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### IRAQI KURDISTAN: "DIJLA" FORCES AGAINST "HAMRIN", KURDS AND IRAQI ON THE BRINK OF WAR

**N**o sooner has the conflict over hydrocarbons calmed down than a new trial of strength has started between Irbil and Baghdad over the Kurdish regions separated from the Kurdistan Regional Government, whose fate was to have been settled by a referendum in 2007.

At the beginning of November the Kurdistan Region authorities protested at the arrival of Abdulmir Zaidi, commander of the Dijla forces of the Iraqi Army, at Qaratepe, a district where the Kurdish Peshmergas are responsible for ensuring security. Their protests were made public by some members of the Iraqi Parliament, in particular by

Shwan Taha, a member of the Parliamentary Security Commission. The latter considered this a *"breach of the Iraqi Constitution. Security in each region is the responsibility of the Provincial Councils – these movements of the Dijla forces will destabilise the security of this region by upsetting political reality"*.

Indeed, Prime Minister Nuri Maliki suddenly decided to fuse the Ministry of the Interior forces (that he controls) with the Kirkuk and Diyala police forces under the command of the Dijla (Tiger) forces. Since Diyala, as well as Kirkuk, contains several regions with a Kurdish majority population, the Kurds had attacked this fusion of forces as an attempt to

ensure an Iraqi stranglehold over the province despite Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution. The Kurdish governor of Kirkuk Province, Najmaddin Karim, stated that he did not recognise the Dijla forces, or believe in their operational effectiveness.

Far from calming down, Maliki envenomed the discussion still further by an outburst during a televised interview on 6 November *"Kirkuk is an Iraqi province and the Iraqi Army can, under the Constitution, go to Kirkuk, Irbil, Salah adDin and Suleimaniah"*. Yet the Kurdistan Constitution states that the Peshmergas are the only armed forces of Kurdistan and, apart from a brief incursion in 1996, no Iraqi soldiers have set

foot in the three provinces of the Kurdistan Regional Government since 1991. While he was at it, the Prime Minister accused the Kurds of having secured arms “from the former Iraqi Army”, saying that tanks, artillery and rocket launchers were in Kurdish hands while the Iraqi army, according to him, “only had light weapons”. Nuri alMaliki affirmed that he had written proof of this, namely copies of the transactions.

Jabbar Yawar, the General Secretary of the Kurdish Ministry of Defence Forces (Peshmergas) denied these allegations as well as an alleged arms contract with Israel and called on the central government “to observe the Constitution” by arming and financing the Peshmerga troops. Indeed, the maintenance of the Kurdish forces another old source of dispute, like the Oil Law and the sharing of the Federal budget. It is, indeed, hard to imagine that, at such a time when clashes have taken place, Baghdad would allocate a budget to arm the Kurds. On the contrary, the Iraqi Prime Minister demanded that the Peshmergas be placed under Iraqi command — that is be under his personal orders as since the last elections he has not appointed either a Minister of Defence or one of the Interior but runs directly runs all the country’s police, security and defence forces.

However, without waiting for Baghdad’s approval or financing, the training of Kurdish “Hamrin” battalions (named after one of the region’s mountains) was announced as a riposte to the Dijla forces so as to ensure “the defence of Kirkuk”. According to the Kurdish daily *Awene*, Massud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party and Jalal Talabani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan have thus provided themselves with a military command including the Peshmergas (troops), the Asayish

(Intelligence) and the Kirkuk police, following a meeting in Kirkuk on 6 November of Jaafar al-Sheikh Mustafa and his assistant, Anwar al-Haj Othman with the Kurdish officials responsible for the province’s security, to discuss forming the Hamrin forces, their chain of command and their logistics. These forces would be under the command of the Minister for the Peshmergas and his assistant, the PUK’s Asayish will be answerable to the governor of Kirkuk, Dr. Najmaddin Karim, a Kurd close to Jalal Talabani and the police to the Director general of the Kirkuk Police, Jamal Tahir.

Hence in Kirkuk the Dijla forces in no way seem to impress the Kurds, even if on his arrival in Diyala, its Commander ordered that the forces of that province as well as of Kirkuk and Salahaddin should make no move “without his orders”. However Halo Najat, Kirkuk’s security chief (KDP) stated: “they will never see the day when the Peshmergas, the security forces and the police work under their command. This is just the start of another confrontation between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region”.

Ahmed Askari,, who presides the Security Committee of the Kirkuk Provincial Council is also certain that a “new era of confrontation” is beginning and that Iraq is getting further and further from the objectives it had set itself at its liberation — that of breaking with the policies of the former Baath regime. In an interview with the daily *Rudaw*, he even compares the Dijla forces to the commander, Ali Hassan Majid (Chemical Ali), in charge of the *Anfal* operation in Kurdistan — operations for which his cousin, Saddam Hussein, had given him a free hand to settle the Kurdish question. He said: “The Command of the Dijla forces wants to kill two birds

with one stone — indirectly confront the KRG, take full control of the disputed territories and intimidate some of the Arabs in the Province”. Ahmed Askari evokes a “secret agenda” of these forces — that of “driving the Kurdish security forces and the Peshmergas out of Kirkuk”.

In Diyala, the arrival of these battalions is far from being welcome. Talib Mohammad Hassan, who presides the Provincial Council recognises that the security situation in the province was better before their arrival. He also reported the lack of confidence among the Dijla officers, who admitted that they had no real powers of action: “We receive orders from Baghdad but we do not carry them out”.

The bloody clashes that were feared soon took place: on 6 November one person was killed and 13 others injured in a clash between Iraqi troops and PUK forces who were guarding a house belonging to a leading member of the party at Tuz Khormato, a locality inhabited by Kurds, Turcomen and Arabs, which is now in Salahaddin Province but was originally part of Kirkuk until Saddam carved up the provincial and district boundaries.

The next day, Massud Barzani ordered the Peshmergas “to show some restraint in the face of provocations but to be nevertheless ready to face up to any aggressive actions by being fully on the alert”. For his part, Lieutenant-General Abdulamir al-Zaidi, commanding the Dijla forces, stated to AFP that this was not an incident “aimed at the Peshmergas” but the arrest of a person accused of murder and kidnapping.

This growing tension is worrying the United States that, according to a Kurdish diplomatic source cited in a Kuwait daily paper, has

offered to again deploy troops in the disputed territories. According to the same source, Massud Barzani had accepted the American offer while Maliki had rejected it. However, Joe Binden is said to have pointed out to the Iraqi Prime Minister that the clash at Tuz Khurmatu was a breach of the "red line" and that if fighting broke out in Kirkuk the USA would intervene regardless. According to Shafaq News, the Americans are convinced that the troop movements are attributable to Syria and Iraq who want to weaken the influence of Turkey and the Sunni Arab Gulf states in the region through Iraqi military control of Kurdistan. These states broadly support the Syrian rebels as part of an anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian axis.

On 30 November Jalal Talabani, the Kurdish President of Iraq, also condemned the formation of the Dijla forces "that will cause chaos, fear and insecurity" in the country. Ali Musawi, one of Maliki's advisors then challenged the President to find and use constitutional means of dissolving them, recalling that the Prime Minister was "commander in chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces". Other members of Maliki's Dawa Party criticised Talabani's statements. However he is supported by both his own party, the PUK, and Massud Barzani's — as his spokesman, Jaafar Ibrahim, has pointed out: "Jalal Talabani has never been alone but always been supported by Barzani and the KDP. We have sometimes had different points of view, but on vital issues like Article 140 and the problems of Kirkuk the KDP members support Talabani and the PUK".

As well as re-uniting the KDP and the PUK (whereas Talabani had saved Maliki from a vote of no confidence in the Iraqi parliament that Massud Barzani had wanted to put) Baghdad's stub-

bornness has enabled the Kurdish Alliance (KDP + PUK) to secure the support, on this issue, of its own regional opposition, namely the Goran party, the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Left party Komal although, hitherto neither Goran nor the PUK had supported the KDP's efforts to dismiss Maliki from office. Serdar Abdullah, the leader of the Goran group in the Iraqi National Assembly has even remarked ironically that Nuri alMaliki has shown little gratitude to Jalal Talabani who had done all he could to save him from this no confidence vote.

On 20 November reinforcing units of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division of the Iraqi Army, on their way to Kirkuk from Baghdad crossed the Hamrin Mountains and other reinforcements from Tikrit moved towards Tuz Kurmatu while Nuri Maliki issued a warning to the Kurdish forces not to approach the Iraqi Army positions. The next day it was the Peshmerga Command's turn to publicly state that its troops were considering attacking the Iraqis.

"A major battle can break out at any moment", declared Mahmoud Sankawi to the Associated Press. "We are fully in a state of alert. We will never allow any force to threaten Kurdistan's security — we will resist them". According to him, 30 Iraqi tanks had taken up positions 80 Km from Kirkuk while some dozens of others were deployed in the Hamrin Mountains. Some Peshmergas were sent on the 21<sup>st</sup> to the Kurdish district of Khanaqin to prevent any Iraqi incursion

Turkey has also been accused of involvement in this conflict. On 17 November Abdul Salam alMaliki, a member of parliament of Maliki's parliamentary group, had called on the head of the Iraqi government to form a Northern Army

Command to "protect the Kurdistan Region" from Turkish border incursions, on the grounds that the Peshmergas were incapable of ensuring the Province's security.

*"Kurdistan is part of Iraq and it is the duty of the central government to defend its citizens against these continuing Turkish breaches. We think that the Regional Guard forces (Peshmergas) cannot ensure the security of the Region, especially since the Region's government has asked the central government to intervene to put an end to these violations. Everyone must know that the operational training of the Armed forces in the North must be carried out under the authority of Maliki".*

While it is true that, between 2008 and 2009 the KRG had protested about the Turkish Army's incursions to attack the PKK bases in Iraq, the central showed little concern about this at the time. Now that the alliances have switched, it is no longer Irbil that is offended by Turkish military operations. As for a Northern Army Command, the last time that such an armed force took control of Kurdistan was in the reign of Saddam Hussein, when Chemical Ali was given full military powers. It is thus easy to imagine the way such a proposal was received by the Kurds.

The Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Osama alNujaifi (a Sunni Arab) finally undertook a series of talks with the Iraqi and Kurdish political leaders, with the aim of avoiding "a civil war". On 26 November the Minister for the Peshmergas sent a delegation to the Defence Ministry in Baghdad to discuss national security with several senior security officials. On the same day, during a press conference held in Irbil, the Kurdistan Prime Minister, Neçirvan Barzani declared that dialogue, not force, was the key to resolving the problem.

The meetings continued over 27, 28 and 29 November. The Minister for Peshmergas gave the Press a draft agreement with the Iraqi Defence Ministry. However, the Kurds first demand was the dissolution of the Dijla force, which was refused out of hand by Maliki, thus blocking the negotiations. As from 30 November, Jabbar Yawar had to announce the failure of the round tables, laying the responsibility for the failure on the Iraqi Prime Minister who he charged with refusing to carry out the agreement reached between the Kurds and officials of the Iraqi Defence Ministry and accused of never really wanting to resolve the problem.

In a Press Conference given on 1 December, Nuri Maliki warned about the dangers of “*an ethnic war*” which would not be in the interests of Kurds, Arabs or Turcomen. To this Massud Barzani retorted, in his own press conference, that his concerns were for all Iraqis and not only the Kurds and that wishing to deal with political issues with the help of the Army was most undesirable.

The vote on Baghdad’s budgetary allocation to the Kurdistan Region only served to increase tension. While Iraq has increased its 2013 budget (113 billion dinars) the share allocated to the Kurds was to be

reduced by 7%. There has been an agreement of several years standing that the Kurdistan Region would receive 17% of the central budget until a population census was carried out. Following this the central government was to share the money between the provinces in proportion to their populations.

However this census has repeatedly been postponed since 2007, essentially because of the controversy over Kirkuk and Baghdad’s fear (according to the Kurds) that the results would show too high a majority of Kurds in that province — as a result of which there has been no Iraqi census since 1963.

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## SYRIA:

### TOWARDS A KURDISH UNIFIED MILITARY FORCE

**A**t the beginning of the month, the Syrian opposition opted for the complete refounding of the Syrian National Council, increasingly powerless and criticised for its disorganisation and ineffectiveness on both the international level and on the battlefield, where it has no hold.

Supported by the USA, which hoped that this new platform would serve as an interim government, the National Coalition of the Revolution Forces and the Syrian opposition was thus set up on 11 November. It incorporates the Syrian National Council, some independent public figures, the Kurdish National Council, a variety of organisations, union and leagues and the local councils of 14 Syrian towns, making a total of 63 members. Sheikh Moar alKhatib alHasani (Damascus local council) was elected President and Mustafa alSbbagh (Syrian Business Forum) is General Secretary.

Meanwhile, on the battle field, the situation has become increasingly

tense and confused in the Kurdish areas, militias more or less controlled if controllable by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) clashing with those of the Kurdish PYD, the People’s Protection Units (YPG) that are trying to prevent the FSA from entering their areas. The Syrian rebels accuse the PYD of helping the government forces by hindering their movements, either by attacking them on the outskirts of the Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsood quarters that are mainly Kurdish. Some Kurds have demonstrated against the entry of this militia, who then opened fire killing or wounding a dozen people. In reprisal, the YPG announced that they had killed 19 FSA fighters and captured a number of them.

Finally an agreement was reached between the FSA and the YPG and confirmed by a YPG statement of a common fight between its forces and those of the FSA and by a declaration filmed by the FSA and broadcast on Youtube.

However, no sooner had this truce been announced than fighting

broke out at Sere Kanive (Ras alAyn in Arabic) a locality inhabited by Kurds, Arabs and Christians, on the Turkish border. On 9 November militia close to alQaida entered it from Turkey and tried to open another border corridor. The Kurds, for once unanimous, fiercely opposed this incursion by force of arms. The Kurdish National Council immediately called on the rebels to leave the town:

*“The Kurdish Council affirms it is taking part in the revolution to overthrow the totalitarian regime but the Province of Hassaké must remain a safe zone for the thousands of refugees that have fled other regions”.*

The armed militia that invaded Sere Kariye, the Jabhat alNusrat and Shurabat al-Sham are jihadists who make the Kurds and Christians of the region fear the worst. These Islamist groups, moreover, entered the Arab quarters of the town, not the Kurdish ones, which were held by the People’s Protection Committees and the PYD.

The proximity of Serê Kaniyê to the Turkish border could have seemed a protection against the possibility of shelling by the regime, which might hesitate to risk other incidents with Turkey after some villages in Turkish territory had been fired upon by the Syrians and several other border incidents. (Such “blunders” by the Baath were not unwelcome by the FSA. . .) However, on 14 and 15 November Serê Kaniyê nevertheless suffered some air raids causing a dozen victims, the wounded being evacuated to the Ceylanpınar hospital in Turkish territory.

On 19 November clashes were reported between the Arab militia and the YPG, causing 5 deaths among the Kurds and 24 among the Jabhat Al-Nusra and Gharba al-Sham forces. There are 35 Kurds detained by the Arab militia and 11 rebels detained by the Kurds. The incidents occurred when the Kurds demonstrated and demanded the withdrawal of the armed groups.

In all, this new advance by the Syrian opposition forces in Hassaké caused 9,000 refugees to flee to Turkey, in addition to the 120,000 already recorded in Turkish camps and some tens of thousands unrecorded by sheltered by local inhabitants.

Thus brutally woken from their relative peacefulness, other Kurdish towns are preparing themselves for possible clashes, attacks being possible from either the Syrian Air forces or the FSA.

At Derbassiyeh and Tell Tamr, the PYD forces announced that they had taken control of the town since the Syrian Army was no longer there, having withdrawn without fighting in the face of the YPG.

At Qamishlo (a non-liberated town where the Kurdish National Council is stronger than the PYD), the population fears an imminent battle between the regime’s forces and the opposition, especially as Turkey and the jihadists are trying to win over the Arab tribes originally from the Euphrates that were settled in Qamishlo by the regime in its plan to “Arabise” its borders known as the “Arab belt” stretching along 240 km of the border from Derik to Serê Kaniyê.

Feeling that there had never been a greater need for understanding between the Kurds, The President of the Kurdistan Regional Government invited, once again, all the parties in Syrian Kurdistan, including the PYD, to meet in Irbil to consider a joint military force uniting the YPG, the Syrian Peshmergas trained in Iraqi Kurdistan that the PYD had so far refused to let enter Syrian Kurdistan, although its own forces are increasingly surrounded by the jihadists and the FSA.

Sponsored by the Kurdish Presidency in Irbil, the meeting was opened by a speech by Massud Barzani urging all the parties to greater cohesion and rejection of civil war, threatening to withdraw his support if their dis-

sension persisted. After three days the meeting ended with an agreement between the Kurdish national Council and the PYD announced on 24 November. According to Ismail Hama, the General Secretary of the Kurdish Union Party, the PYD had accepted to place its YPG units under a unified military command, alongside the Peshmergas and answerable to Supreme Kurdish Council.

Some voices have already expressed scepticism about the application in practice of such an agreement — the previous one that only covered political and administrative management of the Kurdish areas never having been really effective. Abdalbasset Seyda, former president of the Syrian National Council, who favoured a Kurdo-Arab alliance against the Baath expressed his doubts to the daily *Rudaw*: “*The problem with this agreement is that the PYD accepts agreements every time but that once back in Syria does not apply them. The Kurdish National Council follows the Kurdistan Regional Government’s agenda and the PYD that of alAssad. This cannot work*”.

However Tala; Ibrahim Pasha, speaking in the name of the Kurdish National Council considers that this latest agreement will gradually succeed in being carried out in the field, even though statements from the YPG continue to blow hot and cold about this agreement, which provides for the Peshmergas finally entering Syria once the CNK and the PYD have agreed on the composition of the Military Command.

## TURKEY:

### THE STUPEFYING COURT DECISION IN THE PONAR SELEK CASE

**O**n 22 November Istanbul’s N°12 Criminal Court reversed the acquittal of Pinar Selek, which that same court had decided on 9 February 2011, although legal-

ly such a decision can only be annulled by the Court of Appeals.

The case of Pinar Selek has been dragged on for over 14 years — this is his third acquittal — and,

according to his defence committee: “*the judges decided this before the hearing during a meeting lasting an hour and a half, with the Prosecutor present but not the lawyers. At the hearing they just informed the*

lawyers without giving any explanation or allowing the Defence the possibility of objecting (...) It should be added that the decision to cancel comes twenty-one months after the decision to acquit, at a time when the judge who had been in charge of the case was on sick leave — he was replaced by a magistrate who only had a superficial knowledge of the case, seconded by assessors and judges as new to the case as he”.

Thus on 14 December Pinar Selek will be tried for the fourth time for an “bomb attack” the reality of which had been disproved during the police enquiry.

In fact, on 9 July 1998 an explosion and fire in Istanbul’s Bazaar that had caused seven deaths and 127 injured had, initially been attributed to “a terrorist group”, the PKK being straight away designated as responsible. A “suspect” was arrested and, under torture, confessed to having placed a bomb in the bazaar. He also gave Pinar Selek’s name as his accomplice.

Pinar Selek was arrested on 11 July on his return from an on the spot enquiry on the PKK fighters in Turkey’s Kurdish region. She was imprisoned and tortured to make her confess and give the names of the people she had interviewed. It was only a month later that she learnt in her cell, that she was, in fact being accused of being the perpetrator of “the Bazaar bomb attack”.

Imprisoned for two and a half years, the sociologist denied any involvement. Meanwhile it was found that the explosions was due to a gas leak — which didn’t prevent the Turkish courts from continuing proceedings against her even though, following technical assessments, she was released though still charged in 2000.

However, the Police Department sent the Court a report “testify-

ing” that a bomb was the cause of the explosion, based on “evidence” that has since been proved to be forgeries, like the alleged “crater” caused by the explosive device. In 2005 the Prosecutor asked for life imprisonment. She was tried and acquitted by Istanbul’s N°12 Assize Court in 2006, the scientific experts having totally refuted the thesis of a bomb attack.

The Prosecutor then appealed to the Court of Appeals — three consecutive times, after each acquittal, without providing any new evidence for renewing his charges.

Acquitter during her second trial in 2008, Pinar Selek was again tried, following a ruling by the Court of Appeals, on 9 February 2011 by the 12<sup>th</sup> Chamber of Istanbul’s High Criminal Court. At the end of the trial she was acquitted for the third time as well as the person who had originally denounced her. This did not prevent the Istanbul Criminal Court’s Prosecutor from again appealing to the Great Chamber of the Court of Appeals. However, before sending the all files of the case, including the prosecutor’s speech, some subsidiary issues had to be tried on the 22 November by the local Court. The hearing was to take place presided by a substitute judge, the incumbent judge being on sick leave with heart problems.

According to research worker Etienne Copeaux, who travelled especially to Istanbul to attend the trial “it was not even necessary to understand legal jargon to see the scandalous character of this hearing? The president and the judges are at the back of the hall. The public, which is not very numerous, is squeezed into a restricted area near the entry doors that allows us to hear the sound of conversations in the corridor. There is no amplifying system in this ultra modern courtroom. The president, Mehmet Hamzaçebi, speaks in a low

barely audible voice that the public cannot understand; even the lawyers have to prick up their ears. One can hardly say that he speaks — he seems very bored, speaks disdainfully when answering the lawyers who he frequently interrupts, with an air of “talk if you want”. Above all, only the president speaks — the two judges don’t open their mouths.

Thus the president in no way played his role of president. He was the accuser from beginning to end of the hearing. So that the lawyers spoke to him as to an adversary, not a moderator, which is what his role should have been. I found this situation dangerous as a polemical tone developed between the defence and the “president”, who was being directly challenged. This was inevitable since, by going outside his real role he laid himself open to attack. It became obvious that the president could not lose face by going back on his decisions and abandoning his stand. He virtually turned a deaf ear to the lawyers’ proposals. The 12<sup>th</sup> Criminal Court that, previously, had resisted the Court of Appeals this time knuckles under”.

Professor Baskin Oran, who was also present, describes more precisely how the defence was cheated and presented with a fait accompli:

“The hearing was die to begin at 10.30 am but the gates were closed. The lawyers tried to find out what was happening but the new president replied that he was entitled to a lunch break. The hearing was due to begin at 2.pm but only began at . . . The lawyers took their seats pending the usual identity checks when they saw a computer screen was lit. The clerk of the court was trying to correct a word. They were astounded to find that it was about a decision that had already been taken: “Seeing that the Great Chamber of the Court of Appeals has rejected the petition of objection by the Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeals, the decision to maintain the order of acquittal previ-



ously taken contains a technical defect and this it has been decided to annul the order of acquittal. Thereupon the prosecutor thanks the Court and then reads a summing up of the prosecution that he had apparently brought with him and evidently again demanded a life sentence. This means that makes a summing up for the second time in a case for which a final decision was taken a year and a half ago and against which he had appealed".

According to Baskin Oran, who "the courts are unanimous on this point" "the local Court is legally incapable of annulling its own decision, taken an year and a half earlier as the verdict had been finally made; it has always the right to uphold its decision to acquit against the Great Chamber".

Pinar Selek's lawyers, for their part, filed a petition on 29 November against the substitute

judge who originated the annulment of the acquittal being allowed to preside in the 13 December trial. Moreover the incumbent judge, while still on sick leave, has expressed his astonishment to the daily paper Vatan, in an interview dated 24 November and let it be understood that he would resume his duties on that occasion even if his 45-day sick leave was not over.

According to Baskin Oren there are thus two possible developments in this case:

"1) The judges can go back on their interim decision of 22 November 2012, which is considered illegal by the defence. Thus the proceedings will follow its normal course, in other words the verdict of acquittal given on 9 February 2011 will be brought before the Great Chamber of the Court of Appeals together with the other subsidiary cases when they have been fin-

ished. The decision of the Great Chamber will be final.

2) If the judges do not go back on their 22 November verdict the trial will continue in an illegal manner. The verdict of life imprisonment could be the subject of an appeal to the 9<sup>th</sup> Chamber of the Court of Appeals"

Finally the Pinar Selek case will also be followed by proceedings before the European Court for Human Rights on the grounds of torture and inequitable trial (articles 3 and 6).

Pinar Selek is at present living in France where she is continuing her doctoral research at Strasbourg University. A former scholarship holder from the German PEN, she won the PEN International "Diygu Asena" prize in 2009. She has also written four scientific monographs, a novel and a children's book.

## CULTURE:

### SHOKROLLAH BABAN HAS JUST DIED

**O**n 18 November 2012, Shokrollah Baban, poet, writer broadcaster, lexicographer and student of folklore, he died at 89 years of age after suffering from Alzheimer for several years.

Born into a major princely family of Sine (Sanadaj, in Kurdistan province), Shokrollah Baban did not take up his family heritage but, according to his son, sold part of his property to go and study in Teheran in 1952. In 1958 he became the producer of Kurdish programmes on Teheran Radio and later, in 1963, on Kermanshah Radio for the whole of Western Azerbaijan province, before becoming General Manager of Sanadaj Radio. He was also an author and an active promoter of Kurdish language and literature, being at once a poet, an author a playwright and

translator. His works deal with music, poetry, artistic and theatre forms, aesthetic criticism as well as philosophical and mystic reflections.

According to Kamangar Mohammad, one of his fellow travellers at the time that Shokrollah Baban was managing Kermanshah Radio, the broadcasts could be heard in North America and Kurds living there were able to hear them and contact the organisers and producers. His broadcasts were innovative and his very popular programmes inspired other radios outside of Kurdistan.

Thus his broadcast "Karvan helbest wa gorani" (The caravan of poetry and song) was taken as a model by other radios, like "Barnameh Gol Hah" (The flowers' programme), a programme of

Persian poetry and music broadcast.

Shokrollah Baban was also a musicologist and endeavoured to make the singers Hassan Zirek and Khaleghi better known. His former audiences of all ages remember the extent of his broadcasts and the way Shokrollah's voice was so familiar and popular in Kurdish households.

For the Kurdish intellectuals who followed, he was a pioneer at initiating and institutionalising research on Kurdish tales, literary traditions and modern literature in a language that was clear and accessible to the greatest number of people at a time when bans were weighing heavily on Kurdish writings.

Shokrollah Baban was the author of several works, including the

Baban Dictionary, "The Kurds and Kurdistan", "Salafin Ayyubi" and "The Geography of Kurdistan" that have already been published. Two works, "Names and Symbols" and "An anthology of poetry" remain unpublished.

Dr. Amir Sharafi cites one of the poems that had marked him most when he was 12 years of age, since it was the first poem in free verse that he had ever heard.

O Moon!  
 You and I suffer from the same pains  
 We both are gripped by an icy sigh  
 You, pale and cloudy in the sky  
 And I roaming in every town.  
 I pay you homage  
 O Mecca of sick hearts  
 Cure for the pains of lovesick hearts.  
 Now it is night  
 And this night has come to my aid

I am alone without friend or beloved  
 Distraught and tormented, come to my aid  
 Because I'm a prisoner and oppressed  
 Subjected to my beloved Shirine.

Shokrollah had 8 children, 5 sons and 3 daughters. Fuad and Siamak Baban are both journalists and presenters of Iranian TV; Bakhtiar Baban was the captain of Iran's basketball team.

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### CINEMA: THREE KURDISH FILMS NOW BEING SHOWN

**T**hree Kurdish films have been released this month in different countries.

In France, on 21 November, "Red Heart" is being shown. This film is the first directed by Halkawi Mustafa, born in Suleimaniyah, whose family settled in Norway in 2000 and who has become a Norwegian citizen. This is thus a Norwegian-Iraqi Kurdistan co-production. In addition to some Norwegians, the film shooting team includes technicians from Iraq and Iran. It was shot between 19 December 2009 and mid-January 2010, between Rawanduz and Irbil.

Shirin and Soran are two teenagers who love one another in secret. When Shirin's mother dies, her father seeks another wife. The woman he chose imposes one condition — that Shirin should marry her son. To save their love Shirin and Soran have no other choice but to run away. When Soran is jailed, Shirin has to face up to her new city life on her own.

The film was shown at a number of Film Festivals in France, and abroad, particularly at the Doha Film Festival (Qatar) and the International Festival of Love

Films at Mons. It received the 2012 Henri Langlois Prize at the Vincennes International Film Encounters.

During the Day Against violence Towards Women, on 25 November of every year, screenings of Red Heat were organised followed by discussion in a number of cinemas.

"My Father's Voice", released in Germany and Turkey, is based on the dark pages of the history of the Kurds in Marash, after the massacre of Alevis in December 1978. The film is acted in Kurdish, but in the local Elbistan dialect: "using the original dialect (of the characters) is very important, since it is somewhat different from standard Kurdish. The people who speak this dialect are rather embarrassed as if they were being mocked. One of the aims of the film is to change this" explained the director, Zeynel Dogan.

The plot follows the life of a Kurdish family in Turkey from 1979 to 2009, in a docu-fiction style.

Mehmet lives in Diyarbakir with his wife who is expecting. His mother Basé, lives alone in Elbistan (Marash Province) in an almost deserted village. His elder brother, Hassan, has fled to join

the guerrillas. As for the father, Mustafa, he has left to earn enough to enable them to live by working in Saudi Arabia and has died there. All he has left his family are the cassettes that he recorded and sent to his wife since they were both illiterate. Before becoming a father himself, Mehmet asks his mother for the cassettes but she at first refuses, not wishing that the image the son had of his father be changed. "My Father's Voice" is a poetic meditation on identity and kinship links.

Screened first in Amsterdam, the film won the prize at the Adana International Festival as well as that of the best scenario at the Istanbul festival.

Finally, released in Sweden, "Bekas" (Orphans) by Karzan Kader, was also shot in Kurdistan, and is acted in Kurdish with Swedish and English sub-titles. Shown for the first time at the Stockholm International Film festival, it is due to be screened in 13 other countries.

The plot of "Bekas" is set in the 1990s, at the time when the Iraqi Kurds were suffering from the double embargo since Saddam was still in power in Baghdad following the first Gulf War. Its heroes are two young orphans

who lost their parents during the war with Iran. One of them sees a Superman film and dreams of going to America to bring the Super-hero to Kurdistan so as to eliminate Saddam. Together with his brother, they try to arrange their journey.

The principle roles are played by two children, the director sought for ten days in Suleimaniyah schools to find his actors and took auditioning shots of 2000 children.

Bakhtiyar Fattah, the producer, told the daily paper *Rudaw* that,

despite the difficulties the Swedish team met with on site, particularly in finding equipment that had to be brought from Sweden, she was pleasantly surprised by the welcome they received in the different regions of Kurdistan.

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# Syrian rebels fight unwanted battle with Kurds

Erika Solomon / Reuters

**K**ASTAL, Syria - After a week of clashes between anti-government rebels and Kurdish militants in Syria's Aleppo province, the two sides are observing a tenuous truce.

It is a war within a war which neither side wants.

"We want to fight the regime and instead we are fighting a new front that we don't need or have time for," said a fighter of the rebel Free Syria Army, warming himself over a fire on a mountain overlooking olive groves and stone villages.

"We should be in Aleppo fighting, instead we are camping."

The situation exemplifies the tangle of alliances, loyalties and rivalries - local and international - complicating the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The FSA counts on the backing of Turkey, which gives it sanctuary over its border and is in the forefront of the diplomatic campaign against Assad.

The Syrian Kurdish militants are allied to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), which is locked in a long struggle against the Turkish army to carve out an autonomous Kurdish region in southeast Turkey.

The Syrian Kurds have maintained their own unaligned militias and administer Kurdish areas in Aleppo province - scene of heavy fighting in the civil war. They are believed to be cutting deals with both the government and the opposition in order to maintain their autonomy.

The side conflict risks weakening the mostly-Arab rebels fighting Assad's better-armed forces.

Dozens of rebels and Kurdish fighters of the separatist Democratic Union Party (PYD) were killed in the past week in clashes that began in Aleppo city and have now spread to the countryside, just a few kilometers away from Turkey.

On the mountain dividing rebel-held areas from Kurdish towns to the northwest of Aleppo city, heavy clashes raged for days.

"We are not against all Kurdish groups, but these PKK-linked groups are helping the regime by attacking us, we had no choice but to act," says Mohammed Hamadeh, head of a rebel unit on the mountain.

"WE SHOULD BE ALLIES"

Despite some cooperation before the clashes, mistrust has always been high on both sides.

The rebels are wary of the PYD's neutral stance and believe it is working with Assad, while some Kurds are unhappy with the opposition's unwillingness to accept local Kurdish autonomy.

The PYD may have enjoyed a boost of popularity as locals watched Assad's forces pound rebel strongholds.

"I don't like the PYD, but they have taken care of the Kurds, unlike the rebels whose areas are totally destroyed. Now, many Kurds are taking a second look at the PYD," said Baran Afrini, a Kurdish opposition activist in the area who used to support the rebels.

In Kurdish districts of Aleppo, Syria's largest city, PYD fighters had been running a mini-state with daily services such as bread lines as well as security. Thousands of

residents fleeing the daily bombing in most parts of the city took refuge in quiet Kurdish districts.

But when rebels last week moved into the Kurdish districts, Assad's forces responded by shelling the areas, provoking clashes.

Vital routes leading into the city are now at stake for both sides. Before the fighting, there was a silent agreement to allow each other passage on their roads. Both sides now want to ensure access to their strongholds.

"Our demand is for the Kurdish militants to move off of this mountain, and to guarantee us safe passage through their areas," Hamadeh said. "The Kurds have not yet responded."

Some Kurds say Assad's forces are trying to draw them to their side, despite their repression of Kurds before the uprising, just to sow divisions. The army withdrew from Kurdish areas without a fight, and many say it even gave weapons to the PYD as a way to antagonize the rebels and Turkey.

The internecine conflict between rebels and Kurds risks further drawing in Syria's neighbors. Growing Kurdish assertiveness could leave parts of northern Syria under the control of the Turkish PKK.

Basel, a 23-year-old fighter in jeans and carrying a Kalashnikov, is one of many Kurdish rebels now on the mountain fighting fellow Kurds.

Running through the trees, he shouts out a secret code to warn fighters that it is a rebel comrade coming up the mountain.

"I will fight for my country and my religion before I fight for my ethnicity," he said. "This is how the regime divides people. You have men who should be allies fighting among themselves." □



## Turquie: trois morts dans des heurts entre l'armée et les rebelles

DIYARBAKIR (Turkey), 2 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**UN SOLDAT ET DEUX REBELLES KURDES ont été tués vendredi dans le sud-est de la Turquie dans des affrontements qui ont éclaté à la suite d'une attaque lancée par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles séparatistes armés) contre une position de l'armée, ont déclaré à l'AFP des sources des forces de sécurité.**

Des membres du PKK ont tendu une embuscade à des soldats dans le district de Lice à Diyarbakir, tuant un militaire et en blessant cinq.

Deux rebelles kurdes ont été tués lorsque les forces armées turques ont riposté, selon ces sources.

Jeudi, une voiture avait explosé devant une caserne dans la ville de Hatay (sud-est) près de la frontière avec la Syrie. Cette attaque avait été attribuée par les autorités locales au PKK.

Dimanche dernier, un policier et huit rebelles kurdes avaient été tués dans des combats dans la province de Sirnak.

Ces affrontements surviennent après une série d'attaques des rebelles kurdes contre les forces de sécurité turques dans le sud-est de la Turquie, qui ont entraîné le lancement de vastes opérations militaires dans la région.

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, par l'Union européenne et par les Etats-Unis.

Environ 45.000 personnes ont trouvé la mort depuis que le PKK a pris les armes en 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, où les Kurdes sont majoritaires. □

## Fighting between Arab and Kurds raises spectre of escalating conflict in northern Syria

Loveday Morris / Beirut

**T**he leader of a Kurdish faction embroiled in clashes with the Syrian rebels has vowed to repel further aggravation, as fighting between Arab and Kurds raises the spectre of a new front in an increasingly multifaceted conflict.

Kurdish representatives today remained locked in negotiations with elements of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) after clashes in northern Syria which killed dozens and sparked mass kidnappings. Around 50 Kurdish hostages are still being held by a rebel brigade, according to several Kurdish politicians.

"We will defend ourselves, we will defend our people" said Saleh Muslim Mohammed, the head of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which is fighting a separatist guerrilla war in Turkey. "There are parts of the Free Syrian Army who seem to be working for Turkey and have a strategy to hurt the Kurds."

The clashes heighten concern that the fight will increasingly become a proxy war gouged along ethnic and sectarian lines, in what some have described as the "Lebanonisation" of Syria - a reference to its smaller neighbour's bloody 15-year civil

war.

Turkey has expressed concern that the PYD has seized control over Syria's Kurdish areas, raising the risk of Ankara stepping up involvement if Kurds - who so far have largely stood back from the conflict - becoming increasingly embroiled.

The fighting first erupted a week ago when FSA members entered Aleppo's Kurdish area of Ashrafiya. Details are disputed but the following day thousands of residents took to the streets calling for them to leave. A video from the demonstration shows the crowd chanting as they march down a hill, before gunfire breaks out.

Mr Mohammed claims that ten civilians were killed by FSA gunmen. "There was no other way, so our forces attacked them and killed nineteen of them," he said.

Though he denies the PYD has an armed wing, Mr Mohammed regularly refers to the militants in the Popular Protection Units - a fighting force which he says numbers over 1,000 soldiers - as "our men" and other Kurdish factions maintain they are affiliated.

The fighting was followed by reprisal kidnappings of Kurds on the road between Aleppo and the Kurdish town of Afrin, with as many as 300 taken captive, most of whom have now been released.

Mr Mohammed says the PYD enjoys cordial relations with some elements of the FSA, blaming the kidnappings on the Northern Storm Brigade, led by the controversial Ammar al-Dadikhi. The PYD also pointed the finger at the group for an attack on the Kurdish village of Kastal Jendo, where fighting continued into this week.

Senior FSA figures have expressed regret the clashes took place, but with the leadership unable to assert control over the fragmented armed groups, events have the potential to spiral.

Further complicating the situation is intra-Kurdish rivalries.

Other parties claim they are sidelined by the PYD and accuse it of collaborating with the Assad regime. "We have many problems with the PYD.. any party that is against the Free Syrian Army is against the freedom of Syria," said Abdul Hakim Bashar, head of the rival Kurdish National Council in Syria.

"The Kurds can't unite themselves because of these tensions," said Yussef Anwar, an executive member of the Kurdish Patriotic Movement, which promotes unity between various Kurdish factions. "The situation is worsening, it's chaos now." □

## Kurdish Leaders Oppose Movement of Dijla Forces in Diyala Province



Abdulmir Ziaid, commander of the Dijla Operations Command, recently formed on orders from PM Nuri Maliki.

rudaw.net

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – Authorities in the Kurdistan Region are speaking out against a visit by Abdulmir Zaidi, the commander of the Dijla Forces to the Diyala province.

Shwan Taha, member of Iraq's parliamentary security committee told Rudaw, "The commander of the Dijla Forces coming to the Qaratapa area is an outright violation of the Iraqi constitution."

A decision by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki last summer united the forces of the interior ministry and the police force in Kirkuk and Diyala under the Dijla Operations Command.

This move caused a stir among Kurdish

officials who considered the decision as another step by the Iraqi government to consolidate its power in the disputed territories. "The security of each region is the responsibility of the provincial council and the movement of the Dijla forces will destabilize the security of that region and upsets the political reality," Taha said.

Taha said Kurdish MPs in Baghdad are united in their opposition against the operations of the Dijla forces.

Kurdish officials believe the presence of the Dijla forces will hamper the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution that aims to solve the dispute over territories in Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala provinces where

Arabs and Kurds lay claim to vast areas of land.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Kurdish Peshmerga forces have been based in parts of the disputed territories. The Iraqi constitution recognizes the Peshmerga as part of the Iraqi defense forces.

But in a recent statement, Iraqi PM Maliki rejected the Peshmerga as part of Iraq's defense forces.

"That kind of attitude from Maliki further deepens the tensions between Erbil and Baghdad," Taha said. "It has been established many times before that Maliki has not honored his own agreements including the Erbil Agreement (of 2010)."

Abdulmir Zaidi, the commander of the Dijla forces was due to arrive in Qaratapa region of northern Diyala on Thursday.

Iraqi authorities said Zaidi would accompany the governor of Diyala who visits the people of the region to deliver basic services.

But Kurdish leaders believe that is a cover for the deployment of the Dijla forces in the Kurdish areas of the province.

For its part, the security committee in Kirkuk has opposed the formation of the Dijla forces from the outset. Kirkuk governor Najlamldin Karim says, "We do not recognize the Dijla forces and believe it is doomed to fail." ■

**SunSentinel**

November 5, 2012

## At home away from home, Syrian Kurd refugees long for statehood

Isabel Coles / Reuters

**CAMP DOMIZ, Iraq** - Keyrings and umbrellas in the colors of the Kurdish flag are on sale at a refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan, where thousands of Syrian Kurds who have fled war at home are enjoying the freedom to flaunt their ethnic identity like never before.

Long-oppressed, Syria's Kurds see the conflict ravaging their country as an opportunity to win the kind of liberty enjoyed by their ethnic kin in neighboring Iraq, who live autonomously from the federal capital in Baghdad.

The war between forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and rebel fighters has so far driven some 30,000 Syrian Kurds over the border to Camp Domiz, where breeze-blocks are gradually replacing canvas as residents hunker down for winter and beyond.

A further 200-300 people are arriving each day, according to international disaster relief charity ShelterBox, which is helping put up tents.

Despite being displaced, many of the camp's occupants draw comfort from being in a country where they can at least speak their own language and fly the Kurdish flag without fear of reprisal.

"Even if we didn't have bread and water we'd be at ease here because we're at home with our leader Massoud



Barzani. Dirt turns to gold in his hands," said Naja Hussein Omar, praising the leader of Iraqi Kurdistan, whose image hangs on walls around the camp.

"We want an independent state like any other. Where is our state?"

Divided between Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, the Kurdish people number more than 20 million and are often described as the world's largest ethnic group without a state.

In Syria they make up about 10 percent of the population - the country's largest ethnic minority.

### "WESTERN KURDISTAN"

At the camp, posters advertise a concert to raise money for the people of "Western Kurdistan" - the name Kurds use to refer to the area of Syria

they claim as their own.

"God willing we will get another Kurdistan in Syria, and God willing in Turkey as well," said Ibrahim Abdulaziz Ali, who fled his hometown of Hassakeh several months ago after being drafted into the army.

Not everyone is so sure.

Umran Mohammed said all he and other Kurds of his generation sought was equal rights within a united Syria.

"Our country is Syria. We don't want another Kurdistan," he said, sitting at a table in the cafe he runs out of a blue shelter made from tarpaulin. "The president can be Kurdish or Alawite or Arab or whatever, as long as it's through elections".

If Syria's Assad falls, the Kurdish quest for self-rule is unlikely to be smooth.

Already, tensions between

two main Syrian Kurdish groups, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), have at times threatened to degenerate into intra-Kurdish conflict.

Earlier this year, Barzani brought them together in Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, where they signed a pact to form a joint council, presenting a united front for Kurdish interests in Syria.

But the KNC has repeatedly accused the PYD of failing to keep its side of the bargain, saying its People's Defence Units militia continue to set up checkpoints and impose their agenda by force.

The KNC was forged from more than a dozen smaller Syrian Kurdish parties, with Barzani's blessing, and is broadly accepted by the political mainstream, unlike the PYD, which is seen as tied to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK.

The PYD says it has nothing more than ideological affinity with the PKK, which has fought a 28-year separatist conflict in Turkey that has claimed more than 40,000 lives. But Syrian Kurds at the camp use the two acronyms interchangeably.

"There are loads of PKK people here but they don't dare say 'I am PKK'," said 24-year-old Zenar Ali Abd, who left the Syrian district of Malikiya because he faced army conscription. ●

# Armed rebel groups in Syria and crimes against humanity

By: Beatriz Schiava

Thursday, November 1. Terrorists and armed rebel groups are targeting religious minorities and blockading their neighborhoods. 11 people were killed and dozens more were wounded in a bomb attack near the Shia shrine of al-Sayyeda Zainab in the outskirts of Damascus on Wednesday. This is a Shia Muslim Shrine that Shiite pilgrims visit every year. According to police, an armed group detonated an explosive device that had been left in a garbage bag. The explosion at the Shia shrine may act as a magnet for Shia Muslim militants, drawing them to the region from Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran to defend the holy Shrine and igniting even more sectarian conflicts.

Agenzia Fides reports that Mr. Elias Mansour, the last Christian living in the center of the city of Homs, was killed by rebel groups. He was taking care of his handicapped son and did not want to leave his house; he simply did not have anywhere else to go. Many Christian residents were evacuated in Homs. Armed groups chanted "Alawites to the tomb and Christians to Lebanon," as they looted, and vandalized the evacuee's houses and churches.

Kurds in Syria who had maintained a neutral position were forced to defend themselves from Arab rebels in northern Syria and used the opportunity to seize independence for the Kurdish territories across Syria. Kurds are now trying to negotiate with Turkey, a country that could gain control of Syria if Bashar Al- Assad is deposed. Still, Turkey has become less secular and is shifting towards a more Islamic radical stance that in the end may represent a threat to the security of Israel.

Before the conspiracy of the Arab nations, NATO, Turkey, and the U.S to ignite a conflict that used terrorists and "rebels," as proxies, Syria was a pluralistic, secular country, with a Sunni Muslim majority and a variety of religious minorities living together under an authoritarian regime that secured their coexistence. Democracy was very hard to achieve in Syria as it requires the will of all the ethnic groups and religious sects to form a democratic state. However, this was not the case. The discourse in the Mosques of Syria was that of radical Islam, ethnic cleansing of religious minorities and the destruction of Israel. It is not surprising that religious minorities are being targeted by radical Muslims rebels now that they are armed and supported by foreign countries.

After the uprising of radical Sunni



*Church vandalized in Syria by NATO-backed rebels. Credits: Prisonplanet.com*

Muslims and the invasion of the country by armed terrorists from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other nearby Arab countries, many supported by the US, NATO and Turkey, the targeting of religious minorities was just a matter of time.

Early in the conflict, there were concerns that ethnic cleansing would surge with radical Islam fueling the clash in Syria. NATO and the U.S. State Department, led by Hilary Clinton did nothing to safeguard the religious minorities in Syria. She did not want to use diplomacy, and believes that she has the right to ask to the president of a sovereign country to step down without diplomatic venues to solve the conflict. It was very obvious that the intention of Mrs. Clinton was to depose Assad.

By helping rebels and foreign armed groups (Charter of Nuremberg classifies this as a crime against peace, Article 6 a), NATO, Turkey, the Arab countries involved and the US (As Permanent Representative of NATO and acting also alone), have fueled a conflict that may extend beyond the borders of Syria. Different factions want the power in Syria, namely: Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Sunni radical Islamic factions represented by mercenaries and terrorists from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Yemen.

The New York Times reports that "automatic rifles, rocket propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries including Syria's Muslim Brotherhood and paid for by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar."

Terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda, the exiled Muslim Brotherhood of Syria and the rebels are armed and causing devastation

against civilians and predominantly killing and kidnapping ethnic and religious minorities. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity according to the Charter of Nuremberg Article 6, sections b and c. Human Rights Watch documented at least a dozen executions and many more cases of torture perpetrated by the rebels. They are fighting for the supremacy of Sunni Muslims in the region, exterminating religious and ethnic minorities as they go. This Thursday, a new video shows the execution of soldiers captured by armed rebel groups.

Certainly, Mr. Assad should be on trial for crimes against humanity. However, Assad and his army, composed mostly of Alawites, know that if they do not control the invasion of terrorists and the rebels' upheaval, they face along with the other religious minorities, certain extermination. The country has the right to defend from foreign terrorists and defend their citizens. The rebels wanted to impose their conditions, radicalizing their movement. Thus, the conditions for a peaceful resolution have never existed. The support of NATO, the US, Turkey and the other Arab countries involved have fueled this sectarian war, knowing that the logical conclusion of their actions was a huge loss of human lives.

Rebels and terrorist groups are focusing their efforts on Christian neighborhoods and desecrating the Churches found there, blocking off whole neighborhoods to limit escape routes. Humanitarian help cannot easily get there and evacuation becomes a dangerous hurdle. Christian neighborhoods like Bab Touma, Qatana, the Christian Quarters of Damascus, Hamidiye, and neighborhoods of Aleppo such as Sulaymaniya, AL Jarbiriya, Al Tilal, Villas, and many others have been targeted with bomb attacks and snipers, killing and injuring hundreds of innocent bystanders. Kidnapping Christians for exorbitant ransoms, robbery, looting of private property and desecration of Churches are frequent events.

Alawites, whose religion has ties with Shiites, Christians and with the regime in power, are fighting for their survival after having been targeted, since the beginning of the conflict, by radical Muslims and terrorists. Sunni radical Muslims (and terrorists), aka the Free Syrian Army do not want democracy, they want an Islamic state with freedom to exterminate the religious minorities in the region. Once they achieve it, they have a stated mission to eradicate Israel. Alawites, Druzes, Christians and peaceful Muslims have lived together for hundreds of years in Syria. They have a right to live in peace in their own country. □

## "Les Kurdes syriens se tiennent hors d'un combat aveugle", selon M. Saleh

Par Georges Malbrunot  
blog.lefigaro.fr/malbrunot

Mohammed Saleh Mouslim est le chef du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), une formation kurde, qui a bouté les forces loyalistes dans le nord de la Syrie, sans pour autant rallier la rébellion armée contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad. D'où de récents incidents survenus entre Kurdes et insurgés à Alep. De passage à Paris, son chef explique le délicat « ni-ni » des Kurdes syriens dans le conflit.

**LE FIGARO.- Pour la première fois, des combats ont éclaté entre rebelles et kurdes à Alep. Les Kurdes luttent-ils aux côtés du régime syrien ?**

**MOHAMMED SALEH.-** Il s'agit d'un accident. L'Armée syrienne libre n'est pas constituée d'un seul bloc. Les assaillants qui s'en sont pris aux Kurdes à Alep appartiennent à un groupe kurde dissident, dirigé par Salah Badredine, proche de nos ennemis turcs, et sans liens formels avec l'Armée libre. Cet incident, qui a coûté la vie à une douzaine de nos militants, est sur le point d'être réglé.

**Pourquoi les Kurdes du PYD ne participent-ils pas à la révolte contre Bachar el-Assad ?**

Nous participons à la révolte. Les Kurdes sont contre le régime



syrien, mais nous ne voulons pas prendre part aux affrontements, parce que c'est un combat aveugle. La solution militaire n'existe pas. Les Kurdes soutiennent les efforts politiques pour régler la crise, notamment la mission du médiateur de l'ONU, Lakhdar Brahimi. D'autre part, de nombreux groupes armés ont des agendas différents. Les Kurdes ne veulent pas être mêlés à ces combats obscurs. Mais dois-je rappeler que les Kurdes contrôlent déjà la moitié de leurs zones de peuplement. Notre contrôle est total à Afrine, Qobani et Delik. Ailleurs, à Qamishli, Ras el-Ein ou Dirbesbeh, nous ne voulons pas aller au clash avec les Arabes, qui soutiennent Assad. Mais nous sommes bel et bien dans l'opposition. Nous l'avons montré, ces derniers mois, en défendant nos terres dans les régions kurdes du nord.

**Pour gagner une autonomie, lorsque le régime tombera comme en Irak, après la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003 ?**

Non. Les Kurdes ne veulent pas établir de frontières entre leur territoire et le reste de la Syrie. Soyez en sûrs. Le modèle de large autonomie pratiqué par les Kurdes irakiens n'est pas un exemple que les Kurdes syriens veulent suivre. On ne veut pas d'une Syrie, fragmentée en une zone kurde, une autre alaouite et une dernière sunnite. Au contraire, les Kurdes tiennent à une Syrie démocratique, rassemblant toutes ses composantes. Mais un vrai régime démocratique, reconnaissant toutes les religions et toutes les ethnies, doté d'une constitution qui garantisse les droits politiques, culturelles, et d'auto-défense de la minorité kurde. Nous sommes 15% de la population. Nous ne voulons pas contrôler les 85% restants.

**L'opposition syrienne n'est pas prête à reconnaître vos droits ?**

Jusqu'à maintenant, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), par exemple, n'est pas prêt à reconnaître nos revendications, parce que 60% de ses membres sont des musulmans religieux, qui ont de très bonnes relations avec la Turquie, laquelle ne veut pas reconnaître les droits des Kurdes, au nom de sa traditionnelle pho-

bie kurde.

**Pourquoi l'aide française n'arrive-t-elle pas dans vos zones libérées ?**

Jusqu'à maintenant, nous n'avons aucune relation avec les autorités françaises. Nous ne voulons pas de leur aide, mais nous souhaiterions tout de même avoir des contacts avec leurs représentants. Hélas, les Français acceptent uniquement de discuter avec les Kurdes, comme Abdel Bassit Sida, le président du CNS qui ne représente que lui-même. Dans cette affaire, les Français ne veulent pas mécontenter leurs alliés turcs.

**Y-a-t-il des rebelles kurdes entraînés en Irak ?**

Oui. Sept cents Kurdes syriens ont suivi une instruction militaire chez les Kurdes irakiens de Massoud Barzani, qui dirige les provinces kurdes du nord du pays. Ils attendent de pouvoir rentrer dans les zones kurdes syriennes. Ce sont des militaires, qui ont déserté l'armée syrienne depuis un an. D'autres déserteurs kurdes sont restés, eux, en Syrie pour établir les unités de défense populaire dans nos régions. Au sein du Conseil suprême kurde, nous cherchons à rassembler les uns et les autres dans une seule entité, qui serait une sorte d'armée kurde. □

AFP

## Syrie: une dirigeante kurde tuée par les rebelles en livrant des prisonniers

ALEP (Syrie), 2 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**LA DIRIGEANTE** d'un groupe armé kurde à Alep, métropole du nord de la Syrie, a été tuée vendredi par des rebelles alors qu'elle venait leur livrer deux prisonniers et les dépouilles d'insurgés tués lors de combats la semaine dernière, rapporte une ONG.

Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), "les Kurdes ont reçu des appels de rebelles les informant de la mort vendredi à l'aube de Chaha Ali Abdo, connue sous le nom de Noujine Derric, chef d'un comité de protection du peuple kurde+, bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD)", la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (rebelles kurdes en Turquie).

Agée de 42 ans, elle avait été emprisonnée il y a une semaine par les rebelles alors qu'elle s'était rendue chez eux dans le quartier de Bani Zeyd pour leur remettre deux prisonniers et les dépouilles de deux insurgés, a précisé l'OSDH. Bani Zeyd est tenu par la brigade Salaheddine et le Front Al-Nosra, deux orga-

nisations islamistes radicales.

Un journaliste kurde d'Alep, Rojhad Khalil, a indiqué à l'AFP que cette femme, chargée des relations avec les rebelles, était responsable du comité de protection pour les deux quartiers kurdes de Achrafiyé et cheikh Maqsoud, à Alep. "Les Kurdes ont été informés par les rebelles de sa mort mais n'ont pas encore reçu le corps", a-t-il précisé.

Le secteur du nord d'Alep, contrôlé par le PYD, avait été relativement épargné par les violences qui déchirent la métropole commerçante depuis le 20 juillet, mais sa position, sur une hauteur de la ville, en fait un enjeu stratégique.

La minorité kurde (15% des 23 millions de Syriens) est hostile au régime de Bachar al-Assad, qui l'a réprimée, mais est méfiante envers l'opposition qu'elle juge peu encline à reconnaître sa spécificité.

Cet été, l'armée s'est retirée de certaines zones kurdes, en particulier du quartier d'Achrafiyé et de plusieurs villes le long de la frontière turque, laissant une grande autonomie aux autorités kurdes qui permettent aux rebelles d'y pénétrer, mais sans armes et en civil. ○



# Bête noire du régime syrien, M. Seif veut unifier l'opposition

Soutenu par les Etats-Unis et le Qatar, Riad Seif pousse à la formation d'un gouvernement provisoire

L'opposition syrienne aurait-elle trouvé son homme providentiel ? Incapables de présenter un front uni après vingt mois de soulèvement, de nombreuses formations hostiles au régime de Bachar Al-Assad ont prévu de se réunir en fin de semaine prochaine au Qatar sous l'égide d'un des dissidents syriens les plus respectés : Riad Seif.

Cet homme d'affaires sunnite de 65 ans, bête noire du régime baassiste, dont il avait dénoncé la corruption lorsqu'il siégeait au Parlement, au début des années 2000, espère rallier ses pairs à un projet visant à unifier les différents courants de l'opposition et à former un gouvernement provisoire. Ce plan dont les détails ont été révélés par le site Internet All4Syria a été baptisé « Initiative nationale syrienne ». Il a été conçu avec le soutien du département d'Etat américain, qui s'impatiente de voir émerger une alternative concrète à la dictature Assad et s'inquiète du poids croissant des djihadistes parmi les combattants rebelles.

La première des trois étapes du projet consiste à renouveler et étoffer les instances du Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale coalition de l'opposition, dont Riad Seif fait partie. Ce devrait être l'objet

d'une réunion préliminaire programmée du 4 au 6 novembre à Doha. Le CNS, qui ambitionnait de devenir la maison mère de l'opposition, à la manière de ce que fut le Conseil national de transition en Libye, n'est jamais parvenu à surmonter son handicap de départ – être perçu comme un regroupement d'opposants de l'extérieur, dominé par les Frères musulmans – et à s'imposer comme le représentant légitime du peuple syrien.

