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MOSCOW:

PRESIDENT MASSUD BARZANI WELCOMED BY VLADIMIR PUTIN

Following his diplomatic tour of Europe in January, including to the Davos summit, The President of the Kurdistan Region, Massud Barzani, returned to Irbil for a while before leaving again for Moscow on 19 February. The declared objectives of the journey were *“to discuss relations between Russia and the Government of Kurdistan and developments in Iraq and in the region as a whole”*.

Among those accompanying him were the President's son, Massud Barzani, Kurdistan's Security Advisor, the Deputy Prime Minister Imad Ahmad, the President's Chief of Staff, Fuad Hussein, the Foreign Minister, Falah Bakir, the Minister of Housing and Building, Kamran Ahmed Abdullah and Ashti

Hawrami, Minister of Natural Resources for several years past. The presence of the last two shows that this visit will cover issues regarding economic development and particularly the exploration and operation of Kurdistan's oil fields. The Russian company, Gazprom Neft has, so far, been mainly active in Iraq even though, in 2012, it announced it was taking shares in two blocks in Iraqi Kurdistan — a 40% share in the Garmiyan field and an 80% share in Shakal. The Russian company then estimated that the resources of the two blocks could produce about 3.6 billion barrels.

This announcement came at the height of the controversy between Baghdad and Irbil over the Region's right to sign its own agreements with foreign companies. During the summer of 2012,

Iraq had toughened its discourse, threatening foreign companies that signed contacts with Kurdistan and threatening reprisals against their agreements with Iraq. At that time Baghdad's main targets were ExxonMobil. According to Nefte Compass, a weekly that specialised in fuel and power issues, Nuri al-Maliki's government had envisaged replacing ExxonMobil by LUKOIL (a Russian company) following a meeting between Nuri al-Maliki and Vladimir Putin. However no official statement was made.

In November 2012 there were contradictory rumours about the future activities of Gazprom Neft. Some sources close to the Iraqi government stated that it had frozen its projects in Kurdistan, while others apparently from the company itself (but not from its

official spokesman) and from the KRG stated that Gazprom Neft for alliance with Russia. In October 2012 had let them understand that the contracts signed were being carried out.

However, it is not only in the field of hydrocarbons that Baghdad and Irbil seem to be competing. Nuri al-Maliki had also visited Moscow and had signed arms contracts for a total of 4 billion dollars. Now ever since the resurgence of tension between the Kurds and the Iraqis over Kirkuk and the other disputed territories, Iraq's arms policy has been very closely watched by the KRG, that sees it as a direct threat to the Region. Last December there was a rumour of future arms purchases worth 87 million dollars by the Kurds from Moscow, though this was denied by the Irbil government. Safin Diyazee had denied this in December and it was again denied today by another spokesperson, Omed Sabah, while the media reported remarks by Massud Barzani denying without actually denying it (as is his habit!) by saying that it was not on the agenda but that if such an offer were made it would be welcome...

Seven days later, while nothing concrete had filtered out on the subject of arms sales, more is known about the agreement with Gazprom Neft. It is clear that Russia's fifth largest crude oil producer has secured the lion's share, with 80% of the Halabja oilfield, whose reserves are said to be between 90 and 100 million tonnes of hydrocarbons. However the terms of such an agreement have not been revealed.

"Our next mission is to prepare our working programme of geological prospecting" announced Vladimir Iakovlev, first Assistant General Manager of Gazprom Neft. Despite this, he asserted that he had received nonnegative mes-

sages from Baghdad and that the contract covering the Badra field in Southern Iraq has not be questioned.

Another burning issue raised is that of Syria. Damascus is supported by Putin whereas Massud Barzani is supporting all the initiatives to try and unite the Syrian Kurdish National Council (KNC) and has several times acted as an intermediary between the Syrian National Council, the KNC and Turkey. In any case, his position is openly opposed to that of Nuri al-Maliki who, for his part, remains close to Bachar al-Assad.

The Iranian nuclear issue also could concern the Kurds who chose to remain as neutral as possible as between Washington and Teheran although the increasing Iranian influence in Baghdad has not helped ease the political atmosphere between the Kurds and Nuri al-Maliki.

According to the Kurdish presidential cabinet, however, the meeting between Massud Barzani and Vladimir Putin mainly covered strengthening economic and cultural cooperation and the role of Russian companies in the reconstruction of Kurdistan.

To the extent that there is continuity with his father's policies, it is also in Massud Barzani's refusal to chose between one camp or another, particularly between the USA and Russia. Often supported (but also often let down) by the Americans, the Barzanis have always maintained good relations with the Russians. Mollah Mustafa and his men's long sojourn there (many of whom, while there, married Soviet women and were educated there) always enabled the Iraqi Kurds to maintain the same neutrality between the USA and the Russians as between the USA and Iran.

In the dispute between the Kurdish Region and Iraq, the Americans too often tried to play for time (and even to discourage the Kurdish desire for autonomy) for Irbil to trust Washington to ensure its security let alone to support them in their differences with Iraq. History, also, provides many warning such as Kissinger's betrayal of the Kurds in 1975, while Baghdad's arms purchases from the US have also worried them. Then there was the latest incursion by the US Ambassador to Ankara, Francis Ricciardone, warning Turkey against its policy of energy partnership with the Kurds at the expense of Baghdad, which also displeased Erdogan, who then suddenly became a warm defender of Iraqi Constitutional Federalism. At a time when Kurdish and Iraqi troops have been confronting one another for several months over Kirkuk and before the Hamrin Mountains, such an argument against Kurdish autonomy was obviously not appreciated in Irbil. In any case, this visit and the agreement with Gazprom Neft is a further snub at the Iraqi Prime Minister's centralising policy, enabling the Kurds to strengthen their claim to being an independent economic power a few months after Maliki's visit to Moscow.

Massud Barzani took advantage of his stay in Moscow to visit the where his father, Mustafa Barzani, had lived during his years in exile after his legendary *"long march"* from Mahabad to Russia. Indeed, 66 years after the fall of the Mahabad Republic which had seen his father and 500 Peshmergas seek asylum in Russia, the son returned as President of a Kurdish proto-State flying the same colours at those of Mahabad, though needing to maintain American friendship as well as possible promises of Russian arms.

TURKEY: NEGOTIATIONS AND IMRALI LEAKS

The negotiations taking place for some months between the imprisoned chief of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, and the Turkish Government via the Secretary of State for the Security Services (MIT), Hakan Pidan, are arousing considerable stir in the Turkish political caste — but also in the ranks of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

During a meeting at Antalya on 11 February, the BDP co-President, Gultan Kisanak had again expressed a demand for “autonomy for Kurdistan” and again criticised the opacity of the political process being played out in Imrali and the way his party had been pushed to one side.

“Every day there is a new speculation on who will be going to Imrali for the second round of negotiations with Ocalan. So far the government has not recognised the BDP as part of the negotiation process”.

For his part, Murat Karayalan, the PKK military commander, demanded to be able to have direct telephone communications with Ocalan, which the latter, apparently, had also demanded. Contrary to Gultan Kisanak, he does not seem to want to act as “part of the negotiation” process — possibly to avoid having personally to shoulder the decisions when faced with his men — but just fully to follow the line and orders set out by Abdullah Ocalan: “Ocalan already represents us and we think it’s best to negotiate with Ocalan alone” (Firat News).

There is one demand that, according to the daily paper

Taraf, might be agreed, especially when it’s a matter of carrying out ceasefire operations and demilitarisation of the PKK in the field. Thus *Taraf* suggests that contacts between the PKK chief and his military units could well be by teleconferencing.

Regarding the conditions for a retreat of guerrilla units and an end to the fighting, Murat Karayilan avoided giving any opinion, positive or negative, on this issue. He just answered with another question: “Why were we fighting in the first place? There was a reason for our presence in the mountains”.

For his part, the Turkish Prime Minister is trying to address the “Kurdish electorate” directly in order to ensure its support for the peace process: “We have initiated a process ... to provide a chance for a political solution. So long as you support us we will tackle this problem with determination” he stated in a public speech at Midyat, a town moreover in a region with a mixed population of Kurds, Christians, Arabs and Turks.

However, the demand for a direct visit by leaders of the BDP or Members of Parliament to Imrali was not immediately agreed. In the first instance it was Abdullah Ocalan’s brother, Mehmet, who was authorised to visit him on 16 February. The private character of this visit was confirmed by Mehmet Ocalan, who avoided any personal comments on the peace process, but just gave the daily paper *Dicle* an account of the conversation he’d had with his brother on the subject. Thus Abdullah is said to have asked how public opinion (probably Kurdish) had greeted the negotiations and Mehmet

had answered (without mentioning his sources for this) that they were 70% favourable.

Abdullah Ocalan is said to have said: “I am a prisoner and, consequently, am unable to do everything or find a solution to everything. Here I have meetings with Intelligence officers (MIT) who are behaving sincerely to me. However, the truth is that there are other people and other powers involved in this problem. I do not know to what extent these powers will support the process. I am doing my best, but my means are limited as I cannot answer all the questions and take responsibility for everything. That would not be a correct approach. I have sent my proposals to the government through a State delegation, expressing what we want and what we can do and how the problem can lead to a solution. Whatever the government may call it, this is a war towards peace. The government will examine my proposals and will evaluate the way the Kurdish problem can end with a solution”.

The PKK chief affirmed that the Kurdish question concerns Qandil as well as “Europe” (the PKK in Europe) and added that the co-Presidents of the BDP and the Congress for a Democratic Society (DTK) should also take part in the negotiations so that they could communicate information from Imrali to the PKK’s offices in Europe and Qandil. He then alluded to reservations that had been made to the government following the visit by certain members of the BDP rather than others, without specifying what the reason was.

“The government raised problems about the names of those who would be part of the BDP delegation, but it is not a matter of names. It is not right to make an issue about who

should or should not come to Imrali. No one has been authorised since the visit by Ahmet Turk and Alya Akat 40 days ago. The Turkish and Kurdish peoples are also a major part of the process towards a resolution of the Kurdish problem — which is a problem that has lasted for 100 or 200 years, not just 30 or 40. The BDP delegation must take part in the discussion on the way the process must advance. They must then inform the public about the process while Qandil and Europe must put forward their opinions and proposals. We need people to convey information to these circles. The Kurdish camp does not close the door on a peaceful solution. If the process now taking place reaches a dead end this will harm the Kurds as much as the Turks and the whole region”.

In passing he gave his views on the murders in Paris, where he seems to accuse Turkey of covering an agent: *“The judicial authorities say that the murders were perpetrated by someone from Sivas (Ömer Güney). Our people must know that these three Kurdish political activists were killed by those who brought e here. The suspect is said to have visited Turkey and Ankara 10 times last year. The Turkish State must reveal who this person is , what he was doing in Ankara, what his mission was, whom he met and who planned the attack. France, the United States and NATO all know who is behind this murder but are not telling the truth, which must be disclosed for the process to advance”.*

On 21 February it was finally announced that some Kurdish Members of Parliament would be allowed to see Ocalan even though the Turkish bombing of Qandil were continuing.

The names of those who received the Turkish government's approval to visit Imrali on 23 February (allegedly at

Ocalan's suggestion) included the film director Sırrı Süreyya Önder (a Turk from Adiyaman), Altan Tan and Pervin Buldan. The first two are members of the Parliamentary commission appointed to draft a new Constitution, which is probably no accident. Pervin Buldan made the point that two MIT officers were present at the meeting.

Erdogan had earlier explained that the PKK's disarmament was one of his government's principal demands. Indeed, as from 25 February it was learnt that Ocalan would call for a ceasefire on the following 21 March, the day of the Kurdish New Year. He also announced the possibility of the guerrilla's releasing Turkish prisoners, both Army and civilian (they are said to be 9 or 10 of them), that it has held for several years.

The minutes of the meeting (21 pages long) was sent to the guerrilla commander as well as a “peace plan” of 61 pages drawn up by Ocalan, both of which are supposed to remain confidential. However, the whole of the minutes were rapidly published in the press, in the first place by the daily paper *Milliyet* and then taken up by the other papers, although the three members of the delegation denied being the source of the leak.

It should be recalled that last year the Oslo negotiations had failed because of similar leaks.

In general, there is no change in the tone of Ocalan's accusations and discontent regarding the BDP and the PKK, which gives credit to the statement published in the newspaper *Sabah* in July 2012, that the PKK chief had himself asked the Minister of justice to freeze his lawyers' visits: *“Don't make me meet these lawyers. They distort and transmit*

my words incorrectly. My messages are not sent to those I intended. The BDP and the PKK are betraying me. I no longer want to communicate with them”.

Thus Ocalan is said to accuse the PKK of creating obstacles to his efforts to establish peace, while warning Turkey against wanting to dictate its conditions, expressing the hope that there would not be any “misunderstanding” on the part of the AKP. He criticised that Party's will to hegemony, affirming that if they did not net him control the negotiations or that they failed, Turkey could expect a future as catastrophic as Syria's or Iraq's.

In his opinion, the PKK's withdrawal from Turkey would have to be bi-lateral and decided by Parliament and not just the Prime Minister. Indeed, that would give some legitimacy to an order that is in danger of deeply offending Turkish public opinion. However the complete withdrawal of the Armed Forces and police from the border zones or from the Kurdish regions is unlikely. As for the autonomy, demanded by the BDP, the PKK (as well as its Syrian branch), Abdullah Ocalan no longer considers it to be a means of “sabotaging” the negotiations but is more insistent on the necessity for the democratisation of Turkey, while contemplating a general impunity for PKK members (without an amnesty, considered unnecessary) — which excludes the total dissolution of the movement. The return of those displaced to their villages (destroyed by the Army) is also indicated as a necessary condition for the withdrawal.

The PKK's leader's main peeve, apart from his own movement, was directed at the “Gülen brotherhood” whose under

cover powers seem to be mingled with those of the “deep State” and to be attacking the MIT and the Prime Minister so as to scuttle the political process under way.

It is possible that the reports of the meeting were somewhat distorted to strengthen the impression of some complicity between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Öcalan with the aim of creating difficulties between the Prime Minister and the nationalists. Thus the PKK leader seems to support the possibility of Erdogan becoming President and even of an alliance with the AKP.

“We can seal a Presidential alliance with the AKP on these bases, However, he (the President) must be similar to that of the United States, with a Senate and a People’s Assembly that could be called a democratic parliament, like the US House of Representatives or the Russian Duma or the British House of Commons”.

Erdogan condemned the leaks and denied they had any basis: *“Until we make a declaration and confirm it, all rumours are lies and unfounded. This is clearly an attempt at sabotage by certain circles that do not want Turkey’s development”.*

While he was at it he also rejected any amnesty for PKK fighters contrary to what Öcalan is said to have stated (or wanted) as well as of placing the PKK leader under house arrest. The BDP denied being the source of the leaks while affirming it would conduct an internal enquiry.

On 27 February, another PKK military commander, Duran Kalkan, commented to AFP the latest political events —

Turkey’s demands and the call for laying down their arms. Duran Kalkan confirms the PKK’s lack of enthusiasm, of which Öcalan reproached it and stated that Öcalan had called for freeing of prisoners by the Turks as well as by the Kurds (there are thousands of Kurdish political prisoners) and that *“no one expects a unilateral gesture from us”* and that it was up to both sides to make *“political gestures”*.

On the issue of the withdrawal of the guerrillas from Turkish territory, Duran Kalkan asked, this time in agreement with his leader, whether the Turkish Armed Forces also intended *“withdrawing”* from the Kurdish regions.

“That is an approach that could help lead to a solution. If we each did what was asked of us I can say, on the PKK’s behalf that the Kurdish armed movement will never be an obstacle to the democratisation of Turkey and a solution to the Kurdish question. The PKK and its leaders are determined to fight until the Kurdish people wins its freedom”.

The military commander finally concluded that the PKK must express its position on the way that a solution should be negotiated, adding that his movement will accept *“any agreement that was based on the people’s agreement”*.

What emerges from his statement, which was published by Firat News, the PKK news agency, is that the *“peace process”* as drawn up by Öcalan and the MIT is, indeed, far from de lighting the guerrillas — which, was foreseeable. The question remains whether, as in 1999, it will pretend to agree to a half measure (a cease fire without disarming) in which case noth-

ing would change or whether, under pressure, either from the BDP or its European offices, the guerrillas come down from the mountains.

A BDP delegation visited Iraqi Kurdistan last week to carry Öcalan’s message to the PKK guerrillas. This time, in addition to Altan Tan and Sirri Sureyya Onder, it included political leaders of both the BDP and the DTK, Ahmet Turk and Aysel Tugluk and Selahattin Demirtas and Gultan Kisanak, who went to Suleimaniah. Pervin Buldan, on the other hand flew to Europe to give Öcalan’s message the PKK representatives there.

Ahmet Turk held a press conference jointly with Mele Bextiyar, of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) as he has been PUK interim leader since Jalal Talabani’s stroke. He made the point that contacts with the political circles of Southern Kurdistan are continuing so as to collect their views on the current process. Mentioning the Turkish bombing of Qandil, and thus of Iraqi Kurdistan, he considered that they were liable to *“weaken the peace process”*.

Sabah asserts that a meeting took place between Karayılan, Kalkan a BDP delegation and some Iraqi Kurdistan leaders, since a PKK military withdrawal could take place with the Peshmergas acting as supervisors and guarantors (for the moment Irbil has said nothing about this).

Sülbüs Peri, another of the organisation’s leaders made the point, as had Duran Kalkan a few days previously, that a unilateral retreat was impossible to envisage, and also called for guarantees regarding the security of this retreat.

IRAQ: NO AGREEMENT OVER BUDGET BETWEEN KURDS AND ARABS

At the Davos forum on 24 January last, the Kurdistan Regional Government President, Massud Barzani, had stressed the necessity of resolving the political crisis in Iraq and of launching the political process again, pointing out the extremely dangerous character of the situation.

The following month the differences had in no way eased but the political difficulties of Iraqi governance had, this time crystallised round the vote on the Iraqi budget for 2013, over which the Baghdad Parliament seems unable to agree. The main cause is the multi-faceted conflict between the central government and the Kurdish region.

Thus although the Cabinet had approved the \$118 billion budget last October, this has still not been passed by Parliament as its provisions are opposed for a variety of reasons by Arab Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish members of Parliament.

One of the disagreements that has dragged on for months is the amounts due to companies working in the Kurdish region who export oil to Iraq. Last summer the Kurds had suspended deliveries of crude oil to Iraq because of failure to pay for it. After several promises to settle the exports had been resumed last autumn but without reaching the level of 250,000 barrels a day stipulated by the agreement after Iraq had made a first instalment of its debt.

On 13 February the vote on the budget was postponed *sine die* because the sum of \$644 million to settle the arrears to the oil companies was considered

insufficient by the Kurds. They claimed 4.2 trillion dinars (\$3.5 billion) to cover arrears pending since 2010.

The amount demanded by the Kurds seemed too great to some Sunni Arabs, like Jaber Al-Jabri, elected on the *Iraqiyya* List, who is also a member of the Finance Commission, especially as Iraq has a deficit of \$4.5 billion.

Nuri al-Maliki's list, the State of Laws, retorted that the Kurds must first of all pay damages to the central government for having failed to deliver 250,000 barrels a day as promised since November 2012.

The slowing down of exports irritated Baghdad all the more since, on the other hand, the RGK has stated exporting oil at a rate of 150,000 barrels a day of oil and condensate to Turkey by truck and they are planning to build an oil pipeline that will go directly from Kurdistan to Turkey without passing through Iraq.

Another point in dispute is the percentage of the budget allocated to the Kurdish region by the central Government. Over the last few years it was 17%, calculated on the basis that the population of Kurdistan is 17% of the total of Iraqis. Today, while the population living in Kurdistan is constantly growing, according to the Kurds, the Iraqi Members dispute this figure and holding a census, if accepted by the Kurds, would only delay the vote on the budget. Meanwhile, the State of Laws and the *Iraqiyya* (Sunni Arab) lists are calling on the Kurds to be satisfied with 12%.

The share of the budget due to be allotted to Defence is also

considered too great and some Members are suggesting redistributing the money to the families hit by the recent floods. This proposal, on the other hand, is not opposed by the Kurds, who are watching with concern the arms purchases being signed by Nuri al-Maliki, which seem to them a threat mainly aimed at them. As against this, a budget for maintaining the Kurdish Peshmergas was again rejected by the pro-Maliki coalition, especially since the recent tensions between the Arab and Kurdish forces in Diyala and around Kirkuk.

"The Peshmergas have pointed their arms at the breasts of Iraqi military personnel and now they want us to pay for their equipment and their wages" is how Mohammad Al Sayhood, a State of Laws member summed it up.

However, the Kurds are refusing to vote for the budget unless this demand is met. The Peshmerga budget has not been paid since 2007 and Baghdad owes Irbil, according to the Kurdish Finance Minister, about \$ 6.4 billion.

This issue has even reconciled, temporarily at least, the Kurdish parties in office and those in the opposition since even the Goran Members of Parliament have agreed to block the vote should the refusal continue.

According to para.5 of Article 13 of the 2013 Iraqi draft Budget, based on a mutual agreement between the Iraqi and Kurdish Finance Ministers, all the arrears since 2007 regarding the Peshmergas must be settled on the basis of payments before due date. The Members, however, are claiming even more: that the

Peshmergas budget be part of the overall budget for the whole of Iraq. Muayyad Tayyib, spokesman for the Kurdish Alliance (the majority list) explained that this would avoid postponing payments year after year.

Iraq also demands a reduction in their numbers, from the present 200,000 to 20,000. Evidently this is out of the question for the Kurds, who are determined, in the event of any conflict, to resist in the field the 820,600 man strong Iraqi Army — who, it is true would be much less motivated than the Kurds to defend Kirkuk.

According to the Minister for the Peshmergas, the Kurdish forces have been maintained for years by the Kurdistan Regional Government, without any Iraqi subsidy.

Since all the possible intermediaries and negotiators are often at work in Iraq, it was at the end of February that the Supreme Islamic Council, that wanted to act as mediator through its director Ammar al-Hakim, announced that an agreement had been, or was on the point of being, found to the dispute about oil with the Kurdish Alliance.

The day before, the KRG Minister of Natural Resources, Ashti Hawrami, the Kurdistan Deputy Prime Minister, Roj Nouri Shaways, the Iraqi Oil Minister, Abdel Karim al-Leabi, the Iraqi Finance and planning Minister, Ali Shukri are said to have met privately to reach an understanding regarding payments to the oil companies active in Kurdistan.

On 2 March, Safeen Diyazee, KRG spokesman said he was “not pessimistic” regarding the resolution of the crisis, considering that this government’s delegation had left Baghdad without any concrete results, but that this “*did not mean it had failed*”. He also renewed the idea of a census to determine the proportion of the Kurdistan population.

On 3 March, Mahmud Othman, an independent Kurdish Member in Baghdad and a well considered political veteran, revealed that Massud Barzani was in favour of holding a national conference bringing together all the Iraqi political components without exception, so as to resolve the crisis and all the conflicts pending. It has just been learnt that the Iraqi Finance Minister, Rafea Al-Issawi, has resigned. He announced this during a demonstration against Nuri al-Maliki in the Sunni Arab Anbar province. His reasons had nothing to do with the budget disputes but because, he said, the central government did not respond to the demands and needs of the Iraqi Sunni Arabs even after 70 days of demonstrations. “I have taken sides with my community” he concluded. An additional reason may be that his own bodyguards had confessed (whether or not under torture) to having been accomplices of terrorist assassinations committed with the bodyguards of Tarik Hashimi, the Iraqi Vice President, now a refugee in Turkey.

Nuri al-Maliki has refused to accept this resignation, alleging “financial and administrative irregularities” — which has not helped calm things down...

Today the Kurdish Alliance have again succeeded in blocking the budget vote that Nuri al-Maliki tried to bulldoze through, after refusing an invitation to visit Irbil although the Kurdish Prime Minister, Neçirvan Barzani, is due to visit Baghdad.

Another possible drawback of the parliamentary crisis that works to the advantage of the Kurds would be the cancellation of the arms contract between Baghdad and Moscow, signed last October for a total of \$4 billion. Baghdad is said to have considered reducing this, envisaging limiting it to one billion, and paying a penalty for this. However the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari (a Kurd) has said that the contract still stands and that the Mi-28N helicopters and the Pantsir ground-air artillery are due for delivery next June.

This contract has been the subject of considerable controversy, with accusations of corruption — made by the Iraqi Prime Minister’s own spokesman but refuted by the Defence Minister — which seems to indicate the degree of unity and coherence within Maliki’s Cabinet. Soon after, indeed, they were confirmed by Ali al-Dabbagh, the Iraqi Government spokesman who added, at the same time, that the contract would be “*completely reviewed*”.

Thus it is possibly the foul general atmosphere reigning in Baghdad more than the difficulties in having the budget accepted that leaves one sceptical about the reality of these Russian arms deliveries.



ROME: THE CHALDEAN PATRIARCH IS ELECTED

A synod of 15 Chaldean bishops has been meeting in Rome since 29 January to elect a new Patriarch, since Cardinal Emmanuel Delly had resigned for reasons of health. The man finally chosen is Mgr. Louis Sako, Archbishop of Kirkuk.

Born in 1948 in a family living in Zakho, in Iraqi Kurdistan, Louis Sako studied in Mossul and was ordained a priest in 1974. He has a doctorate in Patristic science and another in Iraq's ancient history as well as a Masters in

Islamic Jurisprudence. From 1997 to 2001 he taught at the Baghdad Patriarchal Pontifical College. He was elected bishop in 2002 and confirmed by Pope John-Paul II in 2003.

As the Kirkuk diocese is the subject of political and armed conflict between Kurds, Arabs and Tucomen and the target of terrorists who attack both Christians and Moslems, Louis Sako has been very active locally to promote understanding between the religious communities and for a united and recon-

ciled Iraq. He is also a member of the Pontifical Council for interdenominational dialogue. Independent of the bishops of the diaspora for this very local church, it is a very good compromise between purely Iraqi dignitaries possibly too "Baghdadi" and the Kurdistan bishops.

As he often travels outside Iraq to make heard the voices of Christian minorities, he speaks fluent French and has received many awards for his activities. In 2008 he received the *Defensor Fidei* prize and in 2010 the Pax Christi.

PARIS: THE KURDISH INSTITUTE CELEBRATES ITS THIRTIETH BIRTHDAY

On 23 February 2013, the Paris Kurdish Institute celebrated its 30-year existence and organised a symposium and the French National Assembly to celebrate the occasion entitled "Kurdistan and the Kurdish Diaspora: 1983-2013". The invitations were presented as follows:

"The 1980s are a dark period in Kurdish historic chronicles since they are so characterised by massive repression and wholesale destruction carried out by the states against any sort of Kurdish resistance, be it armed or peaceful, but also against the Kurdish populations as such: in Iranian Kurdistan, the heady revolutionary days of 1978-9 were replaced by a "juhad" launched by Ayatollah Khomeiny against Kurdish society as a whole; in Iraqi Kurdistan the destruction of the countryside rises to a *crescendo*, leading, at the end of the decade, to a policy of outright genocide while in army governed Turkey Kurdishness itself is criminalised

or considered a pathology to be cured by increased doses of Kemalism and torture.

Founding the Kurdish Institute of Paris, made possible by a political change in France, was thus as much due to an urgent need to save this people's culture — which everything seemed show was doomed to irreversible destruction — as to the will to bring together Kurdish intellectuals driven abroad by political repression on top of an atrocious war between Iraq and Iran that was to cause over a million deaths.

Thirty years later, while the Middle East is going through a new period of violence in many countries, it is time to draw up a balance sheet. It is self-evident that this assessment cannot be just one of the Kurdish Institute or of the Diaspora, that has strenuously influenced the changes in Kurdistan over these decades. Indeed, it is essential to take stock of some considerable transformations that have resulted, *inter alia* in the emergence of

a Kurdish Federal Region in Iraq, and to reflect on the socio-economic consequences of the rapid urbanisation that Kurdistan has experienced between 1980 and 2010. This has brought, in its wake, the emergence of a youth, now partly at the helm, whose sociological profile is radically different to that of the nationalist intelligentsia of the 1950-70 period.

Taking into account the generational phenomenon in Kurdistan's recent history is all the more crucial as a large part of the public figures who had dominated the political and cultural landscape such as Abdurrahman Ghassemlou, leader of the KDP-Iran, the film director Yilmaz Güney, the poets Cegerxwin or Hejar or scholars like Nouredine Zaza or Ismet Cheriff Vanly are now part of the Kurdish national Pantheon. While, in the 80s, the Kurdish Diaspora still remained the only area where a peaceful intermingling of Kurds from different countries was possible, the internal integration of Kurdistan, not

only economic but also cultural and even political, has considerably accelerated in the 1990 – 2010 period. Inter-state borders, already made porous by new communication technologies, are now further weakened by population movements. We are forced to note that the linguistic and cultural areas have, over the last two decades, experienced a renewal, unprecedented in Kurdish history. In contrast with the 80s, when the very word “Kurdish” frightened many universities, Kurdish Studies in Europe and in the United States are really soaring with dozens of theses on Kurdish history and society being presented every year.

The “present” always consists of this space-time continuum and invites us today to evaluate the past and to project ourselves into an as yet undetermined future. This Symposium to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Kurdish Institute is intended as a response to this double challenge”.

The first round table was presided by M. Bernard Dorin, French Ambassador, and its subject was “Kurdistan from 1983 to 2013”. Those taking part were Professor Hamit Bozarslan, of the EHESS, Dr. Khaled Saleh, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kurdistan, Chris Kutschera, a journalist and a specialist on the Kurdish Question, Ms Sève Izouli-Aydin, a Barrister and Celîlê Celîl, *emeritus professor*.

Khaled Saleh : “Iraqi Kurdistan from Saddam Hussein to Nuri al-Maliki”.

Outlining the relations between the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi State, Khaled Saleh described them as an alternating series of crises, acts of violence

and open negotiations with strategic reservations and ulterior motives on both sides. Thus the Kurds were granted a very wide autonomy in the 70s that was due to be fully carried out within 4 years. However, as it remained a dead letter this agreement was broken off by a new period of armed violence. To conclude, Kurdistan suffered a wave of destruction and genocide actions in the 80s that destroyed almost all the Kurdish villages.

The end of Saddam Hussein’s rule allowed hope for a fresh start, a “resurgence of programmes”.

At the start of the new Iraq, following Saddam’s overthrow, Nuri al-Maliki was an unknown quantity in Iraq, whose only effective support came from the Kurds, who were the most united and politically advanced group in the political field, since they had had the experience of 10 years autonomy before the fall of the Baath. The Kurds, at that time held the key to the negotiations.

Today, if we look at recent events, some people who had previously been politically marginal are now threatening to wage another armed campaign against the Kurds.

Iraq is still suffering from the political influences and ideologies current in the 60s and 70s and even the 90s, when agreements could be made, signed and then withdrawn very easily, especially when someone new came to power. This is the main danger overshadowing the perspectives of the Kurdistan Region.

Between 2003 and 2005 there was a favourable climate for a change of attitudes and for

reconstruction in Iraq, but this gradually changed. People were still talking about Arabisation of Kurdish territories (outside the Kurdistan Region) between 2003 and 2004, but for reasons that are unclear the Kurds finally accepted the American proposal to call these territories “disputed territories”. This drastically changed the way of tackling the question of the question of these territories by allowing it to be implied that there were two valid points of view, whereas “Arabisation” stressed the injustice of the policy.

Another important problem was the sharing of power and revenues, which became the subject of finicky controls by Baghdad while for the Kurds and attempt to call into question the sharing of power and revenues or the issue of the territories they claimed immediately triggered a reaction of national defence against the possible consequences.

Going from Saddam to Maliki has not changed the initial situation and the basic problems: What do we want to create in Iraq? An area where people can breathe and live worthily? A step forward has been taken since the 80-90 period, since the period of genocide, but we must still remain aware of the basic problems that the Iraqi State as well as the Kurds face over and above those of individual positions.

Chris Kutschera: “The history of the Iranian Kurds between armed struggle and civil resistance”.

The Iranian revolution surprised everyone, including Dr. Abdulrahman Ghassemlou, General Secretary of the KDPI. This event brought him to the head of an armed resistance of

several thousands of Peshmergas. His mistake was of thinking that the Islamic regime would rapidly collapse after the Shah had been overthrown. After 1983 the KDPI and the Komala withdrew to the Iraqi border and, finally into Iraqi Kurdistan.

The two assassinations of the KDPI leaders, Ghassemloo and Sherefkandi) were terrible blows and this party fell into a fault that is frequent in Kurdish history — that of a *“war between chiefs and under-chiefs”* in a society still impregnated with tribal organisations. The KDPI and the Komala split into a number of movements that event went so far as to confront one another violently. The years following the assassinations were leaden years.

The year 2004 saw a renewal of Kurdish civil resistance under the relative liberalisation of President Khatami, with students as at Samanjad, doctors, lawyers, journalists all watching closely what was happening in other parts of Kurdistan while still remaining close to the Iranian context of the Kurdish question and suspicious of the traditional parties.

That year also saw the founding of the PJAK, considered to be an offshoot of the PKK, that was fighting for a *“democratic and federal Iran”*. Some young Kurds who admired the PKK joined PJAK and started clashes with the Guardians of the Revolution. While the PKK had for a long time been tolerated or better in Iran, the rapprochement between Erdogan’s Turkey and Teheran changed that situation completely.

After several years of clashes the PJAK concluded a ceasefire with the Iranians in the autumn of

2011 and withdraw to the borders while the Iranian Army, for its part, ceased military operations and stopped executing Kurdish political prisoners. Was this a defeat or a real ceasefire? In any case a number of young Iranian Kurds are again fighting in the PKK ranks against Turkey while relations between Teheran and Ankara have again become tense since Turkey supports the Syrian opposition.

Iranian Kurdistan, like that of Turkey, has problems of geographically defining itself, unlike Iraqi Kurdistan. According to Iranian Kurds, Kurdistan includes the provinces of Western Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Ilam and Kermanshah. Western Azerbaijan has cities largely inhabited by Azeri Shiites, like Urmiah, Koy, Maku, Miandoab. In 1946 qazi Mohammad had already refused to take a stand on the issue of including the city of Urmiah in the Mahabad Republic, although some Azeri tribal chiefs had called for this. The province of Sananjad has a more or less homogenous population (Sunni Kurds); Kermanshah and Ilam have heterogeneous, largely Shiite, populations. Iranian Kurdistan calls for a more complex solution than that of article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, to resolve the problem of the *“disputes”* Iranian territories.

Recently two rival leaders of the KDPI, Mustafa Hijri and Khaled Azizi, were able to meet (thanks to the efforts of Dr. Frédéric Tissot, former French consul in Irbil), which may allow us to hope for some cooperation between the two rival branches of the KGP-I.

Will the upheavals of the Arab Spring reach Iran? Are the Americans using the Kurdish

card against the Teheran regime? If so the KDPI doesn’t carry much weight and there are no contacts (at least not official ones) between the PJAK and the USA. The Iranian Kurdistan card, unlike the Iraqi Kurdistan one, is not really promising.

Sève Izouli-Aydin: *“The fate of the Kurds in Syria”*.

Sève Izouli-Aydin began by recalling the terrible years that followed the 1980 coup d’état in Turkey, when even the Kurds of Syrian border villages round Qamishlo were living in fear of Turkish incursions and the impact created by the BBC’s announcement of the founding of the Kurdish Institute in Paris

Then she outlined the broad population figures of the Syrian Kurds, recalling the case of the *“Stateless”* Kurds, either registered as foreigners or just not registered at all, who live, paradoxically enough, in some of the richest regions in Syria, because of their water resources. In 1970, a law on redistribution of agricultural land deprived these *“stateless”* Kurds of their land to give it to Arab colonists from other parts of Syria.

The first Syrian Kurdish party was founded in 1956 (the KDPS). Today there are about a dozen, with four particularly active and influential parties.

Thus one can talk of a real *“Syrian Kurdish opposition”*, with parties, associations, demands, a programme and considerable capacity for mobilising within the population.

Prior to the 2011 Syrian revolution, there had been the 2004 uprising following the attacks on Kurdish supporters during a football match by Arabs shouting slogans attacking Barzani —

brawls that were then suppressed by shooting by Baathist militia. This repression unleashed a series of riots in Kurdish towns and the statues of Hafez al-Assad were pulled down in the town of Amude, well before the Arab revolt of 2011.

Other laws in the years 2000-2010 were past attacking the Kurds and forbidding any real estate transactions, banning the employment of stateless persons or agricultural regulations hindering all activity in the Kurdish regions.

Following the 2011 revolution, a decree by Bashar al-Assad on 7 April restored Syrian nationality to the Kurds. However, this was far from being the Kurds' only demand, contrary to press reports, since *"the recognition of fundamental and democratic rights is at zero level": freedom of expression, the length of detention, separation of powers, an independent TV, freedom to form political parties, free and regular elections, lifting the ban on parties. It was, indeed, a demand for establishing a state of Laws. Thus the restoration of their nationality to Syrian Kurds is not to be seen as a present* — it's one of a number of fundamental rights of which the Kurds have been deprived.

The Kurds have always been against the Syrian dictatorship but they distrust the Moslem Brotherhood that is trying to take over the Syrian revolution with the help of the Turkish AKP, despite the secular character of Syria.

The Kurds also have some specific demands and reject a second "Syrian Arab Republic". They are also in favour of a secular and democratic State — they want the Constitution to specify the equality of men and women.

Celîlê Celîl: "The Kurdish communities of the former USSR after the collapse of communism".

This region has played a remarkable intellectual potential, because of the work of the Kurdish intellectuals, artists and scientists in the ex-Soviet Union. The Kurds of the three Republics in the Caucasus have experienced different dynamics. Thus in Azerbaijan the 20s saw a gradual decline in Kurdish dynamism. In Georgia their number has diminished since 1991.

Until the end of the regime, the Kurds wanted to keep their identity: the villages were grouped close to each other and these rural groupings became the basis for Kurdish identity, described in books, magazines by intellectuals and teachers.

However many Kurds were deported to Central Asia by Stalin, which created a new diaspora in Kazakhstan, which is still very stable. Then new cultural doors were opened after Stalin's death. In 1955, there was the publication of a Kurdish language daily, followed by several literary works. The Kurdish intellectual world had a new voice as well as the scientific Kurdish speaking world, until the beginning of the Glasnost and Perestroika period.

Then there came a new era, an intermingling of freedom with chaos. Religious conflicts were transformed into ethnic conflicts, with armed bands and the war led to changes in Armenia and Azerbaijan, especially for the Kurds. There were thousands of victims in Azerbaijan, the Moslem and Yezidi Kurds were forced to leave the country. Most of them went to Kazakhstan or Kirghizstan.

What is the assessment 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet block:

In Georgia a war created problems for many minorities but the Kurds now have more rights, some organisations have come into existence some associations, though with little economic or political influence.

In Azerbaijan being Kurdish is no longer forbidden but thousands of Kurds have forgotten their language. In Karabagh and other regions that want to be integrated into Azerbaijan the Kurds have had to face a kind of persecution and have also abandoned their language and culture.

In Armenia there is now a split between the Yezidi and Moslem Kurds — two groups have been formed with two alleged separate languages and two different cultures. Kurds have no political rights (not even a Kurdish member of Parliament). Kurdish society has thus lost its unity. The cultural associations have disappeared, as they are no longer supported by the State. Some newspapers will also disappear and TV programmes are limited to one hour.

There are some positive points: the Cyrillic alphabet has been replaced by the Latin alphabet. The daily Riya Taze also uses it. This is an important development for the Kurds of the ex-USSR, as it is an instrument of exchange and a link with the other Kurds and the different diaspora.

Overall, in the ex-USSR the Kurds enjoy a certain cultural autonomy but their rights are insufficient and the scattering of the diaspora makes things harder. Only the diaspora in Kazakhstan is strong enough so

many Kurds from Sates in the Caucasus have gone there to continue their work.

Hamit Bozarslan: “Turkish Kurdistan from the 1980 Army coup d’état to the AKP”.

In 1983, the most important factor then was the existence of mass terror — the Kurdish language was banned, for the first time since the 20s and Kurdistan, as the film *Yol* shows, was a prison inside another prison — Turkey.

However, the Kurdish movement and Kurdish socialisation existed and crossed the generations. In the 60s there was the resurgence of an autonomous Kurdish movement. In the 70s a great number of Kurdish movements and organisations were created. In 1977 an openly Kurdish mayor, Mehdi Zana, won the municipal elections. A movement was emerging from under the repression — very much radicalised and fragmented in 1971. The ending of Mustafa Barzani’s revolt, that the Kurds of Turkey had hoped for, regarding Barzani as their “grand-father”, somewhat broke the movement — but also enabled them to organise themselves in Turkey.

Between 1977-78 saw the creation of the PKK and the KUK. After the 1980 coup d’état, the Kurds of Turkey opened out to the Middle East and became a major part of the diaspora in Europe. In fact, the PKK engaged in its first armed struggles in the Lebanon, against Israel, not against Turkey. The diaspora was composed of very young activists, between 18 and 20 years — the oldest were barely 30. They had been politicised since their adolescence and were very fragmented in Europe.

In 1970 the Kurds wanted to create an organisation and then go into armed struggle. In 1980, in the diaspora, they wanted at least to save their culture — hence the foundation of the Paris Kurdish Institute.

The balance sheet: thousands of villages destroyed, a mass urbanisation of the Kurds in Turkey, the disappearance of the tribal and rural traditions. There is, however, a new Kurdish landscape — being Kurdish has become the very basis of political struggle, even if the AKP has established itself there in a significant manner, since its local representatives stand as Kurds.

The BDP party now exercises some hegemony over the Kurdish movement and has won a central position in Kurdistan and in Turkey.

There has been a 1968 generation, then a 1978 generation, followed by 1988, 1998 and 2008 waves: the Kurdish movement can now ensure its transmission across the generations. However, each generation represents a breach and invents its own political language with different profiles: Ahmet Turk (70 years old), Ocalan (64) but also some mayors in collars and ties and young women who have real political influence are making this movement a long-term one.

In Turkey, the political language is changing — there is no longer a denial of existence of Kurds, but the nationalist language defines them “*the enemies within, a biological threat to the Turks*”. Or else consider Kurds as an uncivilised group that has to be civilised by the Ministries of Justice and Education . . . The AKP is offering to recognise them but, in return for their serving the interests of Moslem

Turkishness — much the Union and Progress party (the Young Turks) demanded of the Armenians in 1914.

There has also been an evolution in Kurdish political language: in 1982-3 it was essentially Marxist-Leninist mingled with Frantz Fanon, then came the Ocalan personality cult, This distinguishes the Kurds of Turkey from the other Kurds who never had a cult about their leaders, even very popular ones like Ghassemloo or Barzani.

However today there are no standards on an international scale, as there were before, under the influence of the USSR or Albania. It is Brussels or Washington that set the tone, and some Kurds now engage discourse on ecological, feminist or homosexual defence themes etc. Turkish Kurdistan has become an area of artistic creation and aesthetic pluralism: music, theatre and all kinds of expressions.

Research about Kurdistan has developed enormously. More and more young researchers are leaving the Kurdish question as such to devote themselves to a whole heap of other subjects: childhood, housing etc within Kurdish society with calmer analyses, a sure sign of becoming commonplace.

However, the Middle East is in a precarious and versatile situation, a new period of violence can be feared even if we are not in the 1980s, in the Kurds’ darkest, most tragic years.

The second Round Table was chaired by Mr Kendal Nezan, President of the Paris Kurdish Institute. Its subject was: “Kurdish Society at the turn of the millennium”. Those taking part are Mrs Nezan Begikhani,

of Bristol University, Mr. Khalid Khayati, of Linköping University, Mr. Philip Kreyenbroek, of Göttingen University and Mr. Ephrem-Isa Yousif, a philosopher and writer.

As Nezand Begikhani, of Bristol University, was unavoidably absent, her contribution was read by Mrs Khanna Omarkhali: "The Women's Question in Kurdistan and in the diaspora".

"Honour crimes" take place inside a family or a community that allow these aggressions. "Honour crimes" in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and in the diaspora have been the subject of research financed by the Kurdistan Regional Government on the basis of its field work.

These research projects were initiated after the stoning of Doa Khalil, a Yezidi teenager of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Region's Prime Minister initiated several measures to struggle against this scourge, including an enquiry to evaluate its extent.

It is most important to reach an understanding of what is meant by "honour". The collective, be it family, clan or nation has codes of conduct with a scale of honour or dishonour. Women must be chaste, obedient and modest. There are expectations regarding their way of dressing, love, marriage and divorce. Romantic relations, being seen out in male company, loss of virginity before marriage endanger them, hence a practice of concealment for fear of remarks, gossip, rumours. Society as a whole suffers from this, not only the women.

There are no precise figures about these honour crimes but they are wide spread in Iraqi Kurdistan, almost daily occur-

rences, even though things are slowly changing: its practice is gradually being condemned as a "dishonour" rather than an honour. More than 50 NGOs are working on violence against women: information, social activism, protection (safety hostels) but these services are overloaded and liable to be attacked by the victims' families.

The issue of honour crimes was not included in the KRG's political programmes until the last few years, which have seen the first attempts to pave the way for fighting against these practices. This gives Iraqi Kurdistan a key role, even though these crimes remain endemic, being part of a wider range of violence against women — acts of violence that are themselves part of a context of political and historic violence. Hence the slow progress.

Honour crimes are an expression of the inequality between men and women — and it contributes to strengthening that inequality.

Ephrem-Isa Yousif: "Christianity in Kurdistan".

Christianity has a very ancient presence in Mesopotamia and the town that are today Kurdish were the birthplaces of Christianity, with the preeminent role of the Syriac translators who transmitted the Greek classics in both Iraq and Kurdistan. However, following the Mongol invasions, then those of the Timurides, and the great plagues (the black death) there was a spectacular fall of Christian presence in Mesopotamia. The Christians then withdraw to the mountains and Kurdish regions, Hakkari, Soran, and Baban etc. Some 90% of the Christians ended up in the Ottoman Empire, in Kurdistan,

and became culturally close to their neighbours.

At the time of the Kurdish resistance in Iraq, the Christians sided with Barzani and took part in the revolution to demand some rights for Kurdistan. They joined the Peshmergas from the first, in the country and abroad. Thus after the signing of the Algiers agreements in 1975 and Barzani's departure Baghdad exacted reprisals. Amongst the 4000v villages destroyed, 182 were Christian. The *Anfal* campaign hit the Christians of Kurdistan as well. During the 1991 exodus they fled with the Kurds and were in the camps with them in Turkey.

The autonomous region, to which the Christians subsequently returned with the Kurds, saw a renaissance of Christianity as from 1993. Teaching in the Aramaic language was encouraged by the Kurdish government and Assyrian and Chaldean political parties were formed.

The autonomous region also encouraged the Christians' cultural efforts, with some cultural centres and Mgr. Rabban's Lycée (High School) in Duhok, which is open to all and where both Kurdish and Aramaic are taught to pupils of both sexes and all origins. Three years ago the Directorate of Syriac culture and arts was created at Ankawa, with offices at Duhok at Suleymaniah. Eighteen months ago a Christian Culture and Art Museum was opened at Ankawa.

Quite the contrary happened in Iraq, following the fall of the Baath regime. There a hunt for Christians was opened in Mosul, Baghdad and Basra and a new exodus — either abroad or to Kurdistan. Over 100,000

Christians have been settled in the Kurdish Region, which helps them to settle, to rebuild the villages and provides linguistic assistance to the Arabic-speaking Iraqi Christians for their education and integration into Kurdish society.

In the Mosul plain, 5 Christian towns and villages administratively dependent on al-Qaida dominated Mosul, have been given peace, protection and stability by the Kurdish Peshmergas. However they are not included into the KRG but remain administratively dependent on Mosul Province that is hostile to them.

The Christians are now asking the Kurdish authorities for University courses in Syriac, a demand supported by the Kurdish Institute.

Kendal Nezan then talked of the Christian participation in the Kurdistan liberation movement, with some major historic figures: Father Paul Beidar, member of the leadership of the Kurdish Movement in the 60s; Marguerite George, who led a women's brigade; François Hariri, who was the first Christian governor of Irbil and one of Massud Barzani's closest associates until he was assassinated by Islamic fundamentalists.

Finally there is the new Chaldean Patriarch, the former Bishop of Kirkuk, who is a Christian from Zakho — which moves the centre of gravity of Mesopotamian Christianity from Baghdad to Kurdistan,

Philip Kreyenbroek: "The development of the religious space in the last 30 years".

Kurds and non-Kurds have become aware of the religious

complexity of Kurdish society. Most Kurds are Sunni Moslem (mostly Shafeite) with a minority of duodecimal Shiites in Iran, and several Sufi orders that play an essential role in Kurdish culture. To this must be added some Christian groups that are also an integral part of the Kurdish religious space, as were the Jews in the past, before their emigration and a whole series of religious minorities like the Alevi, Yezidis and yaresan (Kaka'I or Ahl-é Haqq).

Some even smaller groups also play a role, like the Shabak or the Barzani, who have retained in their community some very ancient religious elements of which we know very little.

Western perception also changed once it discovered the Kurds in the 70s and 80s, with the first political refugees, while the Turkish representatives in Europe were exerting pressure on them the West to continue to believe that the Kurds did not exist but were all "*Turkish citizens with the same religion as the Turks*". Little was known about Kurdish specific characteristics and diversities, cultural, linguistic and also religious — during the period of PKK prominence there was even a tendency to minimise them, considering that it harmed Kurdish unity.

The religious life of the different Moslem Kurdish communities has not yet been studied in detail, as is the case for the rest of the Middle East Sunnis, which gives the West the distorted image that all the Sunnis have a homogenous culture. This did not allow an understanding of the emergence of extremist Kurdish groups like Ansar al-Islam, or the increase in of practices like excision in a culture where it had been inexistent, as well as the tensions between

some Moslem groups and the Yezidis or the Kaka'i.

Sufism and its dervish brotherhoods in Kurdistan also suffer from lack of research, particularly regarding the development of the Qaderis and their relations with other groups in the autonomous region

Since the 80s, the Alevi in Turkey and the diaspora are trying to find their identity in an active manner. In Germany, Alevi, both Kurdish and Turkish, come to Göttingen to try to find the Kurdish roots of Alevism, that has taken on many elements from older Kurdish religious movements, while the Alevi myths and legends are slowly fading from memories as the older generations disappear.

The Yezidis have experienced the greatest changes: victims of persecution in Turkey during the 70s and 80s, West Germany gave them collectively political asylum. Their religious practice was then very discrete, as in Iraq, where the Yezidi religion was considered by many Moslems to be "impure".

However, during the Anfal campaign, the world became aware of the Kurds as in 1991. The setting up of the autonomous zone led the leaders of the movement to ask questions about Kurdish identity. In 1991, Massud Barzani spoke of the Yezidi religion as the "original" Kurdish religion, which was pasted up on the walls of all the Yezidi communities.

Western Universities then became interested in the Yezidis and those in the diaspora began to make themselves heard. Today many Yezidis want to study the whole body of their sacred texts, hitherto only transmitted orally, which is a major revolution.

