le compromis entre Hillary Clinton et Sergueï Lavrov sur la réunion de Genève a ainsi commencé à s'esquisser en amont, lors d'une rencontre à Saint-Petersbourg. L'affaire était suivie non sans inquiétude par les responsables français, souvent en pointe dans la critique du pouvoir syrien, et craignant en l'occurrence un relâchement de la pression occidentale. Laurent Fabius a d'ailleurs laissé entendre qu'il ne se rendrait pas à Genève si la réunion devait déboucher sur un texte inique ou sans force.

Mais comme le constate un diplomate d'expérience, « la France ne pouvait se permettre d'être le seul membre permanent du Conseil de sécurité à ne pas participer à cette réunion ». « Dès lors qu'Hillary annonçait qu'elle irait, et que William Hague, le Britannique, lui emboîtait le pas, on était obligé de suivre. C'est la réalité des rapports de forces dans le monde d'aujourd'hui... De Gaulle doit se retourner dans sa tombe », ajoute le diplomate.

On ne peut que deviner les motifs d'acceptation chez les autres participants « anti-Assad » du Groupe d'action : la Turquie, concentrée sur l'acheminement

des aides à la rébellion et gérant de nouvelles tensions à ses frontières depuis la destruction d'un de ses avions par l'armée syrienne ; le Qatar, content de figurer dans une chorégraphie diplomatique au titre de la Ligue arabe, mais persuadé que l'essentiel est l'évolution du rapport de forces sur le terrain, avec la hausse des livraisons d'armes à l'insurrection.

M. Annan, qui avait convoqué la réunion de Genève pour reconfigurer sa mission en « médiation », et créer de « l'unité » entre les puissances, semble espérer que les Russes vont désormais se montrer plus coopératifs et efficaces, dans la capacité d'influence qui leur est prêtée sur le clan alaouïte au pouvoir à Damas. A l'ONU, un nouveau projet de résolution pourrait être rapidement présenté par les Occidentaux.

Des groupes de l'opposition syrienne voient dans l'accord de Genève une forme de capitulation, de « farce », permettant au dictateur de gagner du temps. Les soutiens occidentaux de l'opposition – qui doit se réunir au Caire, avant d'être représentée au Groupe des amis de la Syrie le 6 juillet, à Paris – savent qu'ils auront du mal à lui faire valider un compromis largement dicté par Moscou. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

A Ankara, la Kurde Leyla Zana contre l'engrenage de la violence

Analyse Alors que la crise syrienne ravive les tensions et les opérations de la guérilla, la militante, Prix Sakharov, a rencontré le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Par MARC SEMO
Envoyé spécial à Ankara

Elle tente le pari risqué du dialogue avec les autorités turques. Leyla Zana, députée indépendante et égérie de la cause kurde, vient pourtant d'être inculpée pour divers propos jugés séditeux et risque de repartir derrière les barreaux pour dix ans. Depuis lundi s'est aussi ouvert dans la prison de haute sécurité de Siliveri, dans la lointaine périphérie occidentale d'Istanbul, le procès de 205 militants et sympathisants, dont des intellectuels de renom, comme l'éditeur Ragip Zarakolu et l'universitaire Busra Ersanli. Tous sont accusés d'être membres du KCK (Union des communautés du Kurdistan) considéré comme le réseau de soutien urbain au PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), qui mène la lutte armée contre Ankara depuis 1984, un conflit qui a fait plus de 40 000 morts.

Considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Washington et par l'Union européenne, le PKK pourrait compter sur 5 000 combattants. La semaine précédente, une vingtaine de syndicalistes de la fonction publique (Kesk) étaient aussi arrêtés car supposés membres du KCK, s'ajoutant aux 8 000 personnes aujourd'hui emprisonnées pour «appartenance à une organisation terroriste», le plus souvent sur la base de dossiers vides. Malgré ces signes d'un durcissement, Leyla Zana a décidé de rencontrer le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, issu du mouvement islamiste, alors que les incidents armés sont toujours plus fréquents dans le Sud-Est, où vit la majorité des 15 millions de Kurdes de Turquie.

LÉGITIMITÉ. «La société est

nerveuse, pleine d'appréhension à cause des arrestations, et il est plus que jamais nécessaire qu'il y ait aujourd'hui de grands pas sincères dans la voie du dialogue», a expliqué Leyla Zana, au lendemain de ce tête à tête samedi à Ankara pendant une heure et demie avec l'homme fort du pays. Ce dernier avait lancé en 2009 une «ouverture démocratique» envers les Kurdes, finalement réduite à la création d'une chaîne publique de télévision en kurde et à

l'autorisation des cours payants dans leur langue. Des négociations confidentielles entre le patron du MIT (les services secrets) et proche du Premier ministre, Hakan Fidan, et des représentants du PKK s'étaient par ailleurs engagées à Oslo avant de capoter l'été dernier.

Emprisonnée entre 1994 et 2004, parce qu'accusée de liens avec le PKK, Leyla Zana avait reçu le prix Sakharov du Parlement européen pour son combat en faveur des droits collectifs, notamment culturels et politiques, de la population kurde. Sa légitimité est donc incontestable, mais cet entretien sans précédent a fait grincer des dents. Le BDP, le parti légal kurde d'abord critique, a fini par soutenir cette «approche par le dialogue qui sera un test de la sincérité des autorités».

Ces réticences n'ont guère surpris la députée. «C'est quand la situation est difficile qu'il faut tout tenter pour rouvrir les portes», a-t-elle expliqué. Lors de son tête-à-tête avec Erdogan, elle a certes clairement rappelé qu'il était «irréaliste» de poser comme préalable un abandon de la lutte armée par le PKK. Mais elle n'hésite plus à reconnaître ouvertement que ce choix des armes est aujourd'hui une impasse. «Si la stratégie de lutte



Leyla Zana, lors de sa rencontre avec le chef du gouvernement turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (au centre), samedi, à Ankara. PHOTOKAYHANOZER. AP

pour un Kurdistan uni et indépendant a bien cédé la place depuis 1999 à une stratégie du vivre-ensemble [au sein de la Turquie ndlr], si le but est bien aujourd'hui la démocratisation et la décentralisation administrative, personne, alors, ne peut en conscience vouloir la mort de jeunes pour cela», expliquait-elle, il y a quinze jours, dans une interview au quotidien Hürriyet. Elle s'adressait aussi au Premier ministre, en affirmant que «celui qui est le plus fort peut mettre un terme à tout cela».

C'est cette interview qui a été à l'origine de la rencontre. «Avec ce face-à-face, Leyla Zana a pris un vrai risque politique, mais le Premier ministre aussi», analyse un intellectuel kurde proche de la députée, soulignant que «l'un et l'autre sont aujourd'hui conscients du risque d'une reprise du conflit à grande échelle, notamment avec les développements de la crise syrienne».

Le régime baasiste a, pendant des années, hébergé les bases du PKK et son leader historique, Abdullah Öcalan, avant de l'expulser en 1998, mais les liens demeurent. Dans les zones kurdes de Syrie, le PKK assure

le maintien de l'ordre. En réponse à l'appui turc aux rebelles syriens, Damas accroît de nouveau son soutien aux insurgés du PKK encourageant les infiltrations.

«GESTES FORTS». Les témoignages de plusieurs combattants arrêtés ces dernières semaines évoquent le poids croissant au sein même de la guérilla de commandants d'origine syrienne, comme Fehman Huseyin, beaucoup plus radicaux même que l'actuel patron opérationnel du PKK, Murat Karayilan, qui avait accepté les négociations d'Oslo avec l'accord d'Öcalan, incarcéré près d'Istanbul et condamné à vie. Lors de la rencontre, la députée a insisté sur la nécessité de «gestes forts», comme la mise aux arrêts domiciliaires d'Öcalan, dont l'aura symbolique reste importante au sein de l'organisation kurde. Ce qui lui permettrait de jouer un rôle plus actif dans un éventuel processus de négociation. Elle en est bien convaincue, plus que jamais le temps presse. ♦



Will Syria Remain a Unified State?

by Harold Rhode
gatestoneinstitute.org

What stands behind much of the violence in Syria is the rise of Arab Sunni fundamentalism in its various forms – whether Salafi, Wahhabi, or Muslim Brotherhood? All of these threaten the very existence of the Alawites, the Kurds, and other non-Sunni ethnic and religious groups.

While the news is filled daily with terrible atrocities which the Syrian regime is carrying out, these reports mask another development: the breakup of Syria into at least two, if not more, statelets. Is Assad trying to create an Alawite homeland in the traditional Alawite area along the Syrian coast between Lebanon and Turkey? Will Syria end up being a federated state, more along the lines of Iraq? And where are Syria's Kurds headed

Reports from various sources inside Syria and from the defectors and refugees whom al-Jazeera has interviewed in northern Jordan reveal that the war in Syria has descended into a sectarian war, primarily between the ruling Alawite minority and the Arab Sunni majority.

One of the places that the Assad regime has been most violent is against the Sunnis living in the Alawite traditional homeland and in Homs, a largely Sunni city just to the east of the Alawite heartland. Assad's forces have been destroying Sunni villages in that area, and wreaking havoc on Homs. As the Sunni refugees in Jordan – mostly from the Homs area – who were cited on al-Jazeera on July 4 noted, "The regime has turned this into a sectarian battle between itself and the Sunnis. It is killing the Sunnis in Homs and forcing other Sunnis to flee that area.

Clearly, the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad understands

that the trend in the Middle East is towards Islamic Sunni fundamentalism, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Wahhabis, the Qataris, and Turkey's Sunni fundamentalist leadership.

The regime knows that in the long run, it cannot stand up to these forces -- possibly the reason Assad and his cohorts are doing everything they can to destroy the Sunni fundamentalists and perhaps hoping then to retreat to the Alawites' ancient homeland.

Another sign that the Syrian Sunnis are abandoning Assad is the defection of Manaf Tlas, a senior Sunni Syrian military official – a childhood friend of Bashar Assad, and whose father Mustafa was a close ally of Bashar's father Hafiz, the previous dictator who ruled Syria with an iron hand.

Since 1966, Syria has been ruled by the Alawite minority, who make up about 12% of Syria's population and live mainly in the coastal area between Lebanon and Turkey. As the Alawites historically would do the distasteful work which the Sunnis refused to do, the Syrian Sunni Arab establishment traditionally looked down upon them, referring them as "abid," or, roughly "slave."

Also, as Alawites believe that Ali – the Muslim prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law – is God, Sunnis do not see them as monotheists, and often therefore do not even accept them as Muslims.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the Sunnis, who did their best to avoid military service, gave their Alawite servants recommendations to enter the military. As they rose to higher and higher ranks, the Alawites eventually, in 1966, took over Syria in a military coup.

Members of Alawite community have all along felt conflic-

ted: should they see themselves as Arabs and try to attain, through Arab nationalism, the equality they lacked among the Sunnis? Those who accepted this view became the most ardent Arab nationalists in Syria; their hope was that speaking Arabic as the Sunnis did would serve to gain them the equality that was eluding them under Syrian traditional system, in which being Sunni was a key element to advancement.

Others within the Alawite community, who disagreed with this approach, argued that they would never be accepted by the Sunni majority as equals; and instead strove to attain an independent homeland in their traditional homeland: the Syrian coastal area between today's Lebanon and Turkey.

In the early 1940s after the French had ruled Syria from post-World War I until 1946, Suleyman Assad, the grandfather of Syria's present leader, Bashar Assad, and about five other Alawite leaders wrote to the French government asking the French to let the Alawites have their own state in their homeland along the coast. These Alawite leaders claimed that the Sunnis had never treated the non-Sunnis fairly, and that therefore, in a united Syrian state, the Alawites would continue to suffer serious discrimination. They cited as evidence the way the Sunnis were at that time treating the Jews in British-Mandated Palestine.

Given the present trend towards Sunni Islamist rule throughout the region, the non-Sunnis clearly feel threatened. Christians have been leaving the Middle East in droves. Shiites in Bahrain, although they form the majority, are ruled by an oppressive Sunni minority who use brutal force and who, earlier this year, called in their Sunni Saudi allies to subdue

the Shiites, who were calling for equal rights. Syria's Druze, Ismailis, Christians and other minorities seem to be terrified about what might happen to them if the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood takes over there.

If one views Assad in this context, there is a real possibility that Syria will not stay united, and that the days of Arab nationalism are over. Islamist Sunni fundamentalism is the enemy of the non-Sunnis, who, to survive, will likely have to look for other political alternatives beyond the present borders, and possibly ally themselves with fellow non-Sunni Arabs in the region.

Similarly, the Kurds in northern Syria, who are directly connected to the Kurdish territories inside Iraq, although also Sunni, see the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahhabis by and large as Arab imperialists trying to force them to abandon their Kurdish identity and become Arabs -- probably the reason most Kurds loathe the Muslim Brotherhood. For the Brotherhood, being Sunni is not enough. For the Brotherhood, only Arabs can be true Muslims. Non-Arabs must abandon their non-Arab and non-Sunni languages and cultures, and adopt an Arab identity -- exactly how most of the Middle East became Arabs during the first century of Islam.

If the present violence in Syria does not come to an end, Syria could easily disintegrate; the northern part of the country would become a Kurdish entity – either within a loosely federated, geographically altered Syria, or possibly even as an independent state. If either of these were to happen, Iraqi Kurds, who have been politically counseling the Syrian Kurds, could form an alliance with Syria's Kurds who inhabit an area which reaches west almost to ➤

➤ Aleppo, a city not far from the Mediterranean Sea. If the Kurds then made some political arrangement/alliance with a future Alawite state, they could gain access to the sea. This would be a major step towards the establishment of an independent

Kurdish state.

In short, what stands behind most of the violence in Syria is the rise of Arab Sunni fundamentalism in its various forms – whether Salafi, Wahhabi, or Muslim Brotherhood. All of those threaten the very existence of

the Alawites, the Kurds, and other members of the non-Sunni ethnic and religious groups.

It is therefore much easier to understand why the ruling Alawites feel they are fighting a life and death battle with the Sunnis, and why they

believe they must spare no effort to survive. It also explains why most of Syria's other minorities – such as the Druze, Ismailis, and Christians – still largely support the Assad regime. ○

middle east online
میدل ایست اونلاین

JULY 12, 2012

What future for Syria's Kurds?

Syria's Kurds seek unity ahead of uncertain future as Turkey keeps an eye on deployment of fighters close to PKK.

Middle East Online / By Acil Tabarra - BEIRUT

Syria's Kurds, hostile to a regime that has oppressed them and suspicious of the opposition, are putting aside differences to unite and manage their own region in the face of an uncertain future.

They have engaged carefully with the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, but have also kept the rebel Free Syrian Army out of their regions, for fear of attracting the violence that has engulfed much of the country.

In recent days, the Syrian army has pulled back from northern Kurdish areas where fighters close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have been deployed.

That has fuelled suspicions among some of collusion with the regime, and angered Turkey, which considers the PKK a terrorist organisation and has criticised the presence of the PKK-linked Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) along the border.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned this week that Turkey would not hesitate to go after members of the PKK, which took up arms in 1984 and has bases in autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, inside Syria.

"That's not even a matter of discussion, it is a given," he said, describing the establishment of PYD posts near the Turkish border as aimed directly at Ankara.

The traditional parties of Syria's Kurds have been largely suspicious of the PYD, particularly following an influx of Kurds from northern Iraq to the area.

But despite the differences, the region's communities signed an accord on July 11, under the sponsorship of Massud Barzani, president of Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Since then, the Kurdish National Council, which groups around a dozen traditional Kurdish Syrian parties has joined the People's Council of Western Kurdistan (PCWK), a PYD offshoot, under the banner of the Supreme Kurdish Council.

"The agreement was extremely positive because we feared violence inside the community with the PYD, which previously backed the regime," Havidar, a Kurdish journalist in northern Syria, said.

"It seems that the Syrian Kurds have decided to work together," said Ignace Leverrier, a former French diplomat who spent part of his career in Syria.



The PYD "has perhaps started to understand that the regime is finished," he said.

The People's Council of Western Kurdistan denies any cooperation with the regime.

"We have peacefully cleansed our areas of the presence of government forces," a spokesman for the council, Shirzad Izidi, said.

He said the group had formed "popular Kurdish units," a kind of Syrian version of the famed Peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq, who are helping keep order in the region.

And while these fighters are believed to be the only ones carrying arms in the Kurdish region for now, Barzani recently revealed that Iraqi Kurds are training their Syrian counterparts in northern Iraq, most of them deserters from the Syrian army.

The Kurdish community, largely concentrated in the north, represents around 15 percent of the 23 million population in Syria, according to French geographer Fabrice Balanche, a Syria specialist.

The community has long complained of discrimination at the hand of the regime's ruling Baath party and advocated for recognition of their cultural and political rights.

And it has had difficult relations with the opposition Syrian National Council, accusing it of seeking to marginalise Syria's ethnic and religious minorities, even though the council's head Abdel Basset Sayda is himself Kurdish.

But the Kurds insist they are not seeking autonomy like their Iraqi counterparts.

"We want our rights to be clearly recognised in the next constitution," said Bahjat Bashir, a leader of Syria's Kurdistan Democratic Party.

"We want to be full partners in the new Syria and we are committed to the unity of the country."■



July 14, 2012

Turkish police and Kurds clash, bomb wounds 12

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey (Reuters) - Police fired water cannon and teargas as they clashed with stone-throwing Kurdish protesters in south-east Turkey on Saturday, while militants elsewhere in the region detonated a bomb which wounded 12 police officers.

Kurdish members of parliament were caught up in the trouble as police and demonstrators battled on the streets of the main south-eastern city of

Diyarbakir, where the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was planning to hold a rally.

The provincial governor had refused the party permission to hold the rally, planned in part to call for the release of jailed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant leader Abdullah Ocalan.

The rally coincided with the first anniversary of a declaration of "democratic autonomy" by Kurdish politicians, and it was also exactly one year after PKK guerrillas killed 13 soldiers in an attack in Diyarbakir.

While the street clashes continued in Diyarbakir, PKK militants detonated a roadside bomb by remote control, wounding 12 police officers after they got out of a vehicle in eastern Turkey, security sources said.

The attack took place outside a police shooting range in the province of



Van, which is on the border with Iran. The wounded police were not reported to be in a serious condition.

No further details were immediately available.

More than 40,000 people have been killed since the PKK took up arms against the state in 1984 with the aim of creating a separate state in mainly Kurdish south-east Turkey. ♦



July 16, 2012

Turkish-Kurdish Oil Deals Upset Baghdad

Dorian Jones / voanews.com

ISTANBUL — Growing tensions between Baghdad and the semiautonomous Iraqi Kurdish government over control of the country's energy reserves is threatening to pull neighboring Turkey into the deepening dispute. This past weekend, Iraq warned Ankara that such trade with the region could damage its relations with the central government in Baghdad.

Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish regional government has started to send dozens of tankers of crude oil to neighboring Turkey. The shipments will be refined and sent back to the Kurdish enclave. Turkey said last week that it had begun importing five to 10 road tankers of crude a day from the northern region of Iraq and the volume could rise to 100-200 tankers per day.

This has angered the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki who called on Ankara to immediately end the arrangement.

But Sinan Ulgen, head of the Istanbul-based international relations research center Edam, thinks Baghdad will be disappointed

"No, I don't think Ankara will comply, essentially for two reasons: one, relationship between Maliki government is quite problematic. Turkey accuses Maliki of trying to grab power. So Ankara does not feel any sort of need to please the Maliki government; secondly

Ankara does not want to take a step that would endanger the position of the Kurdish regional government in its own dealing with Baghdad," Ulgen said.

The Kurds and the Arab-led government in Baghdad have been arguing over the right to develop and export the north's natural resources. Baghdad says the region has no right to sign deals unilaterally and that exports must go through the state-run pipelines. Kurds argue that the constitution gives them the right to sign agreements without consulting Baghdad.

Felah Mustafa Bakir is the head of foreign relations for the Kurdistan Regional Government.

"We have done nothing in violation of the Iraqi Constitution. We have respected the Iraqi Constitution and we want to help the people. We have been able to develop sector. We have been able to produce oil for 175,000 barrels a day, that we did not have single barrel in the past," Bakir said.

Despite the controversy, Iraqi Kurds have been signing contracts with international oil companies, including U.S. oil giant Exxon.

Michael Howard is an adviser to the Iraqi Kurdish energy ministry. He says the Kurdish regional government realizes the potential in selling to Turkey.

"Turkey is a growing economy at the moment,

it aims to be one of top 10 economies within 10 years. They don't have a great deal of energy themselves. So they will be looking around at their neighbors for their energy security. But also Turkey could be a major a transit route," Howard said.

For years, Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan have been trying to hammer out a solution by passing a so-called hydrocarbon law. Baghdad believes petroleum policy should be set at the federal level and comply with its interpretation of the constitution. Irbil, in contrast, wants to be able to award production contracts and plan export pipelines on its own terms.

Political observers say there is little hope of a solution.

Ulgen said irrespective of whether a new law is passed, Ankara is already eyeing Iraqi Kurds' energy as a vital source.

"I would expect Turkey would continue to buy oil even if the hydrocarbon law issue is not resolved. In the long run Turkey is looking at the opportunities in northern Iraq in order to allay some of its concerns over energy imports. So from that perspective in the medium and long term it will provide an alternative to Turkey's dependency on Iran," Ulgen said.

Ankara has been cutting its energy imports from neighboring Iran to comply with international sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program. That, analysts say, has given added impetus to its growing economic and political ties with its Iraqi Kurdish neighbors, despite what Baghdad says. □

TURQUIE • Ankara revoit ses alliances

La crise syrienne a montré au gouvernement islamiste de la Turquie que l'Iran et la Russie ne pouvaient être des alliés fiables. Ankara ne peut compter que sur l'Occident.

Simon Tisdall | The Guardian

Comme les temps changent ! Au début de 2003, quand le gouvernement Bush avait demandé l'autorisation de faire passer ses troupes par le territoire turc pour envahir l'Irak, Ankara avait froidement refusé. Pour s'être aussi audacieusement opposée à la volonté de l'Amérique, la Turquie avait été saluée dans le monde arabe, en particulier en Syrie. C'est désormais au tour du régime du président Bachar El-Assad d'être considéré à Ankara comme un ennemi dangereux : le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a promptement changé de ton [après l'attaque d'un avion turc par la Syrie le 22 juin]. Rechignant à s'attaquer lui-même à Assad, Erdogan s'est tourné vers les Etats-Unis et l'Otan en quête de soutien. Mais Erdogan a eu beau jurer de frapper toutes les unités militaires syriennes qui approcheraient de la frontière, d'appuyer "à tout prix" les forces de l'opposition et de faire tout son possible pour abattre la dynastie Assad, en réalité la position de la Turquie est faible. Les priorités d'Ankara sont doubles, et d'ordre national : la modernisation et la croissance économique. La Turquie ne veut pas d'une guerre à sa frontière sud ; elle ne peut pas se permettre de voir un conflit menacer ces deux objectifs, déstabiliser un peu plus les régions kurdes, et sérieusement compromettre ses intérêts régionaux. Cette faiblesse inhérente de la Turquie était manifeste même avant le début du soulèvement en Syrie, il y a plus d'un an. Et elle s'est accentuée par une série de graves erreurs de calcul. Ahmet Davutoglu, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, surnommé le "Kissinger turc" (un surnom censé être un compliment), est le père de la politique du "zéro problème avec les voisins". En bref, l'idée était que la Turquie renforce ses liens avec les pays arabes qu'elle avait autrefois colonisés, joue le rôle d'intermédiaire de bonne foi avec l'Iran, et entretienne une relation pragmatique positive avec Israël. En



▲© Dessin de Bleibel, Liban.

théorie, tout cela devait consolider la position d'Ankara en tant que puissance régionale montante et d'interconnexion entre l'Occident et le Proche-Orient. Cette politique a semblé fonctionner pendant un temps. En ce qui concerne plus particulièrement la Syrie, la Turquie s'est efforcée de mettre de côté de vieux litiges, comme le partage des ressources en eau, le problème de la province frontalière de Hatay et le soutien de Damas aux militants kurdes. Une ouverture qui paraît aujourd'hui malavisée. Du reste, les relations avec Israël ont capoté. De son côté, l'Irak préfère manifestement Téhéran à Ankara. Et les responsables du programme nucléaire iranien n'ont, semble-t-il, aucune considération pour les efforts de médiation turcs. La question kurde, elle, n'a toujours pas trouvé de solution. La crise syrienne offre aux dirigeants turcs la possibilité de réorienter la politique de leur pays sur une base plus saine, en cherchant aujourd'hui qui sont leurs vrais amis, non qui ils pourraient être. Les Etats-Unis et la Grande-Bretagne appartiennent fermement au premier camp, tout comme la plupart des pays de l'Otan, en dépit des sentiments antiturcs agités par le peu regretté Nicolas Sarkozy et quelques âmes sœurs allemandes. La Russie n'est certes pas une amie de la Tur

quie, pas plus que l'Iran. Confrontés à un nombre toujours plus important de réfugiés, "hôtes" ou transfuges syriens, et à des provocations militaires

imprévisibles, les dirigeants turcs devraient comprendre où se trouve leur intérêt. Sinon, qu'ils se concentrent au moins sur une question en particulier : l'énorme arsenal syrien dans le domaine des armes conventionnelles et de destruction massive. Un danger mis en lumière la semaine dernière par The Christian Science Monitor : "On dispose de peu d'informations solides sur les capacités syriennes dans le domaine de la guerre chimique et biologique, mais le pays disposerait d'un des plus grands stocks d'agents chimiques du monde, dont du VX et du sarin, des gaz innervants. Damas est également doté d'un nombre impressionnant de missiles sol-sol, comme les Scud-D, qui peuvent être équipés de têtes chimiques." Il est effrayant d'envisager que certaines de ces armes soient utilisées par un régime désespéré se battant pour sa survie ou qu'elles tombent aux mains de groupes terroristes, quelle que soit leur obédience. Le chaos qui s'ensuivrait aurait largement de quoi faire pâlir ce qui s'est passé en Libye et dans le Sahel après la chute de Kadhafi. □

Syrie-Russie : des liens stratégiques mais aussi matrimoniaux

ELLEN BARRY

MOSCOU - La Syrie compte environ 20 000 épouses russes, héritage d'une alliance née de la guerre froide qui, à partir des années 1960, mêlait les jeunes des élites dans des dortoirs et des salles de cours soviétiques.

Cette diaspora inhabituelle offre un aperçu de la relation complexe entre les deux pays et explique la réticence du Kremlin à rejeter le président syrien, Bachar el-Assad. La Russie a des intérêts stratégiques en Syrie, y compris des contrats d'armement qui s'élèvent à 700 millions de dollars par an (556 millions d'euros), et un petit port sur la Méditerranée, sa dernière base militaire en dehors de l'ex-Union soviétique.

Mais n'oublions pas le facteur humain. Il est intervenu il y a cinquante ans quand des liens se sont formés entre

Depuis l'URSS, les relations culturelles sont profondes entre ces pays.

des jeunes qui se sont rencontrés à l'université. Dans presque n'importe quel ministère ou siège social syrien, on trouve des hommes qui ont passé leur jeunesse en Russie. Nombre d'entre eux sont rentrés avec une femme à leur bras, et leurs enfants ont grandi dans des foyers russophones.

"Ce sont les épouses de l'élite, qui ont une certaine influence, mais en douceur", explique Nina Sergejeva, qui, jusqu'à récemment, dirigeait une organisation d'expatriés russes depuis son domicile de Lattaquié. "L'élite masculine de Damas est très marquée par la Russie." Selon une estimation du Kremlin, alors qu'aucune solution diplomatique ne parvient à résoudre le conflit en Syrie, environ 30 000 citoyens russes, des femmes et des enfants pour la plupart, y vivent toujours. Moscou a déjà été confrontée à

pareille situation au Moyen-Orient, lorsque la chute de gouvernements alliés de l'URSS a coïncidé des citoyens soviétiques dans divers pays. Mais ni dans ces proportions, ni à l'ère des médias sociaux, où le sort des Russes pourrait se révéler très embarrassant pour Moscou.

"Comme nous l'avons vu avec les cas d'évacuation au Liban et en Palestine ces dernières années, des problèmes surgissent toujours - et là, il n'était pas question de milliers ou des dizaines de milliers de personnes, mais de quelques centaines", explique Yelena Suponina,



Durant les dernières décennies, les unions entre ressortissants des deux pays ont été très nombreuses. Roksana Dzhened (ci-contre) a épousé son mari syrien, Wa'el, en 2000 et vit maintenant à Moscou. Grâce à elle, dit-elle, il échappe aux liens familiaux très importants qui existent dans la société syrienne.

analyste politique moscovite spécialiste du Moyen-Orient. Évacuer les Russes de Syrie, dit-elle, "serait cent fois pire".

Tout cela remonte à une expérience de 1963, lorsque le parti Baas socialiste est arrivé au pouvoir. L'URSS offrait d'éduquer les meilleurs étudiants en provenance d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Amérique latine, en les associant à des camarades soviétiques dans des brigades de travail et des "soirées de l'amitié".

L'objectif était de forger une élite intellectuelle mondiale prosoviétique, mais cela s'est d'abord traduit par des mariages. Les jeunes femmes ont émigré en tant qu'épouses de médecins, de professeurs et de fonctionnaires. "Les Soviétiques leur ont dit adieu, pensant qu'elles ne rentreraient jamais", affirme Natalia Krylova, une historienne qui a publié de nombreux ouvrages sur les populations russes d'Afrique.

Les unions entre Russes et Syriens étaient particulièrement fréquentes - et pas seulement pour des raisons géopolitiques, ont déclaré lors d'interviews maris et femmes. Beaucoup de Syriens ont eu l'impression d'être transformés par leur séjour en Russie, mais ils ont également cherché à éviter de payer un dot, comme c'est la coutume au Moyen-Orient. Mahmoud al-Hamza, qui a rencontré sa femme, Nadejda, dans un parc de Moscou en 1971, dit que pour épouser une Syrienne, "il faut un appartement, de l'argent et de l'or, tandis que pour une Russe, une alliance suffit".

Les demoiselles soviétiques avaient leurs propres raisons de s'intéresser aux Syriens - des hommes sobres qui, grâce aux liens du parti Baas avec les communistes, entraient et sortaient librement

de l'URSS. Une nouvelle vague de mariages a suivi l'effondrement du bloc soviétique, quand les jeunes femmes ont cherché un moyen d'échapper au chaos économique.

"Je veux que le monde entier sache ceci : les Russes sont des gigolos. Peut-être pas tous, mais plus de la moitié d'entre eux", proclame Roksana Dzhened, qui a épousé Wa'el, un homme d'affaires, en 2000 et vit avec lui à Moscou. Cela lui a bénéficié aussi, remarque-t-elle, il a échappé aux exigences familiales qui incombent aux maris de Syriennes. "En cas de dispute, que fait une Russe ? Elle pleure, raconte-t-elle. Au pire, elle va voir une amie et lui dit : 'il est comme ci et comme ça'. Une Arabe ? Elle réunit le groupe de tous ses proches. Elle peut se rendre chez la mère de son mari et sa sœur durant la nuit et se mettre à hurler." L'une des questions les plus épineuses qui se posent, est de savoir, après cinquante ans de mariages entre les deux communautés, qui est russe et qui ne l'est pas. La distinction, si elle existe vraiment, sera difficile à faire.

Svetlana Zaitseva, 62 ans, qui vit dans le port syrien de Tartous, avait 19 ans quand elle a rencontré son mari, un étudiant en linguistique qui partageait le même dortoir dans l'ex-Leningrad.

Cette mère de trois enfants, qui a quatre petits-enfants, s'accroche à l'espoir que le conflit aura une fin, mais même s'il dégénère en guerre, dit-elle, elle choisira de rester en Syrie jusqu'au bout.

"On ne peut pas faire autrement, avance-t-elle. Nous appartenons à cette terre, maintenant. Nos enfants sont ici, ils sont citoyens syriens, comme nos petits-enfants. Tout ce qui est ici est à nous."



Turkey tries 46 lawyers over Kurdish militant links

ISTANBUL / Mon Jul 16, 2012 / By Ece Toksabay / (Reuters)

DOZENS of lawyers went on trial in Turkey on Monday on charges of links to Kurdish militants and foreign jurists rallied outside the court to protest at the latest in a series of cases that have drawn criticism of Ankara's human rights record.

All 50 defendants - including 46 lawyers - had been involved in representing the jailed Kurdish militant chief Abdullah Ocalan. Among the charges listed in the indictment against them was passing orders from Ocalan to rebel fighters.

The trial, and others like it across Turkey, have led lawyers and civic groups to question the stated commitment of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's government to human rights and to criticize the widespread use of pre-trial detention.

"How bitterly funny is it that a country teaching democracy and human rights to Syria and the whole region is stealing the right to defense on its own soil," said Dogan Erbas, one of the lawyers on trial, told the court on behalf of other defendants.

"Going to bed as a lawyer and waking up as an executive of a terrorist organization shows that this case is not trying a crime, it is trying a political stance. This case has been political since the very start," he said.

The defendants, who include a journalist and three members of a law firm, stand accused of maintaining ties to the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which the state sees as the urban wing of the militant separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

A founding member and leader of the PKK, Ocalan, 64, was captured in 1999 and is serving a life prison term.

The PKK, considered a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union, has waged an armed campaign against the Turkish state for autonomy in the mainly Kurdish southeast that has claimed more than 40,000 lives since 1984.

Thousands of Kurdish politicians, activists, journalists and academics have been arrested since 2009 on suspicion of links with the KCK and many of them remain in jail without being tried. Out of Monday's 50 defendants, 37 are in prison.

The trial got off to a chaotic start when more than 100 lawyers, all wanting to represent the defendants, tried to crowd into the small Istanbul courtroom with many resorting to standing on their seats in order to watch the proceedings.

"This is the largest courtroom we have, so there's no point in complaining about it," said presiding Judge Mehmet Ekinçi, after receiving grievances about the size of the courtroom. Hundreds of people were

unable to enter.

Defense lawyers took turns to speak, before leaving the courtroom to allow others to enter. "We are representing colleagues who are now defendants," some of them said.

As in similar trials, the court rejected a request by Erbas for the accused to defend themselves in the Kurdish language.

Turkish is the only official language in Turkey, where ethnic Kurds make up around a fifth of the population and Turkish citizens are required to speak Turkish at formal proceedings. They can request an interpreter only if deemed unable to speak Turkish.

FOREIGN LAWYERS RALLY OUTSIDE COURT

Dressed in their traditional gowns, scores of lawyers from 27 countries around the world gathered outside the courthouse in a show of support for the accused.

"We are here to support our colleagues and protest the judiciary actions that strip the defense of their rights to defend," said Judith Lichtenberg, professor of law and philosophy at Georgetown University in the United States.

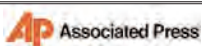
"We will be following this case until the end and we will not leave our colleagues as captives to political motives," she told reporters shortly before the court opened.

In a written statement, 18 rights and lawyers' groups from Turkey, Europe and Canada said they had written to the United Nations calling on it to scrutinize the case and make recommendations to the Turkish government.

Monday's trial came two weeks after the start of another trial in which more than 200 people, including a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, stand accused of links to the KCK.

Fifteen of those defendants, including well-known academic Busra Ersanli, were released from custody last Friday in what appeared to be one of the first outcomes of legal reforms tightening up conditions for pre-trial detentions.

Those reforms were hurriedly pushed through parliament this month before the summer recess, following complaints by campaigners, and the prime minister, about the powers of state prosecutors.●



Turkey helicopter crashes in Kurd region; 4 killed

ANKARA, Turkey, Sunday July 22, 2012 (AP)

A TURKISH paramilitary helicopter crashed Sunday in a southeastern region where troops are fighting Kurdish rebels, killing four security personnel on board, officials said. Eight others were injured.

The S-70 Sikorsky helicopter, belonging to Turkey's paramilitary police force, crashed while landing near an outpost in Hakkari province, close to the border with Iraq, the military said in a statement posted on its website. It was carrying four crew members and 11 security personnel.

The military said the helicopter experienced a loss of power and crashed. But Firat News, an agency that is close to the rebels, claimed the helicopter was downed by rebel fire.

Kurdish rebels have used northern Iraq as a springboard for attacks on Turkish targets in their decades-long fight for autonomy in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated southeast. The conflict has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people since 1984.

Erdogan vs. The Kurds

The National Interest

Aliza Marcus



Pity Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It seems he just can't get the Kurdish issue right.

In early June, when Erdogan visited Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkey's Kurdish southeast, shops closed in protest. A few weeks later, when he announced that schools would be allowed to offer elective Kurdish language classes, opposition Kurdish politicians accused him of denying their identity by refusing mother-tongue education for Kurds. Even Kurdish Islamists aren't fans. "Turks and Kurds fought together to create the state, but somehow, we were then left behind," said Kurdish lawyer Huseyin Yilmaz, who heads the Hezbollah-rooted Mustazaf-Der association (no relation to Hezbollah in Lebanon). "We have our own language, our own identity. We have something we want."

Erdogan's unpopularity among Kurds is hardly a surprise. Since his Justice and Development Party (AKP) won an unprecedented third parliamentary majority in June of last year, Erdogan appears to have abandoned the democratic-reform plans that initially gained him respect from Kurds and the backing of Turkish liberals. The prime minister's campaign pledge to overhaul the constitution—drawn up by the 1980–1983 military junta—is moribund. Kurdish politicians in Ankara from the main political parties say any package he produces is unlikely to answer Kurdish demands that their identity and language be recognized in the constitution. And instead of changing restrictive penal-code laws used for decades to repress Kurdish identity and muzzle demands, he's now using them to silence those who question his policies or advocate for change.

Almost four hundred officials from the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) party are in prison, among them thirty-six elected mayors and thirteen deputy mayors, along with six hundred-plus Kurdish civil-society activists, including human-rights workers, trade unionists and people who did no more

than attend their meetings. Many have been held in prison for upwards of three years while the trials progress. Charges center on alleged membership in the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), which prosecutors say was set up by the PKK rebel force to control the Kurdish southeast. The evidence against defendants, including press conferences they called and legal briefs they wrote, is shoddy even by Turkey's notoriously lax judicial standards.

Meanwhile, the number of journalists jailed—the majority of them Kurds—has skyrocketed to a level not seen since the 1990s, when a broad antiterror law made writing about the Kurdish insurgency a crime. And more than seven hundred university students are in prison, the highest number since the 1980 military coup, many charged with aiding the PKK rebel group through its urban KCK political wing. The evidence, again, usually rests on nonviolent acts or speeches promoting Kurdish identity or criticizing government policies, including the cost of tuition. While the space for legal Kurdish politics narrows, the PKK shows no signs of weakness; in June, rebels killed some twenty Turkish soldiers, including eight in an assault on a fortified Turkish outpost close to the border with Iraq.

Erdogan denies that he's backed off from his reform agenda and frequently cites the changes he has made in his terms in office: he opened a twenty-four-hour state-run Kurdish television channel; allowed graduate Kurdish-language programs at university; opened the way for elective Kurdish-language classes in primary and secondary schools; and made it possible for families to speak to their imprisoned children in Kurdish. The bottleneck isn't him, he claims, it's the Kurds. He notes that the BDP, which won thirty-six seats in last year's national parliamentary elections, won't join him in condemning PKK "terrorist" attacks and won't acknowledge the Kurdish reforms he's done. He also accuses them of not being able to even go to the toilet unless the PKK first "loosens the strings [3]."

Erdogan's not wholly wrong. The BDP won't take his side. It's not because they are afraid of the PKK or because they are spiteful. It's because, from the perspective of many Kurds, the PKK's fight is still legitimate given the judicial assault on democratic activism and the lack of a formal peace process. At the same time, Erdogan's reforms may be new for Turks, but for Kurds, these changes are either irrelevant to main concerns or twenty years behind the demand curve. Take Kurdish-language television: a nice idea, which is why pro-PKK activists in Europe started their own satellite programming in 1995. The graduate programs in Kurdish-language studies were not poorly received, it's just that with so many students and some professors in prison, it's hard to know who will teach the classes—or take them. Elective Kurdish-language courses might be a good idea for Turkish students, but Kurds want their children to learn in their own language, not learn about it. And allowing families to speak Kurdish to their children on visiting day in prison is great. But letting them out of prison would be even better.

It's not that Kurds aren't clear what they want. It's more like Turks don't want to hear it. In a public statement last year, leading Kurdish political parties and organizations demanded "democratic autonomy" and a realistic plan for ending the PKK's war and demobilizing the some eight thousand rebels whose home base is in the remote Kandil mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. In a June interview with the liberal Turkish daily Taraf, BDP cochairman Selahattin Demirtas laid out a framework for getting to the solution: Halt the arrests of Kurdish officials and activists, and release them from prison; ease conditions for imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who hasn't had any visits, including from his lawyers, in almost a year; and create a mechanism for dialogue.

Erdogan's Intransigence

Unfortunately, like those who ruled before him, Erdogan's having a hard time accepting Kurdish nationalism and the popular hold the PKK exerts over Kurdish opinion. As a result, he remains wedded to the idea that if he can do away with the PKK and outspoken Kurdish activists, he can find someone who will be perfectly content with the changes he's made to date. But that's not a way to make peace. If he wants to end the fighting, he has to talk to those who have the guns. And if

➔ he wants a political settlement with the Kurds, he needs to negotiate with their political party. Anything short of that is just wasting time.

It's popular to suggest that Erdogan wants a deal, but he has to move slowly because of the nationalist wing in his party and within his voting base. Yet convincing the Turkish public may not be as hard as it seems. When word leaked out about secret talks between the PKK and

the head of Turkey's national intelligence agency, MIT, last year, Erdogan's government didn't fall, and his ratings in the polls didn't drop. When Erdogan announced the new Kurdish-language reform package, the most amazing thing was the lack of reaction among AKP voters. Erdogan's strength is that he has won the support of the Turkish public—again, again and again. His weakness is that he still hasn't decided how to use this political capital to solve Turkey's most funda-

mental problem.

The Kurdish issue isn't a matter of selling something to the voters. It's a matter of selling it to Erdogan.◆

Aliza Marcus is a writer in Washington, DC, and the author of Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence.



Agency of Kurdistan for News

Syrian Kurdish opposition signs Erbil deal under Barzani's supervision

ERBIL, July 11, 2012 (AKnews)

Under the auspices of Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, two Kurdish opposition forces of Syria signed a joint statement today in Salahaddin, Erbil, Kurdistan presidential website said.

Erbil Statement, as it was named, was signed by Kurdistan National Council of Syria and the National Council of Western Kurdistan.

According to the statement the parties should form a joint committee called Kurdish Senior Board which is supposed to draw the general policy for leading the Kurds in the current decisive political situation in Syria.

The statement further urges the signatories to stop their media war.

Barzani congratulated the opposition parties over the "historic deal" and urged them to unite voices in the face of the current changes in Syria, according to Kurdistan presidential website.



The president also demanded the Kurdish opposition representatives not to give up the struggle for the Kurdish ethnic rights which can be achieved only by maintaining unity among the Kurdish political forces and strategic ties with the entire democratic forces across Syria.□



Agency of Kurdistan for News

France selects new General Consul to Kurdistan Region

ERBIL, July 16, 2012 (AKnews)

The French government has selected Alan Gepran as the new General Consul to the Kurdistan Region, said the Kurdistan Regional Government's representative in France.

qunsuli nwey faransa Khama Zrar said the party was hosted in the region's representative headquarters in France for selecting Gepran as the new consul and to introduce himself to Kurdish migrants in the country.

Zrar added: "France was one of the first countries that opened its consulate in the region and Fredric Tisso was the first French consul there since 2008."



Gepran announced: "The same as last year a French political and economic delegation will visit the region to convince them to work like the other French companies that arrived to work there earlier.

"The cultural relation with the Kurdistan Region will be the work priority of the consulate." □

Syria stiffens its defense of Damascus

BEIRUT

Helicopter gunships join battle in capital as rebels and army extend clashes

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR
AND DALAL MAWAD

Damascus was tense on Tuesday as clashes between the Syrian Army and rebels near the city center extended into a third day, with government forces throwing a security cordon around some embattled neighborhoods, firing from helicopters and reinforcing the number of tanks on the streets.

The urban combat in Damascus overshadowed international diplomacy aimed at halting the Syria conflict, which intensified before a U.N. Security Council vote this week on whether to extend the mission of 300 U.N. monitors, who have been basically trapped in their hotel rooms since last month, their work suspended.

There was also new evidence, reported by Israel's intelligence chief, that President Bashar al-Assad was moving troops into Damascus, the capital, from Syria's border with the disputed Golan Heights territory held by Israel, a possible indication of the seriousness of the fighting that was roiling neighborhoods at the president's doorstep.

The epicenter of the Damascus fighting remained an area in the city's southwest where street battles first erupted Sunday, particularly the Midan neighborhood because rebel fighters concentrated there after being chased out of surrounding quarters.

"The heaviest clashes are going on in Al-Midan and the neighboring areas," said a spokesman for an activist group in Damascus. "Regime forces are threatening to bombard the whole area and telling civilians to evacuate their houses."

Despite other fighting in the northern suburb of Qaboun, plus sweeping statements from some rebel fighters that the ultimate battle for Damascus had been joined, numerous opposition members suggested that it was more-intense skirmishing in a limited number of neighborhoods, a continuing of gun battles that started on Sunday.

"The battle for Damascus has not started," said Abu Raed, a coordinator in Qaboun for the loose coalition of rebel fighters known as the Free Syrian Army, who was interviewed in Turkey and used only one name because he planned to return to Syria. "It is more ebb and flow; these skirmishes are just a test as our fighters infiltrate then withdraw."

There were signs the government was taking it seriously, however, with one video posted online showing tank and troop reinforcements rolling into



The Shaam News Network said this picture, which it released on Tuesday, showed Free Syrian Army fighters firing on a base in the town of Qusayr, Homs Province.

Damascus and activists reporting more tanks entering Midan. Another showed a tiny pickup truck groaning under the weight of more than a dozen shabiha, the militiamen deployed by the government to subdue neighborhoods, apparently headed toward the fighting.

In Jerusalem, Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, Israel's military intelligence chief, told a parliamentary committee that the Syrian government had withdrawn forces from the Golan Heights to redeploy them in Damascus. He did not give more specifics.

Satellite images show that Mr. Assad is directing artillery at highly populated regions and acting "extremely brutally, which displays their desperation and indicates they are unable to find more efficient solutions to pacify the uprisings," General Kochavi said.

Indeed, the government seemed to be preparing the same tactics in and around Midan that it had in other cities like Homs and Hama where it momentarily lost control — isolating them, waiting for the rebels' ammunition to run low and then pounding them into submission.

But that is a riskier, more fraught policy in Damascus because it is such a symbolic prize and the government has tried to use the stability there throughout the 16 months of the uprising to project the sense that it remains in control of the entire country.

Elias Hanna, a retired Lebanese officer and military analyst, said the fighting in Damascus was important for three reasons: Control there is the main pillar of the Assad regime; attacking in the capital indicates the rebels have

ramped up their game; and keeping Damascus calm will tie down a lot of elite troops that the regime has used to try to crush the uprising throughout Syria.

"Damascus is a symbol, it is the center of gravity of the Syrian regime, so this has a psychological, moral, military and political consequences," Mr. Hanna said.

But Mr. Hanna was also dismissive of claims that this was any kind of end game; the rebels would have to control much more territory and be able to make direct assaults on key institutions, he said. "We are seeing changes but it is still not decisive," he said.

The official Syrian news media concentrated on what was happening in the Midan neighborhood. They said Syrian security forces were pursuing "armed terrorist groups" — their description for all opposition — and inflicting heavy losses on them there.