En germe depuis l'été, le lâchage du CNS par Washington a été officialisé mercredi 31 octobre par Hillary Clinton, qui a moqué sans ménagement ses responsables, « *qui dans de nombreux cas n'ont pas été en Syrie depuis vingt, trente ou quarante ans* ». Le CNS doit devenir « *une partie d'une opposition élargie* », a tranché la secrétaire d'Etat.

C'est justement la deuxième étape du plan. Elle consiste à mettre sur pied un comité de cinquante membres, présidé par Riad Seif et composé pour un tiers de membres du CNS, pour un deuxième tiers de représentants des conseils révolutionnaires issus des communes « libérées », les autres factions de l'opposition se partageant le dernier tiers. A terme, le comité ainsi créé aurait la responsabilité de former un gouvernement provisoire.

Ce projet a-t-il une chance de voir le jour ? Son principal attrait réside dans l'aura de son concepteur, un industriel prospère, qui s'est fait connaître en révélant les malversations du régime dans les télécommunications. Emprisonné pendant cinq ans, harcelé par les services de sécurité, passé à tabac en octobre 2011 en plein cœur de Damas, Riad Seif entendait poursuivre son combat à l'intérieur même

**Le CNS doit devenir « une partie d'une opposition élargie », a tranché Washington, après avoir moqué ses responsables**

de la Syrie. Jusqu'à son départ, cet été, probablement coordonné avec le Qatar et les Etats-Unis. « *Riad a une énorme crédibilité au sein de l'opposition et, comme il est malade, personne ne peut l'accuser d'ambitions personnelles* », dit le politologue syrien Salam Kawakibi.

Les récents succès de l'Armée syrienne libre, maître des voies d'accès à Alep après la prise de Saraqeb, jeudi 1<sup>er</sup> novembre, plaident aussi en faveur du plan Seif. La perspecti-

ve d'une libération quasi complète du nord de la Syrie rend plus nécessaire que jamais la formation d'une entité politique crédible. D'autant que certaines dérives sur le terrain nourrissent les inquiétudes, à l'image de l'exécution par des rebelles d'une dizaine de soldats, jeudi à Saraqeb. Un « *crime de guerre potentiel* », selon Amnesty International, que le CNS a condamné.

Au sein de cette coalition, le plan Seif ne fait cependant pas l'unanimité. Nombreux sont ceux qui voient d'un mauvais œil la dilution du CNS dans une structure multipartite. Dans les rangs de la gauche, hostile à toute ingérence étrangère en Syrie, le voyage au Qatar, chaud partisan d'une intervention militaire, suscite aussi des réserves. « *Se réunir à Doha, c'est comme se réunir à Téhéran* », assène l'opposant Samir Aïta, en référence au rôle de boutefeux de l'Iran dans la crise syrienne.

Cofondateur avec Michel Kilo du Forum démocratique, il entend boycotter la session du 8 novembre. Se tiendra-t-elle seulement ? Rien n'est sûr. Il y a deux semaines, une première réunion de refonte de l'opposition avait été annulée quarante-huit heures avant son commencement. ■

**BENJAMIN BARTHE**

## Le Monde

Mardi 6 novembre 2012

# A Alep, l'activité quasiment à l'arrêt affaiblit fortement l'économie de la Syrie

Plus de 600 usines alépineuses auraient fermé et la récession du pays atteindrait 20 % en 2012

**Beyrouth**  
Correspondance

Plus de trois mois de guerre à Alep, l'un des poumons d'activité de la Syrie, ont affaibli l'économie du pays déjà éreintée par les sanctions internationales et par des mois de violences.

Longtemps à l'écart de la révolte contre le régime, la deuxième ville syrienne, dont l'arrière-pays agricole est dominé par les rebelles, a vu son activité s'effondrer depuis le déclenchement des affrontements entre insurgés et armée le 20 juillet. Selon des estimations, son activité

industrielle tourne entre 10 % et 25 % de ses capacités.

« *Les combats à Alep ont un impact plus important que les violences dans d'autres régions, à cause du rôle économique de la ville. C'est la capitale industrielle de Syrie et la principale plaque tournante pour le commerce agricole*, explique Jihad Yazigi, rédacteur en chef du bulletin économique en ligne *The Syria Report*. *La baisse de la production va influencer sur l'inflation.* »

A l'échelle du pays, la hausse des prix se situait déjà à 36 % en juillet, avant l'embrasement d'Alep. Selon M. Yazigi, plus de 600 usines alépineuses ont fermé depuis le début des

combats, au sein de Cheikh Najjar, la principale zone industrielle d'Alep, qui employait 40 000 travailleurs avant les affrontements.

Parmi les entreprises dont la production nationale est désormais à l'arrêt à Cheikh Najjar, sous contrôle rebelle, une vingtaine d'usines pharmaceutiques. Touchées aussi, les fabriques textiles et agroalimentaires, piliers d'Alep. « *La plupart des entrepreneurs ont quitté la ville* », indique le politologue Bakr Sidki, qui réside à Alep. De plus, les échanges terrestres de cette plateforme économique avec certaines zones, comme le Centre et le Sud, sont devenus difficiles, à cause des violences et de la partition du territoire entre rebelles et pro-régime, et le coût du fret par avion vers Damas est prohibitif.

## Baisse de la monnaie

Quelles conséquences pour Damas et le pays ? Les partenaires des acteurs alépins sont touchés, tel Youssef, marchand de tissus damascène dont les fournisseurs ne produisent plus, et qui a vu l'un

de ses camions rançonné par des « mercenaires » sur l'axe Alep-Damas. Selon M. Yazigi, transports terrestres et banques sont aussi affectés à Damas.

Toutefois, pour le responsable de *The Syria Report*, qui constate que d'autres activités se déploient dans la capitale (services de sécurité, générateurs électriques...), si la paralysie d'Alep a un impact significatif sur l'économie syrienne, elle s'inscrit dans un contexte général de violences. Selon lui, d'autres facteurs pèsent sur l'avenir de l'économie : « *la valeur de la monnaie, qui a baissé de moitié face au dollar* », ou encore « *la capacité du gouvernement à assurer la fourniture en blé et en pain, ainsi qu'à importer les produits énergétiques nécessaires* ».

M. Yazigi voit dans plusieurs déclarations officielles alarmistes le signe d'une inquiétude croissante des autorités face aux indicateurs (le produit intérieur brut pourrait chuter de 20 % en 2012) : le ministère de l'Agriculture a par exemple invité les Syriens à développer leurs propres cultures. ■

**LAURE STEPHAN**

UN ENTRETIEN AVEC LE LEADER DES DRUZES

# “La Syrie peut tout faire au Liban”

Pour Walid Joumblatt, chef du Parti socialiste progressiste qui participe à la coalition au gouvernement, le cycle de violences n'en est qu'à son début...



Walid Joumblatt,  
le chef des Druzes

**Le Nouvel Observateur**  
**L'assassinat du général Wissam al-Hassan, le 19 octobre, marque-t-il le début d'une nouvelle déstabilisation du Liban par Damas ?**

**Walid Joumblatt** En commanditant l'assassinat de Wissam al-Hassan, l'un des chefs du service de renseignement libanais, proche des Etats-Unis et de la France, le message de la Syrie était clair : montrer qu'elle avait toujours les moyens de relancer la guerre civile au Liban. Le général Wissam était un ennemi encombrant pour le régime de Damas : proche de l'opposition syrienne, il avait procédé à l'arrestation à Beyrouth de l'ex-ministre de l'Information et député Michel Samaha, homme lige de Bachar al-Assad, qui avait rapporté dans sa voiture des explosifs sophistiqués destinés à perpétrer des attentats contre des personnalités politiques libanaises antisyriniennes. Depuis qu'ils ont assassiné mon père, Kamal Joumblatt, le 16 mars 1977, les Syriens ont gardé l'habitude de faire éliminer tous ceux qui les dérangent au Liban. Ce n'est qu'un début, le cycle des violences vient de s'amorcer. A chaque

fois que le régime syrien est en difficulté, il exporte ses problèmes hors de ses frontières, en Turquie, en Jordanie, en Irak et surtout au Liban où ses réseaux infiltrent encore largement l'appareil d'Etat.

**Aujourd'hui, l'opposition libanaise dénonce le soutien du Hezbollah au régime syrien. Certains appellent à la démission du gouvernement pro-Hezbollah du Liban. Et vous ?**

Si la classe politique libanaise s'accorde pour former un gouvernement d'union nationale, j'y participerai. Mais ce n'est pas moi qui, par ma démission, vais provoquer la dissolution du gouvernement et précipiter le Liban dans l'inconnu. Le vide politique conduirait au pire. Certains hommes politiques libanais semblent déconnectés de la réalité et réclament la démission à tout prix du Premier ministre Najib Mikati : ils n'ont pas pris la mesure de la gravité de la situation. Il faut s'attendre à tout de la part du régime de Bachar al-Assad, y compris au Liban, d'autant qu'il tue en toute impunité face à une communauté internationale pétrifiée.

**Comment jugez-vous l'attitude**

## DRUZES

Forte de 700 000 membres, la communauté druze de Syrie est la plus importante de la région et représente environ 3% de la population syrienne. Il y a 250 000 Druzes au Liban et 125 000 dans le nord d'Israël, en Galilée et sur le plateau du Golan. Branche ismaélienne de l'islam chiite, la doctrine religieuse druze contient des éléments issus du Coran comme du mysticisme musulman.

## de la communauté internationale dans la crise syrienne ?

Tout se passe comme si elle conspirait pour ne rien faire. L'Occident regarde sans bouger un despote pire que Hitler tuer son peuple. Dernier épisode de cette mascarade diplomatique, mercredi dernier [31 octobre, NDLR], à Paris, où les ministres des Affaires étrangères français et russe, Fabius et Lavrov, ont longuement discuté sur des points de détail. Le premier insistant sur la nécessité du départ d'Assad, tandis que Lavrov affirmait qu'il appartenait au peuple syrien de décider du sort de son président. Ces querelles sémantiques durent depuis des mois et permettent de différer les vraies décisions : maintenir ou non Assad au pouvoir, pendant qu'on assassine la Syrie, comme si c'était encore la question... Quelle hypocrisie !

## Que doit faire l'Occident ?

Armer l'opposition ! Cela aurait dû être fait depuis la bataille de Baba Amr, à Homs. Et fournir à l'Armée syrienne libre des missiles antichars pour accélérer la chute du régime afin d'enrayer la guerre civile qui déchire la Syrie. On dit qu'il y a des fondamentalistes qui se battent au sein de l'Armée libre. Mais c'est la paralysie de la communauté internationale qui transforme cette guerre de libération en guerre civile sectaire et religieuse ! Les Syriens n'ont pas besoin d'une intervention militaire, qui provoquerait un conflit entre la Turquie et l'Iran, mais d'armes comme les missiles antichars français Milan ou les Stinger américains qui rééquilibreraient les forces en présence et précipiteraient la chute de ce régime barbare. Nettoyage ethnique, destruction des centres historiques et d'un patrimoine culturel unique, l'Occident ne voit-il pas que le régime est en train d'entraîner le pays tout entier dans sa chute ? Assad n'hésitera pas à ramener son pays à l'âge de la pierre.

Propos recueillis par SARA DANIEL

## Kurdish woman militia leader's death could derail FSA talks

By Lauren Williams / The Daily Star

**B**EIRUT: Syrian rebels have killed a Kurdish woman militia leader in the northern city of Aleppo, escalating growing tensions between anti-regime fighters and the Kurdish groups, a Kurdish leader told the Daily Star Friday.

Shaha Ali Abdu, also known as Nujeen Dirik, the head of a Kurdish popular defense unit that is part of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) was killed early Friday, said Zuhat Kobani, head of PYD's foreign affairs committee. Kobani was captured by Free Syrian Army rebels as she met with FSA groups as part of a mediation mission tasked with retrieving the bodies of other Kurds taken hostage during fighting between Kurds and FSA rebels in the city last week, Kobani said. Clashes between the rebels and PYD - affiliated Kurdish militia in Aleppo reportedly left 30 dead last week, after rebels entered the PYD-controlled, Kurdish dominated neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsoud in Achraifiyeh. Kurdish groups said that move was in breach of

an agreement that rebels not enter Kurdish zones. The ensuing violence has sparked fears of a new front in the already fractured country. Mediation efforts to contain the violence were underway earlier this week but Kobani said the death of Dirik threatened to derail those talks.

"The popular committees (Kurdish militia) are continuing negotiations... but this event will definitely have an impact," Kobani said, adding that talks were now underway to have Dirik's body returned. He said there was evidence Dirik had been killed "savagely." "She was initially lightly injured in the shoulder during an ambush on the mission, but she called her friends to say she was fine." "In my opinion she was tortured and killed savagely." Another kidnapped Kurdish civilian was returned dead Thursday, showing evidence of torture, according to Kurdish leaders and human rights monitors. The PYD opposes the regime of President Bashar Assad but has tried to remain neutral in ongoing fighting in embattled Aleppo, the country's commercial hub. But the latest clashes have threatened to ignite Arab-Kurdish divisions and have already spread to other areas in the country. Kobani said Achraifiyeh was "calm" Friday night, but said there were signs talks with the FSA were breaking down. "The FSA is insisting to enter Sheikh Maqsoud in the negotiations. The [Kurdish] popular committees are refusing saying it will only invite the government forces to enter the area." ○

## Turkey warned Iraqi Kurds that autonomy would not be applied in Syria: PM

**A**NKARA - Turkey gave a clear warning to Masoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Administration, that the autonomous region in northern Iraq would not be applied to Syria, Turkey's premier has said.

"We cannot let playing of such a scenario here [in Syria]. We told this to Barzani too. We wanted him to know this," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told a group of journalists on board a plane en route from Berlin to Ankara late on Oct. 31 in an apparent reference to the possibility of the founding of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Syria.

"Barzani said there was not and will not be such a thing; moreover he tried to tell us that the Democratic Union of Kurdistan (PYD) is not the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)," Erdoğan said, adding that they had warned the Iraqi Kurdish leader that in case of such a scenario in Syria Turkey's stance would not be as it was for Iraq.

With the escalation of clashes in Syria, Kurdish groups in the country have also begun mobilizing in the north of Turkey's neighbor. In a meeting with Barzani in July, 16 different Kurdish groups have agreed to stand together as part of the Syrian Kurdish National Council.

Yet, in a visit by Foreign Minister Ahmet



Davutoğlu to Arbil, Ankara gave a warning to Iraqi Kurds that the mobilization in northern Syria of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), could lead to the establishment of another front for the PKK in its attacks against Turkey.

On the other hand, asked if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would stay in power longer than assumed, Erdoğan said, "Al-Assad is living in a dream world."

He said no political government had stayed in power despite its people in history.

The prime minister said the opposition had been successfully carrying out an increasingly strengthening resistance over 20 months, and that many places had passed into its control.

The sole power in the hands of the regime was planes and helicopters, and the

regime had been shooting its people with those, Erdoğan said. Humanity would not let al-Assad use chemical weapons, he added.

Turkey is continuing to ask for the involvement of NATO in the Syrian issue, Erdoğan said, adding that he had raised the issue recently during the meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

"I told her that this trouble is at the same time NATO's trouble."

He told Merkel that Germany should keep sensitivity about the Syrian crisis on the agenda.

Asked about the opening of a "humanitarian aid corridor" in Syria, the prime minister said there was no humanitarian aid corridor but civil society groups were making efforts.

"NGOs can deliver humanitarian aid to some places in various ways. For example, I have learned that some NGOs in Germany provided sacrifices [for the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice]. Probably, they sent the money and the slaughters were made there."

Erdoğan, meanwhile, said he has been planning to visit Gaza along with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas if the conditions are ripe.

□□□

# Najmaldin Karim: As Governor I Won't Allow the Dijla Forces to Enter Kirkuk

By HEVIDAR AHMED

rudaw.net

**I**n an interview with Rudaw, Najmaldin Karim, the governor of Kirkuk, suggests that the province should be annexed to the Kurdistan Region. Kirkuk is one of the disputed territories that both the federal government and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) lay claim to. Karim also says that Kurdish parties will participate in the next provincial election as one united alliance.



Governor of Kirkuk Najmaldin Karim. Photo: Rudaw.

**Rudaw:** It is said that, since 2003, Kurds have been part of the Kirkuk problem and got in the way of finding a solution. How true is this statement?

**Najmaldin Karim:** There have been some problems since 2003, particularly between the PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which are the two ruling parties in Kirkuk and Kurdistan. In some offices, they have assigned individuals to certain posts that cannot operate in that post. Sometimes, when an official has been listed for removal due to corruption, the official changes his political party and thus avoids being removed. This has dealt the biggest blow to us. We have to criticize both the PUK and KDP in this regard. They are the ruling parties here in Kirkuk.

**Rudaw:** Since you have a strong relationship with the Kurdish and Iraqi presidents, why don't you inform them of this?

**Najmaldin Karim:** This problem is not only in Kirkuk. In Kurdistan, our ministries have allegedly united, but in practice they are still divided. It is true that our Asayish (security forces) have been merged, but this is only in name; they have not merged in practice. What is happening in Kirkuk is an extension of what is going on in the Kurdistan Region.

**Rudaw:** Do you think Kirkuk's problems will be solved through Article 140?

**Najmaldin Karim:** No doubt this article has some problems, like the lack of a time limit for its implementation. Also, some towns have been placed in the article that are already part of Kurdistan. They should have not been placed there and put under negotiations of whether they are in Kurdistan or not. Anyway, this has been done and now we have a constitutional article.

"What is happening in Kirkuk is an extension of what is going on in the Kurdistan Region."

Another mistake of the Kurds has been trusting Baghdad. Kurds believed Baghdad had good intentions and would implement the article. But it turned out that this optimism was not appropriate. Now, Article 140 is not being talked about in the Iraqi Council of Ministers or Iraqi Parliament. Recently, the issue of correcting the provincial borders was

discussed between President Talabani and President Barzani. This was decided, but also has to be taken to parliament for the first reading.

**Rudaw:** Is there any alternative to Article 140 for the disputed areas? What can be done in this regard?

**Najmaldin Karim:** The Kurdish political parties and other parties have to explain their views on the future of Kirkuk. Let's say the people of Kirkuk vote or want to vote to return the province to Kurdistan. You have to assure the people, you have to assure the Turkmen and Arabs, and have a program to show the people of Kirkuk what Kirkuk's future will look like under a Kurdish administration.

**Rudaw:** Do you have any particular suggestion in this regard?

**Najmaldin Karim:** Yes, I do. Kirkuk is not Erbil; it's not Sulaimani or Duhok. Kirkuk has to be treated differently by the Kurdistan Region. In Kurdistan, the government is very centralized. Now, with all the shortcomings of Baghdad, Kirkuk is more decentralized than Kurdistan's provinces. We have to preserve this decentralization and expand it.

We also have to show the Turkmen and Arabs what they can have in Kurdistan's Council of Ministers and ministries. We have to have their representation in Kurdistan's leadership and parliament. They have to have an allocated budget from Kurdistan's budget.

**Rudaw:** The Iraqi government has decided that provincial elections should take place in April 2013. Will elections be carried out in Kirkuk as well?

**Najmaldin Karim:** We are hoping that elections will take place in Kirkuk as well. We have told the United Nations and the U.S. that we are ready for the election and we will not accept any conditions on Kirkuk's provincial elections. We want an election and we believe it is in the interest of Kirkuk. All the Kurdish political parties have decided to participate in the election in one bloc.

Frankly speaking, the biggest problem now is the Turkmen. They are worried about the result of the election. We have told them that we will sit with them to find a solution. They are an original component of Kirkuk's community and their rights will not be violated. We will not tie their rights to the number of seats they win in the elections. Their rights have to be protected. We have told them that we are willing to participate in the elections in one bloc or form an alliance after the elections.

The Arabs would also like to have the elections carried out. They want to participate in the elections and have members in provincial council. However, they had some conditions on the elections. One of the conditions they were trying to impose was that the Kirkuk provincial elections should not take place at the same time as Kurdistan's provincial elections. Later, we found out why they were pushing for this. We have many Kirkuki Kurds who live in Kurdistan provinces and abroad and they cannot come to Kirkuk to vote. So we did not accept this condition.

"Frankly speaking, the biggest problem now is the Turkmen. They are worried about the result of the election."

**Rudaw:** What is your expectation for Kurdish votes in the election?

**Najmaldin Karim:** If an election is carried out now, Kurds will win about 54 percent of the votes in Kirkuk province.

**Rudaw:** Let's talk about the Dijla Operations Command. Were you consulted by the Iraqi government about its formation?

**Najmaldin Karim:** Before the formation of the Dijla Operations Command, I sensed there were attempts to form the force. On May 2, I visited Baghdad and met with the Iraqi defense minister and asked him about it. He said it was just an idea. As I understood it, he was not really excited about forming the Dijla forces, but suggested I discuss the matter with the prime minister himself. I met Maliki later and told him that the formation of the Dijla forces was not a good idea and would not serve Kirkuk and the region. Maliki said it was just a suggestion and not to worry, it would not be formed. But at the end of July, without informing us, all the security forces, including the police and army, were placed under the command of the Dijla Operations Command.

I immediately sent Prime Minister Maliki a letter and informed him that we were against the formation of the Dijla forces. The Kirkuk police refused to participate in the Dijla Operations Command. We assured the Kirkuk police that Baghdad could not take any steps against them. This situation continued. I went to Baghdad and met with Maliki. I told

him that if he wanted a war, then he should let the formation of the Dijla forces proceed, but that if he wanted peace he would have to cancel the formation of this force.

What Maliki is trying to do is declare emergency status. If you place all the powers under the authority of the military, you are declaring an emergency status. But this has to be approved by parliament, even if such a status was needed. What Maliki is doing is unconstitutional.

Maliki agreed and said that the 12th division and police would report to the governor and the governor would be the head of the security committee. But, in practice, none of this has taken place.

“We will not allow any force to enter Kirkuk.”

As long as I am the governor of Kirkuk I will

not allow the Dijla forces to proceed. I have full support from Kurdistan’s leadership and all the Kurdish parties.

**Rudaw: Do you feel like you are left alone in the fight against the formation of the Dijla Operations Command and the Kurdish representatives in Baghdad are not doing much about it?**

**Najmaldin Karim:** Our colleagues in Baghdad could have done a little more. This subject should have been discussed in Iraqi Parliament. They should have summoned the Iraqi defense minister to parliament. What is the Kurdish representative good for if he is silent in such a situation?

The Iraqi Army’s general commander has to speak up as well. He could have said that he does not agree with the formation of the Dijla Operations Command. Silence makes the crisis bigger. Why are they not silent about matters like oil, gas and the budget? I

do not mean the Kurdistan Region; I am talking about our representatives in Baghdad. Kurds do not have a strategy for the issues. What the Kurds do is react to actions. We have to have a strategy and plans.

**Rudaw: If the Dijla forces enter Kirkuk, will Peshmerga forces allow them?**

**Najmaldin Karim:** So far, no forces have come to Kirkuk. And we will not allow any force to enter Kirkuk. We have prepared ourselves for all possibilities. Kirkuk is a disputed province and no one party can decide unilaterally to change the balance of power in the city. The Kurdistan Region has as many rights in Kirkuk as Baghdad does. Therefore, no force can easily enter Kirkuk. And when Kurdistan’s minister of Peshmerga came to Kirkuk, we all heard what he said. ■

# Iraq’s oil The Kurdish opening

Iraqi Kurds and Western oil firms have outfoxed the government in Baghdad



*Kurdish tankers carry oil and hopes of eventual independence*

IRAQ is blessed with abundant oil that is cheap to extract and close to newly built export terminals. Production has hit a three-decade high and continues to rise steadily. By 2035, predicts the International Energy Agency (IEA), an advocate for rich-world consumers, Iraqi output could more than double, to 8.3m barrels per day (b/d).

But Western oil firms are increasingly reluctant to play a part in this boom. ExxonMobil appears keen to sell its stake in West Qurna, one of the giant fields in southern Iraq that will provide much of the production growth. Royal Dutch Shell and BP are both still working in the south, but unhappily so. Suffocating bureaucracy and onerous contract terms make life difficult. Heavier-than-expected costs and delays to infrastructure undercut profits.

Three years ago when they signed contracts with the Iraqi government, the oil majors were prepared to accept hiccups. But their

patience has thinned with the arrival of an alternative source of Iraqi oil. Kurdistan, the semi-autonomous province in the country’s north, has been offering competing and much more lucrative deals. ExxonMobil’s decision last year to acquire six blocks in the region angered the central government, which considers the deal illegal and lays claim to Kurdish oil. But the world’s largest oil company started a trend. In July Total, Chevron and Gazprom all signed contracts with the Kurdistan regional government, potentially dooming their chances of winning future business in the south. BG, a British firm, was in Erbil, the Kurdish capital, on a scouting mission in late October.

“Kurdistan is 11 years ahead of the rest of Iraq in terms of political and commercial development,” says Luay al-Khatteeb, head of the Iraq Energy Institute, a London-based think-tank. Kurdistan’s potential oil reserves of around 45 billion barrels are less than a third of those in southern Iraq. Still, the

Kurdish oil minister, Ashti Hawrami, believes output of 1m b/d is possible within three years.

The tricky part is getting the oil to market. The Kurds today export around 200,000 b/d through pipelines controlled by the central government. Mr Hawrami wants to build a new Kurdish-owned pipe to Turkey, feeding long-held dreams of Kurdish independence. That unnerves Turkey which is fighting Kurdish separatists in its south-east. Some Turkish officials seem to acknowledge the possibility of an eventual Kurdish state in northern Iraq and seek to make it commercially dependent on Turkey. Co-operating with the Iraqi Kurds would also generate lucrative transit fees and offer Turkey an alternative to oil from Russia and Iran.

So far, Turkey has only allowed the Iraqi Kurds to export oil by lorry. To win approval for a pipeline, they would probably have to support Turkish opposition to Kurdish separatism outside Iraq. That seems unlikely. But the growing civil war in Syria is helping the Kurds. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey’s prime minister, is angry with the Iraqi government for supporting Syria’s murderous regime. Backing Kurdish oil exports makes that point. But approving a pipeline may be a step too far for Mr Erdogan just now.

The Iraqi government is pondering how to respond. It could sweeten the terms of its contracts with the oil firms in the south. That might staunch the flow of Western capital to Kurdistan. In the meantime, the main beneficiaries of the majors’ receding interest in southern Iraq are Asian oil firms. Chinese will account for about 2m b/d of Iraq’s production by 2020. Fatih Birol, the IEA’s chief economist, talks of a “Baghdad-to-Beijing” axis.

## Iraqi Kurdish president warns Syrian Kurds over infighting

by Isabel Coles / (Reuters)

**A**RBIL, Iraq - Iraqi Kurdish President Masoud Barzani warned Kurds in Syria against being sucked into the "fires of discord," urging them to preserve Kurdish unity as tensions between rival factions threaten to spillover into violence.

Syria's Kurds see the war ravaging their country as an unprecedented opportunity to gain the kind of freedoms enjoyed by their ethnic kin in neighbouring Iraq, where they live autonomously from the federal capital in Baghdad.

Rivalry between two main camps, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and another group, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) risks devolving into Kurd-on-Kurd conflict and further complicating the civil war in Syria.

Earlier this year, Barzani brought the KNC and PYD together in Iraqi Kurdistan, where they formed a joint council to present a united front for Kurdish interests. But the agreement has struggled to work on the ground in Syria, where the PYD has the strongest presence.

The PYD is also aligned with PKK separatist guerrillas fighting a 28-year-old war against Turkey, and the group's strong presence in northeast Syria has



Ankara worried about a potential PKK safe haven over its border.

Members of the KNC recently accused the PYD's militia, known as People's Defense Units (YPG) of kidnapping a member of their politburo, a charge denied by the PYD.

"We call on all sides to release captives to safeguard the unity of (Kurdish) ranks and not to allow room for the fires of discord," Barzani was quoted as saying in a statement in Arabic on the regional government's website.

Barzani urged Syrian Kurds to co-operate and focus on the "higher goals and interests" of the Kurdish people.

The KNC was forged from more than a dozen smaller Syrian Kurdish parties with Barzani's blessing, and is broadly accep-

ted by the political mainstream, unlike the PYD, which Turkey sees as tied to the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK.

Turkish officials also believe Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has allowed the PYD to take over towns in the Syrian Kurdish region as a way to strike back at Ankara's support of Arab rebels fighting Damascus.

Syrian Kurdish parties are split over what form of self-rule they want if Assad falls, whether to follow Iraqi Kurdistan's autonomy in a federal system or self-administration within the Syrian central government.

Any de facto Kurdish state in Syria could emboldened Kurdish minorities in Turkey and Iran, but also strengthen Iraqi Kurdistan in its own disputes with Iraq's central government in Baghdad over oil rights.

The fate of Syria's Kurdish region will be key in any post-Assad Syria. Most Syrian Kurds -- the country's largest minority -- are wary of the main Syrian Arab opposition dominated by Islamists who are hostile to the idea of Syria's Kurds gaining rights denied under Assad. ●

## There is no Kurdish problem: MHP leader

ISTANBUL-Hürriyet Daily News

**T**he Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is holding its 10th congress today in Ankara with leader Devlet Bahçeli fighting to hold onto his chair against nine other candidates.

Bahçeli's strongest rival is MHP Trabzon deputy Koray Aydın, according to daily Hürriyet. A total of 1,241 delegates at the congress will determine the party's future leadership direction.

Taking the floor, Bahçeli denounced the "blood-sucking vampires" arrayed against Turkey. "If the Nationalist Movement exists, solutions are not exhausted yet. If there is an Ülkücü [Idealist] Movement, nothing has ended yet. We're here against the co-chairman [Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan] of the Greater Middle Eastern Project [an alleged U.S. plot to



control the region], his friends in betrayal, blood-sucking vampires, and we're ready to do all we can for the people," Bahçeli said.

"There is no Kurdish problem; [it is just] a game being played against Turkey," Bahçeli added.

"The government is planning to release the İmralı butcher [outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party leader Abdullah Öcalan]. He will first be sent into house arrest and will then be released," he said.

The congress is continuing throughout the day.

### Health Officials probe MHP congress

Officials from the Ministry of Health have raided the MHP congress, following claims on social media that a number of people were smoking inside the congress hall, according to daily Hürriyet. An investigation concerning the matter will be launched if it is deemed necessary.

Smoking in closed spaces is banned in Turkey, according to a law passed in 2008.

□□□



## Syrie: 26 morts dans des combats près de la frontière turque

BEYROUTH, 8 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**DES COMBATS** entre soldats et rebelles syriens aux abords du poste-frontière de Rass al-Aïn reliant la Turquie au nord-est de la Syrie ont fait 26 morts jeudi, dont 10 rebelles et 16 soldats, a indiqué l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

De leur côté, les médias turcs ont rapporté que cinq civils turcs ont été légèrement blessés par des balles perdues en marge de ces combats à Rass al-Aïn, ville majoritairement kurde où se trouve l'un de deux derniers points de passage vers la Turquie à n'être pas encore tombé aux mains des insurgés.

Des centaines de combattants rebelles ont convergé à l'aube depuis la Turquie vers Rass Al-Aïn, dans la province de Hassaka, tandis que l'armée y envoyait des renforts, a précisé l'OSDH qui s'appuie sur un large réseau de militants et de médecins à travers le pays.

De son côté, la télévision d'Etat a affirmé que les troupes avaient tué des dizaines de "terroristes", terme par lequel les autorités désignent les rebelles, tandis que d'autres avaient pu s'enfuir hors du territoire syrien.

Selon un dirigeant kurde basé dans le nord de l'Irak, les heurts ont opposé les troupes syriennes à des combattants rebelles kurdes et arabes, qui ont invité les habitants à fuir la ville.

"Nous sommes en contact avec des personnes dans la ville selon lesquelles des véhicules de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL, rebelles) circulent en ville et appellent les gens à partir car plus de 70 véhicules des troupes du gouvernement s'approchent", a déclaré Chalal Kedo, membre de l'Assemblée nationale kurde syrienne, qui s'exprimait depuis Erbil, chef-lieu du Kurdistan irakien.

Un habitant a affirmé plus tôt à l'AFP par téléphone que des combattants de l'ASL avaient pris d'assaut le poste-frontière depuis le côté turc, avant d'attaquer un poste de police et un centre des renseignements à Rass al-Aïn.

"L'ASL appelle les membres des forces pro-gouvernementales à se rendre par haut-parleurs", a indiqué à l'AFP via Skype un militant sur place se faisant appeler Hevidar.



"L'armée a des chars stationnés à 25 kilomètres de Rass al-Aïn. L'ASL va déployer des tireurs embusqués aux entrées de la ville et a demandé aux gens qui vivent sur la route de Hassaka de quitter leurs maisons car elle redoute des bombardements", a-t-il ajouté.

Des rebelles et de nombreux civils fuyant les combats se sont réfugiés en Turquie, où les autorités diffusent des annonces recommandant aux habitants de Ceylanpinar, localité turque proche de Rass al-Aïn, de se tenir éloignés de la ligne de démarcation, a affirmé l'agence turque Anatolie.

Un convoi de blindés turcs faisait route de Sanliurfa vers la ville frontalière pour se positionner le long de la ligne de démarcation, selon des médias turcs. Le ministère turc des Affaires étrangères n'était pas immédiatement disponible pour commenter ces informations.

Habituellement, le poste de Rass al-Aïn n'est ouvert qu'à l'occasion des fêtes religieuses, et aux seuls piétons, pour permettre aux populations arabophones des deux côtés de la frontière de rendre visite à leurs familles.

La Turquie a renforcé son dispositif de sécurité à sa frontière avec la Syrie après la mort de cinq villageois turcs tués le 3 octobre par la chute d'un obus syrien. L'artillerie turque riposte depuis à toute chute d'obus sur son territoire.

Ankara a rompu ses contacts avec Damas et affiché son soutien aux rebelles.○



## Conflit syrien : les Kurdes s'en mêlent

10 Novembre 2012

**Des combattants kurdes se sont emparés dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi de deux villes au nord-est de la Syrie. Affiliés au PKK, le parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan pourchassé par la Turquie, ils ne font pas partie des rebelles syriens luttant contre le régime, mais visent l'indépendance kurde.**

Les Kurdes se mêlent du conflit syrien. Peuple sans pays vivant à cheval sur la Syrie, la Turquie, l'Irak et l'Iran, les Kurdes sont majoritaires dans le nord de la Syrie. Mais jusque là, ils n'avaient pas pris une part active à la rébellion contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad.

Dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi, des combattants kurdes ont pris le contrôle de deux villes, Derbassiyé et Tal Tamer après avoir encerclé pendant de longues heures les deux QG de la police et des sièges des renseignements des militaires et de la sécurité de l'Etat dans la province de Hassaka (nord-est du pays).

Selon le président de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, Rahmi Abdel Rahmane, "dans la province de Hassaka, le régime ne contrôle désormais plus que les deux grandes villes de Qamichli et Hassaka".

### AUTONOMISTES KURDES

En septembre, de fortes manifestations s'étaient déroulées dans le nord de la Syrie, où les Kurdes, majoritaires, refusaient d'être enrôlés dans l'armée de Bachar al-Assad. Mais ils n'avaient pas pris les armes à proprement parler contre le régime.

Les combattants de Derbassiyé et Tal Tamer se réclament du Comité de protection du peuple kurde, le bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) turc.



*Des Kurdes syriens manifestent contre leur enrôlement dans l'armée du régime*

Or le PKK, parti autonomiste kurde, est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par l'Union européenne, les Etats-Unis et la Turquie. Cette dernière se livre depuis plusieurs mois à des opérations militaires de grande ampleur contre ces rebelles souhaitant la création d'un Etat kurde indépendant. Ce samedi, un hélicoptère de combat turc s'est écrasé faisant 17 morts au cours d'une de ces opérations.

### QUELLE RÉACTION TURQUE ?

Quelle sera la réaction d'Ankara, qui a accueilli plus de 100.000 réfugiés fuyant le conflit syrien et soutient les rebelles, si l'émanation syrienne du PKK prend une part active à la rébellion contre le régime, ou profite de la déstabilisation de la région pour consolider ses positions à la frontière turque ?

Ayant vivement réagi lorsque des roquettes syriennes avaient visé son sol, la Turquie risque de ne pas apprécier voir les autonomistes kurdes développer leur influence ♦

# En Syrie, l'éléphant et les fourmis

**E**n apparence, tout est bloqué en Syrie. Depuis l'été, plus rien n'avance ni ne se dessine de clair. Ni le régime ni les rebelles ne semblent en mesure de porter un coup décisif à l'adversaire, a fortiori de remporter la victoire finale. Le régime tient, tant bien que mal, les villes, l'insurrection des campagnes, sans réussir à se protéger des bombardements meurtriers de l'aviation et de l'artillerie adverse. Le pays se morcelle en petites poches telle une toison de léopard. La Syrie tout entière est guettée par une « somalisation » contre laquelle met en garde le représentant spécial de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, Lakhdar Brahimi.

Le sort des deux grandes villes du pays – Damas, la capitale politique, et Alep, sa capitale économique – résume le mieux l'impasse actuelle et l'apparent statu quo. L'offensive de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), début juillet à Damas, a fait long feu et les groupes rebelles ont opté pour une tactique de harcèlement par des attentats plus ou moins ciblés, contribuant ainsi à renforcer la confessionnalisation du conflit voulue par le régime dès le début du soulèvement. A Alep, l'ASL n'est pas parvenue à s'emparer de la totalité de la ville, dans laquelle elle est entrée mi-juillet, mais le régime a échoué à reconquérir un seul quartier depuis sa contre-offensive lancée en août.

Vu de loin, le conflit est devenu illisible et fragmenté. Les acteurs politiques, censés donner un sens ou une direction aux opérations, n'aident pas à sa lecture, au contraire. L'opposition s'enlise dans d'interminables querelles de leadership. Quant au pouvoir, pensant disposer d'un blanc-seing pour régler le problème par la manière forte, il n'a jamais fait même mine de vouloir discuter. De fait, personne ne souhaite pour le moment s'asseoir à la table des négociations, chaque acteur restant persuadé qu'il a plus à gagner qu'à perdre dans l'affrontement. Le point d'épuisement du conflit, qui est la condition sine

## Analyse

CHRISTOPHE AYAD  
Service International

qua non de toute solution négociée, ne semble pas atteint.

Pourtant, sur le terrain, des dynamiques se dégagent, des logiques s'esquissent dans le brouillard d'une guerre à nulle autre pareille. L'enchevêtrement des fronts et la capacité donnée au régime par son aviation de frapper à peu près n'importe où et n'importe quand ne peuvent pas masquer un fait inéluctable et fondamental : jour après jour, semaine après semaine, il recule et son territoire se réduit comme peau de chagrin. Certes, il maîtrise les airs, certes, sa puissance de feu permet à ses pièces d'artillerie de bombarder jusqu'à 30 kilomètres à la ronde. Mais, faute de présence au sol et de renseignements fiables, ces bombardements, qu'ils soient effectués par des Mig, des hélicoptères larguant des barils de TNT ou des canons de 105 mm, se font à l'aveuglette et tuent bien plus de civils que de combattants.

Non seulement le périmètre des zones « libérées » ne cesse de s'agrandir, surtout dans le nord du pays, où l'insurrection dispose, dans la Turquie voisine, d'une base arrière lui permettant de s'approvisionner (en armes, en carburant et en hommes), mais le rapport de forces s'est inversé dans l'ensemble du pays : là où le régime assiégeait sa propre société, c'est désormais le contraire qui se passe. Il est sur la défensive, étranger à son propre pays.

L'armée syrienne est dans l'étrange situation d'occuper le pays, à l'instar des Américains en Irak ou en Afghanistan. Comment savoir si ce paysan au bord de la route est un combattant ou un simple civil ? Si cette femme à la fenêtre n'informerait par les insurgés à peine la patrouille passée ? Les convois militaires se font au prix d'innombrables détours et précautions pour échapper aux embuscades et attentats qui

les visent quotidiennement. Quand les soldats ne sont pas coincés dans leurs bases, d'où ils bombardent toute la campagne alentour, sans pouvoir y mettre un pied.

Ils regorgent d'armes mais ne peuvent plus être approvisionnés en vivres que par des largages épisodiques et aléatoires effectués par des hélicoptères n'atterrissant plus, de peur d'être abattus. C'est la parabole des fourmis et de l'éléphant : à chacun de ses pas, le pachyderme écrase des milliers de fourmis, mais, dépassé par le nombre, il ne peut venir à bout de la menace qui grimpe déjà le long de ses jambes.

Les combattants insurgés, qui restent d'une insigne vulnérabilité face aux armes lourdes du régime, se déplacent de part en part de la Syrie. Des unités venues de la province de Hamas rejoignent le front d'Alep, des combattants du djebel Akrad envoient

## L'armée syrienne est dans l'étrange situation d'occuper le pays à l'instar des Américains en Afghanistan

leurs prisonniers en lieu sûr dans le djebel Al-Zawiyah, d'autres traversent le pays jusqu'à la frontière irakienne pour aller récupérer des armes de contrebande, etc. La rébellion est partout car elle est issue de la société. Au-delà des épigones d'Al-Qaïda, qui se chiffrent à quelques centaines, l'Armée libre est formée avant tout de civils issus de leur propre région. Combattre l'insurrection revient donc à combattre la société.

Pour assécher le marais, comme dans toute guerre contre-insurrectionnelle, le pouvoir cherche donc à faire fuir les civils, qui abritent les combattants, les informent et les nourrissent, par une stratégie de terreur. Mais, ce faisant, il alimente les rangs de l'insurrection et accélère sa propre perte. ■

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AP Associated Press

## Rebelles kurdes: l'armée turque pénètre en Irak

ISTANBUL - 7 novembre 2012 - The Associated Press

**DES MILITAIRES TURCS** ont franchi la frontière irakienne pour mener une opération contre les camps de rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé mercredi la chaîne de télévision turque NTV.

La chaîne a précisé que des soldats turcs avaient été hélicoptés à cinq kilomètres à l'intérieur du territoire irakien, sans préciser quand et où précisé-

ment a eu lieu l'opération, ni s'il y a eu des victimes.

La Turquie a déjà mené plusieurs frappes aériennes et procédé à des tirs d'artillerie contre des camps de rebelles kurdes situés dans le nord de l'Irak, utilisés par les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) comme bases pour leurs opérations contre le régime turc. Les incursions des troupes turques hors de leurs frontières restent extrêmement rares.

Les affrontements entre les forces turques et le PKK ont connu un regain de violence ces derniers mois, dans un conflit qui a coûté la vie à des dizaines de milliers de personnes depuis 1984. Des centaines de détenus kurdes sont également en grève de la faim, réclamant plus de droits et d'autonomie dans leur région du sud-est de la Turquie. ●



## Aggressive Ankara risks overplaying its hand in Syria crisis

thenational.ae  
Ranj Alaaldin

**R**elations between Iraq and Turkey are fast deteriorating. Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has designated Turkey as a hostile state, banning Turkish companies from operating in the south and even called for the Iraqi army to be deployed against Turkish forces conducting cross-border attacks on Kurdish rebel PKK targets in the north.

The ebb in relations comes as Turkey pursues an increasingly aggressive Middle East foreign policy. The conflict in Syria puts Turkey, a major supporter of Syria's opposition forces, on the opposing end of a proxy war against Iran and Iraq.

Baghdad fears a Sunni Islamist takeover in Syria would embolden anti-government insurgents in Iraq's northern Sunni Arab provinces, which have supported the Syrian uprising and continue to provide a level of support for terrorist groups trying to undermine the government in Baghdad and Iraq's general stability.

Furthermore, Ankara provides a safe haven for high-ranking officials of the former Baathist regime, who in some cases organise and support militants operating out of Iraq's northern provinces. Turkey also refuses to extradite Iraq's fugitive vice president, Tarek Al Hashemi, who was recently found guilty of running death squads and sentenced to death in absentia by the Iraqi courts.

Ankara's long-term strategy is rooted in a broader objective: limit Iranian expansionism. It has undermined the Shiite-led, pro-Iran government in Baghdad ever since the government was formed in post-invasion Iraq in 2005. A further symptom of Ankara's strat-

egy is its support of Mr Al Maliki's enemies domestically and abroad, including its aggressive economic partnership with the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, valued at \$12 billion (Dh44 billion) in 2011, and its support for opponents of Bashar Al Assad's regime, Tehran's all-important geostrategic ally.

But Turkey should be careful that its wishes might come true. Geostrategic interests demand that it counterbalances Iranian prominence. However, despite revamping its foreign policy in response to the Arab uprisings, Turkey can no longer risk an unstable Iraq. Ankara needs to be careful, firstly, about increased autonomy, and possibly even independence, of the oil-rich Kurdistan region in northern Iraq and, secondly, developments that prompt its own restive population of some 20 million Kurds to demand similar rights.

It is against this backdrop that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Iran last month should be examined. The tide is shifting against Ankara's position. Mr Erdogan's government is looking for fresh options, as the Assad regime continues to defy international pressure with the help of its friends in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

As well as giving increased leverage to Iraq's Kurds - now key players in the region and backed by their oil wealth - the Syria conflict has also allowed an autonomous Kurdish region to emerge in Syria's north-east. Much to the dismay of Mr Erdogan's government, this has emboldened the PKK, the rebel group Turkey has failed to defeat over the past 40 years and which has recently intensified its attacks on Turkish military targets.

The group, which fights for a mixture of

political, territorial and human rights reasons for Turkey's marginalised and repressed Kurds, has seen its sister organisation in Syria, the PYD, take unparalleled control over Syrian Kurdistan. The PYD is increasingly playing the role of a local government as it sets up schools and military outposts in response to the continuing conflict and the possibility of a post-Assad Syria.

Turkey's response has come in the form of a military deployment along its borders with Syria, seen by many as a measure aimed in part at the PYD and Syria's Kurdistan region, rather than just reacting to the Syrian shelling of a Turkish border town last month.

That only shows how limited Ankara's options have become. Active military deployment in Syrian Kurdistan would force Turkey into a quagmire of a long-lasting conflict that it would neither be able to manage nor garner support for, domestically or internationally.

Turkey's response to the rise of the PKK and Syria's Kurds is telling because of its lack of foresight when it first sought the downfall of the Assad regime more than a year ago, as well as its failure to accommodate the gaps in its Syria and Iraq policies.

By alienating its regional neighbours, Turkey has seen them, in turn, revitalise their relationship and support for the PKK. Turkey may, therefore, find itself retreating in the coming months, as both patience with Mr Erdogan and support for his costly backing of the Syrian opposition runs out. □

*Ranj Alaaldin is a senior analyst with the Next Century Foundation, a conflict-resolution NGO based in London*

## Troops kill 13 Kurdish militants in southeastern Turkey

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey November 5, 2012 (Reuters)

**TURKISH ground troops backed by attack helicopters and aircraft killed 13 Kurdish militants in an operation in southeastern Turkey overnight, security sources said on Monday.**

Turkish fighter jets bombed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets in the Cudi and Kato mountains in Sirmak, a volatile province bordering Iraq and Syria that has witnessed a large share of the violence.

Thirteen PKK militants were killed in the raids, security sources said.

The attack came hours after a car bomb, planted by suspected PKK militants targeting a military vehicle in neighbouring Hakkari province killed an 11-year-old child and wounded 18 other people.

The PKK has carried out a steady stream of attacks on military targets in recent months, stepping up their 28-year-old insurgency in a move which Ankara sees as linked to the chaos in Syria, accusing Syrian president Bashar al-Assad of arming the PKK. ○

# Kurdish Rivalries in Syria

Neutrality and intra-Kurdish rivalries amid another Arab civil war.

By Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi

*Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi is a Shillman-Ginsburg Fellow at the Middle East Forum, and a student at Brasenose College, Oxford University.*

**A**mid claims of major advances for anti-regime forces in Aleppo, news emerged that rebels in the city had moved into the Kurdish neighborhood of Ashrafiya, which has been under the control of the Kurdish Democratic Party (PYD). Throughout the Syrian uprising and subsequent civil war, the PYD has maintained a policy of neutrality, attacking both rebel and regime forces who might impinge on their zones of control.

Later, a video emerged on YouTube that purported to show rebel fighters firing on an anti-rebel demonstration in Ashrafiya. These fighters were identified as operating under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Clashes between rebels and militiamen from the PYD-aligned Popular Protection Committees (YPC) culminated in the expulsion of rebels from Ashrafiya.

While this skirmish can be interpreted as signs of escalating Arab-Kurdish tensions in Syria and a desire on the part of Arab rebels to impose their will on the Kurds, a report last week in Lebanon's Daily Star purports to give a more complex picture.

Citing the PYD's Foreign Relations Committee head -- Zuhair Kobani -- and Arab opposition sources, it is alleged that at least some of the rebels who entered Ashrafiya were members of the predominantly Kurdish Salaheddin Brigade.

The Salaheddin Brigade generally consists of strongly anti-PYD and anti-PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) Kurds. Their own backgrounds vary: some are members of the Azadi (Freedom) party that is part of the Kurdish National Council (KNC), others are -- in the words of the Daily Star report -- "disgruntled former PKK members."

It should be noted that the KNC reached a nominal accord with the PYD in the summer that was mediated by Massoud Barzani, who is the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Yet tensions remain deep, as the KNC perceives that the PYD is monopolizing control of Kurdish areas with its affiliated militias that are by far the most powerful among the various Kurdish factions in Syria.

Meanwhile, PYD members have accused elements of the KNC of being stooges for Turkey. As Wladimir van Wilgenburg noted in a report for the Kurdish outlet Rudaw, these allegations prompted the PYD's arrest of the leader of the Azadi party -- Mustafa Jama -- at the end of June, although he was later released.

In the context of such tension, it is not so implausible that members of the Salaheddin Brigade might cooperate with Arab rebels. Therefore, what we may have here in Ashrafiya is a case of intra-Kurdish partisan politics.

Members of the Salaheddin Brigade apparently saw their chance to dislodge the PYD from its stronghold in Aleppo and in an attempt to achieve this goal they allegedly collaborated with the headline Arab jihadist al-Nusra (according to the Daily Star report), whose firepower they believed they could exploit to take on the

PYD.

However, objections could be raised to this account. Specifically, the Salaheddin Brigade denies moving into Ashrafiya, and the only Kurdish sources cited in the Beirut-based newspaper's report are a PYD official and a Kurdish analyst based in the United States.

In addition, despite the presence of Azadi members in the battalion, the Salaheddin Brigade does not have formal links with any Kurdish parties.

It might also strike the observer as an odd calculation on the part of members of the Salaheddin Brigade that they should work with al-Nusra in the apparent expectation that the Islamist militants would subsequently leave them alone.

On the other hand, perhaps those elements of the Salaheddin Brigade thought they would have the popular support of the Kurdish residents of Ashrafiya and as such they could ward off any potential threat from al-Nusra.

Whether the Salaheddin Brigade was actually involved in this rebel move into Ashrafiya cannot be definitely proven and will require further evidence, but in any case, the whole affair is a clear propaganda victory for the PYD.

The YouTube video of rebels firing on Kurdish protesters in Ashrafiya can be easily be held up as damning enough evidence of rebel unpopularity among Kurdish residents, and be used to uphold the PYD's image as protector of Syrian Kurds and their neutrality in the conflict between regime and rebels.

This perception of the PYD among Kurds can now be strengthened by news of an attack by rebels of the Northern Storm Brigade on Kurds (including Yezidis) in villages to the north of Aleppo. Since the perpetrators of these assaults are almost certainly of an Islamist orientation, any notion of Salaheddin-Nusra collaboration is only likely to stir up anger on the part of ordinary Kurds towards the Salaheddin Brigade and by implication (however tenuous) the KNC.

Further, the PYD has now negotiated a formal truce with the FSA to stop the fighting and end the Northern Storm Brigade's attacks on Kurds, further enhancing its image as protector and representative of Kurdish interests in Syria.

In short, the PYD still appears to have the upper-hand over its rivals for influence among Kurds in Syria, and that advantage now seems to be reinforced by this recent debacle over Ashrafiya. It is probable that the PYD's dominance will continue to be the status quo vis-à-vis the Kurdish situation in Syria for quite some time, mainly owing to its superior militia affiliates. The tensions between the PYD and other Kurdish factions are very much apparent but one should not automatically conclude that there will be an intra-Kurdish civil war, for all groups are undoubtedly mindful and wary of the experience in Iraqi Kurdistan after the region gained autonomy, when thousands died in a civil war between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (the latter backed by the PKK). A more likely outcome is brinkmanship from time to time, with much mediation between factions on the part of the KRG. ■



## Car bomb blamed on Kurdish rebels kills child, wounds 18 people in southeast Turkey

ANKARA, Turkey — November 4, 2012 - Associated Press

Turkey's leader says Kurdish rebels have detonated a car bomb in southeast Turkey, killing an 11-year-old child and wounding 18 other people.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the explosion occurred Sunday as an armored police vehicle was traveling on a road in the town

of Semdinli, near the border with Iraq. The bomb went off close to a wedding celebration.

Erdogan blamed the attack on the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which is fighting for self-rule in Turkey's southeast and is active in Semdinli.

The attack comes amid a surge in violence by the rebels in recent months. Hundreds of Kurdish inmates are on a hunger strike to demand increased rights for Kurds.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since the PKK took up arms in 1984. ○



November 9th, 2012

# Turkey needs to change course over own insurgency

By Hugh Pope, Special to CNN

*Hugh Pope is International Crisis Group's Turkey/Cyprus project director and the co-author of Turkey Unveiled: a history of modern Turkey.*

**A**mid the many challenges thrown up for Turkey by the worsening civil war in Syria is the way it adds fuel to the flames of Ankara's domestic conflict with insurgents of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Clashes have worsened dramatically in Turkey's southeast over the past year. A PKK-affiliated group is now dominant in Kurdish areas along northern Syria's Turkish borders. And Turkey is accusing Syria of resuming its previous support for the banned group, listed as a terrorist organization.

But it is important for Turkey to face the fact that the Syrian connection is merely a symptom of its most important internal problem. A U.S. Patriot missile shield along the Turkey-Syria border, as suggested by the Turkish government this week, is not going to be much help against the PKK. The real test for Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is to find a way to use the current turmoil to perform a U-turn to escape from the failed PKK/Kurdish policies of his government in the past 18 months.

A change of course is increasingly urgent. Casualty rates in the insurgency have deteriorated to the worst seen since the bad old days of the 1990s, with International Crisis Group's informal minimum tally counting more than 830 soldiers, police, PKK and civilians killed in violence since June 2011. In September this year, pro-PKK detainees and prisoners began a hunger strike that has now spread to more than 600 people in more than 60 jails, some of whose condition is turning critical. Police have detained several thousand Kurdish movement activists on terrorism charges, mostly with no link to violence. A shutdown last week of shops, schools and municipal services in sympathy with the detainees and hunger



strikers in the main Kurdish-speaking city of Diyarbakir was one of the most widely observed in the past decade.

Erdogan's response so far has been a new round of inflexible rhetoric, a military-only strategy on the ground, and a public denial that anyone was on hunger strike at all. This is no longer realistic. He must find a way back to the fruitful policy he adopted up until 2009, a "Democratic Opening" that did more for the long-oppressed Kurds than anything else in nearly a century, and a real attempt to talk with and engage the PKK in a settlement. The casualty rate plunged during those times, and in June last year the legacy of that policy still helped his ruling Justice and Development Party to win more than one third of the vote in 12 southeastern majority Kurdish-speaking provinces.

To solve the conflict, the Turkish prime minister will need a clear new package of measures. He should start by splitting his military struggle against the recent PKK armed offensive from the underlying Kurdish problem. The Kurdish issue, in turn, should be tackled by policies that include: the right to education in mother languages, decentralization, an election system that allows the Kurdish movement party to win a proper place in parliament, and a stripping out of any discrimination in the constitution and laws. The much-used excuse for not doing this - the supposed Turkish nationalist rejection of equal rights and justice for Kurds - is a mirage. Mainstream Turkish opinion never voiced great opposition to the Democratic Opening, the talks with the PKK or 24-hour Kurdish television - all unthinkable five years ago.

Indeed, Erdogan's government already appears to be backing towards such sensible policies. Optional Kurdish lessons started in schools in September. Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc has promised that Kurds will be allowed to use their own language in court, and that jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan could have access restored to his lawyers (and thus the outside world) after more than a year of isolation. AKP tabled new proposals this week for a new constitution now apparently include a lowering or doing away with the problematic 10 percent threshold of the national vote to get into parliament (which usually excludes only the main Kurdish movement party, which typically polls 5 percent to 7 percent). Finally, the constitutional reform committee in parliament is still in session, and could do much to remove any lingering ethnic discrimination.

But for all this to work, Prime Minister Erdogan needs to summon up real political will, and present this patchwork of positive ideas as a unified, comprehensive strategy to resolve a conflict that has cost more than 30,000 lives and 300 billion dollars since 1984. Just doing what is right on the question of Ocalan's access to lawyers and the use of Kurdish in court and education would also end the hunger strikes. Happily, a long window of elections-free political opportunity to put such a strategy to work reappeared this week, as AKP abandoned plans to bring forward local polls from March 2014.