The Ahl-é Haqq in Iran are experiencing serious tensions between those who consider themselves Moslems, and so tolerated by the regime and those who see themselves as outside Islam and thus persecuted. This has led to a great split in the community. The Moslem Ahl-é Haqq have drawn the attention of academics in recent years while the other group is considered in these works as “backward” and “ignorant”. This has, unfortunately led to their being persecuted by the Iranian government.

In Iraq the atmosphere of fear was the same as that of the Yezidis in 1991 and still exists among the Kaka’i in the Kurdish autonomous Region so they continue to keep quiet. One of them who advocates spreading their culture, the former Minister of Culture, himself a Kaka’I, received death threats (from his community) after he announced that he hoped to publish a book on his religion. Because of these misgivings, some crucial information about the Kaka’I and other groups that speak Gorani are not available.

In the last 30 years, great changes have taken place, especially in the perception of religious space, outside Kurdistan, where they used to consider that all the Kurds, Turks or Arabs were Moslem. However the religious complexity of Kurdish society is now better known. This openness should, as in the case of the Yezidis, mean an improvement for all members of the community, but our knowledge of certain Kurdish religions is still insufficient.

Khalid Khayati: “The formation of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe”.

We should, as with the Kurdish question, discuss many ques-

tions linked to the Kurdish diaspora: language, literature, and social questions.

Rogers Brubakers, an American sociologist working on the diaspora gave this definition: a diaspora has three important components: dispersion, since any population considered as a diaspora is a population that has been dispersed by forced displacement or departure under constraint; a tendency to look back to the old country, as a community retains an emotional or concrete link with its country; the maintenance of a specific identity different from that of the original group that has remained in the country, since its identity is mixed.

The Kurdish diaspora is a very vast one — it stretches from Kurdistan to Central Asia, to Russia, Europe the Iraqi towns, Syria, Iran, Turkey and beyond the Kurdistan Region.

The first group to arrive in Europe was a group of intellectuals, a list of whom is given in the Bulletin of the Kurdistan Research Centre. The second wave of Kurdish students created a first Kurdish students’ organisation that celebrated Newroz for the first time in Europe in 1956, but there wasn’t a real diaspora until the 80s, with the arrival of refugees.

Before that there was a large-scale arrival of Kurdish labour in Western Europe, especially in Germany. This, however, could not be considered part of a diaspora — it was later that they started to be identified with the Kurdish diaspora, with a political change and the fact that the second generation became interested in their origins.

The forming of the diapora occurred to preserve its identity,

with a transnational culture and some symbols representing feelings and emotions in several areas. The Kurdish identity in the diaspora was built round a discourse of victimisation, of an identity of being victims as with the Armenians. It was not the product of imagination but rooted in traumatic experiences of real tragedies: — the genocide, the chemical air raids in Iraq, the severe repression of the Kurds in Turkey, the denial of their identity and banning their language, the destruction of villages and the use of capital punishment for ethnic purposes.

The Kurds also experienced policies of discrimination and of social exclusion in Europe. In Sweden they lived in segregated areas and could not get decent jobs. This was also linked to the kind of life the Kurds had in the areas where they were working.

Among the many internal problems of this diaspora was a pathology of Kurdish politics, that of “divide and rule”, with different political organisations and certain groups being considered mutual enemies. This was sometimes passed on to the second generation of the diaspora.

There was also an association of Kurds with violence — the word Kurdish is often raised when discussing “honour crimes” or violence linked to honour.

However, this feeling of victimisation provides a certain dynamic: the Kurds created a large number of organisation, institutions and transnational networks, like the Kurdish Institute, to strengthen and revitalise their identity in the diaspora.

The Kurdish diaspora has been a meeting place for a good number of Kurds, which has had

positive consequences. Thus Khaled Khayati, a Kurd from Iran met Kurds from Turkey within the diaspora. Kurdish dialects that were eradicated in Turkey still exist in Sweden in a diaspora that is an area of population visibility where people can appear in public and where they have a right to exist. It is also a place for cultural and artistic and academic achievement, a place where democratic values are promoted. The diaspora also put pressure on Iraqi Kurdistan in favour of democracy, equality of the sexes, the rights of women and of children.

The Kurdish diaspora is an illustration of cross-border citizenship: it does not have a single state, with one flag, one language — one can be or several nationalities. It is also the most politicised diaspora in the world, which is over-represented in Sweden — there are, today, 7 Kurdish members out of 349 Members of the Swedish parliament, 4 men and 3 women from different political organisations. Kurdish intellectuals are well represented in Swedish cultural and public life.

A Ministry for the diaspora ought to be formed in the Kurdistan Regional Government

The third and last Round Table was presided by Mrs Joyce Blau, *professor emeritus* of INALCO. Its subject was “Language, literature and artistic creation in Kurdistan”. Those taking part are: Michiel Leezenberg, Amsterdam University, Reşo ZİLÂN, The Kurdish Institute of Paris, Mrs. Clémence SCALBERT, Exeter University, Mr. Salih AKIN, Rouen University, Mrs. Khanna OMARKHALI, Göttingen University.

Joyce Blau gave a short history of the development of Kurdish

Studies by recalling that in the 60s a bare handful of academics were interested in the Kurds — in France they were Roger Lescot, Celadet Bedir Khan and Gérard Chaliand. The founding of the Kurdish Institute of Paris created an important centre for information and resources.

Michiel Leezenberg: “Linguistic debates in Kurdistan’ or alternatively “The Kurdish language and “super-diversity”.

Bülent Arıncısaid in the Turkish Parliament that Kurdish is a language without a civilisation. He is wrong, even though some long-standing differences exist between the dialects of the regions of Kurdistan.

Four stages in the vernacularisation and standardisation of the Kurdish language:

The 17th and 18th Centuries were the period of the vernacularisation and standardisation of the Kurdish language. Many people know the work of Khani and his “*Nûbara biçûkan*” (dictionary) but few know that there are two works of grammar and linguistic and religious sciences produced at the same time, which saw the beginning of an educational tradition in Kurdish, accompanied by a literary civilisation amongst the Kurds. How many people have heard of Ali Termukhi? Yet he was one of the most important people in the intellectual history of Kurdish literature, the first man to have written a Kurdish grammar, which is almost unknown since the “*Tesrifa kurmancî*” is a very small book about the Kurdish language. It was used in primary classes of the madrassas of North Kurdistan and all the former pupils of these madrassas knew the book by heart. Hence the incredible role that this book, written in Northern

Kurdish, had in unifying Kurdish speech and its literary language. It also, consequently, played a part in the feeling of national identity. That period of religious education in Kurdish in the madrassas was a primordial one in a very Persianised context — that is cosmopolitan rather than nationalist.

A century later, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century, was a stage of nation building but, for the Kurds, rather one of the destruction of a nation. Linguistic development was more secular than religious. The period saw the development of a Latin alphabet by the Bedir Khan brothers in Syria and in the Soviet Union (with Erebe Semo, for example) where a Latin alphabet was also devised and then a Cyrillic one. However, it was also the development of a new dialect as a national one, Soranî, which till then had not been considered standard language, despite its expansion.

The third phase is that of the Paris Kurdish Institute and the Kurds of the diaspora. During the years of total cultural repression, some Kurdish intellectuals, particularly in Sweden, Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, Mehmet Uzun and Reşo Zilan undertook important work to perpetuate the existence of a literary and modern Kurdish language, which required some heroic efforts for this generation that had been educated to think in Turkish. The Southern Kurds had never undergone this kind of assimilation process, hence the great differences in the literary tradition of these two Kurdish languages.

Phase 4, at the start of this century, is one of consolidation — and also, paradoxically enough, of globalisation. In Southern Kurdistan, cultural and lingu-

tic activities are made easier. In Northern Kurdistan the “Kurdish opening” has created real opportunities for studying the Kurdish language at university and secondary school, and in a few years time this could extend down to the primary schools.

The Kurdish language has, thus, incredible opportunities — but also some centrifugal tendencies with the politicising of dialects and writings. In Southern Kurdistan, writing in Latin characters implies sympathy with the PKK; some varieties of Kurdish are connected with sympathy for one political party or another.

There is also a process of urbanisation, of migration national and international migration, satellite TV and Internet (Facebook), which has, paradoxically, strengthened Kurdish national feeling still more. Globalising world technology = super diversity, new cultural forms, dialects, and variations of language: the development of a hip-hop culture in Kurdish.

There is also a debate over the standardised language. In Southern Kurdistan some intellectuals recently wanted to make Sorani the standard language for all Kurds with a centralisation of the language, which gave rise to a heated polemic, since the Kurds have always stood up against the centralisation of other States. This is the paradox the Kurds are in: with the Kurdistan Regional Government, Internet etc. it is much easier to form a national community. Yet, at the same time there are more possibilities for the diversification of the Kurdish language, which goes against the ideology that considers that linguistic and cultural unification helps political unification. This is a 19th Century idea even but if it

does seem legitimate it no longer corresponds to the reality of globalised world. The Kurdish language cannot, today, be unified.

In a conference last year at Amed-Diyarbakir, everyone spoke their own Kurdish dialect and everyone was, more or less, understood ... or not. However, everyone wanted a unified language — while thinking that it was important to cultivate his own dialect.

This is a fairly realistic conclusion: there are ancient differences of dialect, of literary traditions, but a feeling of cultural unity. The reality must, therefore, be accepted — that Kurdish is a language that has at least four standards:

the Kurdish of Northern Kurdistan, Kurmancî, written with Latin characters

Zaza, that has developed in Northern Kurdistan as a written language, and perhaps other dialects

- the Soranî of Southern Kurdistan, written with a more or less Persian alphabet

- the Kurdish of behdini, of Southern Kurdistan, also written with Persian letters, which is not quite identical to Kurmancî

Khanna OMARKHALI: “Kurdish Studies in Europe”.

The Kurdish language is daily gaining in importance, on all sides and in different countries as well as in Kurdistan. The reason is not just the importance of the Kurdish question in the changes that the Middle East is going through but also the fact that the Kurds are beginning to be an important part of the European population and the question of teaching the Kurdish

language in higher education is beginning to be an issue that many European universities are facing.

A brief history of Kurdish Studies over the last 30 years.

At the beginning of the 19th Century several European as well as Kurdish academics, began to be interested in Kurdish language and literature, with a certain number of publications, for example Grazoni’s grammar. In Russia Kurdish Studies also began in the 19th Century with some publications.

Russia can be considered to be the cradle of Kurdish Studies, with the cities of Petersburg-Leningrad, Erevan and Moscow, where Kurdish Studies formed an independent field of study, with a team of specialists that was unique in the world for the number and variety of its research projects.

In the 20th Century, Kurdish Studies began to be very active in the 30s at Leningrad University and form the basis of modern Kurdish Studies.

In 1959, this group of Kurdish Studies became an independent unit of the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies. It covered three major disciplines: Kurdish history, language and Mediaeval studies, led by Orbelian, Zuckerman, Kurdoev, Rudenko, Mussaelian Vassilieva, Smirnova, O. Celîl and Yousupova. The strong point of the Kurdish studies at St Petersburg was linguistics and work on different Kurdistan dialects: Mukrî, Kurmancî, Sorani and Zaza.

Literature was also a strong point of this group, with Rudenko as leader, who translated a certain number of works

by ancient Kurdish poets. This centre was able to train active Kurdologists not only in the USSR but also in Kurdistan.

There are now two schools and two directions taken by Kurdish Studies in Russia: St Petersburg and Moscow. The latter devotes itself mainly to the politics, economy, international relations and history of the Kurds. In 1979 a Kurdish Study group was formed in Moscow, separate from the Department of the Near and Middle East.

In the last 20 years, a significant number of non-academic institutes and individual research workers have supported and promoted Kurdish culture, including the Paris Kurdish Institute in 1983, with its review *Kurmancî*. The Kurdish Language was also taught in France at INALCO by Roger Lescot and Kamuran Bedir Khan.

In Germany, there was the Navend centre and Göttingen University where they teach Kurdish language, literature and non-Islamic Religions.

In Vienna Celîlê Celîl has published an abundance of works on Kurdish literature.

Today, however, the major part of the Kurdish Study programmes are incorporated into Iranian or Islamic studies. Thus in 2004, at St Petersburg, the independent Kurdish Studies group was integrated into the Near East Department.

A great number of research workers are interested in Kurdish Studies with a growth of these covering political questions. In 2010 a Kurdish Studies Department opened at Mardin University, in Turkey. The Kurdistan Regional Government

supports Kurdish Studies abroad, with centres like the Kurdish Studies Department at Exeter. In 2011 the Kurdish Studies Network was launched on Internet. Contacts between research workers throughout the world have become easier.

Mrs. Clémence SCALBERT: "Development of the field of *Kurmancî* literature".

As from the emergence of the first Kurdish organisations in the last years of the Ottoman Empire and in Kurdish nationalism, culture played a major part — and Kurdish nationalism also contributed to reformulating that culture. However, can all expression of Kurdish culture be identified with nationalism? How and with what consequences can a minority cultural expression make itself independent of politics?

There is no standard language to use as a tool of a creativity spread by education. At the beginning, those who wanted to learn Kurdish had to do it themselves, had to adapt it and create a language for writing. There were few books in Kurdish, thus very few resources on which to build a contemporary Kurdish literature.

There was also a bilingualism that became very characteristic of the practice of the Kurdish speaking population, with the coexistence of Kurdish languages and Turkish along with, sometimes, loss of the Kurdish language.

The Kurdish language, which is the raw material for the creation of Kurdish literature, also has a political connotation — writing in Kurdish means affirming one's Kurdish identity, which was not an automatic choice.

A de-territorialising of the work of writing can also be seen, due to political conditions, as from the first years of the Turkish Republic, with *Hawar* appearing in Syria and the setting up of a Kurdish diaspora in Europe in the 70s. This was especially the case of the diaspora in Sweden in the 80s, with the forming of Kurdish literature, since the Swedish State's support for publishing and creating allowed some development of this literature.

Before the end of the 70s literary creation was the result of a limited number of people who had a variety of different activities — the same author could write essays, a dictionary and fiction etc. Then creation became differentiated, at the end of the 70s and after the *coup d'état* of 1980, but still remained linked to politics, even though the new generation of after the *coup d'état* turned more towards literature once in the diaspora.

Conditions have now changed a great deal in Turkey and this has had a positive effect on the creation of Kurdish literature. The role of the diaspora in creation has diminished as the number of books published there has declined whereas it has greatly increased in Turkey and in Turkish Kurdistan. Kurdish is thus becoming part Turkey's literature whereas, on the other hand, Kurdish literature from Turkey and that from Iraq remain in two different spheres, each more integrated into their respective national fields.

While the field of Kurdish literature has become more independent with publications, publishing houses etc, it continues to develop under different laws. The idea that Kurdish literature must be written in Kurdish is still very strong, but a breach is

opening with some poets working in the Turkish language.

The actions of State actors in the field of Kurdish literature (universities, the State TV channel) means that Kurdish literature, today, is not longer an act of resistance and Kurdish literature is thus not simply a committed literature. This could be an invitation to review Kurdish literary works and their relation to other kinds of literatures of the region as well as review the dynamics of resistance and determination.

Reşo ZÎLAN: The Kurdish Institute of Paris, "Linguistic studies in the diaspora".

Linguistic studies in the diaspora by Kurds and non-Kurds, over the last thirty years have produced some major works on the Kurdish language.

These works on the Kurdish language by diaspora Kurds appeared in the 60s. The reason was that at that time, a Kurdish diaspora was settling abroad as it was in the 60s that intensive emigration of Kurds began. This was particularly due to the Kurdish revolts in the South and the intensifying of repression on Kurdistan by political regimes, as well as in Turkey, as well as some economic emigration. There also began an expatriation of intellectuals, who, in this diaspora, could work on Kurdish culture and language, which they couldn't do in Turkey.

With the publication of books, reviews or radio and television broadcasts they wrote and spoke in Kurdish. However, they had to move from a language of villages to a more general language adapted to modern life. This is also how these intellectuals gradually worked to develop a language and a culture. Several projects were born,

including that of the Paris Kurdish Institute, to preserve the Kurmancî dialect, threatened with assimilation, built round a group of researchers, writers, linguists, novelists from different parts of Kurdistan, who all worked together. They founded a review, "Kurmancî", which started publishing in the spring of 1967. They used to meet twice a year in various countries like France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Sweden. The regional Government of Kurdistan also housed meetings and 2 others took place in Northern Kurdistan, one at Wan and one at Beyazîd. We are reaching our 50th issue with over 50 meetings. These issues been bound into book form — one volume of 20 issues printed in Sweden and one of 40 issues printed in Istanbul.

About 80-85 people have taken part in these Kurmancî seminars to date and unfortunately three of them are since died.

Kurmancî works on: 1. questions of language and spelling; 2. preserving knowledge of proverbs, the classics and less known words of the language; 3. a lexicon of the speech of different kurmancî speaking regions; 4. typical words and phrases of Kurdish life like carpets, clothing, cattle, milk products, weapons etc. with a list of idioms; 5. on children's language, in Kurdish and neighbouring languages, Kurdish and ancient languages (Parthian, Pehlevi etc); 6. qewls (religious songs) and Yezidi beyts (couplets); 7. Terminology in the scientific, legal economic, geographical, anatomical, literary and mathematical fields as well as cosmetics and football; 8. a dictionary of the fauna and flora with dialectic variants.

There is also a review "Vate", that is working on the Zazki

dialect, which was started in 1993 and has since met about 20 times and publishes on that dialect's culture, language and literature with the Kurdish Institute's backing.

There are now Kurdish dictionaries published in almost every language. There are now also Kurdish dictionaries on Internet.

M. Salih AKIN : "Language(s) and identity(ies) in the diaspora in Europe."

A programme financed by the French and German Foreign Ministries called "contrasting evaluation of the social implications of linguistics in the Kurdish language as a language of immigration" is a research project that associates Rouen and Potsdam Universities.

This research project has four objectives :

measure the transmission of the first language in Germany and in France

to evaluate the language skills of pupils born of the Kurdish immigration in their first language and in language in which they are taught (French or German).

To seek to determine if mastery of the parental language by the children plays a role in their school results.

To seek to study the connection that might exist between the language and identity in the context of the diaspora.

In the framework of this action, only the 4th point has been tackled.

Some results have been obtained in discussions in French and Kurdish regarding the language-identity link in the context of the

diaspora with Kurds from Turkey who have had access to education, having suited in secondary schools and universities.

Apart from one of the people questioned who declared that his mother tongue was Turkish, all the other Kurds stated Kurdish was their mother tongue, even one of them, Ahmed, who comes from the Haymana region of Ankara, from a Kurdish community that had been displaced a long time ago.

Those questioned were then asked if they had received any education in their mother tongue: there is still a lack of education in their mother tongue and its transmission is not didactic but solely within the family circle. The policy of forbidding it released among those being questioned memories of a conflictual situation. Ezdan remembered the traumatism he suffered at school, which was, above all, an area of assimilation and that Kurdish is being gradually stifled, even in family circles.

About links with their origins: *"You can't be attached to a history, a culture if you do not speak the language of that culture"* (Faris).

It may seem paradoxical to talk of the beneficial effects of the diaspora, but the Kurdish exiles have freed themselves from the constraints and interdictions weighing on their language and have been able again to take over their language and their culture, with the possibility of learning to read and write in Kurdish. Exile, which many people consider a mechanism of language dispossession, has, in the case of the Kurds, been a means of rediscovering their mother tongue and an intellectual rebirth.

The mother tongue is considered to be an authentic means of

expression and a symbol of struggle and resistance. Using it becomes a duty. Thus Mehmet Uzun admitted that if Kurdish were not in danger of disappearing he would certainly have written in Swedish, but by writing in Kurdish he was committing himself. *"Abandoning one's mother tongue language in the context of the diaspora is treason"*, said one of those questioned, which is an extreme idea of linguistic loyalty, the only way maintaining the memory.

Recounting past events is not experiencing the events, especially in exile. However, the convergences of testimonies enables the extent of the linguistic violence suffered to be brought to light and establish a strong connection between the ethno-cultural identity and membership of the diaspora. The mother tongue is the principal vector of the collective memory in the uprooting experience of exile.

The final discussion was presided by Mr. Gérard Chaliand, a writer and geo-political expert. Those taking part were Mr. Bernard Dorin, a French Ambassador de France, Mr. Kendal Nezan, Mr. Jonathan Randal, a journalist, former Washington Post correspondent Mr. Frédéric TISSOT, French Consul General de France at Erbil, from 2008 to 2012.

Gérard Chaliand recalled that 51 years earlier, in 1959, when he was mainly working on "practical anti-colonialism", he was asked to write a 30 or 40 page article on *"a cause no one spoke about"* — the Kurds. He was given one book by Basile Nikitine and one by Thomas Bois. In 1960 the 5th Congress of Kurdish students took place in East Berlin attended by Ismet Cheriff Vanly and Abdulrahman Ghassemilou. At that time the

Kurds were practically unknown, except to specialists. They were just emerging from 30 years of repression in Turkey, Iraq and Iran and the repression had not ended with the 1975 Algiers Agreement.

However, as time passed, thanks to accidents such as, the spring of 1991, when the YV cameras were able to show the Kurdish exodus from Iraq and then another when the US decided to remodel the Middle East and attack Iraq, the Kurds found themselves in an unexpected situation: for the first time the Kurds were faced with managing a society and not just with an insurrection.

The situation has been positive, even if fragile and imperfect regarding the economy, education, threatened but still much has been done and it is more useful to welcome what has been done than to lament the things that have not yet been done

Bernard Dorin put forward two proposals for the future: impressed by what had been said about "territorial delimitations", it seemed to him fundamental to have a map on which to locate "the four Kurdistans". A document is most valuable in this respect — the Norodov myra Atlas drawn up in the Soviet Union is extremely precise linguistically and shows where the Kurds are throughout the Near East.

He also proposed that we should be inspired by his proposal for a "Council of Elders" already made for Africa on the occasion of Senghor's funeral, which would draw up a global continental policy. A "Council of the four Kurdistans" could meet quarterly to discuss the state of their part of Kurdistan and seek help,

if need be, from the other parts. A Pan-Kurdish Cultural Council would enable regular contacts with officials in the different Kurdish areas to create a "*spectre of unity of the Kurdish nation*".

Jonathan Randal recalled his first contacts with the Kurdish Institute, its library and the Kurdish circle that he met then, including Ghassemlou and the help he'd received from Kendal Nezan and Joyce Blau when he was writing his book "*After Such Knowledge What Forgiveness?*". He then talked about Kissinger's betrayal of the Kurdish revolution and how Mustafa Barzani had said he wanted to make Kurdistan the 53rd American State. After a history summary of the betrayals that the Kurds had experienced from the Great Powers, he said that when looking at the "success story" of Iraqi Kurdistan it should not be forgotten that George Bush Senior had called upon the Kurds and Shiites to revolt against Saddam in 1991 — making them then pay terrible price. He also recalled George Bush Junior's attempt to have US troops enter Iraq via the

Turkish border and that, while the latest diplomatic developments between the KRG and Turkey were positive, the Iraqi Kurds should remain wary. He ended by recalling the tragic and turbulent fate of the Christians of Mesopotamia and of the Tur Abdin over the last two centuries and the danger of their disappearing.

Frédéric Tissot stressed the major role of the Kurdish diaspora that saw to it that the Western countries would finally know what is a Kurd and also the role it could still play to ensure that one that there really be a Kurdistan.

He wanted to draw attention to the fact the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Kurds does not always enriching but can also be a handicap, recalling the civil war of 1994-96 and that it made the Region's daily running of the Region harder, both inside the KRG and in its relations with Baghdad.

The diaspora must still continue its unceasing work to ensure that this wealth and diversity be

of benefit to all parts of Kurdistan.

He ended by referring to the reluctance of foreign to recognise the Kurdish reality and called on the diaspora to take part in building a future for the Kurds.

Kendal Nezan agreed that there was still an enormous amount of work to be done and to hope that hand it over to younger generations. He also explained the difficulty of ensuring the financial survival of an independent institution, open to all the Kurds and also to the Christians of Kurdistan without becoming dependent on Kurdish political parties. He also paid tribute to the memory of all the foreign public figures who have supported the Institute, including Danielle Mitterrand as well as the outstanding Kurdish intellectuals from all parts of Kurdistan who contributed their prestige in founding the Kurdish Institute. He called for the collective work of the Institute to continue and announced that a Kurdish dictionary would soon be coming drawn up by the Institute.



FEVRIER 1, 2013

Irak: Grandes manifestations sunnites contre le Premier ministre

Par Kamal Naama / (Reuters)

FALLOUJJA, Irak- Des dizaines de milliers de manifestants sunnites ont défilé vendredi en divers points d'Irak, après les grandes prières hebdomadaires, pour clamer leur colère envers le Premier ministre chiite, Nouri al Maliki. Les sunnites manifestent depuis la fin décembre contre la discrimination dont est victime selon eux leur communauté depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003 et l'arrivée au pouvoir des chiites, majoritaires dans la population.

Défilant sous l'ancien drapeau à trois étoiles, qui était celui de l'Irak sous Saddam Hussein, des dignitaires sunnites, des cheikhs de tribus et de jeunes manifestants ont exigé que l'actuelle législation antiterroriste soit amendée, de même que celle qui a encadré la «débaassification» du pays - l'interdiction faite aux membres de l'ancien parti Baas de Saddam Hussein d'occuper des postes dans l'administration. Les sunnites se disent discrimi-

nés et marginalisés par le pouvoir en place, dominé par les chiites depuis la chute du parti Baas.

Craignant de voir les islamistes attiser la colère des sunnites, Nouri al Maliki a lâché du lest sur certains points et libéré plusieurs centaines de détenus. La colère des manifestants sunnites, loin de s'apaiser, a monté d'un cran après la mort de cinq personnes tuées par l'armée lors d'un rassemblement à Falloudja, voici une semaine. «Nous n'oublierons jamais ce que l'armée nous a fait, non seulement vendredi dernier mais, plus largement, en prenant parti contre nous», déclarait un manifestant à Falloudja. «Notre nouvelle revendication, c'est que l'armée irakienne se retire de notre secteur», ajoutait-il.

Discussion sur une loi d'amnistie

L'Etat islamique d'Irak, la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda, a appelé jeudi la communauté sunnite à prendre les armes contre Nouri al Maliki. Un an



après l'achèvement du retrait militaire américain, le gouvernement dirigé par Maliki, constitué de chiites, de sunnites et de Kurdes, est ainsi confronté à sa crise la plus grave, d'autant plus que ses composantes ne se sont toujours pas entendues, depuis plus d'un an, sur les modalités de partage du pouvoir.

Nouri al Maliki a chargé une haute personnalité chiite de discuter avec les manifestants de leurs revendications, notamment d'une loi d'amnistie et d'un assouplissement de la

politique de «débaassification». Le vice-Premier ministre, Saleh al Moutlak, qui est sunnite, a déclaré qu'une rencontre tenue vendredi avec l'Alliance nationale, la coalition chiite de Maliki, et avec Irakia, formation soutenue par les sunnites, avait permis d'avancer sur certains projets de réformes. «On peut dire que les choses ont avancé au cours de cette réunion, ce qui ne s'était probablement pas produit les fois précédentes», a-t-il dit. □



L'archevêque de Kirkouk, Louis Sako, élu patriarche des Chaldéens

CITE DU VATICAN, 01 février 2013 (AFP)

MGR LOUIS SAKO, archevêque de Kirkouk, ville du Kurdistan irakien, a été élu patriarche de l'Eglise chaldéenne dans la nuit de jeudi à vendredi à Rome, ont annoncé plusieurs sites de l'Eglise chaldéenne.

Mgr Sako, qui a été élu par les quinze évêques de cette église réunis depuis lundi à Rome, remplace le patriarche Emmanuel III Delly qui avait démissionné en décembre, après avoir atteint 85 ans.

La nouvelle de l'élection de Mgr Sako a été annoncée vendredi matin sur le site Ankawa.com des communautés chrétiennes d'Irak et sur celui du patriarchat à Bagdad, mais le Vatican ne l'a pas confirmée, attendant vraisemblablement l'aval de l'élection par le pape.

Les débats dans une maison de la congrégation des Passionnistes sur la colline du Célio ont été longs et complexes, a-t-on indiqué de sources informées.

Présidé par le cardinal argentin Leonardo Sandri, préfet de la Congrégation pour les Eglises orientales, le synode de cette communauté principalement irakienne se tenait à Rome et non à Bagdad pour des raisons de sécurité.

Les évêques de cette très ancienne Eglise d'Orient sont originaires d'Irak, d'Iran, de Turquie, de Syrie, du Liban, mais proviennent aussi de la diaspora

d'Amérique du Nord ou d'Europe.

Le nouveau "patriarche de Babylone des Chaldéens" est bien vu des autorités irakiennes et des Occidentaux. Il est jugé pro-kurde et comme ayant favorisé dans son diocèse une collaboration fraternelle avec l'islam.

Comme les autres communautés, les Chaldéens ont payé cher les suites de l'intervention américaine lancée contre le régime de Saddam Hussein, les chrétiens ayant été perçus parfois comme les alliés des "croisés" occidentaux.

Selon Radio Vatican, cette Église, rattachée à Rome, comptait quelque 550.000 fidèles en Irak avant 2003, et 150.000 dans la diaspora. Aujourd'hui, après un exode massif, les proportions sont presque inversées.

Cette Église que la tradition fait remonter à l'apôtre Thomas fait face à de nombreux défis, notamment la question de sa place dans une société irakienne marquée par la violence et les menaces islamistes.

"Nous avons besoin d'un chef qui nous aide à voir l'avenir, et qui rapproche les gens entre eux", avait déclaré Mgr Sako à Radio Vatican avant l'ouverture de ce synode. ■

DE RETOUR DE SYRIE, UN CRI D'ALARME

Koert Debeuf fut porte-parole de Guy Verhofstadt. Il représente les libéraux au Moyen-Orient. C'est le premier officiel de l'UE à s'être rendu en Syrie depuis le début du conflit.

Delphine MINOUI,
Dominique MARCHAL

Caire - Koert Debeuf est en colère. Depuis son incursion au Nord d'Alep, en territoire insurgé, il l'affiche sans réserve. « Les Syriens vivent au rythme des bombes d'Assad, de jour comme de nuit. Ils ne savent pas quand et où elles peuvent tomber. Ils manquent de médicaments, de nourriture, d'armes pour se défendre. Ils en ont assez des promesses vides de la communauté internationale. Ne pas les aider, c'est trahir la révolution syrienne et c'est soutenir le plus grand des criminels ! », lâche l'ex-porte-parole du Premier ministre belge.

Ce lundi 28 janvier, nous le retrouvons au Caire. C'est ici qu'il a élu domicile, peu après le début du printemps arabe, comme représentant des libéraux du Parlement européen – un poste inédit dans l'histoire de l'Union européenne. Echarpe rouge sur blazer bleu foncé, la mèche rebelle qui lui balaye le front, il a mis plus d'une heure à arriver au rendez-vous : la faute à de nouvelles manifestations qui enflamment la place Tahrir. Mais qu'importe, c'est pour ça que ce Belge de 38 ans a choisi de vivre au cœur de cette région : pour voir, sentir, vivre et décrypter les bouleversements inédits qui la traversent depuis deux ans. Et c'est pour ça, aussi, qu'il s'est rendu en Syrie. Non pas par la voie officielle, celle de Damas et de la propagande du pouvoir, mais par la route clandestine des insoumis, celle qui mène aux principales zones du Nord tenues par la rébellion.

Un voyage à haut risque qui commence le 18 janvier à Hatay, en Turquie. Après deux jours de rencontres avec des généraux de l'Armée Syrienne libre, l'envoyé européen traverse clandestinement la frontière, grâce à l'aide de passeurs. A ses côtés : l'activiste Rami Jarrah – plus connu sous le nom de son blog

Alexander page –, et un représentant de l'ASL, ses compagnons de route dans cette Syrie à feu et à sang, où plus de 60 000 personnes ont perdu la vie en moins de deux ans. Par la fenêtre du véhicule, il photographie du regard tout ce qu'il voit : carcasses calcinées des tanks du régime syrien, maisons en ruine, mais aussi, à son grand étonnement, les premiers check-points qui sont tenus, non pas par la rébellion mais par la branche syrienne du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan – l'illustration flagrante des divisions qui déchirent déjà les opposants au régime. « Le PKK contrôle une demi-douzaine de postes sur un corridor d'environ dix kilomètres qui longe la frontière turque. Les Kurdes sont très bien organisés. Sans doute poussés par Massoud Barzani, au Kurdistan irakien, ils entretiennent le rêve d'un territoire autonome. La partition est une des réalités de l'après-Assad », observe Koert Debeuf.

Les surprises ne font que commencer. Le lendemain, après une nuit passée à Azaz, et ponctuée par le bruit sourd des bombardements, ses hôtes l'invitent à se rendre à Alep. Il se retrouve en fait sur la ligne de front de la bataille pour l'aéroport de Quweris. La veille, les environs ont été libérés par l'ASL. Mais les combats s'y poursuivent, violents, meurtriers. « Face aux bombes d'Assad qui pleuvent du ciel, les soldats de l'ASL n'ont que leur courage pour se battre. Ils sont équipés de simples mitraillettes, saisies dans les dépôts de l'armée régulière. Des armes promises par la France, le Qatar ou la Turquie, je n'ai rien vu. Du coup, ils en sont réduits à fabriquer des armes artisanales. Mais ça ne fait pas le poids », observe-t-il. Pire : Assad vise, selon lui, « délibérément des sites civils ». Comme en témoigne cette vidéo, rapportée de Syrie, où un habitant d'Azaz déambule, le regard hagard, à travers un ancien marché d'Azaz. « Des tas de pierre ! C'est tout ce qu'il en reste ! Ca s'est passé une semaine avant notre visite : deux

missiles syriens ont pulvérisé les échoppes à 14h, en pleine heure d'affluence. 30 personnes ont péri dans l'attaque. Parmi elles, des femmes et des enfants. L'homme que nous avons rencontré nous disait qu'il y avait encore des corps sous

les décombres, mais pas d'équipement pour les déterrer. » Le représentant européen se fait le porte-voix du désespoir des Syriens : « Partout, c'est la pénurie. J'ai visité la seule boulangerie qui fonctionnait. Les autres ont été bombardées par le régime. Dans les villages alentours, il n'y a pas de chauffage, pas d'électricité. Le prix de l'essence a atteint 13 fois son prix d'origine. »

De son voyage express, il retient aussi ces scènes de détresse dont il a été témoin, le 23 janvier, lors d'une étape finale au camp de déplacés d'Azaz avant de regagner la Turquie. « 11.400 personnes dont 8.000 enfants y vivent entassées sous des tentes. Certaines familles en sont réduites à se réchauffer en brûlant des journaux. Les plus chanceuses sont équipées d'un petit poêle. Depuis douze jours, il n'y a plus de lait. Alors, les enfants boivent de l'eau sucrée. Les adultes, eux, ne font qu'un repas par jour, à base d'un mélange de légumes acheminés depuis la Turquie, la récolte locale de légumes étant rendue difficile par les bombardements persistants du régime de Damas. Pour ce qui est de l'aide médicale, les trois hôpitaux de campagne tenus par Médecins sans frontières ne sont pas suffisants. Dans le camp, j'ai vu un enfant d'un an blessé à la jambe par des éclats de Shrapnel. Sa plaie était en train de s'infecter, mais il n'y avait pas de quoi la soigner », raconte-t-il.

Intitulé « De retour d'enfer », le rapport brûlot qu'il vient de remettre aux députés libéraux n'y va pas par quatre chemins. « Il est urgent, dit-il, de revoir au plus vite le soutien apporté à la Syrie. » A commencer par

l'acheminement de l'aide humanitaire internationale. « L'ONU a récemment annoncé l'attribution d'une aide de 519 millions de dollars à la Syrie. Or, elle passe par le gouvernement syrien et le Croissant rouge. Autant dire que les populations civiles qui vivent dans les provinces sous contrôle de l'Armée syrienne libre n'en verront pas la couleur. » A l'inverse, poursuit-il, « j'ai été positivement surpris par la façon dont les zones contrôlées par l'opposition s'autogèrent : elles ont leurs conseils locaux, leurs tribunaux, leur police. Ces gens-là sont prêts à aller récupérer vivres et médicaments à la frontière turque pour en assurer la distribution. J'ai obtenu l'engagement d'Abdel Nasser Farzat, le commandant militaire de l'ASL au Nord de la Syrie, de nommer un civil pour superviser cette distribution, et limiter le risque de corruption. »

Quant à l'aide militaire aux rebelles, elle lui semble « cruciale pour faire cesser le massacre ». « Les approvisionner en défense antiaérienne leur permettrait de contrer les attaques par missiles. C'est le seul moyen de faire plier Assad. »

A ceux qui s'inquiètent de voir ces armes tomber entre de mauvaises mains, il répond : « Cette peur est démesurée ! ». « Oui, j'ai vu des islamistes. J'ai même croisé un Syrien qui se revendiquait d'Al-Qaïda. J'ai également vu beaucoup de barbus, et beaucoup d'hommes qui faisaient la prière parmi les combattants anti-Assad. Mais à cela, je vois deux raisons principales : quand on frôle la mort au quotidien, on se réfugie dans la prière ; quant à la barbe, c'est un signe qui permet de se distinguer des soldats de l'armée régulière. Donc, pour l'heure, je dirais que les djihadistes demeurent minoritaires ». Et d'ajouter : « En revanche, Plus nous attendrons pour offrir une aide adéquate aux opposants, plus la guerre se prolongera, et plus nous renforcerons les combattants islamistes. » □

Attaque d'un commissariat à Kirkouk, en Irak, 33 morts



par **Mustafa Mahmoud** | Reuters

KIRKOUK, Irak - Au moins 33 personnes sont mortes dans l'attaque au camion piégé d'un commissariat de police dimanche matin à Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, a-t-on appris de sources policières.

L'explosion, qui a provoqué l'effondrement partiel d'un bâtiment public attenant, a fait également des

dizaines de blessés et des corps restent ensevelis sous les débris.

Selon le décompte de la police, douze employés du bâtiment administratif figurent parmi les 33 personnes décédées. De source médicale, on parle d'un bilan provisoire de 16 tués et plus de 90 blessés.

Le kamikaze qui conduisait le véhicule piégé était accompagné par au moins deux autres assaillants qui ont été tués, a ajouté la police.

"Deux hommes armés portant des vestes munies d'explosifs ont essayé de prendre d'assaut le poste central de la police de Kirkouk mais les gardes les ont tués", a déclaré une source policière jointe à l'intérieur du complexe.

Kirkouk, 250 km au nord de Bagdad, est au centre d'un bras de fer sur la répartition des terres et des droits pétroliers entre le gouvernement central et la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

Plusieurs groupes armés sont actifs dans cette métropole où cohabitent Kurdes, Arabes et Turkmènes, y compris les insurgés sunnites de l'Etat islamique d'Irak affilié à Al Qaïda, qui prennent fréquemment pour cible les forces de sécurité et ont recours aux kamikazes.

Kirkouk abrite également l'armée Nakchbandi ou JRTN, un groupe armé formé d'anciens soldats et membres du Parti Baas de l'ancien président Saddam Hussein.

Le mois dernier, un attentat suicide au camion piégé y a fait 25 morts et dans une ville voisine, un kamikaze a tué 26 personnes lors de funérailles célébrées dans une mosquée chiite.

La violence en Irak a régressé depuis le pic de violences interreligieuses qui ont fait des dizaines de milliers de morts en 2006 et 2007 mais plus de 4.400 personnes y ont trouvé la mort l'an dernier dans des violences politiques. ●

Les Kurdes irakiens déterminés à construire leur oléoduc

Isabel Coles, Anthony Barker / reuters

Le Kurdistan irakien persiste dans sa volonté de construire son propre oléoduc à destination de la Turquie, a déclaré jeudi le ministre de l'Energie de cette province autonome, en dépit de la volonté des Etats-Unis qui craignent que le projet n'aboutisse à la scission de l'Irak.

La région kurde autonome s'oppose frontalement au gouvernement central de Bagdad sur la question épineuse et hautement stratégique de l'exploitation des réserves d'hydrocarbures en Irak, les quatrièmes plus importantes au monde.

Le gouvernement central affirme qu'il est le seul à avoir autorité sur les réserves d'hydrocarbures. Les autorités kurdes affirment de leur côté que leur droit d'exploitation est inscrit dans la Constitution en vigueur en Irak à la suite de l'intervention anglo-américaine de 2003 qui a abouti au renversement de Saddam Hussein.

"Nous voulons notre propre oléoduc", a déclaré le ministre kurde des Réserves naturelles, Ashti Hawrami, lors d'une conférence de presse organisée dans le chef-lieu de province, Erbil. "Il est actuellement en travaux et nous continuerons jusqu'à ce qu'il soit

terminé."

Le pétrole provenant de la région kurde transitait par Bagdad jusqu'en décembre dernier, mais le flux atteignant les 200.000 barils de brut par jour s'est brusquement tari en raison d'un différend concernant le partage des recettes avec le gouvernement central.

Le Kurdistan irakien cherche à renforcer ses liens avec la Turquie voisine, avide en hydrocarbures, et un important partenariat énergétique entre les deux entités est en négociations depuis l'an dernier.

Cette relation déplaît à Bagdad et complique les relations entre

l'Irak et la Turquie. L'ambassadeur des Etats-Unis en Turquie, Francis Ricciardone, s'en est publiquement inquiété mardi.

"Si la Turquie et l'Irak ne parviennent pas à améliorer leurs relations économiques (...), le conflit pourrait s'aggraver en Irak et les forces de désintégration à l'intérieur de l'Irak pourraient se renforcer", a déclaré le diplomate américain.

Les violences en Irak ont régressé depuis le pic de violences inter-communautaires qui ont fait des dizaines de milliers de morts en 2006 et 2007, mais plus de 4.400 personnes y ont trouvé la mort l'an dernier dans des violences à caractère politique. ●

Abdullah Ocalan: A bridge between Kurds and Turks?

By James Reynolds BBC News, Istanbul

For decades, the islands on the Sea of Marmara outside Istanbul have been home to Turkey's most dangerous exiles and prisoners.

Ottoman princes were held there; Trotsky made the islands his home following his escape from Stalin's Russia; and a Turkish prime minister was executed there after a military coup in 1960.

The island of Imrali is now famous for one prisoner - a man Turkey often calls The Chief Terrorist.

His hair is white and he has lost weight. He spends his days reading academic works in his prison cell. He has an AM radio, and was recently given a television set.

For almost 14 years now, no-one apart from a handful of prison guards, politicians, lawyers and family members has seen him or heard his voice.

But Abdullah Ocalan remains the unquestioned leader of the Kurdish armed movement, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Message from a cell

Turkey's capture of Ocalan in Kenya in 1999 did not end his role in the conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish rebels.

History shows that imprisonment can often increase a rebel leader's standing. Any doubts about Ocalan's continuing influence ended in November 2012.

He passed a message from his prison cell, ordering the ending of a hunger strike by hundreds of Kurdish activists.

His order was immediately obeyed.

This action may have forced the Turkish government into a profound decision: If it is to solve its 30-year-long conflict with the PKK, it may have to do so with the involvement of Ocalan himself.

Last December, reports emerged that the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had sent a senior intelligence official, Hakan Fidan, to Imrali island for talks with Ocalan.

Two Kurdish MPs were also allowed to visit the PKK leader.

Bridge

These were rare new faces for Abdullah Ocalan. For years, the only person regularly allowed to visit the PKK leader on Imrali island has been his younger brother Mehmet, who works as a farmer in



Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, has been held in an island prison off Istanbul since 1999

eastern Turkey.

"His amazing willpower is what keeps him alive," says Mehmet Ocalan from the family home in the village of Omerli.

A picture of Abdullah Ocalan playing in the snow hangs on the wall. "His conditions in prison are very tough."

The two men are usually allowed visits which last 45 minutes. The brothers are watched by prison guards.

"We talk about what's happening in the village, and about the family for about 15 minutes. Then for the next half an hour we talk about politics - about events in the region and around the world."

"Does Ocalan ever issue instructions to you to pass on to his followers?"

"Yes, he does. Sometimes he tells me things. I am a member of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy party, so he does.

"Abdullah Ocalan is a bridge between Kurds and Turks," Mehmet Ocalan insists. "If that bridge is broken, there may be serious divisions. I've said it before: He is a bridge. He is working for humanity to stop the bloodshed."

One aim

But others may disagree. Turkey, the US and the EU have designated the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

Its war with the Turkish state has cost around 40,000 lives. Among Turks, the hatred provoked by the PKK is deep.

But the desire to end the conflict may be even deeper.

"Today we are, once more - with ambition and patience - in an honest effort to end this violence and terror," the prime minister recently told his ruling AK party.

"Believe me we have one aim - which I repeat again - to stop the tears in all mothers' eyes."

But violence has marred the start of the



In January, three Kurdish activists were killed in Paris - their deaths remain unsolved

peace process. In January, three Kurdish activists were killed in Paris, and buried here in Turkey.

Their deaths are unsolved. Mourners at the activists' funeral in Diyarbakir insisted that the peace process must go ahead.

The Turkish state wants the PKK to disarm. The Kurds want autonomy, the right to education and justice in their own language, and better conditions for Abdullah Ocalan.

His lawyers demand better access to their client. Firat Aydinkaya was last allowed to see Ocalan 18 months ago.

"The peace process is directly linked to Ocalan's conditions in prison," says Mr Aydinkaya, "If his conditions are improved, he will have a stronger hand and his peace messages will be more effective."

Turkey last heard Abdullah Ocalan's voice in 1999, during his trial on the island of Imrali. Many people in this country question his commitment to peace. But they do not doubt his influence.

The one man this country hates above all others is the same man it now approaches to try to end the Kurdish war. ■

Iran again is open to talks, envoy says

MUNICH

But his lack of clout fuels doubts on negotiating over nuclear program

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

The Iranian foreign minister said Sunday that his country was open to a renewed offer of direct talks with the United States on its nuclear program and looked favorably on a proposal for a new round of multilateral nuclear negotiations on Feb. 25 in Kazakhstan.

But the Iranian official, Ali Akbar Salehi, does not have the power in the Iranian system to decide these matters on his own, so his comments were viewed by European and American officials as more atmospheric, designed for the trans-Atlantic audience at the Munich Security Conference, than definitive.

Mr. Salehi called a restated offer here for direct talks with Washington, expressed on Saturday by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “a step forward” and said, “We take these statements with positive consideration.”

But Mr. Salehi quickly added that “each time we have come and negotiated, it was the other side, unfortunately, who did not heed” its commitments. And he complained to the Iranian press of “contradictory signals” from President Barack Obama and “the threatening rhetoric that everything is on the table,” including military means to prevent Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon.

“This does not go along with this gesture” of direct talks, he said, “so we will have to wait a little bit longer and see if they are really faithful this time.” Having negotiated in the past with Washington over Iraq, he said, Iran has no “red lines.”

Similarly, Mr. Salehi said he had “good news,” hearing that the European Union’s foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, had proposed another round of negotiations with Iran by the members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany during the week of Feb. 25 in Kazakhstan.

Iran has regularly delayed such meetings, which the six powers had hoped to restart in December and then in January, with arguments over venue and timing.

And Mr. Salehi did not confirm the meeting. Iran is represented in nuclear talks by Saeed Jalili, who is designated there as the “personal representative”

of Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It is Ayatollah Khamenei who will decide matters on the nuclear issue, and certainly will decide whether Iran opens direct talks with the United States, whom he regards as intent on regime change in Iran, the officials said. And Mr. Jalili is in Damascus meeting with officials from the Syrian government, which Iran is supporting with arms, fuel and cash.

Iran has played hard to get on the nu-

clear issue, say Western diplomats involved with the talks, and Mr. Jalili has regularly refused offers to meet separately with the American negotiator in the multilateral talks, who is now Wendy R. Sherman, the undersecretary for political affairs in the State Department.

In the last round of talks, in Moscow in June, Iran insisted that the world powers lift all sanctions against Tehran as a precondition for substantive talks on reducing or eliminating Iran’s growing stockpile of enriched uranium. The six powers have maintained that Iran must first comply with Security Council resolutions demanding that it halt enrichment and satisfy the International Atomic Energy Agency that it does not have a nuclear weapons program. Iran has also refused the agency access to various sites in Iran.

Turkish Marxists claim attack on U.S. Embassy

ISTANBUL

BY TIM ARANGO
AND SEBNEM ARSU

A Marxist group with a history of political violence in Turkey has claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, releasing a statement calling the United States “the murderer of the peoples of the world.”

The statement, which also denounced U.S. foreign policy, was released on Saturday by the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front, and a translation was distributed by the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors the communications of extremist groups. The message, which was posted on a Web site that has previously carried statements from the group, condemned Turkey for its cooperation with the United States and for its policy of supporting Syrian rebels fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

After conducting DNA tests, the Turkish authorities on Saturday identified the man who detonated himself at the embassy, killing himself and a Turkish guard, as Ecevit Sanli, 40, also known as Alisan Sanli. Mr. Sanli was a convicted terrorist who had twice attacked government facilities in Istanbul but was freed from prison under an amnesty program. Earlier Saturday, officials in the Black Sea town of Ordu said he lived there.

The Ankara police said they had detained three people thought to have helped Mr. Sanli and had found a handgun linked to the militant group. They also released security footage from the embassy in which Mr. Sanli was shown pretending to be a courier.

The statement by the group included two photographs of Mr. Sanli. In one, he is holding an assault rifle, and a banner

bearing the hammer-and-sickle symbol of Communism is behind him.

The attack Friday, coming in the wake of the attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, by Islamic extremists in September, initially raised fears that it was the work of jihadists. That the bomber has ties to a relatively minor Marxist group is likely to challenge assumptions about the nature of international terrorism and the risks to U.S. interests abroad. U.S. officials, however, have not confirmed the identity of the attacker or a motive, and the United States plans to investigate.

In a statement Saturday, Ordu officials said Mr. Sanli spent four years in prison after being arrested in 1997 for attacking a military hostel and police station in Istanbul. He was released in 2001 under an amnesty program for inmates with medical conditions, said Muammer Guler, the Turkish interior minister. Mr. Sanli reportedly had Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, a brain disorder caused by malnutrition that he suffered during a jailhouse hunger strike.

The authorities said Mr. Sanli lobbed a hand grenade during the attack Friday just before detonating his explosives-packed vest, suggesting that there were actually two explosions.

The Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* reported that Mr. Sanli had gone to Germany after being released from prison, and according to the semi-official Anatolian News Agency, he returned to Turkey illegally only a few days before the attack by crossing the Aegean Sea from a Greek island on a boat.

The group has struck U.S. and other Western targets in Turkey before, and in its statement the group condemned NATO’s recent deployment of Patriot missile batteries in southern Turkey to protect against strikes from Syria.

The Rise of Syria's Kurds

Heiko Wimmen and Müzehher Selcuk
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

In the lee of the struggle for Syria, the PKK comes back in from the cold. Since the summer of 2012, the beleaguered Syrian regime has all but abandoned areas predominantly inhabited by Kurdish populations. So far, the main beneficiary of this situation of quasi-autonomy for a “West Kurdistan” (as it is referred to in Kurdish political geography) appears to be the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokratik, or PYD)—a powerful Syrian Kurdish group established in 2003 by Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants of Syrian origin in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq. The largely bloodless withdrawal of the Syrian army and security forces in the north and northeast of the country—as well as tensions between the PYD and other revolutionary actors—has given rise to a host of accusations and suspicions about the group’s motivations, as well as its national and regional designs.