Witnesses said the government had deployed a huge security presence in Damascus, basically cutting off all the embattled neighborhoods in the southern section of the capital from the rest of the city. There were also reports that government employees in the area, including the staff of Tishreen, the Syrian state-run newspaper, had been sent home early.

Unlike Monday, when activists streamed live images of an assault in Midan and a number of videos showing heavy clashes and sandbagged barricades appeared online, anti-government activists posted relatively few images of street fighting from Tuesday.

Activists in the Qaboun suburb reported that helicopter gunships were firing at fighters in the area, and they claimed that



A picture released by the Syrian opposition via the Sbaam News Network on Tuesday was described as showing destruction in the Juret al-Shayyah neighborhood of Homs.

rebel forces had shot down one of them. That could not be independently corroborated and there was no video evidence.

Videos posted by anti-government activists showed night scenes of gunfire and helicopter noise, as well as daytime images of what was said to be helicopter gunships, flying over the capital. One person posting on Twitter said he could see a helicopter shelling a Damascus

suburb.

There were also reports from Qaboun of rebel soldiers firing on government targets, including a police station and the headquarters of an elite Revolutionary Guard unit.

Elsewhere, there were scattered reports from witnesses and postings on Twitter of gunfire in the very heart of the city, around the Seven Seas Square

and near the old Hamidiyah bazaar, but the heavier fighting did not reach there.

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Istanbul, J. David Goodman from New York, Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem, and an employee of The New York Times from Damascus.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune
THURSDAY, JULY 19, 2012

Syrian leaders dealt blow as defense chief and Assad in-law are killed



AFF

ASEF SHAWKAT, DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER President Bashar al-Assad's brother-in-law and a fixture of Syrian intelligence circles for more than a decade.



REUTERS

DAOUD RAJHA, DEFENSE MINISTER A career military officer who had held his post for just under a year and was among the most powerful, visible Christians in Syria.



MORTEZA NIKOUBAZL/REUTERS

MAJ. GEN. HASSAN TURKMANI An assistant vice president who reportedly led the crisis group of security officials charged with putting down the uprising.

BEIRUT

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR
AND DALAL MAWAD

An explosion described by Syrian state television as a suicide bomb attack killed at least three top aides to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria on Wednesday, including the defense minister and Mr. Assad's powerful brother-in-

law. The blast in Damascus, after three days of fighting in the capital, struck at the very core of the military structure that has battled the 17-month-old uprising against Mr. Assad's rule.

The assassinations were the first of such high-ranking members of the elite since the revolt began and could represent a turning point in the conflict, analysts said. The nature and target of the attack strengthened the opposition's

claims that its forces have been marshaling strength to hit the close-knit centers of state power.

President Assad made no public statement about the attack and his whereabouts were not immediately clear.

The attack heightened tensions between government soldiers and the opposition, with fierce clashes reported in several Damascus districts, and it came despite a huge security presence to iso-

late the embattled neighborhoods.

In such a tense, suspicious climate, it was not clear who Mr. Assad might find to replace those killed and wounded from the innermost circle of his security team that has led the effort to put down the uprising in Syria. The attack was also accompanied by a rash of reported defections from the government side.

According to state television, the dead included the defense minister, Daoud Rajha; Asef Shawkat, the president's brother-in-law who was the deputy chief of staff of the Syrian military; and Hassan Turkmani, a former minister of defense and military adviser to Vice President Farouk Sharaa.

But the television report rejected claims by Arab satellite channels that the interior minister, Mohamed Sha'ar, also was killed, saying he was wounded and in stable condition.

"Who will replace these people?" asked Elias Hanna, a retired Lebanese military officer and a military analyst knowledgeable about Syria. "They are irreplaceable at this stage, it's hard to find loyal people now that doubt is sowed everywhere. Whoever can get to Asef Shawkat can get to Assad."

"Everyone, even those close to the inner circle, will now be under suspicion," he said.

General Rajha was appointed defense minister in August. A Christian, he was one of the prominent minority figures used by the Assad government to put a face of pluralism on the military and security services dominated by the president's Muslim Alawite sect.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an anti-Assad activist organization, said all the members of the crisis group set up by President Assad to try to put down the revolt were either dead or wounded. State television said that besides the three dead and the wounded interior minister, the only other wounded was Hisham Ikhtiar, head of the general security bureau.

The government moved rapidly to project an image of control, naming Gen. Faleh Jassem al-Frej, the military chief of staff and a man once assigned to subdue the restive Idlib province in the north, as the new defense minister. In a statement on state television, General Frej said the military would not be deterred from "cutting off every hand that harms the security of the homeland and citizens."

At the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said that the situation in Syria "is rapidly spinning out of control" and warned Mr. Assad's government to safeguard its large stockpile of chemical weapons. "It's obvious what is happening in Syria is a real escalation of the fighting," he said at a joint news conference with the British defense minister, Philip Hammond.

The attack came as diplomatic maneuvers to seek a cease-fire remained deadlocked by differences between Syria's international adversaries and sponsors, principally Russia, ahead of a United Nations Security Council vote on a West-

ern-sponsored resolution that would threaten Mr. Assad's government with economic sanctions if it does not put in place a peace plan negotiated by the special envoy Kofi Annan more than three months ago. The resolution, which Rus-



SANA, VIA REUTERS

President Assad's opponents claimed the bombing was a major victory against him.

sia has threatened to veto, would also extend the mission of 300 unarmed United Nations monitors, whose work has been suspended because of the violence.

Reporters at the United Nations said that Security Council members had agreed to delay the vote, originally scheduled for Wednesday, until Thursday at Mr. Annan's request, to allow more time for diplomats to resolve their differences over the resolution's wording.

But in Moscow, Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov, offering Russia's first official commentary on the Damascus bombing, said via his Twitter account that the attack had put consensus between members of the Security Council even farther out of reach.

"A dangerous logic: While discussions on settling the Syrian crisis are being held in the U.N. Security Council, militants intensify terrorist attacks, frustrating all attempts," he wrote.

There were conflicting accounts of how the attack took place and competing claims about who carried it out. Lt. Malik al-Kurdi, the second in command of the Free Syrian Army troops in Turkey, claimed that it had plotted the attack. He said it was not a suicide bombing but "bombs planted around the national security building" that were set off by remote control.

But people reached by telephone who live in the same neighborhood said they did not hear any explosions, which would lend weight to the idea that it was a blast within the building.

Regardless of who was responsible, Mr. Assad's opponents claimed a major victory.

"The Syrian regime has started to collapse," said the activist who heads the Syrian Observatory, who goes by the pseudonym Rami Abdul-Rahman for reasons of personal safety. "There was fighting for three days inside Damascus, it was not just a gun battle, and now someone has killed or injured all these important people."

Rumors swirled around Damascus that the bomber was a bodyguard for a

minister or a top official of President Assad's Baath Party, and there were reports of a second bomb in the street that had shattered nearby windows.

"If a bodyguard blew himself up, then there was a major internal security breach," Mr. Hanna, the Lebanese military analyst, said.

An Army statement quoted by state television said in part: "This terrorist act will only increase our insistence to purge this country from the criminal terrorist thugs and to protect the dignity of Syria and its sovereignty."

The information minister, Omran al-Zoubi, also went on a talk show to reject claims by those calling it the beginning of the end.

"The morale of our people is very high and our armed forces are at their highest level," he said.

Activists reached in Damascus said the city appeared deserted, aside from the security cordon thrown up around the leafy, well-to-do neighborhood where the explosion took place — just down the road from the American ambassador's residence, which has been vacant for months. The area is dotted with embassies and government offices.

"All the stores and shops are closed," said an activist in Damascus reached via Skype. "Some people are scared and some are happy, you can hear people firing off gunshots in many places."

The wounded were evacuated to the al-Shami hospital, an elite medical facility.

Since the uprising began in March, 2011, Syria has been run by an ever-tighter circle of army and security officials close to the president. The killings represented as much a psychological blow as a physical one, emboldening the opposition, analysts said, and challenging Mr. Assad to demonstrate quickly that his forces can still confront the rebels.

"Can they demonstrate the ability to put down this challenge and show that they are on the way to survival?" said an analyst with long experience in Damascus, speaking in return for anonymity because he still works there. "The opposition cannot defeat the regime militarily but they can defeat it through psychology."

Even as state media reported the attack, Syria's Russian-armed military was reported to have suffered further defections among its top ranks, with two brigadier generals among 600 Syrians who fled to Turkey overnight, Reuters reported.

Their action brought to 20 the number of such high-ranking figures, who include a onetime close associate of Mr. Assad, Gen. Manaf Tlass, the son of a former defense minister.

Alan Cowell contributed reporting from London, Hwaida Saad from Istanbul, J. David Goodman and Rick Gladstone from New York, Ellen Barry from Moscow, Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem, Elisabeth Bumiller and Eric Schmitt from Washington, and an employee of The New York Times from Damascus.

Syrie : la diplomatie se range derrière les combattants



GEORGES MALBRUNOT
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Sans fleurs, ni couronnes. La France en- terre discrètement le Conseil national syrien (CNS). Enfin presque. Le principal groupe de l'opposition est rétro- gradé au rang de représentant parmi d'autres d'un peuple en lutte depuis seize mois contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad. La reconnaissance internationale de cette alliance hétéroclite d'islamistes, de libéraux et de nationalistes laïcs en exil n'est plus du tout à l'ordre du jour. La refondation d'une opposition appelée à succéder au raïs, privilège au contraire les combattants de l'intérieur, ceux qui, chaque jour, risquent leur vie contre la soldatesque syrienne.

Le virage sera acté ce vendredi lors de la conférence internationale des Amis du peuple syrien à Paris. « La priorité y est accordée aux voix de l'intérieur, celles des comités locaux de coordination de la révolte, tel est le souhait de Laurent Fabius », souligne un diplomate en pointe dans l'organisation de cette troisième édition d'une grand-messe destinée à montrer qu'au bout du tunnel des souffrances, perce la lueur d'une transition politique que le sommet de Paris va chercher à renforcer. Fini donc le monopole du dialogue accordé par la France aux dirigeants du CNS. Tous les courants de l'opposition ont été dûment invités par lettre officielle, signée de l'ex-ambassadeur en Syrie, Éric Chevalier, ordonnateur de la conférence. « C'est vrai, nous nous sommes longtemps trompés », a-t-il récemment reconnu devant Haytham Manna, dirigeant de la Coordination nationale, l'un des plus virulents pourfendeurs du CNS, longtemps marginalisé par le Quai d'Orsay. « Mais vous devez comprendre qu'un État ne peut pas reconnaître qu'il change de politique ». Oubliées également les pressions exercées sur Michel Kilo, figure libérale indépendante, pour qu'il adhère au CNS et demande l'asile politique.

Face à une organisation qui a échoué à fédérer les anti-el-Assad et à rassurer les minorités de l'intérieur qui le soutiennent encore par peur de l'avenir, Paris a fini par appliquer le principe de réalité. Aujourd'hui, le CNS n'a plus vraiment la cote. « C'est à lui de définir son rôle, pas à nous », rétorque-t-on sèchement au Quai d'Orsay. Pendant des mois, pourtant, Paris a misé sur les dirigeants du CNS, notamment Burhan Ghalioun et Bassma Kodmani, deux Syriens devenus français après des décennies dans l'Hexagone, mais dont l'influence est aujourd'hui réduite au sein du mouvement. Pendant des mois également, Paris n'a pas voulu voir qu'en coulisses, les laïcs comme Ghalioun étaient pris en otages par les islamistes liés aux Frères musulmans ou « les néointégristes » exilés à Londres ou Washington, qui veulent aller vite pour bénéficier de la redistribution des cartes dans

Alors que la France réunit ce vendredi la conférence des Amis du peuple syrien, les espoirs pour l'après-el-Assad ne reposent plus sur l'opposition en exil. La priorité va désormais aux rebelles de l'intérieur, que les mouvements islamistes veulent armer.



« ...
La bagarre a porté notamment sur la question kurde »

SAMIR AÏTA,
UNIVERSITAIRE, OPPOSANT
VIVANT À PARIS
LOUAI BESHARA/AFP

l'après-el-Assad. Mais avec le prolongement de la crise et son glissement vers la guerre civile, la France a changé de ton, ne craignant plus d'évoquer « un risque de chaos islamique » après un renversement du régime.

Les Frères musulmans gardent la main

Ces acteurs du changement, propulsés sur le devant de la scène par leurs parrains français, turcs et qatariens, sont devenus des spectateurs, souvent honnis par les insurgés de l'intérieur. « Dites à vos amis Ghalioun ou Manna qu'ils fassent bien attention quand ils rentreront au pays, menace un activiste réfugié en Jordanie, car ils risquent d'avoir des problèmes dès leur descente d'avion à Damas. »

L'opposition de l'étranger ? « Une plaisanterie », ironise Salman Shaikh, à la tête de l'antenne qatarienne du Brookings Institute à Doha. « Mais on ne peut pas dissoudre le CNS puisque c'est notre bébé. » Comment faire alors pour ne pas perdre la face ? « On essaie de l'élargir et de le restructurer », déclare Nasser al-Qidwa, l'adjoint de Kofi Annan, le médiateur international sur la Syrie. Tâche titanesque plombée par les luttes pour le pouvoir, les ego surdimensionnés et la persistance des vieux réflexes baasistes d'exclusion de l'autre.

Sous l'égide de la Ligue arabe, l'opération a commencé fin 2011. Objectif : rassembler toutes les composantes de l'opposition dans un congrès général où le CNS devrait partager le pouvoir. Premier échec. Les Frères musulmans n'ont pas voulu perdre la main. Mis en sommeil ensuite, le projet a été relancé par les Turcs, qui ont réuni en mai un comité préparatoire. Dix-huit représentants de toute l'opposition sont parvenus à accoucher d'un Pacte national, sorte de charte constitutionnelle de la Syrie de demain. Mais il restait à le faire valider par les ténors de l'opposition. Ce fut l'objet des deux jours de conférence à huis clos qui se sont tenus lundi et mardi au Caire, où un autre texte sur les modalités de la transition a été débattu.

Pour la première fois, quelque 200 opposants de tous bords se sont assis autour de la même table pour discuter de l'après-el-Assad. Les premières heures furent pénibles dans l'hôtel thaïlandais qui accueillait les débats sur les bords du Nil. On en est même venu aux mains. Écœuré, le secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe, Nabil al-Arabi, préféra quitter les lieux, tandis que dans les couloirs de l'établissement, les missi dominici français redoublaient d'inquiétude. Si Le Caire échoue, l'opposition s'affichera désunie à la réunion de Paris. C'est la catastrophe ! L'ambiance fut encore alourdie par le coup de tonnerre lancé depuis l'intérieur de la Syrie, où des dissidents de l'ASL rejetèrent d'emblée ces « palabres ».

« La bagarre a porté sur deux points », souligne l'opposant Samir Aïta, présent sur place. La question kurde, tout d'abord. Les représentants de cette minorité exigeaient que la charte constitutionnelle cite « le peuple kurde ». Mais les Frères musulmans et les représentants turcs très actifs en coulisses s'y sont farouchement opposés. Le Pacte national ne parle donc que de « communautés différentes », ce qui provoqua le départ des Kurdes et

d'autres opposants qui les soutenaient. La charte fut finalement adoptée par une majorité des participants, les Frères musulmans ayant quelque peu assoupli leurs exigences sur le passage relatif à la place de la religion dans la Constitution du futur État syrien. Y est reconnue « la liberté de choisir sa religion et même d'en changer », une victoire pour le camp laïc. Par ailleurs, il n'y est indiqué nulle part que le futur chef de l'État devra être musulman, la religion de la majorité. Des concessions chèrement monnayées par les « Frères » qui ont arraché le retrait de la référence, impie à leurs yeux, sur « la religion pour Dieu, la nation pour tous », qui sous-entend une séparation du divin et du politique. Ils ont également conservé la maîtrise du nerf de la guerre : l'argent pour financer les secours aux victimes de la répression.

Accord sur une transition sans Bachar

Les intégristes n'ont pas davantage reculé sur le second texte, le plus brûlant parce qu'il traite des modalités de la transition. Pour les Frères musulmans, cette transition ne peut passer que par la lutte armée. La leur, bien sûr, ou celle des dissidents de l'ASL. Mais également celle de tout le peuple.

D'où leur insistance pour exiger l'expression « résistance armée populaire » dans le document. « Al-Qaïda, c'est de la résistance armée ? », a alors protesté un opposant, en référence aux djihadistes qui combattent également el-Assad et ses miliciens. Finalement, ce document sur la transition n'a pas été adopté par l'opposition. Il ne pourra donc pas être exploité par la Conférence de Paris, qui comptait sur un avis unanime des opposants pour faire avancer l'après-el-Assad.

Mais au final, les apparences ont été sauvées. Les déchirures entre opposants ont été contenues. Les islamistes ont tactiquement reculé sur certains points. « Et si tout le monde respecte ses engagements, Le Caire aura constitué une étape historique pour l'opposition », se félicite Samir Aïta. Contre l'avis de Kofi Annan et des Russes, l'opposition dans son intégralité campe sur son refus de s'associer à un gouvernement temporaire qui compterait des soutiens actuels au régime d'el-Assad. Plus que jamais, la voie choisie est celle du combat armé. Dans ce contexte, le rôle de la Turquie, par où transitent les armes destinées aux rebelles syriens, redevient central. ■

Le Monde

Mercredi 4 juillet 2012

Ouverture du procès à grand spectacle de plus de 200 opposants turcs

Le cas de l'éditeur Ragıp Zarakolu, qui figure parmi les accusés, provoque une vague d'indignation

Silivri (Turquie)
Envoyé spécial

Une vieille femme en habit traditionnel kurde supplie le gendarme de la laisser entrer dans la salle d'audience. Son fils est là, parmi les accusés, explique-t-elle en pleurs. « C'est plein, revenez tout à l'heure », lui répond froidement le militaire. Depuis le moment, tout a été fait pour dissuader les proches de venir au procès qui s'est ouvert lundi près d'Istanbul contre une branche présumée de l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK), présentée comme un réseau civil de soutien à la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui mène la lutte armée contre l'État turc depuis 1984.

Mais plusieurs centaines de personnes sont venues manifester devant le tribunal pour réclamer une relaxe générale. A l'intérieur du tribunal spécial de Silivri, le spectacle a déjà commencé : 205 accusés ont pris place sur le banc, la plupart emprisonnés depuis de longs mois. Les familles s'agitent, échan- gent des signes de la main avec les détenus. Sur la droite sont alignés

des dizaines d'avocats, dont certains figurent aussi sur la liste des « terroristes » jugés par la cour. Quelques activistes internationaux, des journalistes et une dizaine de députés turcs sont venus observer ce procès politique géant.

Dès milliers de personnes ont été arrêtées depuis le déclenchement, en 2009, de l'enquête sur le KCK et, chaque semaine, de nouveaux noms viennent s'ajouter à la liste. Au moins 2000 personnes seraient détenues, selon le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP, kurde). Elles sont soupçonnées de former un réseau de soutien à « une organisation terroriste ». Les dirigeants du syndicat de la fonction publique KESK les ont rejoints la semaine dernière.

Mais l'affaire a déclenché une vague internationale de protestation avec l'arrestation, l'an dernier, de deux figures du monde intellectuel turc, l'éditeur Ragıp Zarakolu et l'universitaire Busra Ersanlı. « Je suis très choqué, s'insurge l'écrivain norvégien Eugene Schoulgin, vice-président du Pen International, venu soutenir son "ami Ragıp". Dès que vous entrez ici, vous voyez bien que cette cour n'est absolument pas indépendante. »

M. Zarakolu avait reçu en octobre 2011 le prix de la Liberté de publication au Salon du livre de Francfort, quelques jours avant d'être arrêté. En mars, des députés suédois ont déposé sa candidature pour le prix Nobel de la paix.

Ce procès illustre à lui seul l'emballement de la machine judiciaire turque qui, depuis cinq ans, a multiplié les procédures spectaculaires contre des opposants au gouvernement islamo-conservateur issu du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) : militaires, journalistes, étudiants, avocats, intellectuels... « Les autorités détournent le sens de la notion de terrorisme. La Turquie est le pays au monde qui compte le plus de prisonniers politiques avec la Chine, l'Iran et Cuba », souligne M. Schoulgin.

Environ 9000 personnes seraient en prison pour des accusations de « terrorisme », selon le député de gauche Ertugrul Kürkçü. A chaque fois, ces affaires sont jugées par des tribunaux d'exception et des procureurs aux pouvoirs élargis, dont la légitimité est contestée, jusqu'au sein de l'AKP.

Ultime coup de théâtre, le Parlement turc a approuvé dimanche au



milieu de la nuit, à quelques heures seulement de l'ouverture du procès de Silivri, l'abolition de ces cours spéciales, soutenue par le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, provoquant une vive opposition à l'intérieur de son parti, l'AKP. « La réforme ne concernera pas les procès en cours », a tenté de rassurer le vice-premier ministre, Bekir Bozdag. Elle risque cependant de les rendre illégaux. A l'ouverture de la séance, lundi, les avocats ont demandé le dessaisissement de la cour de Silivri. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Turquie, Syrie, Irak : tensions autour des Kurdes

Arrestations en masse en Turquie, qui-proquos et contradictions avec l'Armée libre syrienne et tensions avec le régime irakien sur la vente de pétrole, les Kurdes font face à une actualité chargée. Communauté divisée entre quatre pays et aux conditions de vie inégales, les Kurdes tentent de se fédérer à l'heure du printemps arabe. Leur lutte menée depuis une trentaine d'années pour une autonomisation voire une indépendance du Kurdistan se heurte au gouvernement turc. La situation en Syrie met également en porte-à-faux la communauté kurde, majoritairement hostile au régime d'Assad.

Le procès de 205 membres supposés de l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK) s'est ouvert lundi dernier en Turquie, venant couronner des vagues d'arrestations visant les sympathisants kurdes depuis 2009. Le KCK est la structure civile du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Mercredi, la députée PKK et titulaire du prix Sakharov Leyla Zana,

qui figure sur le banc des accusés et a déjà été emprisonnée de 1994 à 2004, a rencontré le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans l'espoir de renouer le dialogue. La communauté kurde a par ailleurs rappelé à Ankara que la Turquie, qui compte 15 millions de Kurdes, ne pourrait pas servir de modèle démocratique dans la région tant que la question kurde ne serait pas réglée. Ce conflit a fait plus de 45 000 morts depuis 1984 et l'armée turque continue de bombarder certaines zones kurdes au Nord de l'Irak sur une base hebdomadaire.

La question kurde s'invite également au cœur des relations turco-syriennes. Damas a menacé d'armer le PKK turc si Ankara continuait à armer l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). La communauté kurde syrienne, la plus faible numériquement, est traditionnellement hostile au régime en place mais s'inquiète par ailleurs de son sort dans l'hypothèse d'une Syrie post-Assad. La communauté kurde est d'ailleurs courtisée par le régime et par les rebelles. Le Conseil national syrien

(CNS) a nommé à sa tête le dissident kurde / turc Abdelbasset Sayda, exilé en Suède depuis 20 ans, tandis qu'Assad a accordé à 300 000 Kurdes la nationalité syrienne dont ils avaient été privés. Mais si les organisations kurdes syriennes sont quelques peu hésitantes, les Kurdes de Syrie ont tranché en participant massivement aux manifestations anti-Assad.

En Irak, où les Kurdes jouissent d'une autonomie de facto depuis 1991, des protestations avaient émergé pendant le printemps arabe. Le mouvement kurde irakien du 17 février 2011 critiquait notamment la manière autoritaire de gouverner des deux leaders kurdes qui se partagent la région, Massoud Barzani et Jalal Talabani, chacun à la tête de son propre parti, armée, médias et compagnie téléphonique. Barzani a récemment recueilli des réfugiés et déserteurs kurdes de Syrie, témoignant ainsi de sa volonté d'unir les différents mouvements kurdes et de profiter des changements politiques de la région pour obtenir une plus grande autonomie. Une situation gênante pour le pouvoir central de Bagdad, qui a tenu à réaffirmer dimanche dernier son autorité suite à la vente directe de pétrole par les régions autonomes kurdes. ●



Turquie/Kurdes: Vaste manifestation à Diyarbakir pour la libération d'Öcalan

DIYARBAKIR, 14 juil 2012 (AFP)

DE VIOLENTS HEURTS, faisant au moins une vingtaine de blessés, ont éclaté samedi entre la police et des manifestants kurdes qui ont bravé une interdiction des autorités de se rassembler à Diyarbakir (sud-est) pour réclamer la libération du chef rebelle emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan.

Plusieurs centaines de manifestants répartis en plusieurs groupes à travers la ville ont affronté durant plusieurs heures les forces de l'ordre à coups de pierre et de bâtons avant d'être dispersés par la force à l'aide de canons à eau et de gaz lacrymogène, a constaté un correspondant de l'AFP.

Plusieurs manifestants, cinq policiers ainsi que des responsables, dont un député, du principal parti pro-kurde de Turquie, le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), ont été blessés dans les incidents.

Les manifestants ont mis le feu à des voitures et saccagé des magasins dans certains quartiers de la ville.

La demande de cette formation d'organiser une manifestation de masse dans le centre-ville de Diyarbakir a été rejetée par les autorités locales qui ont considérablement renforcé les dispositifs de sécurité dans cette ville, la plus importante du sud-est anatolien, peuplé principalement de kurdes.

Le BDP entendait attirer l'attention sur le sort d'Öcalan chef de l'organisation rebelle du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Celui-ci purge depuis 1999 une peine de prison à vie sur l'île d'Imrali (nord-ouest).

La libération d'Öcalan, désigné par une grande partie de l'opinion publique



turque comme le principal responsable des 45.000 morts du conflit kurde en Turquie, est considérée comme une ligne rouge infranchissable par Ankara.

Elle est en revanche réclamée par les militants kurdes comme une des mesures clé à prendre pour résoudre la question kurde.

Öcalan est privé depuis un an de la visite de ses avocats, qu'il recevait auparavant régulièrement et par le biais desquels il communiquait avec l'extérieur. Pour protester contre cette mesure décidée par les autorités pénitentiaires, le détenu refuse de rencontrer les membres de sa famille, qui ont déclaré être inquiets.

Le PKK a pris les armes en 1984 pour obtenir l'indépendance du sud-est turc, une revendication qui s'est muée en autonomisme. ○



Les Kurdes de Syrie unissent leurs forces contre Assad depuis l'Irak

Erbil (Irak), 11 juillet 2012 (AFP)

LES DEUX PRINCIPALES formations kurdes de Syrie, farouchement opposées au président Bachar al-Assad, ont décidé mercredi d'unir leurs forces et de se regrouper au sein d'un seul et même bloc, à l'issue de négociations tenues au Kurdistan irakien.

Le Conseil national kurde, qui regroupe une douzaine de partis, et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental sont désormais unis sous la bannière du Conseil suprême kurde après des discussions auxquelles a parti-

cipé le dirigeant du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani.

"Nous annonçons la bonne nouvelle au peuple kurde de Syrie et du Kurdistan", déclarent les deux formations dans un communiqué commun publié mercredi soir. "Nous avons bâti une maison kurde commune pour unir nos forces".

L'opposition syrienne, surtout le Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale coalition de l'opposition dont la direction est en exil, a été accusée de marginaliser 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 ces minorités.

Les Kurdes représentent près de 9% des 23 millions de Syriens et se plaignent depuis des décennies d'être discriminés sous le régime Assad.○



Le Kurdistan accuse Maliki de "militariser" la société irakienne

ERBIL (Irak), 17 juillet 2012 (AFP)

LA PRÉSIDENTE de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, en délicatesse avec Bagdad depuis plusieurs mois, a accusé mardi le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki de chercher à "militariser la société irakienne".

"L'intention (du Premier ministre Maliki) est de militariser la société irakienne et de soutenir la violence comme moyen de parvenir à ses fins politiques", a affirmé Umid Sabah, porte-parole de la présidence du Kurdistan, dans un communiqué.

Les relations entre le gouvernement irakien et les autorités du Kurdistan, une région riche en pétrole, sont au plus bas depuis plusieurs mois en raison notamment de profonds différends sur le dossier des hydrocarbures.

Massoud Barzani, dirigeant de la région autonome située dans le nord de l'Irak, s'oppose ouvertement à M. Maliki et a apporté son soutien au projet d'un vote de défiance à son encontre au parlement à Bagdad.

"Il ne fait aucun doute qu'il (Maliki) s'entête dans des pratiques contraires

aux valeurs démocratiques les plus élémentaires ainsi qu'au principe même d'un partenariat", a affirmé M. Sabah.

En décembre 2011, les Etats-Unis avaient donné leur accord pour vendre 36 avions de combat F-16 à Bagdad dans un contrat de plusieurs milliards de dollars.

M. Barzani avait déclaré s'opposer à ces achats tant que M. Maliki serait au pouvoir, disant craindre qu'il ne les utilise contre le Kurdistan.

Le Kurdistan accuse par ailleurs Bagdad de ne pas le fournir en produits pétroliers (essence, huile, gaz, etc), ce que le ministère irakien du Pétrole dément. Et la région a récemment cessé ses livraisons pétrolières en raison d'un litige financier avec Bagdad.

Dimanche, Bagdad a sommé la Turquie de cesser de recevoir le pétrole du Kurdistan irakien, après que ce dernier eut annoncé qu'il exportait du brut vers la Turquie pour qu'il y soit raffiné et expédié de nouveau vers le Kurdistan sous formes de produits pétroliers. Bagdad avait qualifié ces opérations d'"illégalles".○



Des avocats jugés pour avoir servi d'agents de liaison entre Öcalan et le PKK

ISTANBUL, 16 juillet 2012 (AFP)

LE PROCÈS d'une cinquantaine d'avocats accusés d'avoir servi d'agents de liaison entre le chef emprisonné de la rébellion kurde Abdullah Öcalan et son organisation, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a débuté lundi à Istanbul, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les prévenus "ont sciemment effectué une mission de définition de la stratégie (du PKK) en relayant le contenu de leurs entretiens (...) avec le chef des terroristes (...) et en donnant les ordres de passage à l'action", affirme l'acte d'accusation, cité par Anatolie.

Le ministère public réclame entre 15 et 22 ans et demi de prison contre sept prévenus accusés d'avoir eu des fonctions de direction au sein du PKK, et entre sept ans et demi et 15 ans de prison contre les 43 autres, en tant que "membres d'une organisation terroriste", selon l'agence.

Au banc des accusés figurent 46 avocats, trois employés de cabinets d'avocats et un journaliste.

Abdullah Öcalan, le chef historique du PKK, a été capturé par des agents turcs à Nairobi en février 1999, puis transféré en Turquie et condamné à

mort pour trahison en juin 1999, une peine commuée en prison à vie qu'il purge sur l'île prison d'Imrali (nord-ouest).

Öcalan est privé depuis un an de la visite de ses avocats, qu'il recevait auparavant régulièrement et par le biais desquels il communiquait avec l'extérieur.

Le procès des avocats s'inscrit dans une vaste opération judiciaire visant à démanteler tous les relais du PKK dans la société civile.

Cette opération contre l'Union des communautés kurdes (KCK), une organisation clandestine considérée par les autorités turques comme la branche urbaine du PKK, a conduit à l'arrestation de plusieurs centaines d'opposants kurdes - des milliers selon des sources kurdes.

Un vingtaine d'organisations internationales et européennes de juristes ont fait part de leur "inquiétude" concernant ce nouveau procès aux rapporteurs de l'ONU pour l'indépendance des juges et des avocats et pour la situation des défenseurs des droits de l'Homme, selon un communiqué conjoint diffusé vendredi.

Le PKK a pris les armes en 1984. Le conflit a fait plus de 45.000 morts, selon l'armée turque.○



15 juillet 2012

L'Irak demande à la Turquie de refuser le pétrole en provenance du Kurdistan irakien

Par RFI Avec notre correspondante à Bagdad, Fatma Kizilboga

L'Irak a demandé, dimanche 15 juillet, à la Turquie, d'arrêter de se fournir illégalement en pétrole au Kurdistan irakien, au risque de mettre en péril les relations entre Ankara et Bagdad. C'est ce qu'a déclaré le porte-parole du gouvernement irakien. A l'origine du contentieux, un accord signé le mois dernier entre la région autonome kurde et la Turquie.

L'accord passé entre Ankara et Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, se veut pourtant clair : il ne s'agit pas d'acheter du pétrole mais de raffiner du brut en Turquie, avant de le réacheminer en Irak sous forme de produits pétroliers.

La région autonome du Kurdistan irakien accuse Bagdad de ne pas la fournir en essence et en gaz, comme le stipule la

Constitution. Des allégations rejetées par le gouvernement central, qui dénonce l'individualisme des Kurdes.

Car ce qui s'apparente à une guerre économique n'est en réalité qu'une nouvelle illustration des aspirations indépendantistes kurdes. Une volonté que le président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, n'hésite plus à marteler dans ses discours.

Un scénario qui semble ne plus faire peur à Ankara, principal partenaire économique d'un Kurdistan irakien riche en pétrole et en plein boom économique. La même Turquie qui a récemment violemment réprimé dans le sud-est du pays une manifestation pro-PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan. Un Kurdistan libre, oui, mais en dehors des frontières turques. □



L'exploitation pétrolière de Tawke près de la ville de Zacho dans le Kurdistan irakien. Getty Images/Muhannad Fala'ah



Bagdad met Ankara en garde contre toute violation de son territoire

Bagdad - 17 juillet 2012 Par Ali al-Saadi | AFP

L'IRAK a mis en garde mardi la Turquie contre toute nouvelle "violation" de son territoire ou de son espace aérien et a décidé de porter plainte devant le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU.

"Nous mettons en garde la Turquie contre toute violation de l'espace aérien ou du territoire irakiens", a indiqué le porte-parole du gouvernement Ali Dabbagh dans un communiqué, à l'issue d'une réunion du cabinet.

"Le gouvernement a demandé au ministre des Affaires étrangères de porter plainte devant le Conseil de sécurité", a-t-il ajouté.

A plusieurs reprises ces derniers mois, des avions de combat turcs ont procédé à des raids contre des rebelles kurdes dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, dans le nord du pays.

Les relations turco-irakiennes connaissent un sérieux coup de froid depuis décembre dernier, en raison notamment du refus de la Turquie d'extrader le vice-président irakien Tarek al-Hachémi, qui y a trouvé refuge.

M. Hachémi est actuellement jugé par contumace devant un tribunal de Bagdad pour avoir, selon la justice irakienne, commandité des assassinats.

Et, dernier épisode en date: dimanche, Bagdad a sommé Ankara de ne plus accepter les exportations de pétrole provenant du Kurdistan irakien, les qualifiant d'"illégal".

"Cette question va affecter les relations entre nos deux pays et notamment nos relations économiques qui seront mises en péril" si ces échanges continuent, avait alors prévenu Ali Dabbagh.

La semaine dernière, le Kurdistan avait dit avoir commencé à exporter du pétrole brut vers la Turquie, provoquant la fureur du gouvernement irakien.

Le brut est envoyé vers la Turquie pour y être raffiné puis acheminé de nouveau vers le Kurdistan sous forme de produits pétroliers (essence, gaz, huile...).

La question du pétrole est au centre d'un conflit entre Bagdad et la région autonome du Kurdistan depuis plusieurs mois.

Le Kurdistan accuse Bagdad de ne pas le fournir en produits pétroliers, ce que le ministère irakien du Pétrole dément. Et la région autonome a cessé en avril dernier ses exportations de brut en raison d'un litige financier avec Bagdad. ○



le porte-parole du gouvernement Ali Dabbagh

A Letter From Tartus

Syria's Alawite Refuge

Katie Paul

On a recent Sunday afternoon, the Syrian port city of Tartus buzzed in the summer heat. Car showrooms displayed lines of new vehicles. Markets full of clothes, furniture, and household knickknacks bustled with customers. Clouds of nargileh smoke wafted from hookah pipes at the see-and-be-seen restaurants lining sandy Mediterranean beaches. Yachts bobbed indifferently in the port.

This Middle Eastern haven, however, lies just 60 miles west of Homs, the battle-broken city that is the center of gravity in the civil war that has shattered Syria, killing more than 16,000 people and displacing a quarter of a million more. Tartus, though, has become a refuge for the country's minority Alawi Shiite population. "As an Alawi, I don't really care about Bashar al-Assad," says 30-year-old Majed, referring to Syria's president, who is also Alawi. "The only thing that concerns me is security."

Eight months ago, after losing his job and fearing for his safety, Majed escaped Homs. (Like others interviewed for this article, Majed chose to keep his last name private for security reasons.) In Tartus, he has found work as a telecommunications salesman. "Everyone thinks we defend the regime and the authorities, but the opposition has given us no choice but to flee to the coast," he says. "It's like I'm not even in the Middle East here, I feel so secure."

Similar sentiments are easy to find in Tartus. Fayeze, a 35-year-old import-export business owner, also abandoned Homs last year after opposition fighters operating under the banner of the Free Syrian Army kidnapped his cousins and wrote "Get out" on the door of his home. "Revolutionaries,"



The Syrian city of Tartus on the shores of the Mediterranean. (Khaled Al Hariri / Courtesy Reuters)

Fayeze describes them sarcastically, holding up his fingers in bitter air quotes. "Tartus is my new home. I don't ever intend to leave," he says. "In the end, Bashar al-Assad will go and our children will be left, and we have to defend their future here."

Eighteen months of fighting have hardened both men's sectarian resolve. In their view, Alawites are under attack by a Sunni majority, which uses its religious identity as an organizing principle for mobilizing the militias operating under the Free Syrian Army umbrella. In turn, the coastal Sahel region is the only safe haven, and this stretch of land -- encompassing the port cities of Latakia, Baniyas, Jableh, and Tartus, and the mountains separating them from the rest of Syria's plains -- must be protected against Sunni encroachment at all costs.

Far removed from the shabiha, Assad's vigilante militias notorious for carrying out the regime's crackdown against the uprising, these men in the Sahel are neither fanatic nor armed. But they represent a demographic force creating another de facto divide in the country. As fighting takes place along Syria's central artery running northward from Homs to Idlib, Alawites are increasingly setting up shop in the Sahel, looking to cordon themselves off from the chaos that they believe will come as Assad's grip on the country weakens.

In several conversations, Alawites said that thousands of families have relocated to the coast. Others spoke of friends and family members who have not yet moved but have purchased homes there in anticipation of a shift in fortunes. Although the real figure is impossible to determine, visits to Damascus, Homs, and Tartus indicated that such numbers are plausible.

Official tallies -- from the UN agencies operating inside Syria, for instance -- are nonexistent.

Such movement could be an early harbinger of territorial entrenchments of Syria's sectarian fault lines. "At this point, the regime is not looking at itself as a small state within Syria," says one Alawi academic who lives in both Damascus and Latakia. "It wants all of Syria, and it will stay that way until the last possible moment." Alawites talk of a return to the coast is specious, he says, the product of a regime "game" of hyping threats in order to instill fear in minorities. Still, he adds, "Just like the weapons game, the sectarian game is a dangerous one. People are hearing rhetoric like, 'We want to annihilate Alawis. We want their deaths.' You never know if it will pass a point at which you can't stop it, you lose control."

That fear is rooted in the community's historical marginalization. Throughout centuries of Mamluk and Ottoman rule, Alawites, a heterodox offshoot of Shia Islam, largely confined themselves to the mountains east of Latakia. Aside from tiny minorities in the villages around Homs and Hama, they emerged from their "wild hills" only occasionally to work as menial laborers. After World War I, French mandate authorities codified these isolationist impulses, creating a sovereign Alawi territory extending from Latakia to Tartus in 1920. Though Alawi leaders initially cheered their region as a bulwark against Sunni domination of the interior, even French protection could not make the state viable. Alawites constituted a majority of the population, but city-based Sunni and Christian communities lagged behind by only a third, possessed far greater wealth and education, and were strongly in favor of union with Damascus. By 1937, the

experiment had failed; the state was incorporated into modern-day Syria.

Alawites eventually entered the Syrian mainstream via new national military and educational institutions in the cities, assuming posts in the full spectrum of professions: public service, the security forces, academia, and business. Eventually, that process put Hafez al-Assad, an Alawite air force officer, in position to seize the presidency in a 1970 coup. Today, Alawites constitute about 12 percent of Syria's population of 22 million, primarily concentrated on the coast but with significant numbers in Damascus and Homs. The mainstreaming process has not been even or complete. Like his father, Bashar al-Assad has kept the top ranks in the military and security services reserved for well-connected Alawites. Meanwhile, fueled in large part by a stifling ban on discussion of sectarian issues, identity within Syrian society remains strongly determined by sect.

Today in Damascus, people living in Alawi districts such as Mezze 86, a middle-class neighborhood, are weighing their future. Ask them how they feel about the city, and it is not uncommon to hear a refrain repeated: "Damascus is my maskan, my residence, but Latakia is my ma'man." Ma'man translates roughly to "home" but derives from a root meaning "security." It means, more precisely, "the place where I am safe." Khalil, a medical student born and raised in Mezze 86, is only in his 20s, but he repeats it, too. "I have friends, and everything is comfortable for me here," he explained to me in May, "but something inside me still feels alienated." For now, he chooses to remain in Damascus to finish his studies, but he keeps one eye trained on encroaching opposition forces and the other on the coast. "If it becomes dangerous for us Alawis, then we can't stay here."

But although the Alawites are minorities, they hold disproportionate power, which makes it unlikely that they would accept a Sunni leadership without a fight. "If Assad leaves tomorrow morning, the war in Syria will not end," says Firas Abi Ali, an analyst at the London-based risk consultancy Exclusive Analysis. "A core of Alawis would continue fighting. The conventional army would

become a lot weaker, since so many powers are centered in the presidential office. But you would end up with a very well-armed core still fighting with tanks, special forces, possibly airplanes."

The most likely scenario, Abi Ali says, is that rebel forces would concentrate on Daraa, Deir al-Zour, the Homs-Idlib corridor, and rural areas around Aleppo and Damascus, while government forces could continue to hold Aleppo, Damascus, and the coastal areas. As the capabilities of the two sides equalize, fighting would gradually progress into conventional warfare, with much of the Alawi civilian population forced toward the coast.

The problem is what comes afterward. As history has shown once before, the odds are stacked against the viability of a state in the mountains of the sea. For one, there is the coast's restive Sunni population. Even Latakia, commonly cast as an Alawi stronghold, is more than 50 percent Sunni province-wide and more than 70 percent Sunni in the city itself. Baniyas, too, is evenly split. Overwhelming force has thus far been sufficient to quell protests in both cities, but, according to one Latakia-based activist, even mountain areas such as Jabal Akrad and Haffeh are beginning to see Free Syrian Army activity. Many Sunnis of means are leaving the city for Turkey, including the activist's own family, fearing a final showdown there as Alawis retreat.

A fledgling "state within a state" would then face the same economic dilemmas that doomed it a century ago. Import-export businesses fuel the economies of Tartus and Latakia, and those would suffer if a de facto partition develops further, since merchants would be unable to move their goods to market in Damascus and Aleppo across a hostile border. Although there is some discussion among the Alawi elite that they might find oil and gas on the coast offshore, according to Abi Ali, sectors such as tourism and agriculture are not enough to sustain an Alawi state on their own. The entity's regional neighbors, wary of their own domestic secessionist movements, would be loath to recognize it.

With these odds in mind, Alawi elites

are divided on the future of the coastal mountains, seeing little choice but to fight for control of the entire country. According to one high-ranking Alawi general in Homs with direct knowledge of the thinking in Damascus, the regime leadership is not formulating any plans for separation. At the same time, he says, the demographic changes are happening organically on their own, driven by the violence in central Syria and fear of the unknown in Damascus. He has already sent his own family coastward, citing the area's security and environment as "suitable for us."

"We're Alawis, so we can't live among the other groups," he says. "We have a different, more open culture, so the coast is best for us. This is our only option."

As the war grinds on, other possibilities may become more attractive to the general. These are still the early days of Alawi migration, a relatively mild flow that could be stanchied if a political deal convinces enough of the population that they would have a stake in the country's future government. But Syria's chronically squabbling opposition figures have so far failed to make such overtures, while Assad's forces, fighting what they consider an existential battle, appear unlikely to put down their weapons voluntarily. Whether those forces choose to make their final battle in Damascus or retreat to the mountains, the stage in Syria is set for a long war and deepening social divisions.

For Majed, settling comfortably into his new home in Tartus, there is no going back. "It's true that there aren't the right ingredients for a state, but the Syrian coast is basically the center of gravity for the sect," he says. "If the war continues in Syria, I'll be among the supporters of separation. There is enough blood." ■

KATIE PAUL was formerly a reporter for Newsweek and is now a freelance correspondent in Beirut. She wrote this story with a journalist inside Syria who chose to remain anonymous for safety reasons.

US's Chevron signs deal with Iraq Kurds, defies Baghdad

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — U.S. oil giant Chevron said on Thursday it signed a deal with Iraqi Kurds to explore for oil in their northern region, defying the central government which wants to control the area's oil wealth.

The agreement makes Chevron the second U.S. company to secure oil deals with Kurds in conflict with Baghdad, after Exxon Mobil Corp. agreed last October to explore for oil in six areas.

Baghdad wants to manage its energy resources nationwide and have the final say on all oil and gas deals. Kurds argue that the constitution allows them to draw up development plans independently and award deals without going through the oil ministry.

Chevron, based in California, said in a statement it will take over India's Reliance Exploration and Production efforts to explore for oil in the Rovi and Sarta blocks. Chevron will hold 80 percent of the contract while Austria's OMV AG will hold the rest.

The blocks are located north of the regional capital, Irbil, and cover a combined area of approximately 1,124 square kilometers (490 square miles).

Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, the Kurds have signed over 50 relatively small deals — production sharing contracts with small and mid-sized oil companies. But the entry of majors Exxon Mobil and now Chevron may be a game changer that could lead to de facto policies the Kurds have long



sought.

Iraq's post-invasion governments have until recently blacklisted energy companies that signed contracts with the Kurdish government to prevent them from working elsewhere in the country or purchase crude oil.

But in the case of Exxon Mobil, the Iraqi government has had a light hand. It prevented it from taking part in Iraq's fourth energy bidding round in May but has not touched its deal to develop the 8.6 billion West Qurna field near the southern city of Basra along with Royal Dutch Shell PLC.

Chevron has no deals with the Baghdad government. Officials in Baghdad and Irbil could not immediately be reached for comment.

Later in the day, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's office said it received a "positive and convincing" letter from President Barack Obama about Exxon Mobil's oil plans in the Kurdish region, where Baghdad wants it to cease operations.

Al-Maliki's statement did not directly

quote from the letter, and his office did not provide a copy of it. It called on the company to meet "recommendations of the Iraqi government and the recommendations of the U.S. administration regarding this issue."

The statement also implied that Obama would side with Baghdad on the dispute, saying his letter "stressed respect of the constitution, and Iraqi laws, along the same lines the Iraqi government is working."

However, Baghdad and Kurdish leaders long have bickered over the legality of regional oil deals without the government's blessing. A law that would settle it has been stalled in parliament for years, and there is no sign the constitutional debate will be settled any time soon.

And there is considerable incentive to work directly with the Kurds -- unlike the flat fee the central government pays for each barrel of oil extracted, the Kurds offer lucrative contracts allowing developers to claim a share in reserves and the oil produced.

Iraq has been struggling to develop its oil and gas reserves after years of war, international sanctions and neglect. Foreign companies with the resources and expertise to develop the oil fields, such as Exxon Mobil, are seen as key to helping revive the nation's vital energy sector.

Since 2008, Iraq has awarded 15 oil and gas deals to international energy companies, the first major investments in the country's energy industry in more than three decades.