No doubt, events in Syria have made Turkey nervous about the empowerment of Kurds in the Middle East, and the Damascus government may well have returned to its past policies of trying to undermine Turkey by making its parallel PKK insurgency and Kurdish problem more difficult to solve. But the lesson of the last 18 months is that Turkey has almost no tools - threats, soft power or military might - that can make a critical difference to the deterioration of the Syria civil war. ●

If Turkey feels vulnerable on the Kurdish question, Prime Minister Erdogan's best defense is to set his own country's house in better order.

# Assad warns other powers to steer clear of Syria war

BEIRUT

BY HANIA MOURTADA AND ALAN COWELL

With battles flaring from the north to the south of Syria, President Bashar al-Assad was quoted on Thursday as warning outside powers not to intervene militarily, saying that the price of an invasion would be “more than the world can afford.”

He also indicated that he would not heed Western proposals to leave Syria.

“I am not a puppet,” he said. “I was not made by the West to go to the West or to any other country. I am Syrian, I was made in Syria, I have to live in Syria and die in Syria.”

A transcript of excerpts from an interview with Mr. Assad was posted on Thursday in English on the Russia Today television news channel’s Web site before the conversation’s broadcast on Friday.

Mr. Assad’s defiance — familiar throughout the months of uprising that have turned to civil war affecting all of Syria’s major cities — came a day after the regional consequences of the fighting seemed to assume ever more ominous tones.

On Wednesday, Turkey, a NATO member, for the first time publicly raised the idea of stationing Patriot missile batteries along its southern border with Syria. The move would effectively create a no-flight zone that could help safeguard refugees and give rebel fighters a portion of Syrian territory without fear of airstrikes by Syrian forces.

Within Syria, insurgents escalated attacks on targets within earshot of Mr. Assad’s palace in Damascus on Wednesday, killing a prominent judge with a car bomb and lobbing mortar shells at a neighborhood that houses central government offices and a military airfield. The assassination of the judge, reported by the official news agency, SANA, was the second high-profile killing of a top Assad loyalist in the Syrian capital this week and added to the impression of an intensifying insurgency in the 20-month-old conflict.

In what appeared to be another high-profile target operation by the rebels, the Free Syrian Army said Thursday that it had seized Abdo Ghazali, the son of Gen. Rustom Ghazali, Mr. Assad’s chief of political security, in the southern city of Dara’a, where the uprising against Mr. Assad’s government began in March 2011. There was no immediate confirmation of the claim. General Ghazali was appointed to his post less than four months ago in a shake-up after the Damascus bombing that killed top security aides to Mr. Assad.

It was not clear when Russia Today recorded the interview with Mr. Assad, who was shown speaking to an interviewer, Sophie Shevardnadze, sitting in a high-backed chair against the background of a carved wooden doorway.

Asked about possible armed interven-

tion, Mr. Assad said, “We are the last stronghold of secularism and stability in the region, and coexistence, let’s say — it will have a domino effect that will affect the world from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and you know the implication on the rest of the world.”

He said he did not believe the West planned to intervene, “but if they do so, nobody can tell what is next,” Mr. Assad said. The price of an “invasion if it happened is going to be more than the whole world can afford,” he said, without elaborating.

The interview coincided with efforts in Doha, Qatar, to unify the fragmented opposition seeking Mr. Assad’s overthrow. It also came two days after Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain suggested that Mr. Assad could be given safe passage out of Syria as part of a peace settlement.

On Thursday, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in Britain and tracks the fighting, said clashes erupted between rebel and government forces in the northern town of Ras al-Ain along the border with Turkey.

The rebels had infiltrated the town from two directions, and after hours of fighting, government forces stormed the town and killed 10 insurgents in a battle for the security headquarters in Ras al-Ain. The Anatolian News Agency said two Turkish civilians had been wounded by stray rounds from the fighting, prompting the Turkish military to send reinforcements to the area.



Counterclockwise from top, fighters with the Free Syrian Army in the city of Harem confronting and then killing a man they suspected of being from pro-government forces. The growing tally of rebel atrocities has been compounded by the changing character of the opposition, from a force of civilians and military defectors to one increasingly driven by extremist jihadists.

# TURQUIE: Vis-à-vis des Kurdes, l'intimidation n'est pas une solution

• Plus de 700 détenus kurdes observent depuis 63 jours une grève de la faim dans les prisons du pays. La romancière Oya Baydar s'indigne du chantage à la peine de mort que le Premier ministre turc oppose à leurs revendications.



Des kurdes manifestent le 14 octobre 2012 pour faire libérer le leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan (AFP)

T24 | Oya Baydar |

Le gouvernement AKP, de même que l'opposition parlementaire d'extrême droite, considèrent que la grève de la faim entamée voici deux mois par les personnes emprisonnées en raison de leurs liens avec le PKK [parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, groupe armé considéré comme une organisation terroriste] et le BDP [Parti pour la paix et la démocratie, pro-kurde et qui a des députés au Parlement turc] n'est rien d'autre qu'un "chantage exercé par le mouvement kurde sur le gouvernement et l'Etat". On nous ressort ainsi toujours la même version des faits : cette grève de la faim, qui évolue tout doucement vers une forme de jeûne mortel, a été décidée par le PKK. Dans ces conditions, elle ne peut donc être considérée comme une action démocratique et légitime.

Il y a trois ans lors d'une visite à l'étranger, le Premier ministre turc Erdogan avait défendu les jeunes filles réclamant la fin de l'interdiction du port du voile à l'Université en Turquie et que l'on accusait alors de faire de la politique. Il avait alors dit: "Et quand bien même ce serait politique, où est le problème ?!", ce qui ne manqua pas alors de provoquer des réactions indignées au sein de l'opposition kémaliste qui cria haut et fort que la laïcité était menacée. A cette époque, j'estimais que même si cela représentait un but politique, le combat démocratique visant à sat-

isfaire des revendications justes était légitime et ne devait pas être empêché.

Dans ces conditions, lorsque d'aucuns affirment que "les revendications des grévistes de la faim ne sont pas innocentes, qu'elles ne sont pas en rapport avec les conditions de vie à l'intérieur des prisons, mais qu'elles ne sont qu'un moyen pour le PKK d'imposer son agenda politique", je réponds "Et quand bien même ces revendications seraient-elles politiques... Il s'agit de demandes qui méritent qu'on les entende et d'être satisfaites". Certes, ne nous mentons pas à nous-mêmes, cette grève de la faim qui est menée par des centaines de prisonniers est bien politique. Dans un cadre carcéral, les militants d'un parti dont les possibilités d'expression se trouvent limitées s'expriment souvent par le biais d'une grève de la faim. Dans un tel contexte, le gréviste de la faim se radicalise et les liens qu'il cultive avec son parti se renforcent.

## UN CHANTAGE INDIGNE CONTRE LA SOCIÉTÉ

Autant que les incitations venant d'un parti, ces grèves de la faim peuvent prendre de l'ampleur dans les dortoirs collectifs suite à la mobilisation de quelques-uns. Dans ces conditions, et pour peu que l'on accorde de la valeur à la personne humaine, le premier pas vers une solution à cette problématique consisterait tout d'abord à changer de discours et ensuite à poser des actes concrets plutôt que

## REVENDEICATIONS

*Les grévistes de la faim kurdes réclament la fin de l'isolement de leur leader, Abdullah Öcalan, emprisonné depuis 1999, le droit de s'exprimer en kurde devant un tribunal et l'instauration de l'enseignement en kurde dans les écoles de l'Etat. Dans la nuit du 12 au 13 novembre, l'AKP a déposé un projet de loi répondant à l'une de leurs revendications, à savoir le droit de se défendre un projet de loi autorisant "un détenu à faire usage, s'il le souhaite, d'une autre langue (que le turc) pour se défendre d'accusations portées à son encontre dans les tribunaux".*

d'affirmer qu'il s'agit d'une opération politique téléguidée par un PKK qui contraint ses prisonniers à participer à cette grève de la faim. D'autant plus qu'une réaction marquée par le souci de sauver des vies permettrait de dénoncer la stratégie d'un PKK qui mise sur la confrontation et le blocage politique. Si cette grève de la faim est du chantage, que dire du Premier ministre Erdogan et du chef du MHP [Parti de l'action nationaliste, extrême droite, opposition parlementaire] qui ont opportunément ramené la question de la peine de mort sur le devant de la scène ?!

Par des mises en garde menaçantes du style "N'allez pas au-delà des droits que nous avons daigné vous octroyer, sinon nous rétablissons la peine de mort !" [supprimée en 2002], ils ne sont pas seulement en train d'intimider le mouvement kurde et le peuple kurde, mais appliquent un chantage indigne contre la société et contre ses aspirations à voir notre État évoluer vers davantage de démocratie. Plutôt que d'éprouver de la fierté à l'égard de la suppression de la peine de mort, qui est une des plus belle réalisation de notre histoire récente, le Premier ministre et l'opposition d'extrême droite se rejettent l'un sur l'autre la responsabilité de ce qu'ils considèrent désormais presque comme une honte, rejoignant ainsi les milieux ultra nationalistes et putschistes qu'ils [l'AKP] prétendaient pourtant combattre. Pire, nous apprenons ainsi de la bouche du Premier ministre que cette suppression ne serait en fait que le fruit de pressions extérieures [de l'Union européenne] ... Il ne faudra donc pas s'étonner si dans un avenir proche, sur fonds de populisme et pour des raisons basement électoralistes, s'impose à l'agenda politique un débat pour savoir ce qui convient le mieux pour l'exécution capitale, la pendaison, l'injection létale ou, ce qu'adorent chez nous les partisans de la peine de mort, l'empalement...♦

# Syrie: "L'opposition kurde se prépare en profitant des divisions"

*Première minorité ethnique du pays, les Kurdes ont rejoint l'opposition à Bachar al-Assad. Mais ils n'ont pas subi la répression du régime. Quel rôle peuvent-ils jouer dans le conflit? L'analyse de Zakaria Taha, chercheur spécialiste du pays.*

Par Taha Zacharia  
[Express Yourself]

Le soulèvement syrien déclenché en mars 2011 dans le contexte du printemps arabe fut l'occasion pour certains groupes communautaires et ethniques d'exprimer leurs revendications particulières. Les Kurdes, première minorité ethnique de Syrie, estimés entre 7 et 10% des 21 millions de syriens et témoignant depuis longtemps d'aspirations nationalistes, n'hésitent pas à appeler ouvertement à travers les manifestations à la reconnaissance constitutionnelle de leur ethnie et de leur langue; certains revendiquent le droit à l'autodétermination et appellent à l'établissement d'un système fédéral similaire à celui de leurs voisins irakiens.

Si certaines de ces revendications expriment les aspirations de la population kurde, la mobilisation de celle-ci semble fortement encadrée et orientée par les partis politiques kurdes. Or, ces derniers, longtemps incorporés au régime d'al-Asad, menaient leur activisme politique chez leurs voisins irakiens et turcs.

Bien que divisée, l'opposition kurde se prépare, à l'instar de son voisin irakien dans les années 1990, à la gestion et au contrôle de sa région, profitant des divisions de l'opposition arabe et de la faiblesse du régime de Bachar al-Asad. L'opposition kurde syrienne, après une longue période de "dissimulation", ressurgit avec un nouveau discours et une nouvelle stratégie. Mutation qui semble guidée par le contexte national et régional de la Syrie.

## DU SYSTÈME POLITIQUE ET COMMUNAUTAIRE D'AL-ASAD AUX REVENDICATIONS NATIONALISTES ET AUTONOMISTES

Contrairement aux Frères musulmans qui ont été violemment réprimés par Hafez al-Asad (père du président actuel) au début des années 1980, le mouvement kurde syrien, bien que d'aspiration nationaliste contraire à l'orientation idéologique arabe du Baath, a été relativement toléré par le régime. Intégrés au système communautaire du régime qui consiste à lui rallier toutes les minorités du pays, les partis politiques kurdes, officiellement illégaux, peuvent à partir des années 1980 exprimer, certes sous contrôle, leur identité spécifique à travers des associations culturelles ou artistiques.

Des leaders et cadres du mouvement kurde, aujourd'hui dans l'opposition, étaient alors députés du Parlement syrien; ainsi Abd al-Hamid Haj Darwich, secrétaire du parti démocrate progressiste kurde ou Fouad



*La minorité Kurde entretient des rapports complexes avec le régime de Bachar al-Assad et l'opposition syrienne. "Des leaders et cadres du mouvement kurde, aujourd'hui dans l'opposition, étaient avant députés du Parlement syrien", explique notamment notre contributeur Zakaria Taha.*

Aleikko, membre du comité politique du parti kurde Yekit. Élu officiellement en tant que candidats indépendants, officieusement sur une liste commune soutenue par les partis politiques kurdes.

Certes, la politique du régime d'al-Asad père constitue une rupture avec ses prédécesseurs, radicaux et intransigeants concernant l'option idéologique nationaliste arabe du Baath, mais les mesures restrictives aux droits des kurdes n'ont pas été pour autant abolies (interdiction de donner des noms non arabes aux enseignes commerciales, arabisation des toponymes des villages kurdes, Kurdes déchus de la nationalité syrienne suite au recensement exceptionnel de la mohafazat d'al-Assaka en 1962).

La question kurde en Turquie et en Irak reste jusqu'à la fin des années 1990 le centre d'intérêt du mouvement kurde syrien. Des Kurdes syriens et militants des partis politiques kurdes peuvent s'engager au côté du PKK dans la guérilla contre l'armée turque. L'alliance du régime syrien avec les mouvements kurdes irakien et turc dans les années 1980 et 1990 semble calmer toute contestation interne au régime liée aux revendications de la communauté kurde de Syrie et repousser les aspirations nationalistes des Kurdes de Syrie en dehors des frontières syriennes.

L'expulsion d'Abdullah Öcalan, chef du PKK ou parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, de Syrie le 9 octobre 1998, l'amélioration des relations du régime syrien avec la Turquie après l'accession de Bachar al-Asad au pouvoir et la suspension du soutien au PKK, entraînent le mouvement kurde syrien à rompre progressivement avec le régime syrien. Le 10 décembre 2002, Journée internationale des droits de l'homme, un premier rassemble-

ment d'une centaine de Kurdes est organisé devant le parlement syrien. Les slogans réclament la "Citoyenneté pour les Kurdes", "Le respect des droits humains en Syrie" et scandent "À bas l'interdiction de la langue et de la culture kurdes".

A travers une lettre adressée au président Bachar al-Asad en octobre 2002 lors d'un rassemblement devant le parlement syrien, l'Alliance démocratique kurde de Syrie réclame la restitution de la nationalité syrienne aux Kurdes apatrides. Les revendications particulières des Kurdes font désormais partie du discours politique kurde (le droit à la citoyenneté, la reconnaissance des droits culturels et linguistiques, la restitution de la nationalité syrienne aux Kurdes "apatrides", les problèmes du décret n° 49 lié à l'interdiction des achats et ventes de biens immobiliers dans les régions frontalières). Toutefois, malgré l'arrestation des militants et des manifestants, les leaders des partis politiques kurdes restent, jusqu'en 2004, à l'abri des arrestations des autorités syriennes.

## CONTEXTE RÉGIONAL ET CHANGEMENT DE DISCOURS

Si les revendications de liberté et démocratie des partis politiques kurdes sont communes à tous les Syriens, ce n'est qu'en octobre 2005 que l'Alliance Démocratique Kurde et le Front Démocratique Kurde, jusqu'alors principaux courants de l'opposition kurde, intègrent le mouvement d'opposition nationale à travers la "Déclaration de Damas Pour le Changement National Démocratique", constituant ainsi la première coalition de l'opposition syrienne formée à l'intérieur. Le comité de Déclaration de Damas ⇒

⇒ préconise la garantie des libertés individuelles et collectives des minorités nationales, leurs droits culturels et linguistiques. Il appelle à trouver une solution démocratique et juste à la question kurde en Syrie en garantissant l'égalité complète des citoyens kurdes syriens avec tout citoyen syrien en ce qui concerne les droits à la nationalité, à la culture et à la langue dans le cadre de l'unité de la Syrie.

La chute de Saddam Hussein et l'autonomisation du Kurdistan irakien, mais aussi la pression américaine sur le régime syrien et son isolement après le meurtre du premier ministre libanais Rafiq al-Hariri en 2005 favorisent l'émergence d'un nouveau discours nationaliste qui vise à légitimer le droit des Kurdes syriens sur la région d'al-Jazira, principal foyer du nationalisme kurde en Syrie.

Pour les nationalistes kurdes, les zones de peuplement kurde en Syrie sont alors considérées comme le prolongement naturel des territoires kurdes de Turquie et d'Irak, désormais appelées "Kurdistan occidental" ou "Kurdistan de Syrie". Les partis nationalistes kurdes considèrent la région de la Jazira comme "la terre historique sur laquelle les kurdes ont toujours vécu".

Les événements de Qamichli survenus le 12 mars 2004, faisant plusieurs dizaines de morts parmi les Kurdes, provoquent un soulèvement général des Kurdes qui s'étend jusqu'aux quartiers kurdes de Damas et

d'Alep obligeant les autorités syriennes à reconnaître officiellement, pour la première fois, l'existence d'un problème kurde en Syrie.

Toutefois, l'affirmation du président Bachar al-Asad lors d'une interview avec le quotidien londonien al-Hayat le 21 mai 2004, de la nécessité de résoudre le problème des kurdes déçus de la nationalité syrienne reste lettre morte. Ce n'est qu'en avril 2011 et dans l'objectif de neutraliser l'opposition kurde, que le régime syrien décide, en promulguant le décret législatif n° 49/2011, de restituer la nationalité syrienne aux "étrangers d'al-Hassaka".

Aujourd'hui, l'opposition partisane kurde, à travers le Conseil national kurde (un rassemblement d'une quinzaine de partis politiques proches du mouvement kurde irakien) et le parti de l'Union démocratique PYD (proche idéologiquement du PKK), peut désormais s'imposer comme une force politique sur la scène syrienne. Elle peut certes compter sur le soutien politique voire militaire du Kurdistan irakien, ce qui conforte ses revendications pour l'autodétermination. Néanmoins, la réticence du Conseil national syrien CNS, principale coalition de l'opposition syrienne, oblige le Conseil national kurde à abandonner cette idée, du moins provisoirement. Contrairement au Kurdistan irakien, les zones de peuplement kurde en Syrie sont discontinues (le territoire kurde en Syrie se

compose de trois régions séparées par des poches arabes) et se caractérisent par une mixité ethnique et confessionnelle. Seul le PYD, dont les rapports avec le régime syrien sont ambigus, maintient la revendication autonomiste.

Si l'immense majorité des Kurdes syriens ne sont pas des militants de ces partis politiques auxquels certains reprochent leur subordination aux mouvements kurdes irakiens et turcs, elle ne cache pas sa crainte de voir ses droits bafoués. Certes, le CNS affirme, lors de son premier congrès à Tunis des 16 et 18 décembre 2011, garantir le respect de la pluralité ethnique et confessionnelle de la nouvelle Syrie d'après Assad, mais la domination des islamistes soutenus par la Turquie suscite leur méfiance. L'élection, en juin, d'Abdelbasset Sayda, un Kurde indépendant, à la tête du CNS était destinée à redonner confiance aux Kurdes syriens.

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## Les Kurdes accusés de s'étendre en faisant le jeu du régime

DERIK (Syrie), 16 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**DES MILICIENS KURDES et des habitants ont conquis une nouvelle localité dans le nord-est de la Syrie, près de la frontière avec la Turquie, mais sont soupçonnés de faire le jeu du régime qui les laisse agir à leur guise.**

Des centaines de personnes se sont rassemblées mardi devant le quartier général des forces de sécurité à Derik, dernier bâtiment abandonné par l'armée et la police syriennes, écoutant de la musique kurde à pleins tubes et des discours en kurde, une langue officiellement interdite en Syrie.

"Nous avons essayé de dire aux troupes d'Assad de partir pacifiquement. Nous sommes des gens pacifiques", affirme Abdi Karim, 56 ans, officier dans le Comité de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (rebelle kurde en Turquie).

Cette prise est intervenue quelques jours après la conquête de trois autres villes proches de la Turquie, par des habitants soutenus par la milice du PYD, mouvement kurde syrien face à qui les troupes pro-gouvernementales syriennes se sont retirées sans combattre.

Le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie abritent la plupart des deux millions de Kurdes du pays, dont les milices sont indépendantes et parfois hostiles à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), principale force d'opposition armée.

"Il y a des divergences entre les forces kurdes opposées au régime et l'opposition arabe, surtout en ce qui concerne la question du nationalisme kurde et la reconnaissance du kurde comme la deuxième langue la plus parlée du pays", estime le militant kurde indépendant Massoud Akko.

Sur le terrain, Karim, milicien kurde lance un avertissement: "si l'ASL vient en tant qu'hôte, nous les accueillerons", mais il n'est pas question que ces rebelles, très majoritairement des Syriens arabes, prennent le contrôle de la ville.

"Nous protégerons les nôtres des Turcs, de l'ASL et d'Assad", martèle-t-il.

Selon M. Akko, les forces du régime syrien laissent volontairement le contrôle de certaines zones au PYD, ce qui expliquerait que la prise des localités de la région ait été relativement pacifique.

"Le transfert d'institutions par le régime au PYD est un sale jeu", estime-t-il, y voyant "un message à la Turquie, car elle aide l'opposition syrienne".

En fait, amis hier, les deux voisins sont devenus des ennemis irréductibles: si Ankara donne tout son appui à la rébellion armée contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad, Damas voit plutôt d'un bon oeil le contrôle par la branche syrienne du PKK d'une partie de la frontière avec la Turquie.

"Je ne sais pas si le gouvernement soutient l'offensive kurde mais je peux vous dire que les Kurdes ont certainement plus le sens de l'honneur que les groupes armés", a affirmé à l'AFP un haut responsable syrien.

"Je ne dis pas que ce parti collabore avec le régime, mais les deux parties se tolèrent mutuellement", assure M. Akko, soulignant que "les Kurdes n'ont pas la capacité militaire de prendre le contrôle des zones kurdes", notamment la vaste province d'Hassaka.

Pour Karim Bitar, directeur de recherche à l'Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques (IRIS) à Paris, "les mouvances kurdes (PYD surtout) ont réussi habilement à profiter du désordre ambiant pour établir des faits accomplis sur le terrain".

"Depuis des années, les Kurdes ont des aspirations d'autonomie: le pouvoir comme l'opposition ont du mal à les accepter et sont dans l'embarras. Les kurdes se sont emparés de plusieurs régions dans le nord, et plus ça dure, plus ça devient irréversible", souligne ce spécialiste du Proche et Moyen-Orient.

"Je ne sais pas s'il y a un accord tacite entre le régime et les Kurdes. Mais il y a sûrement une conjonction d'intérêts, à court terme et chacun en profite", conclut ce chercheur.

Des civils kurdes soutenus par des milices ont discrètement pris le contrôle d'une série de villes dans cette province, où seules deux des principales villes restent aux mains du régime.

Lors de festivités célébrant le départ des forces du régime à Derik, des combattants des YPG arboraient des foulards jaunes rouges et verts, les couleurs du PKK. Jubilant, d'autres manifestants agitaient des drapeaux du PKK, et même le rouge-blanc-vert du Kurdistan irakien.○

# U.N. says Syrian video shows war crime

GENEVA

BY NICK CUMMING-BRUCE  
AND RICK GLADSTONE

The United Nations said on Friday that a video from Syria circulating on the Internet and seeming to show anti-government fighters armed with rifles kicking and summarily executing a group of captured soldiers or militiamen could, if verified, represent evidence of a war crime.

"It looks very likely that this is a war crime, another one," Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, told journalists in Geneva, where the commission has its headquarters.

U.N. investigators had already collected evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity by government and rebel forces that could support prosecutions of those responsible by national or international tribunals, Mr. Colville said. The video, if verified, could be part of that evidence, he added.

"There should be no illusion that accountability will follow," Mr. Colville said. His remarks followed similar assessments Thursday, when the video began circulating, by human rights groups who also called it evidence of war crimes.

The video, which could not be authenticated independently, appeared to have been made in Saraqeb, a town in Idlib Province in northern Syria that has been the scene of particularly brutal



SYRIAN OBSERVATORY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this frame grab from an amateur video, a rebel gunman appears to be stepping on a captured Syrian soldier. The video could not be independently authenticated.

fighting in the 20-month conflict.

In the video, 10 prisoners are shown being forced by their captors to lie next to or atop one another in what remained of a largely destroyed structure that may have been a military checkpoint. The antigovernment fighters, whose precise identity or affiliation were not clear, yell "Allahu Akbar!" or "God is great!" as they kick and herd the prisoners into a pile. Then they open fire.

While much of the video and other evidence filtering out of the Syria conflict

has depicted government atrocities against civilians, increasingly there have been instances of abuses against government forces and their sympathizers. On July 31, videos posted on YouTube showed rebels in the northern city of Aleppo executing several members of a prominent family with close ties to President Bashar al-Assad.

Nick Cumming-Bruce reported from Geneva, and Rick Gladstone from New York.

**Kuwait Times** 10 November 2012

## 17 Turkish soldiers die in copter crash – Army kills 42 Kurdish militants

**ANKARA:** A Turkish military helicopter carrying soldiers on a mission against Kurdish rebels crashed because of bad weather yesterday, killing all 17 troops onboard, officials said. Thirteen soldiers and four military crewmembers were killed in the crash in a mountainous part of Pervari district in Siirt province, in southeastern Turkey, where the rebel Kurdistan Worker's Party is fighting for self-rule. President Abdullah Gul said the soldiers were on their way "to help their friends" in an operation against the rebels who have escalated attacks in recent months, adding the incident would not deter Turkey from its determination to fight the rebels.

The provincial governor, Ahmet Aydin, blamed the crash on heavy fog and ruled out an

attack by the rebel group. "The weather during the transportation (of troops) was bad. There was extreme rain. The helicopter crashed into rocks because of the fog," Aydin said in televised statements. "The incident was the result of a crash and any kind of an attack is out of the question." The Kurdish rebels have been fighting since the 1980s and they seek more rights for Kurds, including autonomy in the mostly Kurdish southeast of the country. Turkey and its Western allies categorize the rebels, known by the acronym PKK, as a terrorist group. Several days ago, Turkish media reported that Turkish soldiers were airlifted into northern Iraq for a brief operation against suspected rebels, who have bases there. There were no reports of

casualties on that mission.

Turkey periodically carries out artillery and air strikes on PKK positions in northern Iraq, but reports of cross-border incursions by troops are rare. Meanwhile, Turkish air force jets and attack helicopters pounded Kurdish militants along the border with Iraq and Iran for three days, killing 42 militants, the local governor's office said on Friday. The operation, which began on Wednesday, was launched after word was received that a group of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants had been identified in Turkey's southeastern province of Hakkari, bordering Iraq and Iran, the Hakkari governor's office said.

One Turkish soldier was killed, the statement said, while searches turned up quantities

of ammunition, food supplies and medication. It said the operation was continuing. The summer saw an upsurge in PKK attacks in southeast Turkey, notably in the Hakkari region. Ankara has linked the rise in violence to the chaos in neighboring Syria and has accused Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad of resuming support for the PKK and arming the militants. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict between Turkey and the PKK, which launched its insurgency in 1984 with the aim of carving out a separate state in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey. The PKK is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union. — Agencies ■



# Hunger strike opens a new page in Kurdish question



Columnists

**LALE KEMAL**

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**A**nationwide hunger strike initiated almost 55 days ago by over 680 Turkish Kurdish prisoners across Turkey in 67 jails has already entered a critical stage as some inmates risk losing their lives as a result of starvation. As part of a policy to increase pressure on the government to meet their demands, thousands of more prisoners may join the hunger strike.

The hunger strikers demand the government allow lawyers to meet with jailed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan and give Kurds the right to receive an education in their mother tongue and the right to address courts in Kurdish.

The government has already accelerated legal work to pave the way for the right to address courts in Kurdish as well as in other mother tongues. This legal step is included in a fourth judicial reform package likely to be introduced soon and is expected to also address concerns regarding Kurds and freedom of speech.

Providing the right to a defense in Kurdish is expected to speed up the trial of defendants charged with being members

of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an urban grouping of the outlawed PKK. The KCK trial was prolonged when a request by the defendants to defend themselves in Kurdish was turned down by the relevant courts.

While Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tries to present a public image of being unwilling to surrender to the political demands of the hunger strikers, his justice minister, Sadullah Ergin, has been engaged in a dialogue with the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) to find a way to persuade the hunger strikers to end their action.

The BDP, on its part, is not that helpful as it tries to exploit the hunger strike for its own political interests while threatening to initiate hunger strikes themselves.

It is a fact that, if Turkey's Kurds have made some gains in obtaining their rights, such as a Kurdish TV station now on air by the state run TV, it has been as a result of the 28-year-old armed campaign initiated by the PKK. More than 50,000 people have died and continue to die as a result of the fight between the PKK and security forces, while the economic cost of this internal strife is estimated to be about \$1 trillion.

Yet, the state has so far only taken small steps to ease Kurdish grievances such as acknowledging the right of Kurds to speak in their mother tongue, which was

banned after the 1980 military takeover.

It was only under the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) that the Kurdish question began to be addressed through non-violent means. The AK Party has introduced reforms granting greater Kurdish cultural rights since taking power a decade ago. But this ruling party has entered into an election period due to take place in the coming three years, as its prime minister, Erdoğan, has preferred to play the nationalist card instead of resuming political means to end the Kurdish question.

The state had already done damage, in particular, by failing for many decades to find a peaceful solution to resolve the Kurdish question instead of resorting to military means alone to end terrorism.

Now hunger strikes are becoming a tool for achieving political demands.

"A hunger strike has enduring power," says Stefan Simanowitz, in an article published on the [tribunemagazine.co.uk](http://tribunemagazine.co.uk) website on July 30, further arguing that the digital age has a new platform for an ancient form of protest.

Hunger strikes may come to an end once some of the above-mentioned political demands of the prisoners are met. But it has the potential to be resumed to force the government to meet other political demands such as putting Öcalan under house arrest.

Hence, the government in particular and Turkey in general face a new chapter in the Kurdish question -- hunger strikes will be used as a means to gain further Kurdish political demands in addition to the ongoing armed campaign. ■



## Turquie: des députés kurdes se joignent aux grévistes de la faim

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 10 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**CINQ DÉPUTÉS** du Parti kurde de la paix et de la démocratie (BDP) se sont joints à la grève de la faim observée par des centaines de détenus kurdes dans les prisons de Turquie pour exiger un assouplissement des conditions de détention du chef des rebelles séparatistes kurdes Abdullah Öcalan, a annoncé samedi une dirigeante de ce parti, Gulten Kisanak.

Les députés qui se sont joints au mouvement veulent soutenir les quelque 700 prisonniers kurdes en grève de la faim dans l'ensemble de la Turquie depuis deux mois. Désormais dix députés du BDP au total participent à la grève de la faim observée par ces détenus. Deux députés avaient rejoint le mouvement cette semaine, dont le maire de Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir.

"Nous sommes inquiets, préoccupés, frustrés par l'impasse" actuelle, a déclaré Mme Kisanak lors d'une conférence de presse dans la province de Diyarbakir (sud-est) à majorité kurde.

"Nous sommes déterminés à ... assumer notre responsabilité pour trouver une solution", a-t-elle ajouté, soulignant que les détenus grévistes de la faim étaient entrés dans une phase critique.

Les grévistes de la faim, qui ont entamé leur mouvement le 12 septembre, demandent une levée des restrictions concernant l'usage de la langue kurde

dans la sphère publique, notamment dans les tribunaux.

Mais leur principale revendication porte sur les conditions de détention du chef historique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), Abdullah Öcalan, sur l'île d'Imrali (nord-ouest) depuis 1999. Les protestataires demandant notamment que Öcalan, confiné dans l'isolement, puisse recevoir la visite de ses avocats.

La grève de la faim relève du "droit des Kurdes à la résistance", a par ailleurs déclaré samedi le co-président du BDP Selahattin Demirtas cité par l'agence Anatolie.

Il a également annoncé que son parti avait décidé de suspendre sa participation aux travaux des commissions parlementaires, mais qu'il continuerait à assister aux sessions du parlement.

Il y a une semaine, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait assuré samedi qu'il ne céderait pas au "chantage" des détenus kurdes grévistes. "Ne faites pas de chantage (...) nous ne libérerons pas le chef terroriste simplement parce que vous le demandez et que vous avez engagé une telle action", avait-il déclaré.

Des manifestations ont eu lieu dans l'ensemble du pays pour soutenir les grévistes de la faim. De nombreuses personnes ont été arrêtées et blessées dans des heurts avec la police.○

## Will Syria's Rebels Face a Kurdish Front?

**With Assad's enemies now struggling to liberate areas from his tanks, fresh fighting between Kurdish militias and Syrian rebels around Aleppo threatens a second front for the already bruised Syrian opposition, notes Daniel Brode.**

### Middle East Online

**F**our decades of unabated Assad rule are testament to the Syrian regime's mastery of sectarianism in the Middle East. Once again, the Assads have utilized this talent to throw another wrench into the Sunni-Western campaign to oust them from Damascus. The regime recognizes the historic tensions between Arabs and Kurds, the incompatibility of pan-Islamism and Kurdish nationalism, in addition to Turkey's escalating ongoing conflict with Kurdish separatists. This enabled Bashar al-Assad to manipulate these realities for his strategic advantage. By withdrawing from the mainly Kurdish northeast this past summer, the regime opened the gates for a Kurdish escalation. With Assad's enemies now struggling to liberate areas from his tanks, fresh fighting between Kurdish militias and Syrian rebels around Aleppo threatens a second front for the already bruised Syrian opposition

That fighting serves as a reminder of the Kurds' long standing aspirations for further rights and autonomy, a quest almost always opposed by their sectarian rivals throughout the region. While the Assads - much like Saddam Hussein - have suppressed Kurds with decades of 'Arabization, 'Bashar calculated early on that his Kurdish subjects, as a whole, were unlikely to fight alongside the opposition. Not out of any loyalty, but for historic and strategic reasons.

So far, Assad's gambit has paid off. Kurdish interests vary but often contradict those of their ethnic neighbors. We may call them Syrian or Iraqi Kurds, but their interests are anything but Syrian or Iraqi. That, however, did not stop the opposition from seeking Kurdish fighters to join their ranks. Unfortunately for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Syrian National Council (SNC), these negotiations failed. The Kurds were reluctant to shed blood for a mainly Arab-Islamist opposition that was unable to offer autonomy in post-bellum Syria. Since then, Syrian Kurds are charting their own course.

Not surprisingly, Assad has manipulated Kurdish neutrality for his own benefit. His army's coordinated withdrawal from Kurdish areas last summer was a serious development. That redeployment purposefully left hard-line Kurdish militias in control, thereby posing serious strategic problems not only for Syrian rebels, but for Assad's new Turkish enemy to the north. Turkey as a rule is opposed to any Kurdish gains in Syria given concerns over its own restive Kurdish population.

The problems for Syria's rebels are as follows: the far-leftist Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) has barred Sunni Arab fighters from Kurdish areas and periodically cooperated with Assad's forces in and around Aleppo, all the while expanding its control over strategic checkpoints and smuggling routes near the vital Turkish border. Over time, these actions and Kurdish neutrality have not only discredited the opposition's narrative as a country united against Assad, they have put both sides on a collision course.

That collision took place on October 26. Heavy fighting erupted between the Peoples' Defense Unit (YPG), a PYD militia and Syrian rebels in Aleppo's Kurdish neighborhood of Ashrafiyah. Sunni Arab gunmen from the Tawhid Brigade entered the neighborhood as a show of strength before the Muslim holiday of Eid. Unfortunately for them, Kurdish militias were not so keen on their presence. After dozens of rebel fighters lay dead, they withdrew but not before they abducted, and then executed, the local leader of the PYD - who happened to be a woman.

Hours after the fighting in Ashrafiyah, additional clashes between Kurds and Arabs broke out over checkpoints in the vicinity of the Turkish border. As reports of the fighting emerged, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkey's arch enemy and PYD ally, consequently threatened to intervene against Syria's rebels. While fighting remains largely localized, the PKK threat could be a game changer.

Both the rebels and PYD for the most part would like to avoid a Kurdish war at this time. A new front could jeopardize what is perceived to be a historic opportunity for Kurdish nation building in Syria. The rebels moreover, can hardly afford to fight the Kurds, especially if the battle-tested PKK becomes involved. Still, the Kurds and the rebels remain highly decentralized, with many rebel units operating pursuant to their own agenda - often to further the Arab-Islamist cause in the Middle East. While both sides are talking ceasefire, tensions and diverging goals could complicate those efforts over the long run.

Kurdish Syria is above all a highly strategic region. Straddling Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, numerous players have an interest in thwarting Kurdish gains here. Such interests coupled with tensions on the ground will make further Kurdish-rebel fighting a real possibility. Beyond Syria, the PKK also has an interest in using Syria as a launching pad for operations against Turkey. This is not a remote possibility, as it is already being reported that PKK gunmen, in addition to their PYD allies, are already stationed along the Turkish-Syrian border.

That presence ultimately contributes to the rebels' struggle to take Aleppo. This along with diverging interests and a history of Arab-Kurdish fighting could lead to a second sectarian war in Syria. In the end this works best for Assad. The regime recognized that Kurdish nationalism and pan-Islamism are two largely incompatible ideologies. The opposition's inability to promise the Kurds autonomy was the ultimate deciding factor. As a result, Assad has simply laid the groundwork for a second front in the Syrian civil war. It remains to be seen if the rebels will take the bait.

*Daniel Brode is an intelligence manager at Max Security Solutions, a geopolitical risk consulting firm in Israel. He specializes in Middle East and North Africa affairs.*



## Iraq warns Gazprom over Kurdish deals

**BAGHDAD, November 12, 2012 (UPI)**

**The Iraqi government said it considered unilateral deals between Russian energy company Gazprom and the Kurdish government to be illegal.**

Gazprom in August acquired a stake in two oil blocks in the northern semi-autonomous Kurdish provinces of Iraq. The Russia deal followed similar moves by French supermajor Total and Exxon Mobil.

Faisal Abdullah, spokesman for Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Hussein Shahrastani, was quoted by the BBC as saying Gazprom's contract with the Kurdistan Regional Government isn't legal.

"This situation will be the same for all companies who work in Iraq because any energy contract should be approved by Cabinet and the Ministry of Oil," he said.

Exxon was blacklisted by the central government for its action, though the U.S. oil company responded by announcing plans to dump assets in southern oil fields governed by Baghdad instead.

Gazprom in 2011 said it expected to reach a target level of 15,000 barrels of oil per day from the northern Badra field by next year. The field is operated by Turkish, South Korean and Malaysian oil companies. ●

## BDP MPs join strikers as key demand awaits PM

**A**NKARA — BDP MP Ayna goes on hunger strike in a show of support to those in jails. DHA photo

Two lawmakers from the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) have joined hundreds of inmates who have been on an indefinite hunger strike for almost two months as senior officials await the premier's return to tackle one of the protesters' key demands.

"Statements from Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç after a Cabinet meeting [on Nov. 5] gave hope to all of us. However, no concrete steps have been taken up to now, although four days have passed and our friends are approaching death with each moment. Our friends will not end their hunger strike without observing concrete steps," BDP Van lawmaker Özdal Üçer said yesterday in Diyarbakır after beginning his own indefinite hunger strike with BDP Diyarbakır MP Emine Ayna. "I'm appealing to Arınç: Why aren't you doing anything about meeting those people's demands even though you promised to do so?"

Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin said yesterday that a legal arrangement paving the



*BDP MP Ayna goes on hunger strike in a show of support to those in jails. DHA photo*

way for the use of mother tongue in courts - one of the three key demands of the hunger strikers - will be sent to Parliament as soon as Premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan returns home from abroad. Ergin said the proposal was mostly complete but still needed some work. Erdoğan is currently in Bali, attending the Democracy Forum.

In Ankara, BDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş held a meeting yesterday with diplomats from the Delegation of the

European Commission to Turkey.

President Abdullah Gül also commented on the issue yesterday during a visit to Çankırı in response to reporters' questions. Gül said he invited Ergin for a detailed meeting to learn correct information on the issue.

Turkey is a country in which the most extreme opinions can be voiced, Gül said. "There are environments of dialogue in the country. That's why the wrong methods of struggle will never help the resolution of problems. In that regard, I call on everybody to give up these actions."

Expressing his concern over the hunger strike, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Füle said he raised the issue during a Nov. 7 meeting with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in Brussels. "I also expect the authorities to prevent, in line with international human rights standards, a further deterioration in the health of the prisoners, and have raised this issue with Minister Davutoğlu when meeting him," Füle said in a letter dated yesterday to independent Kurdish deputy Leyla Zana. Füle thanked Zana for a recent letter from her concerning the ongoing hunger strikes, paying tribute to her personal endeavors to promote a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue by means of dialogue and negotiation.

□□□

Le Monde 13 novembre 2012

## A la frontière turco-syrienne, la guerre au balcon

Guillaume Perrier  
istanbul.blog.lemonde.fr

Pour le sixième jour consécutif, l'armée syrienne a pilonné la ville frontalière de Ras-Al-Ayn (Serekani en kurde), dans le Nord-Est de la Syrie où se trouve une importante minorité kurde, située de l'autre côté du poste-frontière turc de Ceylanpınar. Cette bourgade stratégique était tenue jusqu'alors par les forces de Damas. Une partie de la ville était sous le contrôle des forces du PYD, l'aile syrienne du PKK. Mais un bataillon de combattants se revendiquant de l'Armée syrienne libre en a pris le contrôle la semaine dernière. Ce qui lui permet de tenir un nouveau point de passage avec la Turquie.



*Un hélicoptère vient de larguer des explosifs à 200m de la frontière.*

Depuis cette prise, les chasseurs MIG du régime survolent la ville plusieurs fois par jour. Depuis la ville turque, à quelques centaines de mètres, on peut voir les avions obliquer et longer la

frontière avant de larguer leurs bombes sur Ras-Al-Ayn. Des hélicoptères armés d'explosifs ont également été envoyés. Au sol, des combattants juchés sur des pick-ups, répliquent à la

mitrailleuse. Le Front Al-Nusra, un groupe djihadiste est particulièrement actif dans cette lutte.

On ne sait pas exactement combien la bataille a fait de victimes. Un commandant rebelle a été tué a annoncé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Lundi, selon l'OSDH, les bombardements avaient fait 15 morts, pour moitié des civils.

Ceylanpınar est aux premières loges et les explosions de l'autre côté de la frontière font régulièrement voler les vitres en éclat. Les écoles ont été fermées et les habitants restent terrés chez eux. Plusieurs blessés ont été enregistrés côté turc. Environ 9 000 réfugiés, en majorité des Kurdes syriens, ont fui les combats, franchi la frontière dès les premiers jours de bombardement et ont été hébergés côté turc.

La Turquie a adressé une nouvelle note diplomatique à la Syrie pour protester contre ces frappes aériennes. ■

# It's Time for an Independent Kurdistan



**Stanley Weiss**  
*Founding Chairman,  
 Business Executives for  
 National Security*

**W**ASHINGTON -- Had the course of history taken a modest swerve, the United States and Kurdistan might have celebrated their independence on the very same day. It was July 4, 1187 -- 825 years ago -- that Saladin, Islam's greatest ruler, defeated 20,000 outmatched Crusaders at the bloody Battle of Hattin. The victory ultimately delivered Jerusalem into the hands of Saladin, the crown jewel of an Islamic caliphate stretching from the shores of Tunis through Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus.

If the Kurds' most famous son had bothered to identify himself as such, it may well have been the beginning of a Kurdish empire to rival the Ottomans or the Persians. But Saladin fought for God and not for country, leaving his hapless compatriots at the mercy of Ottoman chieftains, British cartographers and malevolent Arab strongmen.

Today, the 25 million Kurds clustered at the contiguous corners of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria are the largest ethnic group on earth without a formal homeland. As the U.S. abandons Iraq to its own devices and Iran rattles uranium sabers, as Turkey cracks down on its Kurds and Saladin's Damascus descends into the unrestrained slaughter of Bashar Assad's, the millennium-long dream of an independent Kurdistan could be the answer to this unfolding Middle Eastern nightmare.

As with many conflicts in the region, the Kurdish dilemma has its roots in the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Guaranteed self-determination by the Allied powers, the Kurds signed the 1920 Treaty of Sévres, only to watch the Europeans stand passively by as the Ottoman army officer Mustafa Kemal Atatürk cobbled together a country of his own, forming what is now Turkey out of the Kurds' promised land. In the years since, the Kurds have been massacred by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, gassed by Saddam Hussein and forgotten by the rest of the world. In Syria, their language is banned; in Turkey, a Member of Parliament with the temerity to pledge an oath "to the Turkish and Kurdish peoples" was released from a decade in jail -- only to be re-sentenced this year.

With the Assad regime now crumbling, tensions between the Kurdish

minority and their many tormentors, always tragic, are becoming a major geopolitical threat. Desperate to crush the Syrian revolution in its infancy, Assad has transferred troops away from the Kurdish provinces to the north, leaving a power vacuum into which two Kurdish political parties have stepped. If Assad falls, Syria will splinter into religiously or ethnically homogenous mini-states, one of which will almost certainly be under Kurdish control. Coupled with the recent emergence of a relatively independent Kurdish region in Iraq, this would create something of a league of semi-autonomous Kurdish states between the northeast regions of Syria and Iraq.

This combustible state of affairs greatly alarms Turkey, which has waged a bloody, three-decade civil war against its 14 million Kurds, claiming 40,000 lives. Although it has supported regime change in Syria, the Turkish government has "an almost pathological fear" of a greater Kurdistan, and can be expected to strenuously resist any attempt at Kurdish unification. Turkish tanks now patrol the shared border with Syria, intent on preventing any activity from spilling over into its borders.

Should that powder keg ignite, Turkey -- a NATO ally -- could very well drag the U.S. into a cross-border shooting war with Syria, with Russia quite possibly propping up its Syrian proxy. Meanwhile Iran, boasting an infamously brutal history with its own Kurds, remains a regional wildcard spinning nuclear centrifuges as fast as possible.

The dispossessed have become dangerously destabilizing. The overlooked can no longer be overlooked. And what was once a Middle Eastern flashpoint may yet become a safety valve for spiking regional tensions.

It will not be easy, but the uncertainty and plasticity in the region today offers an opportunity to secure a Kurdish homeland and remedy the capricious map-making of the early 20th century. Iraq is threatening to split into the pre-Iraq Sunni, Shia and Kurdish divisions of the Ottoman Empire, with the Kurds semi-independent and the Iran-allied Shiites ruling the Sunnis. Iran's economy is in free-fall. Syria will soon have no central control and no choice. And while no country is eager to surrender a fifth of its population, Turkey would do well to get ahead of this issue -- ending the vicious, ongoing war with the Kurdistan Workers'

Party (PKK), saving countless lives and positioning themselves to reap the benefits of a long-term strategic alliance to counterbalance Iranian influence. Not to mention, membership in the European Union will forever be out of reach for a Turkey at war with itself.

For proof of what's possible, look no further than Iraqi Kurdistan, a pro-American, pro-Israel and semi-autonomous parliamentary democracy most Americans have never heard of. Nurtured by an American no-fly zone in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established under the Iraqi Constitution in 2005, a stunning testament to the success of Muslim representative government. Of more than 4,800 American soldiers killed in the brutal battles for Iraq, not a single one has lost their life -- and no foreigner has been kidnapped -- within the borders of Iraqi Kurdistan. Boasting two international airports, a booming oil industry and a dawning respect for the rights of women, this 15,000 square-mile territory of nearly four million Kurds is the one part of President George W. Bush's "Mission Accomplished" that was actually accomplished.

Building on this unanticipated success, the U.S. should rethink its previous opposition to an independent greater Kurdistan and recognize that the advantages of a friendly, democratic and strategically-positioned ally far outweigh the outdated assumption that the Kurds' national liberation would result in regional conflagration. At this point, inaction is far more likely to provoke continued regional conflict. Whether that means calling for U.S.-brokered talks with Turkey or a temporary UN peacekeeping force, sanctions or scaled up foreign investment, the U.S. should make every effort to incentivize the consolidation and emergence of a single, stable, secure Kurdish homeland.

After a thousand years of turning a thousand blind eyes, the world can't keep kicking the Kurdish can down the road. Somewhere along that bloodstained road to Damascus, the region needs to experience this epiphany -- and soon. The first major protests in Syria began outside the Ummayad Mosque, Islam's fourth-holiest site and the location of Saladin's tomb. Saladin's descendants, it seems, are on the march once more. These Kurds want to be heard. Will the U.S. -- and the world -- listen? ○



NOVEMBER 13, 2012

# Iraqi Kurdistan Pushes Limits on Oil, Autonomy

Voice of America – by Mark Snowiss

**W**ith Kurds asserting themselves throughout the Middle East, Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region has stepped up its profile on the world's oil scene.

A series of recent petroleum deals signals a direct challenge to Baghdad's claim of total control over the country's oil exports and a possible step by the Kurds toward their longstanding aspirations for increased autonomy, or outright independence.

Within the last few months, Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, has begun construction on a major international oil and gas pipeline project with neighboring Turkey that would allow the Kurds direct access to world markets via the Mediterranean.

The KRG has also expanded exploration deals with foreign oil majors and boosted a growing crude-for-products trade with Turkish companies.

The moves reveal that Iraqi Kurds want to make their own economic choices.

## DEALS CAUSE TENSIONS

The deals have not only rankled Iraq's central government but also deepened the diplomatic rift between Ankara and Baghdad.

And they present internal problems for energy-hungry Turkey, too, which is fighting insurgents among its Kurdish minority who have long pushed for more freedoms.

Ankara faces enormous risks were it to throw its economic support solely behind Iraq's Kurds.

"Turkey wants to retain Iraq's territorial integrity and political stability. It doesn't want to encourage any kind of autonomy in Turkey or with any of the other Kurdish populations nearby," said former U.S. international energy envoy David Goldwyn.

"Also, Kurdistan's economic prosperity keeps Kurds happy there and is a significant commercial opportunity for Turkish companies. So [there are] complicated, mixed interests on both sides," he said.

## RICH OIL RESERVES

The Kurdish-run districts of northern Iraq have significant, nearly untapped reserves.

But years of legal disputes between the KRG and federal authorities in Baghdad have kept its oil largely excluded from international markets. Most oil produced in Kurdistan is sold locally for up to \$60 a barrel, well

below world prices.

With its sole grip on federal authority, Baghdad receives all Iraqi oil revenues and distributes a share to the Kurdistan region. Iraq also controls the vast, lucrative oil fields in the south.

In April, the KRG temporarily halted exports to protest what it said were overdue payments from the central government. Shipments were restarted in August and increased in September, when Iraq's federal Cabinet ratified a new agreement with the Kurds.

Kurdish Oil Minister Ashti Hawrami told an energy conference in London the deal could lead to exports reaching 250,000 barrels per day by 2013. Kurdish officials project levels of one million barrels a day by 2015.

The heady outlook is contingent on the KRG's recent deal with Ankara, which bypasses the federally-controlled Iraqi pipeline and is due to be operational by early 2014.

"If the new pipeline[s] go through," said Middle East expert Gregory Gause, "Baghdad's leverage over the Kurds would be reduced to zero."

## OVER-STATED OIL CLAIMS

But some analysts say Kurdish oil claims are over-inflated.

Roughly 75 percent of Iraq's proven reserves are concentrated in the south. The Kurds control only about six percent of the remaining northern reserves while another 20 percent is in the disputed Kirkuk area, according to the U.S.-based Revenue Watch.

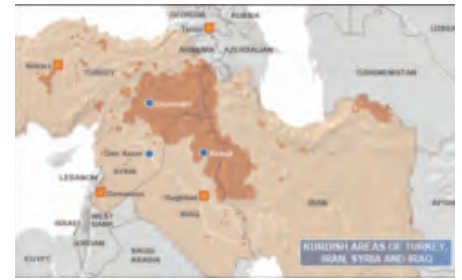
"Kurdistan does not have 45 million barrels of oil as it claims. Most of that is in disputed territories that would never be included or accepted by the central government," said Denise Natali, a Kurdish expert at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C.

Iraq's southern oil fields are the country's "real jewel," she said.

But Iraq remains in political turmoil and the south, in particular, has faced repeated deadly attacks from extremist elements seeking to destabilize the country.

For now, the Kurdish regional government provides better financial terms to oil companies. "Its stable political environment is attracting international investment in a way Baghdad has been unable to do," Gause said.

Last year, ExxonMobil became the first oil major to sign with the KRG, aggravating relations with Baghdad "by taking explora-



*Kurdish Areas of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq*

tion blocks located squarely in disputed territories," according to a report by the International Crisis Group.

Chevron, France's Total and Russia's Gazprom have followed. An estimated 45 smaller petroleum companies also are operating in Kurdistan.

Last month, Iraq's finance ministry belatedly transferred an initial \$650 million payment to the Kurdish government to reimburse two of these firms. But Baghdad does not view the compensation as an endorsement of the Kurdish contracts.

In a further slap to the Iraqi government, diplomatic sources said last month that Exxon is looking to sell its stake in a flagship project to develop the giant West Qurna-1 oil field in southern Iraq, because profits there are thin.

Exxon has declined to comment.

## KURDS CAUTIONED

Former envoy Goldwyn cautioned Kurdish leaders not to overplay their hand.

"The Kurds have some serious cards. But if Baghdad continues to refuse to reimburse costs once those costs become significant — four-five years out — [it] could decidedly hamstring the KRG's economic development," he said.

Iraq's federal government maintains it alone has the right to negotiate contracts and export oil and gas. The Kurdish view is that Iraq's federal constitution provides delegated authority to the provinces over their own petroleum production.

"The constitution gives us the right to develop our oil infrastructure and share it with the rest of the country," said Fuad Hussein, chief of staff for the KRG presidency.

"Each community, each citizen, has a share in the wealth, along with the Iraqi government," he said.

Ultimately, Goldwyn and others say, the crux of the dispute is about sovereignty, not money. In the near term, the Kurds will remain part of Iraq even as they seek to increase their oil hand. ○

# Doha : les dessous de l'unification de l'opposition syrienne

Constituée in extremis, l'entité a été reconnue lundi par la Ligue arabe et les pays du Golfe

Doha  
Envoyé spécial

Le Conseil de coopération du Golfe et la Ligue arabe, qui l'a qualifié de «représentant légitime» et de «principal interlocuteur», ont salué lundi 12 novembre le regroupement de l'opposition syrienne obtenu de haute lutte, la veille, à Doha, au Qatar. Ce succès est l'œuvre de deux hommes au parcours dissemblable mais à la détermination similaire : Georges Sabra, l'ancien instituteur communiste, jovial et dogmatique à la fois, et Riad Seif, le self-made-man devenu capitaine d'industrie, aussi rond que tenace.

Le premier arrive à Doha le dimanche 4 novembre, avec les membres du Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui doit renouveler ses instances. L'ambiance est électrique. Les couloirs de l'Hôtel Ritz Carlton, où sont hébergés les délégués, résonnent des coups de boutoir d'Hillary Clinton. En décrétant trois jours plus tôt que cette

instance ne peut «plus être considérée comme le dirigeant visible de l'opposition», en ironisant sur ses dirigeants, «qui pour certains n'ont pas mis les pieds en Syrie depuis vingt, trente ou quarante ans», la secrétaire d'Etat américaine a dressé une bonne partie du CNS contre elle. Et surtout contre le plan qu'elle a adopté, celui de Riad Seif, qui consiste à fonder cette coalition dans une structure plus large et davantage en prise avec le terrain.

Le plus hostile est Samir Nashar, l'un des concepteurs de la Déclaration de Damas – un appel à la démocratisation du régime syrien, publié en 2005 – qui ne décolère pas contre le «diktat» de Clinton. «Si une initiative est imposée au CNS, elle échouera», prévient aussi l'universitaire franco-syrien Burhan Ghalioun, qui fut son premier président. La tension est telle que Samir Nashar est victime d'un bref malaise cardiaque.

Hasard ou calcul ? Le maître de

cérémonie qatari a logé Riad Seif et les opposants acquis à son plan à l'autre bout de la ville, au Shératon, en plein quartier des ambassades. Le quart d'heure de taxi entre les deux palaces ne sera pas de trop pour apaiser les esprits. Les négociations démarrent le mercredi 7 novembre, et le CNS dépose aussitôt sur la table une demi-douzaine de contre-propositions. L'une d'elles prévoit la convocation d'un congrès de 300 membres dans les zones «libérées» du nord avant toute recomposition de l'opposition. Un projet parfaitement irréaliste quand l'artillerie et l'aviation syrienne bombardent sans répit Alep, Idlib et leurs environs.

En face, Riad Seif est venu en famille. Il est épaulé par sa fille Joumana, sa petite-fille Sarah, qui tient les importuns à distance et quelques collaborateurs fidèles. Il peut compter sur l'entregent de deux diplomates amis, le français Eric Chevallier, ancien ambassadeur à Damas, et son homologue américain, Robert Ford. A coups de cafés et de conciliabules, dans le dédale de salons et de couloirs molletonnés de l'hôtel, l'équipe s'emploie à déminer le terrain. Les pro-Seif martèlent notamment, contrairement à une rumeur insistante, que son plan ne vise pas à ouvrir des négociations avec Damas – du moins, pas tant que les intéressés jugeront cette option inacceptable.