In a remarkably short time, the PYD has succeeded in setting up a well-armed military of about 10,000 fighters, known as the Popular Protection Units (or Yekineyen Parastina Gel, or YPG), as well as local, self-organized civilian structures under the label of the “Movement for a Democratic Society” (Tevgera Civaka Demokratik, or TEV-DEM). In theory, the PYD shares power with some 15 other Kurdish parties (who form the Kurdish National Council, or KNC) in the framework of the Kurdish Supreme Council, which was established in July 2012 through the mediation efforts of Massoud Barazani, president of Iraqi Kurdistan and leader of Iraq’s Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Yet on the ground, the PYD is dismissing its council partners as nothing more than proxies for Barazani himself, whose close relationship with Turkey the PYD deeply mistrusts. Additionally, the PYD has prevented any armed Kurdish presence besides its own loyalist Populist Protection Units; most recently, armed altercations were reported with the Kurdish Union Party in Syria (Yekiti) in the towns of al-Darbasiyah and Qamishli.

The PYD and YPG have also repeatedly clashed with fighters of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), who themselves are connected to the KNC through the Syrian Opposition Coalition—particularly in the mixed town of Ras al-Ayn (Serekani) on the Turkish border. Fighting continues to flare up despite all attempts at mediation. The PYD have also repelled attempts by the FSA to enter Kurdish areas in and around Aleppo and have accused Turkey of instigating and supporting the forays of Islamist elements (such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Ghuraba Al Sham) into Kurdish areas.

The tension between PYD and FSA (as well as with other revolutionary elements) have given rise to accusations that the PYD is, in fact, acting as a sub-contractor for the Syrian regime. In late December, Arab tribes attacked PYD offices in the mixed city of al-Hasakah in retaliation for previous regime violence against protesters, and accused the party of collaboration with the regime. But while the position taken by the PYD certainly complicates the situation for the FSA and its Turkish backers (and therefore provides an objective benefit for the Syrian regime itself), there is little evidence for active cooperation between the two sides. Areas controlled by the PYD are occasionally targeted by the regime, if only on a much lesser scale than those where the FSA is present.



Moreover, there is little reason to believe that the structures of Kurdish self-government that have since developed could even survive should Bashar al-Assad ever manage to reclaim control over the whole of Syria. Yet tensions between the PYD and FSA imply the clear danger of worsening relations between Sunni Arabs and Kurds in this part of the country—with sizable Christian communities caught in the middle.

The second major accusation leveled against the PYD—often by an increasingly nervous Turkey—is that the party is nothing more than a front for the PKK. Officially, the PYD denies any such damaging affiliation. Yet, even if one disregards the origins of some prominent PYD leaders in the PKK, the group’s language, its symbols (most visibly, images of imprisoned PKK-leader Abdullah Ocalan), and its organizational structures (not least among them, a visible presence of female fighters in the lower ranks) mirror those of the PKK. Moreover, it is unclear how the Syrian Kurds could have set up (and by themselves, no less) the logistical and structural framework to form an effective military force of more than 10,000 fighters.

At the same time, there is little evidence thus far of Kurdish fighters attempting to infiltrate Turkish territory from Syria. While the PYD and the PKK leadership are concerned enough to deny Turkey any pretext for direct intervention—authorized by the Turkish parliament in early October 2012, without specification where exactly it may occur—their priority is to build autonomous structures and military forces. This priority fits into PKK’s broader strategic shift since 2000, which abandons the call for a unified, independent Kurdish state and instead strives for Kurdish autonomy within existing state borders. Establishing a second autonomous Kurdish area (after Iraq’s) that puts one of the post-PKK organizations in charge of the quasi-state structures (and eventually, a role in negotiating Syria’s future) appears far too precious an opportunity to be jeopardized. In addition, the rugged territory to the north and northwest of the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq, where the PKK headquarters are located, offers far better inroads into Turkish territory than the Turkish-Syrian border region—most of which is fairly accessible and comparatively easy to monitor from the Turkish side.

Still, since the outset of the crisis in Syria, PKK operations have been picking up across southeast Anatolia, with a notable increase of fighters of Iranian-Kurdish origin among the reported casualties on the Kurdish side. Interestingly, however, operations of the PJAK (the Iranian version of the PKK) on Iranian territory have nearly ceased. Some reports even advance theories whereby a strategic alliance has been forged between the PKK and Iran in attempts to put the heat on Turkey and re-stabilize Assad. Yet even without such an explicit realignment, the conflict over the Syrian crisis was bound to undermine Turkish-Iranian security cooperation on the border region. From an Iranian perspective, turning a blind eye to Kurdish infiltration of Turkey offers

➔ the double benefit of both putting the squeeze on Turkish Prime Minister Tayyeb Erdogan in retaliation for his support for the Syrian revolution, while also directing the separatist efforts of its own restive Kurds elsewhere.

These developments appear to have added new dynamics to the long-standing struggle for leadership within the PKK, between its acting leader Murat Karayilan and Bahoz Erdal/Fahman Hussein (often referred to as “Dr. Bahoz”), the former commander of the People’s Defence Force (Hêzên Parastina Gel, HPG) from 2004 until he was sacked by Karayilan in 2009. Erdal, a younger leader who supports military action, appears to have made a comeback in 2011, as events in Syria improved the margin for such an approach. Time and age are clearly on the side of Erdal (provided he continues to successfully avoid being captured or killed), and so is his Syrian background—and control of a quasi-state is bound to boost the weight of the Syrian element in the overall PKK structure. Thus, it can be expected that the Syrian crisis will accelerate the generational change within the PKK toward a younger, more radical leadership. For the moment, the leadership is in the advantageous position of being able to put military pressure on Turkey on one front while demonstrating a capacity for maintaining stability in the midst of chaos on another.

Recent Turkish efforts to reopen negotiations with imprisoned PKK-leader Abdullah Ocalan may in part reflect the extent of fears of the PKK’s intentions and the corresponding urge to reign in the group’s more militant elements. Turkey has few other options to address a situation it has partly created for itself with its hard line on the Assad regime and its policy of Kurdish suppression. None of its allies south of the border—neither the FSA nor Massoud Barazani—has significant potential to put pressure on PKK or PYD. A full-fledged invasion into Syrian (or Iraqi) territory would only galvanize the local population behind the parties and expose Turkish troops to guerilla warfare on foreign and intensely hostile terrain—a situation in which regular armies rarely fare well. But that may just be the PKK’s preferred scenario. ♦

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Soldiers carried the wounded from the police headquarters in Kirkuk, Iraq, after the bombing.

Iraq suicide bomb kills at least 33 in Kirkuk

At least 33 people were killed in the Iraqi city of Kirkuk yesterday when a suicide bomber detonated a truck packed with explosives outside a police headquarters and gunmen disguised as officers tried to storm the compound.

The blast was the third major attack in weeks in or near the multiethnic city of Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, at the heart of a dispute between Iraq’s government and autonomous Kurdistan region.

“A suicide bomber driving a vehicle packed with explosives hit the entrance of the headquarters and after the blast gunmen in explosive vests attacked with AK47s and grenades, but the guards killed them,” said a police official.

Survivors were dragged on to stretchers amid the wreckage of the blast, which left a large crater in the street.

Police said 33 were killed, including 12 employees at the

government office. But a health official said only 16 bodies were at a hospital morgue and more than 90 were wounded.

The attack comes as insurgents linked to al-Qaeda try to inflame sectarian conflict in Iraq, where a powersharing government split among the Shia majority, Sunni and ethnic Kurds has been in crisis since US troops left a year ago.

Shia prime minister Nuri al-Maliki is facing mass protests from Sunni Muslims in western provinces calling for him to step down. They complain of marginalisation since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

In the north, the premier is also caught in a standoff with the autonomous Kurdish enclave over control of oil wealth and land along the so-called “disputed territories” where both regions claim control.

Sectarian tensions

Kirkuk, 170km north of the capital, is at the heart of the dispute. Last year Baghdad and the Kurdistan regional government sent rival forces to towns close to the disputed areas.

Several armed groups are active in Kirkuk, and Sunni Islamist insurgents linked to al-Qaeda often attack security forces in an attempt to undermine Mr Maliki’s government and stoke sectarian tensions.

Al-Qaeda’s local faction, Islamic State of Iraq, though weakened after years of war with American troops has benefited from the inflow of Sunni Islamists and arms into Syria where Sunni rebels are fighting Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

Suicide bomb attacks are the hallmark of Iraqi al-Qaeda. And the group claimed responsibility for a suicide attack that killed a Sunni lawmaker last month in Falluja.

But Kirkuk has also been home to the Naqshbandi army or JRTN, one of several insurgent groups made up of former soldiers and members of Saddam’s outlawed Baath Party.

Iraqi Arabs, Kurdistan’s government and Kirkuk’s minority Turkmen all lay claim to the city, known to some as the “Jerusalem of the Kurds”, a reference to its historically disputed status.

Last month a suicide bomber killed at least 26 at a funeral at a Shia mosque in the nearby city of Tuz Khurmato. Days earlier a suicide bomber driving a truck killed 25 in an attack on a political party office in Kirkuk.

Violence in Iraq is lower than at the height of sectarian slaughter in 2006-2007, when tens of thousands died. But more than 4,400 people were killed last year in attacks and bombings. – (Reuters)

Le Monde

Mardi 5 février 2013

Washington se dit prêt à des discussions directes avec Téhéran sur le nucléaire

Propositions renouvelées à l'Iran de contacts directs avec les Etats-Unis par le vice-président Joe Biden, perspective de reprise, à la fin février, des négociations multilatérales : le dossier du nucléaire iranien a été relancé, samedi 2 février lors de la 49^e conférence sur la sécurité de Munich, vaste forum international sur les questions stratégiques. Joe Biden, qui a quitté l'Allemagne pour Paris, dimanche, devait aborder cette question, ainsi que les dossiers syrien et malien lors d'un déjeuner, lundi 4 février, avec le président François Hollande, avant de s'envoler pour Londres.

C'est « une offre sérieuse », les Etats-Unis ne cherchent pas « un alibi », avait insisté Joe Biden, samedi à Munich, après avoir déclaré que Washington était prêt à rencontrer des représentants du gouvernement de Téhéran. Les Etats-Unis sont ouverts à des discussions bilatérales « si le gouvernement iranien, le leader suprême est sérieux ». Affirmant la nécessité d'un « agenda » précis, M. Biden a ajouté : « Nous ne sommes pas prêts à faire cela juste comme un exercice ».

Alors que, depuis 2009, les Iraniens refusent régulièrement de rencontrer les négociateurs américains, le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Ali Akbar Salehi, a pris note « positivement » de la proposition de Joe Biden qu'il a qualifiée de « pas en avant ». « Nous sommes tout à fait prêts à mener des négociations, mais cette fois, il faut que l'autre partie ait vraiment envie de parvenir une solution », a déclaré le ministre, qui ne détient pas seul le pouvoir de décision en la matière. Les négociations auront lieu seu-



Joe Biden (à droite), avec le ministre russe des affaires étrangères, le 2 février, à Munich. MATTHIAS SCHRADER/AP

lement lorsque nous aurons suffisamment confiance dans la sincérité des Américains. » Affirmant à plusieurs reprises l'importance que l'Iran – « berceau de la civilisation » – attachait à son indépendance, M. Salehi a ajouté qu'il devait s'agir de « négociations entre égaux ».

« Inflation et chômage »

Parallèlement, un autre processus a été relancé : L'Iran et le groupe 5+1 (les cinq membres du conseil de sécurité et l'Allemagne) devraient se réunir au Kazakhstan le 25 février. Les dernières négociations menées en août 2012 à Moscou n'avaient rien donné. Depuis décembre 2012, les différents protagonistes n'étaient même pas d'accord sur le lieu de ladite négociation. A Munich, le ministre iranien a repris la date du 25 février

proposée par le chef de la diplomatie européenne Catherine Ashton.

Le débat organisé au forum de Munich entre Ali Akbar Salehi et l'Allemand Ruprecht Polenz, président (CDU) de la commission des affaires étrangères au Bundestag, a donné la mesure du fossé qui sépare les deux parties. « Vous ne pouvez pas dire que tout le monde se trompe et que vous êtes les seuls à avoir raison », a attaqué Ruprecht Polenz au sujet de l'enrichissement de l'uranium iranien à des fins militaires. « Il y a quelque chose qui cloche : vous demandez qu'on vous respecte mais vous ne respectez pas les autres. » Le député a souligné que l'Iran est classé parmi les pays les moins respectueux en matière de droits de l'homme. « Alors que l'avenir de votre pays pourrait être florissant,

l'inflation et le chômage sont élevés. N'attendez pas trop pour saisir l'occasion qui se présente ! »

Au cours de ce débat, l'expert Vali Nasr, un Iranien qui enseigne à la John Hopkins University aux Etats-Unis, ne s'est pas montré très optimiste : « La communauté internationale doit reconnaître que mener de pair des sanctions et des négociations est difficile. Les sanctions n'ont pas joué leur rôle ». Néanmoins, un facteur peut être décisif : « Plus longtemps l'Iran sera éloigné du marché pétrolier international, plus il lui sera difficile d'y revenir », parce que les Etats-Unis y occupent une place croissante, mais aussi parce que l'Iran ne bénéficie pas des dernières technologies d'exploitation. ■

PHILIPPE BERNARD
ET FRÉDÉRIC LEMAÎTRE (À MUNICH)

Le Monde

Dimanche 3 - Lundi 4 février 2013

Turquie

Attentat contre l'ambassade américaine à Ankara

ANKARA. Un attentat-suicide a été commis, vendredi 1^{er} février, à une entrée latérale de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis à Ankara et a coûté la vie à un vigile. Un visiteur turc a été grièvement blessé et plusieurs employés américains et turcs ont dû être soignés à la clinique de la représentation diplomatique après avoir été touchés par des débris. L'attaque n'a pas été revendiquée, mais le ministre de l'intérieur, Muammer Güler, a déclaré que l'auteur de l'attentat, qui portait une ceinture d'explosifs, appartenait à un groupe d'extrême gauche et semblait être de nationalité turque. Le kamikaze est soupçonné de faire partie du Parti-Front de libération populaire (DHKP-C). – (Reuters.)

Le chef de la Coalition nationale syrienne reste prêt à dialoguer avec Bachar Al-Assad

L'initiative de Moaz Al-Khatib, qui a pour objectif un départ du dictateur, avait surpris les autres membres de l'opposition fin janvier

Son appel au dialogue avec le régime Assad a pris de court toute l'opposition syrienne. Deux semaines après le lancement de son initiative, le 30 janvier, en dépit des remous qu'elle provoque en interne et malgré le dédain affiché par les autorités de Damas, Moaz Al-Khatib, le chef de la Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS), campe sur ses positions.

Ce quinquagénaire à la barbe blanche et à l'allure élancée est prêt à rencontrer des émissaires du président Bachar Al-Assad à deux conditions : que les quelques centaines de Syriennes actuellement derrière les barreaux soient libérées et que les discussions portent sur les seules modalités de départ du dictateur. M. Khatib ambitionne même de faire endosser son offre par le bureau politique de la CNS, fondé sur un refus de toute discussion avec le régime syrien. « Moaz Al-Khatib est en train d'affirmer son leadership », explique un diplomate occidental, qui le rencontre régulièrement.

C'est par un simple message Facebook, à la manière d'un révolutionnaire lambda, que ce religieux réformiste, ancien prêcheur de la mosquée des Omeyyades, à Damas, s'est lancé fin janvier dans cette manœuvre risquée. Formulée de façon maladroite, sans concertation préalable, elle provo-

que des tiraillements, notamment au Conseil national syrien, la principale composante de la CNS, vexé d'avoir été tenue à l'écart.

Certains observateurs y voient la marque de l'amateurisme politique du cheikh Khatib. Avant d'être propulsé à la tête de la coalition, en novembre 2012 à Doha, il œuvrait dans la société civile, à la tête d'une association islamiste modérée. D'autres en revanche se félicitent

que sa spontanéité coupe court aux interminables débats dont l'opposition est coutumière. « S'il avait consulté ses collègues, sa proposition n'aurait jamais vu le jour, assure la chercheuse Bassma Kodmani. Il était temps que la CNS élabora un discours plus politique. On ne peut pas se contenter de répéter "Assad doit partir". »

Soutenu par plusieurs cadres de la CNS, comme l'influent Riad Seif, qui fut l'architecte de la réunion de Doha, et l'universitaire dissident Burhan Ghalioun, qui dirige le Conseil national syrien, Moaz Al-Khatib séduit aussi parmi les militants de gauche qui sont restés en dehors de la Coalition. « Sa proposition permet d'isoler le régime, de le discréditer face aux Syriens qui seraient tentés de croire en ses promesses de réconciliation », explique Haytham Al-Manana, le responsable du Comité de

coordination pour le changement démocratique, qui a lancé fin janvier un autre appel à la négociation – silencieux celui-là – sur le sort réservé au président syrien. « La solution politique fait peur à Bachar, car il n'a rien à lui opposer. Elle fissure le bloc politico-militaire sur lequel son système est fondé. »

Maison incendiée

A l'origine de cette ouverture, avant même les considérations tactiques, il y a une réaction d'effroi face à l'hécatombe en cours. Selon un diplomate occidental, Moaz Al-Khatib est « authentiquement angoissé » à l'idée que le conflit finisse par ravager le pays tout entier, notamment la capitale, Damas.

Dans cette hésitation face à la guerre, le chercheur français Thomas Pierret, spécialiste de la Syrie, qui connaît personnellement le patron de la CNS, voit aussi l'influence des idées de Jawdat Saïd, alias le Gandhi arabe, un penseur syrien, tenant d'un pacifisme radical. « Moaz Al-Khatib a attendu très tard avant de soutenir la lutte armée », rappelle M. Pierret. Jusqu'au printemps 2012, il a cherché à négocier avec le régime, de concert avec le laïc Louay Husseïn, une personnalité de l'opposition intérieure, tolérée par Damas.

A cette époque, ce descendant

d'une illustre famille damascène sillonne les banlieues déshéritées de la capitale où bat le pouls de la révolution. Dans les oraisons funèbres qu'il offre aux victimes de la répression, il récuse tout sectarisme, à rebours de la propagande du régime. En 1995 déjà, les autorités l'avaient relevé de ses fonctions de prédicateur, parce que ses sermons sortaient du moule. Arrêté au printemps 2011, il est harcelé, surveillé puis incarcéré de nouveau en avril 2012, ce qui le persuade de la vanité de ses efforts de conciliation. Libéré en juin, il prend la fuite et s'installe au Caire.

Vis-à-vis de Moscou et de Téhéran, les deux protecteurs du régime Assad, qui ont applaudi son projet, M. Khatib a d'ores et déjà marqué des points. Il peut se targuer d'avoir été salué comme une voix « sage » et « raisonnable » par le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, Ali Akbar Salehi. Pour ne pas froisser ses alliés, le maître de Damas s'est abstenu jusque-là de rejeter explicitement l'offre du prêcheur-ingénieur. Ses hommes de main seraient-ils moins diplomates ? Dimanche 10 février, la maison familiale des Khatib, à Damas, a été réduite en cendres par un incendie. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE
AVEC CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Obama salue les efforts d'Ankara pour une paix avec le PKK

Le président américain Barack Obama a salué les efforts menés par les autorités turques afin de parvenir à une solution négociée du conflit kurde qui perdure depuis près de trente ans, dans un entretien à un journal turc publié dimanche.

"J'ai applaudi les efforts du Premier ministre (Recep Tayyip) Erdogan de chercher un règlement pacifique à ce conflit qui a provoqué tant de souffrances", côtés kurde et turc, a répondu M. Obama à des questions écrites qui lui ont été adressées par le quotidien Milliyet.

"Je pense que les mesures proactives adoptées par la Turquie pourront avoir des résultats réels", a estimé le président américain, avant d'ajouter: "Le peuple turc doit savoir que les Etats Unis vont continuer d'appuyer par des voies concrètes sa volonté de tourner cette page horrible et d'avancer vers la paix et la sécurité".

Ankara a entamé ces derniers mois des discussions avec la principale figure du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), Abdullah Öcalan, qui purge une peine de prison à vie, dans le but de désarmer les

rebelles puis d'obtenir leur retrait du territoire turc vers leur base du nord de l'Irak.

Selon la presse turque, les rebelles pourraient déposer les armes au printemps.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation "terroriste" par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, est tenu par le gouvernement central pour responsable de la mort de plus de 40.000 personnes depuis qu'il a pris les armes en 1984 pour obtenir l'autonomie des Kurdes de Turquie.

Une précédente tentative de négociation avec le PKK en 2009 avait échoué.

Les Etats-Unis, alliés de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan, coopèrent depuis plusieurs années avec Ankara contre le PKK dans les territoires irakiens. (AFP) □

Syria's Kurds Try to Balance Security and Alliances

By JOSH WOOD

ERBIL, IRAQ — Syria's Kurds have mostly escaped prolonged bouts of direct conflict in the country's civil war, but with rebel units pushing east toward the resource-rich Kurdish heartland, Kurdish militias proliferating and calls for greater autonomy growing, this may not remain the case.

Last summer, the Democratic Union Party, known by its Kurdish-language acronym P.Y.D., seized control of many towns and villages in the Kurdish majority northeast. The group also holds territory in a few Aleppo neighborhoods and some towns around the city.

The P.Y.D. is the most powerful Kurdish faction in Syria and has a well trained militia. This is perhaps a product of its ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., a guerrilla group that has been fighting for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey.

The leadership of the P.Y.D. plays down its ties to the P.K.K. But Syrian Kurds often use the names interchangeably, and P.Y.D. offices feature portraits of the imprisoned P.K.K. leader Abdullah Ocalan and Syrian P.K.K. guerrillas killed in fighting with Turkey.

Detractors of the P.Y.D. accuse it of working in collusion with the Syrian government. The party's leadership and supporters, who say they were struggling against the government to secure rights for Syria's two million-plus Kurds well before the uprising began in 2011, reject this allegation.

But in the complexities of Syria's civil war, friendships are not born of common enemies.

The P.Y.D.'s militant Kurdish nationalism, which puts ethnic identity before allegiance to Syria, and their goal of some form of autonomy has put them at odds with Syria's rebels. After decades of discriminatory policies against the Kurds under the Baath Party, the P.Y.D. is opposed to anybody but Kurds ruling their areas.

Last month, fighting flared in Ras al-Ain, which the Kurds call Serekaniye, as rebel units assaulted P.Y.D.-held areas. Dozens were killed in the fighting.

"Those groups attacking Serekaniye, we don't consider them as Free Syrian Army," said Saleh Muslim, the leader of the P.Y.D.

Instead, he said the groups that attacked "are mainly just taking orders from the Turkish regime."

The Free Syrian Army "is a name, or a trademark, not registered to anybody," said Mr. Muslim. "So anybody can come from his home and get a hold of some weapons and say, 'I am Free Syrian Army.'"

The push on Ras al-Ain, a town on the Turkish border about 300 kilometers, or 185 miles, northeast of Aleppo, could reflect a number of things: a rebel attempt to gain strategic territory, the lack of coordination among Free Syrian Army units, the spread of armed groups beyond the control of the Free Syrian Army, or the prodding of rebel groups by Turkey to confront the Kurds.

Mr. Muslim believes that Turkey, which is concerned that P.Y.D.-controlled areas along its borders could act as a base for P.K.K. attacks and has warned of intervention if it feels threatened, had something to do with the outbreak of fighting.

"I think it's a part of the larger plan by the Turkish regime," he said. "They want to disarm all people, to leave them without defense."

Beyond the strategic value offered by the northeast, with its access to long stretches of the Iraqi and Turkish borders, the area is home to the majority of Syria's oil. Before the conflict, oil exports earned Syria \$4 billion per year.

The amount of oil that Syria could produce is negligible when compared with other exporters in the region, but with the economy shattered the oil fields are attractive real estate.

There are conflicting reports over who holds the main northeastern oil fields around the town of Rmeilan, though in late January a video appeared online purporting to show members of the P.Y.D.'s militia patrolling the smaller Gir Ziro field nearby.

Beyond the P.Y.D., the other notable political player in Syria's Kurdish areas is the Kurdish National Council, a coalition of 16 parties. The parties are mostly small and have differing views, though on the whole they are more amenable to working with the mainstream Syrian opposition, which the P.Y.D. rejects.

The Kurdish National Council was further fractured when four of its parties close to the leadership of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional

Government formed a seemingly independently acting bloc in December.

"In terms of the relationship with the Syrian opposition and in terms of their demands, the formation of this subgroup is in fact a greater element of division within the Kurdish National Council," said Maria Fantappie, an analyst in Iraq with the International Crisis Group.

Mustafa Jumaa, who leads the Azadi Party, one of the factions in the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union, said the alliance had been formed out of frustration with the inability of the Kurdish National Council to make decisions.

Members of the new bloc have started to field militias, with Mr. Jumaa saying the union has about 1,500 fighters in Syria and will ultimately take control of thousands more troops being trained by Kurdistan Regional Government forces, the Peshmerga, in Iraq.

Previously, the P.Y.D. was the only Kurdish group in Syria with a significant armed presence.

"We took this decision because we saw the future for Syria was getting worse and maybe we would be facing heavy clashes in Kurdish areas, so we have to be ready for that," Mr. Jumaa said. "The most important thing is that we do not want to fight our Kurdish brothers."

Given the sharp political divides, the introduction of militias could increase tensions and the possibility of intra-Kurdish fighting down the line.

Ms. Fantappie, the analyst, said the Syrian Kurdish fighters being trained in Iraq were "an important counterbalance to negotiate with the P.Y.D.," though she said she did not believe that the formation of more militias in the area would result in a fight.

Like others in his alliance, Mr. Jumaa holds a mostly favorable view of the mainstream Syrian opposition and the Free Syrian Army, which he referred to as "a national army for Syria."

But in a war rife with misgivings and uncertainties, Mr. Jumaa said his group was prepared for other outcomes.

"If the Free Syrian Army attacks our Kurdish area, our political opinion will change completely and we will be against them also," he said. "Even if we do ■■■"

■■■ not agree with the P.Y.D. on a lot of things, we have to defend and protect our area.”

He added that if minorities were not guaranteed their rights by the opposition in a post-Assad Syria, there would be a “revolution within a revolution.”

As sectarian and ethnic lines harden, many Syrian Kurds fear for the future and are especially concerned about what could happen if their areas fall under rebel control.

In the Iraqi town of Shariya, just outside of the city of Dohuk, Syrian Yazidi refugees, a minority within the Kurdish minority, have sought shelter with their co-religionists. Members of the Yazidi faith, which shows

influences from a number of religions including Islam, Christianity and Zoroastrianism, have long been persecuted for their beliefs. The refugees in Iraq fled mostly out of fear of Arab Islamist fighting groups in Syria, particularly extremist elements like the Nusra Front.

A man who identified himself only as Ahmed left his hometown, Qastal Jindu, near Efrin, after an Islamist rebel unit attacked the village. “The P.K.K. defended the village,” he said. “Without the P.K.K. we all would have been killed.”

As he spoke in the sparse concrete room he was renting, his children attentively watched a movie depicting a past P.K.K. struggle against Turkey.

These fears have helped raise the popularity of the ultranationalistic Kurdish ideology of the P.Y.D., said Omar Hossino, a Syrian-American researcher in Washington. “They are getting a lot of recruits because people are afraid of Islamists,” he said. “People are starting to move into ethno-sectarian militias to protect themselves.”

This retreat to ethnic and sectarian identities in Syria could prove to make any future dialogue between different groups difficult. “It’s one of the most dangerous consequences of the armed conflict,” Ms. Fantappie said. ■



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
6 February 2013

Štefan Füle
European Commissioner for Enlargement and
Neighbourhood Policy

SPEECH - Dialogue for a peaceful solution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey

Plenary debate, European Parliament, Strasbourg

(Strasbourg, 5 February 2013) "A successful outcome would not only put an end to a conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives over the past three decades. It would solve many outstanding problems in Turkey, and play a crucial role in fostering political and constitutional reforms; it would be a strong incentive for the adoption of the fourth judicial reform package, actually addressing the key problems related to freedom of expression and other fundamental rights and it would facilitate the redrafting of the constitution, with respect to the right of citizenship." said Commissioner Štefan Füle at the plenary debate in the European Parliament.

In this regard, a solution of this issue would have a strong impact on the accession process of Turkey as such, as it would further consolidate the role of the European Union as a benchmark for reforms in Turkey.

In turn, putting the accession negotiations back on the right track would also be a strong incentive for supporting a solution to this issue and to the reform process in general.

In the meantime, I welcome steps such as the recent adoption of the law allowing for the defence in Kurdish in Courts as an important confidence building measure in the context of the on-going talks.

Regarding the redrafting of the constitution, we have understood that it has entered a critical stage. While all parties are to be congratulated for the constructive attitude so far, now is the time for results in the spirit of compromise and I cannot underline enough the importance of keeping up the participatory process.

Finally a few words on the tragic events which occurred in Paris last month.

We are aware of the distress this triple murder has provoked. We are confident that the on-going investigations by the French authorities will

shed full light on this crime. We encourage all parties involved not to let this horrible incident or other possible provocations in the future distract them from their goal to achieve peace.

Honourable members,

It is crucial that the European Union as a whole conveys its strong and clear support for these on-going efforts. It remains equally important that we coordinate our messages of support to Turkey.

The Commission stands ready to assist where it can, including on using our financial assistance under our Instrument for Pre-Accession to support a post conflict and reconciliation strategy and to expand further the socio economic development as well as the political and cultural rights of the citizens of Kurdish origin.

Thank you!

Concluding remarks

First of all, since some of you have raised the issue, you need to know that our progress report, like for a number of previous years, has been translated by our Delegation in Ankara into Turkish and has been put on the website of the Delegation.

Second point: I was happy to note, in my meeting yesterday evening with representatives of the BDP (I see a number of them being with us today to observe this debate), that the Kurdish politicians and civil society remain fully committed to a successful outcome of the talks. I can only encourage them to maintain this constructive, solution-oriented approach and to resist any provocative action aiming at distracting them from the search of a peaceful solution.

Regarding what we can do concretely to support this effort: on the one hand, the Commission monitors the compliance of Turkey with the political criteria, of which respect for the rights of people belonging to minorities are an important component. We raise issues of concern on a regular basis with the Turkish authorities and assist them where we can in their reforms. I can mention the work done in the Working Group for the chapter on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (23) under the positive agenda, in which we are working with Turkey on notably the adoption of a Human Rights Action Plan.

We also have a number of projects financed by the Instrument for Pre Accession in South East Turkey, such as a project aimed at the empowerment of Women, a training project for Children on mines and other wastes of conflict or a project in support of local research on disappearances, unsolved murders and mass graves in South-East Turkey. We currently run projects of more than 400 million euros of IPA funds which benefit directly or indirectly the Southeast of the country.

Obviously, should a wider effort be requested to support a post-conflict and reconciliation strategy, the Commission would be ready to support it including through its financial assistance.

A last point: I understand this debate as a strong support for a peaceful solution of the Kurdish issue and for the current talks, stressing, as you did, the wider context of the reform process in Turkey. And because of that it is being a good debate. ●

Jailed rebel leader holds power to end Turkey's Kurdish conflict



would now accept.

Issues in the talks are likely to include steps towards decentralization, Kurdish language education, constitutional changes to improve equality and reform of an anti-terror law under which thousands of people have been jailed for links to the PKK.

Parliament has made only slow progress on constitutional changes and Erdogan has vowed to present his own reform plans in March if there is no cross-party agreement.

ERDOGAN'S BALANCING ACT

The current momentum for a solution has in part been driven by last year's escalation in fighting between the PKK and NATO's second-largest army. Fears of more bloodshed have brought public opinion, Turkish and Kurdish, behind the process.

"There are funerals every day. Really the mothers cannot bear it anymore. We don't have the strength for it," said Esma Seydioglu, tugging her black headscarf as she described her sons who joined the PKK - one killed in a clash and one in prison.

"We want peace after this. No more of our people should die, no more of our children, no more soldiers, no more police, no more guerrillas," she said, sitting in a small office in Diyarbakir in southeast Turkey.

Erdogan himself has described "halting the mothers' tears" as the goal of the current process, but he is wary of inflaming nationalist anger over talks with Ocalan, a man often described by Turkish media in the past as the "baby killer".

His caution is illustrated by his repeated insistence that it is the intelligence agency in talks with Ocalan and not the government, despite the agency being under his direct authority.

"As the government we can't say 'come on Ocalan let's sit down with you and negotiate'. If we say that the nation wouldn't forgive us," Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said on Monday.

In a sign of a rocky path ahead, a row has emerged in the last couple of weeks over the make-up of a Kurdish delegation set to visit Ocalan, with Erdogan rejecting the inclusion of MPs filmed embracing PKK fighters last August.

Mixed signals which Erdogan himself has sent out in recent months have fuelled distrust among Kurdish politicians with denials that there is a "Kurdish problem".

From an expression of regret that the lifting of the death penalty had spared Ocalan from execution in 1999, to a call to lift Kurdish politicians' immunity from prosecution, Erdogan has often alienated those he is now seeking to win over.

The result is a climate of mutual

BY DAREN BUTLER

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Sitting across the table from top Turkish officials, jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan wields the power to silence guns across southeastern Turkey which have killed more than 40,000 people in a three decade-old insurgency.

Reviled by most Turks and held in virtual isolation since his 1999 capture, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader has expressed in fledgling peace talks with Ankara a will to end a conflict which both sides realize they cannot win militarily.

A similar resolve in Ankara amid a winter lull in violence has created an unprecedented opportunity to end fighting which has inflicted massive human and economic costs, and has long undermined Turkey's democratic ambitions.

But both sides face major challenges to meet their end of the bargain.

Looming elections next year and the growing risk of renewed clashes as summer approaches mean Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan will need to initiate reforms swiftly to widen Kurdish minority rights and enable the rebels' reintegration into society.

In return, Ankara hopes Ocalan will set in motion steps towards a militant ceasefire and withdrawal from Turkey in the coming weeks. First he will need to win over battle-hardened PKK fighters in the mountains of northern Iraq.

Comments from Kurdish politicians and PKK commanders based in Iraq's Qandil mountains suggest Ocalan can do just this.

"If Ocalan is convinced, those in Qandil will be convinced. Those in Qandil could not and would not resist an Ocalan who is clearly determined," said Cengiz Candar, author of a think-tank report on ending the conflict.

The talks have been kept under wraps for fears of a nationalist backlash, but media close to the government have outlined a process under which the PKK will halt hostilities, withdraw from Turkey within months, before ultimately disarming.

Ocalan, isolated on the prison island of Imrali near Istanbul, will need to be able to communicate with Qandil and offer them strong incentives to pull out around 2,000 fighters believed to be in Turkish territory.

"Ocalan is no doubt the person who knows his own group the best," said Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, head of a business association in the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir who heads a contact group aimed at fostering dialogue on Kurdish issues.

"(The state) must create channels via which Ocalan can talk to the PKK ... or the talks will not have legitimacy."

Ocalan was seized by Turkish special forces in Kenya in 1999, brought back to Turkey, tried and sentenced to hang. The sentence was later commuted Ocalan dispatched to Imrali.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, took up arms in 1984 with the aim of carving out a Kurdish state in southeast Turkey. Subsequently it moderated its stated goal to autonomy, but it is unclear what sort of deal Ocalan

suspicion which was exacerbated last month when Turkish warplanes bombed PKK targets in northern Iraq, drawing condemnation from Kurdish politicians.

"The two sides do not trust each other," said Hugh Pope, Turkey project director for the International Crisis Group.

"There needs to be a trust-building phase. For a start they need to stop attacking each other."

FROM OSLO TO ARBIL

Ankara previously held secret talks with the PKK in Oslo which fell apart in 2011 amid renewed violence in southeast Turkey. The risk of the latest negotiations meeting a similar fate will grow if the talks drag on.

Commentator Avni Ozgurel, who has followed the process closely, said Oslo had not been in vain and top PKK commander Murat Karayilan had voiced his commitment to the Oslo process.

"This process showed that, contrary to expectations, the PKK had a strong desire for peace," Ozgurel said.

While attention is focused on Ocalan, there is also evidence of talks in

the city of Arbil in northern Iraq, where Iraqi Kurdish leaders are expected to play a role in the process.

"It is not just Ocalan in this process. Maybe it is not highlighted, but people representing the PKK leadership are frequently discussing details with MIT (Turkish intelligence agency) operatives from Ankara in Arbil," Ozgurel said.

The militant group itself has officially denied such talks.

Outlining the process, Ozgurel forecast that initially there would be a symbolic withdrawal of fighters to northern Iraq, with the PKK ordering its fighters to halt attacks.

"If this agreement functions without problems, the group will announce a ceasefire decision in May. Disarmament will come later," he said.

While Ocalan commands the loyalty of the PKK, the prospects of disarmament could still be undermined by the emergence of splinter groups. The picture is further complicated by the Syrian conflict, which has enabled a PKK proxy party to assert its authority in parts of northern Syria.

Erdogan, who has pushed through

cultural and language reforms for Turkey's 15-million strong Kurdish minority during his decade in power, does not have time on his side.

Turkey faces local and presidential elections next year and his government is currently seeking ways to push through parliament a constitution which would enable Erdogan to take charge of a new executive presidency.

There is also a risk of sabotage, with last month's killing in Paris of three Kurdish women activists, including a PKK co-founder, seen by many as such an attempt.

"If dead bodies continue to arrive, who will believe in this process?" said Raci Bilici, Diyarbakir head of the Human Rights Association.

"We will not be able to solve anything in the Kurdish problem with weapons, violence, clashes and security measures."



FEBRUARY 7, 2013

Iraqi Kurds press on with oil pipe to Turkey despite U.S. fears

ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Iraqi Kurdistan will press ahead with building its own oil export pipeline to Turkey, the region's energy minister said on Thursday, despite U.S. objections due to fears the project could lead to the break-up of Iraq.

The autonomous Kurdish region is locked in a turf war with the central government in Baghdad over how to exploit Iraq's hydrocarbon riches and divide up the proceeds.

Baghdad says it alone has the authority to control exports of the world's fourth largest oil reserves, while the Kurds say their right to do so is enshrined in Iraq's federal constitution, drawn up following the U.S.-led invasion of 2003.

"We want to have an oil pipeline to ourselves," Iraqi Kurdish Minister for Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami said at a news conference in the regional capital Arbil. "It is currently in the works and we will continue until it is completed."

Crude from the Kurdistan region used



Iraqi Kurdish Minister for Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami

to be shipped to world markets through a Baghdad-controlled pipeline to Turkey, but exports via that channel dried up in December, from a peak of around 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) due to a row over payments with Baghdad.

The United States says the solution lies in a national hydrocarbons law that has been delayed for years by a power struggle between Iraq's Sunni, Shi'ite and

Kurdish factions, which has intensified since U.S. troops withdrew a year ago.

"The Iraqis have been struggling to pass a hydrocarbons law. It is very important that they succeed in that," U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Francis J. Ricciardone said in Ankara on Tuesday.

Reluctant to wait, Kurdistan has been looking to resource-hungry Turkey for answers. A broad energy partnership between them ranging from exploration to export has been in the works since last year.

Majority Sunni Turkey's deepening ties with the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq have heightened tensions between Ankara and the Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad.

"If Turkey and Iraq fail to optimize their economic relations... There could be more violent conflict in Iraq and the forces of disintegration within Iraq could be emboldened," Ricciardone said.

Kurdistan is already bypassing the federal pipeline network by trucking small quantities of crude over the Turkish border in exchange for refined oil products.

"The issue is that we are entitled to 17 percent of (Iraq's) refined products, but the central government sends us only 3 percent and our refining capacity is not enough to satisfy domestic demand," Hawrami said. ●

Obama voices support for talks on resolving Kurdish issue

TODAY'S ZAMAN, ANKARA

US President Barack Obama has confirmed his country's support for the peace initiative the Turkish government has started with Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), to settle Turkey's decades-old Kurdish issue.

Obama said in an interview that appeared in the Milliyet daily on Sunday that he applauds Turkey's effort to find a peaceful solution to a problem that has caused much suffering.

Noting that the US has always supported Turkey in its fight against terrorism, while at the same time encouraging the steps Turkey has taken to deal with the issue through the use of politics, Obama reaffirmed that the US would continue to extend concrete support in this area. Regarding the governing Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) peace initiative, Obama expressed his belief that the proactive measures the government has been taking will achieve genuine progress in settling the Kurdish issue.

The Turkish government has complained that the international community is not offering sufficient support for the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power, and that the US, for its part, has appeared for some time to be somewhat unwilling to offer substantial backing to the opposition forces fighting the Syrian regime. However, Obama, who described the situation in Syria as a tragedy during the interview, conducted via email, seems to have taken a resolute attitude against Assad because he acknowledged that the end of the Assad regime will come, sooner or later. The US president also re-affirmed its commitment to expend efforts with Turkey to that end.

Iran's nuclear efforts have long been criticized by the US, and the interview Obama underlined the view that a nuclear Iran would pose a serious threat to all its neighbors, including Turkey. The US president, though stating that he wants to settle the issue in a peaceful way at the negotiating table with Iran, made it clear that the US is resolved in its position to not allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons. Obama admitted that Turkish companies have had to pass up business opportunities because of the



Obama has expressed his belief that the proactive measures the Turkish government has been taking will achieve progress in settling the Kurdish issue. (Photo: AP, Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

sanctions imposed by the US on Iran, and that Turkish people pay a higher price for energy as a result of the same sanctions. However, he also maintained that the price the world would have to pay for gas in the event of Iran succeeding in producing nuclear weapons would be much higher, especially for neighboring countries like Turkey.

Obama also noted Turkey's request for Patriot missile systems and thanked Turkey for allowing these missiles to be deployed in its territory. He pointed out that the aim of the deployment is to protect Turkey, not Israel, against a ballistic missiles threat.

It is known that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hopes to pay a visit to Washington to speak with Obama. However, rumors among political circles in Turkey say that he has been denied an invitation by the Obama administration, probably on account a divergence of opinion on various issues. Obama admitted that Turkey and the US have problems but that they can still talk sincerely with each other. Calling Erdoğan a good friend and a great partner with whom he has been working closely on global issues, Obama said, "I very much look forward to seeing my friend Prime Minister Erdoğan again." He also revealed that his team is trying hard to identify a suitable date for the two leaders to meet, adding, "I'm confident that we'll find an opportunity to do so soon."

Only seven of the 11 questions emailed to the White House by Milliyet's Washington representative were answered by Obama. As noted by the daily's representative, Pınar Ersoy, the questions the US president chose not to

answer reveal a great deal. The unanswered questions may be an indication that the divergence of opinion on numerous issues between Turkey and the US persists, although at the same time the two countries may also be cooperating as close partners on a number of issues.

One of the questions Obama chose not to answer asked how the US feels about Turkey's strengthening economic and political ties with the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq while the country's relations with Baghdad have soured in the past year. Turkey has been acquiring oil and similar products from the KRG, and the oil of the region -- although small in amount -- has for some time now been exported via Turkey to international markets, an act harshly protested against by Baghdad, which maintains that it is unlawful for the KRG to export oil without authorization from the Iraqi central government.

A broad energy partnership -- including the building of an oil pipeline -- between northern Iraq and Turkey, ranging from exploration to exportation, has been in place since last year, but the project has been criticized by the US, which fears that the project may pave the way for the Kurds there to break away from Iraq by enabling the Kurdish region to become financially independent, thereby leaving the remaining part of Iraq to fall even further under Iran's influence.

Another question that went unanswered concerned the two countries' diametrically opposed attitudes on an Israeli attack on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip that took place a couple of months ago. While Erdoğan described Israel as a terrorist state following the attack, Obama said Israel had acted in self-defense. To the question whether this divergence of opinion has caused any damage to US-Turkish relations, Obama preferred not to respond.

Questions about Erdoğan's remarks on Turkey's willingness to become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and whether Obama plans -- as he had so promised during his election campaign in 2008 -- to recognize the ordeal experienced by the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire as genocide, also went unanswered. ●

Iran and Hezbollah build militia networks in Syria in event that Assad falls, officials say

By Karen DeYoung and Joby Warrick,

Iran and Hezbollah, its Lebanese proxy, are building a network of militias inside Syria to preserve and protect their interests in the event that President Bashar al-

Assad's government falls or is forced to retreat from Damascus, according to U.S. and Middle Eastern officials.

The militias are fighting alongside Syrian government forces to keep Assad in power. But officials think Iran's long-term goal is to have reliable operatives in Syria in case the country fractures into ethnic and sectarian enclaves.

A senior Obama administration official cited Iranian claims that Tehran was backing as many as 50,000 militiamen in Syria. "It's a big operation," the official said. "The immediate intention seems to be to support the Syrian regime. But it's important for Iran to have a force in Syria that is reliable and can be counted on."

Iran's strategy, a senior Arab official agreed, has two tracks. "One is to support Assad to the hilt, the other is to set the stage for major mischief if he collapses."

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

The fragmentation of Syria along religious and tribal lines is a growing concern for neighboring governments and the administration, as the civil war approaches its third year with little sign of a political solution or military victory for either Assad's forces or the rebels.

Rebel forces, drawn largely from Syria's Sunni majority, are far from united, with schisms along religious, geographic, political and economic lines. Militant Islamists, including many from other countries and with ties to al-Qaeda, are growing in power.

Kurdish nationalists have their own militias, with control over major swaths of the northeastern part of the country and in parts of Aleppo. They are far more interested in autonomy than in an alliance with either side in the conflict. Minority Christians have largely sided with Assad, fearing the outcome of an Islamist victory. Syria's 700,000 Druze, followers of an offshoot of Shiite Islam, are increasingly leaning toward the rebels.

Despite U.S. efforts to convince members of Assad's Alawite sect, itself a minority within Islam's Shiite branch, that their interests lie in abandoning him, Alawite support remains fairly solid.

Each of Syria's internal actors has external backers.

"Syria is basically disintegrating as a nation, similar to how Lebanon disintegrated in the '70s to ethnic components, and as Iraq did," said Paul Salem, director of the Beirut-based Middle East Center of the



Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "It's going to be very hard to put Syria the nation back together."

"We're looking at a place which is sort of a zone, an area called Syria, with different powers," Salem said.

Iran has a history of profiting from chaos, even without control of the government ostensibly in power. Hezbollah arose out of the Lebanese civil war of the 1970s, when Iran was able to exploit the grievances of that country's Shiite population, a pattern it also followed in Iraq during the chaos that followed the U.S. invasion.

Tehran's interest in preserving a Syrian base partly explains why the financially strapped Iranian government continues to lavish resources on groups such as Jaysh al-Sha'bi, an alliance of local Shiite and Alawite militias that receives weapons and cash from Iran, according to U.S. and Middle Eastern officials who have studied the organization. The groups are receiving military training from officers from Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

While ostensibly created to bolster Syria's battered, overstretched army, Jaysh fighters — separate from Syria's pro-regime shabiha, or "ghost," units, which are notorious for reprisal killings of suspected rebel sympathizers — are predominantly a sectarian fighting force overseen by Iranian and Hezbollah commanders.

"Jaysh is essentially an Iran-Hezbollah joint venture," said David Cohen, undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence at the Treasury Department. "Given the other constraints on Iranian resources right now, it's obvious that this is an important proxy group for them."

In slapping sanctions on the militia in December, the Treasury Department said Iran had provided it with "routine funding worth millions of dollars."

A Treasury statement noted that Iran's Revolutionary Guard commander has said that Jaysh was "modeled after Iran's own Basij," which it described as "a paramilitary

force subordinate to the IRGC that has been heavily involved in the violent crackdowns and serious human rights abuses occurring in Iran since the June 2009 contested presidential election."

In a divided Syria, Iran's natural allies would include Shiites and Alawites concentrated in provinces near Syria's border with Lebanon and in the key port city of Latakia. Under the most likely scenarios, analysts say, remnants of Assad's government — with or without Assad — would seek to establish a coastal enclave closely tied to Tehran, dependent on the Iranians for survival while helping Iran to retain its link to Hezbollah and thereby its leverage against Israel.

Experts said that Iran is less interested in preserving Assad in power than in maintaining levers of power, including transport hubs inside Syria. As long as Tehran could maintain control of an airport or seaport, it could also maintain a Hezbollah-controlled supply route into Lebanon and continue to manipulate Lebanese politics.

Preservation of an Iranian-supported area on the coast has always been "Plan C or Plan D" for core regime supporters, Salem said. "If everything fails and they lose, they have always prepared for the fortress region ... with everything they can cart away, even if they lose Damascus."

"That's not necessarily what they want," he said. "They want to hold on to the whole thing." But the worst-case scenario is that "the whole regime relocates to the northwest, and they still have the most powerful [armed] unit inside Syria, with a lot of the current structure."

Newly installed Secretary of State John F. Kerry expressed during his confirmation hearing last month the administration's concern that Syria could break apart, saying that "one of the scenarios everybody's talking about is that people could sort of break up off into their places ... and you could have a disintegration, and who knows where that leads?"

"These are the risks," Kerry said. "I mean, this is what is at stake in this new world that we're dealing with. And nobody could sit here and tell you how it all plays out."

In a closed-door meeting of the U.N. Security Council last week, U.N. and Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi cited two "big risks that are of serious concern to the international community."

"The first is the transformation of Syria into a playground for competing regional forces, governments and non-state actors alike," Brahimi said. "This process is largely underway." The second risk, he said, is "full-fledged regionalization of the Syrian civil war." ♦

LES KURDES, LA SYRIE ET BACHAR EL-ASSAD

Depuis le début du soulèvement contre le régime syrien, difficile de comprendre la position des Kurdes, certains combattant contre les rebelles et d'autres penchant pour l'opposition réunie au sein du Conseil national syrien.



Une manifestation kurde anti-Bachar el-Assad à Kameshli, en juillet 2012. REUTERS/Shaa m News

L'AUTEUR
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.

Depuis le début du soulèvement, les Kurdes de Syrie ont beaucoup louché et hésité entre les promesses de Bachar el-Assad et celles du Conseil national syrien. Finalement, le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD, la branche syrienne du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) a profité de ce que Bachar el-Assad a retiré ses troupes pour instaurer une zone kurde au nord du pays, jouant ainsi la «division» voulue par le régime.

Résultat: les combattants, majoritairement arabes, de l'Armée syrienne libre (ALS, bras armé du Conseil national syrien) affrontent les combattants kurdes du PYD, tandis que le reste des partis kurdes pencheraient plutôt pour l'opposition réunie au sein du Conseil national syrien. En revanche, contre les djihadistes venus se battre en Syrie, les Kurdes se retrouvent unis.

1. Est-il vrai que des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes syriens sont apatrides?

Au début des années 1960, le gouvernement syrien veut arabiser sa frontière avec la Turquie dans les régions kurdes, en particulier la zone de Djézireh, triangle peuplé de Kurdes (et de chrétiens) qui s'enfoncent tel un bec de canard[1] entre la Turquie et l'Irak.