The original goal was to boost daily production from about 3 million barrels now to 12 million barrels by 2017. That may be revised downward to fewer than 10 million barrels however, given infrastructure bottlenecks and a possible falloff in demand on international markets. ♦

REUTERS

Attack on Turkey-Iraq pipeline knocks out oil flows

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey / July 21, 2012 (Reuters)

FIREFIGHTERS in southeast Turkey on Saturday put out a fire on a pipeline carrying about a quarter of Iraq's oil exports, but it was unclear when oil would resume flowing, security sources said.

They blamed sabotage by Kurdish separatists for the explosion on the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline.

The fire broke out at 11 p.m. (1700 EDT) on Friday near the town of Midyat in Mardin province, near the Syrian border.

Officials blamed the attack on the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Kurdish separatist group that has claimed responsibility for past attacks on the 960-km (600-mile) pipeline.

Firat News, a website with ties to the PKK, also said the outlawed group was behind the attack.

Insurgents in Iraq have in the past disrupted the transport of oil on the pipeline, the country's largest, and technical faults on the 35-year-old link, which consists of two pipes, have also cut flows.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984, and more than 40,000 people, mainly Kurds, have died in the conflict.

The PKK has claimed responsibility for attacks on other natural-gas and oil pipelines in what it has calls a campaign to target Turkey's strategic assets. ●

Iraq gets "positive" Obama response on Exxon concern

Aseel Kami and Braden Reddall

(Reuters) -

BAGHDAD/SAN FRANCISCO Iraq's prime minister said on Thursday that U.S. President Barack Obama backed Baghdad's concerns over Exxon Mobil's oil deal with the Kurdistan region and had emphasized Washington's respect for the Iraqi constitution and laws.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki issued the statement as U.S. oil major Chevron Corp confirmed its purchase of 80 percent of two blocks in Kurdistan in a move that may infuriate the central Iraqi government, which wants all oil deals to pass through Baghdad.

Baghdad is embroiled in a deep dispute with the autonomous Kurdish region over energy exports and has asked Obama to stop Exxon exploring for oil there, saying it could threaten stability. On Thursday it welcomed Obama's written response.

"We would like to confirm that the letter was positive and convincing and stresses its respect for the constitution and Iraqi laws, in the same manner as the Iraqi government is seeking," a statement from Maliki's office said.

"The Iraqi government will take all necessary measures in applying the law and will not allow the company to implement these contracts," it said, referring to the deals signed with Kurdistan. Exxon declined to comment.

The White House declined to comment on the content of the letter from Obama to Maliki, but did indicate some level of discomfort with the potential for ruffled relations with Iraq.

"We advise American energy companies doing business in Iraq to consider the legal risks involved in signing deals with a region, against Baghdad's wishes, and are concerned that such deals could be destabilizing," a senior Obama administration official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

"That said, in our economic system, private companies make their own business decisions, largely beyond the reach of government control," the official said.

An industry source familiar with U.S.



oil operations in Kurdistan said the Obama administration was continuing to discourage firms from moving into the northern region, the government of which is based in Arbil.

"Washington is saying, 'This is a bad time to go into Kurdistan, given the sabre rattling between Baghdad and Arbil,'" the source said.

Kurdistan said in June that it expected more oil majors to follow Exxon in the next few months in striking deals there.

France's Total has already said it was interested in investments in the region, drawing a veiled threat from Baghdad which said French companies should avoid unsanctioned oil deals.

Exxon became the first oil major to move into the northern region in mid-October when it signed a deal with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Apart from Total, Norway's Statoil is also looking closely at KRG exploration deals, industry sources have said.

"People are looking at the commercial terms on offer in Kurdistan and they're voting with their feet," said a senior Western oil executive.

"The margins on Iraq's service contracts are slim and Arbil is offering more lucrative production sharing deals."

CHEVRON SEES "PROMISE"

Chevron, the second-largest U.S. oil company, said it sees "considerable promise" in Kurdistan. It is purchasing the Sarta and Rovi blocks from India's Reliance Industries Ltd, where it will be the new partner of Austria's OMV AG - holder of the other 20 percent interest.

Though it chose not to participate in Iraq's four oil and gas licensing rounds, Chevron said it would still monitor opportunities in both the north and south of the country. It was the first big

oil company to offer Iraq technical assistance and training following the U.S.-led invasion.

"The opportunities in Iraq's licensing rounds didn't compete in Chevron's investment portfolio," said an oil industry source. "The commercial terms in Kurdistan were attractive, an opportunity presented itself and Chevron moved on it."

The U.S. major has advised Baghdad of its Kurdish deal and is in the process of setting up an office in Arbil, he said.

An Iraqi oil ministry spokesman declined to comment directly on the Chevron deal on Thursday but repeated Baghdad's warning to foreign energy companies.

"The government attitude is clear. Contracts signed outside the framework of the federal government are considered as illegal," Assim Jihad said.

Iraqi oil industry sources said Baghdad might strike hard against Chevron, going further than just barring it from oil and gas investment projects. Chevron has a contract to buy 167,000 barrels of Iraqi oil per day, which Iraq could seek to cut in protest, they said.

At the same time as punishing those dealing with Kurdistan directly, the central government could also reward other companies developing Iraq's giant southern oilfields by improving commercial terms, the sources said.

The dispute over oil exports is part of a broader clash between Iraqi Arab-led central government and the Kurdish government over territory and regional autonomy that many see as a potential flashpoint for conflict since the last American troops left Iraq in December.

OPEC-member Iraq holds the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and is expected to be a major source of future oil supplies.

Eager to rebuild its dilapidated infrastructure, it has signed a series of contracts with foreign oil companies that target total oil production capacity of 12 million barrels per day (bpd) by 2017, up from about 3 million bpd. Most analysts see 6 million to 7 million bpd as a more realistic goal. □



Syrie: au moins 10 morts dans des combats près de la frontière turque

ATMAH- sam. 14 juillet 2012 , Par Saygin Serdaroglu , AFP

DES COMBATS entre des rebelles syriens et des soldats et miliciens fidèles au régime du président Bachar Al-Assad ont fait au moins 10 morts et 15 blessés samedi matin du côté des insurgés, selon un journaliste de l'AFP sur place.

Vers 03H00 samedi, plusieurs dizaines de rebelles ont attaqué à l'arme légère un poste de contrôle gouvernemental entre les villages kurdes de Diwan et de Talsallour, dans la province d'Idleb, ont expliqué des rebelles à l'AFP.

Les combattants ont expliqué avoir pris la position vers 05H30, assurant avoir tué huit soldats et en avoir fait fuir une quinzaine d'autres. Mais vers 05H45, ils ont subi une contre-attaque menée par un groupe de Kurdes venus de Talsallour.

"Les Kurdes étaient armés par le régime" de Bachar Al-Assad de mitrailleuses et

soutenus par des hélicoptères de combats, a assuré l'un des rebelles, Abou Moujahid. Les combats ont duré jusque vers 08H00, lorsque les Kurdes se sont repliés à Talsallour, selon plusieurs combattants rebelles.

Les deux hélicoptères ont tourné des heures dans la zone des affrontements, rendant difficile l'évacuation des blessés et faisant feu à plusieurs reprises, au canon et à la roquette, selon le journaliste de l'AFP.

En fin de matinée, dix tombes ont été creusées dans le cimetière de la petite ville d'Atmah, à 5 km de la frontière turque, d'où venaient certains combattants rebelles, et dix corps avaient été ramenés en différents endroits de l'agglomération, selon le journaliste de l'AFP.

Des sources médicales ont confirmé un bilan de dix morts, ainsi que 15 blessés, parmi les insurgés.○

MEDIAPART



19 juillet 2012

Syrie: Les kurdes ont pris le contrôle d'une ville

Les kurdes ont mis la main sur toutes les institutions du régime syrien dans la ville de Kobani, au Kurdistan Occidental.



Par Maxime-Azadi / blogs.mediapart.fr

Alors que les combats entre le régime d'Assad et les groupes armés soutenus par l'Occident s'intensifient, les kurdes syriens ont pris le contrôle de la ville de Kobani, a-t-on appris auprès des comités de défense, créés après la révolte lancée la mi-mars 2011, pour la protection du peuple kurde.

Le chef du principal parti kurde PYD, Salih Mohammad Muslim, a confirmé cette information, affirmant que le peuple kurde veut se gouverner dans la région. « Il s'agit d'une mesure empêcher la propagation des violences dans la région kurde » a-t-il affirmé à l'agence de presse kurde Firat et à l'ActuKurde.

Le 3 juillet, les membres de l'opposition syrienne avaient enlevé un jeune kurde connu sous le nom de Chekdar dans la ville d'Afrin et décapité son corps sauvagement après avoir torturé. Le comité de défense du peuple kurde avait aussitôt lancé une poursuite pour retrouver les assassins, tuant trois d'entre eux. Le principal mouvement kurde syrien avait lancé un avertissement à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), en cas d'ingérence dans le Kurdistan syrien.

Le contrôle des plusieurs institutions étatiques dans la ville d'Afrin sont également sous contrôle des kurdes, a dit le chef du PYD, soulignant que la main mise du peuple sur les institutions s'est déroulée de façon pacifique et qu'aucun acte de violence n'a été déclaré.

« Le peuple se gouverne » a affirmé le chef du PYD, avant d'ajouter que le peuple kurde a le droit de se défendre face aux combats qui s'intensifient pour but de s'emparer du pouvoir en Syrie. Ce sont des combats qui se déroulent entre le régime Assad et l'ASL, formée et

financée par des services secrets.

Les kurdes peuvent s'emparer du Kurdistan Occidental, la région kurde en Syrie, a-t-on appris de source kurde.

Sous la menace directe du régime syrien et la Turquie, et face au silence, la complicité et les manipulations de l'Occident, les kurdes ont poursuivi à construire leur autonomie démocratique, en ouvrant à l'initiative du PYD des écoles de langue, interdits jusqu'à la révolte, créant des communes, des conseils du peuple et des comités de légitime défense pour protéger la population kurde, estimée entre 2 et 3 millions, soit 15 % de la population du pays.

Des comités de défense du peuple sont indispensables et un droit légitime face à cette situation qui pourrait dégénérer en une guerre régionale, selon le mouvement kurde. Beaucoup de membres de ces comités sont femmes.

Malgré les tentatives de déstabilisation et de division visant le Kurdistan syrien pour renforcer le Conseil National Syrien (CNS), Le Conseil du Peuple qui regroupe plusieurs partis kurde dont le PYD, le plus influent, et le Congrès national kurde (CNK), deuxième formation au Kurdistan syrien, ont décidé d'unir leur force au sein d'un seul et même bloc après des discussions menées au Kurdistan irakien entre le 9 et 10 juillet. L'accord a été signé en présence de président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani.

Le PYD a été le seul parti kurde refusant de prendre place au sein du CNS dès le début de la révolte lancée mi-mars 2011, déclarant que le but de trio répressif Qatar-Turquie-Arabie Saoudite n'était pas de construire la démocratie, mais de faire obstacle devant les réalisations du peuple kurde.●

Un attentat frappe le cœur du régime syrien

La mort du beau-frère de Bachar el-Assad et du ministre de la Défense pourrait hâter la chute du régime.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Le spectaculaire attentat a décapité l'appareil de répression au terme d'une invraisemblable faille de sécurité. Un homme a réussi à s'introduire mercredi dans le bâtiment ultraprotégé de la Sécurité nationale du quartier de Rawdah, en plein cœur de Damas, avant de faire exploser une mallette qu'il a tendue à l'un des cadres sécuritaires du régime en réunion avec ses collègues. « Je suis sous le choc, l'impact est énorme », soupirait quelques instants après un journaliste syrien proche du régime. L'homme en question serait le propre garde du corps de l'un des participants, Hicham Bekhtiar. Ce qui confirme une infiltration par l'opposition de la nomenklatura syrienne. Et pas n'importe laquelle.

Parmi les tués figurent en effet le général Assef Shawkat, beau-frère de Bachar el-Assad, vice-ministre de la Défense et homme clé de la sécurité dans le pays, le ministre de la Défense, Daoud Rajha, caution chrétienne de la répression des manifestants, et le général Hassan Turkmani, autre homme fort de la sécurité. Avec la disparition de Shawkat, c'est la famille el-Assad qui est frappée de plein fouet. Le ministre de l'Intérieur, Mohammed Ibrahim al-Chaar, et Hicham Bekhtiar ont,

eux, été blessés. Ce dernier aurait eu les jambes coupées par l'explosion.

Les cinq hommes participaient à une

réunion du Comité de sécurité national, en charge de l'organisation de la répression des insurgés. Pour pénétrer à l'intérieur du bâtiment, l'auteur de l'attaque a forcément bénéficié de complicités. C'est le premier attentat qui parvient à éliminer des personnages clés du pouvoir.

Des rebelles galvanisés

Il y a un mois et demi, ces mêmes responsables avaient été visés par une tentative d'empoisonnement, à laquelle ils avaient échappé. Avant de



s'enfuir, un employé de livraison à domicile avait versé du mercure dans deux mets destinés au repas de ces dignitaires, selon des

sources diplomatiques à Damas. Cette fois-ci, les rebelles ont réussi la prouesse de retourner un centurion du régime avant de percer l'armature du premier cercle d'un pouvoir que l'on disait jusqu'à maintenant solide. Deux groupes d'insurgés ont revendiqué l'exploit, l'un lié à l'Armée syrienne libre, les déserteurs et des civils qui ont pris les armes, l'autre un groupe islamiste dénommé « la Brigade de l'Islam », qui a indiqué sur Facebook avoir ciblé « la cellule de crise » mise en place par le régime contre ses opposants.

Pareille réussite devrait galvaniser les rebelles, qui ont lancé depuis dimanche une opération de prise du pouvoir sur Damas, la forteresse du régime el-Assad. Pour celui-ci, le coup est très rude. Dans un communiqué repris par la télévision officielle, le pouvoir accuse « des mercenaires » tout en promettant d'en finir avec « les bandes criminelles », selon la terminologie qu'il utilise pour qualifier ses opposants. « C'est l'État et toutes ses institutions qui sont vi-

60 militaires
tués en deux jours dans les combats à Damas



Bachar el-Assad
Président de la République arabe syrienne



Assef Shawkat
Vice-ministre de la Défense
(beau-frère de Bachar)



Daoud Rajha
Ministre de la Défense



Hassan Turkmani
Adjoint au vice-président



Mohammed Ibrahim al-Chaar
Ministre de l'Intérieur



Hicham Bekhtiar
Patron de la Sécurité nationale

Le Comité de sécurité nationale décimé par un attentat

TROIS MORTS ET DEUX BLESSÉS SUR LES NEUF MEMBRES DU COMITÉ

On annonçait hier soir des bombardements très durs. D'autres craignaient « une boucherie » de la part d'un pouvoir humilié

sés. C'est une guerre ouverte contre tous les Syriens », a réagi le député Khaled al-Aboud, qui a accusé « des parties extérieures qui œuvrent à la destruction de la Syrie ».

Comme elles l'avaient fait l'an dernier en Libye, des forces spéciales du Qatar auraient pénétré sur le terrain syrien, assure une source sécuritaire française. « Cet attentat va certainement hâter la fin du régime », prédit un ancien ambassadeur de France en Syrie. « Bachar est ébranlé, mais comment va-t-il réagir ? », se demande de son côté un diplomate au Moyen-Orient. « Va-t-il réaliser qu'il est

temps de passer la main, ou au contraire va-t-il se lancer à corps perdu dans une intensification de la répression ? » Il semblerait que ce soit la deuxième option qui ait été retenue. « Cet acte terroriste renforce la détermination des forces armées à nettoyer la patrie des restes des bandes terroristes », a affirmé la télévision d'État. D'autres craignaient « une boucherie » commise par un pouvoir humilié. On annonçait, hier soir, des bombardements très durs à Homs. L'armée syrienne avait également positionné ses canons sur la montagne de Kassioun, qui domine Damas, afin de pilonner le quartier de Mezze ainsi que le faubourg de Mouadamiya, selon des opposants.

Pousser d'autres défections

Même si le raïs a rapidement nommé un nouveau ministre de la Défense, le général Fahd al-Frej, une brèche a bel et bien été ouverte. La confiance déjà minimale entre cadres d'une nomenclatura qui se surveillent va encore se réduire. Elle

pourrait pousser des figures baasistes à quitter le navire, deux semaines après le départ de Syrie du général Manaf Tlass, haut responsable de la Garde républicaine et ami d'enfance d'el-Assad.

Pour la fraction de la population qui hésitait encore à rejoindre l'opposition, ce coup est une incitation à penser que les jours du régime sont définitivement comptés. D'autant qu'à la périphérie de la capitale, les affrontements se sont poursuivis, mercredi, notamment à Midane et Kfar Sousséh. Plus de soixante soldats auraient été tués, depuis dimanche, dans la capitale, où le pouvoir a, pour la première fois, recouru aux hélicoptères pour écraser les rebelles. Les appareils seraient de nouveau entrés en action mercredi contre des positions insurgées dans les quartiers de Qaboun et de Barzeh, dans l'est de Damas ■

Assef Shawkat, poigne de fer du clan Assad

« LE PATRON vous salue, mais il ne peut pas vous recevoir », nous avait glissé son adjoint en 2006 à Damas. Le général Assef Shawkat, beau-frère de Bachar el-Assad qui a été tué mercredi dans un attentat à l'âge de 62 ans, n'apparaissait jamais devant la presse occidentale. Il était pourtant l'un des maillons clés d'un appareil sécuritaire, qui a permis au régime baasiste de se maintenir au pouvoir aussi longtemps. L'un des principaux détenteurs des secrets du régime, dont il connaissait toutes les turpitudes. Et l'un des membres éminents du directoire familial qui contrôle la Syrie.

« Assef est un dur, c'est le vrai para des forces spéciales », dit de lui un de ses interlocuteurs dans les services de renseignements français. Il siégeait au Comité de sécurité nationale, l'organisme créé par le régime pour structurer la répression contre les manifestants. Sa connaissance du terrain était très utile à Bachar el-Assad. Ce dernier l'avait envoyé à plusieurs reprises à Homs et à al-Zabadany pour superviser les opérations contre les rebelles.

Blessé par son beau-frère

La « plus-value » de Shawkat résidait dans son passé de patron du tout-puissant service des renseignements militaires. Il y avait tissé un maillage de l'armée, bien utile aujourd'hui pour contrer toute défection en masse. Au début de sa présidence, Bachar el-Assad le laissa placer ses hommes à la tête des autres services de renseignements. Grâce à lui, la maison était tenue.

Mais son pouvoir dépassait le cadre strictement syrien. Il a longtemps eu la haute main sur la redoutée Section Palestine des renseignements militaires, chargée de « neutraliser » les ennemis

du régime hors de ses frontières. Pendant longtemps, Shawkat a incarné la capacité de nuisance du régime syrien

hors du territoire. Et c'est à ce titre que le beau-frère de Bachar était devenu un interlocuteur des services de renseignements occidentaux. « Intelligent et ouvert », souligne un ancien de la DCRI qui le connaît bien. C'est son service qui se chargeait de traquer puis de renvoyer les djihadistes français, britanniques ou américains qui tentaient de pénétrer en Irak, via le territoire syrien. Quand cela correspondait bien sûr aux intérêts de son pays.

Shawkat, qui avait été l'un des principaux architectes de la domination syrienne sur le Liban, était un monstre froid. « Assef fit ses classes dans les commandos parachutistes à Hama en 1982, où 15 000 islamistes furent liquidés », se souvient un de ses interlocu-

teurs français. Mais à cause de ses liens avec les services étrangers, le clan el-Assad s'en méfiait, notamment son autre beau-frère, Maher, qui le blessa d'un coup de revolver à la fin des années 1990, contraignant Shawkat à aller discrètement se faire soigner à l'hôpital du Val-de-Grâce à Paris.

En 2008, Bachar el-Assad l'écarta un temps, lui faisant payer le fiasco du bombardement israélien de la centrale nucléaire de al-Kibar. Avant de le réintégrer comme vice-ministre de la Défense. Le déclenchement de la révolte en mars 2011 le rendit finalement indispensable. Assef Shawkat tirait une partie de son influence de son épouse, Bouchra, la fille aînée et préférée de l'ancien président Hafez el-Assad. Celle dont il avait été le garde du corps. ■

G.M.



Soldats syriens combattant, mardi à Damas. Les rebelles ont lancé une offensive sur la capitale depuis dimanche. AP

Iran in danger of losing main ally

TEHRAN

With Assad threatened, Tehran's dream of great regional power dissipates

BY THOMAS ERDBRINK

At this time last year, as a series of uprisings toppled traditional American allies across the Middle East, the Iranian leadership was welcoming the Arab Spring. It was a gift from God, they argued, one of many divine interventions in favor of the Islamic Republic.

Now, with the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad locked in a life-and-death struggle against an armed rebellion, Tehran is in danger of losing its last and most important ally, and its dream of becoming the undisputed regional power is dissipating like another desert mirage.

Syria has long been the linchpin of the security order in the Middle East, which is why so many nations in the region and beyond — Europe, Russia, Turkey, the Gulf states, the United States and Israel — have a keen interest in the outcome of the 17-month-old conflict that threatens now to end 42 years of rule by the Assad family.

The unraveling of the Assad government, the odds of which increased with the bombing that decapitated the government's war council on Wednesday, has all the potential to enflame ethnic, religious and regional rivalries and draw in outside powers, great and small.

But for Iran, Mr. Assad's downfall would be a powerful blow. Syria is one of Iran's closest allies, and it has been Iran's main conduit to supply aid and weapons to Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad — Islamic groups that in any number of ways act as an extension of Iranian power.

On Wednesday, after the bombing in Damascus, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, delivered an emotional speech live on television, saying that the Syria of Assad was the backbone of the Arab confrontation with Israel.

Indeed, without Mr. Assad, the reach of Iran, which has tried to make opposition to Israel a rallying point for the Islamic world, would be sorely compromised. That is why Iran has offered its staunch support for Mr. Assad, whose Alawite sect is close to the Shiite Islam that Iran champions. It has done so even at the cost of relations with other, longtime allies and blossoming political friendships, from Turkey to Qatar, as

well as the risk of deepening its political and ideological isolation in the region.

It is a far cry from last year, when Arab revolutions brought down leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and it looked to many inside and outside that Iran would emerge as the power broker in the Middle East.

The conditions for an expansion of Iranian influence had never seemed better. Tehran's ally in Lebanon, Hezbollah, had fought Israel to a draw and established itself as a political force there. The Americans were on the verge of leaving Iraq after toppling Saddam Hussein, the Iranians' greatest enemy, and installing a Shiite government. The oil-rich Sunni kingdoms, the Saudis in particular, warned darkly of a Shiite crescent of Iranian influence stretching from Tehran to Damascus to the shores of the Middle East.

At the same time, countries like Turkey, Brazil and Qatar were reaching out to Iran's leaders, giving them new confidence that the political support, trade and joint military exercises with their new friends would enable them to wield considerable clout in the Middle East and even resist Western pressure over its nuclear program.

But that is not how things worked out.

Tehran has tied itself in knots trying to explain to the revolutionary Arab world why it has so strongly supported Mr. Assad. While they say Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution was a model for the region, they charge that the mostly Sunni uprising against Mr. Assad is composed of "terrorists" backed by Israel and the United States.

Last week, Egypt's president, Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, chose to visit Iran's archenemy Saudi Arabia first, clearly favoring an alliance with the Sunni princes over the political clerics in Tehran.

All this has exacted a high political price, said Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, an Iranian Middle East analyst.

"We are supporting some uprisings and ignoring others," he said. "Arab

"Arab people do not believe us anymore. We come across as antagonists, following our political agenda."

people do not believe us anymore. We come across as antagonists, following our political agenda."

The new Arab governments look to-

ward Egypt, he said, with its fresh experiment on democratizing an Islamic society. "Instead of gaining influence," he said, "we are witnessing the emergence of new powerful countries that in the future could pose a challenge to us."

Iran's foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, condemned Wednesday's suicide blast, blaming "foreign intervention." Last week, when Kofi Annan, the special Syria envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League, paid a visit, Mr. Salehi insisted that elections scheduled for 2014 would allow Syrians to solve their own problems.

Despite the political costs and the growing possibility that the Assad government will collapse, there will be no shift in Iran's support for the Syrian president, political insiders in Tehran have said. Iranian leaders believe that Mr. Assad will prevail, just as they were able to suppress the peaceful protests that erupted after the 2009 presidential elections in Iran.

"Have no doubt, Assad's regime will survive," said Hamid Reza Taraghi, an Iranian foreign policy expert and politician whose views are close to the government's. "His leadership is powerful; there is no need for us to support him militarily."

Wednesday's suicide attack was in retaliation for a "definitive" blow dealt by the Syrian Army to the rebels, Mr. Taraghi said. He said 95 percent of Syria is "now cleansed of terrorists," and over 1,000 of them had been killed and arrested in the past few days. "This was a desperate attack, a last stand by them," he said.

But officials lower in the hierarchy have long worried that the Iranian decision-makers' all-out support for Mr. Assad could backfire.

"Ideally, Bashar al-Assad will survive," Hossein Alaie, a former admiral in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, wrote a year ago on the Web site Irandiplomacy.ir, "but this ideal might not be fulfilled. We should think of other ways to protect our national security."

Mr. Shamsolvaezin, the Iranian Middle East expert, predicted an uncertain future for Iran. He noted that at least Iraq was under Iranian influence, but said he did not know for how long.

"We were popular some years ago," he said. "But our ethical decisions have made a crisis for us. We hoped all in the region would turn away from the U.S. Now, we should be careful they do not turn their backs on us."



July 22, 2012

Kurdish MPs urge Turkey to free militant leader

By Ayla Jean Yackley

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Kurdish members of Turkey's parliament on Saturday called for the release of Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed leader of the armed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), saying an end to the group's 27-year conflict with the army is impossible while he is in prison.

Joined by human rights activists, the lawmakers also told a news conference that Ocalan has not seen his lawyers or family members for a full year and that such "inhuman" conditions raised concerns about his health and security.

"If there is going to be a negotiated peace, Ocalan's captivity must be ended," said Emine Ayna, a lawmaker from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). "A negotiating table in which one side holds the key to the handcuffs of the other party won't yield any results."

Ocalan has been serving a life sentence on an island prison in the Sea of Marmara since his conviction for treason in 1999.

Since his detention clashes have become

less frequent and most of the PKK is now based in northern Iraq, but violence still flares up. Fighting between the PKK and the Turkish armed forces has claimed more than 40,000 lives since 1984.

Turkey, the European Union and the United States list the PKK as a "terrorist" organisation.

However, Turkish officials have repeatedly ruled out releasing Ocalan or moving him from jail to house arrest. Nor is there much public support for Ocalan's release outside of the mainly Kurdish southeast.

DIFFERENT CLIMATE

Calling for his freedom would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. Only last year, Ayna was convicted for remarks about the PKK that judges ruled were "terrorist propaganda".

Until recently, even referring to the PKK leader as "Mr Ocalan" was grounds for a prison sentence.

But Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has done away with some taboos surrounding the Kurdish issue and has expanded cultural rights, including ending a ban on educa-

tion in the Kurdish language. The measures are aimed at addressing Kurds' grievances and at meeting EU criteria for membership of the 27-nation bloc.

"Everyone must accept that Mr Ocalan represents the Kurdish people," said Aysel Tugluk, another MP from the BDP.

"Mr Ocalan has called ceasefires and for a democratic end to the conflict. It's because of a recognition of his effectiveness that a dialogue and negotiations were launched with him."

The government is widely believed to have held secret talks with Ocalan in an attempt to end the violence. But no such talks are said to have taken place in well over a year.

About 8,000 Kurdish politicians, lawyers, activists, youth group members and others have been arrested in connection with an investigation into the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), said BDP MP Sebhat Tuncel. Prosecutors allege the PKK set up the KCK to create its own political system in the southeast.

The PKK has dropped its original demand for an independent Kurdish homeland and is now seeing greater political autonomy for Turkey's estimated 14 million Kurds. ♦



July 17, 2012

Iraq warns Turkey against violating airspace

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq warned Turkey against violating its airspace and territory and said on Tuesday it planned to protest to the U.N. Security Council after its radars had repeatedly detected Turkish warplanes, in a deepening a rift with its neighbor.

Over the past four weeks, Turkish warplanes and attack helicopters have carried out repeated strikes on suspected Kurdish militant targets in northern Iraq, according to Turkish military command, after clashes on the Iraqi side of the border.

The Turkish military says it is targeting hideouts of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants after some of the most intense battles this year of the separatist conflict.

"The Iraqi government condemns these violations to Iraq's airspace and sovereignty

and warns Turkey against any violations of Iraq's airspace and territory," government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said in statement after a cabinet meeting.

Dabbagh said the cabinet asked the Foreign Ministry to protest to the Security Council over the violations.

"Iraq will retain its right in taking all the measures to prevent these oversteps against its sovereignty," Dabbagh said.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry was not immediately available for comment.

The PKK, considered a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, has stepped up cross border attacks over the past year after abandoning a unilateral ceasefire.

More than 40,000 people have been kil-

led in the conflict since the militants took up arms in 1984 as part of their fight for more Kurdish autonomy and rights.

Ankara 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

Turkish officials have been waging a war of words with Baghdad since December Iraqi Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, based on allegations that he ran death squads.

The two countries have also clashed over energy policy. The airspace warning comes two days after Baghdad condemned Turkey for receiving Kurdish oil exports by truck, saying it would damage ties with the central Iraqi government.

Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, which borders Turkey, is locked in a dispute with the central Iraqi government over oil exports and energy policy has become a very sensitive topic. □

IRAQI KURDS TRAIN THEIR SYRIAN BRETHREN

Iraq's Shia-led government walks a tightrope on Syria, as regional groups enter the political and military fray.

Jane Arraf

Salahadin, Iraq - The Kurdish government in the north of Iraq is training Kurdish-Syrian fighters who will be sent back to defend Kurdish territory at home, says Kurdish regional President Massoud Barzani.

In an interview with Al Jazeera at the presidential palace near Erbil on Sunday, Barzani confirmed for the first time the presence of a training camp in the Kurdish region.

The training puts yet another twist on complicated Kurdish relations and highlights major differences between the policy of the Kurdish regional government and Iraq's central government towards neighbouring Syria.

"A good number of the young Kurds who fled have been trained. We do not want to interfere directly in the situation but they have been trained," Barzani told Al Jazeera in his first interview in months. He said they have not yet been sent into Syria but are intended to be deployed there to fill any "security vacuum" as Syrian security forces retreat.

Barzani said the fighting force, made up largely of Syrian Kurds who deserted the army and made their way across the border, would take its orders from a new high committee formed two weeks ago when two major Kurdish opposition groups put aside their differences.

"They have not been sent to Syria. They are still here - if this high committee requires them to go they still could - if not they will wait for the situation to be sorted out because these people are from these areas and they will go back eventually," he said. "This was aimed at filling the vacuum that will be created."

'UNIFIED' KURDISH POSITION

Barzani, the most prominent regional Kurdish leader, oversaw an agreement in Erbil between the Syrian armed opposition and the mainstream Kurdish National Council.



Syrian Kurds are increasingly fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan to escape violence [Reuters]



"The best and the biggest support that we could provide is to have a united position and in this we were successful," he said.

He said Syrian forces withdrew from several towns in the largely Kurdish al-Hasekah region which are now controlled by Kurdish fighters.

At Syria's border crossing with northern Iraq, Iraqi officials said Syrian security forces on Sunday morning retook the border post from gunmen who had seized it.

The Iraqi and Syrian sides of the border post are just metres away. One Iraqi border official told us he had spoken with a lieutenant colonel of the Free Syrian Army who took control of the post along with Kurdish and Arab fighters.

They melted away though when Syrian security forces sent in helicopters to

retake the Yarabiya crossing early Monday morning.

Iraq's Shia-led central government has been treading a very careful line on Syria, warning of the dangers of arming the opposition and saying the Syrian people must decide on their own future.

With violence worsening though and attacks on Iraqis in Syria increasing, the government has called on Iraqis to return home, seen by some as an implicit recognition that they do not expect the Syrian government to last. While thousands have returned to central Iraq, hundreds of Sunni Iraqis who fled sectarian violence say they plan to remain in the safer Kurdish region.

Iraq has closed the gates to Syrian refugees, saying it does not have the resources to take care of them at its remote desert crossings. Humanitarian officials from one of the borders reported that Iraqi authorities on the weekend had handed a Syrian family seeking asylum back to Syrian authorities. One official said it was likely because the family included military-age men.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and aid organisations have appealed for Iraq to open the borders to Syrian civilians trying to escape the fighting. ■

Fleeing Syrian Kurds seek refuge with Iraqi brethren



Patrick Marke - Reuters

CAMP DOMIZ, Iraq (Reuters) - Syrian troops usually came before dawn, rounding up young Kurdish men to force them into an army they did not see as their own and into a fight for a government that treated them as outsiders.

When they came, Syrian law student Ahmed slipped out, leaving his family and crossing the border in April into Iraqi Kurdistan to join thousands of Syrian Kurds now living among their Iraqi brethren in a refugee camp or homes of relatives.

As Syria's crisis escalates, Syria's Kurdish provinces have been spared most of the violence. But increasingly, Syrian Kurds say they are fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan to escape from growing economic hardship, kidnappings and instability.

More than 7,000 Syrians have crossed the border and found their way to Kurdistan, where local authorities and international agencies have set up a camp on a dusty plain. Diggers are already preparing land for more.

"Army convoys would come at around 4 am, asking for ID papers. When they surrounded my house I knew I couldn't go back," said Ahmed, who like many others at the camp asked that only his first name be used for fears of reprisals on family.

Some are soldiers escaping orders to fire on protesters or fellow Kurdish deserters, others are families who faced an increasing struggle to find gas and food, or students who wanted no part in fighting for President Bashar al-Assad.

Syria's Kurds have long suffered discrimination under Assad and many see in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan a place where they can find work and easily settle

with common roots and language as Syria falls apart.

While Syrian towns such as Homs face the brunt of Assad's crackdown after more than 16 months of protests and fighting, activists from the Kurdish region say Syrian Kurds - a million out of Syria's 21 million population - now cautiously see a chance to edge closer to rights similar to Kurdistan's model.

Iraqi Kurdistan, autonomous since 1991, has its own provincial government and armed forces, though it still relies on the Baghdad central government for its budget.

Demands from Syria's Kurdish region, which has faced repression of rights such as teaching in Kurdish, will be decisive for the Syrian National Council (SNC), the mainly Arab opposition to Assad, led since June by Abdelbasset Sida, a Kurd.

Numbers of Syrians fleeing into Iraq are still small compared with the refugees crossing into Turkey and into Lebanon, where the United Nations said up to 30,000 refugees may have crossed the frontier in the past week.

At Camp Domiz, where rows of tents are divided between single males and families, newly arrived refugees talk of Assad's departure, and offer a view of Syria splintering into separate regions as the violence there grows.

"I am sure Assad will leave now. In the past the military were strong, but there are too many defections now," said Hamo, a Kurdish Syrian soldier who fled the army and into Kurdistan after 10 months in Homs.

ANOTHER HOME

For Iraq, Syria's crisis is particularly sensitive. Baghdad's Shi'ite-led government is close to Iran, Assad's ally in the region, and has taken a more moderate

position than Sunni Gulf states such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

But Kurdish parties in Syria's opposition to Assad have been supported by Iraq's Kurdistan to encourage them to put aside differences and present a united front to fight for Kurdish rights.

Kurdish SNC members have had open disputes with others in the group over Kurdish rights - on July 4 a Kurdish group walked out of an opposition meeting in Cairo amid scuffles and fistfights - and whether a post-Assad Syria would be built around a federal structure similar to that in Iraq.

The role played by Syria's Kurds in any post-Assad Syria will be important for neighboring Turkey and Iran, where large Kurdish populations have long sought more independence.

For many Kurdish refugees that kinship drove them across Syria into Iraqi Kurdistan instead of seeking refuge in Lebanon or Turkey, where they believed they would face more restrictions.

Eight months fighting in the crackdown on protesters was enough for soldier Bilent to escape across Syria for Kurdistan. He said he paid a \$200 bribe to an officer to get a leave of absence, visit his family and leave.

"There was a rule. When they gave orders if I didn't follow and shoot, then they would shoot me," he said sitting among 20 other Syrian army deserters near the camp. "I'll be here until Assad leaves and then I'll go back."

For families at the camp, food shortages, dwindling supplies of gas for cooking and the threat of violence were enough to push them to abandon their homes and escape over Iraq's border.

Many already see Iraq as their new home, seeking jobs in nearby towns, and fixing tents with air conditioners in preparation for the long wait.

"Even if Assad falls we won't go back, there is no life left in Syria. It is better to stay here," said Wansan, who paid smugglers to ferry her and her three children into Iraq to follow her husband three weeks ago.

At a half-built mosque near Camp Domiz, sentiment running through the settlement is clear. Pale blue graffiti across the mosque's unfinished grey concrete walls reads: "Out with Bashar al-Assad." □

Le Monde

Samedi 21 juillet 2012

Moscou campe sur un soutien jusqu'au-boutiste à Damas

Moscou
Correspondante

J eudi 19 juillet, pour la troisième fois depuis mars 2011, la Russie et la Chine ont opposé leur veto, au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, à une résolution occidentale supposée mettre fin au bain de sang en Syrie. Persuadé que ce texte ouvrirait la voie à une intervention militaire, Moscou tente d'empêcher coûte que coûte la chute du régime de Bachar Al-Assad.

Ce troisième veto russe n'est pas une surprise. « Tout le monde doit comprendre que Bachar Al-Assad ne quittera pas le pouvoir. Même si la Russie modifiait sa position au Conseil de sécurité, cela ne serait d'aucun secours », avait déclaré Sergueï Lavrov, le chef de la diplomatie russe, en marge de la rencontre intervenue mercredi à Moscou entre le président russe, Vladimir Poutine, et le premier ministre turc, Recep

Tayyip Erdogan. « Assad refuse de démissionner non pas parce que la Russie le soutient mais parce qu'une large partie de la population est derrière lui », a, depuis, ajouté le diplomate.

Ni la recrudescence des combats sur le terrain, ni l'attentat ayant visé mercredi trois des collaborateurs du président syrien n'ont infléchi la position russe. « Les défunts, bien connus, avaient grandement contribué à l'essor de la relation russo-syrienne », souligne le ministère des affaires étrangères dans un texte de condoléances publié après l'attentat. Moscou espère que « les auteurs de l'attentat seront punis » et que « le gouvernement et la population syrienne, en vrais patriotes, sauront surmonter la crise ».

Plus les jours du régime syrien semblent comptés, plus l'élite militaro-politique au pouvoir en Russie est acharnée à le défendre. Onze navires militaires russes

font actuellement route vers la base de Tartous en Méditerranée et 10 000 experts militaires russes sont à pied d'œuvre en Syrie.

Pourtant, les arguments rationnels habituellement servis pour expliquer le soutien russe ne tiennent plus. Principal client de Rosoboronexport, la centrale russe d'exportation d'armes, la Syrie a certes acheté pour 700 millions de dollars (570 millions d'euros) d'équipements militaires en 2011 mais elle est dans l'incapacité d'honorer ses factures. Et puis, la base de Tartous, présentée comme le dernier avant-poste militaire russe en Méditerranée, n'est pas d'un grand intérêt stratégique.

La position officielle « est complètement détachée de la réalité », expliquait récemment à la chaîne de télévision indépendante Dojd TV, Gueorgui Myrski, un spécialiste du Moyen-Orient. À l'heure où le Parlement russe vient d'adopter une loi qualifiant les ONG non financées par le Kremlin d'« agents de l'étranger », la politique étrangère de Vladimir Poutine obéit à la même logique. « Le désastre sécuritaire et humanitaire en Syrie est pour le régime russe un exemple de ce que l'Occident et ses "agents" préparent en Russie », explique le spécialiste des questions militaires Pavel Felguenhauer.

« Avec ce troisième veto, la Russie a tout perdu au Moyen-Orient. Son image est ternie, ses chances de maintenir ses intérêts sur place

« Trop impliqués dans le soutien à Damas, les Russes ne peuvent faire marche arrière, ils sont dans une totale impasse »

Mahmoud Al-Khamsa

le représentant du Conseil national syrien à Moscou

sont compromises. Trop impliqués dans le soutien à Damas, les Russes ne peuvent faire marche arrière, ils sont dans une totale impasse », estime Mahmoud Al-Khamsa, le représentant du Conseil national syrien dans la capitale russe.

Malgré les dénégations officielles, le Kremlin veut aider Bachar Al-Assad à se maintenir au pouvoir coûte que coûte. Les navires russes en route vers Tartous pourraient-ils prêter main-forte à l'établissement d'un fief alaouite à Lattaquié ? Tous les scénarios sont possibles.

Ils sont certainement évoqués en coulisse avec l'oncle maternel du président syrien, Mohamed Makhoul, le responsable des finances du clan. Arrivé il y a une semaine à Moscou avec famille et bagages, l'homme s'est installé à l'hôtel Ukraine, sur les bords de la Moskova, juste en face de la « Maison blanche », le siège du gouvernement russe. ■

MARIE JÉGO

LE FIGARO

lundi 23 juillet 2012

À Damas, les opposants toujours sous le feu des loyalistes



Un camion brûle samedi à Damas, dans le quartier d'Erbeen qui vient de se faire plonger. HANDOUT/REUTERS

DANS LA CAPITALE, les forces gouvernementales poursuivent leur contre-offensive antirebelles. Appuyées par des blindés et des hélicoptères, les troupes loyales à Bachar el-Assad ont visé dimanche des poches tenues par les insurgés, légèrement armés. De leur côté, des membres de la Garde républicaine, une unité d'élite, protégeaient les bâtiments des services de sécurité, cibles des révolutionnaires, après leur exploit de mercredi au cours duquel ils ont réussi à tuer quatre cadres de la nomenklatura, dont Assef Shawkat, le beau-frère du président syrien.

Face à la supériorité militaire de l'armée, les insurgés ont dû se retirer des quartiers de Midane et de Mezze. Dimanche, les combats se concentraient à Barzé et dans les vergers derrière Mezze. Ils auraient fait des dizaines de morts. « Le bilan est beaucoup plus élevé que ce qui est annoncé », selon un homme d'affaires

alaouite en contact avec la hiérarchie sécuritaire à Damas.

En parallèle, experts russes et syriens tentent de déterminer le lieu d'où a été commandée l'explosion de la bombe utilisée dans l'attentat de mercredi. Selon nos informations, une plaquette d'explosif de la taille d'un téléphone portable aurait été dissimulée sous chacun des bureaux occupés par les cinq responsables de la sécurité tués ou blessés pendant une réunion.

Des militants de tous horizons

« À Damas, les gens continuent à chercher désespérément à être en sécurité », s'alarme la Croix-Rouge internationale. Les insurgés contrôlent désormais trois postes frontières avec la Turquie, mais ils ont dû en céder un à la frontière irakienne. Un groupe d'environ 150 djihadistes étrangers, armés de kalachnikovs et de lance-roquettes, occupe par ailleurs le

poste syro-turc de Bab al-Hawa. Des militants ont affirmé à un photographe de l'AFP venir d'Algérie, d'Arabie saoudite, des Émirats arabes unis, d'Égypte, de France, de Tchétchénie et de Tunisie. Certains ont indiqué appartenir à une « choura » (assemblée) talibane, et

d'autres ont revendiqué une appartenance à al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique. Tandis que la Turquie a déployé plusieurs batteries de missiles sol-air à Mardin, non loin de sa frontière avec la Syrie, plus à l'est en territoire syrien, les Kurdes ont avancé, prenant possession d'un certain nombre de villes. Quelques

centaines d'autres attendent côté irakien de la frontière avant de retourner chez eux. Samedi, Laurent Fabius a appelé l'opposition « à se mettre en ordre de marche » pour former rapidement un « gouvernement provisoire représentatif de la diversité de la société syrienne ». ■
G.M.

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Syrie : les armes chimiques sous surveillance

Des forces spéciales américaines ont été déployées pour prévenir leur dispersion.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

MOYEN-ORIENT Inquiets de la détérioration de la situation en Syrie, les États-Unis ont accru l'effectif de leurs Forces spéciales, déployées dans le désert au nord de la Jordanie, pour mieux traquer les armes chimiques détenues par Bachar el-Assad. « Les Américains ont également créé une cellule commune avec les Jordaniens, spécialement dédiée au partage du renseignement et à la surveillance de cet arsenal », révèle une source militaire au Moyen-Orient.

Washington a averti le raïs qu'il le tenait responsable du contrôle de ses armes chimiques

Le pouvoir syrien a commencé à déplacer une partie de ses stocks d'armes chimiques, indiquait, il y a une semaine, le *Wall Street Journal*, se fondant sur des sources du renseignement américain. Dans son édition du 3 juillet, *Le Figaro* soulignait déjà de tels mouvements, qui pourraient fournir aux Américains la justification à des frappes ciblées en Syrie. « Grâce aux images satellites, les Américains surveillent assez bien ces dépôts, mais pas tous, et certains stocks, nous le savons, ont été déplacés », nous confiait récemment cet expert militaire. À partir de leur base jordanienne, des commandos des Forces spéciales américaines feraient désormais des incursions en territoire syrien pour s'assurer du maintien de ces stocks entre les mains du régime d'el-Assad, qui dément en posséder.

La Syrie dispose pourtant d'un impor-

tant arsenal d'armes chimiques, accumulé ces quarante dernières années grâce au concours de l'ex-URSS et de l'Iran, notamment du gaz type sarin, VX, ainsi que du gaz moutarde. Ces dépôts sont dispersés en plusieurs endroits du pays, et placés sous la surveillance d'agents des renseignements de l'armée de l'air, le plus puissant des services de sécurité du régime. Selon un rapport du Centre d'études sur la non-prolifération, Damas posséderait au moins quatre usines d'armes chimiques situées près de Damas, d'Alep et de Hama, l'une des places fortes de la révolte populaire, qui menace le pouvoir d'Assad. Jusqu'à une date récente, aussi bien les États-Unis qu'Israël ou la Jordanie voyaient encore en Bachar el-Assad un « leader rationnel » qui ne s'aventurerait pas à utiliser ses « sales bombes » contre ses opposants où l'État hébreu. Leur plus grande crainte résidait plutôt dans la dissémination de cet arsenal entre de « mauvaises mains », notamment des groupes djihadistes liés à al-Qaïda ou du Hezbollah libanais pro-iranien.

Même si l'utilisation de ces armes chimiques par des « amateurs » reste complexe, cette hantise s'est accrue avec le chaos de ces derniers jours, marqué par une certaine perte de contrôle de la situation par le régime. Des experts n'écartent plus qu'Assad ait recours aux armes chimiques « en dernière extrémité ». En début de semaine, Washington a averti le raïs qu'il le tenait responsable du contrôle de ses armes chimiques. Les spécialistes américains restent toutefois divisés sur les raisons qui ont poussé Assad à ordonner un déplacement de certains de ses stocks.

Déclencher une frappe

Volonté d'inquiéter ses ennemis ? Souci de les placer hors de portée des rebelles ? Dissimulation de ces armes face aux menaces américano-israéliennes ? Plusieurs raisons sont invoquées. Une chose est sûre, « c'est la menace des armes chimiques qui peut déclencher une intervention militaire américaine ciblée », avertit un diplomate en Jordanie.