Vendredi après-midi, un accord se dessine. Mais le lendemain matin, tout semble perdu. Car entre-temps, Georges Sabra a été élu président du CNS. Un chrétien, qui habitait il y a quelques mois encore à Damas, porté à la tête

Que s'est-il passé pour qu'un arrangement soit trouvé ? Des pressions qataries un peu plus appuyées ? A n'en pas douter

d'une organisation accusée d'être noyauté par les Frères musulmans et détachée du terrain ? La manœuvre est habile. On redoute que l'ex-marxiste soit grisé par son succès. Qu'il se range à l'avis de son mentor, le dissident Riad Turk, ancien communiste, qui vit caché en Syrie, et qu'on dit farouchement opposé à Riad Seif. Et de fait, devant les journalistes, M. Sabra fait mine d'ignorer son plan.

Vingt-quatre heures plus tard, un accord est pourtant trouvé. Sous l'effet de pressions qataries un peu plus appuyées ? A n'en pas douter, la réputation de médiateur de l'émirat étant engagée. Mais l'ultime rebondissement de la semaine est aussi le produit de l'estime que se vouent Riad Seif et Georges Sabra. Les deux sexagénaires ont la même soif de liberté et de dignité. A un moment de leurs nombreux séjours dans les prisons d'Assad, ils ont partagé la même cellule. Quand fin 2011 M. Sabra, qui craint pour sa vie, décide de s'enfuir de Syrie, c'est au domicile des Seif que l'échappée est échafaudée, avec la participation d'Eric Chevallier. Le poids des responsabilités fera le reste. Après plusieurs tentatives d'unification ratées, alors que la Syrie s'enfonce dans la nuit, l'opposition aurait eu le plus grand mal à se relever d'un nouveau fiasco. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE



13 novembre 2012

## LYON - Grève de la faim en soutien aux prisonniers kurdes

Ils se sont installés place Bellecour pour soutenir les leurs, prisonniers politiques en Turquie. Douze femmes et hommes d'origine Kurdes, vivant désormais à Lyon, ont entamé lundi dans le centre-ville un jeûne symbolique de trois jours en soutien aux « 707 Kurdes, en grève de la faim depuis plus de 60 jours et prêts à mourir pour lutter contre l'oppression dont ils sont victimes ».

« Les grévistes lyonnais ont beau avoir fui à cause de la répression, ils se sentent rattachés à la lutte de ces prisonniers politiques », explique Alexis, membre du comité de soutien des Kurdes de Lyon. Par leur jeûne, également observé dans d'autres villes de France, ces derniers souhaitent notamment sensibiliser les Lyonnais à « cette répression sans précédent en Turquie ». « Ils veulent aussi



que la communauté internationale réagisse, ne reste pas silencieuse », ajoute le comité de soutien.E.R. □

Le Monde  
Jeudi 15 novembre 2012

# Paris en pointe sur le soutien aux rebelles syriens

## L'opposition syrienne reconnue

La France, premier pays occidental à s'engager

Coup politique et diplomatique à la fois, François Hollande a annoncé, mardi 13 novembre, que la France reconnaissait l'opposition syrienne, récemment structurée en une nouvelle entité, comme l'unique incarnation de la légitimité d'Etat dans ce pays. La France est le premier pays occidental à franchir ce pas. « La France reconnaît la Coalition nationale syrienne comme la seule représentante du peuple syrien et donc comme le futur gouvernement de la Syrie démocratique, permettant d'en terminer avec le régime de Bachar Al-Assad », a déclaré le chef de l'Etat. M. Hollande a par ailleurs indiqué que, « dès lors qu'il y aura un gouvernement légitime de la Syrie », la question des livraisons d'armes « sera reposée à tous les gouvernements – pas seulement la France – qui reconnaissent ce gouvernement » syrien.

Autrement dit, il indiquait que la question de la reconnaissance pouvait rebattre les cartes du débat sur la nature, l'ampleur et même la légitimité, au plan international, de l'aide à apporter aux groupes armés anti-Assad. Car si l'opposition incarne la souveraineté syrienne, le problème de l'ingérence ne se pose plus de la même façon.

Jusqu'à présent, Américains et Européens se sont toujours refusés à une politique ouverte d'armement de l'opposition syrienne, expliquant que nul ne pouvait être sûr de la destination finale de ces armes. Les Etats-Unis ont même exercé des pressions ces derniers mois sur l'Arabie saoudite et le Qatar pour qu'ils ne livrent pas de missiles antiaériens portables à l'opposition syrienne, de peur que cela ne se retourne un jour contre des intérêts occidentaux.

Cependant le constat a fini par s'imposer, côté occidental, que pareille « abstention » faisait le lit de groupes à posture djihadiste en Syrie, cherchant à capter des fonds des réseaux du Golfe afin de s'armer. Les propos de M. Hollande reflétaient, semble-t-il, cette

réflexion commune entre Occidentaux, Turcs et Arabes.

Au passage, le président français a omis de mentionner qu'un embargo de l'Union européenne sur les livraisons d'armes à la Syrie est en place depuis juin 2011, et qu'il faudrait en toute hypothèse une décision des Vingt-Sept pour

**Au plan du symbole, la décision renvoie à la reconnaissance par la France du Conseil national libyen, en mars 2011**

le lever. Les Britanniques examinent pour leur part de près les termes de cet embargo, à la recherche de codicilles permettant certaines livraisons.

Les propos de M. Hollande visent à démontrer une continuité avec ce qu'il avait annoncé fin août : la promesse d'une reconnaissance si l'opposition syrienne s'unifiait. Sa décision a pour effet de concentrer l'attention sur la diplomatie française, alors que

les Etats-Unis et le Qatar sont apparus en première ligne pour forger l'unité des groupes anti-Assad, lors d'une réunion de quatre jours à Doha qui a abouti, le 11 novembre, à la création de la Coalition nationale syrienne.

Au plan du symbole, la décision du président français renvoie implicitement à la reconnaissance par la France du Conseil national libyen de transition, en mars 2011, même si personne ne parle de déployer en Syrie une opération militaire extérieure de l'ampleur de celle menée contre le pouvoir de Kadhafi. M. Hollande a pris le tournant de la « reconnaissance » de manière solennelle, en s'exprimant à l'Elysée, alors que Nicolas Sarkozy avait laissé les représentants de Benghazi parler à sa place, sur le perron du palais présidentiel.

Vis-à-vis des partenaires de la France, cependant, l'effet est le même : il s'agit d'un solo et la capacité d'entraînement du dirigeant français sur la scène internationale pourrait être testée. Ni les Etats-Unis ni aucun pays européen ne semblent à ce stade prêts à accorder un tel blanc-seing à la nouvelle

structure de l'opposition syrienne, pourtant largement saluée.

Comme si celle-ci, en dépit de l'accord obtenu à Doha, n'avait pas encore fourni tous les gages de représentativité attendus. « Nous voulons voir l'opposition syrienne ouverte à tous (...) et qu'elle reçoive un soutien de l'intérieur de la Syrie, et si elle l'obtient, oui, nous la reconnaitrons », a commenté, mardi, le chef du Foreign Office, le Britannique William Hague.

Le geste de M. Hollande se conçoit comme une forme de récompense accordée aux groupes anti-Assad, qui ont réussi à se coaliser. La perspective d'une reconnaissance formelle par la communauté internationale, avec toutes les possibilités d'aide accrue que cela pourrait induire, semble avoir agi comme un puissant moteur pour unifier des groupes très disparates. Depuis un an, leur désunion avait souvent été invoquée pour justifier la relative inaction des Occidentaux face à cette crise.

Il reste à voir si cette phase d'unité nouvelle de l'opposition peut se traduire par une meilleure coordination des groupes armés sur le



Des combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre prennent position dans un quartier d'Alep, mardi 13 novembre. JAVIER MANZANO/AFP

terrain, où la fragmentation a été, jusqu'ici, plutôt la règle.

Chose importante: s'il a réagi rapidement après l'émergence d'une nouvelle coalition syrienne, le président français a pris soin d'attendre un geste préalable de pays arabes. Celui-ci est venu lundi des six membres du Conseil de coopération du Golfe (CCG), organisation dominée par l'Arabie saoudite. Le CCG a reconnu l'opposition syrienne comme «le représentant légitime du peuple syrien». La Ligue arabe est cependant restée nettement en deçà, du fait de ses divisions inter-

nes: l'Algérie, l'Irak et le Liban empêchent une pleine reconnaissance de la coalition syrienne, qui n'est en conséquence décrite que comme «représentante légitime de l'opposition», et non du peuple syrien tout entier.

M. Hollande a réitéré, mardi, qu'aucune intervention armée en Syrie ne serait envisageable sans résolution de l'ONU. Il a parallèlement répété que les «zones libérées» devaient être «protégées», mais sans préciser comment.

Personne, côté occidental, ne semble sérieusement envisager la création d'une zone tampon à l'in-

térieur de la Syrie par le déploiement en Turquie, dans des zones frontalières, de missiles Patriot de l'OTAN.

La question immédiate semble être plutôt de voir si la positionne-

**M. Hollande a réitéré, mardi, qu'aucune intervention armée en Syrie ne serait envisageable sans résolution de l'ONU**

ment russe pourrait s'infléchir depuis que l'opposition syrienne affiche une nouvelle donne. Pour l'heure, Moscou continue d'insister sur un dialogue avec le pouvoir de Damas.

La coalition syrienne nourrit maintenant de grandes attentes et demande «à la communauté internationale», comme l'a dit son chef, le religieux modéré Moaz Al-Khatib, «d'honorer ses engagements». «Pas seulement de l'argent et du pain, mais des armes», a-t-il insisté. Quelles promesses, au juste, ont été faites? ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Observateur 15 NOVEMBRE 2012 - N° 2506

TURQUIE



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Premier ministre turc

## Erdogan, le Poutine turc?

Le Premier ministre turc, critiqué par ses adversaires pour ses penchants autocratiques, prendrait-il modèle sur Vladimir Poutine, virtuose de la longévité politique? Après avoir été élu triomphalement pour la troisième fois d'affilée à la tête du Parti de la Justice et du Développement, AKP, qu'il a fondé en 2001, il vise désormais la présidence de la République. Mais il faut au préalable retailer à sa mesure la fonction, actuellement occupée par Abdullah Gül, qui est essentiellement honorifique. Les députés islamo-conservateurs viennent donc de déposer au Parlement un projet de réforme

des institutions afin d'instaurer un régime présidentiel. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, déjà reconduit deux fois au poste de Premier ministre, ne pourra pas l'être une troisième fois après les législatives de 2015. Pour demeurer au pouvoir, reste donc l'élection présidentielle, qui aura lieu au suffrage universel en 2014. Inoxydable, après un très sérieux problème de santé et une opération du côlon en 2011, celui qui règne sur la vie politique turque depuis bientôt dix ans ne cache pas ses ambitions pour la décennie à venir: «Si Dieu me maintient en vie, nous aurons d'autres missions à mener.» LAURE MARCHAND

Observateur 15 NOVEMBRE 2012 - N° 2506

TURQUIE

## Le cauchemar de Sevil Sevimli

Interdite de quitter le territoire turc, Sevil Sevimli (photo, à droite) n'a pas pu effectuer sa rentrée en information et communication à l'université Lyon-II comme elle l'avait espéré. Accusée de faire partie de la «direction d'une organisation terroriste», le DHKP-C (Parti-Front de Libération du Peuple révolutionnaire), un groupe d'extrême gauche violent, cette Franco-Turque comparaitra pour la deuxième fois devant la cour d'assises de Bursa, lundi 19 novembre. Elle risque une peine de trente-deux ans d'emprisonnement. «Je n'ai jamais eu de

rapport avec le DHKP-C», s'est-elle défendue, lors de la première audience le 26 septembre.

En venant en Turquie dans le cadre du programme européen Erasmus, la jeune femme de 20 ans, née en France, voulait découvrir la culture du pays de ses parents et était évidemment loin de s'imaginer qu'elle en connaîtrait les prisons. Elle a été arrêtée le 10 mai dernier dans l'appartement qu'elle partageait en colocation à Eskisehir, une ville de l'ouest de la Turquie, et a été emprisonnée trois mois avant de bénéficier d'une libération conditionnelle en août. Si sa nationalité française lui a sans doute permis de sortir



de prison, c'est en tant que citoyenne turque qu'elle est jugée. «Il n'y a strictement rien dans mon dossier», déclare-t-elle. Il lui est notamment reproché d'avoir participé au défilé syndical du 1<sup>er</sup>-Mai, collé des affiches réclamant l'accès gratuit à l'enseignement supérieur, d'avoir assisté à un concert de Yorum, un groupe de rock contestataire... Bref, rien d'illégal.

Sevil Sevimli, qui vient d'une famille kurde et alévie - une minorité également discriminée en Turquie - n'est pas la seule à être plongée dans un tel cauchemar judiciaire. Plus de 700 étudiants et lycéens sont actuellement détenus pour des raisons politiques. Ils sont victimes d'une utilisation abusive de la loi antiterroriste, renforcée en 2006, qui vise avant tout les militants de la cause kurde et de l'extrême-gauche.

LAURE MARCHAND



## Nechirvan Barzani in Iran: Tehran eyes improved ties with Kurdish neighbour

Iran calls for improved ties with Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly on economic front, as autonomous region's PM visits Tehran.

Middle East Online

**TEHRAN** - Iran on Monday called for improved ties with neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly on the economic front, as the autonomous region's prime minister visited Tehran, media reports said.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told the visiting premier, Nechirvan Barzani, that strengthened relations with Kurdistan could benefit Iraq, the presidency website reported.

"Exploring existing potentials, especially in trade and commerce, can spark a major leap in economic ties between Iran and Iraq," Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying.

"This will help with the welfare and development situation of both Iranian and Iraqi nations," he said.

The website quoted Barzani as saying Kurdistan was prepared for a full expansion of ties, which he said, was of "great importance" to the autonomous region.



Barzani: Kurdistan is prepared for full expansion of ties

Barzani also met with Tehran's top security official, Saeed Jalili, telling him that trade between Iran and his region had exceeded \$8 billion, ISNA news agency reported, without providing any additional details.

Jalili, who heads the Supreme National Security Council, insisted on keeping Iran's restive borders with the Iraqi Kurdistan region as peaceful as possible.

"Minor issues should not be allowed to prevent the development of strategic plans," Jalili was quoted as saying.

Iran's western regions, which border western Iraq and southern Turkey, have been the scene of sporadic clashes between Iranian forces and members of the armed Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK).

Iran has retaliated by shelling PJAK bases in Kurdistan's mountainous districts.

In July 2010, the Islamic republic's Revolutionary Guards launched a summer-long string of operations against the rebels, claiming to have killed more than 180 PJAK members. ■

## Amendment for defense in Kurdish sent to Parliament

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

**T**urkey's government sent a legal arrangement paving the way for the use of suspects' mother tongue in courts – one of the three key demands of hundreds of hunger strikers – to Parliament late yesterday. The arrangement is part of a 13-article amendment proposal to the Criminal



Procedure Code (CMK) and to the Law on Execution of Penalties and Security Precautions.

In the reasoning of the proposal, it says that "the defendant is given the opportunity to make his verbal defense in a language in which he states that he will better express

himself," Anatolia news agency reported.

Over 700 mostly Kurdish hunger strikers are demanding an end to the isolation of imprisoned militant leader Abdullah Öcalan, as well as an end to restrictions against Kurdish in the courts and the education system. Today is the 63rd day of the strike.

The same proposal also outlines a chance for married prisoners to conduct conjugal visits with their spouses without the presence of prison staff from three hours to 24 hours and once in three months.

If the proposal is approved, the implementation of sentences of prisoners who cannot survive alone in prisons due to a serious illness or handicap may also be postponed. ○

## Des Kurdes prennent le contrôle de trois villes dans le nord-est de la Syrie

BEYROUTH, 10 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**DES COMBATTANTS KURDES** ont pris le contrôle de trois villes du nord-est de la Syrie ces dernières 24 heures, après le départ des forces gouvernementales, ont rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) et des militants.

Vendredi dans cette zone frontalière de la Turquie, les rebelles avaient déjà pris

de leur côté pris la ville de Rass Al-Aïn, après des combats féroces avec les forces du régime, d'après l'OSDH et des militants.

Des combattants du Comité de protection du peuple kurde "ont pris le contrôle de Derbassiyé et de Tal Tamer, après avoir encerclé pendant de longues heures les deux QG de la police et des sièges des renseignements des militaires et de la sécurité de l'Etat dans la province de Hassaka", a déclaré à l'AFP le président de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane. ⇒

⇒ Le Comité de protection du peuple kurde est le bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (rebelles kurdes en Turquie).

Carrefour stratégique, Tal Amer se situe au croisement de la route allant de la capitale provinciale de Hassaka à Ras Al-Ain et de la principale autoroute reliant la province d'est en ouest.

D'après l'OSDH, des habitants ont participé à l'encerclement et aux négociations avec les forces gouvernementales, qui ont finalement accepté de se retirer pour éviter des combats.

Les combattants kurdes ont également pris dans la nuit le contrôle d'un petit

poste-frontière à Derbassiyé, selon l'OSDH, qui s'appuie sur un réseau de militants et de sources médicales sur le terrain.

Et samedi, les forces du régime ont abandonné la ville d'Amouda, au nord-est de Derbassiyé, après des manifestations réclamant leur départ, selon l'OSDH.

Dans la province de Hassaka, le régime ne contrôle désormais plus que les deux grandes villes de Qamichli et Hassaka. Et le long de la frontière turque, les forces gouvernementales ne tiennent plus que deux postes-frontière, celui de Qamichli, qui est fermé, et celui de Kesseb, près de Lattaquié (côte ouest), a assuré à l'AFP le président de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane. ○



NOVEMBER 13, 2012

## Kurdish Insurgency Faces Crossroads

Voice of America - by Mark Snowiss

**T**he Arab Spring has given Kurds across the Middle East new hopes for independence through political means. But some are worried an armed Kurdish insurgency operating in four countries may ultimately derail national aspirations.

In recent months, Turkey's conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has escalated rapidly, with some of the heaviest fighting in decades.

More than 700 people have died since large-scale hostilities resumed in summer 2011, the highest casualty rate since the late 1990s, according to reports.

The Turkish army has staged nearly 1,000 raids in the past six months against the PKK, branded by the United States and the European Union as a terrorist organization.

### SPLINTER GROUPS

When Turkey captured influential PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 and cut most of the group's links to states offering support or safe-haven, the PKK countered by founding sister organizations, such as the PYD in Syria and Iran's PJAK, beginning in 2002.

Despite denials, the splinter groups are all PKK-run, said Ihsan Bal, an Ankara-based security specialist.

"[In] the case of PJAK, Iranian Kurds are involved, and, obviously, with the PYD in Syria, the Syrian Kurds are involved, but the main instigator and [effective] leadership is the PKK," he said.

European and American officials say the groups are loosely funded through the PKK's network of voluntary contributions from sympathizers in Turkey and the European Kurdish diaspora, as well as extortion, drug trafficking and kidnapping.

The PKK reportedly raises up to \$25 million annually from the diaspora, but its main funding comes from within Turkey itself. The money is used for everything from armed operations to TV stations and a European lobbying organization.



*Syrian Kurds demonstrators hold flags and portraits of jailed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan during a protest in Derik, Al Hasakah, Syria, November 1, 2012.*

### TURKISH DEMANDS

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has demanded international action to curb the money trail from Europe.

"We would like to see the outcome of the European Union's determined policies," said Erdogan. "So there should not be any 'western-sponsored', separatist terror organization. The West should clearly lay out its position in this case. It is our expectation."

Founded in 1978, the PKK originally vowed to secure an independent, united Kurdistan for the Middle East's estimated 30 million Kurds, a goal that has been scaled back to autonomy within Turkey.

The conflict has killed more than 40,000 people since it began 28 years ago.

In the late 1980s, the PKK established bases in Iraq. According to analyst Bal, the group now controls about 4,000 guerrilla fighters based in that country's nearly impenetrable northern mountains near the Turkish border - and another 1,000 inside Turkey.

Neither Turkey nor the Kurdistan regional government has been able to shut down the PKK's main bases in Qandil [in northern Iraq], "where they will operate for a long time," said Denise Natali, a Kurdish expert at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C.

The commander of the PKK's armed wing,

Murat Karayilan, was quoted as saying the group's military budget amounts to more than \$140 million annually.

"[Outside experts] have also estimated it might be [as much as] \$150 million. So that is the estimate of the PKK military wing," Bal said.

### SYRIAN PUSH

As Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's grip on power began to disintegrate after March 2011, the leaders of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or PYD, moved from Qandil to Syria.

While its allied militia took over towns near the Turkish border, the PYD built schools, cultural centers and other Kurdish institutions.

The PKK and its Iranian offshoot, the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan, or PJAK, appear even more closely aligned, said Henri Barkey, a professor of international relations at Lehigh University.

But key Kurdish political leaders, mainly in Iraq, have been pursuing gains through economic means, thus offering an alternative to the insurgency. Iraqi Kurdish officials met this week in Tehran for talks on trade.

Massoud Barzani, president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, offers a comprehensive regional vision that PKK militarism simply cannot match, said Barkey, who called the Kurdish leader "the single most important new force to emerge from the Syrian crisis."

"Barzani has institutions, he has money, he has a state, even if its part of the federal Iraqi state, it is still a recognized state," Barkey said. "[The Kurdish president] has international recognition and acceptance, versus a PKK that has been ostracized and labeled a terrorist [group] by the U.S., EU, etcetera," he said.

Ultimately, Barkey said, the Kurdish insurgency may become more of a detriment than an asset for the Kurdish cause.

"There's no question the PKK put the Kurds on the map in Turkey," he said. "But from this point on, they will not get a great deal more from continued violence." ○

# Syrian forces again pound border region

## CEYLANPINAR, TURKEY

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Syrian Air Force bombed a rebel-held region near the border with Turkey for a second day on Tuesday, killing at least one person and wounding three, an official said.

The aerial attack raised the two-day death toll in the region to an estimated 31 people. Nearly 10,000 Syrians have fled into Turkey since Friday, seeking safety from shelling and bombing.

A journalist saw airstrikes around the Syrian town of Ras al-Ain, just across the border from the town of Ceylanpinar in southeastern Turkey. Plumes of smoke rose into the sky and Turkish ambulances rushed to the border to ferry wounded Syrians to Turkish hospitals.

An official from the Ceylanpinar mayor's office reported four airstrikes Tuesday. It was not clear whether one or several planes were involved. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

The official said one of the four wounded Syrians brought into Turkey for medical treatment Tuesday had died. He said that an estimated 20 people had died during an air raid in Ras al-Ain on Monday and that 10 others from the town had died of their wounds Monday in Turkey.

The Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, speaking to journalists in Rome late Monday, said Turkey had formally protested the bombings to the Syrian government, saying the attacks were endangering Turkey's security. He said Turkey had also reported the episode to NATO allies and to the United Nations Security Council.

The violence in Syria has killed more than 36,000 people since an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began in March 2011. Hundreds of thousands have fled into neighboring Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

Syrian rebels wrested control of Ras al-Ain from the Assad government forces last week. The town is in the predominantly Kurdish oil-producing northeastern province of al-Hasaka.

The fighting in Ras al-Ain touched off a huge flow of refugees Friday, and more refugees fled into Ceylanpinar on Monday and Tuesday.

Also Tuesday, the leader of Syria's new opposition coalition urged European states to recognize it as the legitimate government, enabling it to buy the weapons it needs to overthrow Mr. Assad.



The Syrian town of Ras al-Ain, which is within sight of Turkey, on Tuesday after an airstrike. The attack raised the two-day death toll in the region to an estimated 31 people.



"I request European states to grant political recognition to the coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and to give it financial support," said the leader, Sheik Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib.

"When we get political recognition, this will allow the coalition to act as a government and hence acquire weapons and this will solve our problems."

Britain and France appeared to set further conditions, notably that the coalition first rally support inside the country, before they grant full recognition to the Syrian National Coalition.

And like the United States, Europeans are still reluctant to arm rebel forces which include anti-Western Islamist militants.

In Paris, the French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, called the creation of the new Syrian opposition group in the Qatari capital, Doha, "a significant step forward"— but said the group did not yet merit international recognition as Syria's provisional government.

"It's not yet a sufficient step forward for it to constitute a provisional government that can be recognized at the international level, but it's on the right track," he said. "I would also say in military terms. So it's necessary to translate the Doha accord into military terms."

The British foreign minister, William Hague, also said the coalition must show it had support within Syria before London would acknowledge it as the rightful government.

"If they have this, yes, we will then recognize them as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people," he said in Cairo, where Arab and European ministers were meeting to discuss Syria at the Arab League.

The coalition deal was reached Sunday after more than a week of meetings, a move that some hope could boost efforts to secure international support to oust Mr. Assad's government.

Western caution, and an Arab League

endorsement that stopped short of full recognition, indicate that the coalition may yet find it hard to win whole-hearted support, even from its allies.

So far, concerted action on Syria has

been thwarted by divisions within the opposition, as well as by big power rivalries and a regional divide between Sunni Muslim foes of Mr. Assad and his Shiite allies in Iran and Lebanon.

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

NOVEMBER 14, 2012

## Iran official says jailed critic wasn't tortured

TEHRAN

BY THOMAS ERDBRINK

A Iranian blogger who died in detention last week was not tortured during interrogations, according to a report cited by the head of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Parliament.

But the lawmaker, Alaeddin Borujerdi, on Monday called for further investigation into the death of the blogger,

Sattar Beheshti, a rare instance in which Parliament and the judiciary followed up a human rights complaint that was first raised internationally.

The Iranian judiciary acknowledged that five bruises had been found on Mr. Beheshti's body, but Mr. Borujerdi told the Islamic Students' News Agency, a semiofficial organization, that "according to a preliminary report, no traces of beating were seen on his body."

On Oct. 29, a day before his arrest, Mr. Beheshti, 35, published a post saying that officers had warned him in a telephone call that his "mother should soon don a black shroud because you refuse to shut your big mouth."

"I will not remain silent even at the moment of my death," he wrote.

He was first taken to Evin Prison, in Tehran, before being transferred to Kahrizak, a police prison south of Tehran where three people died during the anti-government protests of 2009.

One opposition Web site reprinted a signed, official complaint against an interrogator that it said Mr. Beheshti had filed while he was at Evin Prison.

"I, Sattar Beheshti, was arrested by FATA" — the Iranian cyberpolice — "and beaten and tortured with multiple blows to my head and body," read the document, published by the Web site Kalame. "I want to write that if anything happens to me, the police are responsible."

At a news conference, a judiciary spokesman, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, confirmed the existence of the complaint on Monday but said it was "very ambiguous." He said a doctor in Evin Prison had reported that Mr. Beheshti was "extremely exhausted" and had recommended a psychiatric evaluation.

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

NOVEMBER 15, 2012

## French move on rebels is denounced by Syria

PARIS

BY STEVEN ERLANGER,  
ALAN COWELL  
AND RICK GLADSTONE

The Syrian authorities ordered airstrikes on Wednesday for a third consecutive day close to the tense Turkish border and said a French decision to recognize and consider arming a newly formed Syrian rebel coalition was an effort to "destroy Syria."

The French move was depicted by analysts as an attempt to inject momentum into a broad Western and Arab effort to build a viable and effective opposition to hasten the end of a stalemated civil war that has further destabilized the Middle East. For its part, the United States on Wednesday signaled a reluctance to go beyond its characterization of the rebel alliance as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people, rather than as their sole representative.



BULENT KILIC/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Syrian rebels on Thursday in the Syrian town of Ras al-Ain, a target of Syrian warplanes.

Speaking in Perth, Australia, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Washington first wanted to see the coalition influencing events on the ground.

"As the Syrian opposition takes these steps and demonstrates its effectiveness in advancing the cause of a unified, democratic, pluralistic Syria, we will be prepared to work with them to deliver assistance to the Syrian people," news reports quoted her saying.

Journalists near the Turkish border town of Ceylanpinar said they saw a Syrian airstrike in the adjacent Syrian town of Ras al-Ain, where rebels say they have

ousted troops loyal to Mr. Assad. It was the third such strike there in three days.

"The whole world, and Syria too, says the problem in Syria should be solved in a peaceful framework and through a national dialogue," Syria's deputy foreign minister, Faisal Mekdad, said in an interview with Russia Today, according to Reuters. But, he added, "the first decision taken after forming the coalition in Doha was to reject dialogue and to continue the war."

"They want to destroy Syria," he said.

# Abdullah Öcalan, leader éternel ou incarnation du mal



Abdullah Öcalan, fondateur du PKK, est emprisonné depuis 1999. | JOSEPH BARRAK/AFP

LE MONDE GEO ET POLITIQUE  
Par Guillaume Perrier  
Istanbul, correspondance

Ses partisans l'appellent affectueusement " Apo", "le Leader", ou encore le "Soleil de l'humanité". Pour les représentants de l'Etat turc, il reste "le chef terroriste" dont il n'est même plus utile de citer le nom. Héros ou ennemi public numéro un, Abdullah Öcalan inspire toujours autant d'admiration et de haine en Turquie. Celui qui a fondé en 1978 le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, organisation armée séparatiste) est pourtant détenu depuis plus de treize ans sur l'île d'Imrali, en mer de Marmara, transformée en prison. Mais du fond de sa cellule, c'est toujours lui qui dicte le calendrier politique. Immanquablement, la question des Kurdes (environ 24 % de la population) bute sur le sort d'Abdullah Öcalan.

Le dernier exemple en date remonte au 12 septembre, lorsque des centaines de prisonniers politiques kurdes ont lancé une grève de la faim dans les prisons du pays. Après deux mois de jeûne, début novembre, les députés du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie, vitrine légale du PKK, se sont joints au mouvement. Les grévistes réclament l'usage de leur langue maternelle dans les tribunaux, ce qu'Ankara s'appête à concéder. Mais leur principale revendication concerne les conditions de déten-

tion du chef du PKK sur son île-prison. Depuis plus de sept mois, ses avocats n'ont plus été autorisés à rendre visite à Öcalan, l'administration utilisant tous les prétextes pour renforcer cet isolement. Or, rien n'est plus sacré pour la cause kurde que la santé d'"Apo". En 2007, des rumeurs d'empoisonnement avaient déclenché une série de manifestations à travers l'Europe.

Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a dénoncé le "show" et le "chantage" des militants autonomistes kurdes en grève de la faim. Pour l'heure, il affiche son refus de tout aménagement de la détention : pas question d'une assignation à résidence qui pourrait choquer l'opinion turque, aux yeux de laquelle Öcalan est l'incarnation du mal. M. Erdogan s'est même prononcé pour un rétablissement de la peine de mort pour les "terroristes", alors que la peine capitale a été abolie en 2002 pour se conformer aux exigences démocratiques européennes. En 2009, la Turquie avait autorisé le transfert de détenus sur l'île d'Imrali, pour rompre l'isolement d'Öcalan. Ce geste répondait aux remontrances du Conseil de l'Europe et des organisations de défense des droits de l'homme.

## IL DIRIGE LE PKK DEPUIS SA PRISON

La Turquie pensait avoir décapité le PKK en arrêtant

Abdullah Öcalan en 1999, à l'issue d'une cavale digne d'un roman d'espionnage. Chassé de Syrie par le régime baasiste sous la pression turque, le chef de la guérilla marxiste-léniniste, entrée en guerre contre la Turquie en 1984 (le conflit a fait au moins 45 000 morts), avait erré plusieurs mois à la recherche d'un point de chute, entre la Grèce, la Russie et l'Italie. Il fut finalement capturé par les services secrets turcs en sortant de l'ambassade de Grèce à Nairobi, au Kenya, et ramené en Turquie. Condamné à mort, il a ensuite vu sa peine commuée en prison à vie.

Pendant toutes ses années de détention, depuis sa prison, le chef rebelle, aujourd'hui âgé de 64 ans, a continué à diriger l'organisation, distillant, par le biais de ses avocats, des pages de doctrine politique et d'instructions adressées à ses troupes. Öcalan a dicté les grandes orientations du PKK. Il a maintenu un cessez-le-feu jusqu'en 2004, puis il a concédé qu'une autonomie politique pour les provinces kurdes pourrait suffire, idée mise en pratique par le Conseil des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK), administration parallèle contre laquelle la justice turque mène la répression depuis

2009.

Cette même année ont été entamés, en Norvège, des pourparlers secrets entre plusieurs cadres du mouvement kurde clandestin et des représentants de l'Etat, mandatés par le premier ministre Erdogan, pour mettre fin à trente ans de guerre civile. Mais le processus dit d'Oslo n'a débouché sur rien de concret. Pour sortir de l'impasse, il faudra sans doute accepter qu'Abdullah Öcalan prenne place à la table des négociations. Une option difficile à accepter pour Ankara.

## Biographie

**4 avril 1948 Naissance à Ömerli près d'Urfa (sud de la Turquie).**

**27 octobre 1978 Fondation du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à Fis, près de Diyarbakir (sud-est).**

**1984 Déclenchement de la lutte armée contre l'Etat turc. La guerre a causé la mort d'environ 45 000 personnes.**

**15 février 1999 Arrestation à Nairobi (Kenya) par les services secrets turcs.**

AFP

## Le Kurdistan irakien place ses forces de sécurité en état d'alerte

Erbil (Irak), 17 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**LE PRÉSIDENT DU KURDISTAN IRAKIEN a annoncé samedi avoir placé en état d'alerte les forces de sécurité de la région autonome, les peshmergas, après un incident avec des soldats irakiens, illustrant une nouvelle fois les relations exécrables entre Bagdad et Erbil.**

Dans un communiqué, Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, appelle "les peshmergas à s'abstenir de répondre aux provocations et à être prêts à faire face à toute agression".

Selon M. Barzani, des accrochages ont éclaté vendredi entre les peshmergas et les forces irakiennes dans la ville de Touz Khourmatou, que se disputent le Kurdistan et le gouvernement fédéral. "Une personne est morte et plusieurs autres ont été blessées", a-t-il déclaré.

Mais selon le général Abdulamir al-Zaïdi de l'armée irakienne, aucun peshmerga n'a été impliqué dans ces affrontements et l'opération visait seulement à arrêter un suspect.

Le haut gradé dirige le tout nouveau Centre des opérations du Tigre, établi dans la ville de Kirkouk. A l'égal de Touz Khourmatou, Kirkouk est revendiquée tant par Bagdad et que le Kurdistan.

La récente inauguration de ce centre de commandement a encore envenimé un peu plus les relations déjà houleuses qu'entretiennent les deux entités.

Bagdad et Erbil s'affrontent sur un certain nombre de dossiers, dont celui de l'exploitation des hydrocarbures. Le gouvernement irakien reproche ainsi au Kurdistan de signer des contrats avec des compagnies pétrolières étrangères en se passant de son accord. ◻

## L'OBSERVATEUR DU MONDE

## Syrie: les crimes de la rébellion

PAR RENÉ BACKMANN



Réunis la semaine dernière à Doha à l'initiative du Qatar et de la Ligue arabe, les multiples groupes de l'opposition syrienne, civile, militaire, religieuse, intérieure et extérieure, ont décidé, après de difficiles tractations, de constituer une structure politique

unifiée. Créée sous la pression des allés arabes et occidentaux de la rébellion, cette Coalition nationale, où seront représentés les Frères musulmans, devra d'ici à deux mois former un gouvernement provisoire. Interlocuteur privilégié de la communauté internationale, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), dont la représentativité était contestée notamment par Washington, a longtemps retardé la signature de l'accord, car il redoutait d'être marginalisé au sein de la nouvelle entité.

Mobilisés par ces discussions, les dirigeants de l'opposition syrienne ont, une fois de plus, omis d'aborder un problème qui commence pourtant à miner les rapports entre la rébellion et la population civile: la multiplication des crimes de guerre et autres violations des droits de l'homme par les groupes armés rebelles. Certes, les manquements imputés à l'opposition n'ont ni la fréquence, ni la gravité, ni l'ampleur des crimes perpétrés depuis vingt mois par l'armée du régime et ses supplétifs. Mais, comme le fait observer le directeur régional de Human Rights Watch (HRW), « si l'opposition, comme elle l'affirme, combat le régime à cause de son mépris des droits humains, il est temps qu'elle mette ses actes en accord avec ses paroles ». Selon

la commission d'enquête des Nations unies sur la Syrie, les groupes rebelles se livrent à des enlèvements et à des exécutions sommaires, torturent leurs prisonniers et utilisent des enfants comme auxiliaires. La fréquence et l'intensité de ces crimes, estime l'ONU, ont spectaculairement augmenté depuis que, sur le terrain, des groupes d'islamistes radicaux sont venus se mêler aux civils armés et aux soldats ralliés à l'opposition, pionniers de la révolte contre la dictature.

Deux rapports récents des Nations unies ont confirmé cette évolution sans provoquer de réaction notable. L'appel lancé le 17 septembre par HRW n'a pas eu plus d'écho. Dans ce texte, l'ONG demandait aux pays qui arment la rébellion, comme le Qatar, la Turquie, l'Arabie saoudite, et à ceux qui la soutiennent, comme les Etats-Unis, la France, le Royaume-Uni, d'assumer leurs responsabilités en condamnant publiquement les violations des droits de l'homme commises par les groupes rebelles. La cause de la démocratie en Syrie n'avancera pas si le silence actuel persiste. R. B.

## UNE BOMBE NUCLÉAIRE SERAIT RÉALISABLE AU PRINTEMPS

## Iran : si la négociation échoue...

Quelles concessions accorder aux Iraniens ? Que faire en cas d'échec diplomatique et de frappes israéliennes ? La France doit déterminer sans tarder sa position

La Maison-Blanche est-elle en train de négocier en secret avec l'Iran ? Selon une rumeur qui court depuis quelques semaines, des émissaires de Washington auraient rencontré des missi dominici de Téhéran peu avant le scrutin du 6 novembre afin de préparer le terrain à une négociation rapide en cas de réélection de Barack Obama. Le quotidien israélien « Yediot Aharonot » affirme même que le président des Etats-Unis a confié ces discussions préliminaires à l'une de ses plus proches collaboratrices, d'origine iranienne, Valerie Jarrett. Washington et Téhéran ont démenti. Qu'en est-il ?

L'équipe de François Hollande ne croit pas à cette rumeur. « On n'imagine pas qu'un tel canal ait été ouvert dans notre dos », dit un responsable français proche du dossier. D'ailleurs, nos interlocuteurs de l'administration américaine nous ont appelés pour nous rassurer. En fait, à Paris, on ne s'attend pas à ce que des discussions sérieuses avec l'Iran débutent avant janvier prochain. « Obama est en train de remanier profondément son équipe, explique l'officiel français, et il faudra plusieurs semaines pour que celle-ci se mette d'accord sur une stratégie. » L'équipe de Hollande en saura sans doute plus sur les intentions américaines le 21 novembre lors de la réunion du groupe 5+1 à Bruxelles.

Côté français, le nouveau pouvoir réfléchit depuis la rentrée à la posture à adopter dans ce dossier : quelles concessions accorder à l'Iran ? Peut-on accepter que Téhéran conserve une capacité d'enrichissement ? Que faire en cas de frappes israéliennes ? Début septembre, en marge de la conférence des ambassadeurs, Laurent Fabius a réuni en secret sur ce sujet les diplomates français en poste



Valerie Jarrett, collaboratrice d'Obama

dans les capitales concernées et des conseillers de l'Elysée. Le 31 octobre, François Hollande a longuement écouté Benyamin Netanyahu détailler sa position. Le Premier ministre israélien a reconnu que ses services de renseignement n'ont pas la preuve que les Iraniens savent construire une arme atomique. Mais, comme un tel assemblage peut se faire « dans une salle de classe », c'est-à-dire dans un lieu minuscule, donc non repérable, il y a un risque, a-t-il prévenu, de découvrir un beau matin que les Iraniens ont construit un engin nucléaire. Il a ajouté que, selon ses spécialistes, il ne faudrait à l'Iran que « quatre semaines » pour transformer de l'uranium enrichi à 20% en matière fissile militaire. Selon Netanyahu, il n'y a donc pas le choix : si la voie diplomatique échoue, on devra agir avant que l'Iran n'ait accumulé assez d'uranium enrichi à 20% pour faire une bombe, c'est-à-dire d'ici à la fin du printemps. Le président français a-t-il été convaincu ? « En tout cas, dit un responsable français, Netanyahu ne s'est pas senti en terrain hostile... »

VINCENT JAUVERT

# A Kdin, en Syrie, la cohabitation délicate d'une secte alaouite avec les rebelles

Jugés favorisés par le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, les mourchidites s'efforcent de rester neutres.



## Reportage

**Kdin (djebel Akrad, Syrie)**  
Envoyé spécial

C'est un village comme les autres du djebel Akrad, pauvre, agricole et sans électricité, depuis que la région est tombée aux mains de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), au printemps. Un village comme les autres, et pourtant différent. A Kdin, les femmes vont sans voile et les hommes sont particulièrement taciturnes. C'est un village mourchidite, une secte dissidente de l'alaouisme, lui-même une branche minoritaire du chiisme. Pour les sunnites de Syrie, les mourchidites sont assimilés à des alaouites, la communauté de la famille Assad, au pouvoir depuis quatre décennies, même si les relations entre alaouites et mourchidites ont été tendues par le passé.

Mais les habitants de Kdin, contrairement aux villages alaoui-

tes envahis par l'ASL, ne se sont pas enfuis à l'arrivée des rebelles. Ils continuent de cultiver le tabac, la pomme et la grenade. Les paysans vont et viennent sur leurs ânes le long des murets de pierre qui séparent les vergers en terrasse. Le sort des habitants de Kdin est un test crucial pour la capacité de la rébellion à bien traiter les minorités considérées comme proches du régime—alaouites, chrétiens, mourchidites, voire druzes. « Les mourchidites sont comme nos frères, assure un habitant de Majdla Khikia, un village sunnite, voisin de Kdin. Nous avons toujours traité avec eux. Nous achetons leur tabac et eux nos olives. »

En apparence tout va bien donc, entre les révolutionnaires et les habitants de Kdin, et le journaliste étranger de passage se voit poliment prier de poursuivre son chemin. « Tout va bien ici !, crie un paysan. On ne veut pas de problèmes. Oubliez-nous ! Partez. »

Seul un instituteur, qui se fait ironiquement appeler Abou Assad, accepte de parler quelques minutes, « à titre personnel ». Il porte la moustache, à la manière baassiste, et non la barbe, comme les sunnites. « Nous ne sommes ni avec le régime, ni avec les rebelles, explique-t-il en préambule. Nous sommes avec l'Etat syrien, pas avec untel ou untel. » Une prudence qui suscite l'ironie des révolutionnaires : « Les mourchidites attendent de voir qui va prendre le dessus et à la fin, ils vont se ranger derrière le gagnant. »

En attendant, les deux camps tentent de rallier cette petite communauté. L'ASL a ainsi relâché 11 soldats mourchidites capturés lors de la bataille de Haffeh, en juin. L'ASL a également accepté les conditions posées par les villageois : elle peut traverser Kdin mais pas s'y installer pour attaquer les positions gouvernementales. Quelques mois auparavant, l'armée du régime avait accepté le même marché. « On n'est pas avec l'Armée libre et on n'est pas contre elle non plus »,

« Tout va bien ici !,  
crie un paysan.  
On ne veut pas  
de problèmes.  
Oubliez-nous !  
Partez ! »

résume Abou Assad, en se roulant une cigarette. Cette neutralité vaut aux fonctionnaires de Kdin de continuer à toucher leurs salaires, même s'ils ne peuvent pas se rendre au travail comme Abou Assad, enseignant à Alep, ville déchirée par des combats quotidiens. En règle générale, l'Etat cesse de verser les traitements à tous ses employés restant en zone occupée par l'ASL, par mesure de représailles.

Sur un millier d'habitants, Kdin ne compte pas moins de 200 fonctionnaires, selon Abou Assad. Une proportion énorme. « Nous, au contraire, n'avons jamais accès aux

emplois publics et, quand c'est le cas, se plaint Abou Sami, un habitant du village sunnite voisin de Majdal Kikhia, il nous faut payer un énorme pot-de-vin. » Ce dernier, tout en parlant des habitants de Kdin comme des « frères », ne cache pas son intention, après la révolution, de récupérer les terres de son grand-père, distribuées aux mourchidites au moment de la réforme agraire menée par Hafez Al-Assad au nom du socialisme baassiste.

Abou Assad est chef de cellule du parti Baas et sa présentation des « événements » en Syrie ne dépare pas avec celle qu'en fait le régime : « Un petit incident sécuritaire qui a été monté en épingle par des forces étrangères voulant déstabiliser la Syrie. » « La solution passe par le dialogue, pas par la violence. » Il vise essentiellement la rébellion armée, pas le régime en place. « Il faut bien qu'il y ait un gouvernement et qu'il défende le peuple, non ? »

Avant de repartir, il demande à son hôte de transmettre une requête aux chefs de l'ASL, basés à Selma, à moins de 10 km de là. « Pouvez-vous leur demander de libérer un jeune de chez nous qui a été enlevé au début du mois d'octobre, si jamais c'est l'ASL qui le détient ? Il s'appelle Ayman Twete. Nous sommes prêts à payer une rançon. Mais je ne veux pas aller à Selma moi-même. Je pourrais m'y faire enlever. » La concorde confessionnelle dans la Syrie post-Assad n'est pas gagnée d'avance. ■

LEWIS ROTH

AFP

## Turquie: 42 rebelles kurdes tués en trois jours de combats (sources locales)

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 9 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**QUARANTE-DEUX REBELLES** du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués en trois jours de combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé vendredi des sources locales de sécurité.

Les affrontements ont eu lieu près de la localité de Semdinli, dans la province de Hakkari, dans l'extrême sud-est du pays, à la frontière de l'Irak et de l'Iran, ont affirmé ces sources.

La région de Semdinli est le théâtre d'une intensification des combats entre forces de sécurité turques et rebelles kurdes depuis juillet et l'annonce par le PKK du lancement d'une stratégie de "maîtrise du terrain" dans cette zone montagneuse et difficile d'accès.

Des sources locales avaient fait état jeudi d'un soldat et de 13 rebelles tués dans

la journée.

Dimanche, une voiture piégée a explosé dans cette ville au passage d'un véhicule de la police, causant la mort d'un enfant de onze ans et blessant 18 personnes.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a connu depuis 2011 un regain progressif des tensions, avec une augmentation du nombre des accrochages, la multiplication des arrestations de militants kurdes et le lancement en septembre d'une grève de la faim dans les prisons à laquelle participent plus de 700 détenus kurdes.

La chaîne NTV a rapporté mercredi que des commandos turcs avaient menés une opération ciblée contre des camps du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, pénétrant jusqu'à cinq kilomètres à l'intérieur du territoire irakien.

Le PKK utilise le nord de l'Irak comme base arrière à ses opérations dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. ○

# Tensions grow in Iraq over Kurds and oil



ATEF HASSAN/REUTERS

Workers at an oil field in southern Iraq, where foreign companies can earn \$1 per barrel as opposed to \$3 to \$5 under Kurdistan contracts.

## LONDON

### Baghdad's contracts offer such low returns, better deals are found in north

BY STANLEY REED

The re-emergence of Iraq as an oil-producing powerhouse is sending inevitable ripples through the Middle East and the industry as a whole.

The country has surpassed Iran as the second-largest member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, after Saudi Arabia, raising questions about whether other oil-producing countries will need to trim their production to accommodate a rising Iraq.

But more immediate tensions are evident between the federal government in Baghdad and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, which is based in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil.

The Kurds, who suffered terribly under Saddam Hussein, are determined to maintain their autonomy from Baghdad — not least by developing their own oil resources. Baghdad insists that only the

federal government has the authority to grant access to the country's natural resources. But the Kurds are succeeding in attracting some of the world's top oil companies.

Strains between the regional and federal governments were on display Wednesday at the Oil and Money Conference convened in London by the International Herald Tribune and Energy Intelligence Group, a provider of independent analysis and data to the global energy industry.

Hussain al-Shahristani, the Iraqi deputy prime minister, who has been instrumental in drafting contracts to rehabilitate Iraqi oil fields, said Tuesday that Exxon Mobil was in the advanced stages of organizing a sale of its 60 percent stake in a premier Iraqi project, the West Qurna 1 field, to buyers approved by the Iraqi government.

Exxon and Iraq have been at loggerheads since the oil company signed an exploration deal with the Kurdistan government last year. Mr. Shahristani said Baghdad does not recognize the validity of Kurdish contracts with the oil companies.

An Exxon Mobil spokesman, Patrick J. McGinn, declined to comment.

Mr. Shahristani warned the French oil giant Total and other companies that they faced the prospect of being forced out of their Iraqi projects if they have their feet in both camps.

"They must either decide to present their contract to the federal government for approval or they are in breach of their contract" with Iraq, he said.

But Mr. Shahristani is losing the battle to persuade the large Western oil companies. Exxon Mobil, Total, Chevron and Gazprom have all decided that Kurdish oil deals have sufficient potential for profit to be worth risking the ire of Baghdad.

Philip Lambert, head of the London-based advisory firm Lambert Energy, said at the conference that the surge in deals in Kurdistan, compared to a relatively moribund environment in Iraq proper, was a sign that the environment in Kurdistan is healthier.

One reason: As Mr. Shahristani acknowledged, Baghdad's contracts are among the toughest in the world. They offer such low returns that — along with continued security risks and infrastructure problems — Western companies are deciding that they would be better off making deals with the Kurds.



Under Kurdistan contracts, oil companies can earn \$3 to \$5 per barrel,

**Iraq's approach could jeopardize Baghdad's ambitions to triple its current level of oil output, a herculean task.**

compared with about \$1 per barrel under contracts with the Iraqi federal government, according to Wood Mackenzie, a consulting firm in Edinburgh. So far the large companies have been signing exploration deals with Kurdistan, not production contracts. That leaves several years for the governments in Baghdad and Erbil to reach an accommodation before the fields in the north start producing.

Southern Iraq is far more important to the global oil picture today, with more than three million barrels a day of production, while Kurdistan is struggling to export 200,000 barrels per day. But exploration in Kurdistan is still at a rela-

tively early stage, having started only after Hussein's ouster in 2003. Companies looking for oil in the north have enjoyed a high success rate.

Despite Mr. Shahrستاني's prickliness, there are signs that Baghdad and the Kurdistan government could soon reach an understanding. Under an agreement last summer, Kurdistan has been putting oil into the main Iraq-Turkey pipeline. These exports had been suspended over payment disputes between Baghdad and Erbil, leaving companies like Genel Energy, now led by the former BP chief, Tony Hayward, with no other option than to sell their oil cheaply in the Kurdish market or truck it to Turkey.

Kurdistan's success in attracting the big oil companies does seem to have influenced thinking in Baghdad. Mr. Shahrستاني said there was nothing in Iraqi law that prevented the award of contracts that give companies a slice of the output of fields for exploration. Companies prefer these contracts to the service deals that Baghdad has offered so far, which give companies a per-bar-

rel fee for renovating old fields like West Qurna.

At the conference, Mr. Shahrستاني dismissed suggestions that Iraq would have trouble replacing Exxon Mobil, saying that serious international companies were interested.

He indicated that he had dialed back his expectations for Iraqi oil production over the next few years to about 9 million barrels per day from the 12 million barrels per day that Iraq would achieve if the oil companies delivered on all the contracts they have signed. Iraq's approach could jeopardize Baghdad's ambitions to triple its current level of output on oil, a herculean task.

Iraq, although it is an OPEC member, does not have a quota, in recognition of its need for revenue to rebuild. Mr. Shahrستاني said that once Iraq had reached four million to five million barrels per day, it could start discussing its production with other OPEC members.

The Economist

November 17th 2012

**Turkey and the Kurds**  
**Hunger and thirst**

**A hunger strike causes new tension between Turkey and its Kurds**

ISTANBUL

WHAT happens if they start dying? The question weighs ever more heavily as hundreds of Kurds in prisons across Turkey continue the hunger strike they launched on September 12th. Human-rights activists are saying that many have reached "a critical threshold."

The hunger strikers, surviving on sugar water and vitamins, vow to keep up their fast until the ruling Justice and Development (AK) party meets their demands for greater linguistic rights and better prison conditions for the leader of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, has responded with threats to reintroduce capital punishment, to which Mr Ocalan was sentenced after his capture in 1999 (and which AK abolished when it took office in 2002, in line with European Union demands.)

Mr Erdogan has ridiculed the strikers, growling "let them continue" at a recent AK meeting. When five MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) said they would join in, a breezy prime minister noted "some of them are in serious

need of dieting." Yet the government has conceded one demand with a new bill to allow Kurds to use their mother tongue in court. The EU's ambassador in Ankara, Jean-Maurice Ripert, said this could "create the space for political dialogue."  
In this section

The Kurds are unlikely to stop their hunger strike until Mr Ocalan is granted access to his lawyers as they demand. Mr Ocalan's status is shrouded in mystery. He has not met the lawyers for 15 months. The government claims this is because the ferry that carries them to his island prison south of Istanbul has broken down. Nobody believes this, not least because Mr Ocalan's younger brother visited him in September. He returned saying the PKK leader was unkempt and was upset by the escalation in PKK violence that prompted Mr Erdogan to scupper secret peace talks.

Yet the younger Mr Ocalan shed no light on whether it was his brother who is shunning the lawyers or the government that is blocking their visits. Proponents of the first theory speculate that Mr Ocalan will not see the lawyers (or ask the PKK to end its violence)

unless the government moves him from solitary confinement to house arrest. Backers of the second idea think the government wanted to break the links between Mr Ocalan and his fighters (the lawyers carried messages) in hopes of triggering a leadership struggle that would fracture the PKK.

If so, the strategy has failed. Mr Ocalan's grip may be weaker but he continues to be revered by millions of Kurds. Giant images of the mustachioed PKK leader can be seen throughout Kurdish towns in neighbouring Syria, where an affiliate called the PYD seized control after the withdrawal of President Bashar Assad's troops. Turkey has been lobbying America for a no-fly zone over northern Syria in hopes of squashing the PKK's expanding influence. Wary of wading into further Middle Eastern misadventures the Americans have said no. But in a show of support NATO is expected, at Turkey's request, to deploy Patriot missiles in the province of Kilis, which borders Syria.

The Turkish president, Abdullah Gul, says the missiles would defend Turkey against a possible chemical-weapon attack. Western diplomats suggest that, contrary to reports in the Turkish press, the Patriots could not create a no-fly zone for Syrian rebels and refugees, but are "mostly about making the Turks feel loved." Turkish tanks remain on hills facing a PYD-held town this week after PKK sympathisers fired shots into the air during a funeral last month. If the stand-off with hunger strikers persists, more funerals will follow.

□□□

# Turkey gives recognition to anti-Assad coalition

ISTANBUL

FROM NEWS REPORTS

Turkey on Thursday recognized the newly formed Syrian rebel coalition as the legitimate leadership of Syria, a powerful boost to the group's effort to attain legitimacy in its goal of ending the rule of President Bashar al-Assad.

The announcement by Turkey, Syria's northern neighbor and a haven for thousands of Syrian refugees and insurgents, was the second significant recognition of the new group this week. On Tuesday, France also fully embraced the group, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, becoming the first Western country to do so.

The coalition was formed under Western pressure last weekend at a meeting in Qatar that brought together for the first time an array of groups both inside and outside Syria that have been struggling to unseat Mr. Assad, whose family has dominated Syria for four decades. His harsh crackdown on a peaceful Arab Spring democracy movement in March 2011 turned into a civil war that has left more than 40,000 people dead and shaken Syria's neighbors in the Middle East.

The Anatolian News Agency said the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, had made the official recognition announcement at a meeting of the Islamic Cooperation Organization in Djibouti.

Mr. Davutoglu also affirmed the Turkish government's contention that Mr. Assad, once a close friend of Turkey, had lost all credibility and legitimacy because of his forces' repression of the opposition.

Turkey, which is sheltering more than 120,000 Syrian refugees, has led calls for the creation of a buffer zone to protect civilians inside Syria and has grown increasingly frustrated by the lack of international consensus.

The Turkish government has bolstered the military presence along Turkey's border with Syria, fired back in response to mortar shells landing in Turkey, and is talking to NATO about the possible deployment of Patriot surface-to-air missiles, a potential prelude to enforcing a no-flight zone.

"We do not want escalation," Mr. Davutoglu said. "But everyone should

# Turks and rebels struggle to coexist along the border

KILIS, TURKEY

BY TIM ARANGO

It was midday, overcast, as a Turkish man backed up his truck to the front of a beige one-story farmhouse here. It was loaded with enough fertilizer to blow up a city block.

"Whatever they ask me, I do," said the man, who did not want to give his name but was happy to talk about his willingness to help the Syrian rebels. "I don't say no."

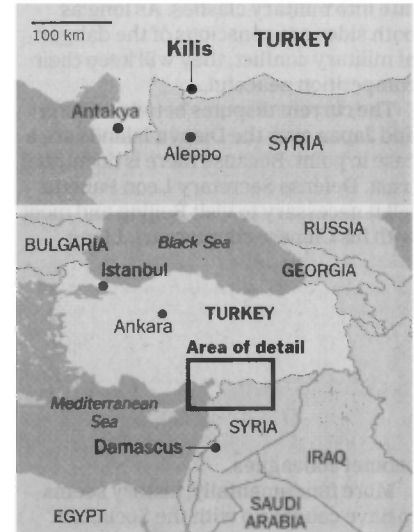
He pulled a receipt from a pocket to show how much money he had spent on his haul: 5,000 Turkish lira, or about \$2,800, to be reimbursed by his Syrian paymasters.