Objectif: sécuriser cette région qui a connu des mouvements autonomistes durant le Mandat français et garder ces terres agricoles fertiles et riches en pétrole.

En 1962, le régime baassiste prétexte un recensement au cours duquel un grand nombre de Kurdes ne pouvant prouver qu'ils y résidaient avant 1945 sont expropriés et se retrouvent sans identité, apatrides.

Ils seraient entre 300.000 et 800.000 (sur un total de un à deux millions, selon les estimations). Ces Kurdes «étrangers en Syrie» ne peuvent circuler librement, accéder à des emplois publics, se marier ou pire pour certains à ne posséder aucun papier légal, donc sans accès à l'université et à l'aide alimentaire ou médicale.

2. Comment Hafez el-Assad s'est-il mis les Kurdes de son côté pendant trente ans (1970-2000)?

Ayant les pleins pouvoirs à partir de 1971, Hafez el-Assad gèle l'arabisation forcenée des zones kurdes. Le nouveau président syrien, qui veut promouvoir son clan alaouite, ne peut se mettre à dos les autres minorités. En 1982, la révolte des Frères musulmans est écrasée dans la terreur, mais les Kurdes ne prennent pas parti. D'ailleurs les gardes du corps d'Hafez el-Assad sont souvent des chrétiens ou des Kurdes, peu susceptibles de l'assassiner ou de fomenter un coup d'Etat.

Le pays est alors prospère, l'école obligatoire, les contacts universitaires avec l'étranger nombreux, les Kurdes de Syrie n'ont aucun droit politique et culturel, mais ils vivent plutôt bien. Pour autant qu'ils ne soient pas politisés, car dans ce cas-là, ils connaissent le sort de tout opposant au régime: accusés de trahison, de séparatisme, de propagande au service d'une puissance étrangère, d'atteinte à la sûreté de l'Etat, etc.

3. Interdit en Turquie, le PKK agissait-il en toute liberté en Syrie?

A propos du PKK en Syrie, on a pu parler d'un «Etat dans l'Etat». C'est à partir du Liban et de la Syrie —où réside le numéro 1 du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan de juillet 1979 à

novembre 1988— que les Kurdes syriens s'engagent et s'entraînent (parfois aux côtés des Palestiniens du FLP et des Arméniens de l'Asala). Dès 1980-90, de nombreux Kurdes syriens vont se battre contre la Turquie dans le Kurdistan d'Irak. Arabophones, ils sont aussi très utiles à la branche politique du PKK dans ses contacts syro-libanais, et dans le reste du monde arabe.

La Syrie s'allie dès 1979 au PKK. Ils ont tous deux un adversaire commun: la Turquie avec laquelle la Syrie compte de nombreux contentieux (guerre de l'eau, Iskenderum). Et puis, membre de l'Otan, la Turquie est alignée sur l'ennemi numéro 1 de la Syrie, Israël.

La proximité du PKK avec le régime alaouite est telle qu'il a collaboré avec les moukhabarat (agents de renseignement) pour contrer l'influence d'autres partis kurdes.

En novembre 1998, Damas expulse Abdullah Öcalan. A la clé, une réconciliation avec le voisin turc, la signature de protocoles et une réintégration dans le concert des Nations. Arrêté au Kenya le 15 février 1999, le leader du PKK est jugé et condamné à mort en Turquie le 29 juin 1999, peine commuée en perpétuité en 2002.

Le PKK syrien n'est alors plus «persona grata» en Syrie; Öcalan déclare un cessez-le-feu unilatéral, demande aux combattants kurdes de se rendre et lance sa politique de «paix et de fraternité» avec les Turcs. Le PKK arrête ses attaques contre la Turquie, et en Syrie, connaît un véritable effondrement politique.

4. Quand l'opposition kurde au régime a-t-elle commencé à se faire entendre?

Après l'arrestation d'Öcalan, c'est l'heure du bilan pour les Kurdes de Syrie. Ceux qui se sont battus dans la guerrilla du PKK contre la Turquie ont l'impression d'avoir été ➔

⇒ bernés et sacrifiés et les pro-Barzani ou pro-Talabani (Irak) sont déçus par la guerre fratricide de ces deux leaders kurdes.

«Nos problèmes à nous d'abord», disent les militants d'un petit parti kurde syrien, Yekitî (unité) fondé en 1992. Les revendications sont modestes: la régularisation des Kurdes apatrides, le droit à l'éducation en kurde, etc. Pas question de demander l'indépendance, de toucher aux frontières.

C'est un mode d'intervention qui est original pour le Moyen-Orient: des actions civiques, des micro-manifestations, avec pancartes en anglais pour attirer l'audience internationale, et très vite l'utilisation d'Internet.

Le régime de Bachar el-Assad réprime ces militants. Les Kurdes syriens du PKK-PYD, eux, ne bougent pas une oreille.

En mars 2004, à Kameshli, un match de foot opposant l'équipe kurde locale à une équipe arabe dégénère. En toile de fond: l'émergence du Kurdistan d'Irak soutenu par les Américains. Une véritable psychose paranoïaque s'empare des Arabes syriens. Des milices armées tirent sur des Kurdes, faisant quelques morts. Les villes et quartiers kurdes de Syrie s'embrasent. Bachar el-Assad tente de temporiser, et reconnaît pour la première fois l'existence des Kurdes. Depuis 2004, chaque Newroz donne lieu à des émeutes et des manifestations violemment réprimées par les miliciens qui tabassent ou tirent dans la foule.

En mai 2005, le cheik soufi kurde Khaznawi est enlevé, torturé et assassiné. C'est une figure de premier plan pour les Kurdes, un patriote, prônant la non-violence et le dialogue inter-religieux. Une nouvelle génération kurde se fait entendre. Les arrestations, procès, emprisonnements et tortures de Kurdes se multiplient; à partir de 2009, les statistiques sont publiées sur le site Kurdwatch.

En octobre 2011, tous les partis kurdes syriens –hormis le PYD-PKK– fondent le Conseil national Kurde syrien (CNKS), opposé à Bachar el-Assad. Et de nombreux jeunes Kurdes syriens très politisés et plutôt pacifiques descendent dans la rue par solidarité avec la jeunesse arabe, dénonçant «les partis kurdes de papa», trop timorés, et agitant autant les drapeaux syriens que kurdes. Pour ces jeunes, le printemps arabe est un printemps syrien.

5. Le PKK syrien, le PYD, est-il devenu un supplétif du régime de Bachar el-Assad?

Au début du soulèvement populaire, en mars 2011, Bachar el-Assad veut mettre les Kurdes de son côté. C'est pourquoi il publie un décret accordant des cartes d'identité à 6.000 des Kurdes apatrides.

Ne voulant pas ouvrir un second front contre les Kurdes, le régime de Bachar el-Assad se désengage des régions kurdes et laisse faire. Les militants du PKK-PYD ne

participent pas aux manifestations anti-Bachar des autres Kurdes. Pis: ils les empêchent voire même tabassent les manifestants.

D'abord attentiste, le PKK-PYD s'allie finalement au Baas. C'est le meilleur moyen, pense-t-il, de constituer une future zone «autonome kurde et démocratique» en Syrie (à l'image de ce qui s'est fait en Irak du nord).

Tolérés par les milices arabes, les membres du PKK-PYD sont les seuls à être armés. Ce sont parfois de très jeunes adolescents de 15-16 ans qui font la loi. Ils contrôlent les barrages, prélèvent des taxes sur les marchandises, réquisitionnent certains biens. De nombreux Kurdes syriens dénoncent leurs exactions (rackets, tortures, intimidation politique, tribunaux populaires de type maoïste).

A Erbil (Kurdistan d'Irak) en juillet 2012, Massoud Barzani réunit et réconcilie tous les partis kurdes syriens y compris le PKK-PYD. Selon l'accord, ce dernier consent à la cogestion des villes et de la population. Mais il refuse d'appliquer une des clauses qui prévoit une force armée unifiée avec les peshmergas kurdes syriens bloqués en Irak du nord qui veulent s'allier à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL).

Au sein de l'ASL existe déjà un bataillon kurde du nom du plus illustre d'entre eux, Salahaddin. Les Kurdes qui le composent sont très anti-PYD syrien, qu'ils considèrent comme des «traîtres qui roulent pour Bachar el-Assad». Sur le terrain, à Alep comme à Ras Al-Aïn, les trêves se succèdent entre YPG (branche armée du PYD) et ALS, chacun voulant contrôler seul «son territoire». Mais des attaques de djihadistes indépendants contre les Kurdes compliquent la situation.

6. Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas plus antidjihadiste qu'un Kurde?

Les Kurdes abhorrent les djihadistes qui les ont depuis toujours pris pour cible. Quant aux Frères musulmans (sunnites), ils considèrent les Kurdes comme de mauvais musulmans (en raison du soufisme kurde, des yézidis, de leurs femmes non voilées, non séparées, et puis les Kurdes refusent l'arabisation). En Irak du nord, les Kurdes n'ont pas laissé un djihadiste mettre le pied dans la région autonome kurde depuis l'attentat de février 2004 qui fit 105 morts. Et ils comptent bien faire de même en Syrie.

Décrié, parfois détesté par de nombreux Syriens kurdes, le PKK-PYD a un atout dans la mesure où il est en première ligne face aux djihadistes que la Turquie, dit-il, aurait laissé passer la frontière.

Durant l'un des combats de la ville de Ras Al-Aïn, il y a eu 5 morts du PYD et 30 djihadistes, ce qui tend à prouver que des membres aguerris de la guérilla du PKK sont là-bas aussi. Et puis, à la différence de ces dji-

hadistes venus d'on ne sait où, les Kurdes syriens connaissent le terrain, ils sont chez eux. De facto, ils constituent l'un des meilleurs barrages contre les djihadistes.

7. A quoi ressemble la carte du Kurdistan de Syrie?

Le Kurdistan de Syrie est constitué de trois poches qui ne communiquent pas entre elles et que le régime de Bachar el-Assad a abandonnées au PKK-PYD depuis juillet 2012. D'abord toute la région d'Afrin au nord ouest d'Alep, puis de petits territoires qui débordent du Kurdistan de Turquie (sous la ville turque d'Urfa, la région de Ras-Al-Aïn, Amude, Hassaké); enfin le «bec de canard» de la Djézireh, avec la ville de Kameshli, une ville stratégique –pouvant être rattachée au Kurdistan d'Irak– que le régime de Bachar el-Assad tient toujours.

8. Les Kurdes de Syrie pourraient-ils être les grands perdants de l'après-Bachar el-Assad?

Sans parler des représailles dont pourraient souffrir les Kurdes du PYD-PKK qui ont fait le jeu du régime, les Kurdes syriens redoutent que les arabes de la «nouvelle Syrie» oublient une fois de plus d'accéder à leurs revendications (comme c'est arrivé en Irak).

Les partis kurdes syriens tentent donc l'impossible: s'entendre à la fois avec le Conseil national syrien (pour la reconnaissance de la nation kurde dans la future constitution) et avec le PYD (co-gestion des régions kurdes, force armée kurde unique) hostile au CNS.

Finalement, c'est le président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, qui tente d'unir les Kurdes syriens et de les pousser –non sans heurts– à rejoindre le camp de l'opposition au régime. La tutelle du président de la première entité kurde autonome rassure quelque peu les Kurdes, comme une garantie pour obtenir un minimum de droits.

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L'auteure remercie Sandrine Alexie, traductrice de littérature kurde, en poste à l'Institut kurde de Paris, pour l'aide qu'elle lui a apportée. Sandrine Alexie qui blogue le monde kurde a écrit également deux romans, dont La Rose de Djam.

[1] Entre les deux guerres, lorsque la Syrie était sous mandat français, un jeune colonel nommé Charles de Gaulle rédige un mémoire sur la «question du bec de canard de Djézireh». Il aurait également consacré une brochure à «La question kurde» publiée en 1930 par l'Imprimerie du Bureau topographique du Levant.

L'armement des rebelles syriens divise Washington

Une audition au Sénat a révélé les dissensions de l'administration sortante sur le soutien à l'opposition syrienne

L'histoire retiendra-t-elle le refus de Barack Obama d'armer les rebelles syriens à la fin de son premier mandat comme une manifestation de sa sagesse ou comme une erreur tragique ?

De façon inattendue, la question a pris un singulier relief, jeudi 7 février, au Sénat américain, lorsque deux très hauts responsables du Pentagone ont reconnu avoir, au cours de l'été 2012, soutenu Hillary Clinton et David Petraeus, alors respectivement secrétaire d'Etat et chef de la CIA, qui recommandaient de fournir des armes aux opposants au régime de Bachar Al-Assad.

Témoignant devant les sénateurs, Leon Panetta, secrétaire à la défense (sur le point d'être remplacé par Chuck Hagel) et le général Martin Dempsey, chef d'état-major de l'armée américaine, ont admis, dans la foulée, que cette option avait fait l'objet d'un veto du président Obama, alors en campagne électorale.

Ces dissensions, révélées au cours d'une audition publique, ont fait sensation, au point d'en éclipser l'ordre du jour, consacré à l'attaque contre le consulat américain à Benghazi, en Libye, le 11 septembre 2012. Longue de quatre heures, la séance a connu un pic d'intensité lorsque le sénateur républicain John McCain, adversaire de M. Obama en 2008 et partisan d'une aide américaine aux rebelles syriens, a questionné solennellement MM. Panetta et Dempsey.

« Combien de gens devront mourir avant que ne vous recommandiez une action militaire ? En mars dernier, 7 500 Syriens avaient été tués. On en est maintenant à au moins 60 000 ! » Et le sénateur de préciser sa pensée : le Pentagone a-t-il soutenu la recommandation faite par M^{me} Clinton et le général Petraeus de fournir des armes à la résistance ? « Avez-vous soutenu cela ? » « Nous avons soutenu cela », ont répondu tour à tour M. Panetta et le général Dempsey.

Veto présidentiel

Le 2 février, le *New York Times* avait révélé que, à l'été 2012, le secrétaire d'Etat et le patron de la CIA avaient joint leurs forces pour soutenir « un plan » consistant à « soumettre les groupes rebelles à une enquête approfondie et à entraîner des combattants qui auraient été approvisionnés en armes ». Le conflit semblait connaître un tournant. Le régime avait été ébranlé, le 18 juillet, par un attentat spectaculaire à Damas, suivi par une offensive rebelle sur Alep. Le recours aux bombardements aériens avait redonné un avantage au régime, qui a répondu favorablement vendredi à une offre de dialogue du chef de l'opposition, Ahmed Moaz Al-Khatib, en excluant ses « conditions préalables ».

Les Etats-Unis contrôlent la fourniture aux rebelles d'armes légères, qui viennent principalement du Qatar et d'Arabie saoudite, via la Turquie. Mais Washington ne livre que du matériel de vision et de transmission, des moyens d'entraînement ainsi que de l'aide humanitaire. Les Américains maintiennent un embargo sur la fourniture d'armes antiaériennes, par crainte de les voir utilisées contre eux dans le futur.

Depuis le veto présidentiel américain, la rébellion a continué de marquer des points, mais avec un coût humain extrêmement élevé et au prix d'une fragmentation et d'une radicalisation inquiétantes dans ses rangs. Cette évolution a conduit les Européens à débattre de la possibilité de lever l'embargo sur les armes, défendue principalement par les Britanniques et plus modérément par les Français, mais à laquelle les Scandinaves s'opposent. Les ministres des affaires étrangères de l'Union européenne devraient de nouveau en discuter le 18 février.

Aux Etats-Unis, l'éventualité d'un changement d'attitude du président Obama après sa réélec-

tion, le 6 novembre, n'a pas pris corps. Fin janvier, interrogé par CBS, le président semblait moins

fermé, mais il disait encore avoir du mal à trancher : « Nous ne rendons service à personne quand nous nous précipitons avant de regarder, quand nous prenons en charge des choses sans avoir réfléchi à toutes les conséquences. »

L'utilisation d'armes chimiques par le régime syrien contre des opposants, à Homs, le 23 décembre, aurait pourtant dû faire basculer Washington, puisque Barack Obama en avait fait une « ligne rouge » aux « conséquences énormes ». Mais le département d'Etat s'est déclaré en janvier incapable de « confirmer » l'usage des armes chimiques, rapporté par *Le Monde*.

Le grand renouvellement des hauts cadres de l'exécutif – M^{me} Clinton vient d'être remplacée par John Kerry et le général Petraeus est sur le point d'être par John Brennan – semble avoir favorisé le déballage d'un désaccord tenu secret jusqu'ici. Il met en exergue la réticence de l'administration Obama à s'impliquer militairement de façon visible par crainte de l'hostilité de l'opinion. « Nous regardons quelles mesures, notamment diplomatiques, pourraient être prises pour s'efforcer de réduire cette violence », a d'ailleurs indiqué vendredi M. Kerry. Ce dernier s'est refusé à commenter les révélations de M. Panetta et Dempsey : « Je ne vais pas revenir en arrière. C'est un nouveau gouvernement, un second mandat pour le président, je suis le nouveau secrétaire d'Etat et nous allons avancer à partir de là. »

Après son « scoop », John McCain a qualifié la situation en Syrie d'« échec choquant de la politique américaine », exhortant le président à « tenir compte des conseils (...) et à prendre immédiatement les mesures nécessaires (...) afin de hâter la fin du conflit ». Les partisans d'une aide militaire aux rebelles soulignent qu'elle seule donnerait aux Etats-Unis une influence réelle si, à Damas, le pouvoir venait à changer de mains. ■

PHILIPPE BERNARD

Kurdistan: vers un accord historique entre Ankara et le PKK?

BENOÎT MARGO

Consultant en géostratégie du Moyen-Orient

KURDISTAN - Depuis décembre, le gouvernement turc et le principal mouvement armé kurde sont officiellement en négociations pour conclure un accord politique. En jeu, la reconnaissance officielle du particularisme kurde contre la fin des affrontements armés qui ont fait des milliers de morts depuis trente ans.

Qui sont les Kurdes?

Les Kurdes sont réputés être le plus grand peuple sans Etat. Il n'existe aucune statistique incontestable, mais ils seraient de l'ordre de 30 millions, répartis entre la Turquie (plus de 15 millions), l'Iran (plus de 7 millions), l'Irak (plus de 5 millions) et la Syrie (plus de 2 millions).

Bien que très majoritairement musulmans sunnites et proches du monde culturel iranien, ils ne sont ni arabes, ni turcs, ni persans. À la fin de la première Guerre Mondiale, lors du dépeçage de l'Empire Ottoman, les Kurdes ont échoué à obtenir un Etat indépendant. Depuis, ils se mobilisent dans leurs Etats respectifs.

Créé en 1978, le Parti des Travailleurs Kurdes (PKK) est le principal mouvement revendicatif de Turquie, originellement d'inspiration marxiste. A partir de 1984, il lance une insurrection contre l'Etat turc en réclamant l'indépendance des zones majoritairement kurdes du pays. Toutefois, après des années de luttes infructueuses, le PKK s'en tient aujourd'hui à la revendication d'une large autonomie au sein d'un Etat fédéral turc.

Pourquoi un accord serait-il "historique"?

Parce que, jusqu'aux années 1990, le fait kurde était pour ainsi dire nié en Turquie. Les Kurdes étaient pudiquement appelés "Turcs des montagnes". En effet, la République de Turquie a été fondée par Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, dont la doctrine était ultranationaliste et résolument hostile à l'idée d'une Turquie "plurielle".

La guérilla menée par le PKK reste jusqu'à maintenant traitée par les autori-

tés turques sous le prisme sécuritaire, plutôt que sous l'angle socio-politique. Outre la Turquie, les Etats-Unis ou l'Union Européenne ont d'ailleurs le PKK sur leur liste noire des groupes terroristes.

Or, le gouvernement turc dialogue aujourd'hui directement avec le mouvement par l'intermédiaire de son fondateur et chef charismatique, Abdullah Öcalan, détenu depuis 1999 sur l'île d'Imrali, au sud d'Istanbul. Depuis son arrestation, Öcalan conserve une véritable aura chez ses partisans, et il plaide désormais pour un règlement pacifique de la crise. Une frange extrémiste du PKK conteste cependant cet appel.

En quoi le contexte actuel incite à un rapprochement?

D'abord parce que les dirigeants turcs ne sont plus foncièrement opposés à la reconnaissance du droit des Kurdes. Artisan d'une réforme de l'Etat nationaliste traditionnel, l'AKP (Parti pour la Justice et le Développement, au pouvoir depuis 2002) a d'ailleurs bénéficié d'une certaine sympathie électorale chez les Kurdes à ses débuts.

La signature d'un accord avec le PKK serait en outre du plus bel effet pour le Premier ministre islamiste Recep Tayyip Erdogan un an avant sa candidature probable à la première élection présidentielle turque au suffrage universel. Fin connaisseur de l'Histoire de son pays, Erdogan aimerait rétablir une entente qui faisait dans le temps des Kurdes les "garde-frontières" du calife ottoman.

Malgré tout, le contexte interne reste tendu. En 2009, le parti qui était considéré comme le bras politique du PKK a été dissous par la justice turque. Prudent, celui qui lui a succédé reste sous pression. Depuis 2011, les violences armées sont aussi revenues sur le devant de la scène.

Des procès sont toujours en cours contre des activistes kurdes. Il y a quelques mois, des centaines de détenus s'étaient mis en grève de la faim pour réclamer notamment des négociations entre le gouvernement et Öcalan. C'est dans ce cadre qu'Erdogan a donc sauté le pas.

En fait, le plus important pour lui est le contexte régional. Gardienne du temple kémaliste, l'armée turque est fragili-

sée par les purges effectuées par l'AKP dans son commandement ces dernières années. Or, la guerre en Syrie menace la stabilité de tout le sud-est de la Turquie.

Pour contrecarrer les Turcs, qui soutiennent les rebelles, le régime de Bachar al-Assad a réactivé ses réseaux d'avec le PKK. En effet, il faut rappeler que Damas fut longtemps la base-arrière d'Abdullah Öcalan. En 1998, celui-ci avait finalement été expulsé par le père du président syrien actuel dans le but précis d'éviter un conflit armé avec la Turquie.

Aujourd'hui, en Syrie, les milices du Parti de l'Union Démocratique (PYD), affiliées au PKK et hostiles aux rebelles de l'Armée Syrienne Libre (ASL), contrôlent une grande partie des zones kurdes au nord du pays, et ce avec la bénédiction de Damas. Cet apprentissage de l'autonomie, conjugué à la quasi-indépendance des Kurdes d'Irak depuis 2005, constitue une vraie bombe à retardement pour Ankara.

L'enjeu géostratégique d'un accord avec le PKK est donc double: il s'agit, d'une part, de prévenir la montée en puissance irrésistible des Kurdes dans la région, et d'autre part, de neutraliser l'influence du régime syrien chez les Kurdes de Turquie.

Que peut-on attendre de la situation?

Les rumeurs d'accord évoquent plusieurs phases. Pour le PKK, cela va du cessez-le-feu à la fin de la lutte armée. Pour le gouvernement, de la libération d'activistes à l'introduction de la langue kurde dans les écoles et les tribunaux.

Si un tel accord doit effectivement être signé, il faudra surtout l'appliquer. Or le débat sur la question kurde est loin d'être clos en Turquie. Les tensions ne s'apaiseront certainement pas du jour au lendemain.

On peut s'attendre à d'éventuelles actions radicales venant d'opposants à cette démarche de compromis. L'assassinat de trois militantes kurdes à Paris, le mois dernier, en est un exemple. Enfin, l'accord sera vu par beaucoup d'activistes comme une simple étape vers l'acquisition d'une véritable autonomie territoriale.

Le dossier kurde est par conséquent loin d'être fermé. □

Erbil and Ankara to sign a strategic agreement

The Kurdish Globe

Kurdistan is safe, which has prompted international investors, and the KRG has been very keen on encouraging new businesses to start-up.

The Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has tried to persuade the American oil giant Exxon Mobil to withdraw from Kurdistan and resume its investment in the West Qurna 1 field, which is under the control of Baghdad. Exxon's CEO Rex Tillerson met the Iraqi Prime Minister in January, but has not made any promises, and met with Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani in Zurich, Switzerland the next day, where he reiterated his company's commitment to its contracts with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In a report published by Reuters on the development of Kurdistan Region in the oil and gas industry, Exxon Mobil lawyers and top executives have been examining their decision which could change the balance of power in Iraq if they pull out of Qurna 1 oil field in Southern Iraq.

Exxon Mobil's entry into Kurdistan Region's oil sector has had a significant impact on the development of this region. It consequently encouraged several other oil giants to sign agreements with KRG for exploring oil, including French giant Total, Russian giant Gazprom and American giant Chevron.

Safety and Stability in Kurdistan

Kurdistan Region is safe, which has prompted international investors, and the KRG has been very keen on encouraging



▲ Turkey's Energy Minister *Taner Yildiz* and Kurdish Natural Resources Minister *Dr. Ashti Hawrami* speak during the "Kurdistan Region's Road to Development Conference in Erbil, May 21, 2012.

new businesses to start-up. This is in contrast to Southern areas of Iraq, where there is no security or safety for workers. Unfortunately the Iraqi government has not played a positive role in attracting international oil companies to help develop the poor economic infrastructure of this war torn country. Consequently, oil giants have been more keen to sign contracts with Kurdistan Region, as opposed to central and Southern parts of Iraq.

Oil autonomy

During the last few years, Kurdistan Region has been relatively autonomous in the energy industry, Reuters reports. This autonomy and development in Kurdistan has even pushed Exxon Mobil to sacrifice its contracts in the south for the sake of having consistent and fast development with a promising energy industry in the region. An energy expert argues that signing an agreement with Exxon Mobil was a big step towards developing Kurdistan region, and since the agreement this region has changed dramatically. According to the report by Reuters, Kurdistan Region is very rich in oil and gas resources. This has attracted many international energy companies, with many other companies eyeing the region for future investments. The question now has become, how Kurdistan can export its oil

rather than whether it has the ability to produce oil.

Kurdistan will not wait for Baghdad

Until recently Kurdistan's oil was exported via a pipeline that is controlled by the central government. However, this line of export was put on hold last month due to Baghdad's refusal to pay oil companies' fees. Reuters reports that KRG authorities will not wait for Baghdad any more, and as a result they have started to export crude oil to Turkey and get refined fuel products in return. Although the volume of exports is small but as per Reuters it is an indication for reaching greater goals in the future, and according to an energy expert "Kurdistan has reached a point in oil and gas sector, where it would not return back and the KRG would no longer support a centralized oil and gas policy".

Erbil-Ankara Relations

Erbil-Baghdad ties have almost reached a deadlock since last year, while KRG has strengthened its ties with neighboring Turkey over the months. A diplomat who is aware about the talks between Erbil and Ankara has said that the two parties are about to sign a very large agreement covering all major energy aspects. The agreement is expected to cover

all aspects of exploring and producing Kurdistan's oil by Turkish companies, marketing and exploring the Region's oil and gas to Turkey. In the future this could lead Kurdistan to world markets through Turkey. However, in the present Kurdistan Region will no longer be dependent on Baghdad for oil exports. Consequently Turkey would not depend on Iranian or Russian oil and gas either.

Revenue independency

Reuters report argues that exploring oil is a great success for the Kurds since the region would receive the revenues of its oil exports directly and it would no longer depend on its 17% share in the Iraqi budget as the only source of revenue for the region. Robin Miles, an exports at the Manarco consultancy company states that, "Assume that Kurdistan exports 1 million barrels of oil per day; the revenue of this export would be much more larger than the budget shares it currently gets from the central government".

Relations get balanced

Commenting on the ties between Kurdistan and Turkey, a senior KRG official says that Turkey has a significant impact on the economic development in Kurdistan. The KRG official argues that "When we start exporting oil and gas, everything would change, and our relations would reach a complete balance". Reuters also says that the Turkish government is eagerly working towards improving ties between Ankara and Erbil. Selahattin Cimen, Deputy Energy Minister of Turkey says "cooperation between the KRG and the Turkish government for exporting oil to world markets would strengthen the relations that already exist between us."

Any solution to Syria?



Thomas L. Friedman

NEW DELHI Should the U.S. intervene to stop the bloodshed in Syria? I find myself torn between four different perspectives — from New Delhi, Baghdad, Tel Aviv and the U.N.

Last week, I met with a group of Indian strategists here at the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses to talk about how America should withdraw from Afghanistan and navigate the interests of India, Pakistan and Iran. At one point, I tossed out an idea to which one of the Indian analysts responded: That was tried before — “in the 11th century.” It didn’t work out well.

That’s why I like coming to Delhi to talk about the region. Indian officials tend to think in centuries, not months, and they look at the map of the Middle East without any of the British-drawn colonial borders. Instead, they only see old civilizations (Persia, Turkey, Egypt), old faiths (Shiites, Sunnis and Hindus), and old peoples (Pashtuns, Tajiks, Jews and Arabs) — all interacting within long-set patterns of behavior.

“If you want to understand this region, just take out a map from the Ganges to the Nile and remove the British lines,” remarked M. J. Akbar, the veteran Indian Muslim journalist and author. It takes you back to the true undercurrents of history that have long ruled the Middle East “and to interests defined by people and tribes and not just governments.”

When you look at the region this way, what do you see? First, you see that there is no way the U.S. can keep Afghanistan stable after we draw down —

without working with Iran. Because of the age-old ties between Iranian Shiites and the Shiite Persian-speaking Afghans of Herat, Afghanistan’s third-largest city, Iran always was and always will be a player in Afghan politics. Shiite Iran has never liked the Sunni Taliban. “Iran is the natural counter to Sunni extremism,” said Akbar. It’s in Iran’s interest to “diminish the Taliban.” That’s why America and Iran were tacit allies in unseating the Taliban, and they will be tacit allies in preventing the reseating of the Taliban.

So from India, the struggle in Syria looks like just another chapter in the long-running Sunni-Shiite civil war. Syria is a proxy war between Sunni-led Saudi Arabia and Qatar — two monarchies funding the Syrian “democrats,” who are largely Syrian Sunnis — and Shiite Iran and the Shiite-Alawite Syrian regime. It’s a war that never ends; it can only be suppressed.

Which is why in Israel some Israeli generals are starting to realize that if Syria is a fight to the death it could pose as great a strategic threat to Israel as Iran’s nuclear program. If Syria disintegrates into another Afghanistan — on Israel’s border — it would be an untamed land, with jihadists, chemical weapons and surface-to-air missiles all freely floating about.

Can that collapse be avoided? From Washington, some hoped that by quickly toppling the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, the West and the Sunnis could “flip” Syria from the Iranian-Soviet orbit to the Sunni-Saudi-American orbit. I’m dubious. I doubt that Syria can be flipped in one piece; it will break apart in the air into Sunni and Alawite regions. And, if we did manage to flip Syria, Iran would try to “flip” predominantly Shiite Iraq and Bahrain into its camp.

Some Arab diplomats at the U.N. argue, though, that there is a middle way, but it would require the U.S. to lead: First, mobilize the Security Council to pass a resolution calling for the creation of a transitional government in Syria

with “full powers” and with equal representation of Alawites and Sunni rebels.

If the Russians could be persuaded to back such a resolution (not easy), it could break the stalemate inside Syria, because many regime loyalists would see the writing on the wall and abandon Assad. The stick would be to tell the Russians that if they don’t back such a resolution, the U.S. would start sending weapons to the secular/moderate rebels.

The question of whether the United States should intervene is more complicated than Yes or No.

Can there really be such a policy between George W. Bush’s “all-in” approach to transforming Iraq and Barack Obama’s “you-touch-it-you-own-it-so-don’t-even-touch-it” approach to Syria?

One should study Iraq. The lesson of

Iraq is that deep historical currents were at play there — Sunnis versus Shiites and Kurds versus Arabs. The December 2010 Iraqi elections demonstrated, though, that multisectarian parties and democratic rule were possible in Iraq — and actually the first choice of most Iraqis. But America would have had to keep some troops there for another decade to see that shift from sectarianism to multisectarianism become even remotely self-sustaining.

Syria is Iraq’s twin. The only way you’ll get a multisectarian transition there is with a U.N. resolution backed by Russia and backed by a well-armed referee on the ground to cajole, hammer and induce the parties to live together.

It’s the Middle East, Jake.

If you will the ends, you’d better will the means. You can’t change the politics “unless you say you’ll stay for a hundred years,” insists Akbar. But no one wants to play empire anymore. In which case, he argues, it’s always best not to stay long in any of these countries — five months, not five years. Five years, says Akbar, is just long enough for people to hate you, but not fear or respect you, let alone change their long-held ways.



Attacks kill 12 in Iraq's Mosul

MOSUL, Iraq - February 12, 2013 (Reuters)

A SUICIDE car bomber and unidentified gunmen killed at least 12 people in the Iraqi city of Mosul on Monday, police and hospital sources said, as sectarian and ethnic tensions build ahead of elections in April.

The bomber drove a vehicle packed with explosives up to a military checkpoint in Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, and detonated it, killing eight people and wounding 18, among them soldiers.

“The blast destroyed everything. It looks like there was nothing here before the explosion,” said a policeman at the scene who declined to be identified because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

In a separate incident in Mosul, gunmen using silenced weapons killed the bodyguard of a Kurdish member of the city’s provincial council and three others, police said.

A surge in violence since the withdrawal of U.S. troops in late 2011 is stoking fears of a return to the sectarian strife that killed tens of thousands of Iraqis in 2006 and 2007.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shi’ite Muslim, is facing mass protests by disenfranchised Sunnis and is at loggerheads with ethnic Kurds who run their northern region autonomously from Baghdad.

The prospect of provincial elections is hardening the divisions as political leaders appeal to their constituencies with hostile and uncompromising rhetoric.

The conflict in neighbouring Syria, where mainly Sunni rebels are fighting to overthrow a leader backed by Shi’ite Iran, is also whipping up sectarian tensions in Iraq and across the wider region. ●

Fuel, food aid draw Iraq, Syria Kurds closer

By Isabel Coles | Reuters

FISHKHABOUR, Iraq - Kurds on either side of the river Tigris that runs between Syria and Iraq are linked by kinship, a history of oppression and now by fuel lines and boats ferrying food and medical aid across the waters that divide them.

The lifeline thrown by Iraqi Kurdistan to its neighbor extends the influence of Masoud Barzani, the autonomous region's President, over Kurds in Syria as civil war threatens to dismember the country.

For Syrian Kurds the conflict presents an opportunity to win the kind of rights enjoyed by their ethnic kin in Iraq, who live autonomously from Baghdad with their own administration, armed forces and an increasingly independent foreign policy.

"Besides the humanitarian dimension there is a political dimension (to the aid) as well," said historian Jordi Tejel Gorgas, an expert on Syrian Kurds based in Switzerland. "The KRG (Kurdistan regional government) and Barzani, as leader of a de facto Kurdish state, are showing they are committed patriots."

It is not clear what exactly Barzani may hope to gain, but the aid consolidates his involvement with Kurds in Syria, to whom he has already provided political support in preparation for a future power transition.

KRG spokesman Safeen Dizayee denied there was any ulterior or political motive to the aid, calling it an obligation.

Kurdish areas in Syria's northeastern corner have been spared the worst of the fighting between rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, but are nonetheless suffering from severe food and fuel shortages.

On the Iraqi side of the river, white pick-up trucks reverse down to the water's edge and men heave sack after sack of flour, tinned tomatoes and ghee into the hull of a motor boat waiting to speed over to Syria. The Kurdish flag flies overhead.

"They are our brothers and a shared fate binds us together," Barzani was quoted as saying in the bi-monthly newspaper of a Syrian Kurdish party close to his own.



Syrian Kurds practise reading the Kurdish language at a school in Derik, Al-Hasakah October 31, 2012. REUTERS/Thaier al-Sudani

Divided between Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, the Kurdish people number around 25 million and are often described as the world's largest ethnic group without a state of their own.

In Syria, where they make up about 10 percent of the population, Kurds have been systematically discriminated against under Assad and his father before him, who stripped more than 100,000 of their citizenship.

Kurdistan's approach to Syria contrasts sharply with the central government's. Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki says Iraq's policy is "non-interference" in Syria, but his interests are closely aligned with those of Iran, which backs Assad.

"The central government has not objected so far," said the head of the crossing, Shawkat Berbehari, a framed portrait of Barzani's father Mulla Mustafa hanging on the wall behind him.

The Fishkhabour crossing opened in mid-January and the authorities are constructing a floating bridge over the river to make it easier to traverse.

"We are helping our brothers and sisters in Western Kurdistan," Berbehari said, using the term by which Kurds refer to the area of Syria they lay claim to as part of their rightful homeland: "Greater Kurdistan".

"OINTMENT"

Around one million liters of diesel and a thousand tonnes of flour as well as medical supplies have been donated so far by the KRG in northern Iraq to their fellow Kurds across the river.

Once laden, each boat takes less than a minute to reach the other side.

"We thank God and we thank the president of Kurdistan for this aid which is an ointment for our wounds," said 49-year-old Amin Ahmed, one of tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds who have sought refuge in the autonomous region.

After being unloaded in Syria, the aid is distributed to Kurds and Arabs alike by committees operating under the "Higher Kurdish Council", a body formed last year at Barzani's insistence to unite rival Syrian Kurdish factions.

The dominant Kurdish group on the ground in Syria is the Democratic Union Party (PYD), aligned with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has fought a 28-year-old insurgency against the Turkish state.

Weaker but more palatable to the international community is the Kurdish National Council (KNC), itself an umbrella for more than a dozen smaller parties, several of which are tied closely to Iraqi Kurdish groups.

Both the PYD and the KNC are wary of the Arab-dominated Syrian opposition, which they see as inherently hostile to their interests, but they differ on how best to capitalize on the civil war.

The KNC has accused the PYD of colluding with Assad in return for him letting the group's supremacy in Syria's Kurdish areas go unchallenged. That

serves Assad's interests by unnerving Turkey, which has supported the uprising against him.

UPPER JAZIRA

The outcome of the Syrian conflict is still highly uncertain, but analysts say Barzani may be looking to strengthen his foothold on the other side of the border.

"All options are open in Syria and since anything is possible, Barzani might have an eye on Upper Jazira," said Gorgas, referring to the territory where Syrian Kurds are concentrated.

But he said any future government in Syria is unlikely to willingly cede much control over an area with one of the country's few oilfields, and nor would Turkey countenance too strong a Kurdish entity on its southern frontier.

Iraqi Kurdish politicians say their main concern is to prevent Syrian Kurds from repeating the mistakes of the 1990s, when Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) fought a bloody civil war against the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani.

Although they buried the hatchet to form a shared administration, friction between the KDP and PUK remains, and in Syria they back different Kurdish parties within the KNC.

"One might assume that the PUK will try to undermine Barzani's moves in Syria," Gorgas said, noting that those parties associated with Talabani have tended to lean towards the PYD.

A senior Kurdish politician said Barzani's objectives were to ensure Kurdistan's border with Syria was secure and to contain the PYD: "We want to keep them in the tent," he said on condition of anonymity.

The KRG has cultivated close ties with neighboring Turkey and does not want the PYD to complicate that strategic relationship, analysts say.

"My sense is that there isn't an over-arching strategy. It's more a reactive response to changing events, with a focus on protecting what they have already gained," said Crispin Hawes, director of political risk consultancy Eurasia Group's Middle East and North Africa practice.

"The ambitions are clearly there to expand but the core desire is that nothing gets rolled back." □



LA TENSION REPREND À LA FRONTIÈRE TURCO-SYRIENNE

Syrie . L'explosion d'une voiture qui a tué au moins dix personnes hier, n'a pas été revendiquée.

Par LUC MATHIEU

Attentat ou accident causé par un trafiquant d'essence ? Une voiture a explosé hier à la frontière entre la Turquie et la Syrie, tuant au moins dix personnes et en blessant une cinquantaine d'autres. Selon des officiels turcs, le véhicule était garé sur un parking dans le no man's land séparant le poste frontière de Cilvezoglu de celui de Bab al-Hawa, côté syrien. L'explosion, non revendiquée, a mis le feu à une quinzaine de voitures et camions. Un responsable du ministère turc des Affaires étrangères a affirmé qu'il y avait «51% de chances pour que cette explosion soit une attaque terroriste». Si cette hypothèse se confirmait, elle risquerait de relancer les tensions entre la Turquie et la Syrie. **Tirs d'obus.** Le dernier incident à la frontière remonte à début octobre 2012, lorsqu'un obus tiré par les forces du régime de Bachar al-Assad avait explosé

dans le village turc d'Akçakale, tuant cinq civils. L'armée avait riposté par des tirs d'obus sur des positions tenues par des militaires syriens. Les Etats-Unis, l'Allemagne et les Pays-Bas avaient ensuite déployé sur le sol turc, dans le cadre d'une mission de l'Otan, six batteries de missiles sol-air Patriot.

Ankara craint une éventuelle attaque des forces syriennes en représailles à son soutien affiché aux opposants à Bachar al-Assad. Dans les mois qui ont suivi le déclenchement de la rébellion, en mars 2011, les autorités turques ont laissé des commandants de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) s'installer sur leur territoire, dans la région d'Antakya, où ils ont tenté d'organiser la résistance. Et même si elles craignent une infiltration de combattants kurdes, elles ont permis à 200 000 réfugiés syriens de passer la frontière.

Certains d'entre eux ont été autorisés à rentrer en Turquie en passant par le poste de Bab al-Hawa, situé à proximité de Reyhanli, là où s'est produite l'explosion d'hier. Les rebelles en avaient pris le contrôle à la fin juillet. Cette victoire sur les



Sur le lieu de l'explosion, lundi. Ankara craint une attaque syrienne en représailles à son soutien aux opposants à Bachar al-Assad. (Photo AFP)

forces du régime avait ensuite mis à jour les rivalités au sein de l'opposition. Les jihadistes qui s'étaient imposés à Bab al-Hawa en ont finalement été chassés par l'ASL.

Ces tensions, récurrentes dans la province d'Idlib, n'ont pas empêché les jihadistes, dont le Front al-Nusra, de s'imposer comme l'une des composantes les plus efficaces de la rébellion. Ils ont pris hier le contrôle du barrage de l'Euphrate, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Il s'agit «de la plus grande perte économique pour le régime depuis le début de la révolte», a affirmé Rami Abdel Rahmane, directeur de l'OSDH.

«**Dernier message**». A Damas, Bachar al-Assad a réaffirmé hier que son régime ne cédera pas aux «pressions». Il a ajouté que la Syrie «ne renoncera pas à ses

principes» malgré les «complots». Ces déclarations peuvent être comprises comme une réponse au chef de l'opposition, Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, qui propose un dialogue sous conditions. «J'adresse un dernier message au régime pour qu'il essaie de comprendre la souffrance du peuple syrien, parce que la révolution continuera et ne s'arrêtera jamais», a déclaré Al-Khatib hier.

Beaucoup plus ambigu, le chef de l'Eglise maronite, le cardinal libanais Bechara Boutros Raï, a affirmé dimanche à Damas que «la vie humaine est une valeur qui n'a pas de prix, tout ce qu'on appelle réformes, droits de l'homme et démocratie ne valent le sang d'un seul homme innocent». Le cardinal Raï était le premier patriarche maronite à se rendre en Syrie depuis l'indépendance du Liban en 1943. ♦

AFP

Un responsable financier présumé du PKK poursuivi en Allemagne

BERLIN, 12 février 2013 (AFP)

LE PARQUET FÉDÉRAL allemand a annoncé mardi avoir engagé des poursuites contre un Turc de 46 ans soupçonné d'avoir récolté de l'argent en Europe pour le compte de l'organisation kurde PKK, selon un communiqué.

Le parquet fédéral de Karlsruhe (ouest), compétent en matière de terrorisme, a indiqué avoir mis en examen un homme répondant au nom de Abdullah S., "pour appartenance à l'organisation terroriste étrangère Parti des travailleurs du

Kurdistan (PKK)".

Cet homme qui agissait sous le nom d'emprunt "Hamza" en Allemagne, avait été chargé de juin 2003 à juin 2004 de récolter de l'argent pour le compte de l'organisation au moyen "de dons, contributions, événements commerciaux, et la vente de matériel de propagande".

D'après le parquet, il s'assurait également d'une présence suffisante de militants à des manifestations et événements du PKK.

Abdullah S. aurait séjourné auprès de la direction du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak entre mai 2005 et juin 2007, avant de diriger un "bureau économique et financier" de l'organisation en Europe jusqu'en mars 2010, a précisé le parquet dans son communiqué.

Arrêté le 27 avril dernier, cet homme se trouve depuis en détention provisoire. ■

Kurdes tuées : un suspect au profil déroutant

ENQUÊTE ♦ Omer Güney, arrêté après la mort de militantes à Paris, est décrit comme «gentil, naïf», et laisse ouverte la piste de la manipulation.

Par **PATRICIA TOURANCHEAU**

La personnalité d'Omer Güney, suspect des meurtres de trois militantes kurdes à Paris le 9 janvier, opacifie encore un peu plus le mobile de ces exécutions. Les pistes politiques d'un complot d'extrémistes turcs ou d'un règlement de comptes entre Kurdes ont tendance à s'estomper au profit d'une vengeance privée ou du coup de folie d'un déséquilibré. A moins qu'il ne s'agisse d'une manipulation...

Le Turc de 30 ans, écroué le 21 janvier pour ces meurtres, est un homme perturbé devenu sympathisant du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) l'an dernier par désœuvrement, si l'on en croit son avocate. Il conduisait depuis trois jours à Paris, avec la voiture de l'association, Sakine Cansiz, 55 ans, égérie du PKK proche du chef emprisonné de la rébellion, Abdullah Öcalan. «Homme à femmes», selon un enquêteur, Omer Güney connaissait bien les deux autres victimes, surtout l'activiste de 25 ans Leyla Soylemez, mais aussi Fidan Dogan, 28 ans, qui tenait le Centre d'information du Kurdistan (CIK) au 147 rue Lafayette à Paris, où les corps ont été découverts.

TUMEUR. Arrivé en France il y a plus de vingt ans avec ses parents qui tiennent un restaurant en banlieue parisienne, le jeune homme se marie et s'installe en Allemagne en 2003. De retour à Paris en 2011 après son divorce, Omer Güney devient agent d'entretien à l'aéroport de Roissy. Sujet à de «fréquentes crises d'épilepsie», explique son avocate, il consulte le serv-



A Paris, le 10 janvier, hommage aux trois militantes assassinées. (Photo Vincent Nguyen)

ice neurologique de l'hôpital Sainte-Anne qui lui détecte «une tumeur au cerveau». Contraint de quitter son emploi, Omer Güney touche depuis une «pension d'invalidité de 700 à 800 euros», «habite chez ses parents puis squatte chez des amis», part de temps en temps en Turquie «avec un billet pas cher pour y chercher la femme idéale». Ce désœuvré «passe beaucoup de temps à aider des familles kurdes dans leurs démarches administratives», et «joue parfois au billard» dans les locaux de l'association de Villiers-le-Bel. Il drague les filles «qui se prennent d'affection pour lui» et «s'intéresse à la cause kurde».

Contrairement à certaines suppositions, «sa famille n'est pas du tout nationaliste turque ni prokurde, pas politique», souligne encore son avocate. Ses proches et ses ex-employeurs décrivent Omer Güney comme «un brave type sympa, pas contrariant, gentil et naïf, qu'il est trop facile de présenter comme le tueur présumé». A force de donner des

coups de main aux Kurdes, Omer Güney, qui «parle bien le français», a été amené à servir de chauffeur à Sakine Cansiz et à «la promener dans Paris les trois jours» qui ont précédé les crimes. Il s'est présenté de lui-même au 36 quai des Orfèvres le 16 janvier pour expliquer à la brigade criminelle qu'il a «passé la dernière journée avant sa mort avec Sakine Cansiz, si cela peut aider à trouver celui qui a fait ça». Omer Güney soutient alors aux policiers qu'il a accompagné Sakine Cansiz sur les lieux du crime le 9 janvier, mais qu'il est parti vers 11 h 30. Or, les images de vidéosurveillance montrent que Sakine Cansiz et son chauffeur entrent dans le local du CIK à 11 h 29 mais qu'Omer Güney en ressort, seul, à 12 h 56. Son avocate impute ces contradictions à ses «trous de mémoire, réels»: «Il n'a aucune notion du temps.» Mais pour le procureur de Paris, François Molins, «la confrontation de l'heure des assassinats et de l'emploi du temps d'Omer Güney constitue un élément capital». Car le créneau horaire de la mort des trois femmes est

«le même que celui de la présence d'Omer Güney».

DOUILLES. Autre élément à charge, des résidus de poudre de tir ont été relevés «à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur de la sacoche» découverte dans le véhicule de l'association utilisé par Omer Güney le jour des meurtres. Or, le «chauffeur» de Cansiz portait la même sacoche sur la vidéosurveillance. Les douilles «de deux marques différentes» retrouvées «peuvent provenir de la même arme» de calibre 7,65 mm qui cadre mal avec des règlements de comptes professionnels. Dans l'attente des expertises balistiques, le parquet de Paris n'a «rien qui permette d'affirmer qu'il y ait eu deux ou trois tueurs. Nous n'avons pas la conviction qu'ils étaient plusieurs».

Le mode opératoire, «une sacrée expédition punitive, 4 balles, 4 balles et 3 balles» dans la tête des victimes, détonne avec le profil apparent d'Omer Güney, mis en examen pour «assassinats et association de malfaiteurs, en relation avec une entreprise terroriste». Néanmoins, enquêteurs et magistrats s'interrogent sur le motif, resté «inconnu», de ce triple meurtre et sur ce suspect qui «évoque une tumeur au cerveau» mais «ne relève pas pour autant de l'I3P» (infirmerie psychiatrique de la préfecture de police de Paris): «Est-il perdu ou manipulateur?» Son avocate n'exclut pas que son client ait pu être «manipulé ou utilisé par d'autres qui seraient impliqués. En tout cas, Omer Güney n'a pas les capacités mentales d'être un agent secret, ces exécutions ne collent pas avec ce type lambda et lui-même se sent incapable de tels actes». ♦



A l'Académie arts et culture du Kurdistan, proche du mouvement du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, à Paris, le 16 janvier.

CHRISTOPHE PETIT TESSON POUR « LE MONDE »

ce, menées par le juge antiterroriste Thierry Fragnoli. Désormais, « toutes les demandes de la Turquie, ou presque, ont été satisfaites par la France », estime le journaliste Emre Demir, correspondant à Paris du quotidien conservateur turc *Zaman*, proche du gouvernement.

Ce 11 février 2013, le procès de la *Kampanya* démarre devant la cour d'appel de Paris. Il passerait peut-être inaperçu s'il n'y avait eu, à peine un mois plus tôt, un triple assassinat politique : trois femmes, militantes kurdes, tuées de plusieurs balles dans la tête, en plein Paris, le 9 janvier 2013. Entre les revirements de 2007 et la brutalité de ces meurtres se dessine soudain un puzzle compliqué, où les pièces semblent bien faire partie d'un même tout, mais où aucune ne s'emboîte. « Une affaire qui pue », lâche un enquêteur. Elle montre aussi à quel point la France est aujourd'hui empêtrée dans le conflit turco-kurde.