Les récentes manœuvres militaires syriennes comprenaient des tirs de missiles Scud et SS-21, capables de transporter des armes chimiques. Damas possède également des missiles M-600 de technologie iranienne pouvant atteindre Israël, après avoir survolé le territoire jordanien. D'où la dernière requête du roi Abdallah II, qui a demandé à ses alliés américains de reconfigurer les batteries de missiles antimissiles Patriot d'ancienne génération que Washington lui avait promis en début d'année. ■



Un tank appartenant à l'armée gît, samedi, dans une rue d'Alep, après un affrontement avec les rebelles syriens. STR/EPA/MAXPPP

Comment se prépare l'après-el-Assad

Afin d'éviter un vide sécuritaire et institutionnel, deux entités sont en chantier : un conseil militaire, d'un côté, et un gouvernement de transition, de l'autre.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT ET ALAIN BARLUET

MOYEN-ORIENT En coulisses, les grandes manœuvres s'intensifient pour préparer l'après-Assad. « *Même si le régime peut encore mordre, reconnaît un diplomate français, l'attentat du 18 juillet marque un basculement, qui nous impose de réfléchir à la vraie question du jour d'après.* » Avec une hantise clairement affichée : « *Nous craignons une situation à la libyenne où les chefs de guerre tiendraient le haut du pavé, ou une situation à l'irakienne, avec un désert institutionnel* », poursuit le diplomate.

Dans les chancelleries, deux mécanismes sont à l'étude pour palier ces vides politique et sécuritaire. Tout d'abord, sur le modèle de la transition égyptienne, la création d'une sorte de Conseil suprême des forces armées, regroupant les généraux déserteurs et ceux qui sont toujours en service. Ce conseil gérerait la période transitoire – neuf mois environ – à l'issue de laquelle des élections seraient organisées, et un projet de Constitution rédigé. Cette première option s'inspire des travaux sur la transition du médiateur international, Kofi Annan, et des recommandations adoptées par l'ensemble de l'opposition lors de sa dernière réunion au Caire, début juillet. Un homme pourrait jouer un rôle central : le général Manaf Tlass, ce haut gradé de la Garde républicaine, qui a quitté Damas pour la France, il y a trois semaines. Depuis, cet ami d'enfance de Bachar el-Assad n'a rompu le silence que pour affirmer dans un texte adressé à l'AFP qu'il prônait « *une opposition constructive* ».

L'armée garante de la stabilité

Selon certaines sources, le général Tlass, un sunnite comme les rebelles, originaire

de Rastan, un des bastions de la révolte, travaillerait à la mise en place d'un « *commandement militaire renforcé* » de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), pour y intégrer les autres généraux qui, comme



Le chef de la diplomatie qatarienne, Cheikh Hamad Ben Jassem, a appelé « l'opposition et l'ASL à former un gouvernement d'unité nationale »

lui, ont récemment fait défection. À cette fin, il aurait pris langue avec son cousin, le colonel Abdelrazzak Tlass, qui commande la brigade al-Farouk, active à Homs et dans la région de Rastane, ainsi qu'avec d'autres figures dissidentes sur le terrain en Syrie. Malgré de récents progrès, les déserteurs et les civils en armes qui ont rejoint ces derniers mois l'ASL restent incapables d'assurer la relève à la chute de Bachar.

Ils auront besoin de se reposer sur l'armée. Justement, « *les Américains et les Britanniques pensent que les bonnes relations de Manaf Tlass avec les généraux syriens peuvent permettre à l'armée de garantir la stabilité et la sécurité pendant une phase de transition* », poursuit un Syrien, en contact avec Washington et Londres. « *On pourrait imaginer un scénario dans lequel le général Tlass sorte de son silence pour annoncer la constitution de ce Haut Conseil, tout en appelant Bachar el-Assad à céder le pouvoir* », explique un diplomate dans l'entourage de Kofi Annan. Assad aurait, selon lui, demandé des garanties à ses alliés russes et chinois qu'il ne serait pas traduit devant la justice internationale. Dimanche, en réunion au Qatar, les 22 pays de la Ligue arabe – sauf

un, vraisemblablement l'Algérie – ont offert à Assad une « *porte de sortie sûre* » pour lui-même et sa famille. Il pourrait se voir offrir refuge à Dubaï ou Abu Dhabi, où sa famille a de nombreux intérêts, financiers notamment.

Contenir les islamistes

À Doha, le grand manitou de la diplomatie qatarienne, Cheikh Hamad Ben Jassem, a appelé « *l'opposition et l'ASL à former un gouvernement d'unité nationale* ». C'est le second volet du dispositif de transition. Il épouse le souhait français exprimé samedi par Laurent Fabius de voir l'opposition « *se mettre en ordre de marche* » pour former rapidement un gouvernement de transition dans lequel seraient inclus le Conseil national syrien, la principale composante de cette opposition – où Paris compte de nombreux amis – mais aussi « *l'ASL, des représentants de l'opposition intérieure, ainsi que des grandes familles sunnites bourgeoises de Damas qui peuvent jouer un rôle structurant pour l'avenir* », précise le diplomate. Mais, à ce stade, Français et Américains divergeraient. Préoccupés par la sécurité, Washington privilégie, dans un premier temps, l'établissement du Conseil militaire. D'autre part, « *les Américains ne tiennent pas à donner trop de place aux islamistes* », souligne-t-on dans l'entourage d'Annan, tandis que, sur le terrain, les groupes intégristes ou même djihadistes s'affranchissent de plus en plus de la tutelle de l'ASL, alors que des accrochages meurtriers sont signalés entre leaders de ces deux mouvances rivales.

Autre souci : comment limiter, à la chute du régime, les règlements de compte anti-alaoüites, dont seraient victimes les membres de la minorité, qui soutient le clan Assad. Les initiatives se multiplient pour éviter les affrontements communautaires. Paris a demandé à ses ambassades, en Égypte notamment, de prendre contact avec les

instances religieuses sunnites pour qu'elles incitent les cadres sunnites de la rébellion à « *une attitude responsable* ». D'autre part, l'oncle de Bachar, Rifaat el-Assad, exilé à Paris, a été approché pour transmettre des messages d'apaisement aux membres de sa communauté alaouite.

« *Ce n'est pas facile de fédérer une structure politique ou militaire, après des mois d'éclatement des groupes armés en Syrie, avec une multitude de parrains, le Qatar, l'Arabie saoudite, la Turquie, la France...* », reconnaît Samir Aïta, responsable de l'opposition à Paris. Enfin, que disent les Russes de ce plan de transition ? « *Bachar reste pendant cette transition, répète inlassablement Moscou. Son sort doit être décidé par les Syriens eux-mêmes lors d'une élection.* » De son côté, un porte-parole du raïs a exclu lundi tout départ d'el-Assad. ■



Un blindé de l'armée syrienne attaqué par des rebelles, lundi à Alep. AA/ABACA

Syria's Kurds stand alone after rejecting rebels and regime

thenational.ae

Aymenn Al Tamimi

Developments in Syria and Iraq have led some to speculate that the birth of an independent Kurdish state might be at hand. A closer analysis shows that a united Kurdistan is still unlikely, although a separate semiautonomous Kurdish community in Syria, with some parallels to the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Iraq, is a growing possibility.

In Syria, Kurds are sitting on the sidelines of the uprising against the Damascus regime. Indeed, the Free Syrian Army has accused members of the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) of hindering its operations in some areas against the Assad regime, according to the Kurdish website Rudaw.net. Leaders of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is affiliated with the PKK, have made it clear that they will not tolerate the spread of Syria's conflict into the Kurdish-dominated areas of Syria.

The PYD stands separate from the Kurdish National Council, a coalition of 11 Kurdish parties in Syria that has ties to the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. But leaders of the Kurdish National Council have also indicated to Rudaw that they are aiming to keep Kurdish areas free from fighting between the regime and the rebels.

The Kurdish groups are far from united on most issues - the KNC has in the past clashed with the PYD, but since Syria's unrest began last year, the two factions have "signed an agreement sponsored by the Iraqi Kurdish leadership to prevent intra-Kurdish tensions", according to Jonathan Spyer, an analyst at the Israel-based Global Research in International Affairs Center.

This, Mr Spyer writes in the Jerusalem Post, ensures "de facto Kurdish control of a large swathe of Syria's north-east and the placing of this area off limits to the insurgency against the Assad regime for the foreseeable future".

Syria's Kurds are not, by and large, supporters of President Bashar Al Assad, but their scepticism about the Syrian opposition is understandable. For one thing, rebel fighters in Syria have the support of Ankara, which



has a bad reputation regarding Turkish Kurds in matters of civil and cultural rights.

In addition, whenever Kurdish groups have tried to engage the Syrian opposition about the shape of a post-Assad Syria, talks have always broken down. The main issue is that the opposition refuses to drop the identification of Syria as an Arab nation (as evinced in the country's official name: "Syrian Arab Republic") and accept that Kurds are a distinct people. Thus ended the recent Cairo meeting of anti-Assad groups, attended by the KNC.

With Syrian Kurds declining to choose between Mr Al Assad and the opposition, the idea of a de facto Kurdish autonomous area in the Al Jazira area of north-east Syria becomes a possibility.

In the event of Mr Al Assad's downfall, Sunni groups and others in Syria might be too distracted by infighting to deal with the question of Kurdish autonomy.

It does not follow, however, that the Syrian Kurds will join with Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government to form an independent Kurdish state straddling the northern part of today's Iraq-Syria border.

Evidently, Iraq's Kurdish leadership would like to win independence from Baghdad eventually, although that is rarely stated explicitly. But economic independence is a prerequisite, and Syria's Kurdish areas would have little to offer the Iraqi Kurds in that regard.

Most of Syria's remaining oil reserves are

located in the Sunni Arab tribal areas around Deir Ezzor. Nor does Syria's Kurdish region have access to ports that could allow Iraq's Kurds to set up an independent pipeline to transport petroleum to the international market.

There was considerable media coverage of an agreement signed in May between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, covering two pipelines that carry oil and gas from the Kirkuk area to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.

Numerous reports portrayed this deal as incurring the disapproval of the Iraqi government in Baghdad. The implication was that Turkey and the KRG had agreed, without Baghdad's permission, to set up these pipelines.

Some commentators saw the deal as part of a Turkish strategy to deepen economic ties with Iraqi Kurds. This was seen as a sign that the Turkish government had warmed to the idea of potential Kurdish independence.

However, as the analyst Joel Wing of the blog Musings on Iraq noted, this analysis gets the basic facts wrong. The Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipelines are under the control of the oil ministry in Baghdad, and so the KRG agreement with Turkey must have had central government approval to some degree. After all, Baghdad provides 95 per cent of the KRG's annual budget.

Note that the Kurdish areas of Turkey constitute at least 50 per cent of the dreamed of Kurdistan. Ankara would not welcome an independent Kurdish state just south of its border, believing that such a state would increase the possibility of a Kurdish revolt in Turkey's south-east. One of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipelines was shut down on Saturday after an explosion that Ankara blamed on Kurdish rebels. That fraught relationship does not appear to be improving any time soon.

As long as Turkey remains opposed to Kurdish independence and the KRG lacks opportunities to break its financial reliance on Baghdad, an independent Kurdistan will remain a remote prospect.■

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SYRIA'S RISKY ARMS RACE

As Russia continues to equip the Assad regime, rebel groups are buying powerful weapons abroad too. Is all-out civil war inevitable?

BY SIMON SHUSTER

THIS WEAPON IS PERFECT FOR CLOSE-QUARTERS COMBAT, house to house," the Russian arms dealer explains, handing a silencer-equipped AK-104 assault rifle to a Syrian official, who brings the gun's sight to his eye and aims it across Pavilion C3 of Russia's biennial arms bazaar. Through the crosshairs, he can see the neon display of Rosoboronexport, Russia's state weapons dealer, which has given the Syrians a rare chance to do some military shopping. Most of the world has banned arms sales to the Syrian government amid

the country's escalating civil revolt. So in Moscow the four-member Syrian delegation is enjoying the hospitality. After an hour with the Kalashnikov salesman, the Syrians stroll over to study some rocket launchers, cruise missiles and military SUVs, which gleam in the summer sun like sports cars at a dealership.

Welcome to Russia's premier weapons expo, the innocuously named Forum of Technologies in Machine Building, a military buffet that President Vladimir Putin, who was then Prime Minister, inaugurated two years ago. In the last week of June, delegations from 103 nations, including Iran, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Uganda, descended on Zhukovsky Airfield near Moscow to attend the expo. One noteworthy attraction: a "ballet" of twirling, smoke-belching tanks staged by a choreographer from the Bolshoi Theatre.

But the Syrians were not there to be entertained. Over the past 16 months, Syrian forces loyal to President Bashar Assad have used their Russian weaponry to hammer a homegrown rebellion, the most violent of the Arab Spring revolts. The U.N. estimates the death toll at more than 10,000, including thousands of women and children. And as Syria falls deeper into disarray, Assad's regime has continued to import Russian weaponry as part of long-standing deals between the two countries. According to CAST, a Russian military think tank with ties to the Ministry of Defense, there are now about \$4 billion in open weapons contracts between Russia and Syria, and even though Moscow has pledged not to sign any new

deals with Damascus until the war ends, its existing agreements "will not be affected in any way," Anatoly Isaykin, the head of Rosoboronexport, tells TIME.

On the opposite side of the conflict, the disparate bands of rebels fighting to oust Assad are also receiving arms from abroad, making the Syrian crisis seem to many observers like a proxy conflict whose lines of patronage stretch not only to Moscow but across the Arab world and all the way to Washington. Russia, the U.S. and Europe all have major stakes in the Syrian struggle, as does almost every religious sect and ethnic clan in the Middle East, and they are all lining up behind one side or another. But with none of the foreign players willing to commit troops, the means of engagement has been through an arms race. For the West and its Arab allies, supporting the rebels is a low-risk way to even out the battlefield just long enough to persuade Assad to step down. For Russia and Iran, Assad's most powerful supporters, this tactic smacks of violent regime change.

The stalemate has allowed more weapons to flow into Syria—increasing the chances that this bloody internal conflict will morph into a full-scale civil war, with regional and international forces backing opposing sides. "This is a proxy war," Sergei Ordzhonikidze, a Russian diplomat, told TIME after returning to Moscow from Damascus in July. It harks back to the tradition of Cold War détente, he says, when the nuclear superpowers "avoided direct confrontation while advancing their interests through third countries."

U.S. officials reject the notion that the

U.S. is involved in a conflict with Russia in Syria. Washington is moving more subtly than its old Cold War adversary. In the past few months, the U.S. State Department has worked to establish relationships with opposition groups and is planning to open an office in Istanbul to vet them for possible ties to al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, Administration and congressional sources say. On July 6, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pledged not to leave the rebel fighters hanging, even if the U.S. continues to avoid direct arms sales, let alone military intervention. "The United States will continue providing nonlethal assistance to help those inside Syria who are carrying the fight," she said at a meeting on the crisis in Paris. That assistance has included communications equipment and training. Meanwhile, countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are providing weapons or funds for them, U.S. sources say. An official at the Saudi embassy in Washington declined to comment; officials from the Qatari and

Emirati embassies did not respond to repeated requests for comment. No government has openly acknowledged supplying the rebels with weapons.

Moscow's Firepower

AS THE MAIN WEAPONS SUPPLIER TO DAMASCUS, Moscow has unmatched leverage with the Syrian regime. Syria has been a Kremlin client state since the 1970s, and apart from Iran, Russia is the only power that may be able to persuade Assad to step down. As international pressure mounts, Russia has shown new signs of impatience with the Syrian despot. On July 9, at a summit in Moscow with his entire ambassador corps, Putin ordered the diplomats to "do as much as possible to force the conflicting sides to reach a peaceful political solution." The same day, a delegation of Syrian revolutionaries arrived in Moscow for talks with the Foreign Minister, signaling that Moscow may have started looking for partners among the opposition, perhaps to retain influence with a post-Assad government. The Russians "have indicated for some time now that they are not invested in Assad specifically but rather are concerned about an outcome that maintains stability in Syria," says Ben Rhodes, President Obama's Deputy National Security Adviser. "They certainly have not closed the door to a political transition from Assad. The hurdle for them has been understanding and appreciating that there's no way to achieve stability with Assad still in power, and that's what we've been trying to convince them of in our conversations."

But at the weapons bazaar there was little sign that Russia intends to use its power in the arms trade to pressure Assad.

“These are the guys we are rooting for,” an official with Rosoboronexport told *TIME* while showing the Syrian delegates a set of truck-mounted rocket launchers. The Syrians climbed into armored trucks, studied surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and discussed certain weapons systems at length with Rosoboronexport reps. But

their chaperone, Colonel Isam Ibrahim As'saadi, the military attaché at the Syrian embassy in Moscow, declined to say what, if anything, they purchased that day, nor did he allow *TIME* to speak with them. The man As'saadi identified as the head of the delegation would say only that he had flown in from Damascus to attend the fair. “That shows a serious intention to buy,” says Hugh Griffiths, an arms-trafficking expert at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks the global weapons market.

In recent years the Syrians have become increasingly good customers. According to SIPRI, which gets its data on the arms trade from open sources, Syria increased its arms purchases almost sixfold over the past five years, and at least 78% of those weapons came from Russia, the world's second largest arms dealer, after the U.S. This included deliveries of MiG-29 fighter jets, Pantsir-S1 rocket systems and Buk-M2E SAMs. “These are deterrents,” says Griffiths. “They would make any foreign intervention in Syria a lot more costly.”

They are also driving the rebels' rush to seek heavy weaponry of their own.

Stoking the Inferno

JUST ACROSS THE BORDER FROM SYRIA, along a desolate stretch of the Mediterranean coast, one of North Lebanon's leading arms traffickers runs his business out of what looks like a repurposed seafood restaurant. Metal shutters are pulled down over the large plate-glass windows, and an empty aquarium embedded in the floor is growing lush with algae. Outside, half a dozen heavysset men dressed in identical khaki vests patrol the parking lot with walkie-talkies in their hands and pistols peeking out of their waistbands.

Inside, Abu Saddam, who uses a nom de guerre, has just gotten off the phone. About two hours ago, he says, he sent a big shipment to Syria. What kind? “Painkillers,” he says, cocking an imaginary gun to his head. He refuses to say what type of weapons they were. But when asked whether they were for the Free Syrian Army, the loose confederation of military defectors and revolutionaries fighting Assad, Abu Saddam rolls his eyes. “Naturally,” he says. “The FSA is like hell. The more you put fire into it, the more it asks for.”

Over the past couple of months, he says, he has shipped several million dollars' worth of heavy weapons to Syria. At the beginning of the conflict, the FSA, which Abu Saddam and other sources say



Comparison shopping
The Syrian-delegation chief inspects a Kalashnikov assault rifle

is funded by wealthy Saudi, Qatari, Emirati and Syrian individuals, among others, was buying anything it could get, including pistols and grenades. Now they want bigger things. “They want thermals,” says Abu Saddam, meaning heat-seeking missiles. Something that could take out an airplane or a tank, like a SAM, would go for about \$2,500, and he could get it “within five minutes.” To prove the point, he tells one of his khaki-vested minions to open an armored metal door tucked behind a tattered curtain. His employee pulls out a couple of mortar rounds, then some SAMs.

All of them are sourced from Libya, he says. “You could not imagine the quantities they have,” says Abu Saddam. The wiser heads among the sometimes fractious Libyan brigades that fought in that country's revolution want to ship the weapons out, he explains, before their postrevolutionary battles get any bloodier. The Libyans even help load the weapons onto cargo ships headed for Lebanon, Abu Saddam says. The ships fly French, Russian or U.S. flags, anything but Libyan, and the manifests are doctored to read wood, ceramics or sheet metal, anything but guns.

Among the nonstate actors contributing to the Syrian arms race are Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been among the most active in supporting the rebels, sometimes in exchange for loyalty. Molham Aldrobi, an executive member of the Muslim Brotherhood and a founding member of the Syrian National Council, says his organization has been providing “all kinds of support,” from logistics and financial aid to weapons. “We're trying to get anything that is more efficient and more effective in this struggle against Bashar,” Aldrobi tells *TIME* from Jidda, Saudi Arabia.

In the Russian analysis, the West is trying to control the flow of arms to the rebels, primarily through its Sunni allies,

‘WE’RE TRYING TO GET ANYTHING THAT IS MORE EFFECTIVE IN THIS STRUGGLE AGAINST BASHAR.’

—MOLHAM ALDROBI, MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

like Turkey and the Gulf states. “Surely you don't think a tiny state like Qatar is acting alone in all this,” scoffs Ordzhonikidze, the Russian diplomat. The motivations for the West are simple, he suggests. For Europe, the goal is regime change so that an oil pipeline can be built from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. For the U.S., as ever, the prize is Iran, which would be isolated if its only major ally in the Middle East fell. Whether or not this intelligence is accurate, it is considered so by Russia's leader, and that makes it hard for them to stay on the sidelines while, in their eyes, the West carves up another region of the world.

Syria is also home to tens of thousands of Russians, a legacy of the cultural and scientific exchanges that began in 1963, when the socialist Baath Party came to power. Soon after, Syria became a Soviet client state under the rule of Hafez Assad, Bashar Assad's father. A legacy of that relationship is Russia's naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, the only military base Russia has left outside the former Soviet Union. On July 10, the Russian Ministry of Defense said it had sent a flotilla



Open arms A
Rosoboronexport
representative, left,
greet the head of the
Syrian delegation

'THESE ARE
THE GUYS
WE ARE
ROOTING
FOR.'

—AN OFFICIAL FROM
ROSOBORONEXPORT,
RUSSIA'S STATE ARMS
COMPANY

of warships for exercises near Tartus, the largest show of force in the region since the conflict in Syria began. "If we lose Tartus, we can kiss our foothold in that region goodbye," says Konstantin Sivkov, a Russian military strategist who once served as a naval commodore in Tartus. "The entire Mediterranean would be surrounded by NATO, and we cannot let that happen."

The Next War?

THE LONGER RUSSIA CONTINUES DEFENDING Syria, however, the greater international pressure Russia comes under. In July, Clinton said the world should make Moscow "pay a price" for standing by Assad—and the frequent reports of Syrian troops torturing and massacring civilians are regularly thrown in Russia's face. This presents an image problem, says Rosoboronexport's Isaykin. "Around these hot spots, efforts are made to present our organization as some kind of evil genius who is trying to pour kerosene on the fire," he tells *TIME* at the Moscow arms bazaar, which his company helped organize and sponsor.

In April, Human Rights Watch informed Isaykin in an open letter that Assad's use of Russian arms puts his firm "at a high risk of complicity" in war crimes. The independent watchdog later urged a global boycott of Rosoboronexport. Isaykin describes the attempts to blacken his company's name as unfair competition on the part of his Western counterparts. "Of course I mean *competition* in the broadest sense of the word," he says. "It always existed, and it will continue to exist." So his orders from the government thus far are to soldier on. He says Rosoboronexport has every intention of fulfilling its multibillion-dollar contracts with the Syrian government

as long as Assad can pay the bills. "None of these events will influence our relationships with our traditional markets in any way," Isaykin says.

But Russia's decision to meet with Syrian opposition leaders in Moscow may indicate that Russia is seeking to ensure its foothold in Syria well after a possible Assad ouster. "We are not married to Assad," explains Sivkov. "We can maintain our position in Syria as long as there is a normal succession process." Russia's arms contracts with Syria require the two countries to maintain stable relations so that the weapons can be installed, serviced and repaired. Russia usually provides ammunition, technical support and training for the lifetimes of the weapons it sells. So unless the post-Assad government wants to replace its entire military infrastructure, it will not be able to sever ties with Russia.

That relationship would come to an end, says Sivkov, if the West insists on uprooting Assad's regime completely. "That would spark a total war," he says. The Alawites—the offshoot of Shi'ism that the Assads belong to and gain much of their support from—would be at risk of persecution at the hands of the majority Sunnis, Iran could be dragged in, oil prices could spike and the region would be in danger of dissolving into a sectarian quagmire.

Part of the reason the West has not been willing to give the rebels heavy artillery is that if Assad is overthrown, "it's going to be ugly," says Joseph Holliday, a Syria expert at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington. "No one really wants to precipitate a war right now. For those reasons you'll see a continued proxy conflict—the Gulf states vs. Russia and Iran, and the U.S. trying to play referee."

So until all sides can agree on a better option, the arms race in Syria is likely to continue—for this war and, perhaps even more worrying, for one yet to start. Abu Saddam, the Lebanese arms dealer, says his clients in Syria are stockpiling weapons not as much to overthrow Assad as to prepare for the carnage that his downfall would initiate. "That will be the real battle," he says. "The FSA will want to take control, the Salafists will want to take control, the Muslim Brotherhood will want to take control, and the CIA, the Saudis and the KGB will want a say in what happens. Libya and Iraq? They will be nothing compared to what will happen in Syria once Bashar falls."

—WITH REPORTING BY ARYN BAKER AND RAMI AYSHA/BEIRUT, RANIA ABOUZEID/TURKISH-SYRIAN BORDER AND JAY NEWTON-SMALL/WASHINGTON ■

U.S. focuses on efforts to topple Assad government

WASHINGTON

Officials hold talks with Turkey and Israel over managing a collapse

BY ERIC SCHMITT AND HELENE COOPER

The Obama administration has for now abandoned efforts for a diplomatic settlement to the conflict in Syria and is increasing aid to the rebels and redoubling efforts to rally a coalition of like-minded countries to forcibly bring down the government of President Bashar al-Assad, U.S. officials say.

U.S. officials have been in talks with leaders in Turkey and Israel over how to manage a Syrian government collapse. The U.S. defense secretary, Leon E. Panetta, is headed to Israel in the next several days, following up on a visit last week by President Barack Obama's national security adviser, Thomas E. Donilon, in part to discuss the Syrian crisis.

In a sign of the escalating seriousness of the Syrian crisis after a week of intensified fighting in Damascus, the capital, and the killing of Mr. Assad's closest security aides in a bombing attack, the White House is now holding daily high-level meetings to discuss a broad range of contingency plans, including safeguarding Syria's vast chemical weapons arsenal and sending explicit

warnings to both warring sides to avert mass atrocities.

The United States has regularly discussed with the Israelis how they might move to destroy Syrian weapons facilities, U.S. officials said. Washington is not advocating such an attack, the officials said, because of the risk that it would give Mr. Assad an opportunity to rally support against Israeli interference.

U.S. officials say they will not provide arms to the rebel forces; Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are already financing those efforts. But officials said the United States would provide more communications training and equipment to help improve the combat effectiveness of disparate opposition forces in their widening, sustained fight against Syrian Army troops. It is also possible the rebels would receive some intelligence support, the officials said.

By enhancing the command and control of the rebels' formations, largely by improving their ability to communicate with one another and their superiors and to coordinate combat operations, U.S. officials say they are seeking to fuel the momentum of the rebels' recent battlefield successes.

"You'll notice in the last couple of months, the opposition has been strengthened," a senior U.S. official said Friday. "Now we're ready to accelerate that." The official said that the hope was that support for the Syrian opposition from the United States, Arab governments and Turkey would tip the balance in the conflict.

Senior U.S. officials say the changes are in response to a series of setbacks at the U.N. Security Council, where Russia has staunchly refused to engineer the removal of Mr. Assad, as well as the turmoil that has left the Syrian government reeling, at least for the moment.

"We're looking at the controlled demolition of the Assad regime," said Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "But like any controlled demolition, anything can go wrong."

Mr. Obama has come under criticism from Mitt Romney, his presumed opponent in the presidential election, who has said that he would arm the Syrian opposition.

Mr. Obama had been pushing Russia to join the United States in calling for Mr. Assad to step down from power. But on Thursday, Russia and China blocked tougher action in the U.N. Security Council. This prompted Susan E. Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, to say that the Security Council had "utterly failed" the Syrians and to pledge that the United States would now instead work "with a diverse range of partners outside the Security Council" to pressure the Assad government.

Officials in Washington say the United States is also working with Syrian rebels to establish a transition process for the day that Mr. Assad's government falls, including trying to set up a provisional government that would include representatives from the various religious groups in the country: Alawites, Sunnis and Christians. "We need to make sure that what comes next has Alawite representation," one U.S. official said Saturday. While the majority of Syrians are Sunni, the Alawite sect, which includes Mr. Assad, controls the levers of power.

Outreach to the Alawite community is important if the Syrian state is to remain intact after Mr. Assad is gone, U.S. officials and foreign policy experts said. And it may be necessary to hasten Mr. Assad's exit.

"The much more urgent challenge," said Martin S. Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, "is to make contact with Assad's generals to get them to defect with units intact."

But as the unexpected turn of events last week indicate, planning for the end of the Assad government is virtually impossible. "What is the end? That's the dilemma," one senior defense official said. "No one knows what the end is. So it's all about mitigating the risks."

And the risks are legion.

The escalating violence has so far sent as many as 125,000 people fleeing across the Syrian border into Lebanon,

The United States may supply rebels with communication aid.

Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, according to the State Department. U.S. officials are expressing fears that the implosion of the government could lead to a breakup of Syria, with Alawites, still armed with chemical weapons, retreating to coastal mountain redoubts.

"It's an outcome that contains the seeds of a war that never ends," said Robert Malley, Middle East and North Africa program director at the International Crisis Group. "The rest of Syria won't accept having part of their territory under the control of the people who've been oppressing them."

This month, Syria started moving



Syrian rebels on Sunday near Aleppo, the commercial center of the country, long a bastion of support for President Basbar al-Assad.

parts of its huge stockpile of chemical weapons out of storage, drawing warnings from U.S. officials not to use them or face unstated consequences. Some U.S. intelligence officials said later that the movements were most likely a precaution as security conditions across the country rapidly deteriorated.

"It's going to take an international effort when Assad falls — and he will fall — in order to secure these weapons," Adm. William H. McRaven, the head of the U.S. military's Special Operations forces, told Congress in March.

U.S. and other Western intelligence officials have expressed concern that some of the more than 100 rebel formations fighting inside Syria may have ties to Al Qaeda that they could exploit as se-

curity worsens in the country or after the collapse of the government.

"If the Assad regime did fall, this would provide more Islamist militants with a potential opportunity to establish a new foothold in the heart of the Middle East," said Charles Lister, an analyst with Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center. "The temporary lack of state structures would also afford aspirant militant Islamists with a safe area for training."

A small number of clandestine C.I.A. officers have been operating in southern Turkey for several weeks, helping allies decide which Syrian opposition fighters across the border will receive weapons to fight the government. The C.I.A. effort is aimed 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.

By helping to vet rebel groups, U.S. intelligence operatives in Turkey also hope to learn more about a growing, changing opposition network inside of Syria and to establish ties to fighters who may be the country's leaders one day.

U.S. diplomats are also meeting regularly with representatives of various Syrian opposition groups outside the country to help map out a possible post-Assad government.

"Our focus with the opposition is on working with them so that they have a political transition in place to stand up a new Syria," Patrick Ventrell, a State Department spokesman, said last week.

Turkey's human rights hypocrisy

Turkey must atone for its own past crimes before lecturing others on human rights.

Taner Akcam

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS A new political order is emerging in the Middle East, and Turkey aspires to be its leader by taking a stand against authoritarian regimes. Earlier this week, Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, went so far as to denounce the Syrian government's continuing massacres of civilians as "attempted genocide."

Turkey's desire to champion human rights in the region is a welcome development, but Mr. Erdogan's condemnation of Syria is remarkably hypocritical. As long as Turkey continues to deny crimes committed against non-Turks in the early 1900s, during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, its calls for freedom, justice and humanitarian values will ring false.

Turkey's attempt to cultivate an image as the global protector of Muslim rights is compromised by a legacy of ethnic cleansing and genocide against Christians and terror against Arabs and Kurds. Memories of these crimes are very much alive throughout former Ottoman territories. And Turkey cannot serve as a democratic model until it acknowledges that brutal violence, population transfers and genocide underlie the modern Turkish state.

Using documents from the Ottoman government archives in Istanbul, which were once classified as top secret, I have sought to pull back the veil on Turkey's century of denial. These documents clearly demonstrate that Ottoman demographic policy from 1913 to 1918 was genocidal. Indeed, the phrase "crimes against humanity" was coined as a legal term and first used on May 24, 1915, in re-

sponse to the genocide against Armenians and other Christian civilians. Britain, France and Russia initially defined Ottoman atrocities as "crimes against Christianity" but later substituted "humanity" after considering the negative reaction that such a specific term could elicit from Muslims in their colonies.

Today, Mr. Erdogan is seeking to be a global spokesman for Muslim values. In June 2011, he told thousands gathered to celebrate the landslide victory of his Justice and Development Party (A.K.P.): "Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul; Beirut won as much as Izmir; Damascus won as much as Ankara. Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza won as much as Diyarbakir."

Speaking in support of oppressed Muslims has earned him popularity. But if Mr. Erdogan aspires to defend freedom and democracy in the region, he must also address the legitimate fears of Christians in the Middle East. Just as the European powers opted for universalism in 1915 by denouncing "crimes against humanity," Mr. Erdogan must move beyond his narrow focus on "crimes against Muslims." All oppressed peoples deserve protection.

It isn't a coincidence that many Christians and other minorities in Syria support Bashar al-Assad's Baath Party; they are willing to sacrifice freedom for security. While Turkish rhetoric appeals to the Sunni Muslim majority's demand for freedom in Syria, it does not relieve Syrian Christians' anxiety about their future. On the contrary, Syrian Christians listening to Mr. Erdogan and his denialist rhetoric are reminded

Confronting the past is closely linked to security, stability and democracy in the Mideast.

of 1915, and that makes Turkey look very much like a security threat to them.

Confronting the past is closely linked to security, stability and democracy in the Middle East. Persistent denial of historical injustices not only impedes democratization but also hampers stable relations between different ethnic and religious groups. This is particularly true in former Ottoman lands, where people view one another in the cloaks of their ancestors. In addition to the reverberations of the Armenian genocide, mass crimes against Kurds and Alevis in Turkey, violence against Kurds and Arabs in Iraq, and Christian-Muslim tensions in Syria and Lebanon continue to poison contemporary politics.

The popularity of the A.K.P. in Turkey and the Muslim world affords Mr. Erdogan an opportunity to usher in an era of tolerance. By acknowledging the genocide against Christians and crimes against other groups, the Turks can become leaders in the realm of human rights. But Turkey's efforts to paint itself as a beacon of freedom and democracy will fail so long as Turkey refuses to atone for Ottoman sins.

Moral purists and hard-nosed realists mistakenly believe that pursuing justice and national interests are mutually exclusive. But acknowledging historical wrongs is not a zero-sum game.

In the Middle East, the past is the present. And truth and reconciliation are integral to establishing a new, stable regional order founded on respect for human rights and dignity. Turkey should lead by example.

TANER AKCAM, a professor of history at Clark University, is the author of "The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire."

Syrie : les Kurdes contrôlent leur région désertée par Assad

Pierre Haski | Cofondateur Rue89

Tandis que la confrontation entre le régime syrien et ses opposants se concentrait sur la ville d'Alep, les zones kurdes du Nord échappaient d'un seul coup, ces derniers jours, au contrôle du pouvoir central syrien, et tombaient entre les mains des mouvements kurdes.

Le drapeau kurde flotte désormais sur les principales localités kurdes du nord et du nord-est syrien, qui ont été abandonnées en fin de semaine dernière par les garnisons de l'armée syrienne envoyées sur d'autres fronts, par les membres des services de sécurité (les « moukhabarat »), et même par les fonctionnaires arabes des grandes villes.

Les Kurdes constituent environ 9% des 23 millions de Syriens, et vivent pour la plupart dans ces zones du nord et du nord-est, à l'exception de communautés kurdes dans les grandes villes comme Damas et Alep.

Les Kurdes sont un peuple de plus de 25 millions de personnes, installées dans quatre Etats voisins, la Turquie, l'Irak, l'Iran et la Syrie. Ils ont eu une éphémère République kurde en 1946, et se battent depuis des décennies pour la reconnaissance de leurs droits politiques et culturels dans leurs Etats respectifs.

Ce retrait du pouvoir syrien, sans se battre, a créé un vide dans lequel se sont engouffrés les partis kurdes, qui ont constitué une instance provisoire (sous l'égide des « grands frères » kurdes irakiens) dont la priorité est de maintenir la sécurité dans cette zone échappant désormais à l'autorité centrale syrienne.

ALLIANCE KURDE PROVISOIRE

Selon **Kendal Nezan**, directeur de l'*Institut kurde de Paris*, rentré ce week-end du Kurdistan irakien où se trouvaient des dirigeants kurdes syriens, cette instance, le Conseil suprême kurde, est composée à parité par :

- le Conseil national kurde (KNC) de Syrie, regroupant les partis traditionnels ;
- le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), proche du PKK marxiste-léniniste d'Abdullah Ocalan, principalement implanté en Turquie.

Ces deux formations, aux objectifs et à l'idéologie très contradictoires, se démar-



Drapeaux kurdes, syriens et du PKK dans la zone kurde de Syrie (Rudaw)



Le drapeau kurde (Institut Kurde, Paris)

quent à la fois du pouvoir baassiste syrien, mais aussi de l'opposition qui mène le soulèvement contre Bachar el-Assad. Aucun soldat se réclamant de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) ne se trouve ainsi sur le terrain, en zone de peuplement kurde.

Cela fait du Kurdistan syrien une force avec laquelle le vainqueur de la confrontation actuelle, quel qu'il soit, devra compter pour dessiner la Syrie de demain.

Le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale force politique de l'opposition à l'étranger, est certes présidé par un Syrien d'origine kurde, Abdel Basset Sayda, mais celui-ci est indépendant de ces formations kurdes.

Les partis traditionnels kurdes s'opposent à la vision majoritaire de l'opposition actuelle au régime de Damas, qui conserve une vision centralisatrice du pouvoir, alors que les Kurdes réclament au minimum une autonomie comparable à celle dont jouissent désormais leurs cousins d'Irak.

Ce désaccord pèse lourdement sur la cohérence du soulèvement contre Assad, et relativise la portée de l'appel lancé samedi dernier par le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius, en faveur de la formation d'un gouvernement syrien provisoire pouvant assurer la

relève en cas de chute du régime de Damas.

LES 2 000 HOMMES ARMÉS DU PKK

En contradiction avec l'opposition, les partis kurdes désormais en contrôle de leur région sont également très divisés entre eux. Selon Kendal Nezan, bon connaisseur, en cas d'élections, le KNC l'emporterait vraisemblablement. Mais aujourd'hui, ce sont d'abord les quelque 2 000 hommes en armes du PYD/PKK qui tiennent le haut du pavé, et assurent la sécurité.

Cette présence du PKK à ses frontières a suscité une sortie prévisible du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui a accusé mercredi le pouvoir syrien d'avoir placé délibérément dans cette zone le Parti marxiste kurde avec lequel il est en guerre ouverte. La Turquie soutient activement l'opposition syrienne, et est l'un des points de passage vraisemblable d'armes au profit de l'ASL.

Erdogan a déclaré qu'il n'hésiterait pas à intervenir militairement contre cette implantation du PKK à ses portes, comme il l'a fait à de nombreuses reprises par le passé, notamment contre des sanctuaires du PKK en Irak.

La Turquie est en guerre depuis 1984 contre le PKK, qui réclame l'autonomie du sud-est anatolien peuplé de Kurdes, et a plusieurs fois, par le passé, bénéficié du soutien actif de la Syrie d'Assad, en fonction du degré d'hostilité ou d'« amitié » entre Damas et Ankara. Le PKK a bénéficié de camps d'entraînement dans la plaine libanaise de la Bekaa au temps de la présence syrienne dans ce pays.

Pour Kendal Nezan, cette accusation est « de bonne guerre ». Mais il craint que la Turquie n'utilise ce prétexte pour occuper une « zone tampon » dans le nord de la

➤ Syrie, afin de se protéger de possibles incursions armées, et qui pourrait lui servir de monnaie d'échange avec le futur pouvoir syrien à l'issue du conflit.

La partie qui se joue dans cette part de la Syrie peut sembler périphérique par rapport à la bataille d'Alep et au soulèvement qui, depuis dix-huit mois, a gagné l'ensemble du pays.

Mais elle peut peser lourd dans la définition de la future Syrie, lorsqu'il s'agira de trouver les équilibres entre la majorité sunnite et les minorités ethniques et religieuses, de choisir un modèle institutionnel adapté aux lendemains de dictature, et de réévaluer les rapports de force régionaux. Il faudra compter avec les Kurdes. □



Pétrole: Chevron signe avec le Kurdistan, Bagdad l'exclut du reste de l'Irak

BAGDAD, 24 juillet 2012 (AFP)

CHEVRON ne pourra désormais plus travailler avec l'Irak, en dehors du Kurdistan, en raison de l'acquisition par le géant pétrolier américain de deux blocs pétroliers dans la région autonome sans l'approbation de Bagdad, a annoncé mardi le ministère irakien du Pétrole.

Dans un communiqué, ce ministère a "fait part de l'annulation de l'autorisation attribuée à la société Chevron" de travailler en Irak, "à moins qu'elle résilie le contrat" passé avec les autorités du Kurdistan.

Interrogé sur cette interdiction d'exercice, un porte-parole de Chevron s'est contenté de répondre que le groupe pétrolier "travaille avec le gouvernement irakien depuis près d'une décennie et a initié le premier programme d'assistance technique en 2003".

"Notre but est d'aider l'Irak à réaliser ses objectifs pour le secteur pétrolier et gazier en participant aux opportunités qui répondent à nos critères d'investissement", a-t-il ajouté.

L'action de Chevron a reculé de 1,53% à 106,30 dollars mardi.

Le 19 juillet, Chevron avait annoncé le rachat à l'indien Reliance de deux blocs pétroliers dans la région autonome, sans en référer au gouvernement irakien. Ce dernier affirme que tous les contrats pétroliers doivent lui être soumis et considère comme illégaux tous ceux qui ne le sont pas.

La semaine dernière, Bagdad a prévenu qu'il prendrait "les mesures qui s'imposent" si ExxonMobil, un concurrent de Chevron, mettait en oeuvre des accords sur l'exploration pétrolière dans cette même région.

Les relations entre le gouvernement irakien et les autorités du Kurdistan sont au plus bas depuis plusieurs mois en raison notamment de profonds différends sur le dossier des hydrocarbures.

En juin, le gouvernement irakien avait prévenu les compagnies françaises que tout contrat avec Bagdad serait annulé si elles signaient d'autres contrats avec des autorités locales ou régionales.

Pour Allen Good, analyste de la maison de recherche Morningstar, c'est sciemment que Chevron a choisi de faire affaires avec le Kurdistan plutôt qu'avec l'Irak, où les contrats sont moins avantageux pour lui.

"Chevron n'a pas participé aux dernières enchères (pour des concessions dans le sud de l'Irak), ça montre qu'il ne voyait pas de valeur ajoutée aux termes de ces contrats. Donc d'être exclu, (pour le groupe), ce n'est pas vraiment une punition", estime-t-il.

Au Kurdistan, où les groupes pétroliers sont payés "avec un accord classique de partage des bénéfices et où ils contrôlent les réserves", "il y a plus de valeur ajoutée" que dans le sud de l'Irak, où les groupes pétroliers doivent produire une quantité donnée de pétrole avant de commencer à gagner 2 dollars par baril, explique-t-il. ○



La Turquie peut exercer son droit de poursuite à chaud contre le PKK en Syrie (Erdogan)

ISTANBUL (Turquie), 26 juil 2012 (AFP)

LE PREMIER ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé le régime de Damas d'avoir "confié" plusieurs zones du nord de la Syrie au PKK et a prévenu que la Turquie pourrait exercer son droit de poursuite à chaud en Syrie contre ces rebelles kurdes de Turquie.

"En ce moment, le régime d'Assad est regroupé à Damas, il est coincé là bas, et aussi en partie dans la région de Lattaquié (nord-ouest). Dans le nord il a confié cinq provinces aux Kurdes, à l'organisation terroriste", a déclaré mercredi soir M. Erdogan lors d'un programme télévisé sur la chaîne Kanal 24.

"Ces derniers essaient maintenant de créer une situation conforme à leurs intérêts en affichant des portraits du chef de l'organisation terroriste séparatiste", a-t-il poursuivi, faisant référence aux rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en lutte contre Ankara depuis 1984.

Interrogé sur la possibilité pour la Turquie d'utiliser son droit de poursuite à chaud contre les rebelles par-delà la frontière syrienne après une action

de ceux-ci en territoire turc, M. Erdogan a répondu: "Ca ne se discute même pas, c'est une évidence. C'est la mission, ce qu'il faut faire."

"Du reste cela fait partie des changements de nos règles d'engagement" de l'armée turque face à l'égard de la Syrie, a-t-il ajouté. La Turquie a annoncé avoir modifié ces règles après la chute le 22 juin d'un de ses avions de combat abattu par la défense antiaérienne syrienne au large de la Syrie.

"C'est d'ailleurs ce que nous avons fait et continuons de faire en Irak. Si nous lançons de temps à autres des frappes aériennes contre les zones des terroristes, c'est qu'il s'agit de mesures prises par nécessité de défense", a-t-il précisé.

M. Erdogan a souligné qu'Ankara considérerait l'installation par Damas du PKK, ou de sa branche syrienne le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), près de la frontière turque comme un geste "dirigé contre" la Turquie.

"Il y aura forcément une réponse de notre part à cette attitude", a-t-il souligné. ○

Welcome to the Kurdistan Region of Syria



The Kurdish Globe
Bashdar Pusho Ismaeel

For thousands of Kurds in Syria, achieving basic rights and citizenship was a dream let alone witnessing the hoisting of the flag of Kurdistan on the historic soil of their ancestors.

For hundreds of years, Kurdish valour, passion and determination stood up to many forms of tyranny and the sheer force and military might of their oppressors. Often helicopter gunships, tanks, fighter jets and even chemical weapons were no match for the heart and pride of the Kurdish warrior.

After decades out of the limelight, it is the turn of the Kurds of Syria to seize their historic opportunity, to unite and liberate another part of Kurdistan from tyranny and dictatorship. As a series of cities succumb to Kurdish control, Kurds need to ensure that the last Arab troop to leave Kurdistan is the last oppressing force to ever be seen in their territory.

Much like the uprising of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, Syrian Kurds must ensure that the newly hoisted Kurdish flags on-top of government buildings are the only flags that the region will ever see.

Liberation of Kurdistan

As Kurdish forces of the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) finally united via the recent Erbil agreement brokered by Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, the renewed vigour of the Kurds was on instant show.

The fall of Kobane, in the province of Halab (Aleppo) and close to the Turkish border, served as the first symbol of freedom. This quickly followed with the liberation of Amude, Afrin, Dêrik and the Cidêris district. Kurdish People's Defense Unions (YPG) alongside



Kurds hold up Syria

the Kurdish citizens, were at the forefront of the liberation.

The battle for these cities was largely without any real confrontation. This is not because Bashar al-Assad's government sees these areas as non-important. On the contrary, they dare not indulge in a bloody confrontation with a group of determined, passionate and patriotic Kurds, where the outcome was certain defeat. Instead, the Syrian army decided to regroup and focus their efforts in maintaining control of key cities.

With reported clashes in Qamishli, the iconic Kurdish power centre of Syria, it is unlikely that Assad will give up the city without a fight. However, with a united Kurdish offensive and the Syrian army already stretched in Damascus and in other battles with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Damascus can ill-afford a protracted and ultimately costly battle against the growing Kurdish brigades.

The Union of Kurdish Coordination Committees (UKCC) urged the members of the Syrian army to withdraw from the Kurdish areas or face consequences. Indeed some reports indicate that the Syrian army may well withdraw under certain conditions

rather than risk a bloody conflict with the Kurds.

At this historical juncture, the Kurdistan Region must continue to support their brethren in Syria, both through a continuation of political efforts to bolster unity and harmony amongst the disparate Kurdish voices in Syria and also through logistical support and aid.

Erbil Agreement

Only a few weeks ago, there was a deep split in Syrian Kurdistan that threatened the nationalist goals of the Kurds, undermined their efforts at a key time to topple Assad and even threatened to break into civil war.

As part of the Erbil agreement, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the People's Council of Western Kurdistan formed an agreement for the joint-administration of Syrian Kurdistan.

Maintaining unity is perhaps the biggest risk to nationalist goals of the Kurds in Syria. Even Assad is less of a danger that the danger of Kurdish disunity itself.