His truck was packed with two tons of nitrate-based fertilizer — the same chemicals and almost the same amount as Timothy J. McVeigh used to blow up a U.S. federal government building in Oklahoma City in 1995 — that he had bought at a wholesale farm supply store in Antakya, Turkey, a two-hour drive southwest.

Another Turkish man, Ahmed Helo, helped unload the cargo, bag after bag, until the front room of the farmhouse, whose owner collects a storage fee, was filled with the bags of fertilizer, as well as a single barrel of sulfur. The plan was to wait until nightfall to smuggle everything into Syria and to give it to fighters to make bombs. Mr. Helo uttered an expletive to describe Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, and then said, "We just want to get rid of him."

"Since the beginning of the revolution, I have helped," said Mr. Helo, a former soldier in the Turkish Army who has relatives in Aleppo, Syria's largest city, and often travels inside Syria to help rebels build explosive devices. Sometimes, he said, he joins the fight.

Nothing about what the men are doing seems secretive, nor do they take measures of concealment. A Turkish military vehicle drove by, and an official border crossing was just down the road.



"It's not a secret," said the Syrian man in charge of the fertilizer deal, a rebel commander who had given his name as Abu Mohammed. "It's not prohibited. It's fertilizer."

It has now been about 20 months since the Syrian uprising began, and the civil war has become the defining feature of life along the long border, shaping the days' rhythms and conversations and commerce. The Syrians are trying to change their lives, and the Turks are trying to hold on to theirs, and both are struggling to coexist.

"We cannot define what we want," Abu Mohammed said. "We just want the regime to fall."

Saiid al-Assi, who has let his beard grow and is now dedicated to his prayers, sat last week in a hotel in Antakya. Mr. Assi, a former farmer who raised and sold sheep and grew almonds, said many Syrian men were now like him. "Most of the men, they are becoming more religious," he said. "Why? Because all of the world has left them."

He added, "Al Qaeda is helping us, but the Europeans are not."

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting.

be well aware that Turkey has the capacity and determination to protect its citizens and borders."

"Turkey's border security has been jeopardized," he added. "Our towns on the border have been targeted by the Syrian Army."

On Thursday, Turkish fighter jets patrolled Turkey's southeastern frontier with Syria for a second day after an air assault this week by Syrian warplanes on the rebel-held border town of Ras al-Ain. (IHT, REUTERS)

## Iraqi Kurdish leader says region will defend itself

### One person dies in shootout between Iraqi forces and Kurdish troops

**Erbil:** Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani said on Saturday the region was fully prepared to defend itself, after a skirmish between Iraqi forces and Kurdish troops along their disputed internal border.

Tensions have been building between the autonomous Kurdish region and the central government in Baghdad since the departure of US forces from Iraq in December, which removed a buffer between the two sides.

Relations have been strained further by the formation of a new command centre for Iraqi forces to operate in an area over which both Baghdad and the Kurdistan regional government (KRG) claim jurisdiction.

"The Kurdish region is fully prepared to confront any undesirable occurrence, with the goal of defending our territory and our citizens," Barzani said in a statement on the Arabic page of the KRG's website.

Article continues below



"I have asked the Ministry of Peshmerga to take all necessary measures," Barzani said, referring to the Kurdish region's troops. He gave no details of what the measures entailed.

Barzani called "on the peshmerga forces to exercise restraint in the face of provocations, but also to be in a highest state of readiness to face any aggressive acts", the statement on his website said.

It said the alert followed clashes between central government forces and

peshmerga in the disputed town of Tuz Khurmatu on Friday "in which one person died and several were wounded".

But the head of Baghdad's recently established Tigris Operations Command, Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Al Zaidi, said that the incident did not involve the peshmerga and was rather an attempt to arrest a man accused of offences including murder and kidnapping.

The establishment of the command, based in Kirkuk city and covering all of the province of the same name as well as neighbouring Salah Al Deen and Diyala, has drawn an angry response from Kurdish leaders who want to incorporate much of the area into their autonomous region.

The dispute over the command strikes at the heart of an unresolved row between Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government in Erbil over territory, oil and the interpretation of Iraq's federal constitution. The fighting is a dramatic illustration of a broader feud over autonomy, oil and land that risks upsetting Iraq's uneasy federal union.

A standoff between Iraqi troops and Kurdish forces earlier this year came close to confrontation. Washington intervened and helped avert a potential clash. ●

## Kurdish commander poised for battle against Iraq soldiers

thenational.ae

**BAGHDAD - Associated Press//** The commander of Kurdish Peshmerga forces warned yesterday that his troops might attack Iraqi government soldiers at "any minute" after the central government sent tanks and armoured vehicles towards the disputed city of Kirkuk.

The threat was the latest sign of increasing tension between the autonomous Kurdish region and Baghdad after the central government sent forces last month to the area, including disputed sites in a new military command.

Already poor relations between the central government and Kurds worsened after an Iraqi government decision last month to set up a new military command there. The force also oversees disputed areas claimed by Iraqi Arabs, Turkomen and Kurds, in particular the areas surrounding Mosul and Kirkuk.

United States forces once supervised

the area, helping Kurdish and Arab security forces form joint patrols.

"A big battle might erupt any minute," said Mahmoud Sankawi, the commander. His Peshmerga forces control security in the Kurdish autonomous region and are also present in disputed areas that Kurds seek to add to their self-ruled area. "We are on high alert. We will not allow any force to threaten the security of Kurdistan. We will resist them."

Mr Sankawi said overnight that some 30 Iraqi government tanks took up positions 80 kilometres from Kirkuk. He said dozens of other tanks were positioned in the Hamrin mountains, 150 kilometres from Kirkuk. The city lies on the outskirts of the autonomous Kurdish region.

The commander of Iraqi government forces in the area, Lieut Gen Abdul Amir Al Zaidi, said three brigades of national police, one regiment of artillery and special forces were sent towards Kirkuk, but he would not say if the disputed city was their final desti-

nation.

"We have the right to go wherever we want to enforce the law, and if anybody stops us, we will use force," he said. Later, a spokesman said Gen Al Zaidi would not make any further comments.

A high-ranking government official denied that Baghdad was trying to exacerbate tensions.

"If some Kurdish leaders try to escalate the situation, they will be held responsible," said the official. "Kurdish officials should not behave in a way that creates a problem."

Last Friday, Baghdad government forces and Kurdish guards clashed for the first time, sparked by a police hunt for a smuggler who sought refuge in a Kurdish political party office. A civilian was killed.

Iraq's central government and Kurds have had heated disputes over land, oil and power sharing since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. ■

# Abdullah Ocalan fait cesser les grèves de la faim dans les prisons

Turquie Le leader kurde emprisonné à vie revient à l'avant-plan : il jouera un rôle clé dans tout processus de négociation de paix à venir

NERBOLLIER, DELPHINE / Istanbul

Après 67 jours de grève de la faim, et alors que l'on attendait un signe de la part du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, c'est Abdullah Ocalan, le chef du mouvement armé du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), qui a mis un terme à la crise. Par l'intermédiaire de son frère, le leader kurde emprisonné à vie a appelé l'ensemble des grévistes à cesser leur action. « Ce mouvement a atteint son objectif, a annoncé samedi soir Mehmet Ocalan parlant au nom de son frère. Il faut y mettre un terme sans hésiter. »

Dès le lendemain, l'ensemble des détenus concernés (une soixantaine - sur les 700 qui ont participé à la grève - menaient cette grève depuis le 12 septembre et se trouvaient dans une situation critique) ont

suivi cet appel.

« Les enfants du peuple kurde ont transformé les prisons en place Tahrir », s'est félicité le député Sirri Sürreya Onder. Du côté du gouvernement, seul le vice-Premier ministre Bülent Arinc s'est félicité de cette décision qui, selon lui, est le fruit du travail des autorités turques et des grévistes.

La plupart des commentateurs soulignent toutefois dimanche le rôle capital joué par Abdullah Ocalan face à un Premier ministre intransigeant envers des grévistes qu'il a accusés de bluffer. « L'organisation (terroriste) a très bien bénéficié des grèves de la faim, constatait sur Twitter l'académicien Sedat Laçiner. Elle a réalisé une propagande parfaite. Elle fait passer le message que des droits ont été obtenus grâce à elle. La Turquie

est rentrée dans son jeu ». Après des mois d'isolement, et comme l'exigeaient les grévistes, « Apo » a en effet reçu la visite de son frère et rencontré à trois reprises des représentants des services de renseignements turcs. Cela lui confère de nouveau un rôle central dans tout processus de négociation de paix à venir. Les grévistes ont aussi reçu satisfaction au sujet du droit de se défendre devant les juges dans leur langue maternelle. Seule leur demande concernant l'enseignement en langue kurde a été rejetée.

Le parti kurde du BDP (Parti pour la paix et la démocratie) a aussitôt appelé le gouvernement à reprendre le dialogue, un an et demi après qu'aient échoué des négociations secrètes entre Ankara et le PKK, et alors que le Premier ministre refuse toujours de

recevoir de manière consistante les députés du BDP. La députée Sebahat Tuncel a aussi lancé un avertissement : « La Turquie se trouve face à une décision historique. Soit elle résout le problème (kurde) de manière démocratique et pacifique, soit elle va vivre un vrai tournant. » D'après elle, les Kurdes vivent une « coupure émotionnelle » avec le reste du pays, et risquent de « se transformer en coupure politique. »

Ces grèves de la faim ont polarisé comme jamais l'opinion publique et causé des heurts quasiment quotidiens dans la ville kurde de Diyarbakir depuis huit jours. Quant à la situation sur le terrain militaire, elle reste elle aussi préoccupante. Hier, 5 soldats et 4 membres du PKK sont morts dans des affrontements à la frontière irakienne. □

AFP

## Syrie: 7 tués dans des combats entre kurdes et rebelles dans le Nord-Est

BEYROUTH, 19 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**SEPT PERSONNES ont été tuées lundi dans des combats d'une extrême violence, qui se poursuivaient dans la soirée, à Rass al-Aïn, à majorité kurde, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).**

"Six rebelles ont été tués dans des combats avec les combattants kurdes et un chef de l'administration locale kurde Abed Khalil a péri sous les balles d'un franc-tireur rebelle", a affirmé à l'AFP le directeur de l'OSDH Rami Abdel Rahmane.

Ces responsables locaux ont été élus par la population après le départ des autorités gouvernementales des régions à majorité kurde.

Les accrochages ont suivi une manifestation kurde demandant aux rebelles non originaires de la ville de partir. Ces derniers ont refusé et ont attaqué des combattants kurdes présents à un barrage. Les affrontements ont fait neuf blessés de part et d'autre, selon l'OSDH.

Les combattants kurdes appartiennent au Comité de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (rebelles kurdes en Turquie). Ils sont accusés par les rebelles de faire le jeu du régime.

Selon le chef de l'OSDH, la majorité des rebelles appartient au groupe islamiste "Ghouraba al-Cham".

"Nous ne cherchons pas l'affrontement avec l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) mais ceux qui ont provoqué les incidents d'aujourd'hui à Rass al-Aïn, reçoivent leurs ordres de la Turquie", a affirmé à l'AFP Saleh Muslim, chef du PYD et un des dirigeants de l'opposition intérieure regroupée au sein du Comité de coordination pour le changement national et démocratique (CCCND).

"Ils sont rentrés par la Turquie car ce pays cherche à déstabiliser les régions

kurdes", où se sont réfugiés des "milliers de déplacés", a-t-il ajouté, joint par téléphone à Londres où il effectue une visite.

Le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie abritent la plupart des deux millions de Kurdes du pays, dont les milices sont indépendantes et parfois hostiles à l'ASL.

Ailleurs dans le pays, le sous-préfet du district de Nabak, au nord de Damas, a été abattu dans la ville du même nom, selon l'OSDH. Le général Abdallah Darawi a été tué par des rebelles, de même que quatre policiers qui l'accompagnaient. Ce district est contrôlé par l'armée mais les accrochages sont nombreux avec l'ASL.

L'agence officielle Sana, citant une source policière, a indiqué que des "terroristes ont ouvert le feu sur le général et ses hommes, alors que l'officier supérieur se rendait de chez lui à son bureau".

Dans la région d'Alep (nord), la base 46 est totalement tombée aux mains des rebelles dimanche soir, selon une source militaire. "L'attaque a été d'une très grande ampleur. Ils ont utilisé des chars et tiré des mortiers et des missiles ce qui a obligé l'armée à se retirer progressivement", a indiqué cette source.

Le camp, qui s'étend sur 12 km<sup>2</sup> est situé à l'ouest d'Alep, était assiégé depuis deux mois.

Des bombardements ont par ailleurs visé la capitale et sa région, faisant notamment sept morts, dont deux femmes, dans le district de Douma (nord-est). A Damas, un passager a été tué et 14 autres blessés, dont des femmes, par l'explosion d'une bombe magnétique attachée à un minibus, selon Sana.

Dans la région côtière de Lattaquié (ouest), des combats se sont concentrés autour d'un poste-frontière avec la Turquie, dans le village de Kesseb que les rebelles veulent prendre aux forces régulières, a indiqué l'OSDH.

Les violences ont fait lundi au moins 50 morts -- 16 civils, 9 soldats et 25 rebelles --, selon un bilan provisoire de cette organisation basée au Royaume-Uni, qui s'appuie sur un réseau de militants et de sources médicales. ○

# Espoir de dialogue entre le PKK et la Turquie

- En Turquie, 700 prisonniers et sympathisants kurdes ont cessé leur grève de la faim dimanche 18 novembre après deux mois d'action.
- Le chef historique du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, ressort gagnant de la fin du mouvement.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIÉ, à Istanbul

Hasan Sen ne cache pas sa joie. Son fils, Erol, 41 ans, a cessé sa grève de la faim dimanche 18 novembre après soixante-huit jours d'action. « Nous l'avons eu au téléphone », explique ce père de famille kurde originaire de Mus, dans l'est de la Turquie. « Il était heureux et rieur. C'est un grand soulagement. »

Erol Sen, poursuivi pour ses liens supposés avec le mouvement armé du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) fait partie de la soixantaine de prisonniers kurdes (sur 700 grévistes au total) qui, depuis le 12 septembre, menaient une grève de la faim.

## ABDULLAH ÖCALAN A SONNÉ LA FIN DU MOUVEMENT

Après deux mois de quasi statu quo et alors que la situation de certains grévistes devenait critique, c'est Abdullah Öcalan, le chef historique du PKK qui a sonné la fin du mouvement.

Par l'intermédiaire de son frère, le leader kurde emprisonné à vie a estimé que l'action des grévistes « avait atteint son objectif ». Son isolement en Norvège imposé depuis un an et demi – c'est-à-dire depuis l'échec des négociations secrètes menées entre le PKK et le gouvernement turc – a en effet été allégé. Il a reçu la visite de son frère vendredi 16 novembre et rencontré à trois reprises en deux mois les services de renseignement.



Un supporter du PKK brandit un portrait d'Abdullah Öcalan, le leader du parti pro-Kurde. ADEM ALTAN / AFP

## LE DROIT DE SE DÉFENDRE DANS LEUR LANGUE MATERNELLE

Les grévistes ont aussi obtenu le droit de se défendre devant leurs juges dans leur langue maternelle. Un projet de loi est étudié par le Parlement. En revanche, ils n'ont pas obtenu le droit à l'enseignement dans leur langue maternelle.

Si Abdullah Öcalan n'a pas initié ces grèves de la faim, celles-ci ont été menées en partie en son nom. Alors que la situation semblait bloquée et que le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan accusait les grévistes de chantage et de « bluff », l'appel du responsable kurde a révélé à l'opinion publique le

rôle incontournable qu'il joue dans ce genre de bras de fer avec l'État.

Même le chef de gouvernement, qui le qualifie de « tueurs d'enfants », a évoqué lundi 19 novembre le « message efficace » adressé par Öcalan. Cet état de fait ne plaît évidemment pas à tous en Turquie. « L'organisation (terroriste) a très bien bénéficié des grèves de la faim, constatait dimanche avec dépit l'académicien Sedat Laçiner. Elle fait passer le message que des droits ont été obtenus grâce à elle. La Turquie est rentrée dans son jeu. »

## RELANCE DES NÉGOCIATIONS AVEC LE PKK ?

Après deux mois de bras de fer se pose désormais une question : les entretiens menés entre Öcalan et les services de renseignement – qui, selon le ministre de la justice Sadullah Ergin n'ont rien « de nouveau » et « se poursuivront dans le futur » –, présagent-ils d'une relance plus globale des négociations avec les dirigeants du PKK basés dans le nord de l'Irak, comme cela eu lieu à Oslo en 2010-2011 ?

À ce stade, rien ne l'indique concrètement même si le climat est favorable. La députée kurde Sebahat Tuncel appelle en tout cas de ses vœux de telles négociations et craint qu'en leur absence, « la coupure émotionnelle » qui existe entre Kurdes et Turcs « se transforme en coupure politique ». ●



## Turquie: Erdogan répète qu'il est prêt à négocier avec les rebelles kurdes

ANKARA, 20 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**LE PREMIER MINISTRE turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a répété mardi qu'il n'était pas opposé à la reprise de négociations formelles avec les rebelles séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), après l'arrêt du long mouvement de grève de la faim observé par des détenus kurdes en Turquie.**

Les services secrets turcs (MIT) "peuvent" rencontrer le chef historique du PKK Abdullah Öcalan, détenu depuis 1999 en Turquie, a déclaré M. Erdogan à des journalistes dans l'avion qui le ramenait lundi d'une visite en Egypte à Ankara.

"Eux (MIT) peuvent le rencontrer, on n'y voit pas d'inconvénient car l'essentiel est de trouver une solution" au conflit kurde, a ajouté le chef du gouvernement turc, cité mardi dans les quotidiens Milliyet et Hürriyet.

En septembre déjà, M. Erdogan s'était déclaré prêt à renouer le dialogue avec la rébellion kurde. "Nous sommes prêts à faire tout ce qui est nécessaire pour (trouver) une solution", avait-il déclaré à la télévision.

Lors de sa conversation lundi avec la presse, M. Erdogan a également confirmé qu'Abdullah Öcalan avait récemment rencontré des représentants des autorités turques à la faveur du mouvement de grève de la faim suivi par des détenus kurdes. "C'est lui qui voulait en fait discuter. Il demandait à rencontrer" des émissaires du gouvernement, a-t-il indiqué.

Quelque 700 détenus kurdes ont interrompu dimanche une grève de la faim que certains d'entre eux observaient depuis 68 jours, au lendemain d'un appel du chef historique du PKK.

Arrêté en 1999, Abdullah Öcalan a été condamné à mort avant de voir sa peine commuée en réclusion criminelle à perpétuité. Il purge depuis sa condamnation à l'isolement sur l'île d'Imrali (nord-ouest de la Turquie).

Le gouvernement de M. Erdogan a engagé en 2009 des discussions, via les services secrets, avec le PKK pour tenter de trouver une issue au conflit kurde, qui a provoqué la mort de plus de 45.000 personnes depuis le début de la rébellion en 1984. Mais ces négociations ont échoué l'an dernier et provoqué un net regain des combats entre le mouvement kurde et l'armée turque. ○

# Syrie : l'OTAN se prépare à déployer des missiles Patriot en Turquie

Le positionnement en pointe de la France sur le dossier syrien suscite des interrogations chez ses alliés



François Hollande et Laurent Fabius avec le président de la Coalition nationale syrienne, Moaz Al-Khatib (à droite), et le nouvel ambassadeur de Syrie, Mounzer Makhous, le 17 novembre à l'Élysée. BENOÎT TESSIER/REUTERS

La France a été le premier pays occidental à reconnaître la Coalition nationale syrienne en tant que « seul » représentant du peuple syrien, le 13 novembre. Force est de constater qu'elle reste bien isolée. A l'exception des pays du Golfe et de la Turquie, personne ne l'a suivie. Le président Barack Obama a même explicitement écarté cette éventualité pour le moment.

Le positionnement français suscite des interrogations chez plusieurs de ses partenaires : après avoir fait des annonces radicales, que propose la France exactement pour traduire dans les faits l'idée d'une « protection » des « zones libérées » en Syrie, évoquée par le président François Hollande ? Et si l'ambassade de Syrie doit désormais revenir à un émissaire de l'opposition, comme l'a annoncé, samedi 17 novembre à Paris,

M. Hollande, à l'occasion de sa réception de Moaz Al-Khatib, le nouveau chef de la Coalition, quelle sera ensuite la réaction française, si des demandes bilatérales d'assistance à l'insurrection anti-Assad sont formellement transmises ? Aucune réponse claire n'est détectée à ce stade par ses alliés, dont certains voient dans l'attitude française une forme de précipitation et d'aventurisme.

A l'issue de son entretien avec M. Khatib, M. Hollande a paru vouloir nuancer la délicate question des livraisons d'armes à la rébellion syrienne, dont il déclarait, le 13 novembre, qu'elle devait être « reposée » par les Occidentaux. Deux aspects doivent être pris en compte, a-t-il précisé samedi : « Le besoin des Syriens de disposer de moyens militaires, mais aussi le contrôle que la communauté inter-

Ces armements devraient être livrés par l'Allemagne, qui déploierait quelque 170 militaires en Turquie

nationale doit assurer. » Le président français a annoncé qu'il y aurait « un commandement militaire intégré » de l'opposition syrienne, « de façon à ce que les Syriens puissent, eux-mêmes, assurer la libération de leur territoire de manière cohérente ».

Lundi, à l'occasion d'une réunion à Bruxelles des ministres des affaires étrangères des pays de l'Union européenne, Paris entend poursuivre son lobbying

sur ce thème. L'embargo européen sur les livraisons d'armes à la Syrie devrait rester en place, mais Paris plaide pour des exceptions pour un armement « défensif » destiné aux zones libérées par l'opposition. Les Etats-Unis, attentifs aux craintes d'Israël en particulier, n'ont jusqu'à présent prôné publiquement que des fournitures de matériel « non léthal » à la rébellion.

D'éventuelles livraisons d'armes ont suscité par avance des mises en garde de Téhéran et de Moscou, principaux alliés de Damas, qui voit dans la nomination d'un ambassadeur de l'opposition à Paris – l'universitaire alaouite francophone Mounzer Makhous – un acte « hostile ».

La reconnaissance par Paris de la Coalition nationale syrienne suscite le soutien enthousiaste du sénateur républicain John McCain, qui milite depuis des mois pour une forme d'intervention en Syrie. C'est « un vrai progrès, un pas vers le genre d'action,

qui est souhaitable », a déclaré au Monde M. McCain, en marge d'un forum sur les questions de sécurité internationale, à Halifax, au Canada. « Dommage qu'il n'y ait aucun leadership américain » sur la Syrie, assène M. McCain, qui prône « l'établissement d'une zone d'interdiction aérienne », ainsi que « l'armement et l'entraînement de la résistance syrienne », mais « sans la moindre présence de "bottes" américaines, ni d'autres, au sol ».

Les alliés de Washington ne s'attendent pas à ce que la politique étrangère américaine sur la Syrie soit clarifiée avant la nouvelle prise de fonctions de M. Obama, en janvier 2013. Dans cette période de latence, un nouvel élément pourrait modifier la donne : la Turquie a l'intention de demander formellement à l'OTAN, lundi 19 novembre, le déploiement sur son territoire de missiles Patriot, face à la Syrie. L'Alliance semble prête à y répondre favorablement, et ces armements devraient être livrés par l'Allemagne, qui déploierait quelque 170 militaires en Turquie. Cette mesure peut-elle conduire à l'établissement d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne (« no fly zone ») à l'intérieur de la Syrie ?

Le signal paraît avant tout politique et vise à apporter à Ankara des garanties supplémentaires, face aux risques de débordement du conflit syrien. La portée des Patriot est limitée à 20 kilomètres,

ce qui ne permet pas de créer l'équivalent d'une large poche protégée, comme celle de Benghazi en Libye, en 2011. Toutefois, la réassurance ainsi fournie à Ankara par les alliés pourrait permettre, à l'avenir, d'intensifier l'assistance apportée à l'insurrection anti-Assad, à partir de la Turquie. La carte « turque », mise en exergue par les Occidentaux, semble en outre destinée à atténuer le rôle joué en Syrie par des réseaux radicaux arabes, basés dans le Golfe.

Alors que, de l'avis général, l'administration Obama procède à une révision de sa stratégie sur la

Syrie, une analyse semble enfin prendre, parallèlement, de l'ampleur côté occidental, ainsi que chez certains responsables israéliens : l'accélération de la chute de Bachar Al-Assad pourrait créer un contexte d'affaiblissement stratégique de l'Iran propice à relancer, dans de meilleures conditions, des négociations entre les grandes puissances et Téhéran sur le dossier nucléaire. A Halifax, cette idée a été exprimée par plusieurs participants du forum. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD  
AVEC NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE  
(À HALIFAX)

LE FIGARO mardi 20 novembre 2012

## L'Europe reconnaît la coalition syrienne avec des réserves

JEAN-JACQUES MÉVEL  
CORRESPONDANT À BRUXELLES

AU GOÛT d'autres capitales européennes, Paris est peut-être allée un peu trop vite en besogne : l'UE a décerné lundi le titre de « représentant légitime des aspirations du peuple syrien » à la coalition des opposants fondée il y a une semaine. Mais sans aller, comme la France, jusqu'à annoncer l'échange d'ambassadeurs, ni investir la CNS de l'autorité d'un gouvernement en puissance. En Occident, le président Hollande a été le premier à reconnaître ce regroupement de l'opposition à Bachar al-Assad comme « seul représentant légitime » des 22 millions de Syriens. Samedi, il a reçu à l'Élysée l'ambassadeur pressenti, Monzer Makhous, figure alaouite. À Bruxelles, les ministres des Affaires étrangères se sont montrés moins empressés, sous la pression du Royaume-Uni et de l'Allemagne.

### Laborieux compromis

La formule européenne, fruit d'un laborieux compromis, fait de la CNS un représentant reconnu mais pas nécessairement unique de la classe politique syrienne. L'organisation de l'islamiste modéré Moaz al-Khatib est pressée de faire ses preuves : l'UE attend « avec impatience qu'elle souscrive aux principes des droits de l'homme et de la démocratie (...) et qu'elle coopère avec tous les segments de la société civile syrienne », ajoutent les ministres dans leurs conclusions.

Laurent Fabius, venu présenter la décision de Paris, semble avoir rencontré des réserves plus fortes que prévu. Plusieurs de ses collègues ont émis des doutes sur la re-

présentativité réelle de la CNS. La France a obtenu que la coalition subisse un examen de passage à Bruxelles, peut-être en décembre. « Tout le monde est d'accord pour une reconnaissance à terme, mais il subsiste des nuances », résume le Luxembourgeois Jean Asselborn.

Jusqu'ici, seule l'Italie de Mario Monti a emboîté le pas à François Hollande. Le Royaume-Uni, en pointe dans la dénonciation du régime al-Assad, repousse sa décision. Le secrétaire au Foreign Office

William Hague la réserve au Parlement, « plus tard dans la semaine ». D'autres pays comme l'Allemagne, l'Espagne ou la Suède gardent leurs cartes pour eux. En privé, plusieurs des partenaires de la France font savoir qu'une reconnaissance pleine et entière de la CNS n'est pas pour demain. Certains souhaitent d'abord s'assurer que la coalition a les moyens de contrôler ses alliés politiques et la situation militaire sur le terrain. « Pour le moment, c'est encore une construction artificielle », relève un diplomate. D'autres comme les Britanniques, échaudés par leur expérience en Irak et en Afghanistan, veulent vérifier que la coalition ne servira pas de cheval de Troie à des groupes terroristes, voire aux mercenaires d'al-Qaïda.

L'Allemagne, elle, a évacué le débat sur une autre ambition française : la levée de l'embargo sur les armes à destination des rebelles. Guido Westerwelle renvoie le dossier à plus tard, lorsque l'opposition unifiée aura démontré qu'« un renouveau démocratique est possible ». L'UE pourrait bien reconduire l'embargo dans les jours à venir, faute d'unanimité nécessaire pour l'abroger. Le débat est théorique, ajoute un expert : les armes affluent en Syrie, en dépit des restrictions officielles. ■

MARIO MONTI  
PRÉSIDENT DU  
CONSEIL ITALIEN

« Nous avons reconnu la coalition qui regroupe les différentes composantes de l'opposition comme un représentant légitime du peuple syrien »



# Syrie : les djihadistes font bande à part

Ils refusent de passer sous le contrôle de l'Armée syrienne libre, et veulent établir leur « État islamique » dans le Nord.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

**MOYEN-ORIENT** C'est un nouveau front - interne celui-là - qui s'ouvre pour l'opposition syrienne. Dans une vidéo diffusée sur Internet, une douzaine de groupes islamistes armés rejette la « Coalition nationale », formée il y a une semaine au Qatar, sous forte pression internationale, pour hâter la chute du régime de Bachar el-Assad. Dénonçant un « complot » fomenté par l'Occident, les groupes djihadistes et salafistes « se prononcent pour un État islamique » établi à partir d'Alep et de sa province, où les radicaux islamistes se sont infiltrés depuis un an. En signe de défi à la nouvelle coalition, les ultras « refusent tous les plans imposés de l'extérieur », jure un de leurs porte-parole, tandis qu'un de ses acolytes brandit un coran, réclamant que le livre saint mu-

sulman « soit la Constitution » du prochain État syrien.

## Course contre la montre

Parmi les signataires figurent les groupes combattants les plus importants dans le nord de la Syrie, passé quasiment entièrement aux mains des rebelles : Jabhat al-Nosra, lié à al-Qaida en Irak, la Brigade al-Tawhid, omniprésente à Alep, et le groupe salafiste Ahrar al-Cham, bien implanté dans la région d'Idlib. Cette annonce officialise leur

refus de passer sous le contrôle de l'Armée syrienne libre. Entre les deux pôles de l'opposition armée, qui ont commencé de s'affronter localement, une course contre la montre est engagée pour s'assurer du contrôle du terrain.

Pour chaque camp, la victoire est d'autant plus cruciale que le régime pourrait à terme perdre cette région

nord, frontalière de la Turquie. D'où les récentes initiatives prises dans l'urgence par la coalition. À Doha, celle-ci s'est mise d'accord pour constituer « cinq fronts » dans lesquels la composante non islamiste radicale rassemblerait à chaque fois plus des deux tiers des combattants, afin de pouvoir isoler le tiers restant, composé des djihadistes et des salafistes. Toute la question est de savoir où vont se situer certains miliciens proches des Frères musulmans, comme ceux de la Brigade al-Tawhid à Alep ?

D'autre part, dans le prolongement de Doha, des rencontres ont lieu actuellement à Riyad, en Arabie saoudite, pour établir ces cinq fronts. Y participent les principaux généraux déserteurs, venus de Turquie et de Jordanie, des représentants des rebelles de l'intérieur, encadrés par des militaires américains, britanniques, turcs et français, les principaux parrains de la coalition.

Celle-ci a décidé lundi d'établir son siège au Caire en Égypte, a annoncé son président Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib. Sur le terrain, les rebelles ont intensifié leurs attaques près de Damas, obligeant le régime à bombarder leurs positions à al-Hajar al-Assouad, al-Tadamon et al-Qadam, des quartiers dans lesquels les insurgés reviennent après en avoir été chassés. Pour protéger la forteresse damascène, le pouvoir a été contraint de retirer certaines de ses troupes des provinces, notamment de Deraa, dans le Sud, berceau de la révolte contre Bachar el-Assad, qui a coûté la vie à près de 40 000 Syriens, en vingt mois. ■



Dans une vidéo diffusée sur Internet, une douzaine de groupes islamistes armés rejette la « Coalition nationale », formée il y a une semaine au Qatar. AFP



# Syria criticizes 3 countries for recognizing opposition

BEIRUT

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

Senior Syrian officials on Sunday lashed out at foreign governments that had recognized the opposition, while armed skirmishes around Syria included a fresh salvo across the border with Israel.

The Syrian information minister, Omran al-Zoubi, accused France, Turkey and Qatar of supporting "terrorism" in Syria by extending diplomatic recognition to the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, including the acceptance of an official envoy in Paris, according to a summary of his remarks carried by the Syrian Arab News Agency, a government entity.

The new coalition does not represent anybody, Mr. Zoubi said, calling it a creation of the foreign states and ineligible to take part in any national dialogue.

In Tehran, a meeting of about 200 members of the officially sanctioned opposition was held on Sunday, but no members of the new coalition were invited. It was unclear who was actually represented by those attending.

Iran has backed the government of Syria, its most important Arab ally, throughout the conflict, reportedly providing arms and training for government forces.

The government of President Bashar al-Assad has said from the start of the crisis in March 2011 that it would engage with its opposition, but it has sought to handpick the participants in any negotiations. As the death toll has grown to 40,000, much of the opposition in exile and in Syria has come to reject negotiations with Mr. Assad.

The Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, addressed the gathering, warning that outside interference could incite violence throughout the region. Arming the opposition would only aggravate the crisis, the Syrian news agency quoted him as saying.

Last week, France broached the idea of lifting the arms embargo on Syria, saying it was studying the idea of helping the rebels. President François Hollande met with the opposition council's leaders in Paris on Saturday and agreed to install a new Syrian ambassador in France. After the meeting, Mr. Hollande said that at a meeting of foreign ministers on Monday in Brussels his government would raise the issue of lifting a European Union arms embargo against all Syrian forces. In general, Western nations have avoided providing weapons.

There were reports on Sunday of a minor exchange of fire across the border with Israel in the Golan Heights, the third

Small-arms fire from Syria hit a military vehicle on the Israeli side on Saturday without causing any casualties, and Israel responded with artillery, according to news agency reports that quoted the Israeli Army.

There may have been Syrian Army casualties, said Brig. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, the chief Israeli Army spokesman, but he said that could not be confirmed. There was no immediate comment from Syria, which demands the return of the

Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967, but has long kept the border quiet.

The Local Coordinating Committees, a network of opposition activists who monitor the conflict in Syria, reported that stray shelling in the southern province of Dara'a had landed in Jordan.

Syria's official news media and the opposition also reported fierce skirmishes in Damascus, Aleppo, Deir al-Zour and other cities.

The Free Syrian Army captured more than 10 tanks after taking a regimental headquarters in Aleppo Province that it had besieged for weeks, the Local Coordination Committees said. Fighting also continued around Bukamal, the Syrian news agency reported, with government troops inflicting "painful blows" by killing and wounding "dozens" of opposition fighters in the town, which is near Deir al-Zour.

# Extremist Islamist groups reject new Syrian coalition

ISTANBUL

BY TIM ARANGO

Several extremist Islamist groups fighting in Syria say they reject the new Syrian opposition coalition, which was formed under the guidance of the United States, Turkey and Gulf Arab countries. The rejection underscores worries about the rising influence of religious fundamentalism amid the chaos of the civil war in Syria.

The Islamist groups are involved in fighting government forces in Aleppo, Syria's largest city, and include units aligned with Al Qaeda. They made their declaration in a video uploaded to the Internet on Sunday, saying that their goal was to establish an "Islamic state" in Syria and that they would reject any plans for the country imposed from abroad. At the conclusion of the video, a man holds up a Koran and yells, "Make the Koran your constitution and you will prosper!"

The video, in turn, was quickly rejected by commanders of the Free Syrian Army, the umbrella group for loosely knit bands of opposition fighters across Syria, and some residents of Aleppo mocked the video in postings on Facebook. While it called attention to the growing role played by Islamist groups, the video and the controversy it provoked among other rebel groups also highlighted the lack of unity among the myriad groups trying to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

In an interview with Orient TV, a private Syrian channel based in Dubai, Abed al-Jabar al-Akidi, the commander of a rebel military council in Aleppo that supports the new political coalition, dis-

missed the video as merely "an expression of a personal opinion" and insisted that the coalition had broad support among the fighters.

The National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces said Monday that it would be based in Cairo, the Egyptian state news agency reported. Formed on Nov. 11 after days of negotiations in Doha, Qatar, the coalition replaces one that was regarded as ineffectual, in part because it included few figures from within Syria and had little credibility with frontline fighters.

As the group continues to gain international recognition, it hopes to secure agreements from Western and Arab countries to supply heavier weapons to the rebels to hasten the demise of the Assad government. France, Turkey, Italy and Gulf Arab countries have already recognized the group as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people, and the European Union has suggested that it may soon do the same.

Fighting continued to rage on Monday along Syria's border with Turkey. Fighting was reported in Ras al-Ain, a city of mixed Arab and Kurd population that was bombarded last week by government jets.

Reuters reported that rebel fighters in the city, who are mainly Arabs, had clashed with Kurdish fighters there, raising the ominous prospect of an armed struggle for control of Syria's predominantly Kurdish region in the east, which the government had largely ceded to local control. A local Kurdish official in Ras al-Ain was said to have been shot and killed by a rebel sniper.

Hania Mourtada contributed reporting from Beirut.

## Kurdish prisoners end hunger strike after Ocalan appeal

**Hundreds of Kurdish prisoners in Turkey have ended a 68-day hunger strike after jailed ex-rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan urged them to do so.**

The prisoners had been demanding better conditions for Mr Ocalan and more use of the Kurdish language in public life.

On Saturday, Mr Ocalan called on the hunger strikers to stop, in a statement issued by his brother.

Some 40,000 people have died in the 25-year conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK militant group.

The PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) has waged a guerrilla campaign in south-east Turkey for the establishment of an ethnic homeland for the Kurdish people.

Five Turkish soldiers were killed on Sunday in clashes with rebels near the Iraqi border, according to Turkish media reports.

### Deaths averted

Mr Ocalan is serving a life sentence in a prison on an island near Istanbul.

On Saturday his brother Mehmet said Mr Ocalan had told him that the hunger strike had "achieved its goal".

"Without any hesitation, they should end the hunger strike," he said.

Doctors had recently warned that many of the strikers were close to death.

There has been no indication from authorities that the conditions of Mr Ocalan's detention will be changed.

The government is due to present a bill to parliament next week allowing Kurds to use their own language in court, but the strikers had branded this insufficient.

Several prominent members of the pro-Kurdish BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) had joined the strike, but party figures said they would heed Mr Ocalan's call.

Tensions between the Kurds and the Turkish majority have been running high in recent months, analysts say. □



## Erdogan accuse Bagdad de vouloir provoquer une guerre civile en Irak

ANKARA, 21 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**LE PREMIER MINISTRE turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé mercredi le gouvernement du Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki de vouloir provoquer une guerre civile en Irak, les tensions étant vives entre Bagdad et la région autonome du Kurdistan.**

"Le régime (irakien) veut conduire la situation vers une guerre civile", a déclaré M. Erdogan à la presse avant un déplacement au Pakistan.

"Nous avons toujours eu la crainte qu'il puisse provoquer une guerre interconfessionnelle, Dieu nous en préserve. Nos craintes commencent en ce moment à se réaliser, peu à peu", a-t-il ajouté.

M. Erdogan a également manifesté son "inquiétude" quant à un possible "conflit pour le pétrole" en Irak.

Ces remarques interviennent après que le Kurdistan, une région du nord de l'Irak qui jouit d'une grande autonomie, a envoyé plusieurs milliers de ses combattants près de la ville de Touz Khourmatou, dans une large bande de territoire que revendiquent tant Bagdad que le Kurdistan.

Selon le président de la région kurde, Massoud Barzani, des accrochages ont

éclaté entre les combattants kurdes et les forces irakiennes vendredi, faisant un mort. M. Maliki a mis en garde les forces de sécurité kurdes contre tout mouvement de troupes ou contact avec l'armée irakienne.

Bagdad et Erbil s'affrontent sur un certain nombre de dossiers, dont celui de l'exploitation des hydrocarbures. Le gouvernement irakien reproche ainsi au Kurdistan de signer des contrats avec des compagnies pétrolières étrangères en se passant de son accord.

Les relations entre Bagdad et Ankara sont elles aussi au plus bas en raison du refus de la Turquie d'extrader le vice-président irakien sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi, condamné à mort par contumace dans son pays.

Bagdad a officiellement protesté en août contre une visite du ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Ahmed Davutoglu, qui s'était rendu à Kirkouk (nord de l'Irak) sans prévenir le pouvoir central irakien.

Le gouvernement irakien a exclu début novembre la compagnie pétrolière turque TPAO d'un important contrat d'exploration dans le sud de l'Irak.

"Ils (les Irakiens) ont eu des approches négatives à l'égard de nos hommes d'affaires (...)", a commenté mercredi M. Erdogan, dénonçant une attitude digne d'une "bagarre entre enfants". ○



## Combats entre islamistes et kurdes en Syrie, à la frontière turque

BEYROUTH, 22 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**DES CENTAINES de combattants islamistes et kurdes s'affrontaient violemment jeudi dans la ville syrienne de Rass al-Aïn, près de la frontière turque, a rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).**

Selon des militants cités par l'OSDH, 200 jihadistes du Front Al-Nosra et une centaine d'hommes de la brigade islamiste Ghouraba al-Cham, appuyés par trois chars pris à l'armée, s'opposaient à 400 combattants kurdes dans cette cité située dans le nord-est à majorité kurde de la Syrie.

Dans une vidéo mise en ligne par des militants, Ghouraba al-Cham appelle les combattants rebelles à travers le pays à rejoindre Rass al-Aïn "pour libérer (la province) de Hassaka et le reste de la Syrie".

Dans une vidéo mise en ligne par des militants, Ghouraba al-Cham appelle les combattants rebelles à travers le pays à rejoindre Rass al-Aïn "pour libérer Hassaka et le reste de la Syrie".

"Nous appelons tous ceux qui affrontent notre révolution et pointent leurs armes contre nous, notamment le PYD, le PKK et tout autre parti armé à se retirer

immédiatement de la région de Rass Al-Aïn", lance un homme sur la vidéo.

"S'ils ne le font pas, la rébellion se réserve le droit de recourir à la force", prévient-il encore, au milieu d'une cinquantaine de rebelles en armes devant un char.

Al-Nosra et Ghouraba al-Cham, deux importants groupes islamistes radicaux, combattent aux côtés des rebelles contre les troupes du régime syrien, sans toutefois reconnaître l'opposition politique ni l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), principale faction de la rébellion armée.

Les rebelles accusent les combattants du Comité de protection du peuple kurde (YPG) de faire le jeu du régime syrien. L'YPG est le bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie).

Plusieurs localités du nord-est syrien sont récemment tombées aux mains des Kurdes, l'armée s'en retirant sans résistance.

Un résident se présentant sous le nom d'Abou Mohammed a affirmé à l'AFP que "la plupart des habitants ont fui, et le peu qui reste vit dans l'insécurité et dans de mauvaises conditions, car à cause des combats, l'eau et l'électricité sont coupées en permanence". →

⇒ Lundi, des combats similaires avaient fait 34 morts, dont 29 combattants islamistes et un chef de l'administration locale kurde, selon l'OSDH.

Les combattants kurdes tiennent le nord et l'est de Rass Al-Aïn, tandis que les rebelles tiennent le sud et l'ouest ainsi que le poste-frontière du même nom vers la Turquie. La localité est désertée par ses habitants.

Le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie abritent la plupart des deux millions de Kurdes du pays, dont les milices indépendantes sont parfois hostiles à la rébellion.

Par le passé, Ankara avait accusé le pouvoir à Damas d'avoir "confié" plusieurs zones du nord de la Syrie au PYD et considéré l'installation de ce parti près de la frontière comme "dirigée contre" elle.

La Syrie est en proie depuis le 15 mars 2011 à une révolte populaire devenue conflit armé face à la répression sanglante du régime. Les violences ont fait en 20 mois plus de 40.000 morts, selon l'OSDH. ○

**L'EXPRESS**

23 novembre 2012

## SYRIE: KURDES ET INSURGÉS ISLAMISTES S'AFFRONTENT DANS LE NORD

**Plusieurs mouvements kurdes ont annoncé ce vendredi la formation d'une force militaire unie pour faire face à des centaines d'insurgés islamistes dans le nord-est de la Syrie.**

Les principaux mouvements kurdes de Syrie ont décidé ce vendredi de former une force militaire unie pour faire face à des centaines d'insurgés islamistes dans le nord-est de la Syrie.

"Les deux Conseils nationaux kurdes du Kurdistan de l'ouest ont convenu de former une force militaire unifiée regroupant les forces du PYD et les dissidents dans le Kurdistan", a affirmé un militant kurde se présentant sous le nom de Havidar. Dans leur terminologie, le Kurdistan ouest désigne la Syrie. Ce militant hostile au régime a précisé que la réunion s'était tenue en Irak.

Le 11 juillet, le Conseil national kurde, qui regroupe une douzaine de partis traditionnels kurdes syriens et le Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), émanation du PYD, se sont regroupés sous la bannière du Conseil suprême kurde. Le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie abritent la plupart des deux millions de Kurdes de Syrie, dont les milices indépendantes sont parfois hostiles à la rébellion.

Affrontements avec le Front Al-Nusra et la brigade Ghouraba al-Cham

Des combattants du Parti de l'Union



**RASS AL-AÏN (Syrie)- Des combattants du PYD, la branche syrienne du PKK (rebelles kurdes de Turquie), affrontent depuis des jours des centaines de rebelles du Front Al-Nusra et de la brigade Ghouraba al-Cham à la lisière de la frontière turque.**

démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie), affrontent depuis mercredi jours des centaines de rebelles du Front Al-Nusra et de la brigade Ghouraba al-Cham à Rass Al-Aïn, localité syrienne à la frontière turque où les rebelles tiennent un poste-frontière.

De leur côté, Al-Nusra et Ghouraba al-Cham, deux groupes islamistes radicaux,

ont appelé les rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) à la rescousse, même si ces deux organisations ne font pas partie de la principale force armée d'opposition.

Dans une vidéo mise en ligne, Ghouraba al-Cham s'en prend au PYD, accusé par les rebelles de faire le jeu du régime syrien dont les troupes se sont retirées de plusieurs localités de la région tombées de fait aux mains des kurdes. □

**L'ORIENT  
LE JOUR**

23 novembre 2012

## Tension entre l'armée nationale irakienne et les Kurdes

Les discussions pour tenter de faire baisser la tension entre l'armée nationale irakienne et les forces de la région autonome du Kurdistan, dans le nord de l'Irak, n'ont guère progressé jeudi et les deux camps ont renforcé leurs positions près des villes disputées de Kirkouk et de Khanakine.

C'est la seconde fois cette année que soldats irakiens et membres des forces de sécurité du Kurdistan irakien se retrouvent face à face à propos de la souveraineté sur ces deux villes, signe des relations difficiles entre le gouvernement central de

Bagdad, dominé par des Arabes chiites, et les autorités autonomes kurdes.

Le président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a rencontré jeudi le président du Parlement de Bagdad pour tenter de calmer les choses. A l'issue de l'entretien, un communiqué a annoncé que Barzani avait accepté "d'ouvrir la porte" à des négociations.

Sur le terrain, les deux partis ont renforcé leurs positions.

Un porte-parole de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK),

qui participe au gouvernement de la région autonome, a précisé que les Peshmergas, les combattants kurdes, avaient reçu pour consigne de ne pas s'en prendre aux soldats du gouvernement central

Pourtant, un porte-parole du commandant des forces de sécurité irakiennes sur place a affirmé que les combattants kurdes multipliaient les "provocations".

"Malgré nos efforts pour calmer la situation, des Peshmergas, avec des lance-roquettes et des pièces d'artillerie, sont entrés à

Kirkouk et à Khanakine", a-t-il dit.

En août dernier, Washington était intervenu pour empêcher les deux camps de s'affronter dans la région. Les Etats-Unis sont encore en contact avec Bagdad et les Kurdes pour trouver une solution à la crise.

Le différend porte en grande partie sur la mise en place dans la région d'un nouveau centre de commandement militaire irakien, dont les autorités kurdes exigent le démantèlement.

Il y a quelques jours, des soldats irakiens ont voulu perquisitionner dans les bureaux d'un parti politique kurde dans la ville de Touz Khourmato. Une fusillade a éclaté avec des Peshmergas et un passant a été tué. (AFP) ●

# Kurdish Parties Seen United Against Dijla Forces' Push into Kirkuk

By HEVIDAR AHMED  
rudaw.net

**E**RBIL, Kurdistan Region - After his return from Baghdad, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani issued a statement on the controversial Dijla Operations Command (DOC).

"Bringing up the issue of the DOC at this sensitive time will not serve peace and security in the disputed areas," Talabani said. "On the contrary, it will cause chaos, fear and insecurity."

The statement comes after Talabani repeatedly asked Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to halt the activities of the military command. Maliki ignored his calls and broadened the activities of the DOC instead.

When preparations for a ceremony related to the launch of the DOC were being made near Kirkuk province, Talabani was in Germany for medical reasons but called Maliki to ask that the ceremony not go ahead. Although the ceremony was postponed, it was carried out later on and the activities of the military command began officially.

Initial reports about Maliki's intentions to form a command with the purpose of militarily controlling the disputed areas came from the Asayish (security) forces of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

These reports were seen as baseless rumors by Kurdish groups. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) political bureau claimed that the military command would not be formed because "Maliki gave his word to Talabani."

Ali Musawi, Maliki's advisor, responded to Talabani's concerns. "If the DOC is unconstitutional, then let His Excellency Talabani resort to constitutional methods to stop it. He can execute the constitution," he said.

Musawi added, "Maliki has no intentions to dissolve or deactivate the DOC. It is Talabani's right to express his opinion, but Maliki is the commander in chief of the Iraqi armed forces."

Some prominent members of Maliki's Dawa Party have also criticized Talabani for his stance towards the DOC.

Ali Allaq, a Dawa Party political bureau member, said, "I am amazed at Talabani's comments that the DOC will cause sedition, discomfort and insecurity for the region."

Saadi Ahmad Pira, a PUK political bureau member, said, "Talabani is concerned about the formation of the DOC



**Kurdish Peshmerga troops are deployed on the outskirts of Kirkuk, some 250 kilometers north of Baghdad. Iraq's Kurdish region has sent reinforcements to a disputed area where its troops are involved in a standoff with the Iraqi army, a senior Kurdish military official said, despite calls on both sides for dialogue to calm the situation. (PHOTO REUTERS, Azad Lashkari)**

because its mission is destruction. This force needs to be defined. We are not afraid of the DOC, but we are rather concerned about the mentality that exists behind it."

The KDP supports the stance of Talabani and described the act of forming this force as "playing with fire."

Spokesperson and member of the KDP political bureau, Jaafar Ibrahim, told Rudaw, "Talabani was never alone and has always been supported by Barzani and the KDP. Sometimes we might have had our differences, but in fateful matters such as Article 140 and the Kirkuk issue, KDP members support Talabani and the PUK."

After Talabani prevented the effort to withdraw confidence from Maliki – brought forward by the KDP, Iraqiya List, Sadr Movement, Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal) -- it was said that the KDP would not support Talabani in this case in Baghdad.

But Ibrahim said, "The KDP will not leave Talabani alone in Baghdad as we have openly told Maliki that the DOC is a provocation and playing with fire."

Pira praised the stance of the KDP towards Talabani. "We have all seen how Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), expressed his support to Talabani in Sulaimani province. Also, he gave the minister of Peshmerga, who's a PUK member, the full authority to take whatever action he deems necessary."

The Iraqi central government and Maliki's State of Law Coalition believe that the concerns of Kurds towards the DOC have been exaggerated. They insist that the DOC is not about the Kurds but the "terrorists" of Syria who are expected to enter Iraq.

Allaq, who is also the chairman of the religious affairs committee in Iraqi Parliament, said, "We ask the Kurdish groups to sit and talk, and to state the source of their concerns regarding the DOC."

He added, "Because the terrorists will come from Syria into Iraq through Mosul, Anbar, Diyala and Salahaddin in the future. This has been planned by Syria and Israel, and Turkey might support it as well."

Pira said, "Kirkuk shares no borders with other countries so the DOC should not be sent there. The DOC should have been sent to the Iraqi borders with Turkey and Syria instead of Kirkuk."

The attitude of Maliki towards the Kurdistan Region by forming the DOC has united various Kurdish groups such as the Change Movement (Gorran), the KIU and Komal, and made them side with KDP and PUK against Baghdad and the DOC.

Gorran did not side with the other Kurdish groups in their efforts to hold a non-confidence vote against Maliki.

Sardar Abdullah, the Gorran bloc leader in Iraqi Parliament, said, "We foresaw this. We anticipated paying the price for not supporting the efforts to

☞ withdraw confidence from Maliki. Today is that day."

He added, "This is how Maliki rewarded President Talabani for saving him from the non-confidence vote."

Abdullah talked about the options now before the Kurds. "The Kurds need to practically take some steps. They should study all their options since Kirkuk is at stake," he said.

According to Najib Abdulla, the KIU bloc leader in Iraqi Parliament, if these policies of Maliki's go ahead "then the Kurds must prepare for the worst. The best move is for Talabani to meet with all the Kurdish groups and unite."

Komal sees this situation as an opportunity for Kurdish groups to demonstrate a united stance against Baghdad.

Muhammad Hakim, spokesperson and member of the Komal political bureau, said, "Now it is very necessary for the five Kurdish groups who have MPs in Baghdad to urgently discuss the DOC and issues with Baghdad, because there is unity among them regarding Maliki and the DOC."

Hakim thinks the Kurds should pressure Baghdad domestically and internationally by "sending representatives to Iran because it plays a big role in Iraq. It should also send representatives to Turkey and the United States to discuss these issues," he said.

"Maliki has manipulated the kindness Talabani showed towards him," Hakim added. "But if the Kurds unite then Maliki will not be able to face them."

"Maliki wants make of himself a hero at the expense of the Kurds," said Gorran MP Muhammad Kayani.

"The dangers of the DOC are greater than what has been mentioned," he said. "The DOC has been assigned not only for Kirkuk or the disputed areas. Rather, they want to push back the Kurds to the 36th latitude and leave behind the region which is rich with resources."

Kayani added, "This would jeopardize the position of the Kurds in Iraq. The failure of the efforts to withdraw confidence from Maliki made the Sunnis side with Maliki and made Maliki pose as an Arab hero. Maliki said that he wanted to become Jamal Abdulnassir." ■

Daily Press

November 20, 2012

## Syria Kurdish leader rejects new opposition coalition

Mohammed Abbas / Reuters

**LONDON - A party that controls much of Syria's Kurdish region on Tuesday rejected the new opposition coalition, highlighting the deep divisions still remaining between the many Syrian armed groups 20 months into the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.**

Saleh Muslim, head of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), said he had not been invited to talks in Doha this month in which the Syrian National Coalition was formed, and he labeled the group a proxy of Turkey and Qatar.

The coalition, led by moderate Sunni Muslim cleric Mouaz Alkhatib, was meant to unify Syria's myriad opposition groups in a bid to secure Western backing in their efforts to topple Assad, and has been endorsed in the West by Britain and France.

Previous efforts to unite the opposition under the umbrella of the Syrian National Council ultimately failed after widespread accusations that the SNC had little sway within Syria and was dominated by the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

"They're making the same mistakes as the Syrian National Council. They're one color, a cleric is the ruler. More than 60 percent of the SNC were from the Muslim Brotherhood and the religious groups, and they've made the same mistake with this coalition," Muslim told Reuters in London.

"It (the opposition coalition) has not

emerged from obedience to Turkey and Qatar," he said, adding that the Kurds included in the group were not representative of Syria's Kurds and were handpicked by Turkey to follow its agenda.

Some 10 percent of the population, Kurds are Syria's largest ethnic minority, and Muslim's party has been extending its power in northern Syria as Assad battles an insurgency elsewhere.

Whichever group holds the Kurdish lands along the border with Turkey will control a sizeable portion of Syria's estimated 2.5 billion barrels of crude oil reserves.

Turkey is alarmed at the growing influence of the PYD which it says is the Syrian arm of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a militant group which has fought a 28-year separatist conflict in Turkey in which more than 40,000 people have been killed.

### KURDS, REBELS CLASH

On Monday, Syrian rebels clashed with armed Kurds near the Turkish border, the latest sign of a power struggle in Syria's ethnically diverse northeast.

Muslim said his party did not want to carve a separate Kurdish enclave, and denied any coordination between his party and the PKK over Syria.

"We don't want separatism or to draw new borders. What we want is constitutional recognition of the Kurdish presence, and constitutional guarantees of the democratic rights of the Kurdish people," Muslim said.

PYD offices in Syria are however ador-

ned with portraits of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and PYD fighters wear badges bearing the image of the moustachioed militant who is jailed in Turkey.

Muslim also dismissed analyst reports that Assad has allowed PYD forces to take control of much of the country's northern border to antagonize Turkey, which has called for Assad's departure.

Though Assad has pulled the bulk of his forces from the Kurdish region, there is a clear co-existence between the PYD and the remaining government troops who man checkpoints unmolested inside the Kurdish region.

The Kurds though have long been discriminated against by Assad and his father before him.

Making matters more complicated, Syria's Kurds are not politically united and rivalries between the PYD and another group, the Kurdish National Council, have at times threatened to spiral into intra-Kurdish conflict.