Avraï dire, un premier procès de la *Kampanya* avait eu lieu en juin 2011 : une jeune femme y avait fait sensation, au-delà des peines prononcées – toutes avec sursis. Fidan Dogan a 30 ans. En 1991, ses parents ont atterri du Kurdistan turc dans un HLM de Strasbourg. Fidan apprend le français à toute allure, saute des classes, rêve de médecine. Elle est l'espoir de la famille. Puis elle lâche tout : la cause kurde a envahi sa vie. Elle passe des cours de danse folklorique aux manifestations politiques, fait de la traduction pour les activistes en escale à Paris et continue par un stage de formation théorique en Hollande. « La recherche des racines », estime Nursel, une de ses copines.

Fidan Dogan devient indispensable dans les relations publiques du mouvement, entre Strasbourg, Bruxelles et Paris. Dans son carnet d'adresses, François Hollande voisine avec Martin Schulz, le président du Parlement européen. « Elle décroche ce qu'elle veut pour une raison simple : elle ne peut pas imaginer qu'on lui dise non », raconte un militant. Devant le tribunal correctionnel de Paris, elle a pris en main la gestion du procès, parlant à la presse et aux avocats, allant jusqu'à placer dans la salle les membres de la communauté. Elle est partout, tout le temps, avec son rire et ses talons qui claquent joyeusement. Fidan Dogan est l'une des trois femmes assassinées le 9 janvier 2013.

Découverte à minuit, la nouvelle des meurtres traverse en un éclair la nébuleuse des associations kurdes françaises autour du PKK. A 4 heures du matin, un millier de personnes sont déjà rassemblées spontanément, service d'ordre compris, devant le lieu des crimes, le Centre d'information du Kurdistan, dans le 10^e arrondissement de Paris. A 10 heures le lendemain, ils sont 4 000, chiffre qui enfle à près de 20 000 à la

Tourments au "Petit Kurdistan"

FLORENCE AUBENAS
ET GUILLAUME PERRIER

Quand Riza Altun est arrivé d'Iran au milieu des années 2000, il savait que ce serait les agents de la DST, les services de renseignements français, qui l'accueilleraient à l'aéroport pour le conduire en voiture jusqu'à Paris. Pas de tapis rouge, bien sûr, rien d'officiel non plus. Surtout pas. Entre ce haut responsable kurde et le contre-espionnage français, les relations sont plutôt discrètes, mais solidement nouées par des accords tacites et des intérêts bien compris. Un ancien des services les résume d'une formule : « Si vous ne faites pas d'histoires, nous n'en ferons pas non plus. »

D'un côté, donc, le ministère de l'intérieur tolère les activités politiques et donne des titres de séjour, même aux membres revendiqués du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, considéré comme illégal, voire terroriste, par un certain nombre de pays. De l'autre, les militants kurdes évitent tout ce qui pourrait faire déborder sur le territoire français le conflit qui les oppose au gouvernement turc depuis plus de trente ans.

Le 5 février 2007, pourtant, lorsque les policiers sonnent à la porte d'un appartement à Ville-d'Avray (Hauts-de-Seine), c'est cette fois pour arrêter Riza Altun au petit matin. L'opération vise une vingtaine de personnes au total, suspectées de lever des fonds pour financer une « entreprise terroriste ». Pendant la procédure, Riza Altun argue de ses contacts privilégiés avec la

Le procès en appel de Kurdes accusés d'avoir collecté des fonds pour le PKK, qui s'est ouvert le 11 février devant le tribunal correctionnel de Paris, passerait peut-être inaperçu s'il n'y avait eu l'assassinat de trois militantes

DST. Il donne des noms, des numéros de téléphone.

La fameuse « levée de fonds » s'appelle la « *Kampanya* », une collecte annuelle faite publiquement au sein de la communauté kurde. Sert-elle, en partie, à financer la guérilla en Turquie ? Bien sûr. Et cela a toujours été un des sujets banalement évoqués avec la DST. Mais rien n'y fait : le juge d'instruction refuse toute confrontation. Entre la France et les Kurdes, la situation vient de basculer. Depuis, en cinq ans, pas moins de vingt et une procédures ont été lancées contre les réseaux du PKK en Fran-

manifestation le jour suivant. Certains sont venus des Pays-Bas ou d'Allemagne en car. Des parlementaires du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), vitrine légale du PKK en Turquie, tiennent une réunion de crise dans une brasserie en face de la gare du Nord, avec l'égérie de la cause kurde, Leyla Zana, Prix Sakharov. Les hauts responsables politiques en exil, Zubeyir Aydar et Remzi Kartal, débarquent de Bruxelles. Tout le 10^e arrondissement, baptisé « le Petit Kurdistan », paraît en deuil. Des vendeurs de kebabs, taxiphones ou coiffeurs ont fermé, par solidarité. A certaines devantures sont placardées les photos des trois femmes. Remarquable organisation, sévèrement cadrée, mais cadenassée sur elle-même – avec discours en turc et slogans directement importés du pays – à l'image du mouvement tout entier.



Moins de quinze jours après les faits, l'arrestation d'Ömer Güney, 30 ans, n'a pas permis de dissiper les zones d'ombre. On serait tenté de dire qu'elle les a épaissies un peu plus. Ömer Güney et sa famille viennent d'une région turque ultranationaliste, mais le jeune homme s'est pourtant approché des associations kurdes depuis un an ou deux, servant volontiers de garçon à tout faire. Son oncle le dit vaguement simple d'esprit, et il s'est d'abord lui-même présenté au commissariat pour témoigner. Ce suspect fantomatique et ambigu a permis au gouvernement turc et à la rébellion kurde de se renvoyer immédiatement la responsabilité des meurtres. Le premier dénonce un règlement de comptes interne. La seconde y voit la signature de « l'Etat profond », ces réseaux clandestins de la contre-guérilla

dont se sont servis, par le passé, les services secrets turcs pour liquider des opposants. « Plusieurs d'entre nous ont été pris pour cible par la presse nationaliste turque. Nous avons reçu en 2012 des menaces précisant que des équipes de tueurs se baladaient en France et en Allemagne », continue Zubeyir Aydar, responsable du PKK en Europe.

Turcs et Kurdes s'accordent en revanche sur un point : ce crime politique vise à torpiller les négociations de paix engagées à Imrali, l'île-prison où est détenu Abdullah Öcalan, le leader historique du PKK. Des pourparlers secrets avaient déjà été menés entre Kurdes et Turcs à Oslo, brutalement interrompus en 2011 par la retranscription dans un journal turc de bandes enregistrées pendant les discussions. Dans la foulée, « les quatre représentants du côté kurde ont tous été inscrits sur la liste des barons de la drogue aux Etats-Unis », relève l'avocat Antoine Comte, qui défend l'un d'eux, Adem Uzun, interpellé en France en 2012. Cette fois, les négociations semblaient plus largement soutenues par la classe politique turque et susceptibles d'aboutir à un accord sur un conflit qui a fait plus de 45 000 morts en trente ans. « Le résultat est que nous risquons de nous replier sur le PKK, constate Ercan, un artiste kurde. La plupart

des gens sont pourtant favorables aux négociations avec la Turquie, ils veulent aussi une démilitarisation du PKK, le transformer en un mouvement civil sans le culte d'Öcalan et les réflexes staliniens. »

A travers Sakine Cansiz, « c'est un symbole qui a été frappé », lance Berivan, militante, née en France. Sakine Cansiz, 55 ans, est la deuxième femme assassinée le 9 janvier. « Quand elle entrait dans la cafétéria du Centre culturel kurde, les gens se levaient spontanément, même les hommes », dit Mehmet Ulker, président de la Fédération des associations kurdes de France. « Rien qu'à sa façon de marcher, on voyait qui elle était. » Droite. Sûre d'elle. Élégante. Pas de café, pas de cigarette, pas de viande, pas d'alcool, pas de mari, pas de vie personnelle. Réveil à 5 heures du matin. Gymnastique. Discipline.

Comme tous les cadres du mouvement, Sakine Cansiz navigue à travers l'Europe. Début janvier 2013, elle arrive à Paris pour refaire ses papiers. Le 9, elle doit partir pour l'Allemagne, mais, juste avant, elle

seins, elle n'a pas parlé. Elle n'a pas hurlé non plus. Elle s'était juré de ne jamais laisser échapper un son devant ses tortionnaires », raconte une mère de famille. Libérée en 1991, elle rejoint la « montagne », le nom donné à la lutte armée, où le mouvement s'est engagé en 1984.

Fidan et Sakine ont rendez-vous au Centre d'information kurde. La fondatrice du PKK doit arriver de Villiers-le-Bel (Val-d'Oise), où l'héberge un militant. Qui aurait une voiture pour l'amener ? Fidan Dogan appelle Ömer Güney, comme souvent dans ces cas-là. Il dépose Sakine Cansiz vers 11 h 15 dans un parking. Va chercher du jus d'orange à l'épicerie. Le dernier mail part du centre à 12 h 42, une demande de traduction à une association. La caméra de surveillance enregistre Ömer Güney en train de quitter le centre à 12 h 56. La police trouvera quatre verres sur la table et trois femmes assassinées. Ömer Güney nie.

La troisième femme s'appelle Leyla Söylemez, mais on disait « la petite ». Elle n'avait pas 25 ans et voulait s'« engager dans la montagne », selon un camarade. Sakine Cansiz devait l'y aider. Au dernier moment, les deux femmes avaient décidé de partir ensemble en Allemagne. ■

Moins de quinze jours après le triple meurtre, l'arrestation d'Ömer Güney n'a pas permis de dissiper les zones d'ombre

doit retrouver Fidan Dogan, avec son rire et ses talons. Si la jeune femme paraît être l'incarnation même de la seconde génération de militants, Sakine est la première, la toute première. Sa légende se raconte dans tous les foyers kurdes, on la montre sur les posters aux côtés d'Öcalan à la fondation du PKK, en 1978, son arrestation presque aussitôt, les douze ans de prison, la torture. « Quand ses geôliers lui ont coupé les

Erdogan Seeks Kurdish Allies For New Turkish Constitution

By: Kadri Gursel for Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse
www.al-monitor.com

All four political parties represented in the Turkish parliament want a new “civilian” constitution to replace the one imposed by a putchist military 31 years ago. The problem is that the same four parties that agree to “no” on the September 12 military constitution cannot agree to “yes” on a new draft constitution.

There are two main reasons for the discord. The first is Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s desire to replace the Turkish parliamentary regime with an executive presidential regime on his own terms. A proposal for Erdogan’s “à la carte” authoritarian presidential system has been submitted to the parliamentary Constitutional Reconciliation Commission.

There is no doubt that if Erdogan submits a draft putting the choice of a presidential system to a referendum – and if it is approved – his goal will be to take his place in history as the first executive president of the Turkish Republic. This is the challenge confronting the parliamentary opposition.

The presidential system proposed by Erdogan envisions a majoritarian and authoritarian regime. Through it, a president endowed with excessive powers will dominate the executive and have supremacy over the legislative and judicial branches. A minimal of checks and balances will not remain. Judicial independence will be terminated.

For the opposition, the most important negative aspect of the proposed regime is that unlike in the current parliamentary system, political parties short of majority support can nonetheless share in governmental power. They would be stripped of such an opportunity in a presidential system in a divided, polarized and heterogeneous society.

This is the anxiety of the main opposition, the secularist Republican People’s Party (CHP), and the other opposition party, the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

The second reason for discord is the omission of Turkishness from the part of the constitution defining citizenship. Its inclusion until now had blocked resolution of the Kurdish issue, and its omission is a demand of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). A neutral definition of citizenship cleansed of references to being a Turk does not disturb Erdogan’s neo-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), but the secular nationalist CHP and Turkish nationalist MHP are not comfortable with such a change.

On the other hand, the AKP does not control enough seats in the parliament to enable it to unilaterally draft a presidential-system constitution and submit it to a referendum. To do so, it needs to control 330 seats in the 550-member parliament, but has only 326, thus lacking four. To overcome this mathematical hurdle, the AKP has two options: One is illegitimate according to political ethics, while the other is not.

The illegitimate approach is to resort to what in the Turkish political lexicon is called the “parliamentary bazaar.” The AKP, in need of at least four more seats in parliament, could lure them with a variety of incentives. It may, however, require many more than four new members if one can believe rumors that in secret parliamentary balloting for the new constitution some members might break with party discipline and vote against the measure. In such a situation, Erdogan’s only option is to collaborate with the Kurdish party if he continues to insist on an executive presidential system.

A statement Erdogan made the previous week on his way home from a tour of central Europe was enough to shake up the agenda. He said, “If we can agree with the BDP on a referendum, then we can take joint steps with them.” The next day, the BDP co-chair, Selahattin Demirtas, said in the same context, “The party we are close to is the AKP.”

The Kurdish party is not, however, a party of Turkey. Its members view



[Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan addresses members of his Justice and Development Party in parliament in Ankara. (photo by REUTERS/Umit Bektas)]

issues from a local perspective and attach priority to securing their ethnic demands, which are neutral citizenship, education in one’s mother tongue and decentralization – that is, achieving some of their demands for autonomy by empowering local administrations.

To partially satisfy Kurdish demands through a new constitution is one the key elements of the AKP’s peace initiative toward the Kurdish movement that it labels the “disarming of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party].” Erdogan is most eager to hear the PKK’s decisions on a cease-fire and disarming. His impatience is understandable because he will be facing voters in a series of ballots until 2015, led off by the constitutional referendum. The prime minister wants to approach these contests as a successful leader who ended the war between the Turkish state and the PKK. A constitutional draft that introduces a presidential system and partial fulfillment of the Kurdish demands would deserve to be known as a “AKP-BDP constitution.”

What we are living through is this: Two major elements of the country – the religious and the Kurds – both marginalized by the modern Turkish republic established by Atatürk, now want to set up their own regimes through their own political representation.

If it works out, the formula for an AKP-BDP constitutional reconciliation will occur like so: The BDP will support the presidential regime Erdogan wants, and the AKP will approve a constitution that meets Kurdish demands. In short, the formula will be a combination of a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue and an authoritarian regime that will concentrate all powers in the hands of a single person.

Such a set up would appear to be paradoxical and hard to accept by Turkey’s democrats, who believe that a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue will automatically democratize Turkey. Is there really a contradiction, however?

True, applying decentralization, allowing use of the Kurdish language and releasing Kurdish prisoners will not eradicate the authoritarian features of an authoritarian presidency. AKP spokesmen – visibly uncomfortable with the equation “Kurdish demands in return for presidential regime” and the press’ use of the label “AKP-BDP constitution” – are now saying they their party has not been bargaining with the BDP and that their aim as well is a constitutional draft agreed to by all four parties.

As long as Prime Minister Erdogan insists on an authoritarian presidential system, however, he is not going find another party to deal with except the BDP. ♦

Kadri Gursel is a contributing writer for Al-Monitor’s Turkey Pulse and has written a column for the Turkish daily Milliyet since 2007. He focuses primarily on Turkish foreign policy, international affairs and Turkey’s Kurdish question as well as Turkey’s evolving political Islam.

Anger growing among Iraq's Sunnis

The minority population is increasingly frustrated by what it sees as Shiite Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's sectarian politics. It seeks a fundamental change in the culture of Iraq's government.

By Ned Parker

RAMADI, Iraq - The call to prayer echoes across the quiet highway in western Iraq and a few hundred men gather along the roadside in the frigid night air. Each has a story to tell: a father whose son languishes in jail without trial; a veteran who cannot get a job; a student so terrified of the police that he avoids Baghdad.

In the morning, they know the area will fill with thousands of people like them, with stories like their own. Under the flutter of tribal flags, they will shout boisterously the same words heard from protesters across the Arab world: Down with the regime.

Something has broken. Much of Iraq's minority Sunni Muslim population appears to have run out of patience with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a religious Shiite Muslim who has ruled since 2006. In recent weeks, Sunnis by the thousands have carried out a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience, closing off the main roads to Fallujah and Ramadi in the west and mounting demonstrations in Samarra, Baghdad and Mosul.

The rallies are a testament to problems left unresolved when the U.S. military campaign ended here, and to the new tension that has spread throughout the Middle East. Angry citizens of other countries have overthrown entrenched rulers through street protests or armed revolt. In neighboring Syria, Sunnis have risen up as well, forming the backbone of the insurgency against President Bashar Assad.

Though the protests have taken Iraq by surprise, they were triggered by two events no different from many in recent years that have left Sunnis feeling like second-class citizens: news reports about the rape of a woman in prison and the arrest of a local politician's bodyguards. But the original causes no longer matter; they have mushroomed into a larger outrage.

The protest leaders' goal is quixotic: draw support from across Iraq's sectarian divide for fundamental change of the political culture. But they face a minefield of religious and historical grievances.

Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, many key events in Iraq have started in Anbar province, the western desert region that is home to more than 1.5 million Sunnis. Here the first wave of resistance to the



Sunnis demonstrate in Ramadi, Iraq, against the government of Prime Minister Nouri Maliki. Sunni Muslim population appears to have run out of patience with al-Maliki.

Ned Parker/Los Angeles Times/MCT

American occupation emerged, followed by the rise of the virulent sectarianism of the Sunni-based group al-Qaida in Iraq and, finally, the defeat of al-Qaida by tribal fighters fed up with the militants living in their midst.

Iraq's next turbulent phase has begun with these protests. They spring from the cumulative effects of 10 years of war and turmoil: poor services and government neglect, relatives detained for years without charges, the visible dichotomy between Baghdad's circles of power, and the poverty and struggles of ordinary people.

The old ways used by the al-Maliki regime to subdue the population — a mixture of security raids and patronage offered to a select few — no longer seem to work.

The protests could lead to a stronger, united Iraq that rallies Shiites and Sunnis around the shared goal of ending the corruption and human rights abuses of the governments that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein. But they could just as easily kick off a period of violence that might threaten to break up of the country.

Checkpoints have been tightened around Baghdad's Sunni neighborhoods. Rumors are rife: People speak of police preventing cars from entering the capital from Sunni

areas; some expect al-Maliki to impose a curfew. Others whisper of a run on guns.

At a recent Friday protest in Ramadi, a young poet sang about the seat of power in Baghdad: "They are hiding in the Green Zone. All suffering and problems come from the Green Zone. They are slaves of foreigners."

Young men hoisted one another up on shoulders, some of them bare-chested, all thrusting their fists high in disgust and defiance at politicians, Sunni and Shiite alike. The singer, with glasses sliding off his nose, recited harsher words, his voice trembling in a whine, and drew more applause. "Baghdad is for us."

The protest leaders, including representatives of the tribes, former security officers, professionals and clerics, are aware they sit atop a volcano of rage. And they know that extremists and political parties alike, from al-Qaida and the old Baath Party to Sunni politicians and even the al-Maliki government, wish to exploit their movement. But the leadership in Ramadi and Fallujah, where the protests originated, want nothing less than to drive the political elite from power.

All say the words like a lament: America handed Iraq on a plate to politicians in the pay of Shiite-dominated Iran and

➔ other powers. They want to guarantee that Baghdad never again treats them as second-class citizens. They worry that if Syria's Assad, an ally of Tehran, is overthrown, then Iran will try to exert greater influence in Iraq.

The protesters' leadership committees say they are planning for a year or more of demonstrations, and the thousands gathered on the highway outside Ramadi leave little doubt about their ability to mobilize. Their wishes transcend sectarian goals, with the call to free prisoners, provide more employment and end corruption. Shiite religious leaders, including cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, have voiced support for their aims. Delegations from Shiite tribes have visited the rallies.

"We are demanding the rights of Samawa, Kufa and Najaf," said Sheik Khalid Jumaili, one of the leaders of the Fallujah protests, listing the names of mostly Shiite cities. He makes it clear that the protests' aim of taking the country back from Iraq's reigning political class gives no quarter to Sunnis. "There is no exception. All the politicians are sectarian."

But the legacy of Saddam's Sunni-led regime and the subsequent civil war between Sunnis and Shiites has hampered efforts to turn the protests into a nationwide movement. Al-Maliki has labeled the

effort sectarian, and some Shiites fear that the Sunni demonstrations will augur a new civil war.

A nostalgia for Saddam is woven into the crowds, with some waving the 1990s-era Iraqi flag. The display articulates a belief that while the past was terrible, the present is far worse. However, their rage is stunningly blind to Shiite memories.

Sunni and Shiite moderates appear hobbled by the fear that if they reach out too aggressively to the other sect, they will be discredited by their own community's extremists.

The danger is a stalemate that will fuel the violence everyone fears, cost moderates credibility and trigger the gradual breakdown of Iraq into separate Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish regions.

At the front of the demonstrations in Anbar province are tribal leaders such as Sheik Ali Hatem Suleiman, the crown prince of the Dulaimis, an early fighter against al-Qaida in Iraq in 2006. He is emblematic of the Sunni rift with al-Maliki: He broke with the prime minister, his former friend, in 2010, disillusioned by the perceived sectarian tenor of al-Maliki's politics.

Suleiman is clear about what the demonstrations should be: They must remain peaceful and win over the Shiites as the

movement seeks a government that does not abuse its power. At times, Suleiman has stumbled, briefly threatening violence two weeks ago after the army killed five protesters in Fallujah.

The challenges of making the protesters' goals a reality were evident in a recent protest in Ramadi. A few Shiite sheiks from Nasiriya were visiting, and even as they proclaimed their support for the demonstrators' goals, four youths hurled water bottles and derided them as allies of al-Maliki. The incensed sheiks bolted from the stage and were hurried off by their bodyguard in blue camouflage.

Suleiman raced to their cars, begging their forgiveness: "Come to my house. I apologize." If you can't control a few people, how can you lead this movement, one sheik replied before they sped off, though some Shiite tribal leaders stayed behind.

Later, Suleiman mounted the stage in a fury.

"I need you to promise me what happened today will never happen again," he rasped, his fist in the air. The young men in the crowd raised their hands in a pledge. □

Bloomberg

February 11, 2013

Iraq Delays Budget on Dispute Over Kurds' Share:Lawmaker

By Khalid Al-Ansary & Nayla Razzouk

Iraq's parliament postponed a vote on the federal spending plan as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition requested a reduction in the share of Kurdish provinces amid a spat over crude sales, a lawmaker said.

The vote has been delayed "at least until next week," Jaber al-Jabiri, a member of the parliament's financial affairs committee, said by telephone from Baghdad today. The main reason is that Maliki's State of Law bloc wants to decrease the semi-autonomous Kurdish region's share of the state budget to 12 percent from 17 percent, he said.

The Kurds have asked for 4 trillion dinars (\$3.4 billion) for payments due to oil companies working in the Kurdish region in Iraq's north, while the budget draft allocates no more than 750 billion dinars for those businesses this year, al-Jabiri said. The Kurds said the 4 trillion dinars cover retroactive payments from 2010, 2011 and 2012 as well as 2013, he said.

Exxon Mobil Corp, Total SA, DNO International ASA and Genel Energy Plc are among companies caught in the conflict between Iraq's central government and the Kurdistan Regional



Government over oil-revenue sharing, production contracts and land. Tensions have deepened in recent months, with armed clashes in the disputed Kirkuk area in November and a halt in oil exports from Kurdistan by pipeline in December.

Iraq holds the world's fifth-biggest crude reserves, according to BP Plc statistics that include Canada's oil sands.

Disagreements over the Defense Ministry budget also played a role in the decision to delay today's parliament session, said al-Jabiri, a member of the Al-Iraqiya bloc led by former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, an opponent of Maliki. ♦

Iran warns Iraqi Kurdistan against thinking about independence or closer ties with Turkey

By Hevidar Ahmed - Rudaw

ERBIL-Hewlêr, Kurdistan region of Iraq'— Iran has warned Iraq's autonomous Kurds against thinking about independence, harming relations with the Shiite government in Baghdad and getting too close to Turkey, a senior Kurdish official said.

He said that Iran's concerns were voiced in Tehran last week to a visiting delegation from his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two ruling parties inside the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), by Qassem Suleimani, the commander of Iran's powerful Quds Force who is said to exercise enormous influence in Iraq.

"Soleimani told the PUK delegation, 'You should not think about the division of Iraq and harming Kurdish-Shiite relations,'" the official said. "Soleimani also asked the delegation to keep their distance from Turkey and not join their axis," he added.

The PUK delegation consisted of Kosrat Rasuli Ali, the party's acting leader,

its deputy secretary-general Barham Salih and Khasraw Gul Muhammad, a leadership member.

Many voices among Iraq's Kurds have been clamoring for independence, and the region is keen on closer ties with neighboring Turkey to sell and export its oil and gas. Relations between the KRG and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shiite-led government, have been strained over competing territorial claims and Kurdish aspirations for independence.

Baram Majeed Khan, a PUK advisor on Iranian affairs, said that Tehran did not want the Kurdistan Region to worsen its relations with Maliki. He said that, in exchange, www.ekurd.net Iran had pledged to keep Maliki in check and made him promise not to attack the Kurdistan region.

Iran wants "to stabilize the political situation in the Kurdistan Region, especially in the green zones in which Iran does not allow political destabilization. Secondly, Iran wants to maintain good relations between the State of Law and

the Kurdistan Region. This was in return for keeping Maliki in check and making him promise not to attack the Kurdistan Region. Maliki's stay in office is important for Iran," Khan said.

"Iran is worried about the fact that the Kurdistan Region has strong economic and commercial ties with Turkey. Iran feels that Turkey has crept into the Kurdistan Region more than it should," Khan added.

A senior PUK official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that existing differences between Kosrat Rasuli and Salih also were resolved at the Tehran meeting. "Iran told them that there should be no conflicts between them inside the PUK, and their issues were resolved in Tehran."

Soleimani also told the Kurds that Tehran backs Salih to succeed Jalal Talabani as Iraq's president. Talabani, who led the PUK for decades and is Iraq's president, is recovering from a serious stroke. ■

Syrian rebels take town, part of oil field, in north

By Babak Dehghanpisheh and Ahmed Ramadan,

BEIRUT — Rebel fighters captured a town in the oil-rich province of Hasaka in northeastern Syria on Thursday after three days of heavy fighting, opposition activists said.

Among the rebels were members of the al-Nusra Front, an extremist Islamic group thought to have links to al-Qaeda, that has proved to include some of the most capable fighters in the opposition forces.

A look at the Syrian uprising nearly two years later. Thousands of Syrians have died and President Bashar al-Assad remains in power, despite numerous calls by the international community for him to step down.

Rebels also shot down two Syrian military jets in Idlib province, in the northwest, and one in central Hama province, according to

opposition groups.

The battlefield gains come only a few days after rebels scored other notable advances in their fight against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

On Monday, rebels took control of the al-Furat hydroelectric dam in northeastern Syria, the country's largest such facility, and on Tuesday, they took over a military airport in the north, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based group that monitors the violence in the country.

Taken together, the rebel gains in less than a week appear to signify renewed momentum after several weeks of relative stalemate, particularly in the large cities of Aleppo and Damascus, the capital.

The opposition's claim to have shot down three aircraft in one day, if proved true, raises the question once again of whether the rebels are receiving heavier weaponry, such as sur-

face-to-air missiles, either from foreign supporters or from Syrian military bases they have captured.

Video posted online Thursday showed one of the aircraft shot down in Idlib streaking across the sky spewing white smoke and a second plane streaking through the sky trailing black smoke.

A third video shows a jet that was hit in Hama province on fire, along with subsequent footage showing the flaming wreckage of the jet strewn across a field near the town of Morek.

The rebel takeover Thursday of the northeastern town of Shaddadi, along with a portion of a nearby oil field, represents a strategic victory for opposition fighters, given that Hasaka province accounts for most of Syria's oil output.

At least 30 al-Nusra fighters and more than 100 government soldiers were killed in the battle over the city, according to the Observatory.

"The Free Syrian Army under the command of Jabhat al-Nusra took over the town," said Miral Biroreda, an activist with the Local Coordination Committees activist network in Hasaka. "Al-Nusra commanded ➤

➤ the operations logistically, militarily and on the ground."

A video posted online Thursday shows an al-Nusra fighter, at what appears to be a military base in Shaddadi, beating a picture of Assad with a stick as his comrades chant, "God is great!"

But the inroads into the province made by the rebels, particularly the hard-line fighters from the al-Nusra Front, could also pit them against Kurdish fighters who see the opposition as a potentially hostile Arab force.

Just last month, dozens were killed in clashes between rebels and Kurdish fighters, who have in the past blamed the al-Nusra

Front for instigating violence against them.

Biroreda said that following recent negotiations, a truce has been struck for now between rebel representatives and Kurdish fighters in the area. ♦

Daily Press

February 15, 2013

Iraq budget battle opens new front in Kurdish feud

Suadad al-Salhy / Reuters

BAGHDAD - A dispute between Iraq's government and the autonomous region of Kurdistan over oil rights is delaying this year's national budget, jeopardizing much-needed investment, as the country's finances have become a new front in the long-running feud.

Iraq's cabinet approved the \$118.6 billion budget in October, but infighting among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish factions this week scuttled attempts by lawmakers to pass the draft legislation in parliament.

A year after the last U.S. troops left, Iraq's economy is improving and should grow 9 percent this year, the central bank projects, as oil production expands.

However, it still needs investment in everything from infrastructure to transport to rebuild the economy, and key oil and investment laws languish in parliament because of political turmoil.

Lawmakers will try again next week to reach agreement on the 2013 national budget. Further delays would postpone major infrastructure projects and payments to regional authorities in the OPEC producer whose state coffers are financed almost entirely by crude exports.

The budget, which foresees a deficit of \$15.5 billion, includes \$45.5 billion for investment projects and has allocated \$644 million for companies working in Kurdistan.

Iraq has the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and oil resources are at the heart of the broad dispute over territory, oil

fields and political autonomy between Baghdad's Arab-led government and Kurdistan, where ethnic Kurds run their own regional administration.

While Kurdistan has a regional government and armed forces, it contributes its oil to national exports and relies on Baghdad for 17 percent of the federal budget, which is financed almost completely by the sale of crude.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition, Sunni-backed Iraqiya Bloc and some other political blocs this week called for Kurds to get no more than 12 percent of the budget based on their minority population, increasing tensions with the northern Kurdish enclave.

The political blocs in Baghdad say Kurdistan's portion should also be cut to make up for the deficit after the autonomous region stopped oil shipments in protest over Baghdad's failure to compensate companies working there.

Kurds say U.S. authorities assigned them 17 percent based on their estimates after the 2003 invasion.

Lawmakers said the political blocs also disagree on the amount owed to those oil companies and over the payment of Kurdistan's Peshmerga armed forces.

"Maliki is trying to use the budget to twist our arm," said Kurdish MP Rawaz Khoshnaw. "It's just a political tool that they are using against the Kurdistan regional government."

BACK PAYMENTS

The ongoing turf war over oil and land rights escalated late last year to the point that both



Iraqi Kurds stand near pipes that feed diesel from a pumping station in Iraqi Kurdistan to Syria on the Iraqi bank of the river Tigris at the Iraqi-Syrian border near the Dohuk province, February 2, 2013. (REUTERS/Azad Lashkari)

the central government and the autonomous region deployed troops to reinforce positions along their disputed internal border.

Maliki's supporters say the budget dispute has also revived a disagreement between the central government, Shi'ite and Sunni blocs over the Peshmerga's role in Iraqi security.

"Peshmerga pointed their guns to the chests of the Iraqi military personnel, and now they want us to equip them and pay their salaries," said Mohammed al-Sayhood, a lawmaker in Maliki's coalition.

Payments to oil companies operating in Kurdistan is still the biggest disagreement in the budget. Kurds say they are owed more than 4 trillion Iraqi dinars, or \$3.5 billion, by Baghdad to cover the costs accumulated by oil companies over the past three years.

But the Iraqi government allocated just 750 billion Iraqi dinars (\$644.33 million), accusing the

Kurdish of illegally shipping some of its oil out of the country instead of contributing to the national budget.

The central government in Baghdad says it alone has the authority to exploit and export the country's crude, but the Kurds say their right to sign deals is enshrined in Iraq's federal constitution and have granted contracts to companies such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Total.

Kurdistan has enticed oil companies by providing lucrative production-sharing contracts and better operating conditions than in the south of the country.

"It is a very big sum of money," said Jaber al-Jabri, a lawmaker from the Sunni-backed Iraqiya Bloc who is also a member of the Finance Committee, referring to the more than 4 trillion dinars demanded by the Kurds in back payments.

"Most blocs have not agreed to include it in the budget." □

Bordeaux : descente de police dans la communauté kurde

Par Jean-Michel DESPLOS

Quinze Kurdes ont été interpellés sur l'agglomération bordelaise dans le cadre d'une enquête antiterroriste portant sur des tentatives d'extorsion de fonds.

Un vaste coup de filet a été mené, hier, au petit matin, dans la communauté kurde girondine, mais aussi à Toulouse et en Espagne. L'opération, préparée dans la plus grande discrétion, était conduite par la Direction interrégionale de la police judiciaire (DIPJ) de Bordeaux et par des enquêteurs de la sous-direction antiterroriste de Paris.

Quinze personnes ont été arrêtées dans le département, à Bordeaux, Cenon, Lormont et Mérignac. Une autre a été interpellée à Toulouse tandis que plusieurs l'étaient au même moment en Espagne, toujours en lien avec l'affaire suivie par le parquet antiterroriste de Paris portant sur de présumées violences et tentatives d'extorsion de fonds destinées à financer le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Tous ces suspects sont en garde à vue pour une durée pouvant aller jusqu'à 96 heures.

des précédents

À Bordeaux, au mois de février 2008, trois membres du PKK ont été arrêtés. Ils travaillaient dans le secteur du bâtiment et des travaux publics. Ces interpellations étaient liées à l'incendie criminel de deux bars turcs, qui avaient été pris pour cible avec des cocktails Molotov au printemps 2007. Au mois de mars, Chez Musa, rue de la Fusterie, et le bar Fut Bol, place Bir-Hakeim, avaient été totalement détruits par le feu.



En octobre 2011, les policiers de la Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur (DCRI) ont mené une opération dans les locaux de l'association culturelle kurde, où ils ont interpellé des sympathisants du PKK qui dormaient là. Les enquêteurs avaient également saisi la comptabilité de l'association et divers documents. Sept d'entre eux avaient été déferés et placés en détention provisoire.

De l'argent et des armes

L'enquête, ouverte à la fin de l'année 2011, concerne uniquement des hommes âgés de 20 à 45 ans soupçonnés d'avoir proféré des menaces ou commis des violences pour se faire remettre la « kampanya », la fameuse collecte annuelle faite au sein de la communauté kurde. Cette levée de fonds est utilisée en partie pour financer la guérilla en Turquie. En quelques années, plus d'une vingtaine de procédures ont été lancées contre le réseau PKK en France. Celle d'hier s'inscrit dans la volonté de déstabiliser le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, organisation armée fondée en 1978 contre le pouvoir turc.

Agissant dans le cadre d'une enquête préliminaire, les policiers de la DIPJ et de la SDAT ont effectué plusieurs perquisitions avec l'appui du Groupe d'intervention de la

police nationale (GIPN) et la Brigade de recherche et d'intervention (BRI) de l'antenne PJ de Bayonne. Les recherches ont été positives puisque plusieurs milliers d'euros en numéraire et des armes ont été découverts.

Les locaux de l'association culturelle kurde, rue Camille-Sauvageau, dans le quartier Saint-Michel à Bordeaux, ont également été passés au peigne fin par les policiers à la recherche de documents.

Transférées à Paris

Quinze Kurdes ont été placés en garde à vue au commissariat central de Bordeaux pour y être entendus. Leurs déclarations sont traduites par des interprètes avant d'être actées sur procès-verbal. Les policiers cherchent d'abord à déterminer le parcours de chacun des mis en cause depuis leur arrivée en Gironde. Viendront ensuite les questions relatives à l'impôt révolutionnaire. Trois individus sont fortement soupçonnés d'être les principaux leaders du groupe, chargés de recruter des exécutants. Ces derniers auraient déjà exercé des violences à l'encontre de gens de leur communauté qui refusent de donner de l'argent. Des victimes auraient eu droit à un passage à tabac.

Hier après-midi, quelques Kurdes, membres de la communauté bordelaise forte d'environ 250 membres, ont manifesté devant la préfecture où une délégation a été reçue. Une banderole sur laquelle était inscrit « Relâchez-les immédiatement » a été déployée.

La plupart des personnes en garde à vue devraient être transférées à Paris à l'issue des auditions, en vue d'une mise en examen pour « association de malfaiteurs en relation avec une entreprise terroriste ».

Au même moment, à Paris, Laurent Fabius, ministre français des Affaires étrangères, recevait son homologue turc, Ahmet Davutoglu. ○



Six arrestations en Espagne lors d'une opération contre le PKK

MADRID (Espagne), 12 février 2013 (AFP)

SIX PERSONNES ont été interpellées mardi en Espagne dans le cadre d'une opération de police contre un réseau de soutien au Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), menée parallèlement en France, a annoncé le ministère espagnol de l'Intérieur.

Selon les autorités espagnoles, cette opération, baptisée Cappadoce, a permis le "démantèlement de l'appareil de financement et d'extorsion du PKK en Espagne".

Six personnes, toutes des Kurdes, ont été arrêtées: quatre à Madrid, une à Barcelone dans le nord-est de l'Espagne et deux à Murcie dans le sud-est, a précisé le ministère de l'Intérieur dans un communiqué, ajoutant que l'opération menée parallèlement en France avait permis l'interpellation de 16 personnes.

Le PKK, qui mène une lutte armée contre le régime d'Ankara, est considéré

comme un mouvement terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis.

En 1984, il a déclenché une rébellion sécessionniste dans le sud-est de la Turquie, région pauvre et sous-développée, peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis cette date, selon l'armée.

Selon le ministère espagnol, l'opération menée conjointement avec la police française a permis de démanteler un réseau chargé de recueillir des fonds "dont l'objectif était l'achat d'armement et de matériel explosif afin de soutenir l'activité armée terroriste en Turquie".

Les suspects, ajoute le communiqué, recueillaient des fonds "à travers des extorsions de compatriotes ainsi que le recouvrement d'un "impôt révolutionnaire".

En France, une source proche de l'enquête a annoncé mardi l'interpellation d'une quinzaine de Kurdes dans le sud-ouest du pays, la plupart à Bordeaux, dans le cadre d'une enquête antiterroriste sur des tentatives d'extorsion de fonds au profit du PKK.

Selon une source judiciaire, ces arrestations s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'une enquête antiterroriste préliminaire ouverte en mars 2012. ■

Dégel du processus d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE

Paris a décidé de rouvrir l'un des chapitres de négociations bloqués par Nicolas Sarkozy

Bruxelles
Bureau européen

Une amorce de dégel, après des années de brouille : mardi 12 février à Paris, Laurent Fabius, le ministre des affaires étrangères français, a indiqué à son homologue turc Ahmet Davutoglu que la France était favorable à la relance des négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne (UE).

L'initiative marque une nette rupture avec l'attitude de Nicolas Sarkozy sur ce dossier : l'ancien chef de l'Etat s'opposait à l'entrée d'Ankara, et avait mis son veto, en 2007, à cinq chapitres de négociations.

François Hollande entend revenir à des relations plus apaisées, entre autres en utilisant le levier de l'adhésion. « La France va renforcer son soutien aux négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie », a déclaré M. Fabius. Nous souhaitons avoir

des relations très positives avec la Turquie. » François Hollande devrait d'ailleurs se rendre à Ankara à une date encore indéterminée.

En gage de bonne volonté, le gouvernement français accepte, comme l'a indiqué le chef de la diplomatie à M. Davutoglu, l'ouverture d'un des cinq chapitres bloqués par le gouvernement précédent, celui portant sur la politique régionale, c'est-à-dire les aides aux territoires les moins développés.

Ankara réclamait depuis l'élection de M. Hollande la levée de ce blocage. Les quatre autres chapitres – politique agricole commune, union économique et monétaire, dispositions institutionnelles, dispositions financières – ne sont pas débloqués à ce stade.

« Nicolas Sarkozy refusait d'ouvrir les discussions dans des matières qui préjugeaient de l'adhésion. Nous revenons sur cette position avec l'ouverture d'un chapitre, tout en considérant que le ter-

me du processus doit être ouvert, explique-t-on à l'Elysée. La relance va prendre du temps, car la France n'est pas le seul obstacle à la poursuite des négociations. »

A Paris, comme à Bruxelles, on considère que certains chapitres – comme les marchés publics – sont impossibles à ouvrir en raison du manque de réformes constaté à Ankara. Et l'on attend l'assouplissement de certaines lois anti-terroristes, considérées comme liberticides, dans le contexte des pourparlers engagés avec la minorité kurde.

« Legeste de Paris est un pas positif pour remettre en mouvement un processus très dégradé », se réjouit une source diplomatique à Bruxelles. La présidence tournante des Vingt-Sept, assurée par l'Irlande ce semestre, espère ouvrir le chapitre « politiques régionales » d'ici à la fin du semestre. Ce serait une première depuis juin 2010.

L'Irlande n'exclut pas non plus d'aborder le chapitre relatif à l'union économique et monétaire. « Ce n'est pas une priorité dans le contexte actuel de refonte de la zone euro », tempère-t-on à Paris.

Depuis l'ouverture officielle des négociations, en 2005, 13 chapitres sur 35 ont été ouverts et plus d'une douzaine étaient jusqu'ici bloqués, soit par Paris, soit par Chypre. Les Européens ont de surcroît décidé de ne clore aucun des chapitres ouverts tant que la Turquie ne reconnaîtra pas Chypre, dont elle occupe la partie nord.

L'assouplissement des positions de la France est cependant très apprécié à Ankara. « Un obsta-

cle important dans les relations Turquie-UE va être levé », a commenté Ahmet Davutoglu à son retour à Ankara, mardi. « Nous pensons que le veto sera progressivement levé sur les autres chapitres. » « Une étape importante », titre le

« La relance va prendre du temps, explique-t-on à l'Elysée, car la France n'est pas le seul obstacle à la poursuite des négociations »

journal *Hürriyet* mercredi. « Nous avons de bonnes nouvelles aujourd'hui : le gouvernement français a décidé de ne pas poursuivre la même politique d'obstruction que le précédent », a souligné le ministre des affaires européennes, Egemen Bagis.

Lundi, au cours d'un dîner à Ankara avec les ambassadeurs des Vingt-Sept, le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait vigoureusement critiqué l'UE, accusée de refuser la candidature turque depuis plus de cinquante ans. Fin janvier, il avait même suggéré que la Turquie pourrait privilégier, faute de progrès avec les Européens, un rapprochement avec l'Organisation de coopération de Shanghai, emmenée par la Chine et la Russie. ■

PHILIPPE RICARD
AVEC GUILLAUME PERRIER
(À ISTANBUL)



Turquie: attaqués, des élus kurdes annulent un déplacement

ANKARA, 20 février 2013 (AFP)

UN GROUPE DE PARLEMENTAIRES KURDES de Turquie a été contraint d'annuler un déplacement dans le nord de la Turquie après avoir été violemment attaqués par des manifestants nationalistes, ont indiqué mercredi à l'AFP les organisateurs.

Le comité formé d'élus du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), la principale formation pro-kurde de Turquie, prévoyait de visiter cinq provinces situées au bord de la mer Noire pour expliquer à la population locale, réputée pour son nationalisme, le processus de paix en cours entre Ankara et la rébellion kurde mais le voyage a dû être écourté "en raison des circonstances", a expliqué une source du BDP.

"Après les incidents survenus à Sinop et Samsun, il a été décidé d'annuler le programme restant du déplacement", a précisé cette source sous couvert d'anonymat.

Les députés kurdes ont été pris à partie par une foule en colère de plusieurs centaines de personnes, constituées pour la plupart de jeunes, dans ces deux villes

et n'ont pu se déplacer que grâce à une imposante escorte policière, parfois dans des véhicules blindés, sous des jets abondants de pierres, selon, les médias.

Aucun des députés n'a été blessé dans les incidents.

"Nous ne voulons pas du PKK dans notre ville", ont scandé les manifestants arborant des drapeaux turcs, pour signaler la sympathie du BDP pour la cause du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, en lutte armée contre les forces turques depuis 1984.

Les autorités turques ont lancé en décembre un nouveau round de discussions avec le chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, un processus de paix mené sur instruction du Premier ministre islamiste-conservateur Recep Tayyip Erdogan qui provoque l'ire des milieux nationalistes.

Mardi, M. Erdogan a dénoncé les attaques visant les élus kurdes, accusant l'opposition parlementaire d'avoir initié ces attaques.

"Vous n'êtes pas obligés de les aimer, mais vous êtes obligés de respecter leurs opinions", a-t-il dit au sujet des députés kurdes dont il était pourtant dans le passé l'un des plus fervents critiques.

Öcalan exerce une influence considérable sur les membres et les partisans du PKK. Le gouvernement turc croit que les pourparlers avec lui pourraient aboutir à un calendrier sur le retrait du PKK à partir de la Turquie et leur désarmement possible.

À Sednaya, la sale guerre des enlèvements

GEORGES MALBRUNOT
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À SEDNAYA

LE VISAGE encagoulé sous un keffieh pour se protéger du vent, Raafat tient un barrage sur la route à l'entrée de Sednaya : « Je suis là uniquement pour défendre notre cité », jure ce chrétien qui habite cette ville de montagne à trente kilomètres au nord-ouest de Damas. Haut lieu de la chrétienté en Syrie, Sednaya et sa douzaine d'églises sont entourées de villages musulmans, qui soutiennent les rebelles anti-Bachar el-Assad.

Les dix mille chrétiens de Sednaya, eux, ont choisi l'autre camp. Celui d'un régime laïc qui assure défendre des minorités, inquiètes de la montée du radicalisme islamiste. Depuis bientôt un an, en accord avec le pouvoir, 300 d'entre eux ont constitué un comité de défense popu-

laire. Raafat et deux autres miliciens calfeutrés dans une guérite de fortune fouillent les voitures. D'autres patrouillent durant la nuit ou surveillent les trois monastères du village. Ils ne sont armés que de fusils et de mitraillettes, mais leur tâche soulage une armée qui ne contrôle plus que les grandes villes du pays et ses principaux axes routiers.

Cette collaboration avec un régime qui réprime massivement ses opposants a un prix. Il y a deux mois et demi, Youssef, le frère du chef du comité de défense populaire de Sednaya, a été tué par des habitants du village voisin de Baïda. La tête de ce dernier avait été mise à prix sur Facebook par l'Armée libre, selon M^{re} Yohana Taly, le supérieur du monastère Saint-Georges, qui égrène les épisodes de cette sale guerre des enlèvements.

L'engrenage de la vengeance

Après le bombardement par l'armée régulière du village voisin d'Attal l'été dernier, 400 de ses habitants se sont réfugiés à Sednaya. Parmi eux figurait une quinzaine d'insurgés que le chef des miliciens chrétiens a dénoncés au régime. L'engrenage de la vengeance était enclenché.

Un mois après, Haïdar, le fils du patron des miliciens de Sednaya, a été capturé, et depuis ses proches sont sans nouvelles. « On a les noms des personnes qui l'ont pris, assure Nicolas Zaher, le maire de Sednaya. C'est un groupe de criminels. Ils sont connus. Mais on pense qu'ils l'ont vendu à l'Armée libre ».

La riposte de ces montagnards rugueux ne s'est pas fait attendre. Dès le lende-

main, quelque deux cents ouvriers de Baïda, employés à Sednaya, ont été à leur tour kidnappés. Cent quatre-vingt d'entre eux ont été relâchés quelques jours après, mais les responsables de Sednaya ont gardé une vingtaine d'otages, comme monnaie d'échange, qu'ils ont placés dans le sous-sol d'un immeuble.

« Ce ne sont pas de vrais otages, dit Abou Thaer, en charge des négociations avec les dignitaires de Baïda. Ils ont à manger, et surtout ils ont pu appeler leurs parents à Baïda, ajoute ce membre du parti Baas au pouvoir en Syrie. C'est la grande différence avec nos voisins. Nous, nous ne cessons de réclamer d'entendre la voix de Haïdar », insiste Abou Thaer. En fait, les habitants de Sednaya pensent que leur coreligionnaire a été tué par ses ravisseurs. Ce qui expliquerait pourquoi, privés de leur butin, les rebelles de Baïda ont de nouveau enlevé six chrétiens et un musulman de Sednaya la semaine dernière, alors que leur bus traversait le village voisin.

Le plus incroyable dans cette surenchère aux otages, c'est que malgré les ten-

sions, les habitants de ces villages continuent de se fréquenter. Chaque jour, des dizaines d'ouvriers de Baïda viennent sur les chantiers de Sednaya. Comme si l'industrie du kidnapping était devenue une banalité dans une Syrie en pleine anarchie. « C'est en effet un grand marché », reconnaît Ali Haïdar, le ministre en charge de la Réconciliation, qui estime à 5000 le nombre des personnes détenues par l'un ou l'autre des deux camps, ou par des criminels qui profitent de l'instabilité pour s'enrichir. Chrétiens contre sunnites, sunnites contre alaouites et vice-versa, toutes les communautés sont concernées.

À Lahjat dans le sud, des rebelles désargentés et coupés du monde n'ont rien trouvé de mieux que de aller enle-

ver quelques chrétiens d'un village voisin qui ne participe pas à l'insurrection contre le pouvoir. A Damas, Ammar un chrétien, un industriel, est sans nouvelle de son associé musulman sunnite. « Son fils est allé dans une banlieue pour déposer un sac en plastique qui contenait les 30000 dollars réclamés par les ravisseurs qui lui avaient promis qu'une heure après, il récupérerait son père », raconte Ammar. Un mois après, l'otage n'a pas réapparu.

Dimanche soir, le ministre Ali Haïdar recevait dans son bureau une vingtaine de représentants de toutes les régions de la Syrie. Officiellement pour parler de réconciliation entre les composantes d'une mosaïque qui a volé en éclats. En fait, la réunion a été surtout consacrée à établir des listes d'otages à échanger ou de prisonniers à libérer. « Regardez, ce sont les noms d'une dizaine de soldats d'Anadan dans le nord près d'Alep qui sont entre les mains d'un groupe armé, on va essayer de les faire sortir », soupire le ministre un peu dépassé par l'ampleur de la tâche qui est la sienne. ■



Le Monde

Vendredi 15 février 2013

Syrie

Un responsable iranien tué par des hommes armés

BEYROUTH. Un responsable iranien a été tué par « des groupes terroristes armés » en Syrie dans la nuit de mercredi 13 février à jeudi, a annoncé l'ambassade d'Iran à Beyrouth. L'ambassade a identifié la victime comme étant Houssam Khoshnevis, président de la Commission iranienne pour la reconstruction au Liban, tandis que les Gardiens de la révolution, corps d'élite des troupes iraniennes, ont fait état de la mort d'un de leurs commandants, Hassan Shateri. Téhéran est l'un des principaux soutiens du régime de Damas dans le conflit qui ravage la Syrie depuis mars 2011. Dans un communiqué, l'ambassade a indiqué que M. Khoshnevis « a été tué par des groupes terroristes armés alors qu'il faisait route pour Beyrouth depuis Damas ». La Commission iranienne pour la reconstruction au Liban a été mise en place après la guerre de 2006 entre Israël et le Hezbollah, puissant mouvement chiite libanais soutenu par Téhéran. - (AFP.) ■

The ironic America-Turkish twist on Kurdistan

Globe Editorial

By Bashdar Pusho Ismaeel

The Middle East can be an ironic stage.