Through unity, the Kurds become a cohesive force and where their battle becomes one of ethnic and sovereign rights, rather than individual goals of political parties.

Kurdish parties seem to be well aware of the dangers of not fulfilling a united front. The importance of working together was recently echoed by the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Kurdistan Freedom Party.

Unity amongst such an array of Kurdish views will not be easy but any alternative is simply not an option.

Ankara Alarm

Whilst the Kurds in Syrian and throughout greater Kurdistan looks at the emergence of a Kurdish con-

trolled region in Syria with great pride, Turkey is inevitably alarmed at such developments.

Regardless of greater Kurdish unity in Syria, there is no denying that a major force on the new Kurdish political maps is the PYD which has strong links to the PKK. The PKK flags on display tell its own story,

Barzani has helped to reposition the PYD focus from one of anti-Turkey and supporting the PKK to one that can focus on the primary and historical objective of liberating Syrian Kurdistan.

PYD has changed its tone for now, but it has left Turkey in a precarious position. Does it remain idle and watch as the Kurds and particularly the PYD carve out a new bastion of Kurdish nationalism, or does it intervene and do something about it?

If Turkey does take military action to intervene then it almost certainly will alienate the Kurds further and may even lead to a greater cross border insurgency. It will also undermine their role as the main sponsor of Syrian oppositional if ironically they are seen to punish Kurds for ousting Assad.

Kurdistan Region on the other hand has the difficult job of keeping Syrian Kurds in tandem with their Region and working on their side and away from one that may incur the wrath of Turkey.

The Kurdistan Region will become the natural foster parent of Syrian Kurdistan and it will be interesting to see how Ankara reacts to this inevitable reality.

However, it may be a small price to pay if the Kurdistan Regional Government can manage to keep the PKK away from dominating the Syrian Kurdistan region.

Kurdistan First

The focus of Syrian Kurds must be on Kurdistan before the nationalist objectives of the Arab dominated Syrian National Council (SNC).

Syrian Kurds will be wary of →

⇒ taking any new power and influence for granted, knowing only too well of the Arab opposition to the idea of Kurdish self-rule let alone de-facto independence.

In this light, it was a wise move by the Kurds to prevent the FSA forces from entering their region

and to limit the prospects of confrontation and thus damage to Kurdistan as much as possible,

While the Kurds should continue to do what they can to topple Assad from power, the very future of post-Assad Syria is far from certain.

How the array of opposition voices can be wedged together is a difficult undertaking. There are many echoes of Iraq in the new Syria, and once the euphoria of the eventual fall of Assad wanes, the battle to keep a united Syria will take centre stage.

Much like Iraq, Kurds in Syria

would have a pivotal region with a plenty of oil reserves, and will work to safeguard and bolster their region before submitting to the sentiment of Arab nationalism once again. ♦



24 July 2012

Republic of Latakia: The key to the free seas for the Kurds



The Kurdish Globe
By Behrooz Shojai

The Kurds have a long history in Syria. By the 11th century the Kurds had already settled a site, which was called Hisn al-Akrad or the Castle of the Kurds.

When this article is printed, the Kurds in Syria may already have control over Qamishli, the chief-town of Western Kurdistan, Syria. The two other towns of Efrin and Kobani were taken over by Kurds without bloodshed through negotiations between Kurdish National Assembly and the People's Congress of Western Kurdistan on one side and Syrian security forces on the other.

The Kurdish towns in Western (Syrian) Kurdistan have been spared from atrocities of civil war that have struck the Arab areas of Syria. It is welcome news and a major accomplishment that not only are these towns now in Kurdish control but that they were taken over without violence. It shows a degree of political maturity among Kurds. This maturity was also put to the test when the two major Kurdish umbrella organizations in Syria found common ground with the agreement of Erbil, the credit of which should also be ascribed to the president of the Kurdistan Region. It proved that Kurds can get what they want without protracted confrontations, internally and towards their antagonists.

The Kurds have a long history in Syria. By the 11th century the Kurds had already settled a site, which was called Hisn al-Akrad or the Castle of the Kurds. This famous site fell under control of the Crusaders and was later renamed Krak de Chevalier. The great Kurdish leader Sultan Saladin ruled the Muslims from Syria and it was from this country that he liberated Jerusalem from the crusading Franks.

The descendants of Kurdish principality of Bohtan settled in the French mandate area of Syria and founded Xoybun, the first modern transnational Kurdish organization. This organization later initiated a liberation war against Turkey on the Ararat slopes in late 1920s. The first modern periodicals in Kurmandji dialect of Kurdish in Latin orthography were published in Syria by Bedirxani princes, Kamuran and Jeladet.

During the first years of the independent Republic of Syria, the Kurds had many representatives in parliament. However, by the seizure of power by the Arab nationalist Baath party, the Kurds were marginalized and subsequently more than hundred thousands of Kurds were deprived of their citizenship. When the Post World War Two Kurdish national movement in Iraq began, many Kurds from Syria joined it and even founded brother parties, like the Syrian Kurdistan Democratic Party.

But later on the Syrian Kurds splintered into a dozen parties, often passive and non-violent.



With the emergence of the PKK to the north, many Syrian Kurds joined its military organization. Eventually a pro-PKK organization was founded in Syria, the People's Union Party or PYD, who latterly founded the People's Congress with a military force controlling the roads, especially in the PKK's stronghold of Efrin.

The other organizations finally established the Kurdish National Congress of Syria. The two umbrella organizations soon accused each other of different kind of violations. Through tremendous efforts led by President Barzani, the two organizations finally signed the so called Erbil Agreement, which stipulated joint efforts on pursuing common cause for the Kurds in Syria. Hoping that they stick to the treaty in the short-term, they are likely to meet tremendous challenges hereafter. The constellation of the opposition parties and their respective agenda's concerning the Kurdish issue in Syria is unclear and inconsistent.

The opposition umbrella organization is dominated by Sunni Arabs,

who will probably be less tolerant towards minorities than even the Assad regime. It is more likely that they are no more than Sunni Arab nationalists with reliance on the virtues of Islam than liberals believing in diversity and democracy.

When Sunni Arabs assume charge, the Christians and the now ruling Alawite minorities will be marginalized and deprived of their privileges. This will spark the Alawite minority to aspire for secession. I will not be surprised if the Alawites try to revive the Alawite State of the French mandate in the mountainous and coastal areas around Latakia. Nationalist-secessionist aspirations among Alawites already existed during the French Mandate in Syria, but the French did not go far as appeasing the Alawite aspiration to convert the autonomous region of Latakia to an independent Alawite State.

Syria traditionally has a military dominated by the Alawites. I do think that they will easily hand over their power and privileges voluntarily to a vindictive Sunni majority. Thus, with the creation of a new state, ⇒

⇒ Republic of Latakia may join the community of new nation-states. Christians are spread over Syria and lack territorial concentration. It is unlikely that they will strive or even aspire for their own independent state. The remaining two groups are Arabs and Kurds.

The question is what will happen to the Kurds and what challenges lay ahead of them. These challenges are both internal and external. Internally, it is important that they stick to their common cause beyond partisan politics. Whether the pro-KRG National Assembly and pro-PKK People's Congress get involved in unison discourse remains to be contested, but it will be crucial to see whether the Syrian Kurds will seize this unprecedented and unique opportunity to rise from political and social exclusion and from a designation of second class citizenship.

Once the unity among the Kurds is

maintained, there are external challenges. Should the Kurds wait and see out the course of the events in Syria or should they be more proactive and anticipate a further escalation of conflict between Sunni Arabs and Alawites, In that case, who will constitute the best allies for the Kurds,

Sounding opportunistic perhaps, the Kurds should choose the one closer to secularism and diversity, but at the same time such a choice should not jeopardize their projects in the future. Socially, historically and politically, the Alawites would be better allies than for instance the Wahabi-inspired Sunni Arabs in Syria. Geopolitically the Alawites are of course the best allies. The creation of an independent Alawite state in Coastal Syria and an alliance with the Kurds will finally offer the Kurds the long-awaited access to the free seas.

The Kurdistan Region would then

have access to the world market through the Alawite harbors if the Syrian Kurds can facilitate a corridor between the two. But creation of such a constellation would be hazardous, since our Turkish neighbor in the north and the Sunni Arabs in South would probably not only oppose such an enterprise, but will actively choose the course of confrontation against it. The Turks will oppose it of several reasons; they have a large mainly Kurdish and restive Alawite minority.

The sovereignty of Syrian Kurds will inevitably give more fuel to Kurdish aspirations in Turkey to push forward some kind of autonomy, which Turkey considers with disapproval. A Syrian Kurdish sovereign area will also give the Kurdistan Region more breathing space. A Kurdish region in northern Syria could practically make the Kurdistan Region independent from Turkish territory in terms of oil export, economic growth and

eventually full independence.

Another challenge is that in contrast to the population of Kurdistan Region, the Syrian Kurds are heavily pro-PKK which naturally alarms the Turks. But all of these disadvantages for Turkey are in fact only short-termed, and the Turks have to be convinced about the long-term advantages of such a solution.

Kurdish-Alawite state formations in the southern frontiers of Turkey will protect it from the Arab dominated Middle East that for decades ahead will be afflicted by turmoil and endless conflicts. The more moderate Kurds and Alawites will eventually constitute not only reliable partners, but also powerful allies for the Turkish Republic. This may sound unrealistic, but in fact I believe that it is an advantageous pact for all three parties. ♦

Kurdish troops march toward Syria as Turkey keeps careful watch

ŞIRNAK - Doğan News Agency (DHA)

Thousands of Kurdish soldiers are marching toward the Syrian border in northern Iraq as Turkey deployed troops along to its own border with its war-torn neighbor.

A cell phone video recording showed Kurdish soldiers walking in two rows on the sides of a road toward the border between northern Iraq and Syria today. The soldiers, apparently unarmed, were flanked by armed guards who held high positions along the road.

Some soldiers yelled "we march to Qamishli, we are on our way to take Qamishli."

The leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, Masoud Barzani, confirmed that they had been training young Kurdish men who had deserted the Syrian army and had fled to northern Iraq.

The "fighting force" has not yet cross-



DHA video grab shows Kurdish soldiers marching toward the Syrian border.

ed into Syria, Barzani said. "They are still here. They can only go if the high council allows them. If not, they will wait for things to settle down. But they will eventually go back to Syria, because that is where they are from," he said.

Barzani said Kurdish men were being trained to fill a possible security vacuum in "Western Kurdistan" in the event the Syrian army withdraws from there.

Turkey moving troops to border

The Turkish Armed Forces have ship-

ped a large number of soldiers to its border with Syria. Around 200 civilian minibuses transported soldiers from garrisons in the Cizre district of the southeastern province of Şırnak to the Nusaybin district in Mardin province – roughly 100 kilometers to the west along the Syrian border.

Turkish gunships are making frequent patrol and reconnaissance flights along the Syrian border, according to reports.

Nusaybin is situated directly across from Qamishli. ●

Iraq rebels deliver a deadly message

BAGHDAD

Widespread attacks kill nearly 100 and assert strength of insurgents

BY YASIR GHAZI
AND ROD NORDLAND

In a coordinated display intended to show they remain a viable force, insurgents in Iraq mounted at least 37 separate attacks throughout the country on Monday morning, setting off car bombs, storming a military base, attacking police officers in their homes and ambushing checkpoints, the Iraqi authorities said.

At least 99 people were killed and more than 300 wounded in the single bloodiest day in Iraq this year, according to local officials in the many areas where attacks took place.

The attacks, coming in the early days of Ramadan, the monthlong Muslim religious rite, were foreshadowed on Sunday in an audio message attributed to the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi, and posted on the group's Web site. Mr. Baghdadi vowed that a new offensive, which he called Breaking Down Walls, would begin soon.

The offensive was without precedent this year at least in sheer number of attacks, spread over a third of Iraq's 18 provinces, from north to south. It was



AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP

TAJI Iraqis surveyed damaged homes on Monday after bombings killed more than 40.



KARIM KADIM/AP

MADAIN A bomb exploded just days after a Qaeda leader declared a new offensive.

sure to raise concerns about the government's ability to contain the violence, six months after the last American troops left the country.

"I think Al Qaeda in Iraq made a big joke of the government and the Iraqi security forces," said Khalid Fadel, a military analyst and former instructor at the Iraqi Military College. "They were so clear that they were going to launch attacks during Ramadan, and the government said that they have information of about 30 terrorist groups entering the country, but still the security forces are unable to prevent the attacks."

Mr. Baghdadi said in the Qaeda statement that "we are returning again to dominate territories we used to dominate, as well as more." He depicted the attacks as part of a battle by Sunnis against the country's Shiite leaders and people.

The first attack came about 5 a.m. on Monday when gunmen stormed onto an Iraqi military base near the town of Duluyah in Salahuddin Province and killed 15 Iraqi soldiers, security officials said. Four soldiers, including a high-ranking officer, were wounded, and a fifth was taken prisoner by the insurgents, who escaped.

Then, in steady succession, mostly from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., car bombs were set off across the country, from Taji and Husseiniya north of Baghdad, to Sadr City in eastern Baghdad; in Tuz in western Salahuddin Province, Dujail in southern Salahuddin, and Balad and Baquba, northeast of the capital, said police, hospital and Iraqi Army officials. Bombs also were set off in the northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk, and in Diwaniya Province, in the south.

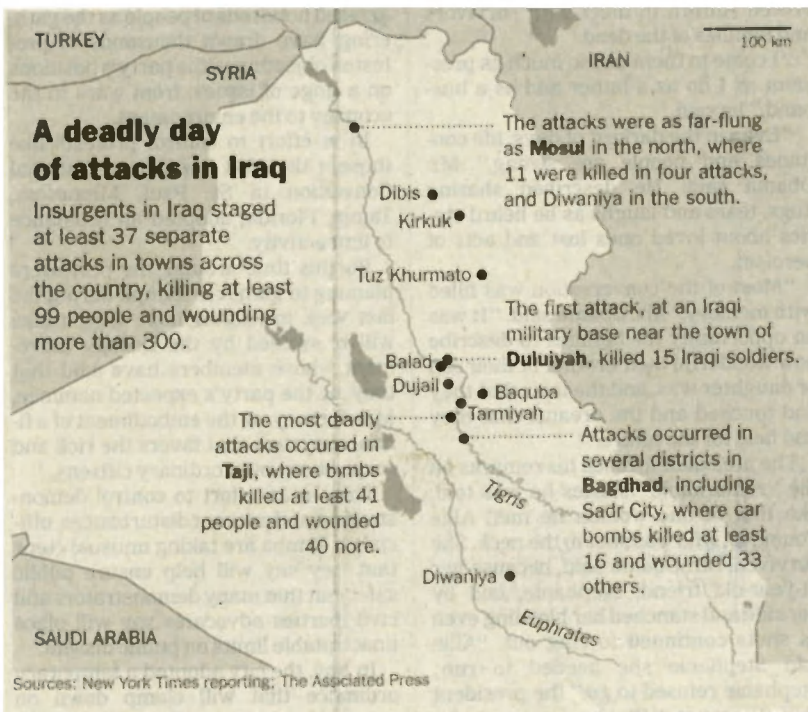
The insurgents also attacked the home of a police official in Balad, seriously wounding four family members, and ambushed a checkpoint near Baquba, killing one police officer. In all, 39 separate attacks were reported in 6 provinces.

Eight attacks struck Kirkuk Province, mostly aimed at police patrols, killing 8 people and wounding 42.

Of the 11 people killed in four attacks in Mosul, 7 were Iraqi soldiers. Other attacks struck marketplaces and other places where civilians were sure to become victims.

The offensive started on the third day of the holy month of Ramadan, and apparently took advantage of the widespread practice in Iraq and many other Muslim countries of staying up most of the night, and then sleeping late during the daytime when fasting is required.

The attacks were likely to continue the trend of the first six months since the departure of U.S. troops, when violence has steadily increased, according to United Nations statistics. June was one of the deadliest months so far, with about 200 people, mostly civilian mil-



grims, reported killed.

U.S. and Iraqi officials have argued that violence has been declining.

Unusually, only one of the attacks was confirmed to have been carried out by a suicide bomber, in Mosul, where police managed to shoot him before he could cause any fatalities, the authorities said.

Awad Musa, 34, was on his way to work in a bus in Sadr City that was caught in a blast. "All of a sudden, the explosion happened and the glass of the windows started hitting my face," he said. "I put my arm up to protect my eyes. It was like a big storm of broken glass."

Mr. Musa, wounded in his arm, was among the lucky.

"Whenever we think it is over and we will live a stable life with no fear of explosion, we wake up again from this dream, to more disasters," he said.

The violence could have been worse.

The authorities in Salahuddin Province, which seemed to be the worst hit area, said they also managed to defuse two car bombs and three roadside bombs without harm.

"If it wasn't for our security plans the loss would have been much bigger," said Maj. Gen. Jamal Tahir, head of the police in Kirkuk.

He said the authorities had killed the leader of the Qaeda cell there and, within hours of the attack, had arrested 12 insurgents, one of whom he said had committed suicide in his jail cell, hanging himself with his clothing.

The anger of Iraqis at their own government was on frequent display, especially in the southern province of Diwaniya, where a car bomb exploded in a busy vegetable market, killing 5 people and wounding 32. A crowd at the scene became incensed and started smashing police cars, then marched on government buildings in the area, leading the

police to fire on the crowd, killing one protester and wounding dozens of others, a police official said.

Karar Mustafa, 27, was waiting at the door of the hospital in Sadr City to find out what had happened to his father, who was brought there with extensive shrapnel wounds.

"We should blame the sleepy government for doing nothing to protect its people," Mr. Mustafa said.

By early afternoon the violence had subsided, but several hours later, four mortar rounds were fired at police and army headquarters in Kirkuk. No one was reported hurt.

Rod Nordland reported from Cairo. Reporting was contributed by Duraid Adnan from Baghdad, and by other Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Mosul and Samarra.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

TUESDAY, JULY 24, 2012

Syria vows not to use chemicals on civilians

BEIRUT

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

With street battles still flaring in Syria's two main cities, the Syrian government said Monday that its forces would never use chemical weapons in its domestic conflict, describing them as being outside the bounds of the kind of guerrilla warfare they are fighting.

Jihad Makdissi, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, read a statement at a news conference in Damascus addressing repeated questions that have arisen in recent days about Syria's chemical weapons. The Syrian Army has all stocks of such weapons under secure guard and would use them only in case of an external attack, he said.

"They will not be used against Syrian civilians," Mr. Makdissi said. "They will never be used domestically no matter how this crisis evolves. Those weapons will only be used in the case of exterior aggression."

The Syrians were evidently taking a lesson from Iraq, where accusations of a chemical weapons stockpile was among the reasons used to justify the March 2003 U.S. invasion.

The Iraqi stockpile never materialized.

Mr. Makdissi said all the attention fo-

cused on the chemical weapons — also referred to as weapons of mass destruction — "aims to justify and prepare the international community's military intervention in Syria under the false pretext of W.M.D."

Syria is facing "gang warfare" in its main cities where the weapons could not be used, the Foreign Ministry spokesman said, and it is ultimately a military decision of when to deploy them, should Syria be attacked from abroad.

His comments came as foreign ministers from the European Union, meeting in Brussels, voted to toughen sanctions against supporters of the country's president, Bashar al-Assad, and to require the 27 E.U. member nations to search airplanes and ships suspected of carrying weapons or banned equipment into Syria, where fighting has raged for days in the country's main cities.

Rebel commanders in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo vowed to liberate it from government control on Sunday and skirmishing continued in the city on Monday, Reuters reported.

But as the fighting appeared to be spreading in Aleppo, skirmishes in Damascus faded as large numbers of government troops were deployed to shut down the rebels in one neighborhood after another where they had gained footholds last week.

An emergency meeting of Arab League ministers in Doha, Qatar, ended with what the Qatari prime minister, Sheik Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-

They "will only be used in the case of exterior aggression."

Thani, said was agreement that Mr. Assad should step down and that the rebel Free Syrian Army should form a transitional government.

Mr. Assad has resisted such calls from the United States and other powers.

And at the meeting in Brussels, E.U. foreign ministers also decided to freeze the assets of, and ban visas for, 26 more people, and to prevent European companies from doing business with three more entities in Syria. The 26 people were not immediately identified.

"I am deeply concerned at the escalating violence and its tragic consequences for the Syrian population," Catherine Ashton, the E.U. foreign policy chief, said in a statement.

"The E.U. has warned against a further militarization of the conflict. Today we take practical steps toward limiting the supplies that fuel the fighting."

The new obligation to search vessels suspected of carrying arms applies to all weapons destined for the country, including any intended for opposition forces, said one European official who was not authorized to speak publicly. Previously, it was up to member states to decide on how to deal with suspect vessels according to their own domestic laws.

"If there is a cargo destined for Syria, suspected of carrying either arms or materials for internal repression, member states will be obliged to search," the official said. "It applies to the whole territory of Syria."

Under the agreement, if a country has reasonable grounds for suspicion — for example if it is notified of intelligence reports of arms movements — then it would have to make a search of a vessel. If it did not do so then it would have breached E.U. law and could in principle be taken to the European Court of Justice.

In addition, aircraft and vessels heading to Syria will have to provide additional information on their cargo before their departure.

Kurdish President: Syrian Kurds Trained in Kurdistan to Defend Their Areas

By ADIB ABDULMAJID
rudaw.net

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands –Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani, told Aljazeera TV on Monday that Kurdish soldiers who defected from the Syrian military have received military training in the Kurdistan Region.

“A number of young Syrian Kurds who defected from the Syrian army and took refuge in the Kurdistan Region have been trained in the Region,” President Barzani told Aljazeera. “The main goal of this military training is to enable those Kurdish soldiers to protect their areas in Syria and to fill the security vacuum which will follow the total withdrawal of the regime’s forces from the Kurdish areas in Syria.

Barzani said that Iraqi Kurds do not intend to interfere in the situation in Syria and that training the Kurdish soldiers for the protection of their areas.

This is the first time the Kurdish leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan confirms the presence of a military training camp for Syrian Kurdish soldiers in the Kurdistan Region.

According to President Barzani, the



trained Kurdish soldiers have not been sent back to Syria yet, and that their return will follow the retreat of Bashar Assad’s army from the Kurdish areas.

“The trained Syrian Kurds are still in the Kurdistan Region, and they will be sent back as soon as the Supreme Kurdish Committee in Syria needs them,” Barzani told Aljazeera.

The Kurdish Supreme Committee was founded recently the main two Kurdish political forces: the Kurdish National Council [KNC] and the People’s Council of Western Kurdistan.

The establishment of this committee followed an agreement initiated by the Kurdistan Region presidency and signed on June 11 in Erbil between Kurdish factions in Syria, namely the KNC and the Democratic Union Party [PYD].

Barzani said that the trained Syrian Kurds would take their orders from the Kurdish Supreme Committee.

Given the withdrawal of Syrian security forces and liberation of several Kurdish cities in the Kurdistan Region of Syria, the fear of disorder and a power vacuum looms large.

“The trained Syrian Kurds may wait for a while until the situation is sorted out, and they will return to their areas in the end, to provide the security to their own people and fill the vacuum,” Barzani added.

During the interview, Barzani also referred to the role played by the Kurdistan Region in unifying the Kurdish political forces of Syria.

“The Kurdistan Region contributed to unify the Kurdish political forces in Syria, and that could be the best support the Iraqi Kurdistan can provide for the Kurdish people of Syria,” Barzani said. □

Turkey blames Syria for supporting Kurdish rebels, inches closer to military action

Should Turkey decide that the Kurdistan Workers' Party – seen now by Ankara as an additional arm of Assad's forces – threatens its national security, it may decide to invade its neighbor.

By Zvi Bar'el

Will the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) drag Turkey into a war in Syria? The Turkish media has emphasized the declaration by the PKK's de facto leader Murat Karayilan that "If Turkey intervenes against our people in western Kurdistan, the area will turn into a battlezone."

Western Kurdistan is the name the Kurds call eastern Syria, inhabited by more than two million Kurds. Turkey now blames Syria for using the PKK as an additional arm, allowing members of the organization to roam freely in its territory with

weapons and permitting them to carry out terror acts in Turkish territory. Should Turkey decide that the operations of PKK members threaten its national security, it may decide to invade Syria under the justification of preventing terror, rather than aiding the rebels against Assad's crackdown. Such a decision could become the turning point the Syrian rebels are hoping for – a foreign military intervention in their country.

Turkey and Syria stood on the brink of a military crisis in 1998, when Turkish forces – including tanks – were deployed on the border with

Syria and threatened to invade the country. In light of that threat, Syrian President Hafez Assad (Bashar's father) decided to distance the country from the PKK and stop any assistance, thus diminishing the chances of a war.

Turkey now supports the establishment of security zones for Syrian refugees inside Syrian territory, yet it is refraining from doing so on its own without an international umbrella that will allow entry of foreign troops to these zones. At the same time, Turkey has declared in recent weeks that it may have to act on its own if the Syrian uprising threatens its

national security. Freedom of movement and operation of PKK operatives in Syria might serve as a Casus belli, especially since the Turkish military is currently engaged in heavy fighting with Kurdish rebels within its own borders.

The Kurdish area in Syria has so far been relatively quiet, particularly after Bashar Assad decided to grant a few hundred thousand Kurds with Syrian citizenships, denied for decades. Nevertheless, the Kurds created their own anti-Assad front after being pushed aside by the Syrian National Council, the large opposition body operating outside of

the country. Turkey claims the Kurdish rebels are supported by the Democratic Union Party, a Kurdish-Syrian organization that is affiliated with the PKK. This cooperation prompted Turkey to demand that the opposition umbrella group does

to include Kurdish representatives, and effectively pushed the Kurdish organizations to the sidelines of the uprising.

Now, Turkey is reporting that according to its intelligence services, Syria is also

allowing the PKK to form a political framework and campaign against Ankara, as well as serve as another arm against the uprising. Turkish sources told Haaretz that highlighting the cooperation between Syria and the PKK may point to a

change in Turkey's policy, which might come into effect after the meeting of the Friends of Syria group on April 1 in Istanbul – which will move from threats to real military action.■

Rudaw

25 July 2012

Liberated Kurdish Cities in Syria Move into Next Phase



By HEVIDAR AHMED
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region -- Syrian governmental forces have retreated from the Kurdish regions of Syria without a fight; the liberated cities are now being ruled evenly by the People's Council of Syrian Kurdistan (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC).

According to the information obtained by Rudaw, the Kurdish cities of Kobane, Derek, Amoude, Efrin and Sari Kani have fallen under the control of Syrian Kurdish forces.

The city of Kobane was the first Kurdish city to be liberated last Thursday, 17 months after the revolution against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad began.

The KNC and PYD agreed to jointly control the liberated Kurdish cities in a deal made in Erbil on July 11, under the supervision of Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani.

"According to the treaty of Erbil which was signed by the KNC and PYD, any administrative vacuum in the Kurdish cities of Syria will be occupied evenly -- 50/50 -- by these two signatories. These two groups will continue ruling the Kurdish regions until an election is carried out," said Nuri Brimo, a spokesperson of the Democratic Kurdish Party of Syria.

The national flag of Kurdistan and the flag of the PKK – which the PYD is affilia-

ted with -- are now being raised over the majority of government and public buildings.

However Abdulbaqi Yusuf, a spokesperson of Kurdish Union Party (KUP), said, "The buildings under the control of PYD are using their own flags, but we as the KNC are using the national flag of Kurdistan. This is a problem because we only recognize one flag and that is the national Kurdish flag, but the PYD does not recognize that flag."

He added, "For example, in the city of Kobane, we controlled some buildings and raised the Kurdish national flag over those buildings, but the PYD came and forced us out with their guns and removed the national flag of Kurdistan and replaced it with their own flag. We could not do anything because they were armed and we were not."

Yusuf also had concerns about the quality of life for Syrian Kurds. "People are living in bad conditions and have not received any help," he said, criticizing the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for not coming to their aid.

"We have requested help from the KRG several times but they have not helped. Nobody listens to us," Yusuf said.

Brimo admits that "Barzani asked the KNC and PYD to rule the Syrian Kurdish cities evenly between them and in return promised financial and moral support."

Abdulbasit Sayda, the leader of the country's largest opposition group, the Syrian National Council (SNC), said they were looking for help for people in the

region. "As the SNC, we are holding meetings with international actors in order to receive financial and humanitarian aid and save ourselves from the clutches of the Syrian regime. We need this aid because the economic situation of the Syrian people and the Kurds is very bad and they need help," he said.

Sayda added, "We are constantly in touch with Barzani regarding the situation in Syria and keep each other updated."

Brimo explained the withdrawal of regime forces from the Kurdish cities. "The Syrian regime is gathering its forces in Damascus," he said. "Therefore, they are retreating from other regions."

He also revealed that the Syrian regime informed the PYD about their withdrawal in advance, so that the group knew beforehand which cities the forces would be leaving.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is present in many parts of Syria, but not in the Kurdish regions. "There is a sort of agreement between KNC and SNC. The FSA will not come to the Kurdish regions and the Kurds will not go the Arabic regions," said Brimo.

Sayda admitted fearing a surprise attack by the Syrian government on these Kurdish regions.

"The Kurds of Syria need to brace themselves for a sudden return of Syrian government forces. It is probable that the regime might return to attack this region again," he said. ○

Iraq blasts kill Kurdish security officials

Explosions in a town north of Baghdad has killed 6 members of Kurdish intelligence forces, and wounded three others.

A twin blast has killed six members of the Kurdish intelligence forces known as the Asayish and wounded three others in a town north of the capital Baghdad, hospital and police sources said.

The first bomb was planted outside a house of a member of the Asayish in Tuz Khurmatu, Salahuddin province, 170km north of Baghdad.

When Asayish members arrived at the scene to evacuate the wounded, a bomb-rigged motorised cart then exploded.

Three civilians were also wounded in the attack, sources said on Tuesday.

At least 107 people were killed in bomb and gun attacks in Iraq on Monday, a day after 20 died in explosions, in a co-ordinated surge of violence against mostly Shia Muslim targets.

The bloodshed, which coincided with an intensifying of the conflict in neighbouring Syria, pointed out deficiencies of the Iraqi security forces, which failed to prevent fighters from striking in multiple locations across



the country.

As well as the scores of deaths, at least 268 people were wounded by bombings and shootings in Shia majority areas of Baghdad, the Shia town of Taji to the north, the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul and many other places, hospital and police sources said, making it one of Iraq's bloodiest days in weeks.

Sectarian violence surged in 2006-2007 but

deadly attacks have persisted while political tensions among Iraq's main Shia, Sunni and Kurdish factions have increased since US troops completed their withdrawal in December.

CHEVRON BLACKLISTED

Meanwhile, the Iraqi government has blacklisted Chevron Corp over its new deal with the semi-autonomous Kurdish region.

"In line with Oil Ministry policy based on the constitution, the Oil Ministry announces the disqualification of Chevron company and bars it from signing any deals with the federal Oil Ministry and its companies," the oil ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

Baghdad says deals made with the Kurdistan Regional Government are illegal.

Iraq banned Exxon Mobil from an oil exploration operation in May because it had signed a deal with the Kurds last year.

The country is said to have the world's fourth largest oil reserves, with parts of the country still undeveloped. ♦

The Washington Post JULY 26, 2012

Turkey says it 'will not tolerate' a Kurdish-run region in northern Syria

ANKARA, Turkey (AP)- Turkey will not tolerate the creation of a Kurdish-run region in Syria, its prime minister said Thursday following reports that Kurdish rebels and a Syrian Kurdish political party had taken control of five cities along the Syrian-Turkish border.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments underscored Turkey's concern that the creation of a Kurdish authority in the north of Syria could provide a sanctuary to Turkey's own Kurdish separatists, who took up arms against the state in 1984. The Kurdish rebels already use northern Iraq as a springboard for attacks in Turkey.

The prime minister said Turkey's military is closely monitoring the developments. He warned the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which is fighting for self-rule in Turkey's southeast, and the Democratic Union Party of Syria, known as the PYD, to avoid any attempt at collaboration.

Otherwise, "it would not be possible for us to tolerate and watch this," Erdogan told reporters before departing to London for the opening of the 2012 Olympic Games. "No one should attempt to provoke us. If a step needs to be taken against the



(PKK) we would not hesitate to take it."

The conflict between Turkey's Kurdish rebels and the government has killed tens of thousands of people over the past 28 years. Kurds also make up substantial portions of the population in the neighboring countries of Syria, Iran and Iraq.

Erdogan said Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu would meet officials from Iraq's Kurdish regional government next week to relay Turkey's concerns over the PKK taking up positions along the border with violence-torn Syria and to urge Iraqi Kurds not to support a Kurdish-run region in Syria.

Erdogan said Davutoglu would tell Kurdish officials in northern Iraq, "We

have trust in you, but please do not be a party to any wrong moves."

As Syrian President Bashar Assad has cracked down on an increasingly armed opposition movement over the past 16 months — a conflict that has left thousands dead and morphed into a civil war — Turkey has emerged as one of Assad's fiercest critics and taken in some 44,000 refugees from the Arab state.

On Thursday, Erdogan said he believed Assad was "on his way out" and that Syria was preparing "for a new era." He said a transitional government should prepare for a new constitution as well as presidential and parliamentary elections.

The Turkish leader again would not rule out the possibility of setting up a buffer zone to protect Syrians along the border if the security situation deteriorates. The buffer zone on Syrian soil would aim to guarantee the security of Turkey's border and the welfare of Syrian civilians fleeing the violence.

"A safe zone, a buffer zone, refugee camps — all of these are possible alternatives," Erdogan said. "Their priorities will depend on the situation; they will be assessed according to the process that unfolds."

Les Kurdes marchent vers leur autonomie

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

Il EST MINUIT moins cinq dans les régions kurdes du nord de la Syrie. Les unes après les autres, les villes échappent au contrôle de Bachar el-Assad pour passer entre les mains de cette minorité non arabe, longtemps opprimée par le pouvoir central à Damas. Après leurs frères d'Irak en 2003 à la chute de Saddam Hussein, les Kurdes de Syrie (10% de la population) profitent du chaos actuel pour prendre leur destin en main. «Les districts de Qabaneh, d'Afrine, d'Amouda, de Derika Hamko et de Girhelaghé sont désormais gérés par les Kurdes, affirme Khaled Issa, un responsable kurde en exil à Paris. Il ne reste plus que les villes de Qameshli, Ras al-Ain, Der Bassié où des discussions sont engagées entre les Kurdes et les autorités locales pour assurer un transfert en douceur du pouvoir.» Car jusqu'à présent, à la différence des zones à majorité sunnite où rebelles et forces loyales à el-Assad s'affrontent, chez les Kurdes, le transfert des responsabilités s'effectue sans trop de violences. Il faut dire que depuis le début de l'insurrection, ces derniers avaient affiché un attentisme prudent.

L'obstacle turc

«À Qamishli, par exemple (250 000 habitants, NDLR), les trois entrées principales sont gardées par des Kurdes, poursuit Issa, mais les partisans du PYD, la principale faction kurde, ont envoyé des émissaires négocier avec les responsables des administrations. Ceux-ci ont peur. Mais nous leur avons promis de leur réserver le même traitement que dans les villes qui sont déjà passées sous notre contrôle.» Là, les chefs de la sécurité et du parti unique au pouvoir, le Baas, ont été priés de déguerpir. Mais les fonctionnaires, eux, ont été appelés à retourner au travail. Objectif : tout faire pour éviter un vide du pouvoir. Quant à la sécurité, elle est assurée par les «unités de défense populaire», des civils armés encadrés par le PYD, qui se préparait depuis la fin de l'année dernière.

Dans leur lente marche vers l'autogestion, les Kurdes avaient en effet patiemment mis sur pied des structures parallèles, misant sur la crainte du régime de Damas de s'aventurer si près de la Turquie. Le 9 juillet dernier, sous l'égide de Massoud Barzani, un des leaders kurdes d'Irak, les Kurdes syriens ont réuni leurs deux principales forces (PYD et Conseil national kurde) dans un Conseil du peuple.

Contrairement aux Kurdes d'Irak, ceux de Syrie assurent ne pas lutter pour l'indépendance. «Notre modèle est une autogestion démocratique, mais pas le séparatisme», jure Khaked Issa. Reste que,



Des manifestants arborant les couleurs et le drapeau kurdes ont protesté contre le régime d'el-Assad en début de semaine, à Hassetché, dans le nord-est du pays. REUTERS



comme au Kurdistan irakien de l'après-Saddam Hussein, le drapeau syrien a vite été remplacé par les fanions kurdes. Si les agents baasistes ont disparu d'une large partie du paysage kurde, des obstacles subsistent sur la voie de cette autonomie rêvée.

Le premier est intérieur à la mosaïque syrienne. Il est incarné par les tribus arabes, présentes dans certaines enclaves

comme Tel-Abiat ou la ville de Hassakeh - toujours sous le contrôle d'un pouvoir qui veille sur les gisements de gaz et de pétrole - mais aussi dans les cités périphériques, comme Raqqa et Deir ez-Zor. «Dans ces zones grises, les tribus peuvent faire pencher la balance d'un côté ou de l'autre, redoute Khaled Issa. C'est pourquoi nous sommes en contact avec leurs

représentants pour leur faire comprendre que notre stratégie repose sur l'unité de la Syrie et non pas sur la sécession.» Malgré ces assurances, dans certaines villes comme à Terbaspi, des affrontements ont éclaté entre Kurdes et Arabes.

Le second danger pour les Kurdes vient de la Turquie, voisine. Pour Ankara, les velléités autonomistes des Kurdes syriens sont d'autant plus inacceptables

« Notre modèle est une autogestion démocratique, mais pas le séparatisme »

KHAKED ISSA, KURDE SYRIEN EN EXIL

que le PYD est proche du PKK (le parti des Kurdes de Turquie), l'ennemi juré

d'Ankara. À en croire des responsables kurdes, la Turquie aurait déjà activé sa capacité d'obstruction antikurde. « Les services de renseignements turcs agitent les tribus arabes pour mettre en difficulté notre nouvelle administration », regrette un autre responsable kurde.

D'autre part, la Turquie chercherait à renvoyer un certain nombre de réfugiés syriens - arabes pour la plupart - de l'autre côté de la frontière, pour y freiner

les aspirations kurdes. Enfin, Ankara ne se prive pas d'exercer des pressions sur le Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale formation de l'opposition, qui est abritée en Turquie.

La récente déclaration du patron du CNS, Abdel Bassit Sayda, en serait une preuve évidente, selon les Kurdes. « Nous ne voulons pas de drapeau kurde, mais uniquement celui de l'indépendance », a insisté Sayda, en sortant d'un entretien

avec le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ahmet Davutoglu. « Plus que jamais, notre stratégie doit éviter les conflits, aussi bien avec les composantes non arabes de Syrie, qu'avec la Turquie, martèle Issa. Nous devons montrer à tous que nous ne nourrissons pas le dessein de créer un grand État kurde à partir de la Syrie. » ■

LE FIGARO 26 juillet 2012

Syrie

« La vengeance sera malheureusement inévitable »

DELPHINE MINOUI
CORRESPONDANTE AU MOYEN-ORIENT

« ET APRÈS ? » Assis en tailleur dans le sous-sol d'un grand hôtel de Beyrouth, Moataz ose enfin se poser « la » question. « La fin du régime, c'était un rêve avant l'attentat du 18 juillet contre des responsables sécuritaires syriens. Aujourd'hui, c'est une réalité à laquelle nous devons nous préparer », relève l'activiste damascène de 23 ans.

De passage au Liban, en compagnie d'une trentaine d'autres jeunes de la dissidence syrienne pour quelques jours de formation intensive en vidéo et secourisme, dispensée par l'organisation humanitaire Avaaz, il estime l'opposition « suffisamment rodée » pour préparer l'après-Assad, même s'il craint, comme ses acolytes, une « période de chaos inévitable ». « Au début de la révolte, il y a près d'un an et demi, nous naviguions à vue. Depuis, des réseaux se sont tissés entre les différents opposants. La résistance a eu le temps de s'organiser en comités locaux et conseils révolutionnaires. Ces derniers sont composés d'avocats, d'hommes d'affaires, de personnalités religieuses. Ils assurent une médiation avec l'Armée syrienne libre et les représentants du Conseil national syrien qui sont à l'étranger. Le jour où le régime tombera, ces différentes structures permettront d'assurer la relève et de combler le vide sécuritaire », confie-t-il.

Des femmes en première ligne

À ses côtés, Rami opine de la tête. Chemise à carreaux et lunettes rondes, il vient de Homs, la cité « martyre » de la révolution. « Là-bas, c'est déjà l'auto-gouvernance. On a fait installer des groupes électrogènes dans certains quartiers pour palier le manque d'électricité. Des familles se portent volontaires pour héberger les populations déplacées. Un approvisionnement en nourriture est assuré par des bénévoles », dit-il.

Symbole de ce réseau d'entre-aide inédit dans la Syrie des Assad : le rôle des femmes. « Elles soignent les blessés, jouent les messagères et traversent discrètement les check-points de l'armée syrienne avec des ordinateurs et des caméras camouflés sous leurs voiles », raconte Lujaim, une des participantes au stage.

D'après Azad, un activiste kurde, les régions tenues par cette minorité ethnique sont particulièrement prêtes à gérer la transition post-Assad. « Dans les villages kurdes de la province d'Alep, ça fait bien longtemps qu'il n'y a plus ni gouvernement ni police. Là-bas, ce sont les comités locaux et les partis politiques kurdes qui ont pris les rênes », dit-il.

« Je n'ai pas fait cette révolution pour qu'on me colle un voile sur la tête ! »

LUJAIM, DISSIDENTE SYRIENNE

Mais de l'avis général, c'est l'ASL - l'Armée syrienne libre - qui, sur le terrain, est la mieux organisée. Pour le meilleur et pour le pire. « Avant, elle était essentiellement composée de soldats déserteurs. Aujourd'hui, les civils constituent environ 70 % de ses effectifs », estime Jad, également originaire de Homs.

« Dans certaines régions, l'ASL supervise tout : la sécurité, la politique, la communication », relève-t-il. Selon lui, un système de cartes d'identité est en train de se mettre progressivement en place à travers le pays. Aux postes tenus par l'ASL, les voitures sont fouillées et leurs passagers contrôlés pour éviter que les agents pro-Assad ne s'infiltrèrent dans les zones tenues par les anti-Assad.

« Ceux qui ont du sang sur les mains sont exécutés »

« À Idlib, les forces syriennes libres dis-

posent même de leurs propres prisons et de leurs propres tribunaux, où les suspects arrêtés sont détenus et jugés », confie Hamdi, un activiste de cette ville proche de la frontière turque. « L'ASL affirme que les prisonniers sont bien nourris, qu'elle ne leur inflige pas les mêmes tortures que le régime à ses opposants. Les innocents sont libérés. Mais ceux qui ont du sang sur les mains sont exécutés », poursuit-il.

Ces méthodes expéditives préfigurent le climat de vengeance qui risque de prévaloir une fois le régime tombé. « Notre révolution était pacifique. En recourant à la violence, Bachar el-Assad

nous a forcés à prendre les armes. Nous avons tous perdu un ami, un frère, un cousin... La vengeance contre les shabiha, les miliciens pro-Assad, ou contre les membres de la minorité alaouite au pouvoir sera malheureusement inévitable », s'inquiète Hamdi.

Unie contre le rais de Damas, l'opposition reste également fragilisée par d'importantes dissensions internes. « Il y a les civils contre les militaires, les Syriens de l'intérieur contre la diaspora en exil, les laïcs contre les religieux. Le partage du pouvoir risque de se faire dans le sang », prédit un autre activiste.

Pour Lujaim, la jeune femme du groupe, c'est la montée de l'islamisme qui constitue la menace la plus importante pour l'avenir du pays. « Je n'ai pas fait cette révolution pour qu'on me colle un voile sur la tête », s'empourte-t-elle. À Homs, ses amis lui ont raconté avoir croisé de nombreux barbus parmi les soldats anti-Assad. « Pendant des mois et des mois, ces gens-là se sont battus contre le pouvoir de Damas au nom d'Allah. À la chute du régime, ils vont réclamer leur part du gâteau en voulant imposer la charia », prédit-elle. ■

Loin de Damas, le Kurdistan syrien de facto autonome

Le régime de Bachar al-Assad a évacué presque tout le nord du pays, provoquant l'ire de la Turquie, son principal opposant. En outre, le risque d'un conflit interkurde n'est pas écarté.

Par MARC SEMO

Le drapeau kurde flotte sur les bâtiments officiels des zones kurdes syriennes. Ou plutôt, les divers drapeaux kurdes variant selon les villes, les quartiers ou les villages, illustrant les divisions politiques de cette population concentrée dans le nord du pays. Outre les trois couleurs, jaune, vert, rouge, plus ou moins admises par tous, figurent celles de la principale formation kurde syrienne, le Parti d'union démocratique (PYD). Proche de la rébellion turque du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), le PYD est resté dans l'expectative, voire la collaboration avec le régime depuis le début de la révolte.

Le drapeau tricolore vert-blanc-rouge frappé du soleil flotte également. C'est celui du Kurdistan irakien, indépendant de fait de Bagdad avec son président «régional», Massoud Barzani, symbole de la lutte pour l'indépendance, et leader du Parti démocratique kurde (PDK), traditionnellement bien implanté en Syrie. «Ce n'est pas encore la vraie liberté, car il y a toujours, dans certaines villes, quelques forces de sécurité du régime, mais elles ne sortent plus des casernes, et les mouvements kurdes ont de fait aujourd'hui le pouvoir dans le Kurdistan syrien», explique un intellectuel qui revient de la région.

PRUDENCE. En Syrie, la minorité (10% de la population) a été longtemps discriminée. Des centaines de milliers de Kurdes, déchus de leur nationalité dans les premières années du régime baasiste, vivent comme des sans-papiers dans leur propre pays.

Cela n'a pas empêché Damas de soutenir pendant des années les rebelles du PKK, avant finalement d'expulser leur leader, Abdullah Ocalan, en 1998. Après quelques concessions sur les droits kurdes, Damas accepta le retour d'exil de Muslim Salih, leader du PYD.

Seize mois après le début de la révolte en Syrie, le rêve d'une entité kurde autonome est néanmoins en train de devenir réalité. Sans un coup de feu tiré, ou presque. «Les responsables des services de sécurité, les soldats, les chefs d'administration arabes sont tous partis après des négociations tout au long du week-end», explique un kurde syrien justifiant les mois de prudence face au soulèvement : «C'était quand même difficile pour des Kurdes de combattre auprès d'une rébellion aidée par l'Arabie Saoudite, le Qatar et surtout la Turquie.» En outre, le Conseil national syrien (l'opposition à Bachar al-Assad), bien que présidé par le Kurde Abdel Bassit Sayda, reste très prudent, et même hostile à toute idée d'autonomie. Damas, qui a besoin de ses troupes ailleurs, notamment pour reconquérir Alep, a donné son accord pour l'évacuation du nord du pays par les forces du régime.

Les fonctionnaires kurdes sont en revanche restés en place partout. Pour éviter tout vide sécuritaire, les divers mouvements qui avaient mis sur pied des structures de pouvoir parallèles ont déployé leurs combattants. Face au risque toujours présent d'affrontements fratricides, le leader kurde irakien, Massoud Barzani, avait réuni dans sa capitale d'Erbil, du 6 au 9 juillet, le PYD et le Conseil kurde syrien



Des sympathisants du PDK (parti kurde irakien bien implanté en Syrie) défilent contre Al Assad à Al Hasakah, dans le nord, le 20 juillet. (Reuters)

- dont le PDK d'Abdulahkim Bachar -, afin de leur imposer de créer une structure commune de pouvoir et de sécurité. «Tous ont finalement accepté ; le PYD, pour se légitimer et faire oublier ses ambiguïtés envers le régime, et le PDK, parce qu'il est sûr de l'emporter lors des premières élections libres dans la zone kurde», souligne une source proche du dossier.