Muslim said new, more inclusive talks between Syrian opposition groups were necessary if anti-Assad forces are ever to truly unify and democracy is ever to take root in Syria.

"This coalition is no good. Right now in Aleppo on the ground there are armed groups saying they don't recognize this group because it does not represent the Syrian people," he said.

"The solution? The Syrian opposition sits down together and talks this through to come to a proposal we all agree on. There were no talks in Doha. There was a pre-prepared scenario put in front of them and they were told to sign," he added.

"If the Kurdish problem in Syria is not solved, democracy will not come." □

## Iraq speaker in Iraqi Kurdistan to push Arab-Kurd accord

Nujaifi pushes to ease Arab-Kurd tensions, as two sides trade accusations about reinforcements being sent to disputed areas.



Barzani responsive to idea of calming situation

### Middle East Online

**ARBIL (Iraq)** - Iraq's parliament speaker pushed on Thursday to ease Arab-Kurd tensions on a visit to Iraqi Kurdistan, as the two sides traded accusations about reinforcements being sent to disputed areas.

Tensions are high in areas of northern Iraq that the autonomous Kurdish region wants to incorporate over the strong objections of Baghdad, and there is a threat of conflict between Arab and Kurdish security forces.

The speaker's office said Osama al-Nujaifi met Kurdistan President Massud Barzani on the second day of an initiative aimed at reducing tensions between Iraqi Kurds and Baghdad, which he warned could lead to civil war.

Barzani was responsive to the idea of calming the situation and dealing with it "in a constitutional way and opening the door of negotiation between the military commands in the border areas," as well as "finding fundamental solutions to all the problems," a statement on his website said.

The meeting took place in a "positive atmosphere," Nujaifi's office said, adding that the speaker hoped to return to Baghdad on Thursday night for talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Federal and Kurdish military officials have traded accusations that the other side had sent military reinforcements to the disputed territory in the country's north.

A statement from Maliki's Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces alleged that Kurdish security forces, known as peshmerga, were reinforcing the Khanaqin area, armed with artillery and rocket launchers.

Jabbar Yawar, a top peshmerga official, denied that and said additional Iraqi forces had been sent to Diyala and Kirkuk provinces earlier in the month.

Barzani has said peshmerga clashed with Iraqi forces in the disputed town of Tuz Khurmatu on Friday, and ordered them "to exercise restraint in the face of provocations, but also to be in a highest state of readiness to face any aggressive acts."

Maliki's office later warned the peshmerga "not to change their positions or approach the (federal) armed forces."

The unresolved row over territory poses the biggest threat to Iraq's long-term stability, diplomats and officials say.

Relations between the two sides are also marred by disputes over oil and power-sharing. ●

## Turkey, Syria and the Kurds A third party joins the fray

by A.Z. | ISTANBUL

THE bloodshed in Syria has taken a nasty turn, as Syrian rebels fighting against Bashar Assad's regime clash with their Kurdish compatriots. Worries of an ethnic war between Syria's Arabs and its 3m-odd Kurds have increased. Kurds on both sides of the border are pointing the finger of blame at the government of Turkey.

The trouble began on November 8th when Syrian rebels attacked a small group of Syrian soldiers loyal to Mr Assad in Ras al-Ayn, a town close to the border with Turkey. Despite being bombed by the Syrian air force, the rebels took the town, which lies just across the border from the Turkish town of Ceylanpinar.

Syria's best armed and most powerful Kurdish group, the Syrian Democratic Union Party (known by its Kurdish initials, PYD), which controls the Kurdish districts of Ras al-Ayn, says it feared retaliation from the Assad forces if it was seen to connive at

their expulsion, so it asked the Syrian rebels, who are said to have been Salafists, to leave. When they refused, the ensuing battle left at least five Kurds and 18 rebels dead. Thousands of angry Kurds are said to be heading for Ras al-Ayn to offer support to their kinsfolk.

The PYD has been tightening its grip on a string of Kurdish towns in Syria's hitherto calm north-east ever since Syrian government forces withdrew from them five months ago in order to fight the rebels elsewhere. It is no secret that the PYD is an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the rebel guerrilla force which has been fighting against Turkish government forces since 1984 in a bid for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey.

The PYD's leadership and ideology—an odd mix of socialism, ethnic nationalism, and feminism, capped by a devotion to the leader—closely copy the PKK's, whose

leader, Abdullah Ocalan, has been in prison since 1999. Yet the PYD's leader, Saleh Muslim, denies any connection to the PKK and has repeatedly called on Turkey to negotiate with it.

Turkey remains hostile to both Kurdish parties, which say that it helped plan the Syrian rebels' attack on the PYD in Ras al-Ayn. Barzan Iso, an independent Kurdish Syrian journalist, says the Syrian rebels used Turkey as a base from which to bash the PYD on November 8th. "The operation wasn't about kicking out Assad's forces," he says. "It was to dislodge the PYD." A Turkish foreign ministry spokesman disagreed: "There is now a pattern of Free Syrian Army forces liberating towns [in Syria], doing the job, and the Kurds then trying to move in and take over."

Turkey has been allowing free passage and a flow of weapons to the FSA, which has commanders based along the Turkish border. But the main aim of Turkey's government may be shifting from regime change in Damascus to preventing the emergence of an autonomous Kurdistan in Syria. Many Syrian rebels evidently share that view. □

# La Turquie relance l'idée de négociations avec le PKK

par Pinar Aydinli / (Reuters)

**A**NKARA - La Turquie a relancé lundi l'hypothèse de négociations avec les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) au lendemain de l'arrêt d'une grève de la faim observée par des centaines de détenus kurdes depuis plus de deux mois.

"Ces discussions ont eu lieu par le passé quand elles étaient jugées nécessaires et elles se tiendront à l'avenir", a déclaré le ministre de la Justice, Sadullah Ergin.

Les quelque 1.700 détenus en grève de la faim depuis 68 jours pour dénoncer le maintien à l'isolement d'Abdullah Öcalan ont cessé leur jeûne dimanche à l'appel du fondateur et chef du PKK, emprisonné depuis 1999.

D'après le journal turc Radikal, cet appel a fait suite à une série de discussions entre le chef rebelle et des responsables des services de renseignement (MIT), qui l'ont rencontré dans sa prison sur l'île d'Imrali, en mer de Marmara.

Des enregistrements ayant fuité l'an dernier ont montré que de hauts responsables des renseignements turcs avaient alors pris contact secrètement à Oslo avec le

PKK.

Ces contacts, encore impensables il y a quelques années, sont vivement critiqués par l'opposition nationaliste.

Le PKK, qui a pris les armes en 1984 contre le gouvernement turc, est classé comme organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne. Plus de 40.000 personnes ont péri dans les violences politiques depuis le début de sa lutte armée pour la sécession du Sud-Est turc, à majorité kurde.

"Nous sommes tous pour des discussions avec Öcalan et toutes les autres parties, tant que cela produit des résultats clairs et concrets", a déclaré lundi Faruk Logoglu, vice-président du principal parti d'opposition, le Parti républicain du peuple.

"Mais le bilan de ce gouvernement est tel qu'il ne donne pas confiance dans sa manière de mener des discussions de manière claire et efficace, sans amener le PKK à formuler des exigences inacceptables", a-t-il ajouté.

## NÉGOCIER DIRECTEMENT AVEC ÖCALAN ?

Idris Baluken, haut responsable du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP, pro-

kurde), qui soutenait les grévistes de la faim, a déclaré que la fin du jeûne fournissait au gouvernement une occasion à saisir mais qu'il faudra qu'Ankara négocie avec Abdullah Öcalan s'il veut mettre fin au conflit.

Le chef du PKK réclamerait, outre la fin de son maintien à l'isolement, l'usage de la langue kurde dans l'éducation et l'administration. Les Kurdes représentent environ 20% de la population turque, forte au total de 75 millions d'habitants.

Depuis son arrivée au pouvoir il y a neuf ans, le gouvernement Erdogan a renforcé les droits culturels de la minorité kurde, qui réclame toutefois de plus grandes réformes politiques et une forme d'autonomie pour le Sud-Est turc.

Rien n'indique toutefois qu'une initiative spécifique du gouvernement soit imminente. La possibilité de discussions a déjà été évoquée par Sadullah Ergin et d'autres responsables du gouvernement par le passé. Le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a lui-même évoqué cette hypothèse en septembre.

Depuis les élections législatives de juin 2011, les combats entre militants kurdes et armée turque ont fait plus de 700 morts, le bilan le plus lourd sur une telle période depuis l'arrestation d'Abdullah Öcalan en 1999, selon un récent rapport de l'International Crisis Group.

Ankara a lié ce regain de violence au conflit en Syrie et accuse le président syrien Bachar al Assad d'armer le PKK. □

# Des centaines de combattants rebelles et kurdes massés à Rass Al-Aïn

BEYROUTH, (AFP)

**D**es centaines de combattants rebelles et kurdes se massaient jeudi à Rass al-Aïn, près de la frontière turque, dans le nord-est à majorité kurde de la Syrie, ont rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) et des habitants.

Ces combattants appartiennent au Comité de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan

(rebelles kurdes en Turquie), accusée par les rebelles de faire le jeu du régime.

Ils tiennent le nord et l'est de Rass Al-Aïn, tandis que les rebelles, en majorité des groupes islamistes radicaux, comme le Front Al-Nosra et la brigade Ghouraba al-Cham, tiennent le sud et l'ouest ainsi que le poste-frontière vers la Turquie.

Selon des militants cités par l'OSDH, quelque 200 combattants d'Al-Nosra et une centaine d'hommes de Ghouraba al-Cham, appuyés par trois chars pris à l'armée lors de

combats dans la région, se trouvaient à Rass Al-Aïn, où 400 combattants kurdes ont afflué. Aucun combattant n'était présent dans le centre de la localité, désertée par ses habitants.

Un habitant qui s'est présenté sous le nom d'Abou Mohamed a affirmé à l'AFP que les combats avaient repris, rapportant que les rebelles étaient arrivés depuis la Turquie, avec trois chars.

"La plupart des habitants ont fui, et le peu qui reste vit dans l'insécurité et dans de mauvaises conditions humani-

taires, car en raison des combats, l'eau et l'électricité sont coupées en permanence", a ajouté cet agriculteur.

Lundi, des combats entre kurdes et rebelles avaient fait 34 morts, dont 29 combattants d'Al-Nosra et de Ghouraba al-Cham et un chef de l'administration locale kurde, selon l'OSDH.

Le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie abritent la plupart des deux millions de Kurdes du pays, dont les milices sont indépendantes et parfois hostiles à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). ●

## Syrie : la branche djihadiste des rebelles syriens attaque les Kurdes près de la frontière turque.

Agence Kabyle d'Information SIWEL

**R**AS EL AIN / SEREKANIYE (SIWEL) — Dans le nord de la Syrie, la branche djihadiste des rebelles syriens, le Front Al-Nosra et la brigade islamiste Ghouraba al-Cham, ont attaqué jeudi les combattants du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) « Dans la ville de Rass Al-Aïn [Sérekaniyé en kurde], les rebelles ont pris un point de passage vers la Turquie » où « 200 jihadistes du Front Al-Nosra et une centaine d'hommes de la brigade islamiste Ghouraba al-Cham, appuyés par trois chars pris à l'armée, s'opposaient à quelque 400 combattants kurdes »

Entre temps les djihadistes du groupe Ghouraba al-Cham ont diffusé sur internet une vidéo dans laquelle ils appellent « tous ceux qui affrontent notre révolution et pointent leurs armes contre nous à se retirer immédiatement de Rass Al-Aïn » citant directement le « PYD et le PKK ». Les islamistes de la révolution syrienne accusent les kurdes de faire le jeu du régime syrien qui leur a permis de prendre, sans résistance, les régions du nord à majorité kurde.

Toutefois, sur le terrain, ni l'Armée syrienne de Bachar El-Assad, ni l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) ne sont les bienvenus dans les régions kurdes qui se sont largement émancipés de toute tutelle, depuis la révolution syrienne visant à renverser le régime de Bachar El Assad.

Du côté kurde, en aout dernier, dans un entretien au Figaro, le chef du PYD, M. Muslim, avait expliqué les réticences de son mouvement à s'engager dans « un conflit armé qui ferait de la région kurde de Syrie un champs



Une des Unités de défenses populaires kurdes (YPG) en Syrie.PH/DR

de bataille ». L'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et le Conseil national syrien (CNS) sont considérés, par les kurdes, beaucoup trop proches de la Turquie et du Qatar, tous deux opposés aux droits des Kurdes. Le Président du PYD déclare au Figaro que les kurdes veulent « une reconnaissance constitutionnelle des droits des Kurdes au sein d'une Syrie unie, démocratique et laïque », des revendications qui ne semblent pas être du goût des branches islamistes de la rébellion syrienne.

Didier Bilion, directeur adjoint de l'Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS) explique au journal Le Monde la position des kurdes « Les kurdes ne sont pas des marionnettes aux mains de Damas. Ils ont surtout peur que le Conseil national syrien (CNS) ne donne pas suite aux revendications nationales kurdes si le régime tombait » « C'est pourquoi ils ont quitté la coalition pour créer le Conseil national kurde de Syrie, malgré la nomination d'un président kurde, Abdulbaset SIEDA, à la tête du CNS. »

De son côté la Turquie, qui voit d'un mauvais œil, l'émergence de villes sous influence

kurde, à sa frontière, craint de voir une nouvelle zone autonome kurde. Ankara, en guerre contre le PKK depuis 1984, accuse Bachar El Assad d'avoir « confié » plusieurs zones du nord au PYD. Le vice-président du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), Hüseyin Celik, a directement incriminé Damas l'accusant de « considérer l'ennemi de la Turquie, le PKK, comme un allié ». Rappelons que jusqu'en 1998, Abdullah Öcalan, fondateur du PKK, vivait à Damas jusqu'à ce que la Syrie ne le chasse du pays sur pressions de la Turquie, qui détient depuis le leader du PKK en Prison. Depuis le conflit qui oppose Ankara au PKK a fait pas moins de 45.000 morts selon les chiffres même de l'armée turque.

Depuis le début de la rébellion syrienne, les Unités de défense populaire (YPG), qui assurent la sécurité de la totalité des villes kurdes restent prudent quant à leur implication dans rébellion syrienne. Ils accusent et le régime syrien et certains groupes armés de « tenter de les pousser dans la guerre » affirmant qu'ils disposent « d'informations selon lesquelles certains de ces groupes armés sont liés au régime de Bachar al-Assad ». □

## Turquie: 7 rebelles kurdes tués dans des combats avec l'armée (agence)

ANKARA, 24 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**SEPT REBELLES KURDES** du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi lors de combats avec l'armée turque dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé des sources locales à l'agence de presse Anatolie.

L'accrochage est survenu près du village de Doganli, dans la province de Bingöl, à l'occasion d'une opération de ratissage de l'armée, a indiqué à l'agence le gouverneur de Bingöl, Mustafa Hakan Güvençer.

"Sept terroristes dont quatre femmes ont été neutralisés. Et un rebelle a été arrêté vivant", a déclaré M. Güvençer, cité par Anatolie.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a connu depuis 2011 un regain progressif des tensions, avec une augmentation du nombre des accrochages et la multiplication des arrestations de militants kurdes.

Une grève de la faim lancée le 12 septembre, à laquelle ont participé plus de 700 détenus kurdes, s'est achevée le 18 novembre après un appel au calme du chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan.

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara et de nombreuses capitales.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait, selon l'armée, plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK en 1984. Les rebelles ont d'abord revendiqué l'indépendance du Sud-Est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, avant d'évoluer vers une demande d'autonomie régionale.○



# La Turquie veut militariser sa frontière avec la Syrie

- Une délégation de l'Otan étudie l'installation de missiles de défense aérienne Patriot.
- La demande d'Ankara suscite des critiques de ses voisins et en Turquie même.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER, à Istanbul

**Pourquoi Ankara fait-il appel au soutien de l'Otan ?**

Une importante délégation de l'Otan était attendue lundi 26 novembre à Ankara. Sa mission : organiser le déploiement probable, en Turquie, de missiles de défense aérienne Patriot, comme les autorités turques en ont fait la demande officielle la semaine dernière. La délégation se rendra demain dans le Sud-Est, afin de déterminer les emplacements possibles des quatre à six batteries antimissiles dont parle Ankara.

Officiellement, l'Otan n'a pas encore donné son aval à son allié turc, membre depuis 1952 de l'organisation et deuxième armée de l'Alliance en termes d'hommes, après les États-Unis. Une réponse est attendue dans les prochains jours. À la vue des signes déjà envoyés par l'Alliance atlantique, la demande turque devrait trouver une issue favorable au titre du soutien matériel apporté aux alliés. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, le secrétaire général de l'Otan, a ainsi estimé la semaine dernière que l'envoi de Patriot serait une « démonstration concrète de la solidarité de l'Alliance ».

Les trois pays disposant de ces missiles de fabrication américaine (États-Unis, Pays-Bas et Allemagne) ont fait part de leur accord de principe. Berlin pourrait déployer jusqu'à 170 soldats et deux batteries de missiles,

mais doit auparavant obtenir l'aval du Parlement allemand. Par le passé, l'Otan a accédé à deux reprises à ce genre de demande turque, en 1991 pendant la guerre du Golfe et en 2003, pendant la guerre d'Irak.

La demande d'Ankara survient en réaction à la tension qui ne cesse de monter le long de sa frontière de 900 km avec la Syrie. En octobre, cinq civils turcs ont été tués par des tirs de mortiers syriens et les affrontements se multiplient, notamment entre Kurdes et membres de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), près de cette même frontière. Si la Turquie a déployé des troupes supplémentaires, des chars et batteries de missiles antiaériens de courte portée, et si elle réplique à toute attaque syrienne, elle manque toutefois de protection de longue portée. Les missiles sol-air Patriot devraient aider à combler cette lacune.

**Comment réagissent la Syrie et ses alliés ?**

Depuis huit jours, on rappelle avec force, du côté de l'Otan et d'Ankara, que ces missiles n'ont aucune vocation offensive mais sont destinés à défendre le territoire turc. Pour Anders Fogh Rasmussen, leur déploiement devrait même « contribuer à la désescalade de la crise le long de la frontière sud-orientale de l'Otan ». Quant à l'armée turque, elle a insisté lundi sur le fait qu'ils ne serviraient en aucun cas à créer une zone d'exclusion aérienne sur la Syrie.



Un soldat turc patrouille le long de la frontière syrienne, où la tension ne cesse de croître. BULENT KILIC / AFP

Ces précisions visent à répondre aux critiques émises par Damas, Moscou et Téhéran, qui considèrent ces missiles comme une « provocation ». Le régime de Bachar Al Assad a fait savoir qu'il « fait porter au gouvernement (turc) la responsabilité de la militarisation de la situation à la frontière ». Quant à la Russie, elle estime que cette « escalade » pourrait provoquer un « conflit armé grave ». En Turquie, ce même type de critiques est relayé notamment par le principal parti d'opposition, le CHP (kémaliste), qui reproche au gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan d'accélérer « l'internationalisation » du conflit syrien. ■

REUTERS

## Accord entre l'armée nationale irakienne et les Kurdes

Bagdad, Irak - 26 novembre 2012 (Reuters)

**L'ÉTAT-MAJOR de l'armée irakienne et les commandants de la région autonome du Kurdistan se sont mis d'accord lundi pour discuter d'un retrait de leurs troupes déployées dans une région revendiquée par les deux parties, en geste d'apaisement.**

Bagdad et Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, ont renforcé la semaine dernière leurs positions près des villes de Kirkouk et de Khanakine, situées le long de la frontière intérieure, faisant craindre un regain de violences.

Pour tenter d'apaiser les tensions, des dirigeants de l'armée nationale et de l'armée du Kurdistan se sont rencontrés au ministère de la Défense à Bagdad lundi en présence d'un haut responsable militaire américain.

Selon un communiqué publié par le commandant en chef des forces

armées irakiennes, les deux parties se sont mises d'accord pour "entamer une pacification de la situation et discuter d'un mécanisme visant à renvoyer les forces qui ont été déployées après la crise à leurs positions initiales."

La délégation du Kurdistan va faire un rapport des discussions et de la situation au gouvernement central qui décidera de la marche à suivre, a indiqué de son côté un porte-parole du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan.

Un peu plus tôt lundi, le Premier ministre du Kurdistan irakien Nechirvan Barzani avait estimé que le dialogue était la seule solution possible pour résoudre la crise née entre autres de la mise en place dans la région d'un nouveau centre de commandement militaire irakien, dont les autorités kurdes exigent le démantèlement.

En août dernier, Washington était intervenu pour empêcher les deux camps de s'affronter dans la région.



# Quatre morts dans des attentats dans le Kurdistan irakien

KIRKOUK, Irak - 27 novembre 2012 (Reuters)

**QUATRE PERSONNES** ont été tuées dans trois attentats à la bombe perpétrés mardi à Kirkouk, dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, sur fond de tensions entre l'armée irakienne et les forces régionales kurdes.

Une voiture piégée a explosé à quelques mètres du siège du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), faisant deux morts, rapporte la police. Une seconde explosion s'est produite dans le même quartier, tuant une troisième personne, selon une source proche des services de sécurité.

Une personne a en outre trouvé la mort dans un attentat à la voiture piégée dans un autre quartier kurde de Kirkouk. Au total, 38 personnes ont été blessées dans les trois attentats à la bombe, selon des sources policières et hospitalières.

Les explosions n'ont pas été revendiquées mais les militants sunnites de l'Etat islamique en Irak (ISI), lié à Al Qaïda, mènent régulièrement des attaques dans le pays dont le bilan, pour le seul mois d'octobre, a atteint 144 morts.

Ces attentats surviennent au lendemain d'un accord conclu par l'état-major de l'armée irakienne et les commandants du Kurdistan sur l'ouverture de discussions en vue d'un retrait des troupes déployées



*Au moins quatre personnes ont été tuées et 38 autres blessées dans trois attentats à la bombe perpétrés mardi à Kirkouk, dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, sur fond de tensions entre l'armée irakienne et les forces régionales kurdes. /Photo prise le 27 novembre 2012/REUTERS/Ako Rasheed*

dans des territoires revendiqués par les deux parties.

Bagdad et Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, s'opposent sur la mise en place dans la région d'un nouveau centre de commandement militaire irakien dont les autorités kurdes exigent le démantèlement.

Des explosions ont également secoué la ville de Tuz Khurmato mardi, théâtre d'affrontements entre forces fédérales et troupes kurdes la semaine dernière. De même à Hawija, dans la province de Kirkouk, où plusieurs personnes ont été blessées dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée.



# Syrie: l'Iran met en garde l'opposition, rebelles et kurdes vers une guerre

DAMAS, 23 novembre 2012 (AFP)

**LE PRÉSIDENT** du Parlement iranien Ali Larijani a mis en garde vendredi l'opposition syrienne ainsi que le Qatar et l'Arabie saoudite contre toute action "aventuriste" en Syrie, où rebelles islamistes et combattants kurdes se préparaient à une guerre ouverte dans le nord du pays.

Autre allié du régime, Moscou a critiqué la décision turque d'installer des missiles anti-aériens Patriot à sa frontière avec la Syrie, mais Ankara a répliqué en soulignant leur caractère "purement défensif".

Ce vendredi, les adversaires de Bachar al-Assad s'apprêtaient à manifester sur le thème de "l'heure de la victoire approche", après les récents succès des insurgés dans l'est et le nord.

A Damas, M. Larijani, qui a rencontré le président Assad, s'en est pris sans les nommer au Qatar et à l'Arabie Saoudite, principaux soutiens et bailleurs de fonds de l'opposition.

"Certains dans la région veulent mener des actions aventuristes pour causer des problèmes à la Syrie", a-t-il dit aux journalistes.

"Mais, a-t-il ajouté, l'Iran apprécie toujours le rôle d'avant-garde joué par la Syrie dans le soutien à la Résistance", c'est-à-dire aux pays s'opposant à Israël et aux Etats-Unis.

Avant son départ de Téhéran, le président du Parlement avait critiqué les rebelles, qui ont infligé de récentes défaites aux troupes gouvernementales. "Certains groupes (d'opposition, ndr) au nom de réformes (...) cherchent à perturber la situation politique en Syrie", a-t-il dit, avant de préciser qu'il venait pour "pour tenter de trouver une solution au problème syrien".

"Nous soutenons la démocratie et la réforme en Syrie mais nous nous opposons à toute action aventuriste", a-t-il ajouté, selon des propos rapportés par l'agence ira-

nienne Mehr.

Il doit se rendre ensuite au Liban pour y rencontrer le président chiite du Parlement Nabih Berri, puis en Turquie, pays qui a demandé à l'Otan l'installation de Patriot à sa frontière avec la Syrie

Ce déploiement a suscité le mécontentement de la Russie qui y a vu un risque de provoquer un "conflit armé grave".

"Plus on accumule d'armes, plus elles risquent d'être utilisées", a estimé le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov.

## VERS UNE GUERRE TOTALE ENTRE REBELLES ET KURDES

En Syrie, les principaux mouvements kurdes syriens ont décidé de former une force militaire unie pour faire face à des centaines d'insurgés islamistes dans le nord-est de la Syrie, a rapporté un militant kurde.

Des combattants du Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie), affrontent depuis des jours des centaines de rebelles du Front Al-Nosra et de la brigade Ghouraba al-Cham à Rass Al-Aïn, localité syrienne à la frontière turque où les rebelles tiennent un poste-frontière.

"Les deux Conseils nationaux kurdes du Kurdistan de l'ouest ont convenu de former une force militaire unifiée regroupant les forces du PYD et les dissidents dans le Kurdistan", a affirmé ce militant se présentant sous le nom de Havidar. Dans leur terminologie, le Kurdistan ouest désigne la Syrie.

Ce militant hostile au régime a précisé que la réunion s'était tenue en Irak.

Dans le même temps, Al-Nosra et Ghouraba al-Cham, deux importants groupes islamistes radicaux, ont de leur côté appelé les rebelles à la rescousse, même si ces deux organisations ne font pas partie de la principale force armée d'opposition, l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL).

Le Qatar, qui a joué un rôle de premier plan dans l'unification le 11 novembre de la rébellion syrienne, a demandé à la Coalition de l'opposition de nommer un ambassadeur à Doha, a indiqué un haut responsable qatari.

Jeudi, les violences à travers la Syrie ont fait 138 morts, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), qui a décompté en s'appuyant sur un large réseau de médecins et militants 40.000 morts en 20 mois de conflits.○

## Talks to defuse Iraq army-Kurdish standoff make little headway

By Suadad al-Salhy

**BAGHDAD (Reuters)** - Talks to defuse a standoff between Iraqi troops and forces from the country's autonomous Kurdish region made little progress on Thursday with both sides further reinforcing positions on their disputed internal border.

The second military build-up this year illustrates how far relations between Baghdad's central government, led by Shi'ite Muslim Arabs, and ethnic Kurds have deteriorated, testing Iraq's federal cohesion nearly a year after American troops left.

Baghdad and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region earlier this week both sent troops to an area over which they both claim jurisdiction, raising the temperature in a long-running feud over land and oil rights.

Iraqi Kurdish President Massoud Barzani met Iraq's speaker of parliament on Thursday in an apparent effort to cool the row. A statement issued after the talks said Barzani had agreed to "open the door" to negotiations.

In the meantime, both Kurdish troops and the Iraqi army reinforced their position in and around the contested cities of Kirkuk and Khanaqin, a police source said.

A spokesman for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party (PUK), which co-governs the

Kurdish region, said their troops, known as Peshmerga, were under strict instruction not to engage with Iraqi forces. But a spokesman for the commander of the Iraqi security forces said Kurdish troops were provoking them.

"Despite efforts to calm the situation, the Peshmerga troops backed by rocket launchers and artillery have entered Khaniqeen and others have entered Kirkuk and Khaniqeen in civilian uniforms," he said.

The Iraqi army and Kurdish troops have previously come close to confrontation only to pull back at the last moment.

### IRAQ ARMY COMMAND CENTRE AT ISSUE

Washington intervened to end a similar standoff in August and is now again in contact with Iraqi and Kurdish officials to ease tension mounting over the formation of a new command centre for Iraqi forces to operate in the disputed areas.

A legislator with the Sadrist bloc, a critic of Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki within his coalition, said the talks were not serious and dismissed the entire conflict as a sham.

"The current escalation is deliberate and both sides do not intend to seek solutions, because the crisis is fabricated and it will end in a month,"

Amir al-Kinani told Reuters. "No one ready to fight, neither Shi'ites nor Kurds."

Kurdish political factions met on Thursday and denounced the Dijla Operations Command as a violation of the federal constitution and a sign of the danger Baghdad would repeat the "chauvinist attacks" of the past, referring to former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against them.

In a statement on the Kurdistan Regional Government's website, they called for the command centre to be immediately dismantled.

Maliki says the Dijla Operations Command is necessary to keep order in one of the most volatile parts of the country.

The latest escalation began a few days ago when Iraqi troops tried to search the office of a Kurdish political party in Tuz Khurmatu, 170 km (105 miles) north of the capital, triggering a clash with Peshmerga in which one passerby was killed.

Maliki has sparred more aggressively with Barzani since the withdrawal last year of U.S. troops who had served as a buffer between the federal Baghdad government and Kurdistan.

One of the major disputes revolves around Kurdistan's granting of contracts to foreign oil companies, which the central government says is illegal without its approval. □

## Syria rebels open new war front: against Kurds

**Two Kurdish national councils in western Kurdistan have agreed in Iraq to create united military force to fight Syrian rebels.**

Middle East Online

**BEIRUT** - Kurdish fighters have agreed to join forces in a standoff with hundreds of Islamist rebels in northeastern Syria, an activist opposed to President Bashar al-Assad said on Friday.

Hundreds of fighters loyal to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) -- which has close ties to Turkey's rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) -- have been locked in fierce battles with fighters of the jihadist Al-Nusra Front and allied Ghuraba al-Sham group in Ras al-Ain on the border with Turkey.

"The two Kurdish national councils in western Kurdistan have agreed in Iraq to create a united military force, bringing together PYD forces and other Kurdish dissidents" in Syria, said the activist, who identified himself as Havidar.

The two councils are the main Kurdish organisations active in Syria.

On July 11, the Kurdish National Council, which comprises several Syrian Kurdish parties, met in Iraq with the People's Council of Western Kurdistan, which is close to the PYD.

At the meeting they decided to form the Supreme Kurdish Council.

Friday's agreement was announced a day after the Ghuraba al-Sham called in a video posted on the Internet for Islamist volunteers to flock to Ras al-Ain for a drive on the provincial capital Hasakeh, whose



population is majority Kurdish.

"We of the Ghuraba al-Sham battalion call on the (mainstream rebel) Free Syrian Army and the mujahedeen to advance towards Ras al-Ain. Increase our numbers so that we can free the city of Hasakeh," an unidentified rebel commander said in the footage, standing among some 50 fighters.

"And we warn all those who stand in the way of this revolt... especially the PYD and the PKK, and any other armed group, against taking any action that contradicts with the path of the revolution," he added.

Syria's Arab-led rebels accuse the PYD of being in cahoots with Assad's regime.

Northern and northeastern Syria are home to the majority of the country's two million Kurds.

In July, the army withdrew from majority Kurdish areas, leaving the ethnic group's militia to fend for the minority's safety.

Although Syria's Kurds are opposed to the Assad regime, most have sought to remain neutral in the armed rebellion seeking to topple him.

Over time, they have been dragged into the fighting, after rebel assaults on majority Kurdish areas in key northern provinces. ●

# The Second Career of Abdullah Ocalan

By ANDREW FINKEL

ISTANBUL - Over a decade ago, I was a witness to one of the most cathartic episodes in postwar Turkish history. This week I was a witness to one of the most puzzling.

In February 1999, Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (also known as the P.K.K.), was abducted from a hideout in Kenya and returned to Turkey. By the end of May, he was sitting in a bullet-proof glass box in a purpose-built courthouse on Imrali Island, opposite Istanbul. He was on trial to answer for waging a ruthless guerrilla in the name of Kurdish independence, which is estimated to have cost more than 30,000 lives since 1984.

I had a rare ticket to attend the court proceedings, eight hearings spread over a month. Along with a handful of other journalists, diplomats and relatives of soldiers killed in action, I would go through retina scans and security checks before boarding a predawn hydrofoil to Imrali. Ocalan's lawyers and family took another craft.

For the mothers with photos of their sons in uniform, the news anchors and the hordes of demonstrators waiting for

our daily return to the mainland, the trial was the occasion for an outpouring of bitterness. After 15 years of conflict, with Ocalan finally in custody, popular frustration was uncorked.

And yet my clearest memory was just how unaffected by the drama unfolding around him the principal actor seemed to be. Ocalan once motioned in court his condolences to a woman whose husband, a police officer, had been shot before her eyes at a roadblock in 1995. But he made no great declarations about the Kurdish cause.

His general attitude toward the prosecutors seemed to be "Been there, done that." He behaved less like a prisoner in the dock than a politician plotting his next move. Forget about the past; it's time to move on.

Back then, he presented a simple choice to the court and to Turkey: he, Mandela-like, would get his supporters to cooperate with the authorities to end the fighting. After all, he claimed, he alone could bring Turkey's Kurdish conflict to an end. And if the government turned him down and, more so still, if he ever were executed - there would be "one hundred years of bloodshed."

Ocalan wasn't executed. He was sentenced to death in 1999, but in keeping

with its commitment the European Union as a candidate for membership, Turkey abolished capital punishment a few years later. So Ocalan is still in Imrali prison. And he is still a commanding figure outside it, even though the P.K.K., particularly its militant wing based in the mountains of northern Iraq, isn't under his control.

Omerli, the village where he was born, is a place of pilgrimage; his birthday is celebrated there like a saint's day. And his influence over Kurdish activists everywhere is still significant.

Over the course of this autumn, an estimated 1,700 Kurdish militants held in extended pretrial detention went on a hunger strike. Some of their supporters, including members of Parliament like Leyla Zana, joined in. The protesters were demanding the right to defend themselves in court in Kurdish (to this, the government says it is prepared to accede) and the right for their children to be educated in Kurdish (this, the government denies, apart from allowing a few elective courses in school).

They were also calling for Ocalan to be allowed to see his counsel: For the last 15 months Ocalan has been denied access to his lawyers on the pretext that the boat used to transport them to his island prison is in need of repair.

The government refused to negotiate - in public at least. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan toyed with the idea of restoring the death penalty. Meanwhile, even after the strike had been going on for over two months - for the fasters, a medical tipping point toward death or irreparable brain damage - P.K.K. leaders were still saying it wasn't up to them to call off the protest.

And so on Nov. 11, the 67th day of the strike, it was Ocalan who, communicating from prison through his brother, said it should end. He may have intended this as a humanitarian gesture, but it was also a demonstration of power.

There have been clandestine talks between the Turkish government and the P.K.K. before, but they have been called off upon becoming public knowledge. Now that the strike is over, the Justice Ministry has announced that, if necessary, negotiations could resume. With them, so it would appear, also resumes the career of Abdullah Ocalan.



Turkish Kurds held a poster of jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan during a gathering to celebrate Noruz, the Kurdish New Year in Istanbul in 2011. Mustafa Ozer/Agence France-Presse

# Iraq's Kurds: we don't want a new war with Iraq

**Locals do not seem to be convinced there will be military confrontation between Iran and Kurdistan despite growing troop number in area.**

Middle East Online

Niqash / By Zanko Ahmad - Sulaymaniyah

**RECENT** clashes between the Iraq army and troops from Iraqi Kurdistan have alarmed many. But while troop numbers in the area grow, the locals don't seem to be convinced. Is it just pre-election sabre rattling? Geo-political? Or is what the politicians say true, and war is imminent?

"It is the sound of war echoing again. The Kurdish may soon see blood. We are all with you so don't lose your spirit."

Those are the lyrics to a famous song that is broadcast by media in the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan whenever the local military are preparing for a confrontation of some kind. Locals know that when they hear that song then there is, as they say, "the smell of war".

But the song is not having the same effect as it used to. Iraqi Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous region with its own government, legislation and military. Although the mixture of people living here is broad – including Christians, Shiite and Sunni Muslims and a variety of other ethnic and religious minorities – almost all the majority - of Kurdish ethnicity - identify as Kurdish before anything else.

The Kurdish people are one of the largest ethnic groups in the world without an actual homeland and Kurdish living in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey share a language, culture and ethnicity. For many, the idea of a nation of their own, a greater Kurdistan, is something to strive for – and in fact, this is one of the biggest conflicts between militant Kurdish fighters who believe in that dream and the governments of the various countries in which they live, such as, for example, Turkey.

Currently the closest the Kurdish get to their own country though is Iraqi Kurdistan and after years of persecution by the former Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein, they are not planning to give up their autonomy or rights.

Up until relatively recently the Iraqi Kurdish politicians and those in Baghdad seemed to have established a relatively amicable, if not exactly untroubled, relationship. However recently tensions have been building again.

Earlier this year one of the most senior Iraqi Kurdish politicians, Massoud Barzani, described Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki as a dictator, Iraqi Kurdistan signed oil deals with major multi-national companies that Baghdad authorities described as illegal and trouble seemed to be brewing again about Iraq's so-called "disputed territories". Basically these are lands that Iraqi Kurdistan says belong to their region whereas Baghdad says the lands belong to the rest of Iraq.

Then in September 2012, the formation of a new military command post – the Tigris Operation Command - in Kirkuk, in the middle of the area of disputed territories, saw tensions escalate again. High ranking Kurdish officials called the new outpost a conspiracy by Baghdad to take control of Kurdish areas while Arab politicians saw the new Iraqi forces as a positive addition to local security in areas that are still some of Iraq's most dangerous.

And ever since the formation of this military command, analysts have speculated that, if the matter was not handled slowly and carefully, there was potential for clashes between the two military forces present – the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces, tasked with protecting the Iraqi Kurdish territory, and the Iraqi army sent in by al-Maliki's office.

The events of the past week in the district of Tuz Khurmatu in the Salahaddin province have proven them right.

Last Friday there were clashes between forces made up of the Iraqi police and army and Iraqi Kurdish military with allegiance to one of the two major

political parties running the semi-autonomous region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan or PUK. Clashes between the two groups left one civilian dead and wounded two PUK military members, five Iraqi police and eight members of the Iraqi army.

The incident was extremely worrying with many fearing that it could be the spark that ignited a more heated military exchange. The first response by Barzani, who heads the PUK and who is also the President of the Iraqi Kurdish region, was to ask the people of Iraqi Kurdistan to be prepared for any unwanted eventualities. Of the heads of the two major political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, Barzani has been the most confrontational.

The day after the clashes, the Iraqi Kurdish Minister for Peshmerga – the name given to the Iraqi Kurdish military – and other ranking politicians and military leaders visited Tuz Khurmatu. The Minister, Jafar Mustafa, said that all of his troops were ready to defend the disputed areas and Peshmerga military commander, Mahmoud Sankawi, said that his troops were prepared to confront those he described as "occupying forces".

Meanwhile the Iraqi Kurdish media were reporting that the new Tigris Operation Command had been placed on the highest level of alertness and that more troops from the Iraqi army were being sent into the area.

Sources from within the Peshmerga and the two major political parties that run Iraqi Kurdistan – besides the PUK there is also the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) – have said that "war is at the doors". And the most recent updates suggest that the sabre rattling from both sides appears to be continuing.

However there is one significant group that doesn't appear so keen on confrontation: the ordinary people of Iraqi Kurdistan. Mostly it seems they're not sure why these confrontations are happening – yesterday's allies are enemies all of a sudden - and what the possible benefits to anyone could be.

"People in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan are not ready to pay the price for these irrational decisions taken by officials," Dalir Ahmad, a professor of political science at the University of Sulaymaniyah told NIQASH. "The events in Iraq are being driven by what is going on in Iran, Turkey and Syria. It's the result of a regional equation and these three countries are part of it. The agendas of the three countries are fuelling the confrontations between Iraq and Kurdistan. Moreover, the two sides – Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan – are also doing this in preparation for the forthcoming provincial elections." The latter are due to be held in April 2013.

Ahmad lamented the fact that media on both sides were fuelling the bad feelings with inflammatory stories. But he also believed that the majority of people in both Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraq understood the seriousness of any armed conflict and would not support further fighting. "The people are aware that this is not a war between the Arabs and the Kurds," Ahmad said. "They know it is a war between two armed militias who only understand the use of force to solve problems."

Meanwhile many Iraqi Kurdish politicians were also calling for dialogue. "The Kurds will not abandon any part of the disputed areas. But this does not mean that they want to solve the conflict by resorting to force," suggested Latif Sheikh Mustafa, a member of Iraqi Kurdish opposition party, the Change movement.

"Both parties bear responsibility for this conflict," Mustafa told NIQASH. "Unfortunately neither the Iraqis nor the Kurds have many diplomats or real statesmen among them and that's why conflicts like this develop into armed confrontations. Basically they are unable to find a solution at the meeting table so they use displays of force instead."

"The people of Kurdistan don't want this war," Mustafa continued. "They know that a big part of this conflict relates to politics. They know that al-Maliki doesn't understand that he can't exert himself like this and violate the Constitution. Many Iraqi leaders have tried to establish themselves in Iraqi Kurdistan – but it never lasts for long."

"And here the Kurdish people of this region don't trust their two ruling parties; they don't trust them taking these steps. Their leaders have told the Kurdish people before that there is big danger ahead, that will threaten their security and regional stability, and nothing has really happened. So the people just don't believe them."

For a large part of the population in Iraqi Kurdistan, the current events are similar to the fable about the boy who cried "wolf", Mustafa says.

Despite troops being sent into the area by both sides, locals in Iraqi Kurdistan still don't seem to be singing the lyrics of that famous war song with any conviction. Whether they'll be forced to or not, remains to be seen – but doubtless many on both sides in this war-ravaged nation are hoping they'll never have to sing that particular song again. ●

## Iran objects to Turkey's missile request

**Beirut -Associated Press** -Iran lashed out Friday at Turkey for requesting that NATO supply it with Patriot surface-to-air missiles to deploy along the border with Syria, denouncing the step by Ankara as counterproductive.

Iranian parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani made the remarks after a visit to Damascus, a show of support by Tehran to its increasingly diplomatically isolated ally.

"The internal crisis in Syria cannot be solved through the deployment of such weapons," Larijani, who is close to the Islamic Republic's supreme leader, said at a news conference in Beirut where he went after leaving Syria.

Turkey's request earlier this week follows several incidents in which violence has spilled across the border from the civil war in

Syria, frequently mortar rounds falling a short distance inside. Patriots would be useful in intercepting ballistic missiles - a much more serious but still hypothetical threat.

NATO said Wednesday it will consider the request "without delay."

The Syrian Foreign Ministry also criticized the Turkish move, calling it "a new provocative step."

Larijani, who met Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus earlier Friday, said Iran was seeking a peaceful solution to the war in Syria.

"The difference between us and the others when it comes to Syria is that the others want to impose democracy through weapons," he said. "Iran cannot accept or support such a way."

Iran is Assad's strongest ally in the region, and antigovernment activists accuse Tehran of sending both weapons and fighters to Syria.

Syria's conflict erupted in March 2011 with an uprising against Assad's regime, inspired by other Arab Spring revolts, but quickly morphed into a civil war that has since killed more than 40,000 people, according to activists.

In violence around Syria Friday, Islamic extremists, including members of the al Qaeda-inspired Jabhat al-Nusra group, battled with pro-government Kurdish gunmen in the northern town of Ras al-Ayan near the border with Turkey, activists said.

Kurdish activist Mustafa Osso and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in Britain had no reports of casualties

In Damascus, regime forces shelled the neighborhoods of Tadamon and Hajar Aswad, where rebels and government troops have clashed for weeks. □

## Syrian Kurds in talks to join forces

**BEIRUT:** Two rival Kurdish groups are in talks aimed at forming a joint force in a standoff with hundreds of Islamist rebels in northeastern Syria, Kurdish representatives said Friday.

Hundreds of fighters loyal to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) - which has close ties to Turkey's rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - have been locked in fierce battles with fighters of the jihadist Al-Nusra Front and allied Ghuraba al-Sham group in Ras al-Ain on the Syrian border with Turkey.

An agreement would set the stage for an expanded conflict in the area between Islamist rebels

opposed to Syrian President Bashar Assad and Syrian Kurdish forces.

"We initially agreed on forming these [joint] forces that do not belong to any side, and discussions are ongoing now" in Irbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, Mohammad Rashed, a representative of the People's Council of Western Kurdistan told AFP.

Abdul Salam Ahmad, another leader with the People's Council of Western Kurdistan, said talks had agreed on the formation of a joint military unit called the "Kurdish Army" that will be open to any Kurdish

volunteer and not affiliated with any particular party. PYD's main militia will act as the foundation of the new group.

But others involved in the talks suggested the agreement was far from being finalized. Mustafa Juma'a, the general secretary of the Kurdish Azadi Party and a member of the Kurdish National Council, said any agreement will be difficult to implement.

"The PYD still just want to take control of all the Kurdish territories in Syria," Juma'a said.

Friday's talks came a day after the Ghuraba al-Sham brigade called for - in a video pos-

ted on the Internet - Islamist volunteers to flock to Ras al-Ain for a drive on the majority Kurdish city of Hassakeh.

"We of the Ghuraba al-Sham battalion call on the Free Syrian Army and the mujahedeen to advance toward Ras al-Ain," an unidentified rebel commander said in the footage.

"We warn all those who stand in the way of this revolt ... especially the PYD, the PKK, and any other armed group, against taking any action that contradicts the path of the revolution," he added. - With AFP. ■

## Turkey, Iraq exchange sharp rhetoric with Syria as backdrop

Syrian war fallout » Leaders trade barbs; U.S. treads carefully.

By Roy Gutman

McClatchy Newspapers

**Istanbul** • Turkish and Iraqi leaders exchanged sharp, rhetorical assaults Friday, each warning of growing instability in the other's country, in the latest sign that tensions stoked by Syria's civil war are spilling over into the region.

Tayyip Recep Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, said this week that recent clashes in the north of Iraq between Iraqi government forces and the Peshmerga, who report to the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, "could be an oil feud as well as a sectarian conflict."

He was referring to oil deals between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has criticized as well ➤

► as al-Maliki's crackdown this past year on leaders of Iraq's Sunni Muslim minority, who first sought refuge in Kurdistan and later in Turkey.

"We always had concerns that, God forbid, this may turn into a sectarian clash. Now our fears are slowly becoming reality. This gives us cause to be concerned," Erdogan said this week.

Al-Maliki retorted Friday by effectively calling for Erdogan's removal from power, even as he warned that Turkey could be descending into civil war.

"Erdogan should focus his attention on addressing Turkey's domestic issues, which raise our concern, as Turkey heads toward civil war," al-Maliki said in a statement released by his office.

He predicted that the "Turkish people are looking forward to changing the political situation to protect Turkey from worsening domestic and foreign problems."

Turkey responded by deriding al-Maliki's comments as "nonsensical remarks," "groundless claims" and "fictitious evaluations." The Foreign Ministry said al-Maliki had "lost touch with reality" and "confused the state of affairs in Iraq with that of Turkey" and called on him to "abandon policies that escalate tensions in the country."

The United States in some ways is caught in the middle, committed to defending Turkey as a NATO ally but also linked with Iraq as a strategic partner that Washington is helping to arm.

Among the factors leading to the rhetorical volleys are two sets of clashes in the past week. According to news reports, 12 Iraqi troops died Monday in clashes with the Peshmerga, Kurdistan's self-defense force, near Tikrit. Al-Maliki sent tanks and armored vehicles to the oil-rich Kirkuk region - which both Kurdistan and the central government claim - among other incidents. □

## Kurds say they'll stop Islamist rebels from moving along Syria's border with Turkey

By David Enders  
McClatchy Newspapers

**RAS AL AYN, Syria** — A tense truce between Syrian rebels and a Kurdish militia held Tuesday in the city of Ras al Ayn, fast against the border with Turkey. But neither side hid its disdain for the other, and both continued to hold prisoners in a standoff that suggests rebel hopes to push their control further east faces an all but certain challenge.

Ras al Ayn fell to the rebels almost two weeks ago, the first rebel victory in the country's predominantly Kurdish northeast. But that did not end fighting here. At least five members of a Kurdish political party, the United Democratic Party, known locally as the PYD, were killed last week when they exchanged fire with the rebels, whom the Kurds asked to leave. Kurds make up about 10 percent of Syria's population but are a majority in Hasaka province, where Ras al Ayn is located.

With the rebels saying they intend to move from Ras al Ayn east to the city of Qamishli, PYD's militia on Monday set up 10 checkpoints between Ras al Ayn and the largely Kurdish city of Dar Basiyeh, about 40 miles to the east.

Khabad Ibrahim, one of the militia's commanders, said that the group would allow some rebel fighters to pass but that members of Islamist groups who have been at the forefront of recent rebel victories would be kept back. He referred to them as "al Qaida" — a distinction that became clearer during the fight for Ras al Ayn.

The rebels in Ras al Ayn largely fall into two camps: those who call themselves the Free Syrian Army and operate under the nominal command of military councils that have been set up in each of the country's 14 provinces, generally under the leadership of a defected Syrian army officer; and the mujahedeen, as they call themselves, who are members of conservative Islamist groups who espouse a post-Assad Syria characterized by Islamic Shariah law.

In Ras al Ayn, the two groups worked in a pattern that repeats itself across the country — the mujahedeen do the heaviest fighting and make up the majority of frontline soldiers, while the military councils act as a rear guard, moving in to control territory behind the conservative rebels' offensive.

The military councils offer a vision of a democratic Syria and complain that the mujahedeen receive more support from donors abroad than the councils do, further increasing the Islamist fighters' influence.

On Monday, it was clear that one of the Islamist groups, Jabhat al Nusra, has no plans to withdraw from Ras al Ayn. It also appears to have close operational links with the military council in Ras al Ayn, as well as Ghroba al Sham, the largest group of fighters in the



A Syrian man covers the face of a Syrian soldier killed by rebels near Ras al Ayn, Syria - David Enders /MCT

city. Ghroba al Sham is considered by other rebel groups as having an ideology similar to Jabhat al Nusra's. It operates outside the command of a military council.

At Jabhat al Nusra's base in Ras al Ayn, the group's leader apologized to a waiting journalist. He said he didn't have time for an interview because he had to meet with PYD representatives to discuss a cease-fire agreement.

Hassan Abdullah, the commander of the local military council, said that meetings were taking place to create a civilian body to administer Ras al Ayn, whose residents largely fled when the fighting here began and have yet to return. There have been complaints of looting in the lawlessness that followed.

"What can we do? We are trapped between two sides," asked one man who had returned to his home on Monday to check on it and said he planned to leave the city again before the end of the day. He declined to give his name.

As for rebel and Kurdish tensions, they are likely to get worse. The rebels suspect that the PYD is in fact a cover for continued control of the northeast by the government of President Bashar Assad, whose troops withdrew from the Kurdish areas four months ago, ceding control to the PYD.

But other Kurds have rallied to the PYD as the rebels have moved into Kurdish areas, including a group in Hasaka city, south of Ras al Ayn, that proposed setting up a "Free Kurdish Army" to act as a buffer between the PYD and the rebels. Now the men who intended to set up this new militia have said they would view any attack on the PYD as an attack on them. □

# Syria is central to holding together the Mideast



By Condoleezza Rice,  
Condoleezza Rice was secretary of state from 2005 to 2009.

**T**he civil war in Syria may well be the last act in the story of the disintegration of the Middle East as we know it. The opportunity to hold the region together and to rebuild it on a firmer foundation of tolerance, freedom and, eventually, democratic stability is slipping from our grasp.

Egypt and Iran have long, continuous histories and strong national identities. Turkey does as well, except for the matter of the Kurds, who are still largely unassimilated, mistrusted by Ankara and tempted by the hope of independent nationhood.

Every other important state is a modern construct, created by the British and the French, who drew borders like lines on the back of an envelope, often without regard for ethnic and sectarian differences. The results: A Bahrain that is 70 percent Shiite, governed by a Sunni monarch. Saudi Arabia was created with a 10 percent Shiite population in its richest provinces to the east. Iraq is 65 percent Shiite, 20 percent Sunni Arab, and a mix of Kurds and others, all ruled until 2003 by an iron-fisted Sunni dictator. Jordan's population is almost 70 percent Palestinian. Lebanon is roughly divided among Sunnis, Shiites and Christians. And then there is Syria: a conglomerate of Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds and others, ruled by the Alawite minority.

The fragile state structure of the Middle East has been held together for decades by monarchs and dictators. But as the desire for freedom has spread from Tunis to Cairo to Damascus, authoritarians have lost their grip. The danger now is that the artificial states could fly apart.

In Iraq, after overthrowing Saddam Hussein, the United States hoped that a fledgling multi-ethnic, multi-confession-

al democracy could do what authoritarians could not: give all of these groups a stake in a common future. To an extent it has, with elections repeatedly producing inclusive governments. But the institutions are young and fragile, and they are groaning under the weight of the region's broader sectarian explosion. The conflict in Syria is pushing Iraq and others to the breaking point. At the same time, U.S. disengagement has tempted Iraqi politicians to move toward sectarian allies for survival. If Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki cannot count on the Americans, he will take no risks with Tehran.

The great mistake of the past year has been to define the conflict with Bashar al-Assad's regime as a humanitarian one. The regime in Damascus has been brutal, and many innocent people have been slaughtered. But this was no replay of Libya. Much more is at stake.

As Syria crumbles, Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds are being drawn into a regional web of sectarian allegiances. Karl Marx once called on workers of the world to unite across national boundaries. He told them that they had more in common with each other than with the ruling classes that oppressed them in the name of nationalism. Marx exhorted workers to throw off the "false consciousness" of national identity.

Today's Karl Marx is Iran. It envisions the spread of its influence among Shiites, uniting them under the theocratic flag of Tehran — destroying the integrity of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Lebanon. Iran uses terrorist groups, Hezbollah and the Shiite militias in southern Iraq to do its bidding. Syria is the linchpin, the bridge into the Arab Middle East. Tehran no longer hides the fact that its security forces are working in Syria to prop up Assad. In this context, Tehran's sprint toward a nuclear weapon is a problem not just for Israel but the region as a whole.

In response, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other neighboring powers arm and sup-

port Sunni factions. The Turks are being drawn into the conflict, desperately fearful that the Kurds will break away in Syria and push their brethren in Turkey to do the same. Missile and mortar strikes are increasingly common across the borders of Israel and Turkey. Ankara's cries to NATO for help last month should have gotten our attention.

But where is the United States? America has spent months trying to get the Russians and the Chinese to agree to toothless U.N. resolutions to "end the bloodshed," as though Moscow will abandon Assad and Beijing really cares about chaos in the Middle East. Vladimir Putin is not a sentimental man. But if he believes that Assad can survive, he will do nothing to undermine him.

In recent days, France, Britain and Turkey have stepped into the diplomatic vacuum to recognize a newly formed opposition that is broadly representative of all Syrians. The United States should follow their lead and then vet and arm the unified group with defensive weapons on the condition that it pursues an inclusive post-Assad framework. The United States and its allies should also consider establishing a no-fly zone to protect the innocent. America's weight and influence are needed. Leaving this to regional powers, whose interests are not identical to ours, will only exacerbate the deepening sectarianism.

Certainly there are risks. After more than a year of brutal conflict, the most extreme elements of the opposition — including al-Qaeda — have been empowered. Civil wars tend to strengthen the worst forces. The overthrow of Assad could indeed bring these dangerous groups to power.

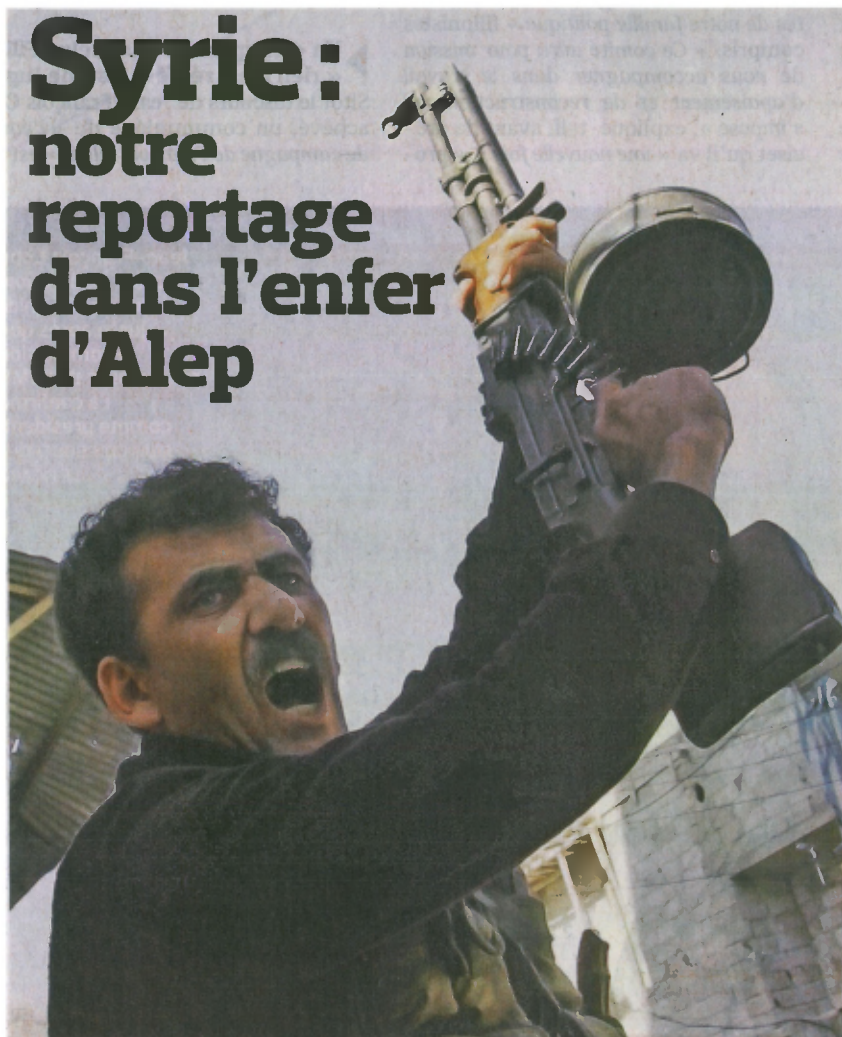
But the breakdown of the Middle East state system is a graver risk. Iran will win, our allies will lose, and for decades the region's misery and violence will make today's chaos look tame.