Only a few years ago, the US administration, deep in its Iraqi quagmire, was reassuring the Turks about the unity of Iraq and pressing an anxious Ankara towards diplomacy over potential conflict with Kurdistan.

Fast forward to 2013, and it is the Americans who are worried that increasingly close alliances between Ankara and Erbil is fueling the disintegration of Iraq. American views are mirrored by Baghdad who accuses Turkey of dividing Iraq.

There is no doubt that ties between Turkey and the Kurdistan Region are miles apart from that of 2008 when Turkey invaded, harsh rhetoric was the norm and even recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was a bitter pill to swallow.

But in the fast changing socio-political whirlwind of the new Middle East, 5 years is an awfully long time. Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds have become natural allies and have much to gain politically and economically, in particular from Kurdistan's immense energy potential.

And it is these energy ties that continue to underpin and consolidate strong relations between both governments that are the source of discomfort for Baghdad and Washington.

Baghdad's all too frequent cries and threats against KRG energy deals with foreign firms is hardly a new phenomenon nor has it deterred the Kurds or oil majors who have started to stream in. The underlining question is what are



U.S. President Barack Obama shakes hands with Turkey's Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan after a bilateral meeting in Seoul March 25, 2012.

the Kurds doing illegally? Are they breaking laws or is Baghdad's only gripe Kurdistan's growing strategic clout and economic prominence?

In a further twist of irony, while Washington has tried to slow down Kurdistan's growing independence and close ties with Ankara, US oil majors Chevron and Exxon-Mobil have signed key agreements with the KRG. This is in addition to Total and Gazprom who have joined the ranks.

If it was so illegal to deal with Kurdistan and such deals were "unconstitutional", why would oil majors flock to do business?

There is growing talk of a "secret" framework agreement signed between Turkey and the KRG around the transportation and marketing of oil and gas from Kurdistan directly to Turkey.

Kurdish plans to build an independent pipeline to Turkish ports are hardly a secret or a new initiative. Broad plans including oil pipe-lines were announced publicly last year at the international energy conference hosted in Erbil.

It goes without saying the political importance of a national hydro-carbon law for Iraq, but 6 years since the last draft was sidelined, efforts to reconcile differences have been lacking and Nouri al-Maliki's government has done little to bridge major disputes with Kurdistan, and not only

in the energy sector.

The Kurds are faced with a predicament to either wait indefinitely on Baghdad and be at their mercy on oil exports or drive their own destiny with the legal basis to do so.

The stop start nature of oil exports via Kurdistan and the bitter disputes over payments to foreign companies is synonymous with many other disputes between Erbil and Baghdad.

The control of oil exports is one remaining noose that Baghdad has around Kurdistan and this is also manipulated in other political struggles against the Kurds.

Recently, KRG has started to export independently via trucks to meet domestic demand much to the fury of Baghdad. But it appears that with Turkish support and growing confidence, the Kurdish patience with the Baghdad waiting game is running thin.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a major boost to Kurdish ties, defended Turkish energy cooperation with Kurdistan. Erdogan deemed such ties as legal and in line with Iraq's constitution and stated they were merely helping their neighbour meet their needs.

Political ramifications

There is no doubt that Turkish ties with America has rapidly cooled, especially as Turkey has loo-

ked increasingly east. Turkey is attempting to adapt to a new Middle East, seeks a proactive role in current conflicts, particularly in Syria, while it perceives the Obama administration as increasingly distant, slow and indecisive.

Washington is particularly uneasy about deteriorating Turkish ties with Israel and cautioned Turkey on recent "inflammatory" statements.

Turkey has also realised necessity of peace at home at a time of Middle Eastern sandstorms with a new reach-out to the PKK and its own Kurds. It deems new strategic relations with the Iraqi Kurds as a bridge with its own Kurdish community.

Closer cooperation with Iraqi Kurds comes at a time when Turkey is increasingly wary of Maliki and his Iranian influence.

U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Francis J. Ricciardone, warned that "If Turkey and Iraq fail to optimize their economic relations... There could be more violent conflict in Iraq and the forces of disintegration within Iraq could be emboldened."

This follows previous warnings by Ricciardone and other senior US diplomats.

With Maliki at the helm and with a continuous policy of lip-service to implementation of key constitutional articles, division and the disintegration of Iraq is intensifying. There is no fear of something breaking when it is already broke.

With a fragile government, monopolisation of power under Maliki, renewed sectarianism, a lack of security and deep distrust and discord throughout Iraqi circles, is it really the Kurds who are the source of the Iraqi divide?



17 February 2013

A decade after the invasion of Iraq, the Kurds emerge as surprise winners



PATRICK COCKBURN

World View: Troubles in surrounding countries may puncture Iraqi Kurdistan's boom but, for now, new hotels and malls are mushrooming

The Kurds of Iraq are the big winners in the 10 years since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. They have also been lucky. Up to a few weeks before the invasion in 2003, the US was intending to invade northern Iraq from Turkey, along with 40,000 Turkish troops. The Kurds were horrified at this, suspecting that once the Turks were in northern Iraq it would be impossible to get them out. I remember the Kurdish relief and jubilation when the Turkish parliament voted against participating in the US invasion.

Erbil, the Kurdish capital, was at that time a dismal, impoverished place at the centre of three Kurdish provinces with de facto independence from the rest of Iraq since 1991. But self-determination had come at the price of isolation and poverty. The mountains were bare, stripped of trees and bushes by people desperate for firewood. In the middle of minefields, along the Iranian border at Penjwin, I came across villagers who had a peculiarly dangerous occupation. They defused and dismantled a jumping mine called the Valmara in order to sell the explosives, and the aluminium in which they were wrapped, for a few dollars. The local cemetery was full of fresh graves and many villagers were missing hands and feet.

All this sounds like tales from a medieval past, given the present state of the five million people living under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Erbil today has a glossy new international airport and its skyline is broken by the towers of new five-star hotels. In contrast to the rest of Iraq, life is safe and the electricity supply almost continuous. New housing and shopping malls have sprung up everywhere.

Critics argue that there is rather less to this than meets the eye and the main beneficiary of Kurdistan's economic prosperity is the ruling elite. "We have plenty of new hotels," remarked one jaundiced Kurdish observer, "but just try to find a decent school for your children or a hospital for a sick relative." Government supporters respond that 50 to 60 international oil companies are looking

Building boom: New residential complex in the Kurdish city of Erbil



for oil, the hotels and new apartments are full, and every week sees the arrival of a delegation of businessmen from Turkey, Germany or the Gulf. The KRG benefits from being one of the few places in the world seen as booming at a time of recession and stagnation elsewhere.

A striking change is in the countries surrounding Iraqi Kurdistan. I was very interested in these places in early 2003 because I was trying to reach Iraq in time for the start of the US-led invasion. I was certain the government in Baghdad would not give me an entry visa because they disliked a book about Saddam Hussein I had written with my brother Andrew. I knew I would be welcome in the Kurdish enclave, but it was difficult to get there since it was virtually besieged by neighbouring states – Turkey, Iran, Syria and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The problem appeared depressingly insoluble until the Kurds persuaded the Syrians that it was in their interest to allow some foreign journalists to pass through Syria into Iraqi Kurdistan. The journalists would be able to publicise the Kurds' hostility to a Turkish invasion of northern Iraq, something both the Kurds and Syria wanted to avoid. I flew to Damascus on a tourist visa, was driven for 10 hours, by a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, to the police headquarters in Qamishli in northern Syria. I waited in some trepidation as a Syrian officer leafed slowly through a large handwritten ledger to see if my name was among those allowed to cross the frontier. Finally, his finger stopped at an approximation to my name and I drove immediately to the Tigris, on the far side of which was a sliver of territory controlled by the Kurds. I got into a tin boat with a spluttering outboard motor, which slowly made its way across the river.

I spent the next three months in Kurdistan in a hotel called the Dim Dim in Erbil, which was low on creature comforts, but had the

great advantage that I could use my satellite phone from my south-facing room instead of having to clamber on to the roof. People in Erbil were in an edgy mood, hopeful that Saddam would be overthrown, but fearful that the Turks might invade alongside the Americans. They were also fearful of a poison gas attack by Saddam, having experienced it first hand at Halabja in 1988. In the days before the invasion started, the city emptied of people, who took refuge in the countryside. The few who remained bought plastic sheeting to cover windows and doors in a touching effort to keep out any gas.

The last weeks of peace and the short war that followed were filled with incidents that seemed ominous for the future of Iraq. The first American soldiers I saw in Iraq were part of a US State Department security detail guarding Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan-born US diplomat, who was overseeing a conference involving the opponents of Saddam Hussein. The US soldiers stood in the driving snow, enforcing stringent search procedures on venerable Shia clerics and bemused Kurdish military leaders, as well as on journalists. "Stop filming and friggling listen to me," shouted an American soldier. "This [the body search] is non-negotiable and anyone who doesn't like it can leave." At this stage, the Americans did not much care what Iraqis thought of them.

All this seems like very ancient history these days. American influence diminished after its last soldiers left at the end of 2011. Instead of Turkey being feared as a menace to the Iraqi Kurds, it has become their reinsurance policy against action by Baghdad. So dependent is the Kurdish economy on Turkey that some in Erbil wonder if their leaders might not be making the same mistake as in the past when they became over-reliant on the US and Iran, both of which cynically betrayed them when it suited their interests. Just at the moment, the Iraqi Kurds probably do not have much →

⇒ choice other than looking to Turkey for support.

Once the prospect of Turkish military intervention disappeared in 2003, the Kurds were the only military ally of the US in northern Iraq with troops on the ground. They exploited this cunningly, placing themselves under US command and promising not to capture Kirkuk. I was not a great believer in this

promise at the time since I had run into a Kurdish police general in a resplendent uniform who told me that he was the director of traffic-designate for Kirkuk once it had been taken. Ten years on, Kirkuk is firmly under Kurdish control, with no sign of acceptance of this by Baghdad or compromise over its future.

Key to Kurdistan's success is security and

there is no sign of this being impaired. But the countries around the KRG are under stress, from civil war in Syria to smouldering guerrilla war in south-east Turkey, rising violence in the rest of Iraq, and economic sanctions and regional setbacks in Iran. These troubles may one day puncture the Kurdish boom and expose it as fragile, but that day has not yet come. ●

Turkey enters key week in Kurdish solution bid

The week ahead could be a turning point in Turkey's bid to end the Kurdish issue thanks to judicial reforms and a possible visit to the PKK's leader

Turkey is entering one of its most crucial weeks in its efforts to solve the Kurdish question amid expectations surrounding new judicial reforms and visits to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader, but the premier has warned against possible sabotage.

The significance of this week is due in part to expectations that the government is expected to complete its deliberations on the fourth judicial package before submitting it to Parliament, which could result in the releases of many jailed Kurdish politicians, as well as anticipation of a second meeting between a Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) delegation and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was set to decide on the names of the BDP delegation late yesterday.

"A very big atmosphere of hope has developed across all of Turkey. Believe me, this crowd today is voicing hope the way [the Black Sea province of] Rize is voicing it. Istanbul and Ankara are as hopeful as you are. Let's not waste this hope. Let's not allow those who would kill this process [to succeed]," Erdoğan said yesterday during an address to voters in the southeastern province of Mardin.

Erdoğan spent the weekend in the province, where he attended the opening ceremonies of numerous projects accompanied by several ministers, including his new interior minister, Muammer Güler, who is from the area.

Following days of uncertainty as to the date of the BDP's second visit to İmralı island, where Öcalan is serving a life sentence, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin announced that it could occur this week after he receives an official application from the BDP. Erdoğan said yesterday



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is on a visit to southeastern province of Mardin. AA photo

morning that the names had been provided to the government and that they would provide a decision later in the day. The peace process is being coordinated by the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), which has been in constant talks with Öcalan since December 2012.

Kurdish lawmakers Ahmet Türk and Ayla Akat Ata conducted the first visit to Erdoğan on Jan. 3, but Erdoğan vetoed Türk for the second visit because he subsequently criticized military strikes in the southeast. The BDP has pressed for the delegation to include one of the party's co-chairpersons, Selahattin Demirtaş or Gültan Kışanak, but the latter is said to have no chance of going after being photographed embracing militants last summer. Alongside Demirtaş, BDP deputy Pervin Buldan is in the running to join the delegation.

Equally important is that the government completes the necessary procedures on the fourth judicial package, which could effect the release of many Kurdish politicians who have been arrested as part of the Kurdistan Communities' Union (KCK) case. It is believed that a great majority of KCK suspects will be released pending trial as a result of the fourth judicial package. Ergin confirmed that KCK detainees would benefit from the package as it

amends an anti-terror law in accordance with European Court of Human Rights norms. There are 5,000 to 6,000 KCK suspects behind bars.

NO TURKISHNESS OR KURDISHNESS

In his rallies in Mardin over the weekend, Erdoğan reiterated that he was against all sorts of nationalism, saying: "We are into the solution process. No one should come to us with Kurdishness or Turkishness in this process. We are a government that disregards all sorts of nationalism. Those who claims that his or her race is superior than others is in the footprints of evil."

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), in contrast, is patriotic, rather than nationalist, he said.

"The Turkish Republic is one nation on this soil," Erdoğan said. "That one nation includes everyone. Whoever pursues ethnic nationalism is of ill-intent. No one should come to us regarding being Turks or being Kurds. We have no separatism or divisions. Our nationalism is about patriotism and about humanism," Erdoğan said.

Speaking on the issue of terrorism in the region, Erdoğan mentioned a new form of "national unity and brotherhood" project that called for the end of guns and violence and the triumph of the political will. "We have started a process to allow an opportunity for politics. The south will have the same rights as the west. The solution to the problem involves providing the same rights for everyone."

Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ also responded to criticisms that his government was acting slowly on the peace process given that no visits to İmralı had been conducted for several weeks and that a second had yet to be definitively scheduled.

"There is no timetable for the solution process," he said in an interview with private channel Kanal 7 yesterday.

"What is essential is that we obtain a result from this process. The right thing to do is to advance in a way to get a result from this process and not to move speedily," Bozdağ said. "People tell us to stop the terror. 'End this how no matter how you do it, end bloodshed;' they tell us. They don't impose on us a certain method." ■

Syrie : l'UE maintient son refus d'armer les rebelles

Face aux réticences de certains pays de l'UE, les insurgés ne devraient recevoir que du matériel non létal.

Par Alain Barluet

L'implacable réalité s'est imposée aux Vingt-Sept: aucune solution politique n'est en vue en Syrie, et la population subit chaque jour plus intensément des violences qui, en presque deux ans, ont fait 70 000 morts. Prenant acte de cette situation, les ministres européens des Affaires étrangères réunis lundi à Bruxelles ont reconduit pour trois mois les sanctions infligées au régime de Damas. Parallèlement, ils ont accepté d'amender l'embargo sur les armes pour permettre l'envoi de matériel non offensif et une assistance technique pour la protection des civils. Concrètement, si cette décision est confirmée au terme de l'embargo, le 28 février, les insurgés pourront recevoir des équipements tels que des gilets pare-balles et des casques mais aussi des moyens de communication cryptés, de même que des moyens de détection et d'information infrarouge. «Ce sont des équipements dont ne sont pas dotées les forces de Bachar et qui, peuvent faire la différence dans un conflit», estime une bonne source.

Volet le plus sensible de la politique de sanctions décidée au printemps 2011 contre Damas, l'embargo sur les armes et son éventuel allègement font depuis plusieurs mois l'objet d'un âpre débat au sein des Vingt-Sept. «Il s'agit toutefois



Soldats de l'Armée syrienne libre, dimanche près de l'aéroport al-Neirab à Alep. Le conflit a fait 70 000 morts en deux ans. REUTERS

d'une évolution importante», souligne une source proche du dossier.

Comme ce fut le cas pour la Libye, plusieurs États appelaient à la levée partielle de l'embargo pour armer les rebelles. Une ligne sur laquelle le Royaume-Uni s'est montré en pointe, soutenu notamment par l'Italie et, dans une certaine mesure, par la France. Le chef de la diplomatie britannique, William Hague, a d'ailleurs salué la décision de lundi dans la mesure où elle permettra, selon lui, d'«aller plus loin» dans trois mois, lorsque le sujet reviendra sur la table. En face, une forte opposition s'est exprimée en particulier de la part des pays scandinaves, du Benelux et de l'Allemagne.

DÉRIVES DJIHADISTES

La France, longtemps hostile à toute fourniture d'armes à la rébellion, a évolué. En novembre dernier, Laurent Fabius avait évoqué la possibilité d'une levée de l'embargo pour fournir aux rebelles des

armes défensives «puisque la Coalition (de l'opposition) nous l'a demandé». Lundi, le chef de la diplomatie française a d'ailleurs estimé que la décision avait été prise «conformément à la demande» du chef de la Coalition nationale syrienne, Moaz al-Khatib. Pour Paris, la priorité est la consolidation de cette structure politique, rempart, veut-on croire, contre les dérives djihadistes de la rébellion. Dans le contexte de la crise du Sahel, les risques d'une militarisation accrue n'ont pas manqué d'être évoqués à Bruxelles. «Le but n'est pas de combattre les djihadistes au Mali pour fournir des armes aux djihadistes en Syrie», a déclaré le Luxembourgeois Jean Asselborn. Récemment, François Hollande avait déclaré qu'une levée de l'embargo ne saurait être à l'ordre du jour tant qu'existait la possibilité d'une issue politique, signe que le débat a aussi lieu à Paris. «Ne pas alléger l'embargo, c'est donner des arguments aux plus extrémistes», argumente ainsi une source proche du dossier. ■

AFP

Gazprom: nouveaux contrats au Kurdistan malgré la colère de Bagdad

MOSCOU, 20 février 2013 (AFP)

LE KURDISTAN IRAKIEN a signé de nouveaux contrats de production de pétrole avec le groupe public russe Gazprom, malgré la colère du pouvoir central de Bagdad contre les accords existants, a indiqué mercredi à Moscou le président de cette région autonome.

"Ces derniers jours nous avons conclu des accords très importants avec Gazprom Neft", la filiale pétrolière du géant gazier, a déclaré Massoud Barzani, cité par les agences russes.

En novembre, le gouvernement irakien avait sommé Gazprom de choisir entre le contrat passé avec lui sur l'exploitation du champ pétrolier de Badra, dans l'est de l'Irak, et son engagement avec le Kurdistan.

Bagdad est furieux de voir nombre de compagnies pétrolières étrangères faire

affaire directement avec la région autonome du Kurdistan, sans solliciter son accord.

Interrogé sur un possible départ de Gazprom du Kurdistan, M. Barzani a assuré que ce n'était "pas vrai".

"Les accords signés récemment confirmeront qu'ils vont continuer à travailler" dans la région, a-t-il martelé.

L'exploitation des hydrocarbures est le principal enjeu des relations houleuses qu'entretiennent Erbil et Bagdad. Le Kurdistan jouit d'une grande autonomie par rapport au reste du pays et gère sa propre administration.

A l'automne, l'américain ExxonMobil avait répondu à un ultimatum posé par Bagdad en disant préférer un contrat signé avec le Kurdistan à l'exploitation d'un champ pétrolier du sud de l'Irak. ■

La Russie poursuit ses ventes d'équipements militaires au régime d'Assad

ISABELLE LASSERRE

PENDANT que les Européens s'interrogent sur l'opportunité de lever l'embargo sur les armes à destination de la Syrie, qui pénalise de facto la rébellion, la Russie réitère son soutien militaire au régime de Damas. « Nous continuerons de remplir nos engagements sur les contrats de la vente d'équipements militaires », a affirmé Anatoly Isaïkin, le patron de l'entreprise d'exportations d'armes Rosoboronexport.

Le montant des ventes d'armes que la Russie aurait livrées au régime syrien en 2011 est estimé à un milliard de dollars. Moscou, qui a bloqué trois résolutions du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU visant à augmenter la pression contre Bachar el-Assad, assure cependant ne pas fournir d'avions de combat et d'hélicoptères d'attaque à Damas. Les contrats concerneraient surtout des systèmes de défense anti-missiles et la réparation du matériel endommagé pendant la guerre, comme les hélicoptères.

Au milieu des années 2000, les autorités russes avaient livré de nombreux missiles sol-air, des roquettes anti-chars et des systèmes de défense anti-aérienne au régime syrien. Entre 2007 et 2011, Moscou a même été le principal fournisseur d'armements de Damas.

La coopération militaire entre les deux pays ne date pas d'aujourd'hui. Depuis Catherine II, le Kremlin a toujours cherché à consolider sa présence dans le bassin méditerranéen. Loin de s'affaiblir, elle semble avoir été ravivée par les événements syriens. Le mois dernier, la Russie a organisé « les plus importants exercices » militaires jamais



Cérémonie pour l'arrivée, en 2010, d'un navire militaire russe dans le port syrien de Tartous, pierre angulaire de la coopération militaire entre Moscou et Damas.
GRIGORIY SISOEV/
RIA NOVOSTI



réalisés par sa marine dans la région. L'augmentation de l'activité navale russe en 2012 en Méditerranée orientale « matérialise le soutien affiché par Moscou à son allié syrien et met de nouveau en lumière l'intérêt de la Russie pour la Méditerranée et le Moyen-Orient », écrit le chercheur de Harvard, Igor Delanoë, dans une note pu-

blée par la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS). Il vise aussi à « mettre en garde l'Occident contre une tentative d'appliquer à la Syrie un scénario libyen ».

Partenariat stratégique

Au bord de mer Méditerranée, le port de Tartous et sa base navale russe sont devenus la pierre angulaire de la coopération militaire entre Moscou et Damas. Redynamisé depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir de Vladimir Poutine, le partenariat stratégique russo-syrien s'est traduit par un développement des infrastructures portuaires de Tartous juste avant le début de la guerre.

Ce point d'appui russe en Syrie « s'inscrit dans une logique globale et de réinvestissement de l'Océan mondial par la marine russe », poursuit Igor Delanoë. Tartous accorde aux navires russes une plus grande capacité opérationnelle en Méditerranée mais aussi vers l'océan Indien. Autant de raisons, vu de Moscou, de ne pas lâcher le régime de Bachar el-Assad. □



Turquie: Libération de maires Kurdes accusés de collusion avec le PKK

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 19 février 2013 (AFP)

UNE COUR DE DIYARBAKIR a décidé de libérer mardi 10 militants kurdes, dont six maires, jugés dans le cadre d'un vaste procès visant un organisme kurde proche des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Les juges ont estimé que le temps qu'ils ont passé en prison dépasse le délai d'incarcération prévu par la loi s'ils étaient trouvés coupables, a-t-on indiqué de source judiciaire locale.

La Cour pense en outre que les preuves dans ce dossier ont déjà été recueillies et que la libération de ces personnes ne pose "aucun risque" à la procédure en cours.

Les premières arrestations dans cette affaire sont intervenues en 2009 contre

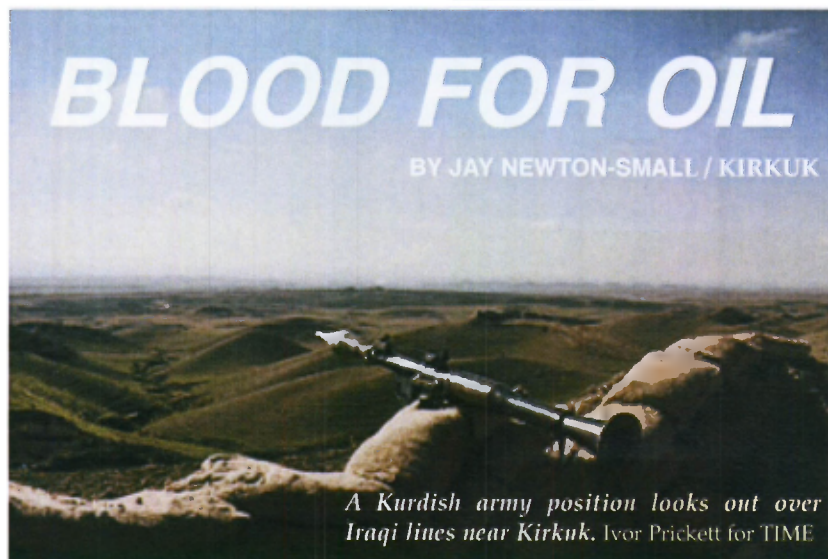
les milieux de l'Union des communautés kurdes (KCK).

Le KCK est une organisation clandestine considérée par les autorités turques comme la branche urbaine du PKK.

Le gouvernement turc accuse le KCK de vouloir se substituer à l'Etat dans les collectivités des provinces peuplées en majorité de Kurdes du sud-est anatolien en créant une structure administrative parallèle aux institutions officielles.

Plusieurs procès sont en cours dans différentes villes turques et visent les différentes vitrines présumées de l'organisation (médias, cabinets d'avocats ou partis politiques).

La libération de ces militants intervient alors que autorités turques ont lancé en décembre dernier un nouveau round de négociations de paix avec le chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan.



LOOK EAST FROM THE KURDISH TRENCHES

on a dusty ridge outside the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk and you can see the cause of it all: a rudimentary oil field where water wells are being sunk and sites are being cleared for drilling.

Now look south into the valley below the Kurdish positions and you can see two Iraqi army units poised to make sure that drilling never begins.

Since November, a crisis of oil, money and history has been building in the semiautonomous northern Iraqi region of Kurdistan. Some 30,000 Kurdish soldiers face just as many regular Iraqi army troops, setting the stage for a civil war in a country that has already endured more than its share. Under these lands lie an estimated 66 billion barrels of oil, enough to shift the global market for crude and alter Iraq's economic fortunes—provided the resource doesn't tear apart the country first.

Both armies arrived in Kirkuk at the end of November after a gas-station shoot-out nearby between Iraqi police and Kurdish troops left one dead and both sides furious. The forces have been tripping over each other since, in patrols through the divided city of Kirkuk and throughout the surrounding disputed territory, which is a bit larger than Kuwait. The situation has become tense for both sides. "I'm going to fight them," Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki warned his staff and allies in December. "I will use force to prevent them from working in the disputed area." With the two armies mustered in such close proximity, war may not wait; a suicide bomber killed at least 36 people and wounded more than 100 at a Kirkuk police station on Feb. 3. "Accidents happen," says Harry Schute, a for-

mer U.S. Army colonel who led U.S. forces into Kurdistan in 2003 and returned in his retirement to advise the Kurdish government on security issues. "This could blow up to be a war that no one wants."

Civil Affair

THE TINDERBOX HAS BEEN YEARS IN the making. Kurds—a nomadic Indo-European ethnic group spread across parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq—have sought an independent state since 1920, with limited success. But Kurds in northern Iraq were largely able to govern themselves from 1991 to 2003 in Iraq and had little or no contact with Baghdad. Only after the fall of Saddam Hussein, however, did the Iraqi Kurds begin to flex their muscles on energy policy, claiming the right to sign deals with foreign oil companies and drill on lands they historically claimed. When the Kurdistan Regional Government opened up to drilling in 2004 it sweetened the offer by allowing foreign oil companies to keep far more of the profits than the post-Saddam government was offering from oil fields in southern Iraq. Baghdad in 2011 threatened to cancel all its contracts with companies drilling elsewhere in the country if they signed up with the Kurds, but that didn't deter more than 50 multinationals from making deals with the north, including majors like ExxonMobil, Chevron, Total and Gazprom. "U.S. firms want to be able to work anywhere in Iraq and base their business decisions on which province or region is the most attractive for investors," says Hussain Qaragholi, president of the U.S. Business Council in Iraq, whose board includes ExxonMobil and Chevron.

\$1.50

Amount of profit per barrel that the Iraqi government allows oil companies

\$30.00

Amount of profit per barrel that the Kurdish government allows oil companies

Of course, oil isn't worth much unless you can ship it to the people who want to buy it, and Iraqi Kurdistan is landlocked. So last month the Kurds struck a provisional deal with neighboring Turkey to build a pipeline to carry any oil drilled on Kurdish lands—or even disputed territory—out of Iraq. There's just one problem: under the new Iraqi constitution, Baghdad controls all oil exports. And without a pipeline to move the crude to market, drilling in Kurdistan makes little sense. The result is an increasingly nasty standoff that's brought to the surface deep divisions between the Kurds and Baghdad.

The Iraqi government has threatened to forcibly halt any Kurdish exports of oil by truck—about 70,000 barrels a day head out by road to Turkey—and to stop the pipeline's construction, which is scheduled to begin later this year. Last May, al-Maliki sent President Obama a letter asking him to persuade ExxonMobil to either abandon or slow down its Kurdish activity. The appeal had little effect; Obama informed al-Maliki that he has no control over private companies, though the White House warned all U.S. oil firms working in Iraq that signing contracts without the approval of Baghdad exposed them to international legal risks.

The company with the most at stake is ExxonMobil, the first oil major to sign on with the Kurds in 2011. It is the only company to own contracts—three of its



A separate people From top: tankers are lined up to export oil; young Kurdish men smoke shisha in Erbil; a Kurdish family rides a gondola high over the city



six Kurdish parcels—in the disputed territory. The company began exploratory work on one of those disputed plots early this year, and ExxonMobil representatives arrived in Baghdad in January to try to negotiate a peaceful solution. Those talks are ongoing. For ExxonMobil and the other oil majors, the political risk of taking sides in a civil dispute is balanced by major potential rewards. Some of the best oil fields in all of Iraq happen to be in territory that's under dispute. A 2012

International Energy Agency report predicted that with the right investment, Iraq as a whole could double oil production to 6.1 million barrels a day by 2020 and raise it to 8.3 million barrels by 2030, making it the single biggest contributor to global oil-supply growth.

But that can happen only if Baghdad and the Kurds can reconcile their differences, and by late November, it became clear just how dire the dispute

was. An estimated 60,000 Kurdish and Iraqi troops marched to Kirkuk, taking up positions across the disputed territory. On Dec. 19, the *peshmerga*, as the Kurdish troops are called, fired on an Iraqi helicopter. The disputed region has been hit by a wave of sectarian bombings in the past month that have killed more than 90 people and injured more than 500—violence that alarmed State Department officials. Administration officials, including U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Robert Beecroft, have stepped in to try negotiating a settlement, but no timeline has yet been set for troops to withdraw. On top of everything else, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd and an experienced peacemaker, has been incapacitated since suffering a stroke on Dec. 17.

Battle Lines

DESPITE THE DRAMA, WAR SHOULD STILL be avoidable, in part because peace would be a lot more profitable. Until they can start exporting their oil in bulk, the Kurds remain reliant on Baghdad for revenue. When the new Iraqi government was formed, the Kurds were given 17% of all oil revenue annually, which today accounts for nearly all the Kurdistan Regional Government's budget. Turkey, thirsty for oil and concerned with its own Kurdish population, prefers to maintain the peace. For its part, Baghdad has its hands full with an outbreak of Sunni violence in recent weeks spilling over from neighboring Syria, including mass protests and a bombing of Shi'ite pilgrims after al-Maliki moved against his Sunni Finance Minister Rafia al-Issawi.

Still, nerves are so tense that even a minor blunder could spark a war that neither side really desires. Back in Kirkuk, a Kurdish soldier named Weli Abdulla stands on that dusty ridge looking down through the row of machine guns and rocket-propelled-grenade launchers aimed at his fellow Iraqis below. In between the weapons someone has propped a solitary rose and a tiny Kurdish flag. "We do not want to fight," he says, grasping the rifle slung diagonally across his chest and glaring down the hill. "But if we have to fight, we will defeat the Iraqi army." There will be oil—or there will be blood. ■

Israel Enters the Syria Conflict

ISRAEL The question is not whether Israel sent warplanes into Syria on the night of Jan. 29. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak made that clear enough later in the week, calling news reports of the lightning strikes “proof [that] when we said something, we mean it.” What Israel had said was that it would not tolerate Syria’s sending advanced weapons into Lebanon, where the Shi’ite militia Hizballah waged war on the Jewish state in 2006. According to then chief of military intelligence Amos Yadlin, Israeli leaders subsequently drew the line at four specific armaments: long-range Scud missiles, precision land-to-sea missiles, chemical weapons and advanced air

defense systems—like the Russian-made SA-17 missiles strapped onto the semitrailers that we know Israeli fighter-bombers blew up during the Syrian strike.

The question is what else Israel’s jets hit that night. A Western intelligence official tells *TIME* the air strikes also targeted Syria’s main laboratory and assembly center for chemical and biological weapons—the Scientific Studies and Research Center, located in the Jamraya district, northwest of Damascus—as well as two additional targets not identified publicly. The logic behind the Jamraya strike, the official explained, was to keep unconventional weapons not only out of the hands

of Hizballah but also beyond the reach of the more extreme jihadists among the motley rebel forces advancing on Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Assad, Iran and Hizballah all threatened to retaliate for Israel’s intrusion. Israeli officials took the threats in stride, calculating that Syria and Iran—dealing with, respectively, a civil war and crippling economic sanctions—have their plates full. As the dominant player in Lebanon’s politics, Hizballah also has interests to protect. The wild card is on the other side of Syria’s civil war: al-Qaeda-grade extremists, the last people in the world Western powers want to see capturing a bioweapons lab. Small wonder that the intelligence official indicated the U.S. military was poised to erase weapons-of-mass-destruction sites elsewhere in Syria.

“If we succeeded all these years to deter the Syrians and all the other surrounding countries that possess weapons of mass destruction not to make use of [them], it’s because we knew how to deliver the message that the price would be very high,” says Amnon Sofrin, a former senior official in Mossad, the Israeli CIA. But the Islamist extremists in Syria pose a different challenge: “What kind of threat can you put in the face of a terror organization?” —KARL VICK AND AARON J. KLEIN/TEL AVIV



Israelis fear that the Syrian conflict could loose weapons of mass destruction

Imams already preach in Kurdish, says Turkey’s top imam

ISTANBUL - *Hürriyet Daily News*

Imams are already able to preach in any language understood by the attendees of the mosque, including Kurdish and Arabic, Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate head Mehmet Görmez has said, describing the exclusion of any language or ethnicity as “a crime against humanity and the maker of all humanity.”

Görmez said any language could be used to preach in mosques, adding that no language had the right to exclusively own religion.

“The representatives of religion can

preach with comfort in the language understood by the people coming into the mosque, especially in rural areas,” Görmez said. “It is sad to treat such an ongoing practice as if it just appeared today.”

Having all languages in the mosque has never caused any problems in the past, and Kurdish people have previously been preached to in the Kurdish language, leading to no societal conflict, Görmez said, referring instead to the “psychological barriers of certain periods.”

The common language was Islam and it is a human duty not to let spoken languages perish, Görmez said.



Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate head Mehmet Görmez. AA Photo

“When we pray personally, along with the original verses, we use the language given to us by God, the language that we use all day. There is nothing wrong with that. If religion is universal, you cannot talk about a single language,” he said. ■

Kurdish refugees have mixed feelings about Syria

Civil war » If the regime falls, the rise of Islamists presents a new threat to ethnic minority.

By **KARIN LAUB**
The Associated Press

Domiz Refugee Camp, Iraq / Syrian Kurds who fled their country's civil war have mixed feelings about a future without Bashar Assad: They hope to win a measure of autonomy after the fall of the regime, but fear chaos and the rise of Islamists could instead make their lives worse.

More than 81,000 Syrian Kurds have found refuge in northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region in recent months and hundreds more arrive every day. Few seem in a rush to go home.

The Kurdistan Regional Government allows fellow Kurds from Syria to work and move freely in the three provinces of northern Iraq it controls. Some 30,000 refugees still live in a camp of tents and cinderblock shacks near the Syrian border, while the rest have found jobs and homes in towns across the autonomous region, some staying with relatives.

Even those struggling with the hardships of camp life say they prefer to stay in Iraq after the fall of the regime, until they have a better idea how Islamists and other groups in the Sunni Arab-dominated Syrian opposition will deal with Kurds, Syria's largest ethnic minority.

"If the Muslim Brotherhood takes over and there are problems in the future, we want to stay here," said Faroush Fattah, a 28-year-old laborer from the northeastern Syrian town of Qamishli who arrived in the Domiz camp three months ago.

The refugees' ambivalence about the upheaval in Syria is shared by Iraqi Kurdish leaders, who have carved out an increasingly prosperous quasi-state in the autonomous region, aided by an oil-fueled economic boom.

Kurdish autonomy in post-Assad Syria, similar to the Iraqi model, could strengthen long-standing Kurdish demands for an independent homeland for the more than 25 million Kurds in parts of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq.



But the emergence of yet another autonomous Kurdish region would likely spook Turkey, a regional power that is key to plans by Iraq's Kurds to export their oil riches directly, if necessary without permission from the central Iraqi government.

Turkey is home to an estimated 15 million Kurds, some with self-rule aspirations, and has been battling Kurdish insurgents for nearly three decades. Adding to Turkey's



In this Friday, Feb. 15, 2013 photo, Syrian Kurdish refugee Abdel Khader Taha, 37, shows off his tattoo of Massoud Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, with a flag of Iraqi Kurdistan in the background, in the Dumiz refugee camp in northern Iraq. Syrian Kurds who fled their country's civil war have mixed feelings about a future without Bashar Assad: They hope to win autonomy if the regime falls, but fear chaos and the rise of Islamists could instead make their lives worse. (AP Photo/Karin Laub)



concerns, the dominant Kurdish faction in Syria, the Democratic Union Party, or PYD, is seen as an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, the leader of the armed rebellion in Turkey.

The president of Iraq's Kurdish region, Massoud Barzani, has tried to exert influence over Syrian Kurdish groups, presumably in part to protect his strategic relationship with Turkey. Last year, he helped form an umbrella group of Syrian Kurdish groups that includes the PYD and smaller factions loyal to him.

"Barzani has some sway over Syrian Kurds," said Washington-based Turkey expert Soner Cagaptay. "He has been reaching out to a spectrum of Syrian Kurds, including the PYD, to stop the hostile rhetoric and attitude toward Turkey."

Falah Mustafa, in charge of the Barzani government's foreign relations, said Iraqi Kurds want to make sure their Syrian counterparts are united when negotiating their role in a post-Assad Syria with the Sunni Arab-led opposition.

He said it's up to all Syrians to shape their future, but that Kurdish rights have to be protected - an outcome he suggested is not assured. Asked in an interview if Syrian territory should remain intact at all costs, he said, "I do not believe that these borders have to be sacred, because these were artificial."

Syria's Kurds, who make up more than 10 percent of a population of 23 million, initially remained largely on the sidelines after the uprising against Assad erupted almost two years ago. They had been marginalized by the regime, but were also weary of the Syrian rebels, many of them Sunnis. Some prominent Kurds joined the Syrian political opposition in exile, while some younger Kurds joined street protests against Assad.

Kurds were pulled into the conflict on a larger scale when Assad's forces unexpectedly withdrew from predominantly Kurdish areas in the northeast of the country last summer, enabling the PYD to take control there.

The pullback appeared to serve two

objectives at the time - giving the PYD a higher profile to pressure Turkey, one of the most vocal backers of the Syrian opposition, and allowing thinly stretched government troops to move to hotspots elsewhere.

The PYD denies it is affiliated with the PKK or coordinates with the Syrian regime, even though in some areas, such as Qamishli, residents say both the regime and PYD forces maintain military posts. At the same time, the PYD has clashed with rebel fighters, particularly those from the al-Qaida-inspired Jabhat al-Nusra.

Some in the Domiz camp said the PYD protects Kurds against both rebel fighters and regime soldiers, while others described the PYD militiamen as regime sub-contractors terrorizing residents.

"The regime and the PYD work together," said Abdel Khader Taha, a 37-year-old laborer from Qamishli who sported a colorful tattoo of Barzani on his chest. Taha said he fears all Kurds will one day be targeted by Syrian rebels because of the PYD's perceived collusion with the regime.

Taha and others in the camp seemed ambivalent about Syria's future.

While favoring Kurdish autonomy, they acknowledge that carving out a self-rule zone, like in Iraq, is difficult because Kurds

are dispersed across the country. Refugees say they fear the Muslim Brotherhood, the pan-Arab Sunni movement driving the anti-Assad rebellion, will disregard Syria's ethnic and religious minorities once Assad falls.

"We fear a big ethnic war in Syria," said Ali Kalash, 57, a former Syrian civil servant, standing with a group of men in one of the tent-lined alleys of the camp.

Staying in Iraq may be their best option, and the Kurds are getting an easier start than hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees who have fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Ali Sindi, the planning minister in Iraq's Kurdish region, said his government has a special obligation to the Syrian Kurds because of the uncertainties over their future after the fall of the regime.

Many of the new arrivals have found jobs, in part because they're willing to work for less than the locals.

Biran Hassan, 25, left Qamishli nine months ago and now works as a waiter in a hotel in Irbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish region, making \$500 a month - just half what local residents get paid. Most of the hotel staff are Syrian refugees.

Faisal Mahmoud, 42, left behind his family

in the Syrian town of Kobani and arrived in Domiz last week. If he can find work as a cook, he'll bring them to Iraq, he said.

Some are even carving out a life in the camp, administered by the government and a U.N. agency.

Cousins Rezzan and Ibrahim Jegarkhouen invested \$2,000 to build a cinderblock shack and turn it into a barbershop, spending a recent sunny afternoon whitewashing the walls.

Even before the Syrian uprising, there was little work in their hometown of Qamishli, and the move to Iraq presents an opportunity, they said. "If there is no democracy (after the fall of Assad), we will not go back," said Ibrahim.

Khader Qassem, 30, has planned even further ahead.

Since arriving with his wife and five children eight months ago, he has replaced a U.N.-issue tent with a cinderblock shack complete with tiled floors, running water and a washing machine. He has also built an adjacent grocery, for a total of \$7,000.

"I want to stay here for at least 10 years," Qassem said of Iraq. "We have more rights here than in Syria." ●

Turkey frees 10 pro-Kurdish politicians in mass trial

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey: A Turkish court released on Tuesday 10 pro-Kurdish politicians who were among hundreds, possibly thousands of people on trial accused of ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The court in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir freed the politicians on the grounds that the time they spent in custody had now exceeded any prison term they would serve if convicted, court sources told AFP.

Turkish authorities first launched a major campaign of arrests in 2009 against the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK) which is considered a terrorist organisation and an urban wing of the PKK.

Critics of the crackdown say the number of people arrested pending trial in the KCK case

tops 3,500 while official figures from late 2011 say over 600 people had been arrested.

Tuesday's decision comes amid peace talks between the state and jailed PKK chief Abdullah Ocalan to negotiate an end to the Kurdish insurgency which has left 45,000 people dead since the PKK took up arms in 1984.

Nearly 1,000 more Kurdish prisoners are expected to be freed after parliament approves a new set of laws being drawn up by the government to bring its widely criticised anti-terrorism legislation in line with European standards.

Turkey has faced international criticism over lengthy pre-trial detentions of suspects -- including journalists, academics, activists, lawyers and politicians -- on terrorism charges. ○



Kurdish people take part in a demonstration, gathering thousand of people from all around Europe, to ask for the liberation of jailed leader of Turkey's Kurd rebels Abdullah Ocalan in Strasbourg, eastern France, on February 16, 2013. AFP PHOTO/FREDERICK FLORIN

Turquie : cap à l'est ?

Istanbul

Correspondance

L'annonce du déblocage par la France de l'un des chapitres des négociations entre la Turquie et l'Union européenne qui avaient été gelés par Nicolas Sarkozy a mis un peu de baume au cœur de la diplomatie turque, après deux ans de statu quo. Bien sûr, il en faudra plus pour réactiver un processus dont le but, l'adhésion, semble aujourd'hui inaccessible. Il en faudra plus encore pour calmer le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. La frustration des Turcs, « *qui frappent à la porte depuis 1959* » et se sont heurtés ces dernières années à l'opposition de la France et de l'Allemagne, les a détournés de l'objectif.

Selon un sondage mené fin janvier par l'institut EDAM, seuls 33,3% des Turcs se disent aujourd'hui favorables à la poursuite des pourparlers, tandis que 59,5% estiment que la Turquie ferait mieux d'abandonner la perspective européenne. Une réaction d'orgueil tant l'enthousiasme était communément partagé, en 2004, lorsque Bruxelles avait donné son feu vert à l'ouverture des négociations avec Ankara.

Mais M. Erdogan est allé plus loin fin janvier en affirmant, sur une chaîne de télévision, que la Turquie songeait sérieusement à « *des alternatives* » à une entrée dans l'UE. « *Si nous adhérons à l'Organisation de coopération de Shanghai [OCS], alors nous dirons au revoir à l'UE. Le groupe des cinq de Shanghai est mieux, il est plus fort et nous avons des valeurs communes avec eux* », a déclaré le premier ministre. Cette organisation créée en 1996 réunit la Russie, la Chine et les républiques d'Asie centrale et a accepté la Turquie comme « *partenaire de dialogue* » en 2012.

L'armée est rentrée dans le rang

L'armée turque, la deuxième armée de l'OTAN, a quasiment abandonné tout rôle politique depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir de l'AKP et l'adoption des critères démocratiques européens. Plus question de coups d'Etat suivis de périodes de répression – la Turquie en a connu quatre depuis 1960 –, ni même de menaces appuyées, comme en 2007. L'armée est désormais aux ordres du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip

L'homme-clé de la nouvelle politique extérieure

Ministre des affaires étrangères depuis 2009, après avoir été le conseiller de l'ombre du président Abdullah Gül puis du premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ahmet Davutoglu porte les ambitions d'Ankara sur la scène internationale. Parfait anglophone et arabophone, cet universitaire, professeur de sciences politiques, a été l'artisan du retour de la Turquie dans son ancienne sphère d'influence, diplomatie qualifiée de « néo-ottomane ».

Cap à l'est ? Ancre à l'ouest ? Une question éternelle en Turquie. Mais, à l'atmosphère négative qui entourait les négociations avec Bruxelles et à la question de Chypre, se sont ajoutées la réduction de la part de l'Europe dans la balance commerciale (moins de 40%) et la crise qui touche les pays européens. L'horizon bouché à l'ouest, M. Erdogan s'orienterait vers une autre direction, invoquant tantôt les origines altaïques du peuple turc, tantôt l'Empire ottoman triomphant et les lieux saints de l'islam.

Depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du parti islam-conservateur de l'AKP, en 2002, la diplomatie turque s'est démenée sur tous les fronts, une « diplomatie à 360 degrés » menée par le ministre des affaires étrangères : Ahmet Davutoglu, ancien professeur

de sciences politiques qui a tenté de mettre sa thèse en pratique. Fini le monde bipolaire, la devise turque devient « *Zéro problème avec les voisins* », et M. Davutoglu imagine une Turquie prospère dans une région stable. D'où un rapprochement sur son flanc est avec l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie. Avant que n'éclate la révolution contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, en 2011, M. Erdogan envisageait même la création d'une zone de libre-échange avec le Liban et la Jordanie, « *un Schengen du Moyen-Orient* ». Ankara a testé son *soft power* régional en tentant une médiation entre la Syrie et Israël, puis en s'invitant comme intermédiaire dans les négociations sur le nucléaire iranien. Deux échecs.

Mais les nouvelles ambitions turques ont d'autres aspects. Economiques d'abord. Pays en plein développement, gros consommateur d'énergie mais dépourvu de ressources naturelles, la Turquie dépend largement de la Russie et, dans une moindre mesure, de l'Iran, ses principaux fournisseurs. L'industrie turque cherche des débouchés, et les échanges avec les pays d'Asie, du Moyen-Orient et d'Afrique progressent rapidement. En témoigne l'ouverture de nombreuses lignes aériennes. Culturelles, ensuite, avec la création de dizaines d'écoles turques à l'étranger et grâce aux échanges universitaires. La Turquie a repris pied dans son ancienne sphère d'influence ottomane et même bien au-delà. Elle possède ainsi une trentaine d'ambassades sur le continent africain, sillonné par ses commerçants.

Le « printemps arabe » a remis à plat les ambitions turques. Les relations avec l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie sont de nouveau exécrables et la Turquie est revenue à une diplomatie classique. Elle s'est ralliée à l'intervention en Libye en 2011 puis, à la faveur du conflit syrien, s'est rapprochée des positions européennes. Ankara a réclamé et obtenu la protection de l'OTAN, dont il est le pilier oriental, et six batteries de missiles Patriot ont été déployées en janvier dans le Sud, près de la frontière syrienne. La Syrie a également été la source d'un incident avec la Russie, avec l'interception d'un avion transportant un radar militaire pour le régime de Damas. En 2011, le gouvernement de M. Erdogan avait autorisé le déploiement d'une partie du bouchier antimissile de l'OTAN sur le territoire turc, sujet de discorde avec Téhéran. ■

GUILLAUME FERRIER

Erdogan, qui a purgé ses rangs des éléments les plus hostiles aux islamistes. Autrefois gardiens autoproclamés de l'ordre institutionnel et de la laïcité, les militaires ont été mis au pas par la justice. Le procès, toujours en cours, de la cellule nationaliste Erge-
nekon et celui des responsables d'un plan présumé de coup d'Etat baptisé « Balyoz », en septembre 2012, ont envoyé des dizaines d'officiers derrière les barreaux.

PKK : onze Kurdes inculpés pour financement du terrorisme

De 10 000 à 45 000 Kurdes, selon la préfecture et les organisateurs, ont défilé samedi 16 février dans les rues de Strasbourg. Onze des dix-sept Kurdes interpellés mardi 12 février dans le sud-ouest de la France ont été mis en examen dans le cadre d'une enquête antiterroriste sur des tentatives d'extorsion de fonds pour financer le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), parti séparatiste en Turquie, a-t-on appris lundi 18 février de source judiciaire.

A l'issue de leur garde à vue après leur interpellation à Bordeaux et à Toulouse, douze d'entre eux ont été déférés samedi devant la justice. L'un a été placé sous le statut de



De 10 000 à 45 000 Kurdes, selon la préfecture et les organisateurs, ont défilé samedi 16 février dans les rues de Strasbourg. | REUTERS/JEAN-MARC LOOS

témoin assisté et les onze autres ont été inculpés, notamment pour "association de malfaiteurs en relation avec une entreprise terroriste", "financement du terrorisme" ou encore tentatives d'extorsion. Sept d'entre eux ont été placés en détention provisoire dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, et les quatre autres placés sous contrôle judiciaire.

Le PKK est considéré comme un mouvement terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. En 1984, il a déclenché une rébellion sécessionniste dans le sud-est de la Turquie, région peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de quarante-cinq mille morts depuis cette date, selon l'armée. ●

(AFP)

Budget conflict and Kurdistan pipeline

GLOBE EDITORIAL
Azad Amin

Despite the fact that Iraq's Cabinet approved the \$118.6 billion budget in October last year, infighting among Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish factions this week scuttled attempts by lawmakers to pass the draft legislation in parliament. A dispute between Baghdad and the autonomous region of Kurdistan over oil rights is the main cause of delaying this year's national budget.