Mais chacune des deux forces compte bien garder ses fiefs. Plusieurs centaines de combattants du PKK seraient ainsi venus gonfler les rangs des milices du PYD, qui tiennent notamment la région d'Afrin, située stratégiquement entre Alep et la frontière turque. Le PDK a aussi ses places fortes, comme à Qamichli, la principale ville kurde de Syrie avec 250 000 habitants, et il aurait reçu des renforts d'hommes formés par les «peshmergas», les combattants kurdes irakiens.

«**SALE GUERRE.** Le principal danger - outre le risque d'un conflit fratricide pour le moment gelé - est une contre-

attaque des tribus arabes enclavées : la zone de Derik, dans le territoire kurde, concentre les principales ressources pétrolières syriennes.

Le régime baasiste aux abois a probablement laissé se créer la zone autonome kurde dans le nord pour compliquer la donne régionale, et mettre en difficulté la Turquie, principal soutien politique de la rébellion et base arrière pour les approvisionnements de l'Armée syrienne libre. Quelque 15 millions de Kurdes vivent en Turquie, notamment dans les zones proches de la Syrie. La «sale guerre» entre les rebelles du PKK et l'armée a fait 40 000 morts depuis 1984. Bien que le PYD tente de lisser son discours, évitant même d'utiliser le mot «autonomie», les liens entre ce parti et le PKK incitent les autorités d'Ankara à hausser le ton. Le Premier ministre islamo-conservateur, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, rappelait ainsi avant-hier dans un discours : «Nous avons un droit naturel à intervenir dans le nord de la Syrie.» ♦



27 JUILLET 2012

Une explosion tue deux soldats dans le sud-est de la Turquie

Reuters

Deux soldats turcs ont été tués ce vendredi dans le sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde, lorsque leur véhicule a explosé sous l'effet d'un engin explosif télécommandé, ont annoncé des sources de sécurité. Un troisième soldat et un

civil ont également été blessés dans l'explosion qui s'est produite aux alentours de 7h près de la ville de Lice, dans la province de Diyarbakir.

Les responsables de la sécurité turque ont attribué cette attaque au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), considéré

comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les États-Unis et l'Union européenne.

Plus de 40.000 personnes, des Kurdes pour la plupart, ont trouvé la mort depuis que le PKK a pris les armes en 1984. Il revendique davantage de droits sur le plan culturel et une autonomie politique pour sa minorité de 14 millions de personnes en Turquie. □



28 juillet 2012

Frapper le PKK en Syrie serait dangereux et contre-productif pour la Turquie

ISTANBUL (Turquie), 28 juil 2012

(AFP) — Depuis quelques jours, la présence dans le nord de la Syrie de miliciens membres ou proches des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, le PKK, est au cœur de tous les discours à Ankara, qui évoque d'éventuelles actions militaires, voire une zone tampon. Trop dangereux, estiment les analystes.

L'idée est hasardeuse d'abord parce que la Syrie en plein conflit interne n'est pas l'Irak, où le pouvoir central comme l'administration kurde autonome nord-irakienne s'accommodent bon gré mal gré d'occasionnels raids de l'aviation turque contre les bases-arrières du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

"Si vous voulez mettre en oeuvre une (opération de) poursuite à chaud contre les milices du PKK dans le nord de la Syrie, le gouvernement syrien va réagir très différemment du gouvernement irakien", prévient Osmam Bahadir Dinçer, du Centre d'études sur le Proche-Orient.

Damas entretient déjà des relations exécrables avec son voisin turc, qui réclame la fin de la répression et le départ du président syrien Bachar al-Assad. Et elles se sont aggravées quand la Syrie a abattu un jet turc le 22 juin au large de ses côtes.

Le pire serait donc à attendre d'un régime aux abois, puissamment armé, et qui dispose de surcroît d'alliés de poids.

"Si la Turquie fait entrer des sol-

dots sur le sol syrien seule et sans le couvert d'une opération internationale, ce sera une provocation ouverte pour la Russie et l'Iran", souligne Cengiz Candar, du quotidien libéral Radikal.

La méthode forte occasionnerait d'autres dégâts collatéraux: toute opération militaire "est condamnée à entraîner (la Turquie) dans de nouvelles aventures non désirées, qui vont ruiner non seulement le rapprochement en cours avec l'Irak du nord kurde, mais aussi aggraver le problème kurde en Turquie", écrit Semih Idiz, dans le quotidien Hurriyet Daily News.

"Cela créerait une hostilité entre la Turquie et tous les Kurdes" du Proche-Orient, insiste Cengiz Candar.

Le PKK lutte depuis 1984 contre l'autorité d'Ankara, sa revendication évoluant de l'indépendance vers l'autonomie du sud-est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 45.000 morts.

Pour les analystes, la vraie solution passe par la diplomatie et les jeux d'influence.

"Dans cette région du nord de la Syrie (...), il y a de nombreuses tribus arabes sunnites, et elles ont beaucoup d'influence sur la population kurde", commente M. Dinçer.

"Si la Turquie peut coopérer avec ces tribus, alors on pourra anéantir l'influence du PKK ou du PYD sur ce territoire", ajoute-t-il, faisant référence au Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), une formation syrienne proche du PKK.

Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé mercredi le régime de Damas d'avoir "confié" cinq zones du nord de la Syrie au PKK ou au PYD pour nuire à la Turquie, avant d'indiquer que la Turquie ferait usage si nécessaire de son droit de poursuite contre les rebelles et d'évoquer une zone tampon en Syrie comme une hypothèse envisageable.

"La situation est beaucoup plus chaotique que ça (...) Le fait est que le PYD ne contrôle pas toute la situation dans le nord de la Syrie (...) Il est clair que sur le terrain ils travaillent en ce moment en collaboration avec d'autres groupes", fait remarquer Hugh Pope, de l'International Crisis Group.

Le Conseil national kurde, qui regroupe une douzaine de partis traditionnels kurdes syriens, et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), émanation du PYD, ont en effet signé à Erbil (nord de l'Irak) le 11 juillet un accord pour unifier leurs rangs, sous le parrainage du chef kurde irakien Massoud Barzani.

La clé des problèmes d'Ankara pourrait ainsi se trouver à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, qui pourrait utiliser son influence parmi les mouvements kurdes syriens pour désamorcer les tensions avec la Turquie.

Le gouvernement turc semble l'avoir compris: le chef de la diplomatie, Ahmet Davutoglu, doit se rendre mercredi à Erbil pour "partager la sensibilité" d'Ankara avec les kurdes irakiens. ♦

By Ceding Northeastern Syria to the Kurds, Assad Puts Turkey in a Bind

Ankara has been a key backer of Syria's rebellion, but the prospect of an Iraq-style autonomous Kurdish zone has Erdogan threatening to intervene

By Piotr Zalewski/Istanbul

The retreat of President Bashar al-Assad's forces from parts of northeastern Syria along the Turkish border might have been welcomed by Turkey, a key supporter of the Syrian rebellion, except for one thing: The region is predominantly Kurdish, and Ankara fears the resulting power vacuum will be a major boon to its number one enemy, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) whose three-decade separatist insurgency has seen some 40,000 people killed.

Until recently, Syria's Kurds had been divided. A coalition of roughly a dozen Kurdish parties had tentatively backed the popular uprising against Assad, while the PKK's Syrian ally, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), appeared to align itself with the Syrian regime, intimidating opposition activists and quashing popular protests. Others sat on the sidelines, wary of closing ranks with a Sunni Arab-dominated opposition that turned a deaf ear to Kurdish demands for new rights in a post-Assad Syria. Two weeks ago – perhaps sensing that the regime's fall was imminent – the rival Syrian Kurdish political currents put aside their differences, under the coaching of Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani. In Irbil, capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish Regional Government, they signed a unity agreement that has allowed them to take control of several



In this Tuesday, July 24, 2012 photo, a Syrian boy sits atop a damaged military tank at the border town of Azaz, some 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Aleppo, Syria. Turkey sealed its border with Syria to trucks on Wednesday, July 25, 2012 cutting off a vital supply line to the embattled nation as fighting stretched into its fifth day in the commercial capital of Aleppo.

northeastern towns, Assad's forces mostly retreating without a fight.

The news sparked a Turkish media and political clamor about the imminent rise of a "PKK Republic" or a "Western Kurdistan" on Turkey's southern flank. Commentators fear that the rise of a second Kurdish statelet, following the emergence of the one in neighboring Iraq in 2003, would embolden Turkey's own 12-15 million Kurds to pursue their own dream of autonomy. Worse still, it could potentially provide the PKK – branded as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the U.S., and the EU – with sanctuaries from which to launch cross-border attacks.

Picking up where the media left off, Turkey's fiery leader, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, banged the war drums. Though he and his government proclaim the Kurds a "brother nation," Erdogan told a TV interviewer on Wednesday, a Kurdish state in northern Syria would likely become a "terrorist entity". If need be, he warned, Turkey would not hesitate to hit the PKK inside Syria, as it has done repeatedly in northern Iraq. "If a formation that's going to be a problem emerges, if there is a terror operation, an irritant, then intervening would be our most natural right."

It would not be easy. In northern Iraq – where the PKK has come under pressure from a Barzani government that seeks to improve ties with Ankara – the rebels remain ensconced in remote mountain hideouts, making it easier for Turkish forces to target them with relative impunity. In Syria, the PKK-aligned PYD is an urban-based outfit. To bring the fight to them, Turkish troops would have to operate in large population centers, many of them within a stone's throw of the common border.

Syrian Kurds are quick to counter Turkish alarmism. Ankara is overstating

the PKK's influence in Syria, Abdulhalim, a Kurdish activist in Syria, told TIME via Skype. Even if it is the strongest and best armed of the Kurdish factions in Syria, the PYD is in no position to overwhelm its local rivals. "People will not allow the PYD to control the area," Abdulhalim insists. "All people here, Arabs, Christians, and other ethnicities, will be in control." The radicals would also have to contend with Barzani, whose government has provided training to Kurdish defectors from Assad's army.

But, Abdulhalim warns, nothing would unite the Kurds of Syria more than resistance to a Turkish incursion. "We are strongly refusing Erdogan talking about any invasion of Syria to protect Turkey from the PYD," he says.

When the sabre-rattling dies down, writes Oral Calislar, a commentator for Radikal, a Turkish newspaper, Ankara will do the same with a Kurdish quasi-state in Syria as it did with the one in Iraq – learn to live with it. "We used to say we'd never tolerate an autonomous Kurdistan on our border," Calislar writes. "It was one of our 'red lines.' And now we're buddy-buddy with Barzani."

For the time being, the most that Turkey can do to contain the fallout from Syria is to make amends with its own Kurds, says Hugh Pope, an analyst with the International Crisis Group. If Erdogan wants to ensure Turkey's security, he adds, his government will have to do so by addressing the Turkish Kurds' main grievances – adequate political representation, mother tongue education, some degree of devolution, and a partial amnesty for PKK members.

The situation across the border might be "alarming" for Turkey, says Pope, "but only because Turkey has not solved its own Kurdish problem." ■

Syria's Kurds play the long game

The National UAE
Phil Sands



Demonstrators wave a Kurd flag and pre-Baath Party Syrian flags during a protest against Syria's President Bashar Al Assad in Qudsaya, near Damascus.

DAMASCUS // Internal divisions and political differences with other opposition groups are still preventing Syria's Kurds from throwing their full weight behind the uprising against Bashar Al Assad's regime.

The dispute between Kurdish blocs and other opposition factions was underlined at a conference in Cairo this month, when scuffles broke out between delegates and a Kurdish group walked out, angrily accusing Arab revolutionaries of being worse than the regime they are seeking to topple.

Although a concluding document was patched together, the fundamental problems that have blocked a truly joint Kurd-Arab opposition front from emerging were not addressed, according to Kurdish political figures.

"We are sorry for what happened in Cairo but we are not responsible for the meeting's failure," said a leading Kurdish dissident in Damascus.

"Unity among the opposition is important but we must have firm guarantees over the rights and aspirations of the Kurdish people," he said.

The Kurdish National Council (KNC), which represents the majority of Syria's dozen or so Kurdish political parties, insists it does not want Kurd-controlled areas to secede from Syria.

But the KNC has demanded written assurances from opposition groups about Kurdish recognition should Mr Al Assad's regime fall. It wants Kurdish identity to be recognised as distinct from Syria's Arab majority and guarantees that Syria's two million Kurds will have a "decentralised" state that permits them "self-determination".

These issues have been a sticking point since the revolt began last March. In April last year, Kurds and Arab opposition groups met in Damascus in an effort to forge a unified anti-regime bloc. They failed to reach an agreement then, and have failed ever since.

Some Arab nationalist opposition parties have baulked at what they see as a

watering down of Syria's Arab identity and have voiced suspicions that the Kurds' real goal is to create an independent state.

Other Syrian opposition figures have said with hundreds being killed each month, all efforts must now be put into winning the struggle, not arguing over constitutional matters that will be settled during a political transition.

Kurdish activists and political analysts say the Syrian authorities have cleverly used a softer approach with the Kurds, avoiding the kind of bloodshed that might spark a full-fledged revolt or push them to take up arms alongside rebelling Arab areas.

Opposition blocs, including the Syrian National Council - which is led by Abdulbaset Saida, a Kurd - have also sought to allay Kurdish concerns by stressing that a post-Assad Syria will be a democratic state in which all citizens are equal before the law.

That would bring to an end the institutionalised discrimination rights groups say Kurds have suffered for the past 40 years in Syria.

However the Kurdish opposition, represented by two major blocs, the KNC and a rival Kurdish alliance, the People's Council for Western Kurdistan (PCWK), have said that is not enough.

"In European or American democracy all citizens are equal but we must be realistic and say Syria will not turn overnight into Sweden so for that reason we must insist on these extra guarantees," said a Kurdish political activist, whose party belongs to the KNC.

He said experience had taught Kurds that supporting revolutions did not always end well, as with the overthrow of the Shah in Iran with repression continuing under the Islamic republic.

"We have our fears and they are legitimate, we don't just want to replace one Arab chauvinist regime with another," he said.

Demographics and the belief their negotiating position is now at its strongest are also pushing the Kurds to cut a deal with the opposition over their future status before further commitment to the revolution.

"At the moment the opposition is trying to unify on a basis of consensual democracy, to bring everyone together but after the revolution it might just revert to a simple democracy of majority rule," said another Kurdish dissident who supported the Damascus Declaration of 2005, a failed attempt to secure political reforms.

With Arabs making up 75 per cent of the country, and Kurds 10 per cent, Kurds could not automatically expect to be able to secure a parliamentary majority to back their political programme.

The strategy may backfire on the Kurds, an independent Syrian political analyst said.

"If the regime falls, Arabs might decide they didn't die to overthrow Assad while the Kurds sat and watched, only for the Kurds to then make demands," the Damascus-based analyst said.

Internal tensions between Syria's Kurds rose dramatically this month with a string of kidnappings and killings in the Kurdish area of Afreen, near Aleppo.

Activists said the violence involved the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and gunmen from the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a political group affiliated to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

The KDP is a key member of the Kurdish National Council bloc, while the PYD is principle member of the ➤

►► People's Council for Western Kurdistan (PCWK), the other major bloc in Syrian Kurdish politics.

The PKK, considered a terrorist organisation in Europe and the United States, has fought a long guerrilla war against Turkey, and KNC members accuse it and the PYD of working as a proxy for the Syrian authorities - now also bitter rivals to the Ankara government - helping arrest dissidents and even assassinating anti-regime Kurds, including the influential Kurdish dissident, Meshaal Tammo. The PYD denies the claims, and insists it is part of the anti-regime uprising.

In Arfeen, KNC members called in the Free Syrian Army - the rebels fighting

against Mr Al Assad - to help them protect themselves against the PYD/PKK gunmen after party members were killed and others kidnapped, Kurdish activists said.

Fearing Syria's Kurds were near an internecine war, Massoud Barzani, the influential president of the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, brokered a reconciliation agreement between the KNC and PCWK in Erbil last week.

The two groups agreed to work on unifying their political stance, and to shut down armed factions in favour of unarmed "protection committees" in Kurdish areas of Syria. Mediation councils are also to be established to solve

disputes before they can spin out of control. With the ink on the deal hardly dry, it remains to be seen if the two blocs will come closer together or if the underlying tensions inside the Kurdish community remain unaddressed.

"The Kurds are fighting multiple struggles at the same time," said a Kurdish political activist with the KNC.

They were battling the Syrian regime, against other anti-Assad groups who see Syria as a purely Arab nation, and against other Kurd factions in the murky, mafia-like world of Kurdish politics.

"It's a very complex situation," the activist said. ■

Rudaw 27 /July/ 2012

Kurdish Forces Stop Iraqi Army Advance Near Syrian Border

By ABDULLAH NIHELI
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – On the second day of a standoff between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi troops near the Syrian border, a senior Peshmerga commander in the area said, "we will not allow the Iraqi Army to advance one more step."

On Friday, Iraqi Army units were dispatched to Rabia and Zumar northwest of Nineveh province to control the border crossing between Iraq and Syria.

The area has been under Kurdish control since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.

Speaking to Rudaw, Colonel Issa Zewayi, intelligence chief of the 8th battalion of Peshmerga forces said that around 7,000 Iraqi troops have been sent to the area armed with heavy weaponry.

Zewayi said the Iraqi forces intended to cross into territories controlled by the Kurdish Peshmerga units.

"But the Peshmerga forces are deployed along an area of 60 kilometers from Cairo village to Zumar district and will not allow the Iraqi Army to advance one more step toward Kurdish areas," said Zewayi.

According to Zewayi, Peshmerga and Iraqi troops are deployed less than one kilometer from each other near Cairo village and "clashes are possible at any moment."

He said the Kurdish units in the area are well armed and ready for any confrontation.



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Zewayi added that the commander of the 38th battalion of the Iraqi Army had asked the Kurdish Peshmerga to allow his units to advance, but their request was rejected.

Anwar Haji Osman, Kurdistan Region's deputy minister of Peshmerga said the Iraqi troops have been sent to control the border areas between Iraqi Kurdistan and Syria.

Osman told Rudaw on Friday that an artillery unit has been dispatched to reinforce the Peshmerga forces in the area.

On Saturday, the office of Iraqi prime minister and Commander in Chief Nuri al-Maliki issued a statement saying the Kurdish Peshmerga forces have acted "against the constitution".

The statement said the situation was on the verge of a military confrontation.

The statement also warned that the deployment of the Peshmerga forces in certain areas of Nineveh province "is a dangerous phenomenon and will lead to bad outcomes."

The prime minister's statement called on the Kurdish authorities to "respect order and law" and calling the presence of Peshmerga troops outside the three provinces of Kurdistan Region – Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk—"a clear violation of the law and security measures."

The office of Kurdish Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani also released a statement on Saturday saying, "we have problems with the mentality that believes in using weapons and force" in a clear reference to Baghdad's statement and deployment of Iraqi troops in areas controlled by Kurdish forces since 2003. □

Assad hands control of Syria's Kurdish areas to PKK, sparking outrage in Turkey

By ROY GUTMAN -
McClatchy Newspapers

ISTANBUL — Syrian President Bashar Assad, facing a growing rebel presence in Aleppo, his country's largest city and its commercial hub, has turned control of parts of northern Syria over to militant Kurds whom Turkey has long considered to be terrorists, prompting concern that Istanbul might see the development as a reason to send troops across its border with Syria.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in comments late Wednesday, said Turkey would not accept an entity in northern Syria governed by the Iraq-based Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which has long waged a guerrilla war against Turkey, and its Syrian affiliate, the Democratic Union Party.

He said the two groups had built a "structure in northern Syria" that for Turkey means "a structure of terror."

"It is impossible for us to look favorably at such a structure," he said in a television interview.

He warned that if Syrian Kurdish militants mount an attack or some other form of cross-border provocation against Turkey, "then intervening would be our most natural right."

The prospect of a PKK-dominated zone in northern Syria appears to be an unintended consequence of the civil war between Assad and rebels of the Free Syrian Army, who are Sunni Muslims fighting, with U.S. and other nations' backing, to topple Assad's government.

Assad withdrew forces last week from six predominantly Kurdish towns and handed control to the Kurdish militants in what appears to be an effort to bolster his defenses at Aleppo, which became the scene of sustained fighting last week for the first time since the anti-Assad uprising began more than 16 months ago. Assad also reportedly has pulled forces from the Idlib region of northeastern Syria and moved them to Aleppo.

Tens of thousands of residents of Aleppo have fled in anticipation of a battle. Reports from anti-Assad groups indi-

cate that thousands of pro-Assad and rebel fighters are converging on the city.

The developments in Kurdish areas, however, suggest that no matter who wins the civil war, the fighting is shifting the politics of Syria and its neighbors in ways that cannot be predicted.

The establishment of a Kurd-ruled zone inside Syria has long been a goal of the Kurdish population. Leaders of the anti-Assad opposition have said in recent days that they would oppose such a zone, and Kurdish fighters have said they would not allow the Free Syrian Army to operate in the region.

Officially, the Democratic Union Party is sharing power over six towns - Kobane, Derek, Amude, Efrin, Sari Kani and Girke Lege - with the Kurdish National Council, an umbrella organization of anti-Assad Kurdish groups. In fact, the Kurdish militants have raised the PKK flag over public buildings or have used force to haul down their rivals' flag, Kurdish news media in the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Erbil reported Thursday.

The PKK affiliate also controls stretches of the Syrian border, including a key crossing into territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the increasingly autonomous province in neighboring Iraq.

Turkey fears that a Syrian Kurdish state run by the PKK will radicalize its own Kurds, who number 12 million of its population of 74 million. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of Syrian Kurdish fighters have taken part in PKK raids inside Turkey over the years.

The development also could worsen the political situation in Iraq, where the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government maintains chilly relations with the central government in Baghdad, but ever closer relations with Turkey. Iraq's prime minister, Nouri al Maliki, a Shiite Muslim, supports Assad, whose Alawite religious sect is an offshoot of Shiite Islam. Baghdad and the Kurdish government disagree over other issues, such as oil-export policy and who should govern cities where the population is split between Kurds and Arabs.

Kurdistan's president, Massoud Barzani, tried to head off a Democratic

Union Party takeover several weeks ago, when he hosted the 16 or so groups in the Kurdish National Council, together with the Syrian National Council, also an umbrella body, at a meeting in Erbil. Many now believe the arrangement he brokered actually led to the PKK takeover.

In a move that some analysts said might be intended to undercut PKK influence in Syria, Barzani announced Sunday that the Kurdistan Regional Government would send back to Syria, allegedly to fill a security vacuum, some of the Kurdish Syrian soldiers who deserted into Iraq to escape the civil war. Kurdish media reported that about 650 Kurdish soldiers returned to Syria last week, and there were suggestions that the Kurdistan Regional Government's own military, the peshmerga, is also considering entering Syria. That move is opposed by the PKK, local Kurdish newspapers have reported.

"Peshmerga forces are our brothers and relatives and we do not have any problems with them," Salih Muslim, a Democratic Union Party leader, told the English-language daily Rudaw. "But Syrian Kurdistan does not need assistance from the peshmerga forces at this point and if the need arises we will ask for their help."

Assad forces still control Qamishli, a city of well over 400,000 and the unofficial capital of the predominantly Kurdish northern region. But a decision by Assad to allow the PKK to take over there as well could move Barzani to intervene on Turkey's behalf. Such a development could spark a reaction in Baghdad, whose authority over Iraq's international relations would be directly challenged by a peshmerga move into Syria.

Turkey has shown little hesitance to invade neighboring countries in response to PKK attacks on Turkish targets. In October, Turkish aircraft and troops crossed into Iraq to hunt down PKK guerrillas who killed 29 members of Turkey's security forces and five civilians in a series of raids in southern Turkey. ■

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Crisis in Syria emboldens country's Kurds



Wyre Davies / BBC News

What is happening in Syria cannot be taken in isolation. The protracted upheaval in one of the Middle East's biggest, most powerful and most influential countries is affecting the entire region and, most critically, its immediate neighbours.

Like Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon Turkey has already absorbed - almost without hesitation - thousands of Syrians fleeing the fighting, in particular from the northern cities of Hama and Aleppo.

Turkey is understandably concerned that the number of civilians fleeing across its relatively open southern border will increase as the fighting intensifies in Syria.

Some of those refugees also bring their own political baggage with them and there have already been disturbances in the border



Kurdish Syrian refugees Some Syrian Kurds have fled to Iraq, but the many remaining are asserting autonomy as the Assad regime becomes embroiled in conflict

camps.

Occasionally ethnic and regional tensions spill over as thousands of displaced Syrians live cheek by jowl in tents under the blistering hot summer sun.

But for Turkey, the refugee issue is a mere inconvenience compared to what it thinks will be the biggest fall-out of the Syrian crisis - the Kurds and Kurdistan.

In an almost mirror image of what happened in Iraq after 1991, Kurdish nationalists in northern Syria are making the most of the turmoil and violence in the rest of the country to strengthen their own identity and position.

'Govern ourselves'



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan sees a Kurdish enclave in Syria a direct threat to Turkey

For Turkey, it is like a red rag to a bull.

As the Assad regime pulls in regular Syrian troops from peripheral areas for the military assault on Aleppo, there is clear evidence that others are almost seamlessly moving in to the vacuum left behind.

And in some Kurdish parts of northern Syria the opposition forces of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and other smaller factions have all but taken over.

The leader of the PYD, Salih Muslim, spoke to the BBC in recent days about his movement's strategy and aspirations.

"We are able to govern ourselves - we have the power for it," he said.

Mr Muslim was careful to insist, at this stage at least, that he wasn't calling for an independent Kurdistan but an autonomous region within a new, democratic Syria.

It is thought that Kurdish militias now control at least four main towns and cities in northern Syria. They reportedly include at least parts of Qamishlo, Efrin, Amude, Terbaspi and Ay El Arab.

More remarkable is that although there were sporadic clashes and some loss of life many of them appear to have been secured without much of a fight.

"We warned them to leave the Kurdish areas, otherwise we would resort to different measures," says Muslim, referring to civil administrators and officials from Damascus who used to run the towns."

They were aware of the people's demands and that's why they gave in without blood being spilled."

Erdogan's "terrorist" threat

Quite deliberately choosing to describe the region of northern Syria as "West Kurdistan"

the PYD leader said most people in the region stood with the movement and supported their aims.

Those aims are certainly not supported by the Turkish government, which has, for decades, fought its own often bloody battles with Kurdish separatists and nationalists of the PKK - the Kurdish Workers' Party.

In a blunt message at the end of this week, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan made it abundantly clear he saw the creation of a separate Kurdish enclave in northern Syria as a direct threat to his own country's interests and security.

Mr Erdogan said that Ankara would not accept the creation of a "terrorist" structure in the region.

"It is our most natural right to intervene (in northern Syria) since those terrorist formations would disturb our national peace," said the Prime Minister in a television interview.

Turkey, a one time ally of the Assad regime



The crisis has emboldened Syria's Kurds but some analysts say their relationship with the FSA is tense

in Syria for pragmatic and economic reasons as much as anything, has all but given up on Damascus.

On more than one occasion Mr Erdogan has called on President Bashar al-Assad to stop the onslaught against his own people and to step down before more lives are lost.

Assad handover?

Some in Turkey also believe that a desperate President Assad has deliberately abandoned, or handed over, the northern regions to the PYD in order to create tensions with Turkey and also divide the already fractious opposition movements in Syria.

"In the North, (Assad) has already allocated five provinces to the terrorists (Kurds)," Mr Erdogan was quoted as saying by a Turkish news agency last week. Ankara simply regards the Syrian PYD as a branch of its own, outlawed PKK.

But the criticism and allegations of trying to create regional instability aren't limited to

the pariah that is the regime in Damascus.

The autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq has now admitted it has been training Kurdish-Syrian fighters on its territory.

In a recent interview the regional leader, President Massoud Barzani, openly confirmed the presence of a military training camp where "a good number of young Kurds" have been trained.

Tension with FSA

With as many as 20million Kurds in Turkey alone, watching their brethren to the east

quite literally marking out their territory, the famously nationalist Turks are, to put it mildly, concerned.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davatoglu is being dispatched to northern Iraq in the coming days where, according to reports, he will talk with Kurdish officials there about the situation in Syria and Turkish "sensitivities."

Many things are still unclear; relations between the Syrian Kurds and other opposition groups (the Free Syria Army) are said to be tense.

In some Syrian Kurdish towns under the de-facto control of the PYD, pro Assad troops have remained in their barracks, raising questions about a deal, of sorts, between Damascus and the Kurds.

And, the biggest question of all, will Turkey carry out its threat to intervene militarily in northern Syria to prevent the creation of a Kurdish "entity".

One thing is certain. If and when President Assad is driven from power, the country he leaves behind will for some time be divided, damaged and violent. □

HAARETZ

29 July 2012

Kurds and Turks: Business as usual – for now

The Kurds' only independent political entity is cozying up to Turkey to do business. How long can Iraqi Kurdistan stay in the quiet eye of the regional storm and avoid collateral damage?

By *Riad al Khouri*

In the high-level geopolitical hurricane currently building up in the Middle East, autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan seems to be the tranquil eye of the storm. The province of nearly 5.5 million people enjoys a GDP per capita that has now grown to well over \$5000, while its political stability is maintained by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Iraqi Kurdistan's provincial capital, Erbil, is a gateway to Iraq for businesses and traders from neighboring countries.

Yet, for Iraqi Kurds, blips on the radar are appearing. Turkey has warmed to the KRG for the last few years. But last week, the Turkish government expressed anxiety that a group linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (or PKK), an organization that Turkey views as terrorist, is now entrenched in northern Syria near the Turkish border.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is due to visit Erbil this week to influence the KRG's position in regard to Syria's Kurds, and he is likely to re-iterate his prime minister's

recent warning that Ankara reserves the right to act in northern Syria against any Kurdish militant organization perceived as hostile, to prevent it from "establish[ing] itself there and threaten[ing] Turkey."

Turkish fears of Kurdish militant spillover near its borders are put aside, however, when the KRG and the Turks increasingly cozy up to do business. This trend has been established over the last five years, after Turkey redefined its geopolitical environment, by publicly growling at Israel and deepening its economic engagement with its immediate neighbors, including Iraq.

Helped by Ankara's concerted promotion of bilateral trade, Iraqi Kurdistan imported around \$5.5 billion worth of goods from Turkey last year, making the province Turkey's eighth-biggest export destination. (A look around the burgeoning malls in Erbil on my most recent mission there several weeks ago confirmed that, increasingly, many of the goods on sale are Turkish-made.)

For its part, Iraqi Kurdistan

sells raw materials to Turkey, including oil. About ten KRG trucks laden with crude oil enter Turkey daily, but that will soon increase to up to 200. The first phase of a pipeline that is due to carry up to one million barrels of oil a day from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey is scheduled to finish by the end of 2012. Kurdish gas will also later be on offer after a recent understanding between Ankara and Erbil over future Turkish imports of the fuel.

Great, one might say - but the story doesn't end there. Three weeks ago, Iraq's prime minister and oil minister accused the KRG of "smuggling" crude oil to Turkey - and Iran. Though such charges had been leveled before, this was the first time the KRG was directly accused by Baghdad's council of ministers in a cabinet meeting, a clear heightening of tension between the federal and provincial governments.

The Kurds counter-argue that the federal parliament has been unable to legislate regulations for the oil sector through a hydrocarbon law, although a draft bill was presented six years ago. The absence of legis-

lation means that the KRG is forced to export oil without recourse to Baghdad, which should technically control marketing of crude oil. Yet another row is breaking out between Baghdad and Erbil - over the deal just made between the KRG and the United States giant Chevron, which is not, according to the federal government, supposed to operate in Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq under separate, parallel agreements.

Iraqi Kurdistan seems set for significant economic success in the long-term because of its strategic geopolitical position and openness to trade, but those very factors are likely to lead to a very turbulent and politically-charged short-term, as relations between the KRG and its neighbors, whether in Baghdad or Ankara, as well as events in Syria, face the test of the region's rough instability. ○○○

Riad al Khouri, an Arab economist who lives and works in the region, is a principal of Development Equity Associates Inc, Washington DC.

"L'alaouistan", ou la stratégie du repli de Bachar al-Assad

Selon plusieurs experts, le président syrien a déjà préparé la région côtière pour s'en servir de base de repli.

Par Céline Lussato

Bachar al-Assad s'est-il rendu ce jeudi dans la ville côtière de Lattaquié, dirigeant la riposte après l'assassinat de trois de ces lieutenants comme l'ont affirmé à Reuters des sources au sein de l'opposition syrienne, ainsi qu'un diplomate occidental ?



Bachar al-Assad

Malgré le terrible coup porté au régime par l'attentat de Damas, Bachar al-Assad a tardé à faire une apparition publique, laissant courir des rumeurs de fuite du pays ou, moins de façon moins radicale, de fuite dans la partie côtière du pays. La télévision d'Etat a finalement diffusé quelques images du président au palais présidentiel à Damas, en compagnie du nouveau ministre de la Défense ayant tout juste prêté serment.

Mais les rumeurs de fuite ont trouvé un large écho dans la presse. Depuis plusieurs mois, certains experts redoutent en effet que le président ne se replie dans sa région à majorité alaouite – la secte chiite à laquelle il appartient – sur la côte méditerranéenne.

"Si la tête du pouvoir était obligée de quitter Damas, elle pourrait tenter de chercher refuge dans le réduit alaouite que Bachar et ceux qui le soutiennent ont

commencé depuis plusieurs mois à préparer", affirmait mercredi l'ancien diplomate Ignace Leverrier au "Nouvel Observateur".

ZONE CÔTIÈRE ALAOUTITE

"Il s'agit d'une zone qui couvre la côte syrienne de la frontière libanaise au Sud, à la limite de l'ancien sandjak d'Alexandrette au Nord, sur à peu près une cinquantaine de kilomètres de large en direction de l'Est."

Selon plusieurs experts, le régime a déjà préparé cette région pour un repli. "Plus ils s'approprient une part grande de cette région, souligne le diplomate, plus ils assureront une protection avancée à leurs bastions et le bénéfice de terres agricoles fertiles dans cette région".

C'est cette logique qui expliquerait, d'ailleurs, les dernières opérations bru-

tales effectuées dans plusieurs villages de cette partie du pays, comme à Houla ou Treimseh. Opérations qui auraient été destinées à chasser les populations sunnites effrayées par les exactions.

INACCEPTABLE

"Combien de temps pourront-ils s'y réfugier ? C'est difficile à savoir. Ils envisagent peut-être ce réduit comme un refuge temporaire, où ils pourront résister et se réorganiser dans la perspective de reconquérir la Syrie. Dans le pire des cas, ils pourraient tenter de s'y fixer à demeure, reconstituant l'ancien Etat des Alaouites," souligne Ignace Leverrier.

Cette éventualité pourrait trouver un écho favorable auprès de quelques minorités syriennes, et notamment les Kurdes, désireux également d'autonomie. Elle limiterait peut-être les chasses aux sorcières anti-alaouites dans le pays. Mais pour la grande majorité des Syriens, cette option ne semble pas envisageable. C'est "une position inacceptable pour la population, sunnite dans son ensemble, à laquelle elle rappelle par trop l'époque où la puissance mandataire, divisant pour régner, avait morcelé la Syrie en mini-Etats autonomes", affirme le diplomate. ■

Opération séduction de Sayda au Kurdistan irakien

ERBIL (Irak) — Le président du Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale coalition de l'opposition, Abdel Basset Sayda, effectue une visite dans le Kurdistan irakien afin de tenter de convaincre les dirigeants kurdes irakiens de rejoindre son organisation, a indiqué dimanche un responsable kurde syrien.

"Abdel Basset Sayda est arrivé ce soir (dimanche) à Erbil (nord de l'Irak), et doit rencontrer le président de la région (autonome) du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, et d'autres dirigeants kurdes" lundi, a déclaré à l'AFP un responsable du Conseil national kurde (CNK), qui regroupe des partis kurdes syriens.

"Sayda veut obtenir un accord avec les dirigeants kurdes pour qu'ils rejoignent le Conseil national syrien", a indiqué ce responsable.

Le Conseil suprême kurde, qui comprend le Conseil national kurde et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), émanation du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), une formation syrienne proche des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, participera à la rencontre.

Le Conseil national kurde est proche

de M. Barzani et du président irakien Jalal Talabani, tandis que le CPKO est proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui a établi des bases dans la région autonome du Kurdistan dans le nord de l'Irak.

M. Sayda a effectué auparavant une visite secrète dans le Kurdistan pour rencontrer M. Barzani et d'autres dirigeants kurdes avant son accession à la présidence du CNS en juin, a ajouté la même source.

Quelque 2 millions de Kurdes vivent en Syrie et M. Sayda lui-même est kurde.

Le Conseil national kurde, qui regroupe une douzaine de partis traditionnels kurdes syriens, et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), ont signé à Erbil le 11 juillet un accord pour unifier leurs rangs, sous le parrainage de Massoud Barzani. ♦

L'Orient
LE JOUR

27 juillet 2012

Les Kurdes tentent de s'unir pour préparer la Syrie de demain

Les Kurdes syriens, hostiles au régime qui les a réprimés et méfiants envers l'opposition qu'ils jugent peu encline à reconnaître leur spécificité, ont décidé de s'unir et de gérer leur région pour faire valoir leurs droits dans la Syrie de demain.

Ils se sont prudemment engagés dans le soulèvement contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad mais ont tenté de garder à l'abri des violences leurs régions, où les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) ne sont pas présents.

Depuis la semaine dernière, l'armée s'est retirée sans combat de certaines régions kurdes où des militants proches du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, autonomistes kurdes turcs) se sont déployés, suscitant des soupçons de collusion avec le régime.

Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a même accusé Damas, son ancien allié, d'avoir "confié" plusieurs zones du nord de la Syrie à la branche syrienne du PKK, le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD).

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara et plusieurs autres pays.

La Turquie a également considéré l'installation du PYD près de la frontière comme "dirigée contre" elle. Ce parti compte de nombreux combattants venus du Kurdistan d'Irak pour soutenir leurs frères de Syrie.

Malgré la grande méfiance entre les partis kurdes syriens traditionnels et le

PYD, les deux parties ont signé le 11 juillet, sous le parrainage du chef kurde irakien Massoud Barzani, un accord pour unifier leurs rangs.

Désormais, le Conseil national kurde, qui regroupe une douzaine de partis traditionnels kurdes syriens et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), émanation du PYD, sont réunis sous la bannière du Conseil suprême kurde.

"L'accord est extrêmement positif car nous craignons des affrontements fratricides avec le PYD qui faisait auparavant le jeu du régime", souligne Havidar, journaliste kurde dans le nord de la Syrie.

"Il semble que les Kurdes syriens aient décidé de travailler ensemble", estime Ignace Leverrier, ex-diplomate français qui a passé une partie de sa carrière en Syrie. Selon lui, le PYD "commence peut-être à comprendre que le régime est fini".

Le CPKO nie lui toute collusion avec le régime. "Nous avons nettoyé pacifiquement nos régions de la présence des forces gouvernementales", affirme à l'AFP son porte-parole, Chirzad Izidi.

Selon lui, son parti a formé des "unités populaires kurdes", sorte de peshmergas syriens, à l'instar de leurs frères irakiens, pour assurer l'ordre.

Si les combattants du PYD étaient jusqu'à présent les seuls à disposer d'armes dans les zones kurdes, Massoud Barzani a révélé récemment

que les kurdes irakiens entraînaient leurs frères syriens, en grande partie des déserteurs de l'armée.

Des décennies de discrimination

Installés dans le nord de la Syrie, les Kurdes représentent près de 15% des 23 millions de Syriens selon les estimations de Fabrice Balanche, géographe spécialiste de la Syrie.

Ils se plaignent d'être discriminés par le régime du parti Baas au pouvoir et réclament la reconnaissance de leurs droits culturels et politiques, mais jurent ne pas avoir de visées autonomistes comme leurs frères irakiens.

"Nous voulons que nos droits soient clairement reconnus dans la prochaine Constitution", affirme Bahjat Bachir, un dirigeant du Parti démocratique kurde en Syrie.

"Nous voulons être des partenaires à part entière dans la nouvelle Syrie et sommes attachés à l'unité du pays", assure M. Bachir.

Les Kurdes ont aussi des relations difficiles avec le Conseil national syrien (CNS), qu'ils accusent de chercher à marginaliser les groupes religieux et ethniques minoritaires. Et même si son nouveau chef, Abdel Basset Sayda, est kurde, il ne représente pas pour autant cette minorité, selon les militants.

"Les Kurdes veulent que la révolution leur garantisse leurs droits avant l'issue finale", explique Ignace Leverrier. ♦(AFP)

L'Orient
LE JOUR

30 juillet 2012

L'Iran ripostera "durement" en cas d'attaque turque en Syrie

OLJ/AFP

L'Iran a mis en garde récemment la Turquie contre toute attaque en territoire syrien, affirmant que Téhéran ripostera "durement" pour venir au secours de son allié, a indiqué lundi al-Watan, quotidien proche du pouvoir à Damas.

"La Turquie a reçu au cours des dernières heures des mises en garde très fermes et le message suivant: 'gare à vous si vous changez les règles du jeu'", a indiqué le quotidien, citant un diplomate arabe non identifié.

"Ankara se préparait, aux côtés des Etats-Unis, à intervenir militairement dans le dossier syrien en utilisant le dossier kurde comme un prétexte, mais l'Iran a mis fin aux rêves turcs", écrit al-

Watan.

La République islamique a informé Ankara qu'elle "ripostera très durement contre toute agression à l'intérieur du territoire syrien et que l'Iran réactiverait (le cas échéant) l'accord de défense commune signée avec la Syrie", écrit al-Watan.

Il s'agit d'une "réponse claire aux dernières menaces du Premier ministre turc", selon le diplomate. Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé le 26 juillet Damas d'avoir "confié" plusieurs zones du nord de la Syrie au PKK et prévenu qu'Ankara pourrait exercer son droit de poursuite à chaud en Syrie contre ces rebelles kurdes de Turquie.

Le diplomate arabe a précisé que "la Turquie s'est mise d'accord avec les Etats-Unis sur une intervention fronta-

lière limitée dans le nord de la Syrie et notamment dans la province d'Alep en vue de créer une zone tampon".

Les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), dont le quartier général est en Turquie, tentent de gagner la bataille dans la ville d'Alep en vue de créer une "zone sécurisée" dans le nord syrien.

L'armée turque poursuivait lundi le renforcement de son dispositif à la frontière syrienne avec l'envoi de batteries de missiles, de chars et de véhicules de combat d'infanterie dans le sud du pays, selon l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Le diplomate arabe cité par al-Watan est présenté comme issu d'un pays où le gouvernement est partisan du régime de Bachar el-Assad.

Téhéran est le principal allié du pouvoir syrien dans la région. ♦

L'armée syrienne a lancé ses chars contre Alep

Alep (Syrie)

Envoyée spéciale

Les dernières heures avant l'assaut, par notre reporter Florence Aubenas

LA GRANDE PRIÈRE du vendredi vient de se terminer à la mosquée Nour Al-Chouhada, à Alep. La chaleur et la poussière montent comme une vapeur, c'est une de ces journées où, même sans bouger, on se couvre de sueur instantanément. Les fidèles commencent à sortir de la mosquée. La semaine dernière, ils avaient réussi à faire dix mètres dans la rue. En fait, ils n'ont jamais réussi à avancer davantage en un an, depuis que des manifestations contre le régime ont lieu tous les vendredis, ici comme dans la plupart des villes en Syrie. A la mosquée Nour Al-Chouhada, les choses se sont d'ailleurs toujours déroulées de la même manière, semaine après semaine.

Passé le seuil, quelqu'un lance assez vite : « Allah akbar. » Le cri agit comme signal : des policiers et des chabbiha – les âmes damnées du régime – se mettent immédiatement à tirer. Cinq minutes plus tard – même si certains vendredis, on a tenu jusqu'à dix – l'endroit est vide. Parfois, il n'y a pas de victime.

Ce vendredi 27 juillet, donc, ils sont 250 manifestants environ à s'engager dans la rue. Ils avancent

**« Dites-le à la télé : nous sommes allés jusqu'à la boutique du tailleur pour hommes ! »
Un manifestant**

d'un mètre. Ils avancent de deux. Quelqu'un lâche : « Allah akbar. » Pas un coup de feu. Personne en vue. Alors, un autre, à son tour : « Allah akbar. » Ils continuent de marcher, centimètre par centimètre. Ils vont dépasser les dix mètres, une foule à la fois décidée, scandant de plus en plus fort, mais qui tressaille au moindre bruit, s'émiettant parfois, prête à se volatiliser.

Ils sont à presque 100 mètres de la mosquée maintenant, et ils n'en croient pas leurs yeux. « Dites-le à la télé : nous sommes allés jusqu'à la boutique du tailleur pour hommes », crie un père de famille et, pour preuve, il montre l'enseigne où un garçon blond en costu-



me noue une cravate d'un geste avantageux.

La manifestation s'arrête alors, comme effrayée d'elle-même. Quelqu'un amène un corps, entouré d'un drapeau. Est-ce un des 17 morts dans l'attaque d'hélicoptère du matin ou un des 40 autres des deux bombardements aériens quelques heures plus tard, tous menés par les troupes de Bachar Al-Assad? Personne ne sait. Le corps est porté en tête du cortège. On lance à nouveau « Allah akbar », qui sera à peu près le seul cri – on n'ose pas dire slogan – du défilé.

Cela a duré une demi-heure. C'était la première manifestation du vendredi, à Alep, deuxième ville de Syrie, depuis que les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre y sont entrés en masse dimanche. « Grâce à eux, la révolution a avancé de 100 mètres », dit un jeune dentiste. Il en rit lui-même. « Mais pour nous, c'est énorme. »

Cette marche-là ressemble bien, à vrai dire, à la situation. Beaucoup de choses ont changé depuis l'arrivée des rebelles, mais ils semblent avancer comme des funambules sur leur fil, lentement, sûrs d'eux, tout en donnant le vertige à ceux qui les regardent.

Dans son bureau, un des principaux commandants de l'Armée syrienne libre, Haji, est en train de

réprimander au téléphone un fonctionnaire de l'administration des eaux : « Puisque je vous dis que

Les rebelles semblent avancer comme des funambules sur leur fil, sûrs d'eux, tout en donnant le vertige à ceux qui les regardent

le gouvernement, c'est nous. Vous devez obéir. » Et l'autre, au bout du fil, qu'on entend hésiter : « Oui, mais si le régime revient ? » Haji hausse les épaules. « Le régime ? Il est très fatigué. »

Haji a 32 ans, une barbe soignée et un long visage un peu triste. Choisi par tous ses pairs pour diriger la région militaire, il a hâte de retrouver son entreprise de semences dans le nord du pays. Il vient de recevoir de l'argent du Qatar, mais toujours pas d'armes. Quand on lui dit que Bachar Al-Assad est, lui, soutenu par l'Iran, la Chine et la Russie, il hausse les épaules. « Eh bien, nous, on gagnera tout seuls. Ici, à Alep, va se jouer le grand combat. »

Rues désertes, magasins fermés, plus de voitures, le pain qui commence à manquer : dans sa partie est, contrôlée par les rebelles, la ville ressemble à un décor

abandonné. Les habitants ont fui en masse depuis que l'armée régulière a annoncé une offensive d'envie pour récupérer Alep. La plupart repassent la ligne de démarcation, pour se retrouver du côté gouvernemental et éviter les bombardements. Dans la rue, un notable soupire : « Dans le cas où l'armée de Bachar reprend du terrain, une partie des habitants se remettra à le soutenir. »

Depuis deux jours, deux avions de chasse ont déjà survolé la ville et le quartier de Salaheddine a été lourdement pilonné. Il est à la fois le premier à s'être insurgé à Alep et aussi le plus proche de la zone contrôlée par le régime. Les forces régulières n'ont, semble-t-il, pas réussi à y pénétrer. Quatre-vingt-trois tanks, venus notamment d'Idlib, se seraient également massés près du pont de Rammoussa, de l'autre côté de la cité, même si les troupes rebelles en ont détruit sept sur le chemin. Aux yeux de tous, ces deux derniers jours ont donc semblé particulièrement calmes, mais personne ne trouvait que c'était bon signe. ■

FLORENCE AUBENAS

Talk to Al Jazeera

Massoud Barzani: Flying the Kurdish flag

The Kurdish president warns that Iraq's Kurds could seek independence if they do not get what they need from Baghdad.