War is not receding in the Middle East. It is building to a crescendo. Our elections are over. Now, America must act.



# La guerre s'est figée dans le dédale de la vieille

## ville d'Alep



### Syrie: notre reportage dans l'enfer d'Alep

ADRIEN JAULMES  
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À ALEP

ON SE BAT dans la vieille ville d'Alep. Dans le dédale des souks couverts, les insurgés syriens et les soldats de l'armée régulière se canardent d'un coin de rue à l'autre, en s'abritant sous les porches ouvragés des hammams et devant les lourdes portes cloutées des caravansérails. Une lumière spectrale tombe depuis les lucarnes des plafonds voûtés. Des chats errent dans les détritiques et les gravats. La pluie goutte comme dans une grotte. Des murs de pierre ont été renversés par les explosions. Le centre historique d'Alep, classé par l'Unesco au patrimoine mondial de l'humanité, est l'une des lignes de front entre les forces du gouvernement de Bachar el-Assad et les révolutionnaires de l'Armée syrienne libre. Mais depuis plusieurs semaines, personne n'avance ni ne recule. Les rebelles n'ont pas assez de munitions pour continuer leur progression. Le régime n'a pas assez de soldats pour regagner le terrain perdu.

Dans les allées désertes, des groupes de combattants rebelles de l'ASL campent dans des magasins, assis sur des

chaises en plastique autour d'un réchaud. «Je n'ai plus qu'un seul chargeur», dit Abdel Hamid Hassan, un combattant révolutionnaire. «Nous n'avons pas assez de munitions pour avancer. Nos seules sources d'approvisionnement sont les armes que l'on achète au marché noir, parfois aux soldats eux-mêmes, ou celles que l'on capture. J'ai demandé à ma famille qui vit à Beyrouth de m'envoyer une mitrailleuse lourde. À la place, j'ai reçu ce téléphone Galaxy», dit-il.

#### Comme à Dresde ou à Grozny

À moins de cent mètres de sa position, le porche de la grande mosquée des Omeyyades est sous le feu des tireurs adverses. «Nous sommes parvenus à entrer dans la cour de la mosquée, mais les soldats étaient cachés dans les caves. Ils nous ont pris par surprise et nous avons dû nous replier», explique Abdel Hamid.

La citadelle d'Alep a retrouvé son rôle militaire. Encerclée par l'ASL, la forteresse médiévale perchée sur son glacis est toujours aux mains des forces gouvernementales. Depuis le haut des murs, les francs-tireurs ouvrent le feu sur les passants imprudents.

La bataille d'Alep s'est figée en une sinistre guerre de positions. La ville est coupée en deux le long d'une ligne qui zigzague selon un vague axe nord-sud. Les immenses faubourgs populaires de l'Est et du Sud sont sous le contrôle des révolutionnaires. Entrés fin juillet par surprise dans la ville, ils ont résisté à la contre-offensive du régime, et même étendu leur périmètre.

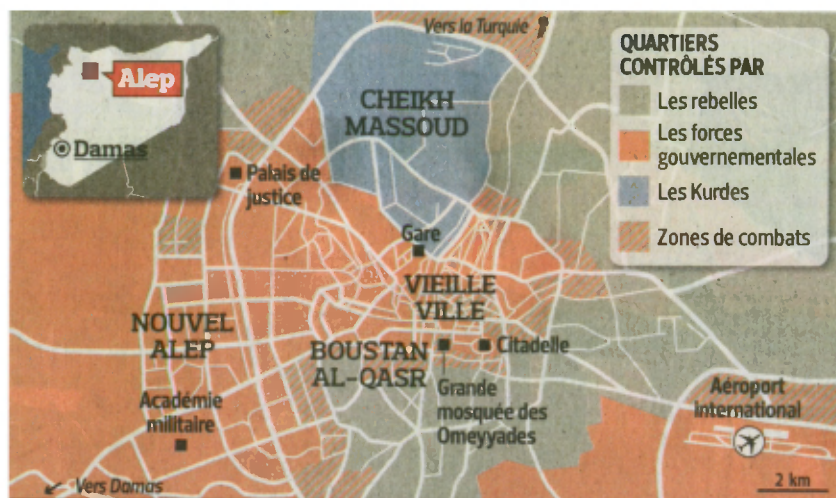
Mais le gouvernement tient toujours le centre d'Alep. La caserne de Bab el-Franj, le quartier général, et le palais de justice sont sous son contrôle, ainsi que l'aéroport, au sud-est. Incapable de regagner le terrain perdu, l'artillerie gouvernementale bombarde la partie de la ville aux mains des rebelles, faisant de nombreuses victimes civiles.

Des pâtés de maisons entiers ont été détruits. Alep évoque par endroits Dresde ou Grozny. Les obus s'abattent à l'aveuglette, sans réel objectif militaire, ni d'autres résultats que de terroriser la population. «J'étais à Bagdad en 2003. Les bombardements d'Alep sont pires que ceux des Américains. Eux visaient des cibles militaires, Bachar cherche à tuer les gens», dit Abou Ibrahim, un habitant resté dans son immeuble presque désert.

**« Quelques lance-missiles anti-aériens suffiraient. Mais aucun pays étranger n'accepte de nous en fournir »**

Beaucoup d'Aleppins ont fui à la campagne ou vers les camps de réfugiés de Turquie. Ceux qui restent s'accrochent à leurs maisons privées d'électricité. La pluie glacée qui s'est mise à tomber ces dernières semaines forme d'immenses mares d'eau boueuse dans les rues pleines de gravats. Les ordures que personne ne ramasse plus pourrissent en tas énormes et nauséabonds. Les habitants y mettent le feu pour tenter d'endiguer cette prolifération, et la nuit est trouée des flammes sinistres et puantes des poubelles en feu.

Pendant la journée, la circulation reprend un peu. Les habitants sortent pour s'approvisionner aux magasins qui étalent leurs marchandises sur le trottoir, ou se rassemblent en longues queues devant les boulangeries. Pendant les éclaircies, on jette des coups d'œil in-



quiets vers le ciel. Les Albatros, avions d'entraînement reconvertis dans l'attaque au sol, tournoient avant de larguer leurs bombes en pleine ville ou de mitrailler les rues.

### Des hôpitaux débordés

« Sans les avions, nous pourrions en finir en quelques jours avec l'armée de Bachar et prendre tout Alep », dit Abdallah Yassin, un combattant de l'ASL devenu l'un des responsables des médias pour la rébellion. « Quelques lance-missiles anti-aériens suffiraient. Mais aucun pays étranger n'accepte de nous en fournir. »

La vie s'organise malgré les pénuries. Les vendeurs d'essence alignent sur la chaussée des bidons et des bouteilles en plastique pleines de liquide verdâtre. Les écoles sont fermées depuis des mois. Des bénévoles donnent des cours privés dans les mosquées.

Les rares hôpitaux sont débordés. À la clinique Dar al-Shifaat, transformée en hôpital de campagne, les ambulances et les voitures particulières amènent régulièrement les blessés des bombardements. Il y a du sang par terre et des ci-vières ensanglantées. Des familles, des combattants rebelles se bousculent dans le hall d'entrée. Quatre médecins opèrent 24 heures sur 24. Le Dr Abou Rayan était en deuxième année de chirurgie à l'Université de Moscou avant de rentrer en Syrie. Il n'a pas fini son cursus mais depuis son retour a acquis plus d'expérience que beaucoup d'autres étudiants. « On manque de tout et on n'a pas vraiment de quoi opérer. Je suis étudiant et certains médecins n'ont jamais fait de chirurgie. On se contente de stabiliser les

blessés, pour pouvoir les évacuer vers la Turquie. »

Le docteur vit dans les quartiers sous contrôle gouvernemental, et traverse régulièrement les lignes, la peur au ventre. L'un des points de passage entre les deux côtés de la ville se trouve au nord d'Alep, sur l'avenue qui passe devant Dar al-Agaza, une institution pour handicapés de l'Église arménienne. Des sacs de sable et un drapeau marquent les dernières positions des rebelles. « On n'est jamais allés plus loin », explique Salah, un adolescent à la moustache naissante qui monte la garde avec son cousin.

Des carcasses de bus protègent les passants des francs-tireurs. À l'autre bout de l'avenue se trouvent les positions des Kurdes du PKK au pied du quartier de Cheikh Massoud. Complication supplémentaire dans une Syrie en

### « Beaucoup d'Aleppins ont fui à la campagne ou vers les camps de réfugiés de Turquie »

plein chaos, les Kurdes syriens mènent leur propre jeu. Leurs organisations, et notamment le PKK, ont pris les armes et transformés leurs quartiers et leurs villages en bastions autonomes. Ils sont ménagés par le régime syrien, qui a besoin de tous les soutiens et notamment celui des minorités, mais aussi par les révolutionnaires, qui ont déjà assez à faire avec Bachar el-Assad. Des combats sporadiques opposent pourtant de plus en plus fréquemment l'ASL aux Kurdes,

et les combattants rebelles cachent à peine leur intention de « régler le problème kurde » dès qu'ils en auront fini avec le régime.

Les rebelles vérifient vaguement les véhicules qui vont et viennent depuis le côté gouvernemental. Les taxis qui viennent du secteur gouvernemental expliquent qu'il y a des points de contrôle de l'armée partout de l'autre côté. « Mais là-bas, tout est calme, c'est un autre monde », dit B., une jeune fille venue avec sa sœur depuis le côté gouvernemental pour participer à une manifestation anti-Bachar. « Le gouvernement veut convaincre les gens que la vie est normale. Il essaye aussi d'instiller la peur entre les communautés. Les chrétiens sont terrifiés par la perspective d'une prise du pouvoir par les musulmans. Je ne sais pas ce qui va se passer, mais j'ai du mal à croire qu'un nouveau gouvernement puisse être pire que celui de Bachar. »

### Une lente désintégration

Chaque vendredi, les révolutionnaires organisent des rassemblements devant les mosquées, à la sortie de la prière. Dans le quartier de Boustan al-Qasr, quelques centaines de participants chantent des slogans hostiles à Bachar el-Assad en agitant des drapeaux révolutionnaires syriens. Ce sont surtout des jeunes. La fracture de la révolution est aussi générationnelle. Ces petites manifestations pas très spontanées sont destinées à entretenir le moral des révolutionnaires, à convaincre les hésitants et à démontrer que la longue ère de la peur est terminée.

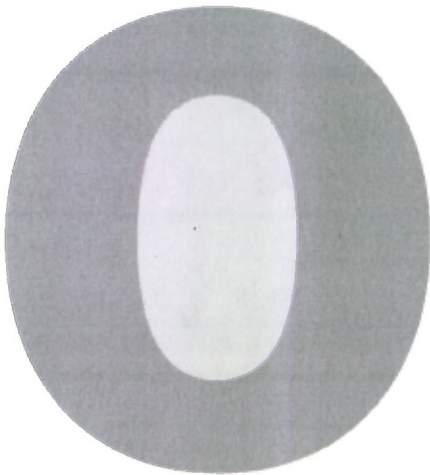
Mais même si le régime de Bachar el-Assad ne fait que perdre du terrain au fil des mois, les révolutionnaires peinent toujours à rallier le reste de la population syrienne. L'impasse militaire du soulèvement se double toujours d'une impasse politique. Minorités chrétienne, alaouite ou druze craignant une révolution essentiellement sunnite et en partie infiltrée par des djihadistes radicaux, bourgeoisie effrayée par le désordre, soldats et fonctionnaires restés loyaux à l'État syrien ou simples attentistes, soutiennent toujours un régime aux abois. Les récents succès des révolutionnaires qui s'attaquent à présent aux voies de communication qui relient encore Alep à Damas et aux aérodromes de l'armée, pourraient cependant accélérer la lente désintégration du régime. ■

**TIME** November 26, 2012

# ALEPPO'S DEADLY STALEMATE

A visit to Syria's largest city, festering with sectarianism as the regime and rebels deadlock

BY RANIA ABOUZEID/ALEPPO



ONLY STRAY CATS HAVE THE COURAGE TO roam the streets in this part of Syria's largest city. As the felines freely pick their way through rubble and garbage, human beings dart from corner to corner, anxious bands of rebel fighters dashing between the bullets of regime snipers.

The neighborhood is called Bustan al-Basha and used to be the place where a lot of Aleppo's citizens would take their cars for repair. It was a mixed Christian-Sunni working-class district, bordering the Kurdish district of Sheikh Maksoud. That is in the past tense because, of the thousands of residents who once lived there, only three remain. The trio live on Rawand Street, which is in rebel hands. Marie, a Christian Armenian, is a retired kindergarten teacher; gray-haired Abdel-Latif is a retired civil servant; and cherubic young Abdel-Maten is a baker who hasn't been to his workplace for months, even though it is less than 2 km away, because

it is in Midan, a neighborhood under regime control. "I've been living here for 20 years," says Marie as she peeks out from her balcony, wiping her soapy hands on a dishcloth. "I'm still here because where am I going to go? This is my home. We are counting on God and staying, but you know, honestly, it's like I went to bed one night and the next morning everyone was gone. When and how they left, I don't know. It happened very suddenly."

Syria's grinding civil war swept into its largest city in late July. A proud and ancient cosmopolis, Aleppo is home to more than 2 million of Syria's 23 million people, but it has now been crudely carved into pro- and antiregime pockets, the edges of which occasionally change

hands. It is the deadliest sort of stalemate, with international diplomacy struggling to find a solution as the government of President Bashar Assad pursues a course of survival via atrocity and the Syrian opposition in exile once again changes leadership in another attempt to weave its disparate ideological and military strands together. The grinding war of attrition has turned parts of Aleppo, like Bustan al-Basha, into wastelands.

The street warfare isn't winning the rebels any more friends. The urbane Aleppans have never really warmed to the opposition fighters, most of whom hail from religiously conservative Sunni Muslim small towns—and there is growing concern that the rebels are turning more sectarian. The rebels know they're not really welcome. "The Aleppans here, all of them,

are loyal to the criminal Bashar, they inform on us, they tell the regime where we are, where we go, what we do, even now," says Abu Sadek, a defector from Assad's military now with Liwa Suqoor al-Sha'ba, one of the three rebel units in Bustan al-Basha. "If God wasn't with us, we would have been wiped out a long time ago."

Assad's assault has certainly been ferocious. Many of Bustan al-Basha's four- and five-story residential buildings have been partially sliced open, their concrete floors pancaked atop one another, their contents—dining tables, children's toys, washing machines—spewed into dusty mounds onto the streets below. Apart from the gentle sound of water gushing from burst pipes, there's a heavy silence, punctured by sporadic sniper fire, the occasional roar of a warplane overhead unleashing its payload in another part of Aleppo, or the more frequent hair-raising whistle of an incoming mortar. Shorn power lines dangle over the streams of water cascading through the streets that have flooded many basements. The danger of electrocution would be high if the neighborhood had power, but it hasn't had that since armed rebels rumbled in from Aleppo's countryside this summer, intent on swiftly wresting Aleppo from the regime's firm grip.

That, of course, has not happened. Instead, the rebels have set up camp in abandoned apartments, stealing electricity from a spot about a kilometer away and sharing it with the neighborhood's three remaining residents. Former residents who return briefly to check on their properties are not always treated as warmly. They are asked for ID and paperwork to prove that they lived in the area. Some rebels say it's to guard against looting. Others have different concerns. "Some of these people toss electronic taggers at our bases that notify warplanes of our location," says one young rebel, explaining why the rebels distrust returning residents. He hadn't seen the devices, or had any proof, but was certain it was true.

In Bustan al-Basha, as in several other frontline neighborhoods in Aleppo, the stalemate has led many of the rebels to say they are bored. The fight in these areas has morphed into a war of the snipers, with fewer opportunities to engage the enemy.

That doesn't mean the danger isn't there. Crossing the length of Rawand Street involves running a gauntlet of sniper fire. Blue-and-white canvas curtains have been strung up at several intersections along the street, while bullet-riddled school buses have been dragged across other junctions in a bid to block the view of the regime's sharpshooters. Rebel snipers are always on the lookout for new positions to establish.



**Wasteland** Heavy shelling and air attacks have left parts of Aleppo in ruins amid the regime's survival-by-atrocity tactics. But the rebels haven't been winning fans either

year history student at Aleppo University who now totes a Kalashnikov. "You must raise your gun against him. It isn't the time for this now, we don't want to open another front among ourselves. We can't afford to do this now."

The way forward, say the two Islamist groups, is to become more religious, more like the extremist Jabhat al-Nusra units that operate in other parts of Aleppo and across Syria. "You have seen the destruction to homes and the looting that is happening. How are we supposed to win this fight when some people are stealing, how will we win if the boots we are wearing are stolen?" says Abu Sadek. "How will God make us victorious? He won't. We don't have the power of weapons, so we must return to God to win this fight."

These rebels speak admirably of Jabhat al-Nusra, of their fearlessness on the battlefield that they say stems from their strong faith. Many say they aspire to either join them or to become more like them. Toward that end, a significant number of Liwa Suqoor al-Sha'ba fighters in Aleppo have taken to wearing black *shalwar kameez* and black headdresses. "Yes, this is Pakistani, but they are strong *mujahedin* [holy warriors]," Ammar, a young fighter, says. "We are an Islamic brigade, we take inspiration from them," he adds, "besides, it's really comfortable, it's good for fighting in." Others say they have discarded their mismatched military uniforms in favor of the Islamic dress because they believe it is similar to that worn by the *sahaba* (companions of the Prophet Muhammad), not because it is from the subcontinent.

"Faith," says one of the rebels. "Faith will make us victorious, not weapons or ammunition or large numbers of people." The problem is, in cosmopolitan Aleppo—and Syria at large—a religious solution may be part of the problem. On a recent night in one unit's headquarters in the city, fighters pealed with laughter when they recalled an encounter between a member of Jabhat al-Nusra operating in Aleppo and a secular FSA commander. The pair were in a meeting when a mortar landed nearby. The FSA commander jumped up to leave, according to several men who were present in the meeting. The Jabhat fighter grabbed his companion's knee, saying excitedly, "Heaven awaits." "Go by yourself," came the reply. ■

They have punched holes through thick apartment walls, creating maze-like safe passages they traverse in the dark. They shout "*Allahu akbar*" as they approach the holes, lest one of their comrades mistake them for the enemy and open fire. The two sides are so close to each other that it's a possibility.

Some rebels are clearly growing impatient, itching to move to other more active fronts in other areas. Others reflect on why their push has stalled. "It wasn't the time to enter Aleppo, honestly," says Abu Sadek. "I'm not saying this with regret, it was a battle that had to happen, jihad for the sake of God, but the lack of coordination between the brigades hurt us. We weren't ready for it." Liwa Suqoor al-Sha'ba says it's planning a major push in the following week or so to try to break the stalemate.

The group is an Islamist brigade under the loose umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The other two rebel units in the neighborhood are Liwa al-Fateh, which is part of the FSA but is not as religiously conservative, and Ahrar al-Sham, a nationwide miniarmy of adherents of the conservative Salafi interpretation of Sunni Islam.

Ahrar al-Sham is not part of the FSA.

Ahrar al-Sham and Liwa Suqoor al-Sha'ba partly blame Liwa al-Fateh for the rebels' misfortune. They look derisively at the group, not because of its weak Islamist credentials, but because it has allegedly been looting homes and harassing citizens. It mans a checkpoint that stops cars arriving from the adjacent Sheikh Maksoud neighborhood. "Look at those *shabiha*," says a member of Liwa Suqoor al-Sha'ba, using the term for the marauding paramilitary gangs of thugs associated with the regime. Abu Tayeb, a member of Liwa al-Fateh at the checkpoint, concedes without prompting that "our reputation isn't good." Still, he says, "this is war, and things happen in war. I'm still proud to be a part of this group."

Other rebels say it's that kind of attitude that has stalled their push into the city, just as much as the lack of heavy weapons and regular resupply of ammunition. Any insurgency needs the support of the local population, and looting homes and harassing citizens obviously don't help. "The problem is: How can you hold a man with a gun accountable?" says Khaled, a second-

# Kurdish militant leader wields influence from island prison

Nick Tattersall / Reuters

**A**NKARA - Snatched by Turkish commandos in Nairobi, Kurdish rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan looked resigned and bewildered as he was flown back to Ankara, the gallows beckoning. A decade later, on his island prison, he appears to have the ear of a Turkish government eager to end a devastating conflict.

It seems an unlikely comeback. Reviled in most of Turkey but commanding fierce loyalty from Kurdish nationalists, Ocalan has been held in virtual isolation on the barren island of Imrali, 50 km (30 miles) south of Istanbul, since his capture in 1999.

Even his lawyers haven't seen him for 15 months.

But after the bloodiest summer for years in Turkey's conflict with Kurdish militants, and with fears over the spread of Kurdish insurrection in neighboring Syria, Ocalan is emerging from the virtual oblivion of Imrali.

When hundreds of Kurdish militants on hunger strike in jails across Turkey drew close to death this month, Turkish authorities turned to the man reviled by newspapers after his capture as "Butcher" and "Baby Killer".

A message through his brother to call off the strike was immediately obeyed, an apparent sign of the authority generally supposed to have drifted from the man, known by allies as "Apo", over his years on Imrali.

"He proved that he is still the boss, that he has the last word," said Turkish journalist Mehmet Ali Birand, who met Ocalan twice in Lebanon and Syria in the 1980s.

"He is not a fighter or a guerrilla war expert, he is more the thinking man trying to shape the Kurdish problem. He wants to be the leader of all Kurds, that is the image he gives."

Turkish MIT intelligence officials took the ferry to Imrali at least three times over the past two months and their talks with Ocalan paved the way for his appeal, according to the

liberal daily Radikal, which did not identify its sources.

Few men stir such hatred in Turkey as Ocalan, who founded the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebel group and led the armed struggle for Kurdish home rule for 15 years before his capture, a conflict which burns at the heart of the country.

Many hold him responsible for the deaths of over 40,000 people since the PKK - designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union - took up arms in 1984.

Its campaign has included bombings in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, and has stirred anger with images of soldiers' coffins returning, although most of those killed in almost three decades of conflict have been PKK fighters.

His brother Mehmet said more than a decade on the tiny island of Imrali, where military coup leaders hanged a prime minister along with two other ministers five decades ago, appeared to have taken only a limited toll.

"Psychologically he's fine. He's able to analyze the world, Turkey and the region very well. He doesn't have any health problem," he told reporters after visiting Ocalan.

"He was in good shape, physically and psychologically."

## "HANG, HANG, HANG"

Many Turks rejoiced when Ocalan was hounded from a series of Middle East hideouts, denied refuge in Europe and finally tracked to Kenya by Turkish special forces in 1999. Television showed footage at the time of him strapped into the seat of a plane transporting him to Ankara, flanked by masked soldiers.

He appeared weary and at times bemused talking with his captors, who had seized him at Nairobi airport in a secret operation as he attempted to flee his refuge in Kenya.

After a televised trial, he was sentenced to death, the sentence upheld while crowds chanted "hang, hang, hang" outside the court.

Ocalan would have become the first prisoner executed in



Demonstrators take part in a protest in favour of jailed PKK leader Ocalan in Strasbourg (VINCENT KESSLER, REUTERS)

Turkey for 25 years had the country not abolished capital punishment a few years later, part of a wave of reforms aimed at gaining membership of the European Union, which still eludes it.

Ocalan's solitary confinement was eased in 2009 when five more inmates were brought to Imrali. Only a handful of people have seen him in recent years. Lawyers say he has no access to a telephone or television and his newspapers are censored.

Pictures released by the government in 2009 to demonstrate that his living conditions complied with international norms showed a mattress on a grey metal bed frame in a narrow cell, a small plastic table and chair under a barred window.

Before his capture, Ocalan, now 64, cut a portly figure, with beady eyes and a thick, bushy moustache.

A drop-out from Ankara University's political science faculty, he forged his political ideas among violent street battles between left- and right-wing gangs in the 1970s. He then split from the left, raising the Kurdish nationalist banner to found the PKK in 1978. His goal was an independent state for Kurds living in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.

Those who met him in the 1980s say he ran his campaign from luxury villas in Syria rather than fighting on the front lines.

"I can't say he gave an image of a very strong character," said

Birand, describing his fear after he was apprehended and held for two days by the Syrian secret police in Damascus.

He was forced to flee Syria in 1998 when Turkish troops massed on the border and threatened intervention. The PKK's base then moved to northern Iraq, where Turkey has carried out air strikes against its camps as recently as this month.

Ocalan himself fled to Rome before moving around Europe looking in vain for a new host to shelter him, ultimately going to Kenya as the snare closed, seeking refuge in the Greek embassy there under close observation by Turkish and western intelligence services.

## RENEWED PROMINENCE

Erdogan, who publicly refused to negotiate with the hunger strikers and dismissed their protest as blackmail supported by "merchants of death", said no promises had been made to Ocalan in exchange for his intervention.

"There was no such thing," he told reporters on the way back from a trip to Egypt last week.

But the government has also suggested more talks between the intelligence agencies and the PKK were a possibility.

"This is Ocalan's second comeback," said Koray Caliskan, a political scientist at Istanbul's Bosphorus University who also writes for the Radikal.

"What people saw with the hunger strike was that peaceful disobedience can achieve

➔ something, that you do not have to kill Turkish soldiers. It will be more and more difficult for the PKK to convince Kurds that their methods are valid," he said.

Negotiations with the PKK were unthinkable until only a few years ago and more recent contacts have proved politically fraught. Recordings leaked last year showed senior intelligence officials had held secret mee-

tings with the group in Oslo, leading to condemnation by parts of the nationalist opposition.

Erdogan's government has widened cultural and language rights for Kurds, who make up around 20 percent of Turkey's 75-million strong population, since taking power a decade ago and has sent to parliament a bill allowing defendants to use Kurdish in court, another demand of the hunger strikers.

But Kurdish politicians, who have called for Ocalan's release, are seeking greater political reform, including steps towards autonomy for the mainly Kurdish southeast, which borders Syria, Iran and Iraq.

"In principle, we're not against talking to PKK or to Ocalan, but under the right circumstances, for the right purposes," said Faruk Logoglu, vice chairman of the main opposi-

tion Republican People's Party (CHP).

"The primary purpose would be to specify the conditions under which they give up arms, not the overall solution of the Kurdish problem, which is not their domain," he told Reuters.

"They have ideas, we know those already. We don't need to hear them from Mr. Ocalan's mouth." □



November 27, 2012

## Turkish PM backs lifting Kurdish MPs immunity from prosecution

by Daren Butler(Reuters)

ISTANBUL — Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday he was in favour of lifting the immunity from prosecution of Kurdish deputies accused of links to militants, a move which would likely fuel tensions in the mainly Kurdish southeast.

The comments came just a week after hundreds of militants ended a hunger strike in jail in response to an appeal from their leader and the government signalled it was open to talks to end a conflict which has



killed more than 40,000 people.

Kurdish members of parliament are the subject of frequent investigations by prosecutors but deputies are immune from prosecution while they are in office, unless the assembly votes in favour of lifting their immunity.

Reporters asked Erdogan about incidents where Kurdish MPs had reportedly clashed verbally with Turkish security forces, but he said he did not want to talk about individual incidents.

"Our decision will be in favour of lifting the immunity from prosecution of those individuals who hide behind that immunity. After that it's up to the judiciary," he told a news conference before departing on a visit

to Spain.

"I believe there should be a very different practice in parliament for those who take on the guise of being an extension of the separatist terrorist organisation," Erdogan said, saying there were 800 such cases currently before parliament.

Among the most notable recent cases, a prosecutor called for 10 Kurdish deputies to be investigated on charges of aiding a terrorist group after they were filmed embracing militants at an impromptu roadside meeting.

The incident happened in August when Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants set up a roadblock and stopped a Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) convoy in southeast Turkey.

Kurdish politicians, including those from the BDP, are frequently prosecuted for alleged links to the PKK, but deny ties with the militants. Previous Kurdish parties similar to the BDP have been closed down for such links.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union, launched its insurgency 28 years ago and more than 40,000 people have since been killed.



November / 28 / 2012

## Hamlet has Kurdish premiere in Ankara

ANKARA - Anatolia News Agency

Shakespeare's "Hamlet" made its Turkish premiere in the Kurdish language Nov. 26 in a performance by the Diyarbakir City Theater, drawing rave reviews from the culture and tourism minister.

"The cultural and traditional motives were well-staged in the play," said Minister Ertuğrul Günay. "It was like we were watching a play about Cizre's Botan society."

The play, staged as part of the 400th year of diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Netherlands, was produced by the Rast Theater in cooperation with the Cultural Department of Diyarbakir in the hopes that the adaption of "Hamlet" would bring Kurdish culture to the attention of a



Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' was staged in Ankara with Turkish subtitles. AA

wider international audience.

Director Rüknettin Gün said the play made its world premiere in Amsterdam on Oct. 17. In addition to Kurdish people

living in the Netherlands, the Dutch showed great interest in the play as well. Directed by Rast Theater General Art Director Celil Toksöz, the play cast Yavuz Akkuzu as Hamlet and also features Özcan Ateş, Elvan Koçer, Mesut Erenol, Mehmet Emin Yağcinkaya, Serdar Geren, İsmail Oyur, Rojda, Gülseven Medar and Ali Tekbaş.

'Hebun an Nebun'

"Hamlet" was translated into Kurdish by Kawa Nemir with the title "Hamlet – Hebun an Nebun." Noting that the play had been previously staged 10 times in Europe, Gün said: "Hamlet is a very controversial text among theater actors and actresses. Interpreting the text in Kurdish has raised much attention among the theater community." □

## Baghdad and Kurds fail to defuse standoff

Both Baghdad and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region claim jurisdiction over oil rich territories.

**Iraq's Kurdish region has sent reinforcements to a disputed area where its troops are involved in a standoff with the Iraqi army, a senior Kurdish military official said, despite calls on both sides for dialogue to calm the situation.**

More Kurdish troops and tanks were mobilised on Saturday and headed towards the disputed areas, Anwar Haji Osman, the deputy minister for Kurdish military affairs, said late on Saturday, adding that they would hold their positions unless Iraqi forces made a move.

"If they overstep the line, we will strike them," Osman said.

Baghdad and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region earlier this week began sending their respective troops to an area over which they both claim jurisdiction, raising tensions in a long-running feud over land and oil rights.

Iraq's speaker of parliament, who visited

Kurdish President Massoud Barzani on Friday, said "significant progress" had been made towards defusing the standoff and that a meeting between military leaders from both sides would be held on Monday in the Defence Ministry in Baghdad.

The Iraqi army and Kurdish troops have previously come close to confrontation only to pull back at the last moment, flexing their muscles but lacking any real appetite for a fight.

### Deteriorating relations

The second military buildup this year illustrates how far relations between Baghdad's central government, led by Shia Muslim Arabs, and ethnic Kurds have deteriorated, testing Iraq's federal cohesion nearly a year after US troops left.

Washington intervened to end a similar standoff in August and is again in contact with Iraqi and Kurdish officials to ease tension mounting over the formation of a new command centre for Iraqi forces to operate

in the disputed areas.

Kurds say the Dijla Operations Command is a threat to them and an attempt by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to seize control over the oil rich territories along the internal border that demarcates the Kurdish region from the rest of Iraq.

Maliki says the Dijla Operations Command is necessary to keep order in one of the most volatile parts of the country.

Barzani on Saturday turned down an invitation from Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr to meet with Maliki to discuss the situation.

In a statement posted on the Kurdistan regional government's website, Barzani's spokesman said he had refused because the matter was not personal, but rather a result of Maliki's "constant non-commitment to the constitution".

The latest flare-up began one week ago when Iraqi troops went after a fuel smuggler who had taken refuge in the office of a Kurdish political party in Tuz Khurmato, 170km (106 miles) north of the capital, sparking a clash with Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in which one passerby was killed.

Maliki has sparred more aggressively with Barzani since the withdrawal last year of US troops who had served as a buffer between the federal Baghdad government and Kurdistan. ♦

## CHP-MHP resist to defense in Kurdish

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

The main opposition and nationalist parties have united to resist a legal arrangement that would pave the way for defense in one's mother tongue, labeling the draft bill as "a concession given to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)."

A commission member from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), Dilek Akagün Yılmaz, claimed yesterday the draft law was unconstitutional and described the bill as "the fore step of official language alteration."

"Under the current legislation one can defend himself in courts in his mother tongue if he doesn't speak enough Turkish to express himself. But the situation is different here. If you allow defense in a defendant's mother tongue even if they can speak Turkish, this draft law will pave the



*Dilek Akagün Yılmaz from the CHP says the draft law was unconstitutional and describes the bill as 'the fore step of official language alteration.' DHA photo*

way for official language alteration," Yılmaz said during debates at Parliament's Justice Commission.

The arrangement allowing for defense in one's mother tongue is part of a 13-article amendment proposal to the Criminal Procedure Code (CMK) and to the Law on Execution of Penalties and Security Precautions.

Under the proposal, a defendant is given the opportunity to make their verbal defense in a language they feel they will be better able to express themselves in. Defendants will be able to speak in a language other than Turkish in their first defense after the indictment is read and in

the final phase of the defense after the deliberation is read out.

Opposition lawmakers accused the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of giving concessions to the PKK by allowing defense in one's mother tongue. Denouncing the bill as a "concession given to the PKK as a result of hunger strikes," Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) lawmaker, Faruk Bal, called on AKP lawmakers to review their position on the amendment.

Over 700 inmates staged a 68-day-hunger strike in several Turkish prisons demanding an end to the isolation of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, as well as an end to restrictions against the use of Kurdish in courts and in the education system. The legal case against the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), the alleged urban wing of the PKK, has recently been deadlocked as the courts have rejected defendants' demands to speak Kurdish when giving their defense.

Inmates ended their hunger strike after Öcalan issued a plea a week after the government submitted the legal arrangement to Parliament. However, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the move should not be considered a concession to strikers, noting that the AKP had promised this right during their party congress on Sept. 30. □

LE FIGARO

28 novembre 2012

# Ankara relit les pages sombres de son passé

L'autopsie de l'ex-président Özal, mort en 1993, laisse penser qu'il a été empoisonné.

**TURQUIE** Autopsie de la dépouille de l'ex-président de la République Turgut Özal, procès des auteurs du coup d'État militaire de 1980 : les Turcs se penchent sur les pages de leur histoire récente qui restaient dans l'ombre et semblaient intouchables tant que l'armée avait la haute main sur le pouvoir civil.

Turgut Özal, officiellement décédé d'une crise cardiaque dans son bureau présidentiel, en 1993, a-t-il été empoisonné ? Sa famille en est convaincue depuis

près de vingt ans et une exhumation du cadavre a été réalisée à la demande de la justice le 3 octobre. Selon le quotidien *Zaman*, proche du gouvernement islam-conservateur, les résultats de l'autopsie renforcent les soupçons d'assassinat : la présence de quatre produits radioactifs ou toxiques aurait été retrouvée, dont une quantité de DTT, un pesticide, dix fois supérieure à la normale.

De nombreux détails comme l'absence de personnel soignant ou la panne de l'ambulance le 17 avril 1993, jour de sa mort, alimentent les rumeurs qui entourent sa disparition. Les partisans, nombreux, de la thèse du meurtre prémédité pensent que Turgut Özal, d'origine kurde, a payé de sa vie son implication dans la résolution du conflit avec la guérilla du PKK. Cet engagement avait valu à ce réformateur libéral, qui avait déjà échappé d'un attentat en 1988, une inimitié tenace d'une partie de l'appareil d'État. L'empoisonnement confirmerait « le pouvoir



F.SARIBAS/REUTERS

Turgut Özal, d'origine kurde, pourrait avoir payé de sa vie son implication dans la résolution du conflit avec le PKK.

des gangs » qui ont agi « au nom de l'État », a déclaré Hüseyin Çelik, vice-président du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) au pouvoir, mais cette révélation « apporterait une énorme contribution aux efforts de la Turquie pour se confronter » à son passé. Le rapport médico-légal devrait être transmis à un procureur dans les jours à venir.

## Confiscation du pouvoir

D'autres épisodes qui ont profondément modelé la vie politique turque ces trente dernières années sont déjà entre les mains de la justice. Le général à la retraite Kenan Evren, l'instigateur du putsch du 12 septembre 1980, est actuellement jugé pour avoir « renversé l'ordre constitutionnel par

la force ». S'exprimant à son procès via un système de vidéoconférence, mercredi dernier, le vieillard de 95 ans a déclaré depuis sa chambre d'hôpital qu'il n'éprouvait aucun « remords » et qu'il referait la même chose « si c'était à refaire ». 650 000 Turcs avaient été arrêtés, cinquante exécutés et 299 torturés à mort.

## Ces démarches sont destinées à affaiblir encore un peu plus l'institution militaire

En avril dernier, une trentaine d'officiers ayant participé au coup d'État de 1997, dit « postmoderne » car réalisé sans effusion de sang ni confiscation du pouvoir aux civils, qui avait conduit à la chute du gouvernement dirigé par l'islamiste Necmettin Erbakan, ont également été arrêtés.

Le jugement de ces événements toujours à vif dans la mémoire collective et la multiplication de procédures judiciaires sont la manifestation concrète de la fin de la suprématie des pachas sur les institutions. Réalisées au nom de la justice, ces démarches ont également un intérêt immédiat pour le gouvernement, celui d'affaiblir encore un peu plus l'institution militaire. En septembre, 332 officiers accusés de complot pour renverser le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan à partir de 2003 ont été condamnés. ■

L.M. (À ISTANBUL)

LE FIGARO

27 novembre 2012

# Syrie : les rebelles progressent au nord

Ils maintiennent également la pression autour de la forteresse damascène.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

**MOYEN-ORIENT** En s'emparant durant le week-end du barrage de Tchrine, après plusieurs jours de combats, les insurgés syriens ont quasiment coupé les routes reliant Alep (au nord) à la ville plus à l'est de Raqqa. Les rebelles poursuivent leur stratégie d'encerclement d'Alep, deuxième ville du pays, théâtre de violents combats depuis juillet. Pour y

envoyer des renforts, il ne reste plus à l'armée que la grande route Damas-Alep mais il lui faut contourner Maarat en-Noman, contrôlée par les opposants à Bachar el-Assad depuis près de deux mois. Cela étant, même si les insurgés contrôlent désormais une très large portion du territoire allant d'Idlib jusqu'à la frontière irakienne, le long de la Turquie, ils ne sont pas à l'abri des frappes de l'aviation syrienne. Lundi, un chasseur-bombardier a encore visé une école de la

localité d'Atmé, frontalière de la Turquie, sans faire de victime, selon un journaliste de l'AFP sur place. Atmé abrite de nombreuses unités rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre ou des groupes islamistes.

## Hélicoptères détruits

Samedi, toujours au prix de violents combats, les activistes s'étaient emparés d'une « grande partie » de l'aéroport militaire de Marj el-Soultane, à 15 km à l'est de Damas, où ils ont détruit deux



hélicoptères. Les appareils décollaient depuis Marj el-Soultane pour mitrailler à intervalles réguliers les villes et villages alentour.

Toujours dans la province de Damas, à Duma, l'opposition armée a pris le contrôle dimanche d'un camp d'entraînement dépendant d'un groupe palestinien favorable au régime, le Front popu-

laire pour la libération de la Palestine-Commandement général. Damas a imputé cette attaque à un groupe «terroriste armé et instrumentalisé par le Mossad», les services secrets israéliens. Les combats s'intensifient autour de la capitale et sa proche région, où le régime a rassemblé ses forces terrestres sur un axe partant du sud, passant par Damas et le

centre, avant de rejoindre le pays alaouite et la côte dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie. En vingt mois de révolte, alors que le pays s'enfonçait chaque jour dans la guerre civile, les violences ont fait plus de 40 000 morts en Syrie. ■

LE FIGARO

mercredi 28 novembre 2012

## En Turquie, l'ex-Antioche, victime de la guerre en Syrie

LAURE MARCHAND  
ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE À HATAY

LES PORTRAITS de Bachar el-Assad ont disparu des échoppes de souvenirs d'Antakya, dans le sud de la Turquie. Mais l'ancienne Antioche sur l'Oronte, à soixante kilomètres de la Syrie, ne l'a pas renié. « On dit que c'est un dictateur, mais que penser des fanatiques qui coupent des gorges en criant Allahou Akbar ? » demande Celal Nihadioglu, un habitant, attablé devant un kebab dans une gargote du centre-ville. Cette opinion est fréquente dans cette province de Hatay, principal foyer des 500 000 alaouites vivant en Turquie, pays majoritairement sunnite. Arabophones, ils appartiennent à la même branche hétérodoxe du chiisme que le président syrien et cette parenté les rend particulièrement réceptifs aux lignes de fracture ethniques qui nourrissent la guerre civile de l'autre côté de la frontière.

Soucieux de ne pas voir le conflit déborder sur son territoire, Ankara cherche à désamorcer toutes les sources de ressentiment communautaire. Les quatre camps de réfugiés syriens dans la province ont donc été construits à proximité de villages sunnites afin d'éviter les problèmes de voisinage. « Nous n'en avons mis aucun dans le district de Samandag (entièrement alaouite, NDLR) », précise un représentant du ministère des Affaires étrangères, qui reconnaît que « les tensions avec les alaouites d'Antakya » sont la raison des pressions policières pour faire partir les familles syriennes qui s'étaient installées en ville. Favorables à l'Armée syrienne libre en lutte contre le régime baasiste, ces réfugiés sont mal perçus. « Une partie a fui la guerre mais l'autre est composée de terroristes », affirme Ali Yeral, un chef religieux alaouite local. La nuit, ils prennent les armes pour aller se battre là-bas et rentrent au petit matin. Hatay s'est transformé en huse d'al-Qaida. »



Des réfugiés syriens en Turquie, protestent contre leurs conditions de vie au camp de Boynuyogun, dans la province de Hatay, en octobre. MURAD SEZER/REUTERS

### Une mosaïque ethnique

L'histoire récente de la province, calquée sur l'ancien sandjak d'Alexandrette, explique son particularisme. Hatay n'a été rattachée à la République turque qu'en 1939. La France, puissance mandataire en Syrie, l'a cédée à la Turquie en échange de sa neutralité vis-à-vis de l'Allemagne nazie. De nombreux alaouites sont alors partis s'établir de l'autre côté de la frontière. Ceux qui sont restés se sont peu à peu retrouvés en minorité : des transferts de populations sunnites organisés par Ankara ont « turquifié » la province tout au long du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Mais la mosaïque ethnique, survivance de l'Empire ottoman, qui comprend également des chrétiens et une minuscule communauté juive, n'a pas totalement disparu.

« On vit tous comme des frères », tient à souligner Servet Mullaoglu, président de la province du Parti républicain du peuple, fondé par Atatürk et principale formation de l'opposition. « Notre plus grande inquiétude est qu'il y ait des massacres confessionnels en Syrie. Ils se repercuteraient ici car nous sommes des milliers à avoir de la famille de l'autre

côté », ajoute cet alaouite en précisant qu'un de ses beaux-frères et un oncle sont syriens. Les prêches haineux d'Adnan al-Arouf, un obscur cheikh syrien réfugié en Arabie saoudite, promettant de « passer au hachoir » les alaouites qui soutiennent Bachar el-Assad et de les donner aux chiens ravivent la mémoire des persécutions que leur communauté a subies sous l'Empire ottoman.

Le soutien déterminé du gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc à la rébellion syrienne renforce le sentiment d'isolement de ces Turcs qui vénèrent Ali et qui ont fait leur laïcité instaurée par Mustafa Kemal.

Pour eux, il ne fait aucun doute que le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, au passé islamiste, est motivé par une solidarité religieuse. « Il y a une volonté d'imposer le sunnisme en Syrie. En menant cette politique, ils font le jeu des wahhabites et des Frères musulmans, résume Ali Yeral. C'est vrai que la présence d'un régime alaouite tout près nous rassure. » ■

# Turkey confronts a resurgent Kurdish threat

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA

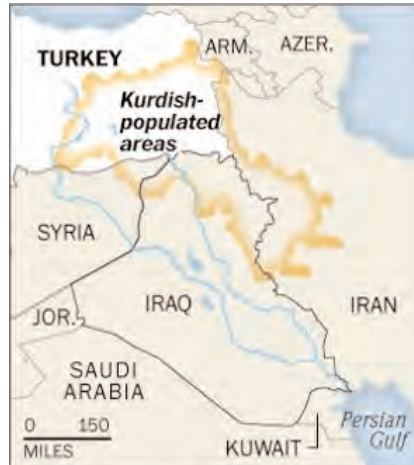
**S**EMDINLI, Turkey — This town of 19,000 nestled in an idyllic mountain pass of impossibly green pastures and golden autumn trees is on the front lines of Turkey's rapidly escalating guerrilla war.

In a struggle for autonomy as well as independent language and education rights, the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has waged a low-grade conflict in Turkey for decades. But in recent months, the group has reemerged as a stronger, better equipped and increasingly organized force that is now in the midst of one of its bloodiest campaigns since the worst days of the conflict in the 1990s.

The rebels, observers say, appear to be taking a cue from the recent Arab uprisings, seeking to inspire a "Kurdish Spring" among segments of a stateless ethnic group numbering roughly 30 million and traditionally living in parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. The campaign is presenting a major security risk for Turkey at a time when this strategically vital NATO member is also pushing for a limited international intervention against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who Turkish officials see as being at least partly responsible for the mounting PKK threat.

As Assad's grip on Syria has loosened during the civil war, a Syrian Kurdish faction allied with the PKK has established itself as a de facto administration in a growing number of northern cities and towns. Some analysts and diplomats suggest that Assad may be tactically ceding lands to Kurdish rebels there, allowing Syria to become a transit point for weapons and fighters targeting Turkey, which has called for his immediate ouster. Others suggest that Assad, struggling to quell a broader uprising, has simply been unable to prevent the group's spread.

Either way, the rising strength of Kurdish rebels in the region is fueling a bloody uptick in Turkey's long-simmering guerrilla war. The death toll in Turkey has climbed to at least 490 in the past 10 and a half months, making this the conflict's deadliest year since at least 1999, according to International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based nongovernmental organization.



THE WASHINGTON POST

Here in Semdinli, near the mountainous border with Iran and Iraq, a massive truck bomb went off Nov. 4 just as a Turkish army tank rolled by. Marking the worst bombing here since 2005, the explosion sent hot shrapnel raining down on revelers leaving a wedding party, killing an 11-year-old boy, wounding 24 others and blowing out windows and storefronts for blocks.

The blast followed a series of assaults in which rebel commandos attempted to seize this town populated largely by ethnic Kurds, attacking an army base and launching rocket-propelled grenades at the regional governor's residence, forcing Turkish troops to stage a daring rescue of the Ankara-appointed governor and his wife.

"Their tactics have suddenly changed," said Sedat Tore, Semdinli's mayor. "They used to come down from the mountains for quick attacks and quick retreats. Now, they are staying and trying to control territory."

The deepening conflict comes as armed Kurdish groups across the region appear to be increasing their level of cooperation. Terrorism experts, for instance, say more Kurdish fighters from Iran — where the pro-Assad government reached a truce with another faction of Kurdish rebels last year — also appear to be pouring into Turkey.

"We think the PKK has become an organization that is being utilized by a number of countries as proxies, to inflict harm on Turkey and show displeasure with Turkey's policies toward its neighbors," said Suat Kiniklioglu, an Ankara-based

political analyst and former national legislator from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party.

In Semdinli, old bullet holes in apartment buildings and city walls stand as testaments of the frequent fighting over the decades. But residents call the recent bout of violence among the worst they've seen in years. "My children are so scared they can no longer sleep at night," said Nucran Tire, 35, who had to pick shards of glass from her 12-year-old son's back following the early-November bomb explosion, which blew out the front windows of the family's apartment. "The violence is getting worse. We must have peace."

## RENEWED RESISTANCE

Formed in the 1970s as a radical Marxist guerrilla outfit, the PKK has long fought for a list of demands aimed at ending what they call the "assimilation" of Kurdish youths into Turkish society and the suppression of their rights. After a horrific period of war in the 1990s punctuated by suicide bombings and the hijacking of Turkish Airlines Flight 487, the conflict entered a more subdued phase following the arrest of the movement's de facto leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in 1999.

Kurdish rights groups hoped Erdogan's arrival on the political stage in the 2000s signaled a new chance for peace. That optimism among Kurds in Turkey for a settled agreement increased as Ankara fostered healthy ties with the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq. Yet in a country where Turkish nationalism remains strong, the peace process has seemed to take one step forward and two steps back.

In 2009, the government granted what some saw as a breakthrough. In a country where Kurds could once be detained for listening to music in their native language and were called "mountain Turks" to avoid any reference to their differing ethnicity, Turkey legalized Kurdish programming on state television and allowed Kurdish language classes as an elective in secondary schools. But that same year, authorities also arrested scores of local and national Kurdish politicians and alleged PKK sympathizers.

After the latest round of talks broke down last year, the PKK launched a new military offensive in June 2011 that escalated this summer. Turkish authorities are now facing a multi-faceted Kurdish resistance, including a hunger strike by jailed Kurds that started with 65 prisoners in one compound two months ago. It has now spread to hundreds of inmates and Kurdish politicians nationwide, with their list of demands including the improvement of conditions for Ocalan, who is being held in a prison on an island in the Marmara Sea.

The Turkish government this month said it would move to comply with at least one of the strikers' demands — legalization of Kurdish in Turkish courts. But Kurdish leaders say that is not enough.

"We don't want independence, just a separate parliament and rights within Turkey that recognize our different language, our separate identity," said Esat Canan, a national legislator from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party. "The demands of the Kurds are reasonable. If the government would just sincerely move to help us obtain our rights, the fighting would stop."

In the meantime, the hunger strike and increased PKK activity appear to be heightening tensions in Turkey's southeast. A reporter who recently drove through the heavily Kurdish city of Yuksekova near Semdinli, for instance, witnessed gangs of masked, rock-throwing Kurdish youths burning tires and staging running battles with Turkish security forces.

The PKK and splinter groups loyal to their cause have also redoubled efforts in the area to firebomb schools — seen as "indoctrination centers" — and detain Turkish teachers sent to the region by the government in Ankara.

"It takes us so much time and energy to build these schools out in the mountains, to give these children a chance at an education," said Ibrahim Kalin, a senior adviser to Erdogan. "But this is part of their totalitarian and backward Marxist-Leninist ideology. They think we are still in the 1970s."

#### MIXED FEELINGS

On a chilly morning in Semdinli this month, Hamida Kara, 55, sat under a white canvas mourning tent, rocking back and forth in solemn grief. The aunt of the 11-year-old boy killed by the car bomb that struck the town Nov. 4, Kara held the hand of her younger sister — the boy's mother — as they received a grim parade of well wishers.

Yet Kara, like many paying their respects after the boy's funeral, still appears to support many of the goals — if not the tactics — of the PKK. A woman who clings closely to her Kurdish heritage, she was forced with her family to relocate here from their rural village during the anti-PKK sweeps in the 1990s. Ten of her family members have died in the violence. More have been jailed under anti-terrorism laws.

Towns like Semdinli, observers say, remain a fertile recruiting ground for new rebel fighters, with many residents privately expressing sympathies for the PKK despite the recent rebel siege that began here in July.

But conflict-weary residents — particularly the mothers of young children — also say they just want the violence to stop.

"The sweetest boy in the world was taken from us," Kara said, weeping. "We have reached the point where this needs to be settled with pens, not guns." ●

## Bombs kill four Kurds in Iraq's disputed areas



Nov. 27, 2012. Three parked car bombs exploded Tuesday morning simultaneously in the city of Kirkuk, home to a combustible mix of Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Turkomen who all claim rights to the city, killing and wounding scores of people, police said.

By Mustafa Mahmoud

**KIRKUK, Iraq (Reuters)** - Bombs targeting ethnic Kurds killed four people on Tuesday in the city of Kirkuk in Iraq's disputed northern territories, where the Iraqi army and troops from the autonomous Kurdistan region have been in stand-off for more than a week.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the attacks although Sunni Islamist insurgents including a local affiliate of al Qaeda continue to strike regularly, killing 144 people across Iraq in October alone.

The latest bomb attacks come after troops from Baghdad and the Kurdistan region moved in last week on the territories over which both the central government and the Kurds claim jurisdiction.

On Tuesday a car bomb exploded metres away from the office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the contested city of Kirkuk killing two people, police said. A second explosion followed in the same area, killing a third person, according to a security source.

"When the explosion happened, I felt the house was collapsing on us," said 22-year-

old Ahmed Germi, a Kurd living in the house adjacent to the KDP's office, whose clothes were stained with blood.

Kurdish residents of Kirkuk were blocking roads with rubbish bins and other obstacles to prevent potential attackers from entering their area, a Reuters reporter said. Police sirens wailed and the smell of smoke, blood and gunpowder filled the air.

A car bomb in another Kurdish district of Kirkuk killed at least one person. The three blasts also wounded 38 people, police and hospital sources said.

"Problems were created by the officials but we are the victims," Germi said through tears.

The military stand-off brings to a head a row over the formation of a new command centre for Iraqi troops to operate in the oil-rich disputed areas.

Kurdish officials say the Dijla Operations Command is a threat to them, but Baghdad's Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki says it is necessary for security.

Kirkuk police colonel Yaseen Hassan linked the political crisis with Tuesday's attacks: "they targeted Kurdish areas at a time when there is a crisis between the central government and the (Kurdish) region; it is a proof that they are trying to stir sectarian strife."

Explosions also hit the town of Tuz Khurmato on Tuesday, the site of a clash between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi troops last week, which triggered the current military build-up.

There were also blasts aimed at police and the army in the town of Hawija in Kirkuk province, a car bomb wounded several people in the city of Mosul, and a car bomb near Baghdad wounded four people.

## Syrian Kurds seek to re-unite divided ranks

**ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Rival** Syrian Kurdish parties have agreed to re-unify their ranks and push for federalism in Syria after a previous pact that was not implemented, but the new deal has already been undermined by the reluctance of one faction to fall into line.

Syria's Kurds see the civil war ravaging their country as an opportunity to gain the rights they have long been denied under President Bashar al-Assad and his father before him, who deprived thousands of citizenship.

But they are divided over their role in the Syrian conflict and where they stand in relation to the Arab-dominated opposition, which some regard as inherently anti-Kurdish.

Under firm pressure from Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani, representatives of two main camps: the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and the

Kurdish National Council (KNC) met and renewed their commitment to a joint higher council.

"We agreed to adopt federalism as a working draft," said Aldar Khalil, a member of another council that presides over the PYD.

They also said they would create a joint security apparatus, control border checkpoints together and merge their military wings.

But an armed unit known as the Popular Protection Committess (YPG), which is affiliated with the PYD, issued a statement saying it would not unite with any other military force, according to media close to the group.

There is also discord regarding the new Syrian opposition coalition, which the PYD rejects as a proxy of Qatar and Turkey. The KNC, itself a coalition of more than a dozen smaller parties, has yet to

decide whether to join the body.

The KNC is broadly accepted by the political mainstream, unlike the PYD, which is aligned with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Turkish Kurd militant group listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

Barzani already brought the two sides together in July, but the KNC repeatedly accused the PYD of flouting that accord, blaming the group for kidnapping one of its members and harassing rival activists.

A source close to the talks said he doubted the latest agreement would make much difference, citing suspicions of complicity between the PYD and Assad.

"Relations will be cordial for a week or two but then the same problems will resurface," he said on condition of anonymity. "The problem is there are two sides: one is with the regime and the other is against it".

At the recent meetings in the Iraqi Kurdish capital Arbil, Barzani said he would not support the Syrian Kurds unless they stayed together. □

## Erdogan pushes Öcalan to the forefront



**MEHMET ALİ BİRAND**  
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**P** rime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has toughened his stance toward the Kurdish issue recently. The previous Erdoğan is gone, and an Erdoğan who prioritizes toughness has come.

I have been reiterating this: "The prime minister will not want to take any political risks until the 2014 presidential elections, or even the 2015 general elections. Especially to attract the Nationalist Movement Party's (MHP) nationalist votes, it is reasonable that he adopts a tougher stance on the Kurdish issue." Just like me, many other experts shared the same impression and made pessimistic comments.