The Iraqis have accustomed to yearly argument over the budget and this year without exception the issue has again come to the fore, as the Iraqi parliament cannot decide on what proportion to give to each of Iraq's regions. At the core of the matter however is the political dispute amongst the divided ethnic and religious constituencies of Iraq. The most hotly debated aspect of the budget at the parliament is about the share of

Kurdistan region. Postponement of the ratification of the budget 2013 is mostly due to the dispute regarding the share of the Kurdistan. The State of Law Coalition, led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, is trying to slash this share from 17% to 12%, which has led to vehement Kurdish objections.

The discussion and dispute over the budget may be seen as purely technical issue that due to the lack of proper census in Iraq result in allocation of budget to provinces that which province to get what proportion. However it is not simply a technical issue but used by the Al-Maliki government as a way of punishment of Kurdistan region. More than that allocation of Iraqi budget to Kurdistan used by Maliki as a blackmail to force the Kurdish authorities to give up on territorial and oil dispute with Baghdad. A Kurdish MP, Rawaz Khoshnaw, rightly argued that "Maliki is trying to use the budget to twist our arm. It's just a political tool that they are using against the Kurdistan



An oil worker tending to a supply pipeline in Iraqi Kurdistan.

regional government."

It is the Iraqi central government that for a very long time have repeatedly postponed the carrying out census in Iraq. Baghdad fears the census may release the proportion of ethnic combination of disputed territories and strengthen the hands of Erbil against Baghdad on territorial issues.

Delaying of budget have negative effect on Iraqi and particularly on Kurdistan economy. It is true that unending budget infighting each year is jeopardizing investment in almost in everything from transport to rebuilding the economy, and

implementing much-needed infrastructure projects that millions of Iraqis are urgently needing it is the Kurdistan region that suffers a lot. Kurdistan economy due to stability and security attracted billions of dollars local and foreign investments in various fields and economic boom have become a norm rather than exception. Life standards of the people of Kurdistan since 2003 have considerably increased. A growing middle class now appears in the region.

Budget problems that Baghdad artificially creates is an attempt to impede growing Kurdish economy and ➤

➤ the growing differences between Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq. Indeed in a short period of time successful economic policies of Erbil made a huge differences between Kurdistan and rest of Iraq from infrastructure to public services. Access to electricity and clean water is much better in

Kurdistan than other parts of Iraq.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition is not the only bloc in Baghdad that tries to reduce the Kurdiistan share. Sunni-backed Iraqiya Bloc and some other political blocs have also called last week for Kurds to get no

more than 12 percent of the budget based on their population. Kurdistan share of budget since the formation of new government following the demise of Baath regime in 2003 have been 17 percent.

Kurdistan region government is right to develop an independent economic policy parti-

cularly on energy sector to rebuke Baghdad's attempt to diminish Kurdiish economy. To do so it is essential that Kurdistan to have its own pipeline in order to export its energy sources to global market to have its own independent budget should Baghdad ever tries to stop Kurdish 17 percent. ○



20 février 2013

En mal d'énergie, la Turquie courtise contre toute attente les Kurdes d'Irak

ANKARA, (AFP) - **S**oucieuse de réduire sa dépendance énergétique au gaz et au pétrole importés, la Turquie lorgne avec insistance vers le Kurdistan irakien et ses réserves de brut, malgré la colère de Bagdad et la crainte de son allié américain de voir l'Irak éclater sous l'effet de ce rapprochement.

C'est un de ses bouleversements d'alliance qui donne des sueurs froides aux diplomates. Pendant très longtemps, Ankara s'est refusé à tout contact avec les Kurdes d'Irak, accusés d'héberger sur leur sol leurs "frères" honnis du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en guerre ouverte contre ses troupes depuis 1984.

Mais, depuis qu'il a pris les rênes du pouvoir, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a prudemment repris langue avec les dirigeants de ce qui constitue aujourd'hui la "région autonome kurde" d'Irak, et noué avec elle des liens économiques très forts destinés à nourrir en énergie l'impressionnante croissance (8,9% et 8,5% en 2010 et 2011) de son pays.

De 2,8 milliards de dollars en 2007, le montant des échanges entre la Turquie et l'Irak est passé à 10,7 milliards l'an dernier, dont une très large part avec sa région kurde, où un millier d'entreprises turques sont implantées.

Aujourd'hui, la Turquie propose de transformer cette entente en véritable partenariat stratégique. Selon la presse turque, ce projet prévoit la construction

d'un gazoduc capable d'acheminer 10 milliards de mètres cubes de gaz par an.

S'il n'a pas confirmé ce projet, le ministre turc de l'Énergie Taner Yıldız a en tout cas justifié l'intérêt de son pays pour son voisin du sud. "Quoi de plus naturel pour la Turquie que de protéger ses intérêts ?", a-t-il lancé.

Une réponse aux critiques que suscite le rapprochement entre Ankara et Erbil. A commencer par celles de l'Irak, qui dénie à la région kurde le droit d'exporter ses hydrocarbures sans son accord.

Ajoutée au refus turc d'extrader le vice-président irakien Tareq al-Hashemi, la question énergétique a pourri les relations entre le Premier ministre chiite irakien Nouri Al-Maliki et la Turquie, à majorité sunnite.

Inquiétude américaine

En décembre, l'Irak a interdit à l'avion de Taner Yıldız d'atterrir à Erbil pour y parapher l'accord. Un mois plus tôt, les autorités de Bagdad ont empêché le groupe pétrolier turc TPAO de participer à un appel d'offres pour un contrat d'exploration.

Mais ce n'est pas tout: M. Erdogan doit aussi affronter les mises en gardes de Washington, qui redoute que ses attentions pour la région kurde précipitent un éclatement de l'Irak, dévastateur pour la stabilité de la région.

"La réussite économique peut favoriser l'intégration en Irak. Un échec pourrait y nourrir les forces qui poussent à sa désinté-



Le ministre turc de l'Énergie Taner Yıldız (2g) et le ministre irakien du Pétrole Hussein al-Shahristani (d) signent un contrat sur l'utilisation de l'oléoduc Kirkouk-Ceyhan, le 19 septembre 2010 à Bagdad

gration, et ce ne serait bon ni pour la Turquie, ni pour les Etats-Unis, ni aucun pays de la région", a averti récemment l'ambassadeur américain à Ankara, Francis Ricciardone.

La sortie a été peu goûtée des Turcs. "Nos relations économiques se renforcent malgré tout, même malgré les Etats-Unis", a lancé M. Erdogan. "Ils nous disent que nous avons tort d'agir ainsi. Je leur réponds +non+, la Constitution irakienne l'autorise", a-t-il ajouté en rappelant que ce texte permettait aux Kurdes d'utiliser comme bon leur semble 18% de l'or noir du pays.

Aux yeux des analystes, le choix turc de réorienter une partie de ses coûteuses importations d'hydrocarbures de l'Irak, l'Azerbaïdjan et la Russie vers le Kurdistan irakien est une évidence économique.

"L'énergie irakienne est la meil-

leur marché et un moyen, pour la Turquie, de réduire sa dépendance énergétique", souligne Mete Goknel, l'ancien patron du transporteur turc d'hydrocarbure Botas.

Politiquement, Ankara a fait de l'enclave kurde irakienne une de ses cartes maîtresses dans le dialogue de paix renoué fin 2012 avec le chef emprisonné du PKK Abdullah Öcalan. Sur ce dossier, le Kurdistan irakien constitue l'un de ses rares alliés.

"La Turquie ne peut pas ignorer les Kurdes d'Irak", juge le professeur Huseyin Bagci, de l'université technique du Moyen-Orient. "Je considère les liens noués par la Turquie avec les chefs kurdes d'Irak comme l'un des plus intéressants développements survenus dans les affaires régionales", renchérit Ross Wilson, du Conseil atlantique, un centre de recherche américain. ♦

Defiant Turkey pursues Iraqi Kurd energy ties

Turkish PM has moved gradually to forge ties with Iraqi Kurds in bid to quench its economy's growing thirst for energy despite US opposition.

By Fulya Ozerkan - ANKARA - AFP

Turkey is defying Washington and Baghdad in developing a broad energy partnership with Iraqi Kurds as it pushes to secure affordable oil and gas supplies to fuel its rapid economic growth.

Analysts say the move could also establish the country as a regional energy hub, but risks aggravating tensions in the powderkeg region and damaging ties with the United States, its major ally.

Ankara had initially refused to engage in official contacts with Iraqi Kurds, fearing that the establishment of an independent Kurdish state there could embolden its own Kurds, some of whom have waged a nearly three-decade insurgency.

But as Turkey's economy has boomed -- it grew by more than 8.0 percent in 2010 and 2011 -- and its thirst for energy grown, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has moved gradually to forge trade ties with Iraqi Kurds.

In a major deepening of those ties, Turkey and Iraqi Kurds have reportedly agreed recently to build a natural gas pipeline to transport at least 10 billion cubic metres of gas annually.

That represents over a fifth of Turkey's current consumption.

Turkish officials have refused to publicly confirm the project that threatens to aggravate a dispute between Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdistan region over control over energy resources.

The burgeoning energy ties are raising eyebrows in Washington, where there are concerns that they could tip the volatile country towards disintegration and push an increasingly isolated Baghdad into Iran's embrace.

"Economic success can help pull Iraq together," US Ambassador to Turkey Francis Ricciardone said earlier this month.

But "if Turkey and Iraq fail to optimise their economic relations ... there could be more violent conflict in Iraq and the forces of disintegration within Iraq could be emboldened," he warned.

"...and that would not be good for Turkey, the United States, or anybody in the region."

Turkey has already ruffled Washington's feathers by continuing to import Iranian (oil and gas) despite US efforts to isolate Tehran over its alleged nuclear weapons drive.

But Ankara has remained defiant, supporting Iraqi Kurdistan's right to use part of its energy resources as it sees fit.

Erdogan said the regional Kurdish government "is free to use this right with whichever country it wants and we are their neighbour."

Analysts say energy-hungry Turkey's dependence on expensive energy imports from Iran and Russia are pushing it to find cheaper sources, and northern Iraq appears to be the best provider.

"Iraqi sources are the cheapest and it is a way for Turkey to diminish its energy dependence," Mete Goknel, former director of Turkey's state-owned pipeline company Botas, told AFP.

According to the US Energy Information Administration, Turkey has been importing about half of its crude oil from Iran, although this is likely to fall given international sanctions on Tehran.

In 2011 Turkey was importing nearly 60 percent of its natural gas from Iran, with a fifth coming from Russia.

"Turkey depends on Russia and Iran on energy and if both countries close the tap, the Turkish economy will tank," said an energy expert who asked to remain anonymous.

This imported energy has been responsible for a large part of Turkey's trade deficit, which threatens to crimp expansion.

"Turkey cannot ignore Iraqi Kurds"

Goknel said Iraq would also benefit from Turkey becoming a regional energy hub.

"It would be more advantageous for Iraq to ship its gas to western markets through Turkey versus the more expensive shipping lane, the strait of Hormuz," he said.

A decision is expected within months on the route of a separate pipeline to ship natural gas from Azerbaijan via Turkey to Western Europe.

But Baghdad appears intent on dashing Ankara's designs to become a regional energy hub, blocking Turkish efforts to step up their presence in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In November, Baghdad blocked Turkish national energy firm TPAO from bidding for an oil exploration contract, a decision which Erdogan said was not "smart business".

And in December, Baghdad barred a plane carrying Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz from landing in Arbil as he was reportedly on his way to seal the much-speculated energy deal.

A Baghdad-controlled oil pipeline that goes to Turkey operates well below its capacity to transport 70.9 million tonnes per year.

Sunni-majority Turkey is also at loggerheads with the Iraqi government of Shiite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki over a number of issues including Ankara's refusal to extradite fugitive Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi.

Despite the difficulties Turkish trade with Iraq has grown rapidly, from \$2.8 billion in 2007 to \$10.7 billion last year.

Iraq is now Turkey's number two trade partner following Germany, with most of that trade with the Kurdish region.

More than 1,000 Turkish companies are currently operating in northern Iraq, and they are optimistic Iraq could become Turkey's top trade partner as soon as this year.

"Turkey cannot ignore Iraqi Kurds" Professor Huseyin Bagci of the Middle East Technical University said, citing both strong economic links and nearly three-decade old Kurdish insurgency.

The Iraqi Kurds, who for long sheltered PKK rebels, could hold the key to peace.

Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani remains key to new talks between Turkey's secret services and jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan which were resumed late last year with an ultimate goal of disarming the rebels.

And peace with the rebels would likely further increase the attractiveness of Iraqi Kurdish energy resources for Turkey, say analysts.

"I see Turkey's relationships with Iraqi Kurdish leaders to be one of the bright new elements in regional affairs," said Ross Wilson, director of the Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center at the Atlantic Council in the United States. ●



Business interests overshadow political ones

In Turkey, a voice for the silenced

The Female Factor

AYSEGUL SERT

ANKARA At 51, she is petite yet powerful. Arriving at a cafe in a crowded shopping mall, she sits only after her brother has checked out the locale. Generally reluctant to speak to journalists, Leyla Zana has come by caution the hard way but has lost none of her determination to fight for the rights of Kurds, and of women.

Born in the province of Diyarbakir in southeast Turkey in 1961, she dropped out of elementary school because she could not understand the language of instruction — Turkish — and was forbidden to speak her own.

Married at 14 to Mehdi Zana, a political Kurd some 20 years her senior who became mayor of Diyarbakir and spent 16 years in jail after the 1980 military coup, she found herself the single mother of two children. Learning Turkish with them as they were schooled, she also found her political voice — and went on to become, in 1991, the first Kurdish woman elected to the Turkish Parliament.

There, she famously infuriated nationalists by wearing a headband of yellow, red and green — the Kurdish colors — and, amid loud whistles, recited the formal oath in Turkish, adding at the end a sentence in Kurdish calling for brotherhood between Turks and Kurds. It was the first time that Kurdish had been spoken inside Parliament.

Viewed against that history, today's Turkey has come a long way. The use of Kurdish in public is legal now and is slowly expanding to some instruction and possibly to courts, along with radio and television broadcasts by TRT, the national public broadcaster.

Last year, Ms. Zana paid a once inconceivable visit — to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Just weeks earlier, she had said that Mr. Erdogan could solve the Kurdish issue, a statement that drew fierce criticism from foes and even friends who saw her as naïve.

“When criticizing, you should offer an alternative, and they haven't,” is her response to critics. “In Turkey today, the death tolls on both sides hurt society as a whole. The funds of this country, billions of dollars, are spent on this conflict. The necessary condition is set for the Kurdish question to be solved; this opportunity should not be wasted.”

“I always tried to be the voice of the silenced,” she said at another point in a spirited 45-minute conversation. “Yes, the struggle has yielded results. This is good, but not enough. Turks newly begin to understand Kurds. I have faith in Turks and Kurds. We have many more hardships to face. Each system is the mirror of a society. If people are still imprisoned in this country because of their views and identity, it shows the level of development and democracy.”

Indeed, many Kurdish activists are in pretrial detention as part of a continuing terrorism case winding through the courts.

Ms. Zana's political career was interrupted in 1994 when her party was shut down by the government and her immunity lifted; she was sentenced along with other deputies on several counts, including separatism and collaborating with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, the P.K.K. She spent 10 years in jail. While incarcerated, she won the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought from the European Parliament in 1995.

“Prison may have captured me physically, but never mentally,” she said. Like many revolutionaries in history, she used it to improve her mind. “I read tremendously while incarcerated; I educated and questioned myself a lot.”

She traces her activism back to the military-ruled Turkey of the 1980s — “I saw oppression. I saw brutality. I had to do something against that injustice,” she said, recalling in particular an old woman hurled to the ground by an officer for speaking Kurdish as prisoners' wives waited hours for a glimpse of their loved ones.

Demographers estimate that Kurds, who are a sizable minority also in Iraq, Syria and Iran, amount to about 15 million of Turkey's 75 million people. “Kurds want to have a status,” Ms. Zana said. “What kind of governance and autonomy they choose is up to them, but first and foremost they want to have their identity recognized and their rights respected.”

For 25 years, Ms. Zana knew Sakine Cansiz, one of three Kurdish female activists shot and killed in Paris last month. Ignoring doctors' orders not to fly because of ear problems, Ms. Zana went to France, lauding Ms. Cansiz, a

co-founder of the P.K.K., as “a pioneer” and an “enlightened Kurdish woman.”

Ms. Zana's differences over the years with the P.K.K. and its armed struggle are subjects on which she remains reticent during this meeting. The killings of Ms. Cansiz and the two other women have raised questions about divisions among Kurds and Turks over the Turkish government's move to accept the imprisoned P.K.K. leader Abdullah Ocalan in talks on ending the Kurdish conflict.

In the current Middle East turmoil, can Kurds resolve their fate? “A new process has begun in the Middle East, proving dictatorial regimes can no longer be accepted,” Ms. Zana replied. “I think what we see is an overall resistance to injustice,” a larger struggle that should help, not hinder, the Kurds.

“Kurds will be free one day,” she said. “I don't know if I will get to see it, but I do know that when I leave this world, I will do so with a clear conscience, for I have done my very best.”

And women? She sighed, but noted “a social awakening.”

“Today, women in Turkey rush to the streets and make their voices heard,” she said. “In the past, they were shouting to exist as human beings; now they shout to express their ideas and ideals. We have overcome many difficulties. The view was: If you are a man, you have value; if you are a woman, you don't. This narrow-mindedness had to be shattered. A woman is equal to a man. However, in this change of balances, men should not be enslaved while women find their freedom. The goal is to walk shoulder to shoulder together.”



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Ras al-Ain Agreement Between FSA and Kurds Reduces Tensions

<http://www.al-monitor.com>

By: Tareq al-Abed Translated from As-Safir (Lebanon).

The northeastern Syrian city of Ras al-Ain can finally live in peace after the unprecedented agreement between the Popular Protection Units and Free Syrian Army (FSA) brigades. The agreement, which puts an end to the constant fighting between the two groups, resulted from various mediation efforts orchestrated by opposition leader Michel Kilo. It signaled the end of the hostile media campaigns orchestrated by both sides, and it constituted a victory for the inhabitants of Sri Canet — the Kurdish name for Ras al-Ain — in the face of constant attempts to cause strife between Arabs and Kurds. This went along with a campaign to portray the Kurds as traitors and accuse their parties of fighting alongside the regime. The accusations were denied by the Kurds, who affirmed their loyalty to Syria and their rejection of any calls for secession.

The agreement entails the withdrawal of all fighters from the streets, the redeployment of military forces and the establishment of a temporary follow-up and monitoring committee with members from both sides. The committee's task will be to monitor the agreement's implementation and to establish a local civil council that represents the city's constituents and administers the city's affairs. In other words, the council would be considered a local representative of the sovereign authority, in whose affairs no military force may interfere, in addition to responsibilities for managing the border crossing.

The agreement transcended the borders of Ras al-Ain, for it considered the cities and towns in which the regime has no presence — Drabsiyeh, Amouda, Tel Tamr, Kirki and Derek — to be "liberated" cities, per a joint communiqué issued by the two parties. The result is an agreement that ends the continuous Arab-Kurdish state of conflict.

But why Ras al-Ain? And what drew all sides to this specific region? The answer is that Ras al-Ain, this small border town with Turkey, is viewed as a microcosm of society composed of Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Muslims, Christians and a Yazidi minority. Opposition control of the town is considered a prelude to the opposition controlling the region's remaining areas, and securing the northern oil fields, having already secured those of Deir al-Zour. This would be followed by the sale and export of oil to Turkey — which would generate significant



Members of the Free Syrian Army are seen in the northern Syrian town of Ras al-Ain, near the Turkish border, Jan. 25, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Osman Orsal)



PYD's Kurdish militias.

revenue for the brigades controlling these vast riches.

Securing these regions would also guarantee keep them from falling under the control of Kurdish forces opposed to Turkey, and therefore prevent the spread of any Kurdish forces feared by Ankara. Additionally, it would neutralize the threat of an Arab-Kurdish conflict erupting under the guise of an inter-clan war. The Hasakah Province comprises a mixture of different clans, some loyal and others opposed to the regime. In addition, there are Arab clans that look on their Kurdish neighbors with suspicion since in Ras al-Ain, the Kurds have a large presence of Popular Committee forces.

The presence of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, which shares much of the same ideology as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), further exacerbates an already delicate situation, as a result of the Syrian armed opposition's accusation that it backed the Bashar al-Assad regime. The joint protection leadership denies this accusation, arguing that the party's members only took up arms to defend themselves and the Kurdish populace against armed brigades that considered them a threat to their agenda in the "liberated" regions.

But the real story goes back further.

According to Kurdish opposition activists, the perception that the Kurds harbored secessionist feelings and were part of a fifth column is an old one. Kurds were viewed that way even before the popular demonstrations began two years ago. That perception intensified with the increased Turkish sway on political opposition figures, especially those belonging to the Syrian National Council (SNC). Turkish intervention even extended to many militant brigades fighting on the ground, to the point where Turkish tanks sometimes interceded to back FSA troops against the Kurds.

The aforementioned agreement hasn't garnered support from all armed opposition factions, such as the Jazeera and Euphrates Front to Liberate Syria, headed by one of the most prominent clan elders in the region, Nawaf al-Bashir. The position of Salafist factions, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Ghuraba al-Sham Brigades, is not yet known. Such factions have never hesitated to open fronts against the Kurds, not only in Ras al-Ain, but in other Kurdish areas of the north as well. Despite this, optimism reigns in Sri Canet that the agreement will restore the Arab-Kurdish relationship to its previous state. Furthermore, it could pave the way for a wide-ranging recognition of Kurdish rights, and the possibility that they may be allowed to ➡

➔ manage their areas without having to face accusations of being mercenaries and separatists.

This optimism remains cautious for fear that any slight problem might produce a new crisis. All it takes for the media war and street provocations to resume is for emotions to flare in opposition to the Kurdish or Jabhat al-Nusra flag being raised. Such sensibilities might in turn lead to a renewed argument about who is more entitled to run the region — with the Kurds insisting that they be allowed to run their own affairs, and the FSA insisting that it alone should control the region, in accordance to certain clan or political considerations. Guarantees offered by opposition figures will, of

course, not suffice, as these figures are notable in their disregard for the events taking place in town.

With the exception of spurious statements, the Kurdish issue has been absent from the activities of the opposition coalition, as it is busy with the initiative launched by its president, Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib, and the formation of a transitional government. The SNC was also unable, during the reign of its former president Abdulbaset Sieda, to put an end to the Arab-Kurdish conflict. On the other hand, the Coordination Committee seems more in tune with the situation on the ground, as evidenced by the presence of the prominent Kurdish opposition figure Salih Musallam among its leadership's

ranks. The committee has demanded that the international community exercise pressure on Turkey, which is heavily involved in Kurdish affairs.

One can say that the Kurdish factions and the FSA brigades have succeeded in signing a truce that puts an end to the madness of war. It now falls on the Kurds to make their presence felt and play an effective role as part of the Syrian opposition. The opposition as a whole must now approach the Kurdish issue with a great deal more responsibility, for the risk remains great that matters could deteriorate if some elements continue to try to sabotage the truce. ♦

middle east online
میدل ایست اونلاین

February 22, 2013

Syria Islamist-Kurd hostilities end after Kilo's mediation

Arab anti-regime rebels, Kurdish militias end three months of hostilities following fragile agreement brokered by prominent dissident Michel Kilo.

Middle East Online

By Alison Tahmizian Meuse - BEIRUT

Arab anti-regime rebels and Kurdish militias in northern Syria have ended three months of hostilities following a fragile agreement brokered by prominent dissident Michel Kilo, a Christian. Clashes have erupted periodically between the two sides since Islamist rebels entered the city of Ras al-Ain last November and seized a strategic crossing on the Turkish border.

The majority Kurdish city was once home to some 55,000 people of mixed ethnic and religious origin, among them Arab Sunnis, Christians and Armenians.

Activists say some 65 percent of the city's residents have fled because of the fighting, and those who have stayed behind have little access to food and other essential goods.

Negotiations led by Kilo, an independent, long-time opponent of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, began 15 days ago and ended with a weekend accord between the Free Syrian Army (FSA) military council and the Kurdish popular committees.

"The FSA signed on behalf of all rebel groups except (jihadist) Al-Nusra Front, which did not take part in the last round of fighting. Still Al-Nusra took part in the talks and guarantees the agreement will not be broken," Kilo said by phone.

Kilo also said Ghuraba al-Sham, the second-most powerful Islamist rebel group after Al-Nusra in the area, supported the agreement.

The most critical point in the pact was the "complete withdrawal of military forces from and displays of arms in the city".

"There are very few fighters left in Ras al-Ain now," Kilo said.

Kurdish fighters and rebels meanwhile agreed to join forces against troops loyal to Assad.

"We unite our energies in the battle of dignity against a bloody, authoritarian regime to build a free Syria in which all members of society can exercise their legitimate rights," said a statement issued on Sunday.

The rebels were represented by Colonel Hassan al-Abdullah of the FSA Military Council and Fahd al-Gaad of the Islamist Al-Nusra Front, and the Kurds by Juan Ibrahim of the popular defence committees, Mohammed Saleh Attia of the Kurdish National Council and several representatives from the Supreme Kurdish Authority.



'There are very few fighters left in Ras al-Ain now'

North and northeast Syria are home to most of the country's two million-strong Kurdish minority.

They have engaged carefully with the uprising against Assad, but have also resorted to arms to keep the rebels out of their regions, for fear of attracting the violence that has engulfed much of the country.

Rebels have frequently accused the Kurds of cooperating with the regime after government troops withdrew from their areas early on in the revolt without violence.

Sunday's agreement is therefore a significant step, said Kilo, though he admitted "any accord in the world can suffer violations".

Just one month ago, the Ras al-Ain branch of the Kurdish National Council had called on the Syrian opposition to intervene over the fierce rebel incursion.

"We felt we must do something to end this foolishness," Kilo said.

"We told the (two sides) we can make a win-win situation ... All combatants agreed to retreat from the city and fight the regime together," he said.

A Kurdish activist from Ras al-Ain said the Kurdish parties were hopeful that the main opposition Syrian National Coalition would ensure the rebels honour their side of the bargain to allay residents' fears.

"Hostilities ended between the two parties a week ago and since then things have been calm," the activist, who gave his name as Havidar, said via Skype. "There have been no confrontations following the agreement."

But a prominent Kurdish anti-regime dissident said by phone that the agenda of radical Islamists in Syria meant fighting could erupt again at any time.

"Ghuraba al-Sham believe all Kurds are pro-regime and not Islamic enough for their taste," said Massoud Akko.

"Either side can break the agreement at any moment," he warned, after taking part in the talks leading up to the accord.

"The FSA military council is not strong in the area, and its leadership has made contradicting statements in the past. From my point of view, this accord is empty." □

JUSQU'OUÛ IRA L'AKP ?

Turquie : la dérive islamiste

Au pouvoir depuis dix ans, de plus en plus autoritaire, le Premier ministre Erdogan impose au pays un tournant conservateur, puritain et intolérant

DE NOTRE CORRESPONDANTE

Avant d'attaquer une descente tout schuss, les skieurs de la station de sports d'hiver du mont Erciyes, au cœur de l'Anatolie, pourront bientôt s'en remettre à Allah. Une mosquée de trois étages et de 1 200 places est en construction en bordure de pistes. Les justiciables turcs, de leur côté, ont depuis le mois de janvier la possibilité de choisir une avocate voilée pour les défendre, ce qui est une révolution dans un pays où les tribunaux étaient jusqu'à il y a peu des bastions ultralaïques.

Les symboles de l'islam sont de plus en plus visibles dans l'espace public turc. Au pouvoir depuis une décennie, confortés par une troisième victoire électorale en juin 2011, les islamistes modérés du Parti de la Justice et du Développement (AKP) multiplient les réformes conservatrices en invoquant le respect des valeurs morales et familiales de leur électorat. Un vent de puritanisme souffle de plus en plus fort en Turquie.

L'humour des « Simpson », par exemple, ne plaît plus au Haut Conseil de l'Audiovisuel turc. Dans l'un des épisodes, Dieu encourage des jeunes à s'enivrer lors du réveillon de la Saint-Sylvestre, et Ned Flanders se transforme en tueur en série, croyant obéir à un ordre divin alors qu'il s'agit d'un mauvais tour d'Homer, son indémodable voisin. Pour avoir passé ces séquences qui « tournent en dérision » Dieu et nuisent au développement des enfants, la chaîne CNBC - e s'est vu infliger une amende de 22 600 euros. La célèbre famille américaine n'est pas la seule à subir ce nouvel ordre rigoriste. Le Premier ministre turc, autoroproclamé grand censeur, a appelé la justice à sévir contre « le Siècle magnifique », qui s'inspire de la vie intime de Soliman I^{er}. Cette série, dont

se régalaient les Turcs chaque semaine ainsi que des millions de téléspectateurs dans quarante pays, doit son succès aux intrigues amoureuses du sultan dans son harem. Mais, pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan, montrer ainsi son « ancêtre » batifoler alors qu'il a « passé trente ans de sa vie à dos de cheval » est inacceptable.

Les déclarations politiques sur le parvis de la mosquée le vendredi sont devenues monnaie courante. Le chef du gouvernement surveille comme le lait sur le feu son projet architectural sur la colline de Çamlıca, qui surplombe le Bosphore. Déjà surnommé « mosquée du sultan Erdogan », l'édifice pourra accueillir 30 000 fidèles, « sera visible de tout Istanbul », et ses six minarets, les plus hauts du monde, dépasseront ceux de Médine. Les députés sont également gagnés par cette frénésie bâtisseuse : une loi prévoit de doter les salles de théâtre et les universités de salles de prière. En revanche, en décembre, le Parlement a une fois de plus refusé d'accorder le statut de lieu de culte aux endroits où les Alevis, une minorité de 15 millions de membres, pratiquent leur religion. Etant musulmans, ils doivent aller à la mosquée, selon la déclaration de la Grande Assemblée, qui perpétue ainsi la discrimination subie par les Alevis depuis l'Empire ottoman. Des haut-parleurs appelant cinq fois par jour à la prière ont été installés dans leurs villages.

En 2008, le Parti de la Justice et du Développement avait été condamné pour « activités antilaïques » et avait échappé de peu à une interdiction. Depuis, toutes les institutions, de l'armée à la justice, sont passées sous les fourches caudines du gouvernement. Débarrassé de contre-pouvoirs, celui-ci a désormais les coudées franches. Est-il en train de mettre en place son « agenda caché » pour transformer la république laïque en une république

islamique, comme le proclament certains de ses opposants ? « La finalité n'est pas la charia mais davantage de valeurs conservatrices dans l'espace public, relativise Mustafa Akyol, musulman libéral auteur de "l'Islam sans extrêmes". La question est de savoir jusqu'ouù l'AKP ira. »

Sans surprise, l'alcool est une des premières victimes de la croisade morale des autorités. La semaine dernière, la compagnie aérienne publique Turkish Airlines a confirmé la suppression des boissons alcoolisées en classe affaires sur la plupart de ses lignes intérieures. La classe éco n'y avait déjà plus droit. Dans la foulée, les passagers de huit destinations internationales, comme l'Iran ou les pays du Golfe, ont également été mis d'office au jus d'orange. Vins, bières et liqueurs sont régulièrement frappés par une hausse des taxes. Une bouteille de raki, la boisson nationale anisée, coûte désormais près de 30 euros, une somme énorme pour les Turcs. A Ankara, dans les repas officiels, se servir un verre de vin, lorsqu'il y en a, est devenu un geste politique alors que, jadis, ne pas boire d'alcool pouvait coûter une promotion.

La personnalité du Premier ministre, surnommé le « Poutine turc » par ses détracteurs, est la clé de voûte de cette évolution. Le nouvel homme fort qui murmure à son oreille s'appelle Bekir Bozdag, vice-Premier ministre et théologien de formation. Son entourage s'est modifié au fur et à mesure que son discours politique se radicalisait. Les conseillers européens ont disparu du premier cercle depuis que le virage nationaliste a enterré le projet d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne. Et il n'y a plus beaucoup de volontaires pour modérer l'autoritarisme de Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Sa vision des femmes les réduit à un rôle de génitrice. « Faites au moins

DATES

1923 Fondation de la République par Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

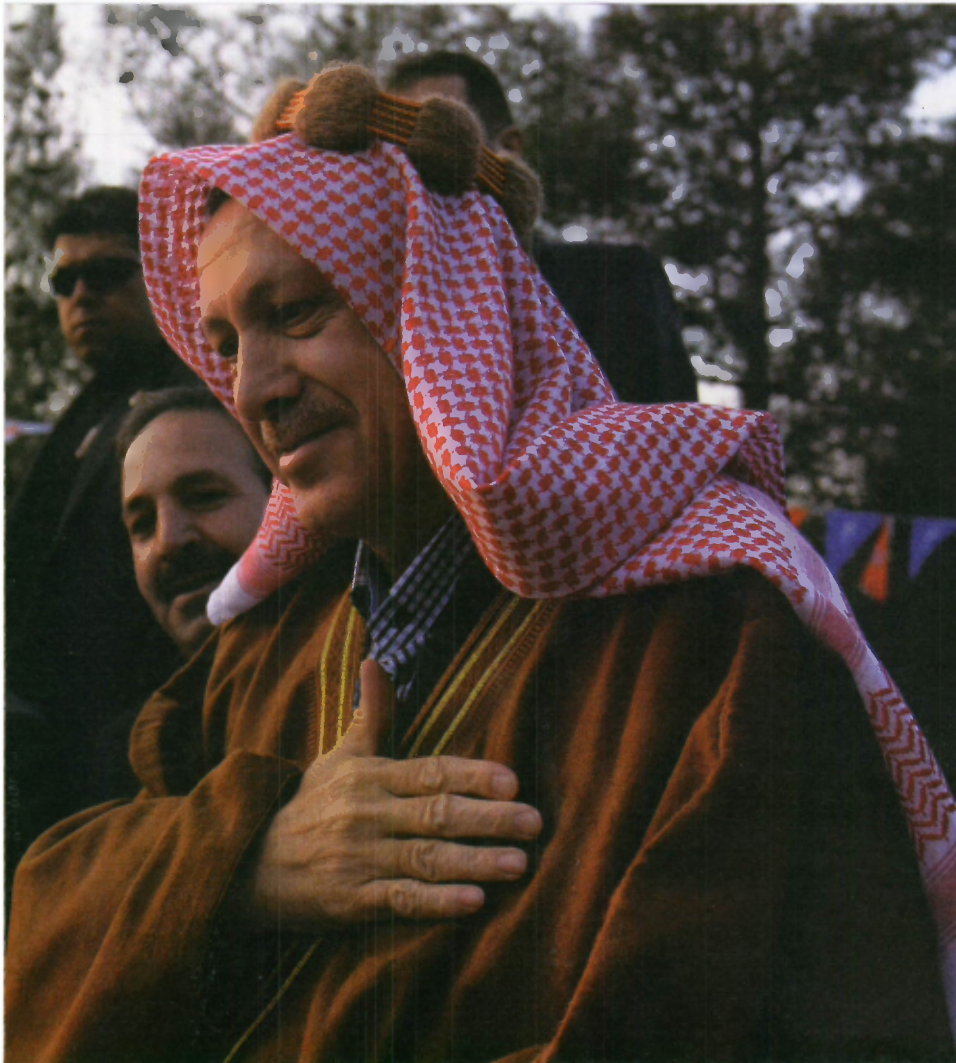
1960-1971-1980 Coups d'Etat militaires.

1997 L'armée renverse le gouvernement dirigé par le Premier ministre islamiste Necmettin Erbakan.

2005 Ouverture des négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne.

2008 L'AKP est condamné pour « activités antilaïques ».

2011 L'AKP remporte les élections législatives pour la troisième fois consécutive depuis 2002.



trois enfants», serine-t-il. Et, lorsqu'au printemps dernier il compare l'avortement à un « meurtre », l'interdiction de celui-ci est aussitôt évoquée par ses ministres. Les manifestations pour défendre un droit obtenu en 1983 et les résultats de sondages défavorables à sa suppression ont finalement eu raison des vellétés législatives. « Il n'y aura pas d'interdiction, mais l'accès à l'avortement et à la contraception est rendu de plus en plus difficile, décrypte Pinar Ilkkaracan, cofondatrice de l'association Femmes pour les Droits fondamentaux des Femmes. En 2011, 37 des 43 plantings familiaux qui pratiquaient des avortements et fournissaient un moyen de contraception gratuitement ont été fermés, ceux qui sont encore ouverts ne font plus d'avortement. » Selon un projet de loi concocté en catimini inais que la presse a détaillé, les femmes devront,

pour avorter, obtenir l'aval d'un conseil d'experts et seront obligées d'écouter les battements cardiaques de l'embryon.

L'Education nationale a également intégré la ligne fixée par le Premier ministre, qui a déclaré que sa mission était de former une « jeunesse religieuse » et non pas « droguée ». En plus du cours de religion hebdomadaire, obligatoire, qui se limite à un enseignement de la foi sunnite – le rite majoritaire en Turquie –, le nouveau programme prévoit un enseignement optionnel de la vie de Mahomet et du Coran. L'accès aux *imam hatip*, des écoles initialement destinées à la formation des imams mais fréquentées majoritairement par les filles de familles conservatrices, a été facilité. Ces établissements sont désormais ouverts aux élèves dès l'âge de 9 ans, et les restrictions d'entrée à l'université pour leurs diplômés ont été levées.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan en habit traditionnel, décembre 2012

Résultat, les inscriptions sont en forte hausse. Il y a désormais 1 808 écoles *imam hatip*, selon le ministre de l'Education. Et, en septembre dernier, de nouveaux établissements de ce type ont remplacé des écoles d'enseignement général. Dernière annonce, fin décembre, l'introduction de questions sur la religion dans le concours d'entrée à l'université.

En fait, l'AKP n'a pas démocratisé l'appareil d'Etat, il l'a mis au service d'une autre idéologie. Le Diyanet, par exemple, a été conçu en 1924 pour placer la religion sous le contrôle de l'Etat laïque. Cette administration chargée des affaires religieuses et rattachée au Premier ministre salarie les imams, qui sont des fonctionnaires, et rédige les prêches du vendredi. Cette tutelle était fortement critiquée par les islamistes tant qu'ils étaient dans l'opposition. Non seulement le Parti de la Justice et du Développement n'a pas supprimé le Diyanet mais il en a fait l'une des institutions les plus puissantes du pays. « Son budget a quasiment triplé en dix ans et représente le double de celui du ministère de la Santé, détaille Samim Akgönül, professeur au département d'études turques de l'Université de Strasbourg. Il donne son avis sur tous les sujets de société, prête ses fonctionnaires à tous les ministères, notamment à celui de l'Education nationale, qui peut leur faire occuper la fonction de professeur principal... »

Les classes pieuses ont longtemps été opprimées par l'armée, partisane d'une laïcité autoritaire, et par les kémalistes – gardiens de l'héritage du fondateur de la république – qui détenaient les postes clés des institutions. « Maintenant que les conservateurs ont le pouvoir, ils continuent de prendre leur revanche de façon haineuse, dit encore Samim Akgönül. L'AKP va réussir à former une élite très conservatrice et peu tolérante. » Jadis, l'« insulte à la mémoire d'Atatürk » pouvait conduire en prison, aujourd'hui c'est le blasphème qui est condamné. Fazil Say, pianiste de renommée mondiale, a comparé sur Twitter un islamiste à un « pou » et à un « bouffon ». Cet artiste à l'athéisme revendiqué encourt une peine de dix-huit mois de prison pour avoir « insulté les valeurs religieuses d'une partie de la population ».

LAURE MARCHAND

Is Abdullah Öcalan a double agent working for Turkish intelligence against his own PKK?

BY Palash R. Ghosh
<http://www.ibtimes.com>

The name Abdullah Öcalan may not sound familiar to most people, but is known to everybody in Turkey. For a few months in early 1999 he even made international headlines, when the Kurdish independence leader turned up in Rome, where he provoked a diplomatic brouhaha as the guest of an uneasy Italian government -- before fleeing to Kenya and eventually being captured there by Turkish agents.

The Turks were after him for a reason: He was, at the time, the country's number one public enemy. The 64-year-old co-founder of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is widely blamed for tens of thousands of deaths, of both civilians and soldiers, arising from the Turkish state's multi-decade war against Kurdish nationalists in the southeastern part of the country.

The Kurds, a separate ethnic group related to Iranians, have been seeking for a long time to form an independent state.

Since his arrest, Öcalan has been incarcerated at the Imrali island prison in the Sea of Marmara -- up until recently he was the sole inmate in the facility. He was sentenced to death, but that was later commuted to life imprisonment after the Ankara government eliminated capital punishment as part of its bid to join the European Union (a process that is still ongoing).

Over the past 14 years, the world has changed dramatically for both Öcalan -- called "Apo" ("uncle") by his legion of admirers -- and the Kurds. While the PKK still wages a periodic campaign against the Turkish state from armed camps across the border in northwestern Iraq and Iran, the Kurds of Turkey -- representing at least 20 percent of the population -- have gained some civil and political rights, thereby compromising the PKK's radical and violent agenda.

Even Öcalan has called for an end to the violent insurgency and for a focus on a political solution to the ancient Turk-Kurd conflict.

Late last year, Turkish media reported that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) -- a longtime adversary of the Kurds -- directed his senior intelligence officials to reach out to the jailed Öcalan in order to commence some kind of peace dialogue between Ankara and the PKK.

Quite a surprising turnaround, given that in 2012 Erdogan had ordered Turkish jet fighters to bombard PKK bases in Iraq, killing scores of Kurdish guerrillas.

Murat Yetkin, a columnist for Turkey's Hürriyet Daily News, commented that talks with Öcalan would have been "unthinkable" just a few years ago.

"But now the majority of the people, Turks and Kurds, are giving silent consent to the process, hoping for an end to the violence," Yetkin wrote.

Specifically, Öcalan has been talking to Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT), and his aides. In connection with these preliminary negotiations, PKK guerillas have temporarily offered to lay down their arms.

However, in the complex, serpentine world of Turkish political intrigue, not everything is as it seems; indeed, whose side is Öcalan really on?

Questions about Öcalan's true loyalties and motivations have floated for many years, even among his Kurdish brethren. Some critics have accused Öcalan of working in league with MİT.

Writing in KurdishAspect.com in 2007, a columnist named Sosun Welat explicitly accused Öcalan of serving as an agent for MİT and blamed him for perpetrating a "systematic betrayal and treason to [the] Kurdish cause."

"Öcalan played a double agent role for years," Welat wrote. "His rise and fall was well planned and



Hostilities between Turkey and the Kurdish militant group PKK has escalated, while the group's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, remains imprisoned for life.(Photo: Reuters)

controlled by [the] Turkish state. He and PKK provided cover for [the] Turkish state to ... destroy [the] Kurdish heartland, its way of life, culture, language."

Welat and other observers believe that prior to the forming of the PKK, in the mid-1950s, Turkish intelligence infiltrated Kurdish activist groups and helped establish their Communist credentials, thereby providing a legitimate excuse to oppress Kurds in the name of preventing the spread of Communism (which would, of course, please Turkey's then-new allies in Western Europe and the U.S.).

Then in the 1970s, so the theory goes, Turkish intelligence facilitated the emergence of PKK, hoping to use it as a counterforce that would weaken other Kurdish insurgents. "MİT planned to split Turkish leftist groups by creating (its own) Kurdish leftist group, PKK -- but apparently it got out of control," said Emrullah Uslu, an analyst at the Jamestown Foundation and a professor of political science and international relations at Yeditepe University in Istanbul.

According to at least one eyewitness, Öcalan's ties to MİT even go back fifty years.

Late last year, Turkish journalist Mehmet Avni Özgürel, who himself has been linked to MİT, told local media that he saw Öcalan

attend meetings at a foundation operated by Turkish intelligence in the 1960s, when the future PKK leader was still a student.

Özgürel's allegations about Öcalan's unsavory arrangements with non-Kurdish organizations were painted with a fairly wide brush. He told the Aksiyon weekly magazine that besides his links to MİT, Öcalan had relationships with senior political figures in foreign countries, including the U.S., UK and Greece.

"I don't want to elaborate on this [Öcalan's relations with other countries] now because one day I want to prove it with documents that show where and with whom Öcalan met," Özgürel told the publication.

He may have good reason to keep quiet; some Turks believe that one investigative reporter lost his life probing alleged connections between Öcalan and MİT.

Özge Mumcu, the daughter of journalist Uğur Mumcu, who was killed by a car bomb in 1993, told reporters in 2010 that her father died because "he probably was investigating evidence proving that Öcalan was a MİT agent." (Mumcu's murder has never been solved.)

Mumcu was planning to meet with a retired prosecutor named Baki Tug to discuss Öcalan's ties to MİT but he never made that appointment. According

➔ to Memcu's son, Tug knew of Öcalan's MİT relationship because in 1972 Tug was asked by Turkish intelligence to release Öcalan from jail after he was arrested for participating in a pro-Kurdish, anti-government boycott. Öcalan was freed without explanation, within weeks.

About a month after Mumcu's death, another man who was investigating the same links, Gen. Eşref Bitlis, died in a mysterious plane crash.

Yeditepe University's Uslu said that Öcalan has admitted "that when he was a student at Ankara University he had contacts with MİT. But Öcalan argues that 'MİT wanted to use me but I used them instead.'"

But MİT isn't the only organization seemingly anathema to Kurdish interests that Öcalan has been linked to. Some of Öcalan's closest associates allege that he is controlled by the Ergenekon ter-

rorist organization, also known as the "deep state" -- a secretive group comprising Turkish military officers, right-wing nationalists, and others who seek to topple the government of moderate-Islamist Prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

According to Öcalan's former right-hand-man, Hüseyin Yıldırım, "Öcalan controls the PKK and the 'deep state' controls Öcalan." As Yıldırım sees it, "Öcalan made an agreement with the 'deep state' at İmralı [prison] to save his life."

Following this line of reasoning - which may be little more than a conspiracy theory -- the Kurdish-Turk conflict is now being directed by Ergenekon in order to foment social chaos, thereby precipitating a military coup.

Political scientist Uslu speculated that in 2004, entities related to the "deep state" may have asked the PKK to resume its violent activi-

ties, after a ceasefire, despite the fact that Kurds in Turkey had gained new rights as the government sought to enter the EU.

In order to protect himself from accusations of serving as a double agent, Öcalan has also claimed that the PKK was infiltrated by Ergenekon. But his former colleague Yıldırım says that Öcalan is trying to throw up a smokescreen.

"This is in fact putting his own crimes on the shoulders of others," Yıldırım told Taraf. "This is an effort to protect himself."

Meanwhile, today Kurdish PKK guerrillas remain encamped over the border in Iraq, awaiting a victorious battle against Turkish forces that seems more and more distant by the day.

Indeed, Uslu contends that MİT continues to penetrate the PKK through a new organization called Koma Civakên Kurdistan (KCK)

-- leaders of whom are actually MİT agents.

But it is a mystery what Turkish intelligence can gain at this point in keeping Öcalan alive and continuing to support its alleged "enemy," the PKK.

"This problem has turned into a political and sociological crisis," Uslu concluded. "I don't know what the MİT is aiming for with this, but it is no secret that MİT does not want to harm Murat Karayılan, the current acting head of the PKK."

As it apparently does not have any interest in hurting Öcalan.

Indeed, Öcalan remains safely locked away in İmralı prison with secrets that he will likely take to the grave, the same place many of his former friends and current enemies will have to leave their suspicions about him. ●

REUTERS

Kurdish militant leader to call ceasefire in 1 month - media

ISTANBUL, February 25, 2013 (Reuters)

* **Ocalan signalled Turkish captives could be released by PKK**

* **Peace plan envisages withdrawal of militants from Turkey**

* **More than 40,000 people killed in conflict**

JAILED KURDISH militant leader Abdullah Ocalan will call a ceasefire at the Kurdish New Year next month, moving forward a peace process with Turkey aimed at ending his group's 28-year-old insurgency, media reports said on Monday.

Ocalan, head of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), has been holding peace talks with Turkey since last October and met a delegation of Kurdish politicians at the weekend to discuss the negotiations.

At those talks, on the island of İmralı near Istanbul, he signalled the PKK may release Turkish state officials it is holding, according to a statement read by the politicians. Several newspapers on Monday reported details of a timetable to end a conflict which has killed more than 40,000 people.

"Ocalan will make a ceasefire call to the PKK at Newroz for a lasting peace," the liberal Radikal daily said, referring to the March 21 Kurdish New Year. The Yeni Safak newspaper, which is close to the government, carried a similar report. They did not disclose their

sources.

Only a few Turkish officials are familiar with details of the negotiations and MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) who visited Ocalan on Saturday only conveyed the brief statement from the PKK leader.

"My health is good but I am getting old. I want to see peace before I die," the Milliyet daily quoted Ocalan, 63, as saying in İmralı where he has been held in virtual isolation since his capture in 1999.

The timetable for ending the conflict envisages a gradual withdrawal of several thousand militants from Turkey after the ceasefire call and Yeni Safak said the PKK fighters would begin leaving Turkey between March and June.

In return the government is expected to push through reforms extending the rights of a Kurdish minority numbering around 15 million out of a total population of 76 million. Last week the government sent to parliament a penal reform bill which is expected to result in the release of some of the thousands of Kurdish activists who are currently on trial accused of links to the PKK.

The PKK, which is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union, launched its insurgency in 1984 with the aim of carving out a Kurdish state in southeast Turkey but it has moderated its goal to limited self-rule.

A 21-page record of the talks between Ocalan and the BDP was delivered to the PKK leadership in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq on Saturday night and Ocalan's 61-page peace plan was being delivered to the PKK separately, Yeni Safak said.

It added that the PKK was expected to release several security personnel and officials which it holds this week, while its fighters in Turkey were ordered to keep away from military areas. There was no immediate comment from the PKK.

The PKK holds nine people, including soldiers and civil servants, according to the Diyarbakir-based Human Rights Association. ●

Syrie: Michel Kilo, le chrétien à l'origine de la trêve entre kurdes et islamistes

Opposant syrien de longue date, Michel Kilo a organisé des négociations entre les combattants kurdes et islamistes qui se déchiraient depuis trois mois près de la frontière turque. Focus sur ce dissident

Par Marie MICHELET

Il n'a pas hésité à négocier avec les rebelles islamistes de Jabhat al-Nosra, groupe officiellement considéré par Washington comme une organisation terroriste. Après plus de trois mois de violents combats dans la ville de Rass al-Aïn située à la frontière turque, rebelles et miliciens kurdes ont accepté dimanche 17 février d'observer une trêve, grâce à la médiation du célèbre opposant chrétien Michel Kilo.

Présents dans le nord de la Syrie, les Kurdes se sont engagés très prudemment dans la contestation et ont dans plusieurs localités instauré des zones autonomes. En empêchant les rebelles de pénétrer dans leurs régions, afin d'éviter d'éventuelles représailles du régime, ils ont fréquemment été accusés par les insurgés de coopérer avec le pouvoir. Des heurts violents ont ainsi éclaté en novembre dernier à Rass al-Ain, une ville de 55 000 habitants en majorité kurde, quand les rebelles islamistes ont voulu s'en emparer pour contrôler un poste-frontière vital vers la Turquie.