"... Some of the people in Baghdad do not intend any goodwill for the people of Kurdistan and they are simply hostile to the Kurdistan region They just want to stop the progress that the Kurdistan region is making."

- Massoud Barzani, the Kurdish president

There are more than thirty million Kurds - most of them living in an overlapping area of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

It is said to be the biggest ethnic community in the world without a homeland. In some of the countries in which they live, they are prevented from speaking their language or obtaining citizenship.

Saddam Hussein, the former Iraqi leader, used chemical weapons against the Kurds, destroyed their villages and killed tens of thousands of them during his rule. The bodies are still being unearthed.

The US encouraged them to rise up against Saddam when his forces were driven out of Kuwait in 1991 but then left them hanging. And thousands died fleeing to Turkey as refugees.

But the no-fly zone that the US, British and French established to protect them from Saddam's attacks, allowed them to break away from Iraqi government authority, while remaining part of Iraq.

Since 2003, the Kurdish region has become the most stable and prosperous

"I am very proud of being one individual among the Kurdish people because our people have had their suffering and pain and they don't think about retaliation or revenge after the tragedies that have happened to them."

- Massoud Barzani, the Kurdish president

part of Iraq, fuelled by oil and Turkish investment.

And while relations with Turkey have improved, they have worsened with Baghdad - with disagreements over oil, land and politics that some fear could turn violent.

Massoud Barzani, the Kurdish president, has emerged as a crucial player in Iraqi politics and as the leader of Kurdish aspirations in the region.

He has warned that Iraq's Kurds could seek independence if they do not get what they need from Baghdad. And that his region will not be dragged down by the

rest of Iraq.

"We have seen tanks, artillery and other weaponry being used against our people. We have seen large numbers of troops being used against our people," explains Barzani. "Our fear is not of that. Our fear is the mentality that still believes in using planes, artillery and tanks to solve problems. We do not believe that that will solve the problem. This is the wrong approach and the misery and the troubles that Iraq faces today is a result of that kind of mentality. Therefore we do not want that to be repeated again.

"Otherwise if Baghdad or the federal government thinks about the usage of such things then we will be obliged to go back to the times when we had to think about how to target the F-16s in order not to allow them to reach here. We hope this will not be the case but we have to get ready."

On this episode of Talk to Al Jazeera, we sit down with Barzani to find out how far he is willing to go to protect and promote the interests of the Kurdish people. ♦

Two soldiers killed in blast in southeast Turkey

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey - July 27, 2012 - (Reuters)

TWO TURKISH soldiers were killed in the mainly Kurdish southeast on Friday when the vehicle they were traveling in was hit by a remote-controlled explosive, security sources said.

A third soldier and one civilian were also wounded in the attack, which occurred around 7 a.m. (0500 GMT) near the town of Lice in Diyarbakir province, they said.

Security officials blamed the attack on the outlawed Kurdistan

Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a 27-year campaign against the Turkish state in which 40,000 people, mainly Kurds, have died. Explosives were buried in a road near military barracks and were set off by remote control when the vehicle carrying soldiers passed, the officials said.

Turkey, the European Union and the United States all list the PKK as a "terrorist" organization.

The PKK, based mainly in northern Iraq, has scaled back its demands for a Kurdish homeland for Turkey's 14 million Kurds to greater cultural rights and political autonomy. □



Turkish forces kill 15 Kurdish rebels in southeast

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey / July 25, 2012 / (Reuters)

TURKISH SECURITY forces killed at least 15 Kurdish rebels in a raid near the country's border with northern Iraq after tracking them with drones and attacking them with helicopters and on the ground, officials said on Wednesday.

They said drones spotted a group of Kurdish fighters who blocked roads on Monday in Hakkari province, then pinpointed them for an attack when the Kurdish fighters returned to the same area on Tuesday evening.

Three Turkish soldiers were injured in clashes that ensued, the security officials said.

The region is the theatre of a 28-year-old conflict between Turkish forces and fighters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which in various incarnations has waged a campaign for autonomy in the lar-

gely Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Turkey has cemented ties with the Kurdish leadership of Iraq's semi-autonomous north, where the PKK has a military presence, through trade and investment, but remains wary that the example of Kurdish self-rule in Iraq and deepening chaos in neighboring Syria could inflame its own Kurdish conflict.

Syrian Kurdish opposition figures say Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces have quit areas of Hassaka and Aleppo provinces, which border Turkey, leaving them under the control of the PKK-linked Democratic Union Party (PYD).

The head of the Syrian National Council - which aspires to political leadership of the revolt against Assad and much of whose leadership is in Turkey - said Assad's troops had lost control of some parts of those regions, but that the Syrian opposition did not endorse any Kurdish separatist project. ○



28 July 2012

Kurd leader warns against budget cuts by Iraq

Massoud Barzani says any move to cut funding to the region in a dispute over oil sales would be a "declaration of war".

Jane Arraf

Salahadin, Iraq - The president of Iraq's Kurdistan region has warned that he would view as a "declaration of war" if the federal government cuts funding to the region in a dispute over oil sales to Turkey. In an interview with Al Jazeera this week, Massoud Barzani also said his region would take measures to counter any military threat from the Iraqi government.

The comments, in the Kurdish leader's first international interview in months, appear to serve notice to the government in Baghdad that he does not intend to back off on the escalating dispute over its authority over the region.

Speaking at his presidential palace outside Erbil, Barzani said the issue could be solved if political parties agreed to pass an oil and gas law. Hostility by the Iraqi prime minister and others towards the Kurds was holding it up, he said.

"And of course cutting the budget of the region from Baghdad we would consider it as war, a declaration of war and Baghdad will be held responsible for the consequences," he said, speaking in Kurdish



"Our fear is the mentality that still believes in using planes, artillery and tanks to solve the problems."

- Massoud Barzani, the Kurdish president

through his official interpreter.

Asked to explain what that would mean, the Kurdish president said: "It's obvious what it entails. It's premature [to talk about that now] but certainly the moment they do that [cut the budget] then we consider it a war declaration."

Disputed oil contracts

The Iraqi government considers the Kurdistan region's contracts with oil companies such as Exxon Mobil and its plans

for direct oil exports illegal.

The Kurds argue that the contracts are in line with the constitution and say they have been forced to sell crude because of delayed revenue transfers from the central government.

"Instead of having such an animosity to Kurdistan and the Kurdish people they should respond to the Iraqi people," Barzani said.

"After spending \$27bn on the electricity sector can they respond to the Iraqi people and tell them what happened to that money?"

Barzani said he would not accept the current political situation to continue and said his region would find ways to counter any threat arising out of the Iraqi government's purchase of F-16 fighter jets from the US.

"If Baghdad or the federal government thinks about the usage of such things then we will be obliged to go back to the times when we had to think about how to target the F-16s... We hope this will not be the case but we have to get ready," he said.

"For us, F-16s do not differ from MIG 19s or MIG 21s. We have seen them being used against us. We have seen tanks, artillery and other weaponry being used against our people.

"We have seen large numbers of troops being used against our people. Our fear is not of that. Our fear is the mentality that still believes in using planes, artillery and tanks to solve the problems." ■

Al Qaeda slips into Syria, changing nature of conflict

CAIRO

BY ROD NORDLAND

It is the sort of image that has become a staple of the Syrian revolution, a video of masked men calling themselves the Free Syrian Army and brandishing AK-47s — with one unsettling difference. In the background hang two flags of Al Qaeda, white Arabic writing on a black field.

“We are now forming suicide cells to make jihad in the name of God,” said a speaker in the video, using the classical Arabic favored by Al Qaeda.

The video, posted on YouTube, is one more piece of evidence that Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists are doing their best to hijack the Syrian revolution, with a growing although still limited success that has U.S. intelligence officials publicly concerned, and Iraqi officials next door openly alarmed.

While leaders of the Syrian political and military opposition continue to deny any role for the extremists, Al Qaeda has helped to change the nature of the conflict, injecting the weapon it perfected in Iraq — suicide bombings — into the battle against President Bashar al-Assad with growing frequency. The evidence is mounting that Syria has become a magnet for Sunni extremists, including those operating under the banner of Al Qaeda. Bab al-Hawa, an important border crossing with Turkey that fell into Syrian rebels’ hands last week, has quickly become a jihadist congregating point.

The presence of jihadists in Syria has accelerated in recent days, in part because of a convergence with the sectarian tensions across the country’s long border in Iraq. Al Qaeda, through an audio statement, has made an undisguised bid to link its insurgency in Iraq with the revolution in Syria, depicting both as sectarian conflicts — Sunni versus Shiite.

Iraqi officials said that the extremists operating in Syria are in many cases the very same militants striking across their country. “We are 100 percent sure from security coordination with Syrian authorities that the wanted names that we have are the same wanted names that the Syrian authorities have, especially within the last three months,” Izzat al-Shahbandar — a close aide to the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki — said Tuesday. “Al Qaeda that is operating in Iraq is the same as that which is operating in Syria,” he said.

One Qaeda operative, a 56-year-old known as Abu Thuha who lives near Kirkuk, Iraq, spoke to an Iraqi reporter for The New York Times on Tuesday. “We have experience now fighting the Americans, and more experience now with the Syrian revolution,” he said.



TURKPIX, VIA AP

BATTLE IN ALEPPO LOOMS

A Syrian rebel on Wednesday in the town of Azaz, about 30 kilometers from Aleppo, where a major government-rebel clash was expected.

“Our big hope is to form a Syrian-Iraqi Islamic state for all Muslims, and then announce our war against Iran and Israel, and free Palestine.”

His grandiose plans have been echoed by Al Nusra Front for the People of the Levant, which military and intelligence analysts say is the major Qaeda affiliate operating in Syria, with two other Qaeda-linked groups also claiming to be active there, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades and Al Baraa ibn Malik Martyrdom Brigade.

Since the start of the uprising, the Syrian government has sought to depict the opposition as dominated by Al Qaeda and jihadist allies, something the opposition has denied and independent observers have said was not true at the time. The uprising began as a peaceful protest movement and slowly turned into an armed battle in response to the government’s use of overwhelming lethal force, they say.

Syrian state media have routinely described every explosion as a suicide bombing, as they did with a bombing on July 18 that killed at least four high-ranking government officials.

Over time, however, Syria did become a draw for jihadists as the battle evolved into a sectarian war between a Sunni-dominated opposition and government and security forces dominated by the Alawite minority. Beginning in December, analysts began seeing what many thought really were suicide bombings.

Since then, there have been at least 35 car bombings and 10 confirmed suicide bombings, 4 of which have been claimed by Al Nusra Front, according to data compiled by the Institute for the Study of War. In some cases, like on June 1, when

a bomb struck at government security offices in Idlib, or on April 27, when a suicide bombing killed 11 people in Damascus, Al Nusra claimed credit in postings on a jihadist Web site, according to the SITE monitoring group. The group also claimed responsibility for a June 30 attack on Al Ikhbariya TV, a pro-government station, which it said “was glorifying the tyrant day and night.” Seven media workers were killed, to international condemnation. Spokesmen for the Syrian opposition denied any role.

In February, the U.S. director of national intelligence, James Clapper, told a congressional hearing that there were “all the earmarks of an Al Qaeda-like attack” in a series of bombings against security and intelligence targets in Damascus. He and other intelligence community witnesses attributed that to the spread into Syria of the Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda.

Shortly before Mr. Clapper’s testimony, Ayman al-Zawahri, the apparent leader of Al Qaeda since the killing of Osama bin Laden, released an audio recording in which he lavishly praised the Syrian revolutionaries, calling them “the lions of the Levant,” a theme that has since been taken up repeatedly in public pronouncements by the group.

Daniel Byman, a counterterrorism specialist who is a professor at Georgetown University in Washington and a fellow at the Brookings Institution, said it was clear that Al Qaeda was trying to become more active in Syria. As they have already done in Somalia and Mali, and before that in Chechnya and Yemen, the group is trying to turn a local conflict to its advantage.

“There’s no question Al Qaeda wants to do that, and they are actually pretty good at this sort of thing,” he said. “They’ve done well at taking a local conflict” and taking it global.

They have done this by relying more heavily on local fighters than on foreign ones, except at upper leadership levels — correcting a mistake that cost them

“Our big hope is to form a Syrian-Iraqi Islamic state for all Muslims, and then announce our war against Iran and Israel, and free Palestine.”

credibility in the early years of the Iraqi conflict. “They learned a lot from Iraq,” Mr. Byman said. “They even write about this — they say, ‘We got on the wrong side of the locals.’” In Iraq, the government is led by the Shiite majority, while a Sunni minority has been Al Qaeda’s early breeding ground.

On Sunday, one day before a wave of 40 attacks across in Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the pseudonymous leader of the group’s Iraqi affiliate, issued a rare audio statement, not only predicting the next day’s attacks, but also lavishly praising Syrian revolutionaries. “You have taught the world lessons in courage, jihad and patience,” he said, according to a translation provided by the monitoring organization SITE.

Joseph Holliday, an analyst from the Institute for the Study of War who studies Al Qaeda and the Arab Spring, said, "The emergence of Al Qaeda-linked terrorist cells working against the regime poses risks to the United States and a challenge to those calling for material support of the armed opposition."

He added: "It's something to keep an eye out for, the convergence of Iraq and Syria. As the Syrian government loses the ability to project force on the periphery of its territory, what you're going to see is an emboldened Sunni opposition emerging in Nineveh and Iraq."

For the moment, though, mainstream Syrian rebels are nearly uniformly op-

posed to a role for Al Qaeda in their popular uprising.

"Every now and then, we hear about Al Qaeda in Syria, but there is so far no material evidence that they are here," said Samir Nachar, a member of the executive bureau of the Syrian National Congress. "The regime has talked about it, and there were political statements from the Iraqi government that Al Qaeda has moved from Iraq to Syria, but on the ground there is no information on the presence of foreign fighters."

In Deir Ezzor, Syria, not far from the Iraqi border, a Free Syrian Army brigade leader, identified only as Sayid, said in an interview by Skype that he

had heard rumors about Qaeda fighters, but had never actually seen one. In Deir Ezzor this year, a massive truck bomb exploded near a military base — which the resistance immediately attributed to the Assad regime, claiming it bombed itself.

"If Al Qaeda comes to get rid of him," Sayid said, referring to Mr. Assad, "why not? But I personally have seen none of them."

Duraid Adnan contributed reporting from Baghdad; Dalal Mawad, Neil MacFarquhar and Haida Saad from Beirut; and Eric Schmitt from Washington.

INTERNATIONAL
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Syria is Iraq



Thomas L. Friedman

Lord knows I am rooting for the opposition forces in Syria to quickly prevail on their own and turn out to be as democratically inclined as we hope. But the chances of this best-of-all-possible outcomes is low. That's because Syria is a lot like Iraq. Indeed, Syria is Iraq's twin — a multisectarian, minority-ruled dictatorship that was held together by an iron fist under Baathist ideology. And, for me, the lesson of Iraq is quite simple: You can't go from Saddam to Switzerland without getting stuck in Hobbes — a war of all against all — unless you have a well-armed external midwife, whom everyone on the ground both fears and trusts to manage the transition. In Iraq, that was America. The kind of low-cost, remote-control, U.S./NATO midwifery that ousted Qaddafi and gave birth to a Libya is not likely to be repeated in Syria. Syria is harder. Syria is Iraq.

And Iraq was such a bitter experience for America that we prefer never to speak of it again. But Iraq is relevant here. The only reason Iraq has any chance for a decent outcome today is because America was on the ground with tens of thousands of troops to act as that well-armed midwife, reasonably trusted and certainly feared by all sides, to manage Iraq's transition to more consensual politics. My gut tells me that Syria will require the same to have the same chance.

But because I absolutely would not advocate U.S. intervention on the

ground in Syria or anywhere in the Arab world again — and the U.S. public would not support it — I find myself hoping my analysis is wrong and that Syrians will surprise us by finding their own way, with just arms and diplomatic assistance, to a better political future. I know columnists are supposed to pound the table and declaim what is necessary. But when you believe that what is necessary, an outside midwife for Syria, is impossible, you need to say so. I think those who have been advocating a more activist U.S. intervention in Syria — and excoriating President Obama for not leading that — are not being realistic about what it would take to create a decent outcome.

Why? In the Middle East, the alternative to bad is not always good. It can be worse. I am awed at the bravery of those Syrian rebels who started this uprising, peacefully, without any arms, against a regime that plays by what I call Hama Rules, which are no rules at all. The Assad regime deliberately killed demonstrators to turn this conflict into a sectarian struggle between the ruling minority Alawite sect, led by the Assad clan, and the country's majority of Sunni Muslims. That's why the opposite of the Assad dictatorship could be the breakup of Syria — as the Alawites retreat to their coastal redoubt — and a permanent civil war.

There are two things that could divert us from that outcome. One is the Iraq alternative, where America went in and decapitated the Saddam regime, occupied the country and forcibly changed it from a minority Sunni-led dictatorship to a majority Shiite-led democracy. Because of both U.S. incompetence and the nature of Iraq, this U.S. intervention triggered a civil war in which all the parties in Iraq — Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds — tested the new balance of power, inflicting enormous casualties on each other and leading, tragically, to ethnic cleansing that rearranged the

country into more homogeneous blocks of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

But the U.S. presence in Iraq contained that civil war and ethnic cleansing from spreading to neighboring states. And once that civil war burned itself out — and all sides were exhausted and more separated — the U.S. successfully brokered a new Constitution and power-sharing deal in Iraq, with the Shiites enjoying majority rule, the Sunnis out of power but not powerless, and the Kurds securing semi-autonomy. The cost of this transition in lives and money was huge, and even today Iraq is not a stable or healthy democracy. But it has a chance, and it's now up to Iraqis.

Since it is highly unlikely that an armed, feared and trusted midwife will dare enter the fray in Syria, the rebels on the ground there will have to do it themselves. Given Syria's fractured society, that will not be easy — unless there is a surprise. A surprise would be the disparate Syrian opposition groups congealing into a united political front — maybe with the help of U.S., Turkish and Saudi intelligence officers on the ground — and this new front reaching out to moderate Alawites and Christians who supported the Assads out of fear and agreeing to build a new order together that protects majority and minority rights. It would be wonderful to see the tyrannical Assad-Russia-Iran-Hezbollah axis replaced by a democratizing Syria, not a chaotic Syria.

But color me dubious. The 20 percent of Syrians who are pro-Assad Alawites or Christians will be terrified of the new Sunni Muslim majority, with its Muslim Brotherhood component, and this Sunni Muslim majority has suffered such brutality from this regime that reconciliation will be difficult, especially with each passing day of bloodshed. Without an external midwife or a Syrian Mandela, the fires of conflict could burn for a long time. I hope I am surprised.

Kurdish worries drag Turkey deeper into Syria war

By Peter Apps and Daren Butler

LONDON/ISTANBUL (Reuters) - - Turkey may be some way from acting on Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's threat to strike Kurdish separatists in Syria, but week by week it finds itself sucked ever further into its neighbor's worsening war.

The shooting down of a Turkish reconnaissance jet last month was seen by many as a turning point, prompting Ankara to join Saudi Arabia at Qatar in semi-covert support for the Free Syrian Army fighting against President Bashar al-Assad.

On Friday, Reuters revealed the existence of a secret Turkish operations centre where it worked with the two Gulf states to provide aid and weaponry to the rebels.

For most foreign powers, events in Syria's Kurdish provinces are largely seen a sideshow compared Assad's battle to survive. But Erdogan's comments on Thursday made it clear that Turkey is alarmed by worries over Kurdish PKK rebels taking advantage of the chaos.

The Turkish leader - once a friend to his Syrian counterpart who helped to rehabilitate Assad on the international stage, but now apparently an increasingly implacable foe - accused Damascus of allocating five provinces to the PKK.

Both Ankara and most Western powers view the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as a terrorist group, blaming it for a long-running conflict that has killed some 40,000 people since it took up arms in 1984. Turkey regularly strikes PKK bases in Iraq's northern self-ruled Kurdish enclave, and Erdogan made it clear the same option was being discussed for Syria.

"We will not allow a terrorist group to establish camps in northern Syria and Turkey," he told a news conference before travelling to London for the opening of the Olympics. "If there is a step which needs to be taken against the terrorist group, we will definitely take this step."

Rising numbers of refugees crossing the border could put further pressure on Turkey. If, as many expect, Assad's forces target the partially rebel-held city of Aleppo in the coming days, numbers could soar. Turkey has already closed its borders to commercial traffic but says it will allow

fleeing civilians through.

Whatever might happen on the Kurdish front, a senior Turkish official speaking on condition of anonymity said support for the rebels was set to continue - although clear caution remains.

"Naturally we are watching developments in the Kurdish region, but Ankara will not give up on its support for the whole revolution because something has happened in the Kurdish region," he said.

"We have been saying from the start, we do not think it is right to impose a regime from outside... The Syrian people must decide its own future."

The official declined to comment on what Turkey might do if the PKK established itself in the region.

CROSSING RED LINES

What Turkey is desperate to avoid is a scenario in which Kurdish parts of Syria quietly break away from the rest as the government, rooted in Assad's Alawite minority sect, slugs it out with the predominantly Sunni Muslim opposition.

"Any area which serves as a potential haven for the PKK or its affiliated groups poses a direct threat to Turkish security and Ankara's jingoistic rhetoric should be judged in this context," says Anthony Skinner, head of the Middle East practice at UK-based security consultancy Maplecroft.

"Any government which allows the PKK to set up training camps represents a red line for Ankara.... Ankara is again warning Damascus not to cross Turkey."

But if it is to take military action, Turkey's options are somewhat limited. Turkey might have the largest military in the region, but a large-scale ground incursion is seen as unlikely for now.

An airstrike on a known PKK facility - or perhaps a Syrian government post believed supporting them - seems a much more probable approach. But while air defenses over Kurdish areas are seen as a much less sophisticated than those along the coast, the loss of one Turkish jet already points to the dangers of entering Syrian airspace.

"If Turkey could prove that there was an attack coming out of Syria against Turkey, then it could launch an air strike, if it could identify a specific PKK camp in Syria," said Istanbul-based security expert Gareth

Jenkins. "The problem is there would inevitably be civilian casualties because these camps would be put near civilians."

Then, there is the risk of severe retaliation. Earlier this week, Syria's government said that while it would not use chemical weapons against its own people, it might against any foreign intervention.

"Unlike with Iraq, attacks in Syria can very likely draw Turkey into a prolonged military confrontation with the Assad regime, which has a formidable military and the political will to respond," says Hayat Alvi, lecturer in Middle Eastern politics at the US Naval War College. "Syria and Turkey are both heightening the rhetoric, but it would be a huge gamble for both sides to engage in military confrontation."

Turkish leaders have long regretted the way in which northern Iraqi Kurdistan effectively seceded after the 1991 Gulf War. At worst, Turkey now fears Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish areas might try to come together to form a larger Kurdistan - an entity that might yearn for swathes of Turkish territory.

SIMPLY SABRE RATTLING?

Already, commentators in Turkish newspapers express growing concern that that is exactly what is happening. What the PKK may end up running in parts of Syria, they say, may not just be assorted training camps but a de facto Kurdish state.

The image of PKK members directing traffic and performing other civic duties, some Turks worry, could help swell its support both amongst Kurds and more broadly. At the very least, the PKK would probably have access to both new recruits and some of the weaponry made available by Syria's wider and fast-growing conflict.

"The recent developments could provide the PKK with significant military opportunities. If the government doesn't take any precautions and wastes this most precious time, Turkey will face serious security problems," Nihat Ali Ozcan, a security analyst at the Ankara-based think tank TEPAV, wrote in Hurriyet Daily News.

"The PKK wants to harvest the political opportunities these military advantages would provide, will rise up and be more aggressive about reaching its aims."

Exactly how much support Syria might be giving Kurdish separatists is far from clear, although some Syrian opposition figures accused the PKK's local partners, the PYD, of acting as enforcers for Assad.

Under both Assad and his father, Hafez, Turkish accusations of Syrian backing for the PKK were points of contention and occasionally led to threats of outright conflict.

➤ In 1998, Turkey moved tanks to the border and explicitly threatened to send them into Syria if Damascus did not expel PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, at the time sheltering in Syria. Hafez al-Assad took the threat seriously enough to evict Ocalan - who was shortly afterwards captured in Kenya by Turkish forces and probable US

support.

Some kind of at least tacit agreement from Washington might still be needed for the Turks to be willing to take action.

"The Turks have been going for a gold medal when it comes to sabre rattling," says David Lea, regional analyst for Control Risks, a consultancy firm.

"But someone - most likely the Americans - has been sitting on their tail. I don't think the Turks would do anything unless they knew the Americans were with them. They want to act, but they don't have any good options. It's a microcosm of the whole Syria situation." □

The Arab Spring has transformed into the Kurdish Spring

Ertuğrul Özkök

Our Foreign Minister is reported to be "looking for a place for Bashar al-Assad."

You know what, while he is looking for a place, let us, ourselves, look for a new place for Turkey.

We may or may not support our country's Syrian policy. That does not matter in the least. We are all aware of the picture in front us, aren't we?

We have a 1,200 km long Kurdish border

ONE:

Only one week ago, we had a 400-kilometer "Kurdish border." Now, 800 kilometers have been added to this.

Friends, this is the new geopolitical reality that has been drawn by "our strategic depth":

As of today, we have a 1,200 kilometer long Kurdish border.

We could not manage 400 km, could we manage 1,200 km?

TWO:

We should consider this.

We could not manage a 400 kilometer Kurdish border. How are we going to manage 1,200 kilometers? We are awaiting an "in depth" response to that.

Arabs are fighting, Kurds are winning

THREE:

Are you aware, the "Arab Spring" that we fervently support has completely transformed into a "Kurdish Spring"?

There is a strange situation both in Iraq and in Syria: Arabs are fighting each other, people are dying.

The Kurds are taking one more step on their path to an independent state. Besides, they are able to achieve this without firing one bullet, without losing one soul.

Here you go, this is true strategic depth.

FOUR:

On the other hand, the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is fighting and losing lives, but is not able to win.

FIVE:

There is another weird situation present:

In Turkey, the PKK is firing bullets in the name of Kurds but it has not gained anything up to today.

Let's stop a minute.

Who can guarantee that the "Kurdish Spring" that has arrived in the Arab countries will not one day also arrive in Turkey?

Don't mention Foreign Minister Davutoğlu.

It is enough if he keeps a distance.

The coming era cannot be entrusted to the fantasies of an academic

* This de facto situation achieved by Kurds in two countries will involuntarily turn eyes to the Kurds in Turkey.

* If one day in the future an intense "Kurdish Spring charge" is directed in Turkey, how are we going to respond to this?

* By firing bullets?

* Or by a policy that would suit a democratic country?

What happens if an Alevi/Christian massacre starts in Syria?

The situation in the areas under the control of the opposition in Syria is far from pleasant.

We hear that such creepy slogans as: "Christians to Lebanon, Alevis to the coffin" are being chanted in those areas.

Concrete information is emerging that Christians are being badly mistreated.

What will Turkey's stance be if Sunnis attempted a massacre tomorrow?

Are we going to request the Sunni Arabs to "act with decisiveness"?

Look at the map to see the photograph

RESULT:

From now on we have a 1,200 kilometer long border with the Kurds.

If you look at the map, you will see another reality.

On this side of the border, at least 800 to 900 kilometers long, the Kurdish population of Turkey is residing.

This means:

The "Kurdish Spring" has arrived at our border.

To counter a "spring charge" launched by Kurds, based on the de facto situation in the two neighboring countries, we should respond with a serious policy, one that is backed by the whole of Turkey, not by the fantasies of an academic.

I might have oversimplified the matter, but the realities facing us are that simple...

May God save Turkey from the after-shocks of "strategic depth"...

Ertuğrul Özkök is a columnist for daily *Hürriyet*, in which this piece was published on July 26. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

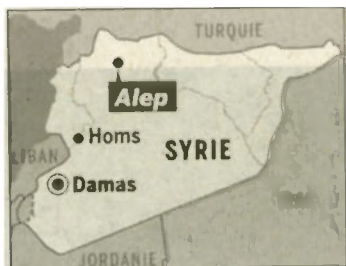
Le régime syrien privilégie à nouveau les bombardements

Combien de temps pourront-ils résister ? Retranchés dans quelques quartiers d'Alep, la deuxième ville de Syrie, à 350 km au nord de Damas, les insurgés se battent pied à pied pour maintenir leur position. Lundi 30 juillet au matin, une source sécuritaire syrienne assurait que le secteur de Salaheddine, au sud-ouest d'Alep, où se concentre le plus grand nombre de combattants rebelles, avait été repris par le régime. L'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) prétendait de son côté que ce quartier demeure sous son contrôle. Deux allégations impossibles à vérifier de source indépendante, compte tenu des entraves posées par Damas au travail des journalistes.

Ce que l'on sait, c'est que les rebelles se défendent avec un arsenal rudimentaire, composé essentiellement de kalachnikov et de lance-roquettes RPG, contre un ennemi en grande partie invisible. Fidèles à la tactique qu'elles avaient testée lors du siège de Homs, au mois de février, les forces régulières ont entrepris de pilonner les secteurs dont les rebelles se sont emparés il y a une semaine. Par tanks, par hélicoptères et même par chasseurs bombardiers MIG. Plutôt que de se lancer dans un combat de rue, qui ferait l'affaire de ses adversaires, rompus à la guérilla, l'armée loyaliste a choisi – pour l'instant au moins – de les matraquer à distance, en usant de sa puissance de feu.

Outre Salaheddine, bombardé de façon métronomique, le quartier de Sakhour, dans l'est d'Alep, a été mitraillé par hélicoptères. De violents affrontements se sont aussi déroulés autour du siège des services de renseignement de l'armée de l'air dans le quartier d'Al-Zahira, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). D'après cette ONG basé à Londres, qui effectue un décompte quotidien des victimes, 67 personnes ont été tuées dimanche à travers toute la Syrie. Samedi, date du début de la contre-offensive du régime à Alep, elle avait recensé 26 morts dans cette ville et 190 dans l'ensemble du pays.

Conscient que le rapport de forces est déséquilibré et que les mutins d'Alep ne sauraient résis-



SUPERFICIE DE LA VILLE

190 km²
Soit 2 fois la superficie de Paris intra-muros

NOMBRE D'HABITANTS AVANT LES AFRONTEMENTS

2,5 millions
La ville la plus peuplée du pays

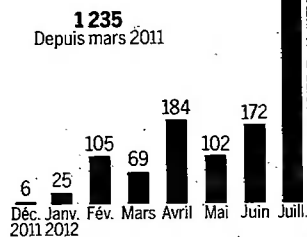


La vieille ville a été classée au Patrimoine mondial de l'humanité par l'Unesco en 1986

NOMBRE DE MORTS À ALEP

485
9^e ville la plus touchée du pays, depuis mars 2011

NOMBRE DE MORTS DANS LA PROVINCE D'ALEP



FORCES ARMÉES DU RÉGIME

300 000 (en 2011), dont **50 000** soldats d'élite

4 950 chars

555 avions dont **300** chasseurs

36 hélicoptères d'attaque

SOURCES : GRAFIC NEWS, SYRIANSHUHADA, AFP, « LE MONDE »

ter longtemps à la machine de guerre syrienne, le président du Conseil national syrien (CNS) a exhorté ses alliés arabes et occidentaux à livrer à l'ASL des armes plus

Le chef de l'opposition syrienne en visite dans le Kurdistan irakien

ERBIL. Le président du Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale coalition de l'opposition, Abdelbasset Sayda, effectue une visite dans le Kurdistan irakien afin de tenter de convaincre les dirigeants kurdes irakiens de rejoindre son organisation, a indiqué, dimanche 29 juillet, un responsable kurde syrien. « Abdelbasset Sayda est arrivé à Erbil (nord de l'Irak) et doit rencontrer le président de la région (autonome) du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, et d'autres dirigeants kurdes » lundi, a déclaré à l'AFP un responsable du Conseil national kurde (CNK), qui regroupe des partis kurdes syriens.

Le Conseil suprême kurde, qui comprend le Conseil national kurde et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), émanation du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), une formation syrienne proche des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, participera à la rencontre. Le Conseil national kurde est proche de M. Barzani et du président irakien Jalal Talabani, tandis que le CPKO est proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui a établi des bases dans la région autonome du Kurdistan dans le nord de l'Irak.

Quelque 2 millions de Kurdes vivent en Syrie et M. Sayda lui-même est kurde. – (AFP) ■

performantes que celles dont ils disposent actuellement, notamment des lance-roquettes sol-air. « Nous voulons des armes capables d'arrêter les chars et les avions de combat, a déclaré Abdelbasset Sayda. Il faut que les Syriens puissent se défendre contre la machine à tuer. »

Dans un communiqué diffusé dimanche, le CNS a aussi réclamé une réunion d'urgence du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, de façon à prévenir le « massacre » que les autorités syriennes s'apprentent, selon lui, à commettre à Alep. Il a réitéré, une nouvelle fois, son appel à « imposer une zone d'exclusion aérienne et à instaurer des zones sécurisées pour quelque deux millions de déplacés ».

Le quotidien pro-gouvernemental Al-Watan affirmait de son côté que « l'armée syrienne a commencé une opération très délicate à Alep pour (...) faire régner l'autorité de la loi et libérer les Alepains des terroristes envoyés de différentes régions du monde pour faire tomber l'Etat ».

« Au bout du compte, le régime d'Assad creuse sa propre tombe »

Leon Panetta
secrétaire à la défense américain

Une fuite en avant dans la répression qu'a dénoncée le secrétaire à la défense américain, Léon Panetta. « Alep constitue un nouvel exemple tragique de la violence aveugle à laquelle a recouru le régime d'Assad contre son propre peuple », a déclaré le patron du Pentagone, à bord d'un avion qui l'emmenait en Tunisie, première étape d'une tournée qui doit également le mener en Israël et en Jordanie. « Au bout du compte, il creuse sa propre tombe », a-t-il ajouté.

Depuis Dubaï, où il se trouve, Abdelbasset Sayda a également annoncé la tenue prochaine de consultations sur la formation d'un gouvernement de transition, chargé d'organiser des élections libres, une fois le régime tombé. Une équipe qui, dans son esprit, pourrait compter quelques membres du pouvoir en place.

« Il y a des personnes du régime actuel qui n'ont pas de sang sur les mains et qui n'ont pas été impliquées dans les grandes affaires de corruption », a déclaré M. Sayda. Nous allons en discuter avec d'autres partis, mais on devrait aboutir à un consensus. Le chef du CNS a néanmoins rejeté l'idée de confier la direction de cet exécutif transitoire à Manaf Tlass, un général autrefois proche de Bachar Al-Assad et aujourd'hui réfugié à Paris. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

POLITIQUE | COMMUNAUTÉ KURDE

Syrie : la crainte d'une « aventure » turque

La menace d'Ankara de représailles dans le nord de la Syrie inquiète la communauté kurde, qui a pris le contrôle de cinq régions frontalières.

Les menaces du Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan de poursuivre le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, autonomistes kurdes turcs, considérés comme « terroristes » par Ankara) jusqu'en Syrie inquiètent vivement la communauté kurde. Selon Ankara, les rebelles kurdes profiteraient des positions de leurs voisins syriens pour s'y réfugier et continuer leurs actions de guérilla. Mais ces déclarations et la perspective de voir l'armée passer la frontière font ressurgir chez les Kurdes la crainte de massacres.

En déplacement à Thionville pour des raisons culturelles, le maire kurde de la ville de Sur, au sud-est de la Turquie, Abdullah Demirbas, a qualifié ces projets d'« aventure » qui ne servirait pas les intérêts de la Turquie.

Face à une centaine de représentants de la communauté kurde de Moselle, cet élu du BDP (Parti de la paix et de la démocratie) a largement commenté l'actualité turque mais aussi syrienne, après la prise de contrôle, des mains du régime Baas, de cinq régions frontalières par les Kurdes. L'émergence de cette nouvelle région autonome aux frontières de la Turquie, après celle du Kurdistan irakien, risque d'engendrer de vives réactions.

« Un bel exemple »

« En Syrie, les Kurdes revendiquent leur autonomie mais pas d'indépendance », p récise pourtant Abdullah Demirbas. « Ils ne sont pas séparatistes, ils veulent une constitution démoc-



Le maire kurde de la ville de Sur, au sud-est de la Turquie, Abdullah Demirbas (qui tient le tapis à gauche) a rencontré il y a peu le maire de Thionville, Bertrand Mertz (à droite) et a attiré l'attention sur la situation des Kurdes en Syrie. Photo RL

ratique qui leur garantit des droits en tant que peuple. Une intervention de la Turquie serait injuste car il n'y a pas de danger pour la population syrienne. La volonté du peuple doit être respectée. » Aussi, il appelle la communauté internationale à reconnaître ces nouvelles autonomies. « C'est un bel exemple pour le peuple kurde qui aspire à être reconnu. Il y aurait un impact certain en Turquie. Malheureusement, le pouvoir ne veut pas de démocratie. »

Selon le BDP, il y aurait actuellement huit mille prisonniers politiques kurdes en Turquie. « Des maires, des députés, des conseillers généraux, des académiciens et des intellectuels sont emprisonnés », détaille Abdullah Demirbas. « Sur la scène internationale, Ankara assure mettre tout en œuvre pour régler le problème kurde, mais dans les faits, la Turquie fait exactement l'inverse ».

Emprisonné durant deux ans pour « crime de langue » après avoir édité des textes en kurde dans sa ville, Abdullah Demirbas a été libéré pour raison de santé. « Nous n'avons pas le droit de nous exprimer. Ces pressions font que la jeunesse se radicalise et nous ne parvenons plus à la canaliser. Depuis le début des procès, deux mille jeunes ont rejoint le PKK et nous craignons pour leurs vies. »

Olivier SIMON.



Le Kurdistan irakien a entraîné des Kurdes syriens (haut responsable)

Erbil (Irak), 31 juillet 2012 (AFP)

LES FORCES KURDES irakiennes ont donné un entraînement de base aux Kurdes syriens afin de "combler une éventuelle brèche dans la sécurité" en cas de chute du régime de Bachar al-Assad, a indiqué mardi un haut responsable du parti du président de la région autonome du Kurdistan.

Un "très petit" nombre de jeunes Kurdes syriens "a reçu un entraînement de base dans les camps de la région afin de combler une éventuelle brèche dans la sécurité après la chute du régime syrien", a déclaré à l'AFP Hayman Hawrami, responsable des relations extérieures du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK).

"Nous, au PDK et au sein du gouvernement de la région, n'interférons pas dans les affaires syriennes, et nous n'imposons aucune équation politique concernant la situation des Kurdes en Syrie", a-t-il ajouté.

"Mais nous soutenons l'unité des Kurdes en Syrie, afin qu'ils soient un soutien majeur de l'opposition syrienne et un soutien majeur au changement positif en Syrie", a précisé M. Hawrami.

Les deux principaux blocs kurdes syriens d'opposition -- le Conseil national kurde, qui regroupe une douzaine de partis traditionnels kurdes syriens, et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO) -- ontsigné à Erbil le 11 juillet un accord pour unifier leurs rangs, sous le parrainage du président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani.

"Nous, au PDK, suivons les affaires syriennes, parce qu'il y a plus de deux millions de Kurdes en Syrie", a souligné M. Hawrami.

Cette déclaration intervient alors que le président du Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale coalition de l'opposition, Abdel Basset Sayda, est en visite au Kurdistan irakien.

Selon une ONG syrienne, plus de 20.000 personnes ont été tuées en 16 mois de révolte en Syrie.○

Irak. Les troupes kurdes empêchent l'armée d'atteindre la frontière syrienne

Des troupes du Kurdistan irakien ont empêché des soldats de l'armée irakienne de rejoindre un point de passage informel avec la Syrie situé dans une zone que se disputent la région autonome et le gouvernement irakien, ont annoncé les autorités kurdes vendredi.

Des troupes irakiennes envoyées par Bagdad ont tenté mercredi « de se rendre de Rabiya (dans la province de Ninive) vers la région de Zimar, mais les peshmergas (troupes kurdes) les en ont empêché », a indiqué Jabbar Yawar, secrétaire général du ministère des peshmergas.

Protection de la frontière syrienne

L'armée irakienne comptait se déployer à un point de passage informel à Fichkhabour, dans la région de Zimar, contrôlée par les peshmergas depuis 1992, mais que se disputent le Kurdistan



irakien et le gouvernement central. Selon Jabbar Yawar, les soldats irakiens étaient censés protéger le côté irakien de la frontière avec la Syrie.

L'ASL contrôle les postes-frontières

Les autorités irakiennes ont récemment

déployé des troupes supplémentaires à leur frontière avec la Syrie, pays en proie à un mouvement de contestation réprimé dans le sang. L'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), formée en majorité de déserteurs et de civils armés, contrôle l'un des trois postes-frontières avec l'Irak.

Des relations tendues

L'arrivée des soldats irakiens « n'avait pas été préparée et il s'agit là de territoires disputés », a expliqué Jabbar Yawar. « Cette région n'a pas besoin de troupes supplémentaires. Ce sont des zones sûres et stables ». Les relations entre le gouvernement irakien et les autorités du Kurdistan, une région riche en pétrole, sont au plus bas depuis plusieurs mois en raison notamment de profonds différends sur le dossier des hydrocarbures. □



Total se lance au Kurdistan irakien et suscite la fureur de Bagdad

PARIS, 31 juillet 2012 (AFP)

LE GÉANT PÉTROLIER français Total a mis un pied mardi dans l'exploration pétrolière au Kurdistan irakien, s'exposant aux représailles immédiatement promises par Bagdad, en conflit avec la turbulente région autonome sur l'exploitation des hydrocarbures.

La troisième compagnie pétrolière européenne a annoncé l'acquisition auprès de l'américain Marathon Oil de 35% de deux permis d'exploration, couvrant des superficies respectives de 705 et 424 kilomètres carrés. Le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan détient lui-même 20% de ces deux blocs.

De facto, Total s'est lancé dans un bras de fer avec Bagdad, qui entretient des relations exécrables avec la province autonome, à l'image de ses rivaux américains Chevron et ExxonMobil désormais en froid avec le gouvernement central irakien.

Ce dernier n'a pas tardé à réagir. "Nous considérons ce contrat illégal et anticonstitutionnel, et nous traiterons cette compagnie comme nous avons traité celles qui violent la législation irakienne", a déclaré un porte-parole du vice-Premier ministre irakien chargé de l'Énergie, Hussein Chahristani.

En réaction, un conseiller du ministre des Ressources naturelles du Kurdistan a réaffirmé que la région était dans son bon droit.

En juin, le gouvernement irakien avait prévenu les compagnies françaises que tout contrat avec Bagdad serait annulé si elles signaient d'autres contrats avec des autorités locales ou régionales.

Dans le même esprit, il a annoncé la semaine dernière que Chevron ne pourrait plus travailler en Irak, en dehors du Kurdistan, car le géant pétrolier américain a acquis sans son approbation deux permis pétroliers dans la région autonome. Bagdad a aussi menacé ExxonMobil de représailles similaires.

Les relations entre Bagdad et les autorités du Kurdistan sont au plus bas

depuis plusieurs mois en raison de différends sur le dossier stratégique des hydrocarbures.

Conditions plus alléchantes

En effet, les contrats de partage de production proposés par le Kurdistan sont beaucoup plus lucratifs que les contrats de service du gouvernement fédéral, qui offrent un prix fixe par baril de brut.

Du coup, les compagnies pétrolières sont de plus en plus tentées de passer outre l'ire de Bagdad et d'aller travailler dans le nord du pays. Total, tout en réaffirmant la souveraineté de l'Irak sur la région autonome, avait reconnu il y a plusieurs mois négocier une entrée au Kurdistan.

"Les conditions contractuelles y sont meilleures, donc c'est peut-être un petit message à passer sur l'ensemble du pays", avait lancé son PDG Christophe de Margerie en février. "Beaucoup d'entreprises investissent au Kurdistan irakien, et je ne vois pas pourquoi Total ne pourrait pas le faire", avait-il renchéri le mois suivant.

Total a cherché l'apaisement mardi en réaffirmant dans son communiqué "son engagement de contribuer au développement du secteur pétrolier irakien et investir dans de nouveaux projets".

Cet accord, qui risque d'ouvrir un nouveau chapitre dans les relations entre Total et l'Irak, marque un retour aux sources pour le groupe français.

Son ancêtre, la Compagnie française des pétroles (CFP), avait été créée dans les années 1920 pour prendre part à l'extraction pétrolière en Irak, suite à la découverte d'un gisement près de Kirkouk, ville du nord du pays toujours objet d'un conflit de souveraineté entre Bagdad et les Kurdes.

La CFP dut quitter le pays en 1972, suite à la nationalisation du secteur pétrolier. Depuis le renversement de Saddam Hussein, Total était revenu par la petite porte, en remportant en 2009 un appel d'offres pour le développement et l'exploitation du gisement de Halfaya, dans le sud du pays, dans le cadre d'un consortium avec des compagnies asiatiques. Un contrat qui pourrait être menacé par l'incursion de Total côté kurde. □

Attacking Kurdish militants in Syria: Dangerous adventure for Turkey

Analysts warn Turkish attack of Syrian Kurds will further complicate Syria's deadly conflict, volatile regional situation.

Middle East Online

By Nicolas Cheviron - ISTANBUL

Turkey this week cranked up its already-heated rhetoric against Kurdish militants in northern Syria, saying it would not hesitate to go after PKK fighters, just as it has in northern Iraq.

Analysts warn such a move would be dangerous for Turkey and further complicate Syria's deadly conflict and the volatile regional situation.

"If you implement a hot pursuit against the PKK militias in northern Syria, the government in Syria will react very differently from the Iraqi government," Osman Bahadır Dincer of the Ankara-based USAK thinktank said.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday said it was a "given" that Turkish troops would pursue fleeing Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants inside Syria if they struck Turkey.

The PKK, listed as a terrorist organisation by Ankara and by much of the international community, took up arms in Kurdish-majority southeastern Turkey in 1984, sparking a conflict that has claimed some 45,000 lives.

Turkey regularly bombs suspected Kurdish rebel hideouts in northern Iraq, with both Baghdad and the government in the autonomous Kurdish region forced to accept the military strikes.

Relations between the former close political allies Turkey and Syria have disintegrated as Ankara has lashed out against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's bloody response to the ongoing uprising against his rule, which so far has led to the deaths of about 19,000 people since mid-March 2011.

The relationship soured further after Syria shot down a Turkish jet on June 22.

Though Syria is facing isolation from many Western powers, analysts warn that Turkish military action in Syria risks the wrath of some of the country's powerful allies.

"If Turkey brings soldiers onto Syrian soil by itself and not as part of an international operation, it would be an open provocation to Russia and Iran," said Cengiz Candar of the daily Radikal newspaper.

Hurriyet daily news writer Semih Idiz said any military operation would be doomed to lead Turkey into "new and unwelcome adventures, which will not only ruin the ongoing rapprochement with Kurdish northern Iraq, but also aggravate the Kurdish problem in Turkey."