We have reached this conclusion after assessing the prime minister's speeches, his attitude toward the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the KCK arrests.

However, interestingly, there have been different signals coming from Ankara for a while. Those who are close to the prime

minister managing the Kurdish issue are stating that the situation is not at all as it looks.

As an example, they cite the hunger strikes. They point to the prime minister's approval behind Öcalan's intervention.

### According to Ankara

The same circles draw attention to the strikes being started by Kandil (Mountain), Öcalan being against the strikes and Öcalan, together with Ankara, taking it in his hand. Moreover, the fact that it was the family instead of the lawyers who were allowed to go to İmralı is shown as the product of this convergence.

The prime minister's other pressure is especially geared toward the "pro-Kandil segment" within the BDP. The lifting of political immunity is especially the result of this policy, it is believed.

Another step is KCK arrests. Despite all criticisms, it is emphasized that KCK arrests will continue.

In this way, Ankara is planning to decrease the political power of both Kandil and the BDP during solution negotiations, if not all together exclude it. Efforts are toward deactivation as much as possible.

We are facing a completely different picture.

### Actually, Öcalan is carried to the forefront.

According to the officials I contacted, the project behind all these maneuvers is the idea of taking significant steps on the Kurdish issue before the 2014 elections. Much more important decisions than the famous Kurdish initiative are being prepared, it is claimed.

Will all this strategy bear fruit, or will it again be an inconclusive initiative? Nobody can know that side of the matter.

### Target voting rate

Everything is locked to the 2014 presidential elections. Ankara's only target it is to have Erdoğan elected in the first round with 57-58 percent of the votes. The Justice and Development Party (Ak Party) and the government bureaucracy are busy looking for ways to reach this result.

Whenever the prime minister opens a debate on a new subject, it is decided depending on its possible effects on elections results. Constantly renewed opinion polls are highly effective. There is a survey on almost every topic. Not like the other parties, where they depend on occasional feedback and reports filed from the party organization. □

# In Syria, clashes between Arab rebels, Kurds



Jihadist Rebels Clash with Kurds in Syria's Ras al-Ain

By Justin Vela,  
The Washington Post

**ANTAKYA, Turkey** — Clashes between Arab rebels and Kurdish militants in northeastern Syria are bringing additional complexities to the already murky front lines in the country's civil war.

The latest round of fighting was prompted when two Sunni Arab rebel groups with reputed links to al-Qaeda captured a border crossing with Turkey in the Syrian town of Ras al-Ayn this month. The groups succeeded in driving out forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad but also drew the ire of a Kurdish militia with a presence in the area. Dozens of Arabs and Kurds have been killed in the fighting that followed.

Analysts fear that the clashes could hamper efforts to unify Syria's disparate opposition factions, deepen ethnic divisions and empower radical elements among both the Arabs and the Kurds.

Despite a cease-fire, the situation in Ras al-Ayn remained locked this week in a tense standoff between the two Arab groups — Ghuraba al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra — and the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Union Party, which is known by the acronym PYD.

More moderate rebel factions have criticized the two Islamist Arab groups for their decision to attack Ras al-Ayn without per-

mission from the rebels' military council, which is attempting to centralize decision making.

The attack inflamed already tense relations between the majority Arab opposition and Syria's Kurds. It also underscored the determination of more-radical elements within the opposition to buck the will of those attempting to unify the rebellion against Assad.

The fighting in Ras al-Ayn is not the first time that Arab forces have clashed with Kurds, who compose about 10 percent of the country's population. Last month, battles occurred in the northern city of Aleppo after Arab rebels entered a Kurdish neighborhood. But the fighting in Ras al-Ayn is the first time that Arab rebels have attacked so far east in territory largely controlled by the PYD.

"There are a lot of efforts to limit the extremist groups in Aleppo province," said Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "I think they are looking for a safe haven and a place where they can find some opportunities to carry out attacks against the regime forces. That takes them dangerously close to Kurdish areas."

The PYD, meanwhile, has expanded its area of influence by using a past relationship with Assad's government to broaden its footprint as regime forces have been transferred to other areas.

"They struck a deal of sorts with the



The Washington Post

regime that gave them some room in the north of the country," said Peter Harling, an expert on Syria with the International Crisis Group.

That expansion is seen as part of the PYD's long-standing efforts to achieve autonomy — and perhaps independence.

Having fought a decades-long war with Kurdish militants affiliated with the PYD, Turkey has expressed deep concern about PYD forces massing along its southern border.

Syria's 20-month-old conflict arrived in Ras al-Ayn, a border town consisting of Arabs, Kurds and a small Christian population, early this month. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict, reported that rebels entered the town from Turkey and from a Syrian village to the west.

After the Arab rebels drove regime forces from the town and seized control of the border crossing, PYD forces withdrew into the eastern Kurdish parts of the town "in order to show good intention and that we were not against the uprising," said Nasser Haj Mansour, a PYD spokesman.

However, clashes began after an incident at a PYD checkpoint, with both sides demanding that the other leave Ras al-Ayn and neither complying.

Various Kurdish groups have met in Irbil, the capital of neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan, and have attempted to form a united opposition to the Arab forces. "Reinforcements are coming," Mansour said. "Until now, we did not attack them. We just defended ourselves."

But Harling said he doubted that either side had an interest in a major escalation. "It would be a distraction from other objectives," he said. ■



# Une fierté kurde sortie de prison

**GRAND ANGLE ♦ En Turquie, 700 détenus de cette minorité, les plus jeunes en tête, ont mené une grève de la faim de soixante-huit jours. Ce mouvement spontané, d'une ampleur sans précédent, a réussi à faire fléchir - un peu - l'intransigent gouvernement Erdogan.**

Par MARC SEMO Envoyé spécial à Diyarbakir(Turquie)

**E**n ce vendredi caniculaire de la mi-septembre, elle se rendit comme chaque semaine au parloir de la prison de Midyat, dans le sud-est du pays, pour voir sa fille. Cette fois-là, elle la trouva «un peu étrange». «Elle était pâle, amaigrie, et elle éludait toutes mes questions. Je n'ai appris qu'après qu'elle avait entamé sa grève de la faim, mais elle n'avait pas osé m'en parler de crainte que je pleure», raconte Süheyla Moray. Derya, 24 ans, étudiante en éducation physique, était dans le premier groupe de détenus politiques kurdes à avoir cessé de s'alimenter, se contentant d'eau sucrée ou salée et de vitamines B afin d'éviter d'irréversibles lésions cérébrales.

Près de 700 autres détenus dans 67 prisons turques ont participé à cette grève de la faim «illimitée et sans rotation» d'une ampleur sans précédent. Elle s'est achevée le 18 novembre, après un appel lancé depuis l'île-prison d'Imrali par Abdullah Öcalan, le chef historique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste), organisation qui mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre Ankara, et que l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis considèrent aussi comme terroriste. «L'action a atteint son objectif, je veux qu'ils y mettent fin sans tarder», a déclaré à son frère Mehmet le leader kurde arrêté en 1999, condamné à la prison à vie, et qui, depuis août 2011, ne pouvait plus voir ses avocats.

## LE PIRE ÉVITÉ DE JUSTESSE

La fin de cet isolement carcéral était la principale revendication des grévistes. Si, officiellement, rien n'a changé dans les conditions de détention d'«Apo», comme l'appellent ses partisans, le gouvernement islamo-conservateur de Recep Tayyip Erdogan a toutefois fait un geste et reconnu de fait son rôle fondamental dans toute solution négociée du problème kurde. Après avoir clamé pendant deux mois «qu'il ne céderait jamais au chantage», le Premier ministre a également amorcé une réforme sur une autre des exigences des grévistes : le droit à se défendre en kurde pendant leur procès. Une

revendication symbolique puisque tous parlent turc.

Ces concessions ont permis d'éviter le pire. De justesse. Ceux qui avaient démarré le mouvement en étaient à leur 68e jour de jeûne et des décès pouvaient survenir à tout moment, même si les autorités avaient annoncé qu'elles auraient eu recours à l'alimentation forcée. Le «sacrifice des martyrs» aurait en effet rendu difficile tout compromis. «Un père peut accepter que son enfant tombe dans la montagne l'arme à la main, tué par un soldat qui lui-même risque sa vie, mais pas que l'Etat le laisse mourir de faim alors qu'il demande simplement l'égalité, la dignité et la justice pour les 20 millions de Kurdes de ce pays. C'est du meurtre, et cela aurait créé une irrémédiable fracture entre Kurdes et Turcs que nous voulons éviter», explique Osman Baydemir, le très populaire maire de Diyarbakir, la capitale du sud-est anatolien peuplée en majorité de Kurdes.

Ces derniers représentent 20% de la population d'une république turque qui, inspirée du modèle jacobin, ne reconnaît pas de droits collectifs aux minorités, ni aucune forme d'autonomie régionale. Mais elle considère qu'un Kurde peut, comme n'importe quel citoyen, devenir ministre, général, ou même président de la République, ce qui fut le cas du défunt Turgut Özal. Comme 12 des 35 députés du BDP, le principal parti prokurde, Osman Baydemir s'était mis en grève de la faim le 10 novembre pour sensibiliser l'opinion au sort des prisonniers jeûnant depuis septembre. Durant ces deux longs mois de grève de la faim, Süheyla n'a pas pu revoir sa fille Derya. «Dès le début du mouvement, les grévistes avaient décidé de refuser les visites afin de ne pas être ébranlés dans leur détermination d'aller, s'il le fallait, jusqu'à la mort», explique la mère. Malgré son angoisse, cette veuve qui gagne sa vie comme femme de ménage a respecté «la libre décision» de sa fille, la cadette de ses huit enfants, qu'elle avait réussi à pousser jusqu'à l'université. Le seul contact qu'elle a gardé était l'appel téléphonique hebdomadaire - dix minutes maximum comme l'exige la loi, que les détenus, épuisés, écourtaient le plus souvent.

## LA PRISON AU MILIEU DES HLM

Comme d'autres proches et parents, Süheyla venait chaque jour à midi devant la vieille prison qui se dresse en périphérie de Diyarbakir. Non pas parce que sa fille y est détenue, mais parce que c'était le seul lieu où les manifestations de soutien aux grévistes n'étaient pas immédiatement dispersées. Dans ce quartier de Bağcılar, fief du PKK, les autorités ont préféré laisser faire, même si les policiers anti-émeute étaient aussi nombreux que les deux ou trois cents protestataires.

La prison de Diyarbakir, aux murs décrépis flanqués de miradors, se dresse au milieu de HLM où s'étagent des villageois kurdes chassés de leurs terres dans les années 90, au plus fort de la «sale guerre» entre les forces de l'ordre et la guérilla du PKK. Celle-ci a fait au moins 45 000 morts et plus d'un million de déplacés depuis 1984. Le lieu est un symbole dans la martyrologie kurde. Deux ans après le coup d'Etat militaire du 12 septembre 1980, cette prison fut le théâtre d'une très longue grève de la faim qui s'acheva avec plus de 35 morts. «A l'époque, il était hors de question de descendre dans la rue. C'était la loi martiale», se souvient Mevlut Dagtas. Son fils Tarek est depuis vingt ans derrière les barreaux. Il avait été capturé dans la montagne au cours d'une opération militaire et condamné à trente-six ans de prison. Détenu à Bolu, au nord-ouest du pays, il s'est rapidement joint au mouvement de grève de la faim. «C'est la dixième qu'il fait et, une fois, il a tenu soixante jours. Il y a perdu toutes ses dents et ressemble à un vieillard, même s'il n'a que 46 ans», soupire le père.

Cesser de s'alimenter au risque de sa vie est le choix de ceux qui n'ont plus d'autres moyens de faire entendre leur voix. «Il faut que tout le monde puisse voir la terrible réalité de la mort», a expliqué à sa mère un détenu lorsqu'il a entamé son jeûne dans cette même prison de Bolu, où le mouvement a été très suivi. «Nous ne commençons pas cette grève de la faim parce qu'il y a des clous dans notre nourriture ou qu'ils nous humilient. Nous sommes en grève contre cet Etat qui bombarde nos gens et nos mon-

tagnes depuis 35 ans. Nos corps serviront aux générations futures», a écrit à ses parents Gülen Kiliçoğlu, une jeune femme de 25 ans. «Dans un tel mouvement, c'est la première fois que des détenus ne demandaient pas une amélioration de leurs conditions carcérales ou des exigences équivalentes, mais tentaient de faire sauter le blocage politique autour du problème kurde», souligne Emin Aktar, ex-président du barreau de Diyarbakir et pilier du «comité des sages», réunissant personnalités kurdes et turques, qui a œuvré à ce qu'un compromis soit trouvé.

## COUPS DE FILET

«Nos enfants sont encore petits, mais leur courage est grand», déclare Süheyla, fière de sa fille. Le mouvement lancé en septembre est parti spontanément des prisons. «Le PKK l'a suivi par respect pour les prisonniers. Mais il était plutôt embarrassé par cette décision des détenus qui estimaient n'avoir plus d'autres moyens que de mettre la question kurde sur le devant de l'agenda politique», reconnaît Ahmet Türk, député et figure charismatique du mouvement politique kurde. Les plus résolus étaient les jeunes, et surtout les femmes. «Elles sont doublement opprimées, dans la famille comme dans l'arène publique, et cela explique leur détermination», renchérit Sebhat Tuncel, populaire députée du BDP d'Istanbul, venue à Diyarbakir pour se joindre à la grève de la faim de solidarité.

Les parcours de ces détenus témoignent de la répression ordinaire. Etudiante à Ankara, Gülen Kiliçoğlu, avait été arrêtée à Diyarbakir alors qu'elle venait voir sa famille. Dénoncée par un «repenti» comme étant membre du PKK, elle a été condamnée à six ans de prison. Derya Moray, elle, a été appréhendée lors d'un des nombreux coups de filet visant élus locaux, dirigeants d'associations, cadres des organisations de jeunesse ou journalistes soupçonnés d'être membres du KCK (Union des communautés du Kurdistan), que les autorités accusent d'être la structure urbaine de la rébellion kurde. Près de 8 000 personnes sont actuellement détenues au nom d'une loi antiterrorisme durement critiquée pour ses aspects ■■■

■■■ *Liberticides* par les organisations de défense des droits de l'homme et par l'Union européenne.

Incarcérée depuis trois ans, Derya n'a toujours pas été jugée. «Il y a déjà eu plus d'une vingtaine d'audiences. A chaque fois, les accusés exigent de parler kurde, la cour refuse, et ils repartent en cellule», raconte sa mère. Tous les procès du KCK étaient ainsi bloqués. La réforme concédée par le pouvoir leur permettra de parler kurde à deux ou trois moments de la procédure, en payant l'interprète de leur

poche. En théorie du moins. Car le juge pourra s'y opposer.

La politique de répression n'a en fait pas cessé de se durcir ces dernières années, au fur et à mesure que se sont à nouveau multipliés les accrochages entre les forces de l'ordre et la guérilla. Le Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a misé sur la manière forte après l'échec, à l'été 2011, des négociations secrètes entamées avec le PKK à Oslo (Norvège). «Le pouvoir veut anéantir toutes les structures du mouvement kurde, qu'il voit comme une menace à son hégé-

nie», souligne Ahmet Türk, tout en rappelant que «sans stabilité pour les Kurdes, qui vivent écartelés entre quatre pays, il ne pourra y avoir de stabilité au Moyen-Orient». La crise en Syrie et l'émergence d'une zone autonome kurde dans ce pays, tentée de suivre le modèle de celle en Irak, déjà indépendante de fait de Bagdad, ont encore accru l'inquiétude des autorités turques. Mais aussi leur conscience de l'urgence d'une solution politique.

La grève de la faim des détenus mettait à mal l'image du pays et

cristallisait une solidarité croissante. Chaque soir à 19 heures, à Diyarbakir, éclataient des concerts de casseroles et les lumières de nombreux appartements s'éteignaient en signe de protestation. C'est aussi pour cela que le Premier ministre a cédé. Vendredi, Suheyla a pu enfin revoir sa fille Derya, à l'hôpital de la prison de Midyat. «Elle était encore plus pâle et encore plus amaigrie qu'en septembre. Mais elle riait», raconte la vieille femme. Elle ajoute, souriante : «Cette fois, nos enfants ont gagné.» ♦

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## En Irak, la querelle entre les Kurdes et Bagdad dégénère

LE MONDE GEO ET POLITIQUE  
Christophe Ayad

**A** couteaux tirés depuis bientôt un an, les dirigeants de l'entité autonome kurde d'Irak et le pouvoir central de Bagdad se rapprochent d'un conflit ouvert, voire d'une confrontation armée. Déjà en conflit sur l'exploitation du pétrole, ainsi que sur le degré d'autonomie des Kurdes et le tracé des frontières de la région autonome, Bagdad et Erbil s'affrontent aujourd'hui sur l'explosive question de Kirkouk.

La ville, située hors du périmètre administratif de l'actuel Kurdistan irakien, est revendiquée par les Kurdes depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003. Des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes se sont réinstallés dans la ville dont ils avaient été chassés sous l'ère baasiste ; les peshmergas (combattants kurdes) y patrouillent. Mais le sort définitif de Kirkouk doit être scellé par un référendum, sans cesse repoussé tant la question est délicate. Arabes, Kurdes et Turcomans se disputent sur la composition du collège électoral. Kirkouk est d'autant plus convoitée que son sous-sol est riche en hydrocarbures.



Des combattants kurdes, le 24 novembre à 20 km au nord de Kirkouk. | SAFIN HAMED/AFP

Or, dans son bras de fer qui l'oppose au dirigeant kurde Massoud Barzani, le premier ministre irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki, joue à fond la carte du nationalisme arabe à Kirkouk. Après avoir tenu un conseil des ministres dans la ville en juin, il a discrètement installé un centre de commandement militaire en septembre. Ce centre des opérations du Tigre, du nom du fleuve qui traverse le nord de l'Irak, a vocation à superviser la sécurité dans les provinces de Kirkouk, Diyala (elle aussi revendiquée par les Kurdes) et Salaheddine (à majorité arabe sunnite).

Les dirigeants kurdes ont immédiatement réagi contre

cette mesure, qu'ils jugent "anticonstitutionnelle". Sur le terrain, la tension est subitement montée d'un cran mi-novembre avec l'envoi de renforts kurdes dans les régions disputées de Kirkouk et de Khanakine. Des incidents ont éclaté à Touz Khourmato, un village revendiqué par les Kurdes, mais lui aussi en zone mixte. Des soldats gouvernementaux ont voulu perquisitionner les locaux d'un parti kurde, suscitant l'ire des peshmergas. Un passant a été tué dans la fusillade.

De passage à Paris, où il a reçu Le Monde, Fouad Hussein, directeur de cabinet du chef kurde Massoud Barzani, ne mâche pas ses mots contre la

décision de Nouri Al-Maliki, qui "viole les accords de sécurité à Kirkouk signés sous l'égide des Américains", avant leur départ en décembre 2011. Il qualifie ces "provocations" de "jeu dangereux rappelant les mauvais souvenirs du passé, lorsque les Kurdes étaient traités comme des étrangers dans leur propre pays".

Sans aller jusqu'à comparer Nouri Al-Maliki à Saddam Hussein, les dirigeants kurdes s'inquiètent de son autoritarisme croissant et de la concentration des pouvoirs en ses mains. "Quand je vois que l'armée irakienne compte un million d'hommes alors que le sud du pays souffre d'un retard considérable en termes d'équipement, je pose la question : à quoi toutes ces armes vont-elles servir ?", ironise le conseiller de Massoud Barzani.

Le divorce croissant entre le Kurdistan et Bagdad pourrait-il mener rapidement à une proclamation d'indépendance par Erbil ? "Le temps n'est pas venu de se poser cette question, tempère Fouad Hussein. Les Kurdes d'Irak ont toujours travaillé à un Irak plus démocratique pour tous. Nous voulons continuer à le faire et nous pensons que le seul moyen d'éviter un éclatement est justement plus de démocratie et plus de fédéralisme." ■

# Syrian battles flare as Cairo talks open

Opposition tries to unite in meetings in Egypt as bombs kill more than 30

BY CHRISTINE HAUSER  
AND HALA DROUBI

Syrian opposition groups pushed ahead on military and political fronts on Wednesday as rebels shot down a government warplane in the north of the country and a newly formed coalition started talks in Cairo on a transitional government intended to replace that of President Bashar al-Assad.

The new coalition, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, was formed at a meeting in Qatar this month, and has already been anointed with official recognition from Britain, France, Turkey and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. But in order to encourage further recognition internationally, it must tackle the broader problem of uniting multiple groups in exile and rebels on the ground in Syria.

That challenge was apparent on the first day of what were expected to be two days of talks in Egypt. Disagreements emerged over the composition of the coalition when the Syrian National Council, one of its members, tried to increase the number of its representatives.

"Nothing will proceed until we work this out," said one council member at the talks, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity because this member was not authorized to speak to the media.

The assistant to another delegate said that the group would address other matters on its agenda before electing a transitional government. Another member, Ahmad Ramadan, said in an interview with Radio Sawa, an Arabic-language broadcaster sponsored by the United States government, that the talks were more likely to decide on the selection process than actual candidates.

Khaled Khoja, a coalition member attending the talks, said: "I don't think we'll be discussing the election of a transitional government during the meeting today. We're still discussing whether to have a government or to have committees, instead. There are also talks about waiting to see the outcome of the meeting in Morocco before deciding on the government. We're now discussing the main structure of the coalition."

The Syrian opposition was meeting against the backdrop of a 20-month civil war in which about 40,000 people have been killed, and as rebels and jihadist forces continued to pursue their armed efforts or take on a more prominent role

in the fighting to unseat the Assad government. The conflict has also spread to Syria's neighbors and spilled over into tensions with Israel, Turkey and Jordan.

Syrian state media said on Wednesday that 34 people and possibly many more had died in twin car bombings in a suburb populated by minorities only a short distance from the center of Damascus, the capital. One estimate by the government's opponents put the death toll at 47.

There were also reports from witnesses in Turkey and anti-government activists in Syria that for the second successive day insurgents had shot down a government aircraft in the north of the country, offering further evidence that the rebels were seeking a major shift by challenging the government's dominance of the skies. It was not immediately clear how the aircraft, apparently a plane, had been brought down.

Video posted on the Internet by rebels showed wreckage with fires still burning around it. The aircraft appeared to show a tail assembly clearly visible jutting out of the debris. Such videos are difficult to verify, particularly in light of the restrictions facing reporters in Syria. However,

**"We watched a Syrian plane being shot down as it was flying low to drop bombs. It slowly went down in flames."**

the episode on Wednesday seemed to be confirmed by other witnesses.

"We watched a Syrian plane being shot down as it was flying low to drop bombs," said Ugur Cuneydioglu, who added that he observed the incident from a Turkish border village in southern Hatay Province. "It slowly went down in flames before it hit the ground. It was quite a scene."

Video posted by insurgents on the Internet showed a man in an aviator outfit being carried away. It was not clear if the man was alive but the video said he had been treated in a makeshift hospital. A voice away from the camera says, "This is the pilot who was shelling residents' houses."

The aircraft was said to have been brought down while it was attacking the town of Daret Azzeh, 30 kilometers, or about 20 miles, west of Aleppo and close to the Turkish border. The town was the scene of a mass killing in June, when the government and the rebels blamed each other for the deaths and mutilation of 25 people. The video posted online said the plane had been brought down by "the free men of Daret Azzeh soldiers of God brigade."

On Tuesday, Syrian rebels said they shot down a military helicopter with a surface-to-air missile outside Aleppo and they uploaded video that appeared to confirm that rebels have put their growing stock of heat-seeking missiles to effective use.

In recent months, rebels have used mainly machine guns to shoot down several Syrian Air Force helicopters and attack jets. In the case on Tuesday, the thick smoke trailing the projectile, combined with the elevation of the aircraft, suggested the helicopter was hit by a missile.

Rebels hailed the event as the culmination of their long pursuit of effective anti-aircraft weapons, though it was not clear if the downing on Tuesday was an isolated tactical success or heralded a new phase in the war that would present a meaningful challenge to the Syrian government's air supremacy.

In Damascus, the official news agency, SANA, said the explosions in Jaramana outside the city at around 7 a.m. were the work of "terrorists," the word used by the authorities to denote rebel forces seeking the overthrow of Mr. Assad.

Photographs on the Web site of SANA showed wreckage and flames in what looked like a narrow alleyway with cars covered in chunks of debris from damaged buildings. The agency said the bombings were in the main square of Jaramana, which news reports said was largely populated by members of the Christian and Druze minorities. Residents said the neighborhood was home to many families who have fled other parts of Syria because of the conflict and to some Palestinian families. The blasts caused "huge material damage to the residential buildings and shops," SANA said.

The photographs on the Web site showed shattered windows at the Abou Samra coffee house and gurneys laden with injured people clogging what seemed to be a hospital corridor.

SANA said two bombings in other neighborhoods caused minor damage. Activists reported that there were four explosions and said they were all "huge."

The blasts seemed initially at least to shift the focus of the fighting from the north, where insurgents have claimed string of tactical breakthroughs in recent days, to areas ringing Damascus.

The death toll from the bombings Wednesday was not immediately confirmed. An activist group, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, initially said that 29 people had died but revised the figure later to 47, of whom 38 had been identified. Of the 120 wounded, the rebel group said, 23 people were in serious condition.

*Hala Droubi reported from Dubai. Alan Cowell contributed reporting from Paris, Sebnem Arsu from Istanbul, and Hania Mourtada from Beirut.*



# U.S. considers stronger action in Syria

WASHINGTON

BY DAVID E. SANGER  
AND ERIC SCHMITT

The Obama administration, hoping that the conflict in Syria has reached a turning point, is considering deeper intervention to help push President Bashar al-Assad from power, according to government officials involved in the discussions. While no decisions have been made, the administration is considering several alternatives, including directly providing arms to some opposition fighters.

The most urgent decision, likely to come next week, is whether NATO should deploy surface-to-air missiles in

Turkey, ostensibly to protect that country from Syrian missiles that could carry chemical weapons. The State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, said this week that the Patriot missile system would not be "for use beyond the Turkish border."

But some strategists and administration officials believe that Syrian Air Force pilots might fear other ways in which the missile batteries could be used. If so, they could be intimidated from bombing the northern Syrian border towns where the rebels control considerable territory. A NATO survey team is in Turkey, examining possible sites for the batteries.

Other, more distant options include directly providing arms to opposition fighters rather than only continuing to use other countries, especially Qatar, to do so. A riskier course would be to insert C.I.A. officers or allied intelligence services on the ground in Syria, to work more closely with opposition fighters in areas that they now largely control.

U.S. officials discussed all of these steps before the presidential election. But the combination of President Barack Obama's re-election, which has made the White House more willing to take risks, and a series of recent tactical successes by rebel forces, one senior U.S. official said, "has given this debate a new urgency, and a new focus."

The outcome of the broader debate about how heavily the United States should intervene in another Middle Eastern conflict remains uncertain. Mr. Obama's record in intervening in the Arab Spring has been one of caution: While he joined in what began as a humanitarian effort in Libya, he refused to put U.S. military forces on the ground and, with the exception of a C.I.A. and diplomatic presence, ended the U.S. role as soon as Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi was toppled.

Some officials continue to worry that the risks of intervention in Syria — both in American lives and in setting off a broader conflict, potentially involving Turkey — are too great to justify action. Others argue that more aggressive

steps are justified in Syria by the loss in life there, the risks that its chemical weapons could go missing, and the opportunity to deal a blow to Iran's oldest ally in the region. The debate now coursing through the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department and the C.I.A. resembles a similar one among the United States' main allies.

"Look, let's be frank, what we've done over the last 18 months hasn't been enough," the British prime minister, David Cameron, said three weeks ago after visiting a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan. "The slaughter continues, the

## The outcome of the broader debate remains uncertain.

bloodshed is appalling, the bad effects it's having on the region, the radicalization, but also the humanitarian crisis that is engulfing Syria. So let's work together on really pushing what more we can do." Mr. Cameron has discussed those options directly with Mr. Obama, White House officials say.

France and Britain have recognized a newly formed coalition of opposition groups, which the United States helped piece together. So far, Washington has not done so.

Intelligence officials and independent specialists on Syria said that the administration was reviewing its Syria policy in part to gain credibility and sway with opposition fighters, who have seized major Syrian military bases in recent weeks.

"The administration has figured out that if they don't start doing something, the war will be over and they won't have any influence over the combat forces on the ground," said Jeffrey White, a former Defense Intelligence Agency intelligence officer and specialist on the Syria military. "They may have some influence with various political groups and factions, but they won't have influence with the fighters, and the fighters will control the territory."

Senior congressional officials and diplomats in the region said that they had not been briefed on any impending policy shifts and expressed doubts any would be made until Mr. Obama had selected his new national security team, including new secretaries of state and

defense, a new director of the C.I.A. and perhaps more.

Until now, the United States has offered only limited support to the military campaign against the Syrian government, instead providing nearly \$200 million in humanitarian and other non-lethal aid. In addition, a small number of C.I.A. officers have operated secretly in southern Turkey for several months, according to U.S. officials and Arab intelligence officers, helping allies decide which Syrian opposition fighters across the border would receive shipments of weapons.

The weapons, including automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries overseen mainly by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, U.S. officials said. Even that limited effort is being revamped in the wake of evidence that most of the arms sent to Syrian opposition fighters are going to hard-line Islamic jihadists, not the more secular opposition groups supported by the West.

"The problem right now is that we don't have much visibility into where these weapons are going," one senior administration official said. "That's the problem with outsourcing the issue."

On the more immediate concern about defending Turkey, NATO is expected to act on the Patriot missile request next week. The Patriot PAC-3 is the most modern air defense system in the U.S. and NATO arsenals. Built by Lockheed Martin, the system shot down Iraqi missiles in the early days of the war there in 2003, and has been deployed to South Korea to protect against missile attacks from the North.

In the case of the impending deployment to Turkey, the missiles could come from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. While they could reach into Syrian territory, their range is limited. Turkey requested the missiles after Syrian artillery and mortar fire landed inside Turkish territory, killing several civilians.

# Kurdish-Iraqi government talks collapse amid fear of civil war

Talks between the Kurds and Iraq's central government on pulling back troops in disputed areas are collapsing. What does it mean for Prime Minister Maliki?

By Jane Arraf, Correspondent

**B**aghdad, Iraq — Talks between Kurdish and central government forces aimed at defusing military tension in northern Iraq have collapsed amid fears that bitter political divisions are again bringing the country to the brink of civil war.

The talks in Baghdad between Iraqi and Kurdish military commanders brokered by a three-star American general broke down on Thursday, two days after the prime minister announced both sides had agreed on pulling back forces in part of the disputed areas. Officials on Friday said there were no new talks scheduled.

Kurdish regional President Massoud Barzani, who has described deployment of Iraqi forces as a plot against the Kurds, accused the Iraqi prime minister of renegeing on the agreement and vowed that Kurdish forces would deter Baghdad's "militarism."

The collapse of the talks and the high-profile corruption charges connected to a Russian arms deal have added fuel to efforts by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's political opponents to engineer a no-confidence vote. While attacks have declined since sectarian violence tore the country apart several years ago, rampant corruption and political paralysis have made it difficult for the country to move forward.

"We believe this is a deliberate policy by Baghdad to divert attention from the government's political failures and its deepening crisis, including corruption," says Barham Salih, former Kurdish prime minister and a senior official in President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

## SECURITY CONCERNS

Mr. Maliki says a new security operations center overseeing three northern provinces adjacent to the Kurdish region was necessary to address worsening security. The Kurds have seen the move by Iraqi forces to consolidate control in areas disputed by the two sides as a declaration of hostilities.

Two weeks ago, it flared into an armed clash and a movement of Kurdish and Iraqi forces after an Iraqi police operation near the headquarters of a Kurdish party in Tuz Kharmatu, close to Kirkuk.

Gunfire involving Iraqi and Kurdish forces



*Kurdish Peshmerga troops are deployed on the outskirts of Kirkuk, some 155 miles north of Baghdad, Iraq, November 24. Iraq's Kurdish region has sent reinforcements to a disputed area where its troops are involved in a standoff with the Iraqi army, a senior Kurdish military official said, despite calls on both sides for dialogue to calm the situation.*

killed a civilian and prompted both Iraqi Army and Kurdish Peshmerga commanders to move more forces into the region.

Despite the rhetoric, neither side appears to be ready or willing to engage in a larger battle. But the same fear that prompted US forces to act as a bridge between the two factions before American troops withdrew from Iraq has prompted worry that the ongoing tension could ignite something that would be difficult to stop.

## THE PLAN

Although the troops are gone, the US continues to play a limited role in trying to resolve the conflict.

The prime minister's office on Tuesday took the unusual step of specifying that an American official, Lt. Gen. Robert Caslan, in charge of the US embassy's office of security cooperation, was involved in the talks with the Kurds.

A senior adviser to the Kurdish President Falah Mustafa says a cabinet-level delegation on the government side, which had been expected to agree to a plan hammered out by military commanders on both sides, hadn't done so. He said Friday no new talks were scheduled.

The plan calls for developing a mechanism for "urgent" withdrawal of two sides to positions held before the mid-November clash.

The Kurds are also asking for a review of the Dijla (Tigris) Operations Command, seen by even many of Maliki's allies as part of wide-ranging efforts to centralize power.

## POLITICAL LANDSCAPE CHANGE?

Many view the dispute as an attempt to lay the groundwork for provincial elections scheduled for next year – seen as a key test of support for political parties facing a national poll in 2014.

Maliki owes his position to a fragile and fractious coalition of Shiite and Kurdish parties cobbled together after he failed to win a majority two years ago.

"The political landscape will be quite different from what we have seen in 2010," says Maria Fantappie of the International Crisis Group. "Maliki seems to be devoting a lot of thought to how to create a cross-sectarian and cross-confessional political force.... The provincial election is an important opportunity to see who has power, where."

The current coalition is increasingly fraying, with key partners such as Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr increasingly going on the attack against the prime minister. Maliki has been reaching out to Sunni politicians and a breakaway Shiite faction of the Sadr movement for political support.

On Thursday, Mr. Sadr lashed out in a statement against what he said were security failures by the Maliki government as →

⇒ well as growing corruption scandals.

"The Iraqi spring will come against corruption, sectarianism, and those engaged in corruption and terrorism," said the statement from the influential cleric.

Maliki this week dismissed his government spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, in a widening scandal over a \$5.2 billion Russian arms deal – one of more than a dozen officials being summoned by Iraq's integrity commission in an investigation over alleged corruption. Iraq, eager to lessen its dependence on the US, had planned to buy attack helicopters and missile systems from Russia. The deal was opposed by the Kurds who fear the weapons

could be used against them.

#### LATEST VIOLENCE

Although the country has become much safer, there are still regular bombings and assassinations of government and security officials.

Iraq on Thursday was hit by a string of bombings and suicide bombings, most of them in the Shiite south, killing more than 35 people and exposing serious weaknesses in security.

Two million pilgrims gathered in Karbala last Sunday to commemorate Ashura – the main day of mourning for the killing of Imam Ali – without a single bomb explo-

ding. An estimated 30,000 security forces blanketed the city and were placed on high alert in Baghdad and other cities.

But on Thursday, a suicide bomber was apparently waved through several checkpoints before detonating his truck packed with hidden explosives just a few hundred yards from the Karbala shrine.

Many checkpoints rely on widely discredited explosive detection devices that the Iraqi government purchased several years ago at hugely inflated cost and are the subject of a fraud case in Britain. ■

Rudaw

28 November 2012

## Kurdish Political Parties Ready to Defend Territories if Necessary

By NAWZAD MAHMOOD  
rudaw.net

**SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region** -- Kurdish political parties say that they are ready to fight and defend Kurdistan's territories should a conflict erupt between the Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga.

The parties that met on Nov. 23 in Erbil confirmed their united stance with Kurdistan's president on the Dijla Operations Command (DOC) being in the disputed regions. In the case of a military conflict, the parties agreed that they would not remain silent.

Even the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), which has been an unarmed party since its foundation, wholeheartedly expressed its readiness to fight.

Relations between Kurdistan and Baghdad are at a complicated stage, which some observers believe is closer to conflict than settlement. Officials on both sides are talking about deescalating the crisis, but sending more forces to the disputed regions at the same time.

Muhammad Ahmed, a KIU political bureau member, said, "Defending the achievements, security, peace and territories of Kurdistan is a national and religious obligation. All the parties and all the Kurds need to defend Kurdistan."



"we are totally ready and have more than 100 vehicles of armed, loyal Peshmergas ready to take part in the war."

He added, "If a war breaks out, then it will happen to all of us and we have to be united."

Jalal Jawhar, a leader of the Change Movement (Gorran), said that their party is anti-war and a civil political group. He advised Iraqi citizens to take war out of their minds because "we have suffered the most in wars, especially the Kurds and the Shia."

Jawhar told Rudaw that war is for armed groups and armies, and Gorran is neither of these. "But if the situation escalates to the level of occupation of our country, then we are ready with our bodies and properties and will be there before the two ruling parties," he said.

Muhammad Haji Mahmud, a political bureau executive official of the Democratic Socialist Party of Kurdistan (PDSK), demonstrated his reaction to the actions of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Iraqi army officials by sending large numbers of armed Peshmergas to Kirkuk.

Mahmud recalled that the secretary of his party was wounded during the liberation of Kirkuk in 1991, and that if war breaks out again "we are totally ready and have more than 100 vehicles of armed,

loyal Peshmergas ready to take part in the war."

He explained that many of his party members are among the Peshmerga forces and many others guard party bases. "All the supporters and members of our party are ready to fight and defend Kurdistan," Mahmoud said.

"We are proudly ready to fight and defend the disputed areas," said Bilal Sulaiman, leadership member of the Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal).

Sulaiman said that defending land and country was a national and religious duty. "In addition to the guards of Komal and its bases, we have hundreds of other members and supporters," he said.

Komal was an armed party until 2002. After the bombardment of their base by the allied forces and the arrest of their leader, Ali Bapir, they announced that they were disarming and would continue on as a political party.

Six hundred of their armed members were retired, but Sulaiman said that these Peshmergas have experience and skills. "They are at home now and can receive arms and take part. We are fully ready," he said. ●

# En Syrie, Kurdes et rebelles entrent en conflit

Des combattants islamistes et des milices affiliées au PKK s'affrontent dans la région de Ras-Al-Aïn

## Région de Kamichliyé (Syrie)

Envoyé spécial

Les armes se sont tuées, pour le moment, à Ras-Al-Aïn. Après une semaine d'intenses combats pour le contrôle de cette ville frontalière de la Turquie, les miliciens kurdes des Forces de défense du peuple (YPG), liés au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), et les brigades islamistes se revendiquant de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) ont conclu une trêve, dimanche 25 novembre. Tous les hommes en armes se sont retirés du centre de la petite cité désertée par ses habitants. Les affrontements des jours précédents avaient pourtant fait craindre une escalade rapide et l'ouverture d'un nouveau front dans le conflit syrien.

Les Kurdes (10% de la population), majoritaires dans le nord-est du pays, s'étaient jusqu'alors tenus à distance des affrontements. Mais la prise de Ras-Al-Aïn (Sere Kaniye

pelleteuse, des hommes et des femmes portant keffieh et kalachnikov, pointent leurs armes sur les véhicules qui approchent.

Le 19 novembre, la tension est brutalement montée d'un cran. Au dernier point de contrôle, on pouvait entendre, ce jour-là, les échanges nourris de coups de feu et voir s'élever des colonnes de fumée. Plusieurs milliers de civils, vieillards, femmes, enfants, mobilisés par le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), l'aile syrienne du PKK, principale force politique kurde du pays, ont fait route vers Ras-Al-Aïn pour en reprendre possession. Les combattants de l'Armée libre y étaient entrés le 8 novembre, subissant dans un premier temps des bombardements de l'aviation syrienne.

A la première accalmie, les tensions sont apparues entre les rebelles de l'ASL et les Kurdes. « Nous allons chasser tous ces djihadistes à la solde de la Turquie. Nous défendons notre terre », menaçait Miz-

gin, un manifestant armé d'un fusil de chasse et d'une ceinture de grosses cartouches. La caravane bigarrée, encadrée par des pick-up hérissés de mitrailleuses fut stoppée aux portes de la ville. Au moins une douzaine de combattants arabes et cinq Kurdes ont été tués ce jour-là, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, parmi lesquels Abed Khalil, chef local du PYD. Le lendemain, 10 000 personnes assistaient à ses funérailles.

La trêve conclue dimanche reste fragile. L'ASL a fait part de son intention de progresser vers l'Est et de « libérer » la ville d'Hassaka, tenue par le régime, voire celle de Kamichliyé, où les forces loyalistes restent solidement établies autour de l'aéroport.

Les combattants islamistes déployés à Ras-Al-Aïn ne cachent pas leur hostilité aux Kurdes du PYD. « La révolution pour la liberté s'est transformée en guerre de religion. Il y a beaucoup de combat-

tants étrangers qui se réclament d'Al-Qaïda et sont aidés par la Turquie », affirme Kamiran Hassan, membre du Conseil du Kurdistan occidental, une institution affiliée au PYD. Le Jabhat Al-Nousra, qui possède trois chars pris aux forces du régime, est mieux armé. Les

« Nous allons chasser tous ces djihadistes à la solde de la Turquie. Nous défendons notre terre »

Un manifestant kurde

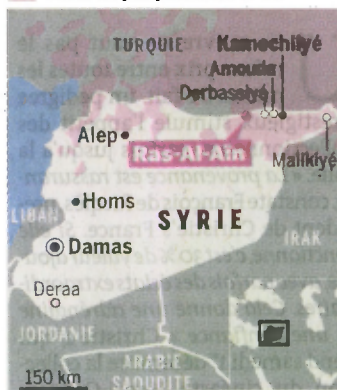
affrontements de Ras-Al-Aïn pourraient donc annoncer d'autres batailles. Déjà fin octobre, des combats avaient éclaté à Achrafiyé, un quartier kurde d'Alep, après une tentative d'intrusion de l'ASL, faisant plusieurs dizaines de morts. La dirigeante locale des milices

YPG, Nujin Deriki, avait été capturée. « J'ai été torturée et livrée par l'Armée libre à la Turquie, affirme cette femme, rencontrée le 23 novembre à Kamichliyé. J'ai été détenue à Hatay (Antioche) six jours par les services de renseignements turcs avant d'être relâchée. »

Dans la bande de territoire contrôlée par les Kurdes, qui court jusqu'à la frontière irakienne, la défense s'organise. Les miliciens locaux sont encadrés par des hommes plus aguerris du PKK, venus de Turquie. A Malikiyé (Derik), Derbasiyé et Amoudé, les derniers représentants de l'administration baasiste ont été chassés le 12 novembre, laissant les Kurdes seuls maîtres du terrain. C'est désormais la crainte d'une percée des rebelles qui fédère les deux principales factions kurdes : le Conseil national kurde (CNK) et le PYD, ont accepté la création d'un Conseil militaire commun. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Zone de peuplement kurde



en kurde), début novembre, par des groupes islamistes radicaux, Jabhat Al-Nousra et Ghouraba Al-Cham, a changé la donne.

Tout le long de la route qui borde la frontière turque et mène de Kamichliyé à Ras-Al-Aïn, les combattants kurdes du YPG ont disposé points de contrôle et barricades. Dans des tranchées creusées à la

# Qui sont les Kurdes et que veulent-ils?

Tout le monde a entendu parler de cette «nation sans Etat». A cheval sur quatre pays (la Turquie, l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie), ce peuple est tout de même largement méconnu.



**Ariane Bonzon** Journaliste, spécialiste de politique étrangère. Elle a été en poste à Istanbul, Jérusalem et Johannesburg. Vit et travaille actuellement entre la France et la Turquie. Dernier ouvrage paru: Dialogue sur le tabou arménien, d'Ahmet Insel et Michel Marian, entretien d'Ariane Bonzon, ed. Liana Levi, 2009.



Un Kurde sunnite iranien, à Marivan, en Iran en mai 2011. REUTERS /Morteza Nikoubazl -

**A**u cœur du Proche-Orient, partagés entre au moins quatre pays (Irak, Iran, Turquie, Syrie) et formant une nombreuse diaspora en Europe, les Kurdes constituent la plus grande nation sans Etat.

Dans la recomposition régionale que les soulèvements arabes pourraient entraîner, les Kurdes auront certainement leur mot à dire.

L'occasion de s'interroger sur ce que représentent aujourd'hui les Kurdes et sur ce qu'ils veulent, en compagnie de **Sandrine Alexie** de l'Institut kurde de Paris. **Ecrivain, traductrice, elle blogue le monde kurde depuis 2000.**



## ON NE SAIT PAS COMBIEN SONT LES KURDES

**VRAI.** Les estimations varient entre 20 et 40 millions. Aucun des quatre pays où vivent les Kurdes n'a jamais fait de recensement ethnique. Rester dans le flou arrange tous les gouvernements.

Les estimations les plus plausibles donnent 15 millions en Turquie et 7-8 millions en Iran. Dans ces deux pays, les autorités évitent le recensement pour ne pas renforcer le poids des particularismes ethniques. Ils seraient 1-2 millions en Syrie, parmi lesquels 800.000 environ sont privés de nationalité syrienne, donc d'existence légale.

En Irak, le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK) donne les chiffres officiels de 5,3 millions d'habitants et l'Irak ne veut en compter que 4,3 car cela permet de minorer le budget accordé aux provinces kurdes en fonction de sa population.

Si on compte les autres petites régions kurdes hors GRK dont Kirkouk, on peut envisager 6 à 6,5 millions de Kurdes en Irak.

Enfin, selon les estimations du Conseil de l'Europe, on peut décompter dans la diaspora: ceux qui vivent en Allemagne, environ 800.000, plutôt originaires de Syrie et de Turquie; en Suède 100.000, provenant plutôt d'Iran et d'Irak; en Grande-Bretagne 90.000, provenant d'Irak; en France 120-150.000, majoritairement de Turquie. Mais ces estimations sont difficilement fiables en raison du nombre de clandestins dans la diaspora. Impossible aussi de chiffrer les Kurdes d'ex-URSS. En Israël, ils seraient 130.000.

Un total de 35 millions de Kurdes vivant dans le monde ne serait cependant pas complètement irréaliste.

## LE «PEUPLE KURDE» N'EXISTE PAS

**FAUX.** Les tribus et les familles kurdes sont à cheval sur plusieurs frontières. Certains partis politiques ont une influence transfrontalière.

Ainsi le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, le PKK (Turquie), listé comme organisation terroriste par les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, possède une branche dans chaque pays: en Syrie (PYD), en Iran (PJAK) et un petit parti en Irak (PÇKD). Les partis kurdes syriens, hors le PYD-PKK, ont souvent eu des sympathies pour l'un des deux principaux partis irakiens, le PDK de Barzani ou l'UPK de Talabani.

Les Kurdes ont deux dialectes principaux, différents mais compréhensibles l'un par l'autre: le kurmancî est parlé en Syrie, en Turquie, au nord du Kurdistan d'Irak et du Kurdistan d'Iran, dans tous les pays de l'ancienne URSS, ainsi qu'au Khorassan iranien; le soranî, quant à lui est parlé au sud du Kurdistan d'Irak et d'Irak. Au Kurdistan de Turquie, une autre langue voisine, le zaza, est surtout parlée à Dersim-Tunceli.

Sandrine Alexie explique:

«Avec tout ce qu'ils ont subi depuis la fin de la première guerre mondiale (politiques d'assimilation voire génocide comme en

*Irak, interdiction de l'enseignement de la langue, etc.), si les Kurdes ne constituaient pas une nation, ils auraient disparu et il n'y aurait plus depuis longtemps de "Question kurde". Le sentiment national des Kurdes a été renforcé par les persécutions.»*

## CHEZ LES KURDES, IL Y A DES MUSULMANS, DES CHRÉTIENS ET DES JUIFS

**VRAI.** La grande majorité des Kurdes est musulmane sunnite (70%).

En Irak, la petite population kurde chiite a été massacrée ou déportée par Saddam Hussein en 1987-1988. Certains de ces Kurdes chiites, originaires d'Irak, vivent dans des camps de réfugiés en Iran. Depuis la chute du parti Baas, ils commencent à revenir en Irak, mais ils sont au maximum 20.000.

En Iran même, il y a une concentration de Kurdes chiites au sud du pays. Parmi les Kurdes, le syncrétisme soufi-chiisme pré-islamique est influent (alévis en Turquie, yézidis en Irak du nord, shabak autour de Mossoul, kaka'i yarsan en Iran).

Les chrétiens du Kurdistan se partagent entre catholiques et églises autocéphales: Chaldéens, Assyriens, Syriaques. Ils sont de langue arméénienne.

Beaucoup de ces chrétiens ont participé à partir de 1967 aux révoltes des Kurdes, car ils étaient menacés par les exodes forcés, la destruction de leurs villages et par l'arabisation, avant de l'être aujourd'hui par l'islamisme.

On compterait actuellement plus de 100.000 chrétiens kurdes au Kurdistan d'Irak. Ils ne sont pas reconnus comme minorité religieuse ou ethnique en Turquie où la guerre des années 1990 les a chassés des régions kurdes (ils sont souvent pris entre deux feux, dans les combats des Kurdes contre le gouvernement central).

Au Kurdistan de Syrie, leurs rapports avec les Kurdes musulmans sont plutôt ➤

➤ bons et les chrétiens dans les villes kurdes soutiennent plutôt les mouvements kurdes ou n'en souffrent pas, contrairement à ce qui se passe dans le reste de la Syrie.

Depuis 1949-1950, tous les Kurdes juifs sont partis en Israël, en Australie ou aux Etats-Unis.

L'Irak n'a pas de liens diplomatiques avec Israël mais en 2006 le président du KRG, Barzanî, s'est prononcé en faveur de l'ouverture d'un consulat israélien à Erbil. Les Kurdes juifs peuvent cependant revenir visiter leur village d'origine, sous d'autres passeports. Il ne paraît pas y avoir d'hostilité des Kurdes musulmans envers eux.

Mustafa Barzanî (le père de l'actuel président du KRG) avait de très bonnes relations avec Israël qui l'a soutenu dès les années 1960, ou encore en 1975, et les Kurdes ne s'en sont jamais cachés. La tribu des Barzanî avait des liens étroits avec les juifs d'Aqra dont l'ancien ministre israélien de la Défense, Ytzakh Mordechai. Il y a aussi de nombreux «Barzanî» (originaires de Barzan) israéliens.

#### LE KURDISTAN N'A JAMAIS EXISTÉ

**VRAI & FAUX.** Le Kurdistan (mot interdit en Turquie) n'a jamais existé en tant qu'Etat nation du XXe siècle, mais dès l'époque médiévale, il y eut des principautés indépendantes ou semi-indépendantes tenues par des princes kurdes.

Le Sultan de Perse, Sandjar, un Turc seldjukide, a créé (en 1150) une province portant le nom de Kurdistan. Parallèlement à ce dernier, émergea ensuite un Kurdistan ottoman dont les contours changèrent en fonction des déplacements de frontière turco-persane.

«Dans leur titulature, les Sultans ottomans portaient le titre de "Padişah-i Kurdistan" (empereur du Kurdistan) comme en attestent les archives administratives ottomanes. Mais les autorités turques ne semblent pas s'en souvenir», rappelle Sandrine Alexie.

Et par la suite, a toujours subsisté une province appelée Kurdistan en Perse, puis dans l'Iran moderne.

A la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale, les nouvelles frontières répartissent les Kurdes sur quatre pays. Les premières cartes du Kurdistan ont été dressées en 1919, par un envoyé kurde sur la demande de la Société des Nations (les articles 62 et 64 du Traité de Sèvres signé en 1920 signé par le sultan et les Puissances prévoyaient un Kurdistan autonome voire indépendant et une Arménie indépendante). Le Kurdistan y a la forme d'un grand chameau dont la tête boirait dans la mer, sa superficie y est égale à celle de la France.

#### LES KURDES VEULENT UN ETAT À EUX

**VRAI.** Les Kurdes veulent majoritairement leur indépendance. Ils tiennent à dire qu'ils en remplissent tous les critères (continuité territoriale, langue, culture, histoire) et qu'ils

en ont le droit.

Mais ils savent que le demander serait un suicide politique. Cela conduirait les Américains à lâcher les Kurdes d'Irak. A ses débuts, fin des années 1980-début des années 1990, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, Turquie) réclamait l'indépendance, une revendication qu'il a abandonnée par la suite.

Dès les années 1960, une autre solution s'esquissait selon laquelle chacune des quatre parties du Kurdistan devrait acquérir son autonomie pour s'unir ensuite dans une sorte de Benelux, un ensemble aux frontières plus souples.

Cette idée est rapportée pour la première fois en 1963 par Dana Adams Schmidt, journaliste au New York Times, qui passe 46 jours dans les montagnes avec Mustafa Barzanî et écrit un récit: *Journey Among Brave Men*.

Ce projet d'union revient en force aujourd'hui et bénéficie d'un certain consensus. Ce qui se passe au Kurdistan d'Irak depuis 2003 a redonné confiance en eux aux Kurdes des autres pays.

En particulier en Turquie où, depuis 2009, l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK), prenant pour modèle la Région du Kurdistan d'Irak, multiplie les initiatives politiques dans le sens de l'autonomie et de l'autodétermination, ce qui explique la politique de répression actuelle (arrestations, procès, interdictions, etc.) redoublée de l'Etat turc.

#### LES KURDES NE S'ENTENDENT PAS ENTRE EUX

**VRAI.** Très indépendantistes, ils n'ont jamais vécu sous un pouvoir centralisé kurde.

C'est un peuple des montagnes et un peuple anciennement nomade, ce qui ne prédispose pas à l'unification. De plus, l'organisation, encore très tribale, oppose souvent les chefs de tribus. Sandrine Alexie précise:

«Les Kurdes n'ont pas le culte du grand dictateur, ils seraient plutôt du genre gascon. Chaque Kurde est le roi de sa montagne. Alors ils se chamaillent, les rivalités sont fréquentes et faciles.»

En Irak du nord, les Kurdes ont connu une guerre civile de 1992 à 1996. Les grandes puissances régionales ont soutenu l'un ou l'autre parti, à tour de rôle. Les frères ennemis de l'UPK et du PDK se sont finalement réunifiés en 2003. Mais cette guerre qui a failli faire couler leurs rêves d'indépendance reste un souvenir traumatique pour les Kurdes.

#### C'EST EN TURQUIE QUE LA SITUATION DES KURDES EST LA PIRE

**FAUX.** Malgré le harcèlement judiciaire, les arrestations et les emprisonnements dont ils sont l'objet, les Kurdes de Turquie ne vivent plus les années de plomb (déportations, villages brûlés, tortures de masse, disparitions de militants, opérations du

Hezbollah turc) qu'ils ont connues dans les années 1980-1990 avant l'arrivée au pouvoir des islamo-conservateurs de l'AKP.

En Iran, le traitement des Kurdes est pire (interdiction de toutes les langues minoritaires, dont l'arabe, interdiction des journaux en kurde, des associations culturelles de défense des droits de l'homme, des associations féministes, des syndicats kurdes, persécutions, répression de tout début d'expression de la société civile).

Les arrestations, les emprisonnements, les tortures sont nombreuses à l'égard des militants ou des combattants du Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan (PJAK) qui seraient soutenus par la CIA. Les condamnations à mort également car les Kurdes du PJAK, se définissant parfois comme athées et plutôt marxistes (la ligne politique du PKK-PJAK est très difficile à suivre mais ils sont anti-islam).

Il y a aussi les Kurdes sunnites qui sont mal vus des mollahs. Tous peuvent être condamnés (et le sont souvent) comme «ennemis de Dieu» par les Hautes cours révolutionnaires d'Iran, ce qui est passible de la peine capitale.

#### LA GUERRE EN SYRIE EST UNE OPPORTUNITÉ POUR LES KURDES

**VRAI.** Soit la démocratie est instaurée et les Kurdes y gagnent au moins une plus grande autonomie locale et une reconnaissance constitutionnelle de leur peuple et de leur langue; soit c'est le chaos, avec des zones d'influences diverses et là aussi ils peuvent en tirer profit car ils veulent reproduire ce qui s'est passé en Irak en 1992 (autonomie) lorsque Saddam Hussein s'est retiré du nord du pays.

Dans ce cas, ils empêcheront le retour des soldats arabes dans les zones que le régime de Bachar el-Assad leur a laissées. Et ne laisseront pas non plus entrer l'armée de libération syrienne (ASL), car ils craignent l'influence des djihadistes qui se battent aux côtés de l'ALS (les clashes entre milices de l'ASL et celles du PYD-PKK ont déjà commencé).

La stratégie du PYD-PKK pourrait être la suivante: on laisse les Syriens sunnites s'affronter aux Syriens chiites, on protège nos minorités et notre population et on sécurise nos zones.

«Mais on ne peut pas exclure non plus une guerre civile entre Kurdes du PYD-PKK et Kurdes de la nouvelle coalition révolutionnaire», explique Sandrine Alexie. Si les Peshmergas syriens (volontaires, déserteurs de l'armée syrienne qui se sont réfugiés au Kurdistan d'Irak) ne sont pas encore revenus en force dans le nord de la Syrie, c'est probablement parce que tout le monde craint des affrontements interkurdes. □

Ariane Bonzon