Analysts say Turkey must stick with diplomacy and work with the region's Arab Sunni tribes, which hold sway over the largely Sunni Kurdish population.

"They have an influence on these people, so if Turkey can



cooperate with these Arab Sunni tribes then we can cut the influence of PKK and PYD on the territory," Dincer said.

The PYD, or Kurdish Democratic Union Party, is a Syrian Kurdish group close to the PKK.

Erdogan on Wednesday accused Assad's regime of allotting five northern Syrian provinces to Kurds and said he would consider creating a military buffer zone on the border between Turkey and Syria.

Hugh Pope of the International Crisis Group said the situation was more complex than Erdogan claimed.

"The fact is that PYD is not controlling all of the situation in northern Syria," he said. "On the ground they are currently working with the other Kurdish groups."

The traditional parties of Syria's Kurds have been largely suspicious of the PYD, particularly following an influx of Kurds from northern Iraq to the area.

But despite the differences, the region's communities signed an accord on July 11, under the sponsorship of Massud Barzani, president of Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Since then, the Kurdish National Council, which groups around a dozen traditional Kurdish Syrian parties, has joined the People's Council of Western Kurdistan, a PYD offshoot, under the banner of the Supreme Kurdish Council.

Ankara could find solutions in the town of Erbil in Iraq's Kurdish region, where officials could use their influence among various Kurdish movements to defuse tensions with Turkey.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is due to head to Erbil next week. ●

Turkish 'Tuscany' is rebel haven

ANTAKYA, TURKEY

Syrian insurgents strain a once-peaceful region beloved by tourists

BY JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

People here call it Tuscany with minarets.

Turkey's southeastern quadrant, along the long Syrian border, is one of its most picturesque, where olive groves dot the rolling farmland and the mountains are sluiced by Evian-clear streams. In the mornings, old women come down from the hills to pluck apricots from the market. In the evenings, tourists stroll along the promenades, happily searching for a simit, a bagel-like thing, or a scoop of ice cream.

But now it's not unusual to see rebel soldiers limping around the tourist town of Antakya on crutches, and countless apartments across this area have been turned into makeshift combat field clinics, crammed with young men nursing gunshot wounds.

Turkish security services insist they are closely patrolling the border. But medical supplies, material and fighters slide across the frontier every night, making this part of Turkey the most important base for the growing Syrian rebellion.

"The Turkish police are watching the border, but with their eyes closed," said Ahmed al-Debisi, a Syrian pharmacist and opposition member based in Antakya. He's trying to make homemade gas masks out of Coke cans and cotton balls, in case the government of President Bashar al-Assad unleashes chemical weapons, as many fear it might.

Syria's intensifying civil war is turning into a raging national security headache for Turkey. Beyond the strain of sheltering more than 40,000 refugees — which Turkish officials said was initially manageable but is now "creating problems" — a Syrian border post just fell into the hands of a group linked to Al Qaeda and a contingent of Libyan fighters was recently spotted hanging around Antakya's main hospital, waiting for their wounded "brothers."

Another border zone, just inside Syria, was seized by Kurdish militias, leaving the Turks deeply concerned that the rapid unraveling of the Assad government could provide a lift to Kurdish militants in Turkey.

When asked this past week if Turkey would strike inside Syria, should Kurdish militants use Syria as a base, the prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said: "That's not even a matter of discussion; it is a given."

Turkey is eager to flex its diplomatic muscles, but the conflict next door is a major setback. Originally, the Turkish

government tried to played nice with Mr. Assad, asking him to reform. When he refused, Turkey threw open the doors to the Free Syrian Army, the most powerful of Syria's myriad rebel groups, who now operate from a heavily guarded compound inside Turkey near the border. The Turkish government has been trying to delicately steer events inside Syria, pushing the opposition to unite and hosting several high-level meetings with Syrian rebel leaders, but it is fearful of getting dragged deeper in.

"The Turkish people don't want an intervention," said Ilter Turan, an international relations professor at Istanbul's Bilgi University. "This society is enjoying the fruits of economic prosperity and they don't want it destroyed by some external engagement."

In Antakya, the grumbling is growing — on both sides. This town is known for its ruins, its old churches and a museum with a world-class collection of Roman and Byzantine mosaics. The fertile farmland produces cherries, olives, huge and sweet melons. Abdulfecit Ercin, an insurance broker and Antakya native, remembers all the tourist buses that used to wend along the Asi River beneath his office window. But since the war began in Syria, the buses have disappeared.

"In the market," he lamented, "there's no energy, no life."

At the Damascus Restaurant, a Syrian fighter hangout across from Antakya's main hospital, several broad-shouldered men squeezed together on

"The Turkish people don't want an intervention. This society is enjoying the fruits of economic prosperity."

tiny, vinyl-covered stools. One wounded fighter started griping about how he got an X-ray for his back and then was rudely hustled out of the hospital.

"It's been 20 days — 20 days! — and I still haven't heard anything," he said. "We have an expression in Syria: You either host your guest properly, or you don't host them at all."

At that, a local official within earshot pulled him away from the group and said: "What are you talking about? You're eating the bread of this country. Don't complain." A few minutes later, a police van pulled up, disgorging half a dozen beefy Turkish police officers. The Syrian fighters scooted.

In a way, the two neighbors couldn't be more different: Turkey, nationalistic, democratic, orderly and on its way up, versus Syria, a deeply repressive, deeply divided society, plunging into a messy civil war. Many Syrian rebels here, when asked why they defected, began their answer with the same word: "atfal," Arabic for children.

"The government is slaughtering children," said Mulham al-Masri, a former captain in the Syrian Army who



Turkish police officers patrolling Thursday in Antakya, Turkey, a picturesque tourist town near the Syrian border where many rebel fighters and refugees have taken shelter.

defected a few months ago.

He said he had been plotting his escape for weeks, talking to a cousin in the Free Syrian Army via cellphone and then walking out of his barracks one morning, in full uniform, and slipping into a Black Hyundai stuffed with rebels.

One of his comrades, Nabil al-Amouri, also formerly an officer in the Syrian Army, said many other officers wanted to defect but were worried about revenge.

"These guys have killed civilians and

they're now afraid of the families," Mr. Amouri said.

Every night, the border is bustling, along illegal crossing points, of course. Medicine and supplies flow into Syria and bloodied fighters trudge out. It seems the Antakya area is becoming a magnet for foreign jihadists, with the Libyan contingent of around a dozen fighters recently arriving and other foreigners just across the border.

Antakya used to be a hot weekend des-

tinuation for Syrians coming across the border for shopping trips. One tourist operator said he used to get 2,000 customers per day, but now it is down to zero. The operator, who did not want to be identified because he was embarrassed about going bankrupt, said he had just laid off the last of his three secretaries.

"This conflict did not affect us," he said. "It finished us."

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

MONDAY, JULY 30, 2012

Syrian lashes out at rebel supporters

BEIRUT

Foreign minister faults Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey for rising violence

BY KAREEM FAHIM
AND ELLEN BARRY

As fierce fighting continued in the Syrian city of Aleppo and its outskirts on Sunday, the Syrian foreign minister, on a visit to Iran, lashed out at Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, blaming them for the escalation of violence and saying that their backing of armed groups in Syria was blocking a path toward "political dialogue."

His words, an echo of comments made by Russia, Syria's most important ally, reflected the growing pressures on the Syrian government as it fights a mounting and emboldened armed insurgency on several fronts, most cru-

cially in Aleppo, Syria's biggest city.

The minister, Walid al-Moallem, said fighters from Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Tunisia had entered Syria over the Turkish border and he called on Lebanon to help block the infiltration of "terrorists."

"The campaign on the international stage against Syria will not stop," he said. During the news conference, he also said countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were working with Israel in an effort to overthrow the Syrian government.

"Israel is the mastermind of all in this crisis," Mr. Moallem said, according to The Associated Press.

His comments came as the Syrian Army used tanks and artillery to pound opposition strongholds in Aleppo, continuing its barrage on a city that for days has been steeling for an assault, residents and activists said. It remained unclear whether the attack, which activists said was focused mainly on the southwestern neighborhood of Salaheddin, was the beginning of a broader campaign.

In Dubai on Sunday, a leader of a Syrian opposition group appealed for countries opposed to the Syrian government to provide rebels with heavy weapons.

"The rebels are fighting with primitive weapons," Abdelbasset Sida, who heads the Syrian National Council, said in Dubai, according to Reuters. "We want weapons that we can stop tanks and planes with. This is what we want."

The clashes came after days of warnings from the international community about the human toll in Aleppo as President Bashar al-Assad's forces massed on the outskirts of the city. For days, rebel fighters have been pouring into Salaheddin and other neighborhoods in Aleppo, which had remained quiet for much of the uprising that started in March 2011.

Russia joined the chorus on Saturday by warning of tragedy as it chastised the rebels' foreign backers for failing to pressure the opposition to end the violence.

Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, called on Mr. Assad's government to "make the first moves" in ceasing military action. But he also blamed Western countries and some of Syria's neighbors for not putting enough pressure on the armed opposition to stop fighting.

Speaking in Sochi, Russia, Mr. Lavrov said those countries "encourage, support and direct the armed fight against the regime."

Although he did not name any countries, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have been helping the Syrian rebels obtain weapons and American officials say U.S. intelligence officers are operating in southern Turkey to help decide which groups receive the arms.

Russia said this month that it would halt any weapons shipments to the government of Mr. Assad. On Saturday, though, the Russian Foreign Ministry said it would not cooperate with the European Union's effort to block such shipments by searching ships suspected of carrying weapons to Syria. A ministry spokesman said Russia considered the plan to inspect ships a violation of other countries' sovereignty.

In comments to the Interfax news service, Mr. Lavrov dismissed the notion that Russia would grant Mr. Assad asylum, saying it was a rumor started to make Russia look bad.

"There is no such agreement — we are not even thinking about this matter," he said. "It's a provocation by those who want to put all the blame for what's happening in Syria on us and on China, because supposedly we're blocking someone there. We are blocking only one thing: an attempt to allow people to support one side in an internal conflict through a U.N. Security Council resolution."

*Ellen Barry reported from Moscow.
Hwaida Saad contributed reporting.*



A member of the Syrian opposition in Aleppo on Sunday. Rebel leaders appealed for heavy weapons from abroad as the Syrian Army continued its attack on the city.

En Syrie, des djihadistes en embuscade

La présence de militants islamistes internationaux a été signalée en diverses parties du pays.

PROCHE-ORIENT Deux journalistes occidentaux ont été enlevés et détenus pendant une semaine par des djihadistes internationaux en Syrie, avant d'être libérés jeudi dernier par des combattants rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre. John Cantlie, photographe indépendant de nationalité britannique, et Jeroen Oerlemans, un photographe néerlandais, ont été capturés le 19 juillet peu après leur passage clandestin de la frontière turque, dans la région de Bab al-Hawa, dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie. Les deux hommes sont tombés sur le campement d'un important groupe de plusieurs dizaines de combattants islamistes étrangers,

plus vraisemblablement par malchance que du fait d'une quelconque complicité de leurs passeurs.

Les journalistes ont décrit leurs ravisseurs comme des musulmans britanniques d'origine pakistanaise et bengalie. Certains avaient, selon eux, de forts accents londoniens. Ils ne cessaient de faire référence à la charia et au Coran, et affirmaient être sous les ordres d'un émir non identifié. Menacés de mort, les deux journalistes ont tenté de s'enfuir pieds nus du camp où ils étaient retenus en otages. Leurs ravisseurs ont ouvert le feu sur eux, manquant de peu de les tuer. Blessés, l'un à la jambe, l'autre au bras, les deux hommes ont été

sommairement soignés par leurs ravisseurs, qui les ont accusés d'espionnage avant de leur déclarer leur intention d'exiger une rançon en échange de leur libération.

Certains combattants pourraient avoir la nationalité britannique

Après plusieurs jours de captivité, détenus sous étroite surveillance et les yeux bandés, ils ont été finalement libérés par l'intervention de combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre, qui ont investi par la force le campement de ces djihadistes étrangers.

Les yeux bandés

Ramenés en Turquie, où ils ont été soignés, les deux journalistes sont arrivés hier en Grande-Bretagne et aux Pays-Bas. Le Foreign Office enquête sur l'origine de ce groupe de combattants, dont certains pourraient avoir la nationalité britannique. L'enlèvement des deux journalistes vient confirmer les nombreuses informations selon lesquelles la Syrie serait devenue le nouveau terrain de prédilection du djihad international.

Ces militants islamistes internationaux sont manifestement plus intéressés par l'instauration d'un État islamique dans la Syrie de l'après-Bachar que par une quelconque participation aux combats contre l'armée syrienne, rappelant en cela l'attitude d'al-Qaïda dans les dernières années de la guerre contre les Soviétiques en Afghanistan. Leur présence a été signalée dans diverses parties de la Syrie, mais presque jamais dans les opérations de l'Armée syrienne libre. Les forces rebelles sont essentiellement composées de Syriens, qui combattent dans des groupes formés selon des allégeances locales ou familiales. ■

A. J. (A ANTAKIYA)

éditorial

par Pierre Rousselin
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Syrie : l'autre danger



Plus le temps passe, plus la guerre civile qui oppose la rébellion syrienne et la dictature de Bachar el-Assad fait le lit des islamistes.

Ce qui a commencé, en mars 2011, comme un soulèvement pour la liberté est devenu, en un an, une guerre ouverte où les confrontations ethniques se multiplient.

Entre la minorité alaouite, qui est installée depuis quarante ans au pouvoir, et la majorité sunnite, qui fournit les troupes des rebelles, le conflit est devenu implacable. Les autres minorités, chrétienne notamment, sont aussi la cible d'exactions, non parce qu'elles auraient soutenu el-Assad et son clan, mais parce que le conflit alimenté par la répression sanguinaire des forces régulières est en train de démembrer le pays.

Après tout le sang versé, l'effondrement du régime, que l'Occident appelle de ses vœux, pourrait bien ne pas mettre fin aux règlements de comptes.

Dé plus en plus ethnique, le conflit devient aussi de plus en plus religieux. Il attire les djihadistes venus d'ailleurs, peu sensibles à l'aspect nationaliste du combat pour une nouvelle Syrie, mais ravis de trouver un terrain propice où propager leur conception d'un islam radical.

Même s'ils ne forment pas le gros des combattants, ils profitent de la militarisation croissante du soulèvement. L'aide financière et les armes provenant des monarchies du Golfe, dont la générosité est souvent motivée par des impératifs religieux, contribuent à renforcer l'aile islamiste d'une rébellion déjà marquée par l'influence des Frères musulmans, principales victimes du régime el-Assad. Encourager l'insurrection et appeler au départ de Bachar el-Assad, tout en laissant à d'autres le soin d'armer les rebelles, est une politique qui a ses limites.

Il est vrai qu'en l'absence de solution politique, il n'y a guère d'alternative. Mais les islamistes, eux, prospèrent, à mesure que la guerre civile s'enlise dans des combats sans fin.

LE FIGARO

mardi 31 juillet 2012

SYRIE

Une insurrection musulmane conservatrice, plutôt qu'extrémiste



LES RÉVOLUTIONNAIRES syriens partent à l'attaque des chars de Bachar el-Assad en criant «Allah Akbar!», «Allah est grand!». Le même cri leur sert à saluer leurs morts, à célébrer leurs victoires et à rallier leurs troupes. Leurs véhicules sont décorés de drapeaux arborant la Chahada, la profession de foi des musulmans.

Les insurgés syriens sont dans leur immense majorité des musulmans sunnites. Ils assurent qu'il y a dans leurs rangs des chrétiens, et même des alaouites. C'est peut-être vrai, mais on n'en voit pas beaucoup.

Le soulèvement contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad reste avant tout celui de la Syrie musulmane sunnite, pieuse, conservatrice et majoritaire, qui se dresse non seulement contre une dictature particulièrement sanglante, mais aussi contre un clan familial, celui des el-Assad, appartenant à une minorité religieuse schismatique et méprisée : les alaouites.

La défense de l'islam constitue une puissante motivation dans le combat des rebelles. Les histoires de profanations de mosquées par les chabiha, les nervis du régime, spécialistes du viol et du meurtre, sont colportées dans leurs rangs et déclenchent des réactions indignées. Toutes les horreurs, bien réelles, commises par ces écorcheurs, se mêlent dans l'esprit des insurgés aux préjugés stigmatisant cette secte ésotérique apparentée de loin aux ismaéliens et aux chiïtes.

Ferveur religieuse

«Les alaouites ne sont pas des musulmans», assure Ayman H., un jeune professeur d'anglais de la région d'Alep, rallié à la révolution. «Ils ne croient pas en Dieu et ignorent que Mahomet est son Prophète. Ils n'ont aucune morale et leurs femmes vont la tête découverte. Ils boivent de l'alcool et n'observent aucune règle de comportement.»

Le courage des insurgés, qui combattent un ennemi équipé de tanks avec des kalachnikovs et des lance-roquettes, est alimenté par cette ferveur religieuse. On s'échange comme des faire-part les photos et les vidéos des martyrs tombés au combat. «On se fiche de

mourir», disent les rebelles. L'influence des Frères musulmans, si elle n'est pas directe, reste aussi présente dans les rangs du soulèvement. Beaucoup d'insurgés sont les fils de victimes de la grande répression des années 1980 lancée par le père et l'oncle de Bachar el-Assad contre l'organisation islamique.

Pour ces combattants, les mots de «liberté» et de «démocratie» n'ont pas forcément une signification libérale. La liberté? «Mais c'est la liberté de pratiquer notre religion, dit Ayman H., sans que l'on puisse offenser nos croyances. Ce qui existe actuellement en Tunisie, où l'on peut caricaturer le Prophète, est le contraire de la liberté.» «Ouais, on se bat pour la liberté, dit en rigolant un rebelle entré dans Alep, mais parmi nous, plus encore se battent pour la reli-

« On se bat pour la liberté mais parmi nous, plus encore se battent pour la religion »

UN REBELLE ENTRÉ DANS ALEP

gion.» Quant à la démocratie, c'est une revendication qui, dans un pays dont la population est à 70% sunnite, revient à réclamer le pouvoir.

Le régime de Bachar el-Assad s'est empressé de présenter les révolutionnaires comme des islamistes apparentés à al-Qaïda, meilleur moyen de stigmatiser n'importe qui, en Occident comme en Orient.

L'accusation, en tout cas pour le moment, est fautive. Dans les campagnes, la révolte ressemble plutôt à une chouannerie version musulmane, avec des bandes regroupées par villages ou familles étendues, sans beaucoup de contenu idéologique. Ces musulmans conservateurs et pratiquants ne sont pas extrémistes. Ils représentent la majorité silencieuse dans la plupart des pays de la région.

Pour le reste, les combattants de l'insurrection fument comme des cheminées et n'observent pas très rigoureusement le jeûne du ramadan. Les étrangers sont bienvenus, et tout le monde se met en quatre pour être à la hauteur de la réputation d'hospitalité syrienne. Rien à voir avec la paranoïa xénophobe et bornée de certains milieux sunnites irakiens, par exemple.

Prédicateurs itinérants

Mais l'isolement de la rébellion, dépourvue de soutiens extérieurs, la rend vulnérable à des influences d'organisations musulmanes extrémistes venues du Golfe et d'Arabie saoudite.

On aperçoit parfois dans les zones rebelles de mystérieux prédicateurs itinérants saoudiens, Coran en main, qui viennent prêcher une version nettement plus politique et radicale de l'islam que celle pratiquée localement.

L'abrutissement de quarante ans de dictature, où tous les maux du pays étaient attribués par le pouvoir à des complots de l'étranger, occidentaux et sionistes, la déception face à l'inaction des pays occidentaux, États-Unis, France et Grande-Bretagne, constitue un terreau favorable aux idées fondamentalistes.

«Personne ne nous aide. Plus la révolution continuera, plus el-Assad nous tuera, plus nous resterons isolés, plus nous allons voir ces extrémistes prospérer, explique Mohammed K., un volontaire rebelle du Nord. On a déjà dans la région d'Idlib des combattants étrangers venus d'Angleterre ou du Pakistan. Des membres d'al-Qaïda arrivent du monde entier. Ça ne va pas aller en s'améliorant.»

Comme dans une terrible prophétie autoréalisatrice, le régime de Bachar el-Assad, acculé, pourrait bien laisser en héritage après sa chute un pays travaillé en profondeur par des forces extrémistes qu'il prétendait combattre. Et laisser les minorités syriennes qu'il prétendait protéger, chrétiens et alaouites en particulier, aux prises avec un islam dominateur qui pourrait vite mettre fin à la très ancienne et très fragile mosaïque confessionnelle qui constitue l'une des principales richesses de la Syrie. ■

Time to manage the fall of Assad

A breakup of Syria poses a graver threat to the Middle East than Iran's nuclear program.

Vali Nasr

The conflict in Syria has reached a tipping point, but not one that promises a quick end to the fighting. With or without Bashar al-Assad as its leader, Syria now has all the makings of a grim, drawn-out civil war: evenly matched protagonists who are not ready for a cease-fire, and outside powers preoccupied with their own agendas and unable to find common ground.

There is no easy way out of such a stalemated struggle, and this one threatens the stability of the whole Middle East. So the United States and its allies must enlist the cooperation of Mr. Assad's allies — Russia and, especially, Iran — to find a power-sharing arrangement for a post-Assad Syria that all sides can support, however difficult that may be to achieve.

Until now, Washington has seen the developments in Syria as a humiliating strategic defeat for Iran, and it has largely sat on the sidelines, trying to draw diplomatic cooperation from Russia. The administration and its critics alike may think that involving Iran in any resolution to the conflict would throw Tehran a lifeline and set back talks on Iran's nuclear program. But a breakup of Syria — and the chain of events that such a breakup would inevitably set in motion — poses a graver threat to the Middle East and to America's long-run interests in the region than does Iran's nuclear program. And Iran is much more influential with the Assad leadership than is Russia.

If the Syrian conflict explodes outward, everyone will lose: It would spill into Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey.

Lebanon and Iraq in particular are vulnerable; they, too, have sectarian and communal rivalries tied to the Sunni-Alawite struggle for power next door.

In the past week, Mr. Assad has lost control of important parts of the country, and the opposition, buoyed by outside sympathy and support, has built on the momentum of a bombing in Damascus that killed key security aides to the president. The shift in balance is significant, but it is not decisive. Rather, it sets the stage for a protracted conflict that would divide Syria into warring opposition and pro-Assad enclaves.

For now, the Assad government has enough support and firepower to keep fighting, and it shows no sign of giving up. Most members of Syria's Alawite, Christian and Kurdish minorities, along with a slice of its Sunni Arab population, still prefer Mr. Assad to what they fear will follow his fall; together, those groups make up perhaps half of Syria's population, the rest of which is largely Sunni Muslim.

The opposition, meanwhile, is winning territory, but its ranks are divided among some 100 groups with no clear political leadership. Even if Mr. Assad were to step down voluntarily, his Alawite military machine and its sectarian allies are likely to fight on, holding large chunks of territory.

Syria would then fracture, with the fighting deciding who controls what area — a larger version of Lebanon in the 1970s. There would be ethnic cleansing, refugee floods, humanitarian disasters and opportunities for Al Qaeda.

In Lebanon, a decade and a half of carnage was stopped only with the assistance of Syria and its army as peace-

makers. A similar sectarian conflagration plunged Iraq into violence after the U.S. invasion. There, a surge of American troops in 2007 helped stop the fighting. In Syria, there are no foreign troops to play such a role, and little prospect that any will come while the war lasts.

But there is still time to prevent the worst from happening in Syria. It will require difficult decisions and recalculating what is possible. Even in the face of vetoes from Russia and China, which feel that the West overstepped its U.N. mandate in Libya, the United States and its allies are still focusing on inter-

national pressure and support for the opposition to bring down Mr. Assad. That is the wrong goal, because it will not end the fighting.

Instead, the aim of diplomacy should be to devise a post-Assad power-sharing arrangement that all sides could sign on to. That, rather than more pressure on the government and more bickering among the outside powers, could finally persuade Syrians who are still in Mr. Assad's corner to abandon the fight.

There is ground for hope that Russia and Iran would join the bargaining. Both wish to rebuild their damaged prestige in the Arab world, and Iran is concerned about the fate of more than a million Shiite Muslims in Syria. As for the West, Mr. Assad's fall, without a transition plan, would be a Pyrrhic victory — the beginning of a greater bloodletting.

A transition plan also must include Turkey, which has a long border with Syria and the military muscle to influence the conflict.

But the single most important participant would be Iran. It alone has the influence on Mr. Assad and the trust of various parts of his government to get them to buy in to a transition. Currently, Iran is at an impasse: It cannot abandon Mr. Assad, nor can it save him. But intense debates are taking place among its leaders, some of whom have called for ending Iran's unwavering support for Mr. Assad.

Once a transition plan is worked out, it will be important to remember this: No such plan will be credible without committing foreign troops to enforce the cease-fire and protect the defeated minority communities that have backed Mr. Assad. Until the United States and its allies get down to business with Russia and Iran, and get serious about how they will manage Mr. Assad's fall, the conflict will only grow — and so will the threat to the region.

VALI NASR, dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, advised President Obama's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.



PIERRE TORRES/GETTY IMAGES-AFP

Turkey reinforces border against Syrian threat

ANTAKYA, TURKEY

Heavily armed militants control a border area as battles rage in Aleppo

BY SEBNEM ARSU
AND JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

The Turkish military dispatched troops, armored personnel carriers and missile batteries to the Syrian border on Monday, shoring up its defenses against a country that has plunged into turmoil, with some serious potential repercussions for Turkey.

In the past few weeks, as Syria's government has struggled against an inchoate but spirited rebel army, chunks of Syria have fallen into the hands of Kurdish militias while at least one area along Turkey's border is now controlled by jihadist groups dominated by heavily armed foreign fighters.

Television pictures on Monday showed a convoy of Turkish Army trucks chugging down a highway running along the Syrian border. The Anatolia News Agency reported that mobile missile batteries, which were based in Iskenderun, a southern coastal town, were being relocated by rail to Islahiye township along the border.

Turkish officials were quick to describe the border buildup as "routine" but at the same time, one government official said, "it is not possible to expect Turkey to act as if nothing is happening."

Inside Syria, the government and its opponents claimed victories in the embattled city of Aleppo on Monday, a day after the United Nations humanitarian chief warned of a growing crisis in Aleppo, the country's largest city, saying that almost of a tenth of its residents had fled over two days of fighting.

Opposition fighters said that after a pitched battle lasting several hours, they had seized control of a vital checkpoint northwest of the city, freeing up a route for supplies and fighters from the Turkish border.

The combat convulsing Aleppo came as the Syrian government suffered another high-ranking defection from its diplomatic corps, the fourth since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began more than 17 months ago.

In Britain, the Foreign Office announced that the Syrian chargé d'affaires, Khaled al-Ayoubi, had resigned because "he is no longer willing to represent a regime that has committed

such violent and oppressive acts." He joined Syria's top diplomats in Iraq, Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates who have formally dissociated themselves from Mr. Assad's government in the past few weeks.

Turkish officials now fear that Syria could become a beachhead for Kurdish militants bent on wreaking havoc inside Turkey. Officials have indicated they will not hesitate to strike in Syria should Kurdish militants stage attacks against Turkey from there.

The Turkish government considers Kurdish separatists to be its greatest national security threat. Since the 1980s, tens of thousands of people have been killed in a conflict pitting the government against the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., a militant Kurdish group fighting for more autonomy.

But there is another growing problem. Scores and perhaps even hundreds of foreign fighters — from Libya, Algeria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Europe — are streaming into Turkey and using it as a transit point to Syria. Many of the fighters say they are on a jihad, or holy war, with the goal of turning Syria into a purist Islamist state.

On Sunday, a recent refugee from Bab al Hawa, a Syrian border town, said a jihadist group of 200 foreign fighters had seized control of that town. The refugee, a sinewy young man named Ahmed, said the jihadists' plan was to gain control of a specific area, secure it, invite in the Free Syrian Army, the main rebel al-

liance, and then shift to another area to fight government troops.

"These guys are very professional," Ahmed said. "You can tell by the way they move they know what they're doing."

Turkish analysts say they do not expect Turkey to get dragged deep into Syria's conflict because popular sentiment is solidly against that.

"Recent deployments are not at a scale pointing at a major military operation but look more like a reinforcement," said Nihat Ali Ozcan, a terrorism expert with the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey.

But Turkish officials are clear that they do not like the direction in which some of the Kurdish areas of Syria are heading. It seems the Kurdish areas are rapidly getting sucked into the growing proxy war between Syria and Turkey. The two countries used to be allies, but after Mr. Assad refused to compromise with Syria's political opposition, Turkey began backing the Syrian political opposition and helping rebel fighters get weapons.

Recently, Kurdish militants in Syria, apparently with the approval of the Assad government, seized control of a few northern Syrian areas and then raised the P.K.K. flag. This prompted Turkish officials to ask Syrian rebel commanders to take down the flags and hoist the white, green and black banner of the Free Syrian Army.

Turkish officials say they are concerned about the fragmentation of Syria, which has deep sectarian fault lines.

"Taking a separatist line is not good for the country," a senior Turkish official said. "The other groups could start their own agenda."

But analysts say the possibility of a Kurdish stronghold in neighboring Syria is the real worry.



A Turkish tank moving toward Turkey's border with Syria on Monday.

UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

"Recent deployments are not at a scale pointing at a major military operation but look more like a reinforcement."

Kareem Fahim, Rick Gladstone, Hwaida Saad and Dalal Mawad contributed reporting from Beirut, and an employee of the New York Times from Aleppo.

TUESDAY, JULY 31, 2012

Rallying cry in Syria is increasingly religious

BEIRUT

Fighters invoke jihad to attract more foreign money and weapons

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR
AND HWAIDA SAAD

As the uprising in Syria against the government of President Bashar al-Assad grinds on with no resolution in sight, Syrians involved in the armed struggle say it is becoming more radicalized: Homegrown Muslim jihadists, as well as small groups of fighters from Al Qaeda, are taking a more prominent role and demanding a say in running the resistance.

The past few months have witnessed the emergence of larger, more organized and better-armed Syrian militant organizations pushing an agenda based on jihad, the concept that they have a divine mandate to fight. Even less-zealous resistance groups are adopting a pronounced Islamic aura because it attracts more financing.

Idlib Province, the northern Syrian region where resistance fighters control the most territory, is the prime example. In one case there, after jihadists fighting under the black banner of the Prophet Muhammad staged significant attacks against Syrian government targets, the commander of a local rebel military council recently invited them to join. "They are everywhere in Idlib," said a lean, sunburned commander with the Free Syrian Army council in Saraqib, a strategic town on the main highway southwest from Aleppo. "They are becoming stronger, so we didn't want any hostility or tension in our area."

Tension came anyway. The groups demanded to raise the prophet's banner — solid black with "There is no god but God" written in flowing white Arabic calligraphy — during the weekly Friday demonstration. Saraqib prides itself on its newly democratic ways, electing a new town council roughly every two months, and residents put the matter to a vote — the answer was no. The jihadi fighters raised the flag anyway, until a formal compromise allowed for a 20-minute display.

In one sense, the changes on the ground have actually brought closer to reality the Syrian government's early, and easily dismissible, claim that the opposition was being driven by foreign-financed jihadists.

A central reason cited by the United States for limiting support for the resistance to things like communications equipment is that it did not want arms flowing to Islamic radicals. But the flip side is that Salafist groups, or Muslim puritans, now receive most foreign financing.

"A lot of the jihadi discourse has to do with funding," said Peter Harling, the Syria analyst with the International Crisis Group, whose headquarters are in Brussels, adding that it was troubling all the same. "You have secular people and very moderate Islamists who join Salafi groups because they have the weapons and the money. There tends to be more Salafi guys in the way the

groups portray themselves than in the groups on the ground."

But jihad has become a distinctive rallying cry. The commander of the newly unified brigades of the Free Syrian Army fighting in Aleppo was shown Sunday in a YouTube video exhorting men joining the rebellion there by telling them: "Those whose intentions are not for God, they had better stay home, whereas if your intention is for God, then you go for jihad and you gain an afterlife and heaven."

What began as a largely peaceful, secular protest movement in March 2011 first took on a more religious tone late last summer as it shifted into an armed conflict waged by more conservative, more rural Sunni Muslims whose faith was already a focus of their daily lives.

But greater attention has been paid to Qaeda involvement in the uprising since mid-July, when fighters professing allegiance to the terrorist organization appeared during the opposition takeover of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey. In one video, five fighters declared their intention to create an Islamic state. Mainline Qaeda ideology calls for a pan-Islamic caliphate.

Still, there is as yet no significant presence of foreign combatants of any stripe in Syria, fighters and others said. The Saraqib commander estimated there were perhaps 50 Qaeda adherents in all of Idlib, a sprawling northwestern province that borders Turkey. The foreigners included Libyans, Algerians and one Spaniard, he said, adding that he much preferred them over homegrown jihadists. They were both less aggressive and less cagey than the locals, said the commander, interviewed in Turkey and via Skype and declining to be further identified.

An activist helping to organize the Syrian military councils said there were roughly 50,000 fighters all told and that far fewer than 1,000 were foreigners, who often have trouble gaining local support. "If there were 10,000, you would know, and less than 1,000 is nothing," said the activist, Rami, declining for safety reasons to use more than one name.

Not all foreign fighters are jihadists, either. One Libyan-Irish fighter, Mahdi al-Harati, who helped lead the battle for

Secular people and moderate Islamists "join Salafi groups because they have the weapons and the money."

Tripoli in Libya, organized a group of volunteers for Syria, noted Thomas Pierret, a lecturer in contemporary Syrian Islam at the University of Edinburgh. "He is not a jihadi; he sees himself as a Libyan revolutionary there to help the Syrian revolution," Mr. Pierret said.

Fighters, activists and analysts say that jihadi groups are emerging for several reasons. They generally stand apart from the Free Syrian Army, the loose national coalition of local militias made up of army defectors and civilian volunteers. Significantly, most of the money flowing to the Syrian opposition is coming from religious donors in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and elsewhere in the Gulf region whose generosity hinges on Salafi teaching.

Further, as the sectarian flavor of the uprising deepened, pitting the majority Sunni Muslims against the ruling minority, the Alawites, it attracted fighters lured by a larger Muslim cause. Alawites, the president's sect, dominate Syria, but many orthodox Muslims view them as a heretical offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Understanding the military players in the Syrian opposition has become remarkably more difficult in recent months through the proliferation of brigades, battalions and fronts, many bearing religious names. Plus they change all the time, and some have all but disappeared.

But there is a marked trend in videos not displaying the revolutionary banner — Syria's independence flag with a green, white and black stripe and three red stars. "The issue of the flag really is key," Mr. Pierret said. "They are on their way to a more Salafi, jihadi agenda and a rejection of the national framework."

One recent such video, highlighting the storming of a police station near Aleppo, featured a pistol, the Koran and a song about fighting. "The Koran in our hands, we defy our enemy, we sacrifice with our blood for religion" were some of the lyrics.

The commander in Saraqib said that when he invited jihadists into his military council, they rejected several proposed names for the expanded group that included references to Syria. "They consider the entire world the Muslim homeland, so they refused any national, Syrian name," he said.

The attitude prompts grumbling from fighters used to the gentler Islam long prevalent in Syria. Adel, a media activist from Idlib interviewed in Antakya, Turkey, in June, said that "the Islamic current has broken into the heart of this revolution." When a Muslim Brotherhood member joined his group in Idlib, he said, within a week the man demanded that the slogans that they shouted all include "There is no god but God."

"Now there are more religious chants than secular ones," Adel said.

Isolé, Damas cherche le soutien de Téhéran

En visite en Iran, le chef de la diplomatie syrienne a accusé les puissances sunnites d'attiser la violence

A lors que le régime de Bachar Al-Assad lutte pour sa survie en jetant toutes ses forces dans la bataille pour le contrôle d'Alep et de Damas, l'alliance stratégique entre la Syrie et l'Iran reste plus que jamais de mise. Le chef de la diplomatie syrienne, Walid Al-Mouallem, a effectué une visite remarquée à Téhéran, dimanche 29 juillet, au lendemain du début de l'offensive contre les quartiers d'Alep tenus par les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL).

A l'issue d'une entrevue avec son homologue iranien, Ali Akbar Salehi, M. Al-Mouallem a déclaré, à propos des combats en cours : « Toutes les forces antisyriniennes se sont rassemblées à Alep pour lutter contre le gouvernement, et elles seront sans aucun doute vaincues [par l'armée syrienne]. »

Reçu comme un hôte de marque, le diplomate syrien avait également rendez-vous avec Saïd Jalili,

secrétaire du Conseil suprême de la sécurité nationale et homme de confiance du Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, ainsi qu'avec le président du Parlement, Ali Larijani. Il a aussi été reçu par le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, qui a repris à son compte la thèse, développée par les autorités syriennes depuis le début de la crise, en mars 2011, d'un « complot international » d'Israël, des Etats-Unis et de l'OTAN, avec l'aide de pays de la région afin de renverser le régime syrien.

Instructeurs iraniens

L'émissaire syrien est allé plus loin, accusant « le Qatar, l'Arabie saoudite, la Turquie » d'attiser la violence en soutenant les rebelles et en leur fournissant des armes. Cette mise en cause de ces Etats est parfaitement en ligne avec la diplomatie iranienne, actuellement à couteaux tirés avec les pays arabes sunnites au sujet de ses ambitions

nucléaires et de ses prétentions à une hégémonie régionale.

L'Iran, soumis à des sanctions économiques et financières asphyxiantes de la part des Etats-Unis et de l'Europe, a averti, mardi 24 juillet, par l'entremise de son chef d'état-major adjoint, Massoud Jazayeri, que les alliés de la Syrie « ne permettront pas un changement de régime » à Damas.

Une chute du régime Assad ferait perdre à l'Iran son principal soutien dans le monde arabe, depuis l'alliance nouée en 1980, renforcée par un traité de défense mutuelle signé en juin 2006. Elle couperait, par ailleurs, les voies d'approvisionnement entre Téhéran et le Hezbollah, le mouvement islamiste radical qui domine la scène politique et le gouvernement libanais.

Dans ce conflit, qui a pris désormais une dimension clairement régionale, l'Irak est un enjeu pri-

mordial. Son gouvernement, à dominante chiite, est favorable à Bachar Al-Assad. Mais, selon des sources diplomatiques, les Etats-Unis font pression sur Bagdad pour interdire le survol de son territoire aux avions iraniens qui approvisionnent l'Etat syrien en armes (alors que l'Iran est soumis à un embargo de l'ONU sur les exportations d'armes), mais aussi en carburant et en devises.

Une importante délégation économique syrienne, dirigée par le vice-premier ministre, Omar Ghalwanji, et comprenant cinq ministres, avait effectué jeudi une visite en Iran, où elle avait notamment signé un accord pour importer de l'électricité depuis l'Iran vers la Syrie via l'Irak. Selon des témoignages d'insurgés syriens, des instructeurs iraniens seraient également à pied d'œuvre en Syrie, aux côtés de conseillers militaires russes. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Istanbul

Correspondance

Depuis qu'il a découvert en famille le Shahinn Paradise, Mahfoud Saadouni, un Parisien qui travaille dans la finance, le recommande à tous ses amis. Pour le confort cinq étoiles et le parc arboré de cet hôtel-club situé sur la côte turque, à l'ouest d'Antalya. Mais surtout pour sa plage close, son code vestimentaire strict, sa zone réservée aux femmes, sa mosquée et son buffet sans alcool.

Cet hôtel propose à ses clients des vacances « halal » : en accord avec les règles qu'ils s'imposent dans la pratique de leur foi musulmane. « Les gens qui fréquentent ce lieu cherchent la même chose que nous, ce qui garantit une atmosphère saine et familiale », explique M. Saadouni.

Pendant le mois de jeûne de ramadan, qui débute le 20 juillet, le Shahinn Paradise fera le plein. Ouvert en 2000, c'est l'un des plus anciens clubs islamiques de Turquie. A l'époque, ce type d'établissement était observé avec curiosité

En Turquie, de plus en plus d'hôtels se convertissent au tourisme halal

Certains ont des piscines non mixtes, avec port du burkini obligatoire

en Turquie. Mais depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du Parti islam-conservateur de la justice et du développement (AKP), en 2002, et l'émergence d'une nouvelle classe moyenne conservatrice, les mœurs en matière de tourisme ont évolué.

En dix ans, le nombre d'établissements offrant des « vacances alternatives » a été multiplié par dix selon le quotidien *Milliyet*. Le chiffre d'affaires de ces clubs a progressé de 200% en cinq ans. « Il y a une demande croissante pour le tourisme halal en Turquie », constate Teoman Duman, universitaire spécialiste du marketing « musulman ». Il estime que près de 6% de l'offre de logements touristiques en Turquie répond aux critères de ce marché.

La demande est locale, mais aussi en provenance des pays du Golfe ou du Maghreb. Des touristes européens de confession musulmane sont également séduits par ce type

de formule.

Filtrage ultrastrict

« Ce qui m'a motivé à 80%, c'est la piscine ouverte pour les femmes, pour que la mienne puisse prendre un peu le soleil au moins une fois dans l'année. Un filtrage ultrastrict est réalisé à l'entrée, pour éviter les téléphones portables, appareils photo, etc. », témoigne Kevin, un Français musulman venu passer des vacances dans un hôtel près d'Antalya, qui raconte son séjour sur un site Internet communautaire.

Une quarantaine d'hôtels islamiques ont ouvert depuis, là où il en existait cinq avant 2002. La crise économique en Europe y est aussi pour quelque chose. Russes, Britanniques et Allemands sont moins nombreux à venir bronzer sur les côtes turques en période estivale. Tandis que « pour les touristes arabes, l'argent n'est pas un problème, alors qu'avec les Européens... », soupire Ali, qui tient une

boutique dans un quartier touristique d'Istanbul.

Avec 30 millions de touristes par an, le secteur pèse 10% du PNB turc et compte pour environ 7% des emplois dans le pays. L'offre s'adapte à la demande. C'est ainsi que Serafettin Ulukent, un hôtelier de Cesme, sur la côte égéenne, s'est converti au tourisme islamique. Au départ, les premiers clients de son club étaient plutôt des surfeurs allemands qui appréciaient la bière fraîche et les soirées détente, explique ce Turc, musulman non pratiquant.

Un jour, il est venu en aide à un groupe de touristes religieux laissés en rade par leur tour-opérateur. « Les surfeurs étaient sympas, mais ces gens-là avaient vraiment de l'argent », souligne M. Ulukent. Depuis, il dirige le Yeni Meltem, un village vacances, avec piscines séparées pour hommes et femmes et port obligatoire du burkini à la plage. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le Proche-Orient après Assad

Par **GÉRARD
CHALIAND**
Spécialiste des
conflits armés

Une fin programmée du régime dictatorial de Bachar al-Assad approche. Celle-ci, outre le soulèvement d'une partie croissante des populations, est largement due au soutien de la grande majorité de la Ligue arabe, menée par l'Arabie Saoudite, relayée par le Qatar et appuyée sur le plan logistique par la Turquie. L'appui des Etats-Unis en matière d'observation satellite, sans compter des actions plus discrètes de services spécialisés, ainsi que celui de ses alliés européens isolent un régime qui n'est plus soutenu que par la Russie et la Chine.

Ces deux Etats estiment que l'éradication du régime du colonel Muammar al-Kadhafi, menée par les Anglo-Français et piloté par les Etats-Unis, outrepassait le mandat du Conseil de sécurité de

l'ONU et qu'ils ont été floués. La Russie soutient Damas et lui fournit des armes, mais devra tenir compte de l'évolution des rapports de force sur le terrain. Le but de l'opération en cours, sous couvert d'humanitaire, est essentiellement politique. Il s'agit d'affaiblir l'Iran en le privant d'un allié régional essentiel. Par voie de conséquence, le Hezbollah libanais en subira le contrecoup, ce qui ne peut que conforter Israël qui sera l'un

On peut interpréter les événements actuels comme un refoulement du chiisme offensif...

des bénéficiaires des événements en cours.

Sur un plan plus large, on peut interpréter les événements actuels, qui trouvent leur source dans la révolution khomeyniste de 1979, comme un refoulement du chiisme offensif (la contestation populaire à Bahreïn a été discrètement jugulée par Riyad) couronnant le contre-feu sunnite mené depuis lors

par l'Arabie Saoudite, à laquelle la Turquie prête désormais main-forte.

La situation militaire, sans être désespérée pour un régime qui dispose encore de moyens importants et de divisions sûres, s'est graduellement modifiée au profit des factions insurgées avec l'introduction d'armes anti-tanks et de missiles sol-air destinés à neutraliser les hélicoptères de combat. Tandis que le régime s'est efforcé de frapper les villes à très forte majorité sunnite comme Homs, l'insurrection s'est judicieusement attaquée aux bastions urbains de l'Etat baassiste: Damas et Alep avec quelques actions à caractère terroristes particulièrement professionnelles. En revanche, l'utilisation d'armes chimiques paraît improbable parce qu'elle serait suicidaire.

Au sud, la longue frontière avec l'Irak qui jouxte les régions sunnites de ce pays est partiellement contrôlée par l'insurrection. Au nord, les Kurdes, jadis opprimés et déplacés par le régime alaouite, puis récemment courtisés afin

qu'ils restent neutres, ont désormais choisi de s'opposer activement. Le dirigeant du Kurdistan irakien autonome, Massoud Barzani, tenait il y a peu une réunion de conciliation à Erbil entre les différentes factions kurdes de Syrie. Bien que divisées, celles-ci, parmi lesquelles se trouve le PKK (mouvement armé kurde de Turquie), disposent d'armes et contrôlent déjà un pan de territoire jouxtant la Turquie. Ces développements inquiètent Ankara qui vient de masser des troupes à la frontière syrienne.

Les diverses factions politiques syriennes, dont aucune n'est pleinement représentative, sont loin d'avoir une coordination comme le souhaiterait Washington soucieux d'éviter un chaos entre sectes religieuses. La majorité sunnite sera bientôt tentée de tirer vengeance des alaouites et, d'une façon générale, des chrétiens qui ont été les protégés et les alliés de ces derniers. L'exil d'une partie d'entre eux est inévitable. Par ailleurs, les Etats-Unis veulent éviter une désintégration de l'Etat syrien qu'envisageraient peut-être, en dernier ressort, les alaouites majoritaires dans leur réduit montagneux en bordure de

Méditerranée. Certaines factions kurdes évoquent la perspective de l'autonomie d'un Kurdistan.

La dégradation générale de la situation devrait se poursuivre, toujours en zone urbaine, où se joue la partie essentielle

en cours. Les règlements de comptes, dans lesquels les populations civiles vont payer le prix, sont à l'ordre du jour. Le gros des victimes est sans doute à venir. L'agitation diplomatique devient de plus en plus empressée en prévision de la montée prochaine du dernier acte.

La probabilité, elle aussi programmée, d'une intervention extérieure se rapproche. Ce rôle a été dévolu (par la Ligue arabe et les Occidentaux, à défaut de l'aval du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU) à la Turquie voisine, désireuse à la fois de conforter son statut de puissance régionale sunnite majeure et de ne pas laisser se développer à ses frontières une agitation kurde pouvant menacer sa sécurité.

Le dernier acte n'est pas encore joué, mais l'Iran va se retrouver de plus en plus sous pression. Le Liban pourra-t-il éviter d'être directement affecté par les changements en cours? L'Irak chiite, et plus particulièrement le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki, va être de plus en plus isolé. L'opinion publique occidentale, essentiellement informée des péripéties et du décompte des victimes, ne paraît pas se douter qu'elle assiste à une importante recomposition géopolitique de la région.

Derniers ouvrages parus: «l'Impasse afghane», l'Aube 2011 et «la Pointe du couteau (mémoires, tome 1), Flammarion, 2011.