Aujourd'hui, selon les militants de la ville les combats ont cessé. Grâce à Michel Kilo. Il a réuni à la même table, des membres du Conseil militaire de l'Armée syrienne libre, des représentants de Jabhat al-Nosra et



d'autres factions djihadistes ainsi que des représentants des combattants kurdes. Après plus de quinze jours de négociations les différentes parties sont parvenues à un accord dont la clause principale stipule "le retrait complet des forces militaires et des armes de la ville" désertée depuis par ses habitants. Plus encore qu'une trêve, rebelles et combattants kurdes auraient conclu une alliance puisqu'ils ont depuis décidé de combattre ensemble les forces loyales à Bachar al-Assad "afin de construire une Syrie libre dans laquelle tous les citoyens pourront exercer leurs droits légitimes", selon le communiqué annonçant la trêve.

Opposant de longue date

Le journaliste et écrivain marxiste a lui-même pris l'initiative d'organiser ces négociations. Un rôle nouveau pour cet intellectuel défenseur de la laïcité. À 72 ans Kilo mène de longue date un combat con-

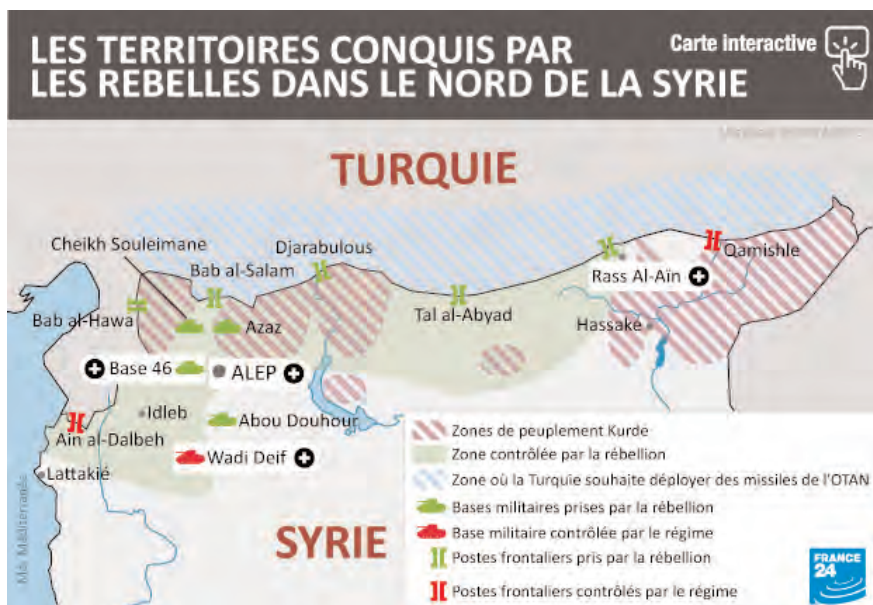
tre le régime syrien, dont il connaît les pires facettes. Né en 1940 à Lattaquié sur le littoral syrien, Michel Kilo a étudié en Égypte et en Allemagne. Un temps journaliste pour le quotidien libanais al Safir, il n'a eu de cesse de dénoncer l'occupation syrienne au Liban. Son positionnement politique éloigné de toute influence religieuse, a toujours séduit largement l'opinion publique syrienne au-delà des clivages communautaires. Membre de la coordination du changement national et démocratique (CCND), il a été emprisonné à deux reprises, la première fois par le régime d'Hafez al-Assad de 1980-1983, la seconde par celui de son fils Bachar, peu après le Printemps de Damas entre 2006-2009. À sa sortie de prison, il annonce qu'il poursuivra comme par le passé ses activités politiques en Syrie, renforçant l'admiration qui lui est vouée.

Malgré l'aura dont il bénéficie en Syrie, il reste peu connu en Occident. L'une des raisons est qu'il ne fait pas partie de la Coalition nationale syrienne considérée par les pays occidentaux comme l'organe le plus représentatif de l'opposition. Depuis le début du soulèvement, il n'a eu de cesse de mettre en garde contre la militarisation du conflit en fondant notamment le 15 avril 2012 au Caire le Forum démocratique qui regroupe des opposants de la société civile syrienne.

"Kilo place l'intérêt de la Syrie au-dessus de tout le reste"

De prime abord, sa démarche à Rass al-Aïn a de quoi surprendre. La communauté internationale n'a eu de cesse de mettre en garde contre la montée de l'islamisme en Syrie depuis l'apparition il y a plusieurs mois de factions de combattants djihadistes très présents dans le nord de la Syrie. Il y aurait une vingtaine de groupes distincts et non coordonnés agissant sur tout le territoire. Le plus connu d'entre eux, Jabhat al Nosra - Front de la victoire - qui a déjà revendiqué la plupart des attentats meurtriers qui ont secoué à plusieurs reprises Damas et Alep, a été placé par Washington sur sa liste des organisations terroristes. Mais cela n'a pas découragé cette bête noire du régime Assad.

Pour Fabrice Balanche spécialiste de la Syrie et directeur du Groupe de recherches et d'études sur la Méditerranée et



le Moyen-Orient (GREMMO), l'initiative de Kilo lui ressemble. Il le décrit comme un homme "honnête, qui voudrait faire avancer la modernité en Syrie". "Il place l'intérêt de la Syrie au-dessus de tout le reste", confie-t-il à FRANCE 24. Depuis le début de la révolte et alors que l'opposition représentée par le Conseil national syrien, puis par la Coalition nationale syrienne s'y est longtemps refusée, Michel Kilo préconisait ainsi de dialoguer avec Moscou. "Les Russes veulent trouver un partenaire au sein de l'opposition qui garantit leurs intérêts: rester influents au Moyen-Orient, garder leur position de partenaire privilégié avec l'armée syrienne", expliquait-il dans un

entretien accordé au Figaro début avril 2012. "Nous devons leur offrir une alternative à Bachar", affirmait-il.

Dédiaboliser Jabhat al-Nosra

Aujourd'hui, les combattants islamistes sont à ses yeux un interlocuteur incontournable. "C'est la première fois que je leur parlais mais ce ne sera pas la dernière. Nous voulons éviter les combats au sein du peuple syrien", a-t-il affirmé à l'AFP.

Depuis ces pourparlers concluants, Kilo tente par voie de presse de dédiaboliser les combattants islamistes de Syrie. "Cessez d'abuser les gens en leur faisant

peur avec les extrémistes", disait-il dans un entretien accordé à la BBC, interpellant ceux qui mettent en garde contre la montée de l'islamisme en Syrie. "Je suis entré en Syrie. J'y ai rencontré des membres de la Jabhat al Nusra et du Liwaa Ahar Souria - Brigade des hommes libres de Syrie, que vous qualifiez de fondamentalistes. Moi qui suis chrétien, ils m'ont serré dans leurs bras, ils m'ont embrassé, ils m'ont entouré d'honneurs", a-t-il poursuivi, cité par le site d'information syrien d'opposition All for Syria. "La Syrie ne s'oriente pas vers le fondamentalisme. Il s'agit d'une situation temporaire due à l'influence de la croyance dans la lutte contre le régime", a conclut Kilo. ●



Manifestation à Istanbul contre les pourparlers de paix avec le PKK

ISTANBUL, 24 février 2013 (AFP)

PLUSIEURS centaines de manifestants ont protesté dimanche à Istanbul contre les discussions de paix avec les rebelles kurdes engagées depuis décembre par les autorités turques, a constaté un journaliste de l'AFP.

"Nous voulons du respect pour les Turcs" et "Nous voulons du respect pour les martyrs", a scandé la foule en remontant l'avenue de l'Indépendance, la principale artère commerçante de la métropole.

Les soldats tombés au combat contre la rébellion du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sont qualifiés en Turquie de martyrs.

"Nous sommes les soldats de Mustafa Kemal", ont également clamé les manifestants, faisant référence au fondateur de la Turquie moderne, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

La manifestation est survenue au lendemain d'une visite de députés kurdes au chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, sur l'île-prison d'Imrali (nord-ouest), à l'issue de laquelle le dirigeant rebelle a qualifié d'"historique" le processus de paix en cours.

"Suspendez Imrali, pendez ce bâtard d'Öcalan", ont crié les manifestants, dont plusieurs faisaient de la main le signe du loup, signe de ralliement des Loups Gris, une organisation d'extrême droite radicale.

De nombreux protestataires ont également appelé à la démission le gouvernement du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, issu de la mouvance islamiste) et son Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Les autorités turques ont lancé en décembre des discussions de paix avec le PKK, qui se sont concrétisées par plusieurs entretiens entre Abdullah Öcalan et des responsables du renseignement turc, ainsi que deux visites de députés kurdes à Imrali.

L'objectif est faire déposer les armes au PKK au printemps.

Une précédente tentative de négociation avec le PKK en 2009 avait échoué. ■



La Turquie responsable de l'escalade de la violence en Syrie (chef kurde syrien)

PARIS, 26 février 2013 (AFP)

LA TURQUIE est responsable de l'escalade de violences en Syrie, où elle instrumentalise des groupes de combattants jihadistes, a accusé mardi à Paris le chef de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), le principal parti kurde syrien.

"La Turquie a fait dévier la révolution de son cours, a participé à sa militarisation. Elle a soutenu des groupes jihadistes", a accusé Saleh Muslim, du PYD, branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes en Turquie), lors d'une conférence de presse à Paris.

"L'Etat turc s'ingère dans les affaires syriennes. Il essaie d'influencer la situation dans le sens de ses intérêts. Il a négocié son soutien à l'opposition syrienne à la condition que les Kurdes soient écartés du mouvement", a accusé Saleh Muslim.

"Parmi les groupes de jihadistes, il y en a, comme le front al-Nosra, qui disposent de bases d'entraînement en Turquie", a affirmé M. Muslim.

Le leader du PYD estime également que "l'opposition de l'extérieur", réunie notamment au sein de la Coalition nationale syrienne, a des "relations étroites avec le régime turc et ne veut pas traiter avec le conseil suprême kurde", embryon de l'administration dans les zones kurdes contrôlées par le PYD.

Les régions kurdes de Syrie, que le PYD appelle "l'ouest du Kurdistan", bénéficient d'une relative autonomie depuis le début de la contestation en mars 2011 qui a tourné à la guerre civile.

Depuis l'été 2012, des combattants organisés par comités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du PYD, assurent la sécurité des zones kurdes.

Saleh Muslim assure toutefois que le PYD va coordonner ses actions avec l'armée syrienne libre (ASL), le principal groupe de l'opposition armée en Syrie, pour faire chuter le régime de Bachar al-Assad.

Il entretient toutefois le flou sur ces actions en se disant "contre la militarisation du conflit". "Ce que nous faisons est différent, il s'agit d'autodéfense", assure-t-il.

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.

A côté de l'ASL, différents groupes de combattants, salafistes ou jihadistes, majoritairement sunnites, combattent l'armée syrienne de Bachar al-Assad.

Dans une interview au quotidien français Le Monde, le chef de l'ASL, le général Salim Idriss, déplore que les pays occidentaux "semblent attendre que notre pays soit intégralement détruit pour venir à notre secours".

Le général Idriss dément recevoir des armes du Qatar et d'Arabie saoudite et affirme que la rébellion achète des armes "à des marchands spécialisés et qui rentrent en Syrie par l'Irak".

"Tout le reste de notre arsenal provient de l'armée syrienne", ajoute-t-il en référence à des armes "récupérées sur des sites" dont les rebelles ont pris le contrôle ou "achetées" à des officiers de l'armée syrienne loyaliste.

Citant des responsables occidentaux, le New York Times rapportait mardi que l'Arabie Saoudite a acheté en Croatie des armes pour équiper les rebelles syriens.

Les armes appartenant à "un stock secret" datant des conflits dans les Balkans dans les années 90 ont été fournies aux rebelles syriens via la Jordanie en décembre, selon le journal. ■

Russia renews Kurdish bonds

By M K Bhadrakumar

An unusual visitor arrived in Moscow last Tuesday - President of the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq Massoud Barzani. The Kurds played it up as Barzani's "first official visit" to Russia. Moscow called it a "working visit" but nonetheless embellished the official trappings - President Vladimir Putin received him at the Kremlin on Wednesday.

The historical poignancy is self-evident. According to folklore, 60 years ago Massoud's father and legendary Kurdish leader, Malla Mustafa Barzani stood outside the Kremlin's Spassky Tower, and knocked on the massive gates crying out, "This is the Kurdish people knocking." He had fled to Russia with thousands of Kurdish fighters following the collapse of the so-called Republic of Mahabad in 1947. Joseph Stalin decided to provide him asylum in Russia, where he lived for 12 years.

The son visited Mustafa's Moscow residence on Tuesday. True, Russia's dealings with the "mountain Kurds" of northern Iraq go back in time and 60 years ago it was already suffused with politics of the most intriguing kind. There, national interests intersected with regional politics, while the geopolitical maneuverings of great powers imparted much drama to the goings-on.

Massoud Barzani's visit signifies that Moscow is playing a high-stakes game. Aside, the great unresolved Kurdish national question, at least half a dozen templates overlap - Iraq and Syria's fragmentation, Turkey's "neo-Ottomanism", Iran's surge as regional power, the "Arab Spring", the United States' waning regional influence and of course post-Soviet Russia's "return" to the Middle East.

Barzani's arrival in Moscow coincides with a defining moment in Iraq's history. Kurdish nationalism is rising to a crescendo, drawing inspiration from the Arab Spring. The regional autonomy of Iraqi

Kurdistan, which began in the early 1990s when the US-led "no-fly zone" was imposed on Iraq following the Gulf War, is leading to independence.

Waving the red flag

According to the Kurdistan version, Barzani proposed to discuss "a number of important issues concerning relations between Russia and the Kurdistan region and the political developments in Iraq and the region in general". Barzani's delegation included his son and key security adviser, Masrouf Barzani, and top officials in charge of oil and gas, construction and housing.

Given the current state of US-Russia relations, it might be tempting to view Moscow's dealings with Barzani as an "anti-American" impulse. But Moscow and Washington are probably on the same side of history here. Neither wants Iraq's break-up. The recrudescence of the al-Qaeda groups in Iraq worries both.

Again, Iraq's known oil reserves are estimated to be 143.1 billion barrels with at least the same estimated to lie in unexplored regions of the country. Iraq may at some point outstrip Saudi Arabia, which has reserves of 296.5 billion barrels. Suffice to say, Iraq's stability impacts on the world oil market. Also, the tsunami of Shi'ite empowerment draws inspiration from Iraq.

But the Russian and American interests and priorities also diverge. Washington is obsessive about the Iraqi government's proximity with Tehran. Washington nurtured Barzani through the Saddam Hussein era but at the same time, has not reconciled with its current loss of influence in Baghdad, which is critical to its ability to influence a range of regional issues, especially in the Persian Gulf region.

The US ambassador Francis Ricciardone in Ankara recently waved the red flag at Turkey's dalliance with Kurdistan. He said:

Turkey and Iraq have no choice



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, right, and Massoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, before a working breakfast at the Russian Foreign Ministry, Moscow.

but to pursue strong ties if they want to optimize the use of Iraq's resources and export them via Turkey. If Turkey and Iraq fail to optimize their economic ties, the failure could be worse than that. There could be a more violent conflict in Iraq and [the chances of] disintegration of Iraq could be [strengthened]. And that would not be good for Turkey, the United States, or anybody in the region.

Same side of history

Indeed, if Iraq unravels, the debris is bound to fall far and wide. The US and Russia have a common interest in preventing the country's fragmentation. But in the prevailing power dynamic in the region, Moscow's capacity to do something about it is, arguably, better than Washington's.

Russia has developed warm ties with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government in Baghdad and hopes to steer through (despite robust US opposition) a US\$4 billion arms deal that the Iraqi leader negotiated during his visit to Moscow in October. Indeed, Lukoil of Russia is doing roaring business with Baghdad, having secured lucrative terms for developing the West Qurna 2 megafield in southern Iraq, where two-thirds of Iraq's known oil reserves lie.

After a meeting with Barzani in Moscow on Tuesday, Russia's energy leviathan Gazprom said,

"The parties discussed the prospects for bilateral cooperation deepening in the oil and gas sector. In particular, the meeting addresses potential interaction between Gazprom and Kurdistan's oil and gas companies in geological exploration, development and operation of oil and gas fields."

Barzani was quoted as disclosing while in Moscow on Tuesday, "We are satisfied with Gazprom Neft's work in the [Kurdistan] region. New agreements have been reached with his Russian company in recent days."

However, playing Baghdad against Erbil or vice versa isn't in the Russian interest. Putin telephoned Maliki recently for a second time in the past two months and probably kept the latter informed Moscow's intentions in fostering ties with Barzani. Weaning Barzani away from Turkey's embrace will be one key Russian objective and Maliki would appreciate it.

Both Moscow and Baghdad would view with extreme disquiet Turkey's grandiose visions of offering itself as an "energy hub" connecting the Middle East with Europe, especially the recent reports that Turkey is planning to construct a new gas pipeline from Kurdistan for feeding the proposed Nabucco pipeline supplying gas to western Europe.

However, the bottom line is =>

⇒ that Russia would be loathe to see the fragmentation of Iraq, as its implications could be very serious for the security of the Trans-Caucasus. Equally, Russia would restrain Barzani from getting involved with the Turkish shenanigans in Syria. Barzani told the Russian media that he would focus on possible ways to solve the Syrian conflict.

An untenable waltz

What works to Moscow's advantage is the great trust deficit between Barzani and Ankara, which is a legacy of the violent history of the region and cannot easily be wished away. On the contrary, only Turkey can offer a vital lifeline to Kurdistan, which is land-locked and whose econo-

mic viability as a separate entity independent of Baghdad's control depends solely on its access to the world energy market.

Besides, there is also a congruence of interests here between Ankara and Barzani. Ankara is in need of the relatively cheap oil supplies from Kurdistan to meet its growing requirements of energy. In 2011 Turkey met 60% of its gas requirements through imports from Iran and around 20% from Russia. In addition, the US Energy Information Administration estimates that Turkey has been importing about half of its crude oil from Iran.

But Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran have become problematic lately following its decision to

deploy the US missile defense system. The Turkish strategy has all along been to cultivate Barzani and his family, which has vast business interests especially in exporting oil from Kurdistan, based on the calculus that incrementally Barzani would be work with Ankara on regional security issues.

On the contrary, Barzani's bonhomie with the Turks has never gone down well with the Kurdish "peshmerga". Also, Syrian Kurds resent his interference. The recent illness of Jalal Talabani (Iraqi president and the leader of the rival People's Union of Kurdistan) has introduced new uncertainties. Tehran and Ankara may end up sponsoring the rival Kurdish groups and there is a strong possibility of intra-Kurdish

violence erupting in the period ahead.

Barzani is skating on thin ice and he seems to realize that his Turkish waltz may soon become untenable. He has annoyed Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus. Meanwhile, while in Moscow, Barzani could witness that Russia has moved to the center stage on an intra-Syrian political dialogue. The meeting of the Russia-Arab Forum took place in Moscow on Wednesday. □

Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar was a career diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service. His assignments included the Soviet Union, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Germany, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kuwait and Turkey.

Orlando Sentinel February 25, 2013

Iraq says Turkey rejects Kurd export pipelines

Ahmed Rasheed / Reuters

BAGHDAD - Turkey has told Iraq it will reject any extension of oil and gas pipelines from Kurdistan without the approval of the Baghdad government, Iraq's oil minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi was quoted as saying by the state media network on Monday.

Iraq's Arab-led central government and the Kurdistan regional government (KRG), run by ethnic Kurds, are in a long-running dispute over how to exploit the country's crude reserves and divide the revenues.

Baghdad says it alone has the authority to control export of the world's fourth largest oil reserves, while the Kurds say their right to do so is enshrined in Iraq's federal constitution, drawn up following the U.S.-led invasion of 2003.

"Turkey has officially informed Iraq it rejects extending oil and gas export pipelines from the Kurdistan region to pass through Turkey without approval from federal government," the network quoted the minister as saying.

The Turkish energy ministry declined to comment on the statement.

Kurdistan's Minister for Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami said earlier this month the autonomous region was pressing ahead with plans to build its own oil export pipeline to Turkey, despite objections from the United States, which fears the project could lead to the break-up of Iraq.



Iraqi Kurdish Minister for Natural Resources Haurami speaks during a news conference in Arbil (Azad Lashkari Reuters, / February 7, 2013)

Resource-hungry Turkey has heavily courted Iraqi Kurds, straining ties with the Iraqi central government.

Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki's media advisor Ali al-Moussawi said Turkey's rejection of the pipeline would help enhance bilateral relations between Ankara and Baghdad, which have deteriorated over the past year.

"The government welcomes Turkey's move, which will significantly help to stabilize the region and also strengthen relations between central government and Kurdish region," Ali al-Moussawi added.

Ankara has been locked in a war of words with Maliki, a Shi'ite, since December

2011, when he ordered the arrest of his Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, who took refuge in Kurdistan before fleeing to Turkey.

GAS LICENSE DELAY

Iraqi Kurdistan halted oil exports through the Baghdad-controlled Iraq-Turkey pipeline in December in a dispute over payments to oil companies operating in the autonomous region.

In early January, Kurdistan began exporting crude oil directly to world markets through Turkey, further angering Baghdad, which threatened action against the region and foreign oil companies working there to stop "illegal" crude exports.

A broad energy partnership between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan ranging from exploration to export has been in the works since last year.

Amid uncertainty over the detail and timing of the deal, Turkey's energy watchdog EPDK on Friday again delayed a decision on whether to award a license for Turkish firm Siyah Kalem to import gas from Kurdistan.

Siyah Kalem had sought extra time from Turkey's Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK) for its application due to difficulties in reaching agreement with the northern Iraqi administration. It was given until the end of 2013.

Turkish officials initially indicated that they thought a purchase agreement signed with the KRG was legally sufficient to allow imports into Turkey. But officials later confirmed any such agreement would need to be approved by Baghdad. ■

Kurdish rebel leader warns of disaster if no Turkey peace

By Daren Butler - Reuters

ISTANBUL: Emerging briefly from solitary confinement in his island prison near Istanbul, Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan said Turkey could become as troubled as Syria or Iraq if it does not take steps to end his group's decades-old insurgency.

A paunchy and greying Ocalan, cut off from the world since his capture in 1999, told a delegation of pro-Kurdish MPs visiting him at the weekend of his plans to end a 28-year conflict that has killed 40,000 people.

Ocalan has been negotiating the outlines of a peace deal with Turkey's government from his cell since he intervened to end a hunger strike by jailed Kurdish militants last year.

With a Turkish intelligence official listening in the background, he spoke for two hours on Saturday about Turkey, the changing Middle East and his political beliefs, relishing attention he has long been denied.

"We must establish a new democratic republic in line with the new world and the new Middle East. The Kurdish problem can only be solved with Turkey's democratisation," the 63-year-old Ocalan said, his words relayed to Reuters by parliamentarian Altan Tan.

"If it is not solved, these problems in Turkey will deepen... God forbid, we will end up like Iraq or Syria," Tan related him as saying, calling for a new constitution and democratic reforms to avoid such a "disaster".

Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) took up arms in 1984 with the aim of carving out a Kurdish state, but has since moderated its goal to autonomy. It is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union.

Turkish forces clashed with PKK fighters last month, killing four of the rebels after they killed a police officer in the province of Mardin.

The Turkish military has continued attacks on PKK forces in southeast Turkey and northern Iraq in recent weeks and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has said the military operations will continue until the PKK lay down their arms.

Turkish warplanes bombed PKK targets in northern Iraq on Feb. 20 and Kurdish media said military operations targeting the militants were conducted in southeast Turkey near the border with Iraq this week.

Yet Ankara will need the help of Ocalan to end a conflict which has des-



Hundreds of Turkish nationalists march on February 24, 2013 on Istiklal Avenue to protest at the resumption of peace talks with Kurd rebels, saying they sullied the memory of soldiers killed in the near three-decade conflict. AFP PHOTO /OZAN KOSE

tabilised Turkey and stunted development in its mainly Kurdish southeast.

It is a remarkable change of fortune for a man dubbed "baby killer" and "monster of Imrali" by nationalists and reviled by most Turks, who hold him responsible for 28 years of bloodshed.

CRITICAL WEEKS AHEAD

For the three visiting Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputies, he cut a very different figure. Wearing a grey cardigan, grey corduroy trousers and white sport shoes, the moustachioed Ocalan was "very polite and addressed everybody respectfully", Tan said.

For 14 years, Ocalan has had little contact with the outside world besides newspapers delivered to his cell. His lawyers have been denied access to him for 1-1/2 years but his brother has been allowed occasional visits.

He also has contact with several other inmates sent to join him in 2009. More recently, he was given access to television.

Ocalan views efforts to draft a new constitution for Turkey as an opportunity to secure the devolutionary reforms long demanded by his group.

His draft peace plan has been sent to the BDP and the PKK leadership in northern Iraq and Europe. The leader of the BDP, which received the "road map" on Tuesday, said all sides needed to respond swiftly.

"The next two or three weeks will be very critical for the process," BDP leader Selahattin Demirtas told reporters late on Monday, saying the government now needed to take "practical, concrete, confidence-building steps".

"This is not a process that can be put on Mr. Ocalan's shoulders alone. Above all the government, but also all groups in favour of peace and solution, society and the public must give strong support for the process," he said.

Ocalan could call a ceasefire at the

Kurdish New Year on March 21 and, in a first step, the PKK may release some 16 Turkish captives it is holding by this weekend, according to media reports. Such details were not discussed in Saturday's meeting.

The plan would then see the withdrawal of several thousand PKK fighters from Turkey to their bases in northern Iraq before their ultimate disarmament in exchange for reforms boosting the rights of a Kurdish minority which makes up around 20 percent of a population of 76 million.

Erdogan's government has presented to parliament a penal code reform which could lead to the release of many Kurdish activists jailed over alleged PKK ties. Among other reforms, Kurdish politicians seek Kurdish language education and a constitution boosting equality.

Only a few people have been privy to details of the negotiations between Ocalan and Turkey's intelligence agency, the MIT. MP Pervin Buldan said they had to wait for the arrival of MIT officials before starting Saturday's talks.

Ocalan had been talking with an MIT official when they were taken in to meet him and they shook hands before beginning their talks, Buldan said.

She gave Ocalan a pen and Muslim prayer beads as a present. The third deputy, leftist film-maker Sirri Sureyya Onder, gave him a parliamentary report on coup investigations.

Conveying her excitement ahead of the talks, Buldan had described the visit in a message on Twitter as "the most meaningful, important and valuable of my life".

"We spoke for around two hours. As we left he signed on an empty piece of paper in my hand: 'With my love and respect, Abdullah Ocalan'". ■

Kurdish peace process will start after PKK militants leave Turkey, PM Erdoğan says

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet

Turkey's peace process will effectively begin after armed militants from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leave Turkey, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said in the wake of the second parliamentary visit to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

"This process will de facto begin after terrorists go to a second country from the border," Erdoğan said.

"Then there's Makhmour Camp, this issue should be resolved after discussions with the United Nations because that camp is effectively an incubation center [for the PKK]. And there's Kandil Mountain [where the PKK has its main bases] on the other side. This is an issue we have to resolve with the northern Iraqi administration. But all of those are the steps that will be taken after [the PKK militants] in Turkey leave our country," Erdoğan said.

Erdoğan's remarks, which were originally delivered to journalists on board a plane en route from Dubai to Ankara late Feb. 24, were reported a day after by Anatolia news agency in Q&A format.

The premier reiterated assurances that military operations would not be conducted against PKK militants during their withdrawal from Turkish soil. "The previous mistakes will not be made. We will take necessary precautions," Erdoğan said, tacitly referring to the military operations in 1999 that killed over 500 PKK militants as they were withdrawing from Turkey after a call from Öcalan following his capture.

Though launching the new process means taking risks, Erdoğan said they were



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan. REUTERS photo

determined to maintain the momentum. "Unless we take that risk, we cannot come to a conclusion. If other active layers of society share this risk with us – the media is very important here – our progress will speed up."

Suggesting that the recent peace process should be defined as the "resolution process" instead of the "İmralı process" – in a reference to İmralı island, where Öcalan is serving a life sentence – Erdoğan said Kurds living in both eastern and western Turkey supported the process.

BDP meeting

Meanwhile, the Peace and Democracy Party's (BDP) Parliamentary Group Administrative Board met yesterday at the party headquarters for a briefing by BDP Deputy Parliamentary Group Chair Pervin Buldan, Istanbul deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Diyarbakır deputy Altan Tan about their Feb. 23 trip to see Öcalan.

The three traveled to İmralı after the government permitted their visit as part of the resolution process which involves

government officials' recently launched talks with Öcalan to convince the PKK members to disarm. The Feb. 23 visit was the second after BDP MP Ayla Akat Ata and independent deputy Ahmet Türk visited the PKK leader on Jan. 3.

BDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş is expected to reveal Öcalan's messages to the public today during his speech at the BDP's parliamentary group meeting, while Erdoğan is also expected to make his first comments on the content of the Feb. 23 meeting.

At the same time, the National Security Council (MGK), which brings together the country's top civilian and military leaders, will hold a regular bimonthly meeting during which the ongoing "peace process" is likely to be discussed at length.

CHP rebuffs Öcalan's expression of 'captives'

Separately, main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Deputy Chair Faruk Loğoğlu rebuffed yesterday Öcalan's decision to describe the detained suspects in the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) case as "captives."

"The state has captives in its hands. So does the PKK. The PKK has to treat its captives very well. I hope they will rejoin their families in the shortest time," Öcalan said in a letter read out by Buldan following their Feb. 23 visit.

"Turkey has no captives in its hands. There are people who committed crimes, who are involved in terror crimes or armed terror activities," Loğoğlu said during a press conference in Parliament.

The KCK is the alleged urban wing of the PKK. □



Turquie: Öcalan évoque la libération de prisonniers par le PKK

ISTANBUL, 23 février 2013 (AFP)

LE CHEF EMPRISONNÉ des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, Abdullah Öcalan, a dit samedi espérer une libération prochaine des prisonniers détenus par son organisation, dans un communiqué lu par une députée kurde au retour d'une rencontre samedi avec le dirigeant dans sa prison.

"L'État (turc) détient des prisonniers de guerre. Le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) a aussi des prisonniers de guerre. Le PKK doit se comporter correctement avec ces prisonniers, j'espère qu'ils retrouveront leurs familles au plus vite", a affirmé M. Öcalan dans cette déclaration lue par la députée Pervin Buldan.

Mme Buldan, la vice-présidente du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), la principale formation kurde de Turquie, a lu ce communiqué devant des journalistes à Istanbul, au retour d'une visite à M. Öcalan sur l'île-prison d'İmralı (nord-ouest), où celui-ci purge une peine de prison à vie

Il s'agissait de la deuxième visite d'élus kurdes au chef du PKK depuis le lance-

ment par les autorités turques de pourparlers de paix avec la rébellion, en décembre.

M. Öcalan a qualifié cette rencontre avec les députés de "pas historique".

"Nous vivons un processus historique. Toutes les parties doivent agir avec beaucoup d'attention et de sensibilité pendant ce processus", a ajouté le leader rebelle.

Il n'a pas en revanche donné de détails sur les modalités de l'éventuelle libération des personnes détenues par le PKK, et notamment s'il envisageait un échange de prisonniers avec l'État turc.

Mme Buldan, qui était accompagnée à İmralı par deux autres députés du BDP, a indiqué que son parti donnerait "en temps voulu" davantage d'explications sur la teneur des entretiens de la délégation avec M. Öcalan.

Le PKK détient, selon les médias turcs, plus d'une vingtaine de personnes -- pour la plupart des fonctionnaires-- enlevées dans le sud-est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de kurdes et principal théâtre des affrontements avec l'armée.

Cette deuxième visite était attendue depuis plusieurs semaines comme un signe de la poursuite des pourparlers, après le meurtre à Paris le 9 janvier de trois militantes du PKK, qui avait fait craindre un abandon de ces négociations.

Le déplacement a été autorisé jeudi par le ministère de la Justice.

Une première délégation s'était rendue à İmralı le 3 janvier. ■



Homs, le 11 février. Le quartier de Baba Amr, cœur de la révolte, est aujourd'hui totalement dévasté et déserté par la plupart de ses habitants. SARKIS KASSARJIAN/AFP

À Homs, la révolte se fige dans une fausse torpeur



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Ce matin-là, la route Damas-Homs est quasi déserte, une fois franchi le barrage de l'armée régulière à Qaboun - une banlieue rebelle à la sortie de la capitale, régulièrement bombardée par l'aviation, comme en témoignent les bâtiments en ruines de part et d'autre de l'autoroute. Même désolation quelques kilomètres plus loin à Duma et Adra. Puis la voie, longue de 160 kilomètres, s'étire dans le désert, et les barrages disparaissent. Sauf à hauteur de la ville d'al-Nabk, à partir de laquelle les rebelles ont attaqué l'armée et coupé l'autoroute quelques jours plus tôt. La cité, et ses minarets que l'on aperçoit sur la droite, est entre les mains des insurgés. À Yabroud, au contraire, une trêve a été conclue entre les rebelles qui gèrent la ville et l'armée qui se tient à distance. « Vous allez être surpris en arrivant à Homs, la ville est plus calme que Damas », lance Randa, notre voisine dans le taxi. Celui-ci dépasse un camion en route pour Tartous, le port sur la Méditerranée qui approvisionne Damas et l'intérieur du pays. Quelques rares autobus et des Mercedes noires d'agents de la police secrète foncent vers Homs. Sur le terrain central, les portraits de Bachar el-Assad sont toujours là. Le régime tient à garder le contrôle de cet axe stratégique reliant Damas au pays alaouite, son bastion.

Un an après avoir essayé les pires bombardements de la révolte, la vie à Homs a repris son cours. Au moins les deux tiers des quartiers sont repassés sous le contrôle de l'armée. Les magasins et les administrations sont ouverts. Contrairement à Damas, l'ancienne « capitale de la révolution » n'est pas en état de siège, même si de temps à autre des bombardements s'y font entendre. Aux barrages, les soldats ne paraissent pas nerveux. L'un des check points est même tenu par des jeunes filles en armes, boudinées dans leur tenue léopard, les cheveux ramassés sous leur béret. Les partisans du ré-

Un an après l'écrasement de Baba Amr, les deux tiers de la ville sont repassés sous le contrôle de l'armée syrienne. Profitant du calme relatif, des familles y retournent. Mais la réconciliation reste un vain mot.



gime les appellent « les lionnes d'Assad ». Elles font partie de la nouvelle « Armée de défense nationale » que le régime cherche à bâtir en structurant ses milices. « Ce sont des filles ou des mères de martyrs », glisse l'une d'elles. Elles sont en grande majorité alaouites, la confession du président. Provocation contre les insurgés sunnites ou défi au machisme oriental ? Sans doute un peu des deux.

Le bureau du gouverneur est situé peu après leur

barrage, sur la rue Palmyre. Ahmed Mounir Mohammed, un ancien militaire, s'est installé dans le bâtiment normalement dédié aux services techniques de la ville. Le jour de notre visite, il y préside une réunion ouverte à 300 notables et opposants de la province de Homs, dans le cadre du programme de « réconciliation nationale » mis en place par le régime. De la poudre aux yeux pour les rebelles armés, qui refusent d'y participer. Mais aussi, sans doute, une tentative de renouer un tissu social déchiré par deux ans de violences meurtrières. « *Même si cette réconciliation n'a que dix chances sur cent de réussir, nous devons tout faire pour arrêter la destruction de notre pays* », affirme l'évêque grec catholique Michel Naaman. « *Le monde doit nous aider, mais sans livrer d'armes, ni au gouvernement, ni aux rebelles* », insiste ce Syrien formé à la Sorbonne.

La réunion, qui a duré cinq heures, a été houleuse, surtout lorsqu'on a évoqué les prisonniers. Six cents ont été libérés, selon le gouverneur. Mais il en resterait encore plus de 1 500 sous les verrous. Ahmed Mounir Mohammed assure qu'il est en contact avec des chefs de groupes armés. Ces derniers mois, quelques-uns auraient même accepté de déposer les armes pour rejoindre le programme de réconciliation, mais ils ne représentent qu'une goutte d'eau dans l'océan. « *La réunion n'a pas été très fructueuse* », nous affirme le lendemain le ministre de la Réconciliation, Ali Haïdar, dans son bureau à Damas. « *Les gouverneurs représentent l'État, c'est ça le problème, reconnaît cette personnalité non membre du parti Baas au pouvoir. Les opposants ont besoin de voir d'autres gens en face d'eux quand on leur parle de réconciliation.* »

La vieille ville toujours assiégée

À Homs, entre 3 000 et 4 000 rebelles restent assiégés dans la vieille ville. Impossible de s'approcher de leurs quartiers de Khaldiya et Hamidiya. Parmi eux figurent des civils, dont 80 chrétiens qui ne peuvent s'échapper que par les cavités souterraines dont Homs est truffée. « *J'en suis sorti en mai avec une chemise et un pantalon* », se souvient le père Naaman. À l'intérieur, la situation humanitaire serait catastrophique. La dernière fois qu'une aide alimentaire et médicale leur est parvenue, c'était il y a bientôt quatre mois. L'armée a massivement bombardé les environs de Khaldiya pour en faire une zone tampon et, ces dernières semaines, elle a encore renforcé son étai autour des insurgés. Quitte à susciter la colère des familles de rebelles du quartier martyr de Baba Amr, relogées dans celui d'al-Waher, à l'ouest de Homs. « *La situation y est explosive, une étincelle suffirait pour que le feu reparte* », prévient un de ses habitants, gorgé de rancœur. Après l'écrasement de Baba Amr, il y a un an, beaucoup de rebelles ont quitté Homs, mais d'autres ont rejoint un groupe armé, ici même ou autour d'une ville gagnée à l'insurrection.

Dans son bureau, sous l'inévitable portrait du raïs, le gouverneur insiste sur les réunions qu'il organise entre jeunes sunnites de Baba Amr ou d'Inchaat et leurs voisins alaouites d'Akrama. Pour quels résultats ? Même si la population est fatiguée par deux ans de conflit, la confiance n'existe plus. Alors « *parfois les rebelles sortent de leurs caches pour attaquer les positions de l'armée ou des bâtiments gouvernementaux* », regrette Samira, une chrétienne du quartier d'al-Mahatta. « *Nos voisins musulmans sont pour l'opposition, ajoute cette dentiste, mais nous ne parlons pas de politique avec eux.* » La station d'essence, non loin de chez elle, ne connaît pas de files d'attente, contrairement à celles de Damas. Située sur le périphérique dans un

On a tous perdu. Tout le monde est affaibli. Alors un dialogue, avec ou sans conditions, peu importe, mais il faut sauver la Syrie

PÈRE NAAMAN

quartier repassé sous contrôle loyaliste, la raffinerie est de nouveau opérationnelle. Profitant du calme de ces derniers mois, des centaines de familles sont rentrées chez elles. D'autres d'Alep ou de Deir ez-Zor, où les combats font rage, sont même venues se réfugier à Homs.

Les environs aux mains des rebelles

On en rencontre quelques-unes rue al-Karama, la principale artère de Baba Amr, où un immense portrait d'Assad cache un immeuble en ruines. Des tapis et des vêtements pendent aux balcons d'habitations éventrées. Une femme voilée attend, avec sa fille dans une poussette. Mais les langues ont du mal à se délier et les apparences sont trompeuses. Dès que l'on s'enfonce dans les ruelles, le spectacle rappelle la destruction de Berlin, après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. « *Si le calme règne aujourd'hui, c'est parce que l'armée a purifié tous ces secteurs des terroristes* », se réjouit une jeune alaouite. Entre la minorité du président et les sunnites, la haine demeure. Dans un de leurs quartiers, les alaouites n'ont pas hésité à ouvrir un « souk sunnite » où l'on retrouve à bons prix les objets volés par les miliciens prorégime dans les secteurs favorables aux insurgés. À Hamra, le voisinage de la mosquée Omar Abdelaziz reste sous très haute surveillance depuis qu'une voiture piégée a explosé. « *Ce fut une grande surprise pour nous* », lâche Samira, qui voulait croire à une cohabitation relancée. La veille, Amer, son mari est rentré en urgence de Damas, paniqué par un appel téléphonique. « *Un homme m'a appelé pour me dire qu'il occupait avec quatre autres combattants ma ferme à 5 km de Homs. Il m'a dit que si jamais je prévenais l'armée, ils feraient sauter ma maison. C'est quoi cette révolution ?* », se lamente cet employé de banque.

Les rebelles, qui tiennent les villes voisines de Rastan et Talbisseh, ont besoin de telles bases arrière pour espérer reprendre Homs. Entre eux et le régime, tout dialogue paraît impossible. « *Oui, mais Rastan et Talbisseh sont des cas spéciaux, minimise le gouverneur. Ailleurs, comme à Talkalakh près de la frontière libanaise, la trêve fonctionne. Mais Rastan compte beaucoup d'officiers qui ont fui l'armée. Ils sont irrécupérables.* » Il faut avoir la foi du charbonnier pour croire avec le père Naaman qu'une « *brise d'espoir* » s'est levée depuis que Moaz al-Khatib, le président de la Coalition nationale, principal groupe d'opposition, a appelé à des négociations avec le régime afin de stopper les tueries. « *On a tous perdu. Tout le monde est affaibli, constate avec amertume le père Naaman. Alors un dialogue, avec ou sans conditions, peu importe, mais il faut sauver la Syrie.* » Une population à genoux. Des rebelles farouchement hostiles à des négociations avec un régime qui ne paraît pas, lui non plus, décidé à céder. À Homs, le calme trompeur risque de ne pas durer. ■

La CIA m'a trompé

Il y a dix ans, le secrétaire d'Etat américain prononçait à l'ONU son discours sur les armes de destruction massive en Irak. A l'occasion de la publication de son livre "J'ai eu de la chance" aux Editions Odile Jacob, il revient sur cet épisode et sur la politique étrangère de son pays

UN ENTRETIEN EXCLUSIF AVEC COLIN POWELL

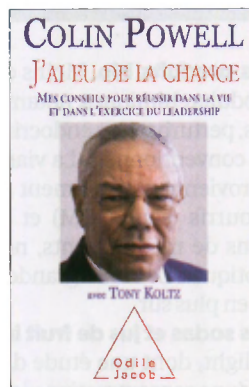
Le Nouvel Observateur Le 5 février 2003, vous avez prononcé à l'ONU votre « célèbre » discours sur les armes de destruction massive en Irak, dans lequel vous énonciez des « preuves » qui, pour la plupart, se sont révélées inexactes. Dix ans plus tard, vous écrivez dans votre nouveau livre que ce discours restera une « tache » dans votre carrière et que vous vous souvenez de ce 5 février aussi « profondément » que du jour de votre naissance. Pourquoi ?

Colin Powell Il est très dur d'oublier un tel moment surtout quand on vous en parle chaque jour pendant dix ans ! Depuis que j'ai découvert qu'un grand nombre d'informations que l'on m'avait fournies étaient inexactes, je ne cesse de me demander : qu'aurais-je dû faire pour éviter cela ? Pour ma défense, je dirais que je n'ai eu que trois jours pour préparer cette présentation et que nous avions un très grand nombre de documents à analyser.

Pourquoi seulement trois jours ?

Le problème était le suivant : le président Bush m'a demandé de présenter nos preuves à l'ONU à partir d'un texte rédigé par un conseiller du vice-président Cheney. Or, quand j'ai demandé aux services de renseignement des éléments concrets pour étayer certaines parties de ce document, ils m'ont répondu qu'ils n'avaient jamais vu ces informations-là ! Il fallait donc repartir de zéro et écrire un autre discours. J'ai dit au président que j'avais besoin de plus de trois jours, mais il m'a répondu qu'il avait déjà annoncé au monde la date de ce discours à l'ONU, qu'il ne pouvait pas la reculer.

Le fait que le texte écrit par le bureau du vice-président était si étrange ne vous a-t-il pas alerté ? Ne vous êtes-vous pas dit : on essaie de me manipuler ?



Non, pas vraiment. J'étais déçu mais je ne paniquais pas : la CIA allait m'aider. Je suis allé au siège de l'Agence, et grâce aux informations fournies par son patron, George Tenet, j'ai pu bâtir le discours. Remarquez que j'y ai mis moins d'éléments controversés que le président, Condi Rice ou Rumsfeld avaient déjà utilisés publiquement et à plusieurs reprises. Le bureau de Cheney, par exemple, insistait pour que je parle des liens supposés entre Saddam Hussein et Al-Qaïda, que le vice-président avait souvent évoqués. Mais, comme les éléments n'étaient pas probants, je ne l'ai pas fait. J'ai également très peu parlé du programme nucléaire.

Mais sur le reste aussi, le chimique et le biologique, les « preuves » étaient fausses.

Oui, mais ce n'était pas un mensonge délibéré de ma part. Je croyais à ce que je disais. Tout le monde, le président, les membres du gouvernement et le Congrès y croyaient. Le président m'a choisi parce que j'étais le plus crédible vis-à-vis de la communauté internationale, mais, encore une fois, je ne faisais que transmettre ce que les seize agences de renseignement disaient. Et je pense que si vous aviez été à ma place et que vous aviez vu les documents que l'on m'a présentés vous auriez cru à tout cela, vous aussi.

Evidemment je pensais que la CIA avait vérifié ses informations. Aussi, quand, quelques semaines plus tard, l'Agence nous a dit que l'« information » sur les laboratoires biologiques ambulants venait d'Allemagne et qu'aucun agent américain n'avait interrogé la source principale de ce canular, j'ai été stupéfait.

George Tenet, le patron de la CIA, vous avait-il dit que les Allemands l'avaient prévenu du manque de fiabilité de cette source ?

Non et je ne sais toujours pas ce qu'il savait en réalité. Plus tard, il est apparu qu'un certain nombre de personnes dans les services de renseignement étaient au



PAGES RÉALISÉES PAR FRANÇOIS ARMANET
ET GILLES ANQUETIL

courant de cette alerte des Allemands et d'autres mises en garde. Ils ont dit : « *Nous sommes allés voir Tenet mais il ne voulait pas nous écouter.* » Est-ce vrai ? Je ne sais pas. En tout cas, lors de ma présentation à l'ONU, je voulais qu'il soit à mes côtés, que la présence du patron de la CIA signifie au monde que ce que je disais reflétait ses conclusions. Dix ans plus tard, Tenet n'a toujours pas reconnu que celles-ci étaient fausses ! Pas une fois, il a expliqué pourquoi ses services avaient écrit, par exemple, que Saddam Hussein avait des centaines de tonnes d'armes chimiques, « *dont la plupart avaient été fabriquées l'année passée* » alors qu'il n'en possédait pas un gramme !

Il y a quelques années, vous avez dit qu'une commission du Congrès devrait enquêter sur tout cela.

Passons à un autre sujet, voulez-vous ?

Dans votre livre, vous dites que les Etats-Unis sont toujours la nation « nécessaire », que voulez-vous dire ?

L'ancienne secrétaire d'Etat Madeleine Albright utilise l'adjectif « *indispensable* ». Je suis d'accord avec elle, mais « *nécessaire* » est un terme plus soft, moins arrogant. Quand il y a un problème dans le monde, au Moyen-Orient ou en Asie, on se tourne toujours vers les Etats-Unis. Prenez la Libye. C'était une bonne idée de laisser les Français et les Britanniques lancer l'opération militaire. Mais auriez-vous pu la mener à bien sans les Etats-Unis, leurs avions ravitailleurs, leurs missiles ? Je ne crois pas. Quand nos alliés veulent entreprendre quelque chose et n'ont pas tous les

COLIN POWELL

(ci-dessus lors de son « célèbre » discours à l'ONU, le 5 février 2003) a été chef d'état-major des armées américaines de 1989 à 1993 et secrétaire d'Etat de 2001 à 2005. Il vient de publier (avec Tony Koltz) chez Odile Jacob un nouveau livre : « *J'ai eu de la chance. Mes conseils pour réussir dans la vie et dans l'exercice du leadership* »

moyens pour le faire, les Etats-Unis sont la nation « *nécessaire* ».

Le second mandat d'Obama vient de commencer, quel est son problème numéro un en politique étrangère ?

Notre situation internationale est celle-ci : depuis la fin de l'URSS, il n'y a plus de puissance équivalente à la nôtre qui veuille nous attaquer. Les deux seules nations ayant la population et le potentiel économique de rivaliser avec les Etats-Unis sont la Chine et l'Inde. Mais aucun des deux Etats n'a la moindre intention d'être notre ennemie.

Même pas la Chine ?

Bien sûr que non, les Chinois possèdent 2 000 milliards de notre dette ! Comment voudraient-ils faire exploser tout cela ? Ils vont moderniser leur armée, tout faire pour protéger les îles qu'ils considèrent être les leurs, mais ils n'ont aucun intérêt à devenir notre ennemi. Il y a des questions internationales comme la Corée du Nord, la Syrie ou l'Iran. Ce sont des problèmes sérieux, mais aucun ne représente une menace pour la survie des Etats-Unis et son système démocratique, comme ce fut le cas de l'Union soviétique. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il faut les ignorer. Ils affectent nos alliés et amis. Et ils peuvent dégénérer en guerre comme au Mali ou en Syrie. Mais aujourd'hui les Américains sont concentrés sur les problèmes internes des Etats-Unis, le chômage et le déficit budgétaire surtout. Nous devons donc faire ce que nous pouvons pour aider nos alliés, mais le président sera très réticent à engager militairement notre pays dans des conflits régionaux.

Y compris en Iran ?

La position de la Maison-Blanche est que, dans ce dossier, aucun président ne peut renoncer à une option, quelle qu'elle soit. Ma conviction personnelle est qu'il y a des solutions diplomatiques au problème iranien. Je suis un vieux soldat qui a vu ce que le *containment* (politique d'endiguement) et la dissuasion peuvent accomplir. Les Iraniens n'ont pas encore d'arme nucléaire et, même s'ils en avaient, leur nombre serait très inférieur à la force atomique disponible de l'autre côté. Donc, je continue de penser que, même dans le cas de l'Iran, la dissuasion marche. D'ailleurs, regardez ce qu'a dit Ahmadinejad cet automne : pourquoi voudrais-je d'une arme atomique alors qu'en face ils en ont des dizaines de milliers ?

Après l'extraordinaire carrière qui a été la vôtre, que souhaitez-vous que l'on retienne de votre action ?

Que j'ai bien servi mon pays. Que j'ai travaillé à des traités qui ont éliminé de grandes quantités d'armes nucléaires ! Je voudrais que l'on n'oublie pas que j'ai toujours essayé d'éviter des guerres et toujours préféré la diplomatie pour régler les problèmes. Je pense que l'on se souviendra de moi à propos d'une doctrine militaire qui porte mon nom. Et puis je suis devenu le premier chef d'état-major noir et le premier secrétaire d'Etat noir des Etats-Unis. Malheureusement, on n'oubliera pas le discours à l'ONU, qui occupera une grande place dans ma nécrologie...

Propos recueillis à Washington par VINCENT JAUVERT

San Francisco Chronicle February 24, 2013

Doctor says Iraqi president speaking after stroke

By ADAM SCHRECK, Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi President Jalal Talabani is able to speak and understand people around him as he recovers from a stroke he suffered in December, a doctor responsible for his medical care said Sunday.

In an interview, Dr. Najmaldin Karim described the improvement in the president's health as encouraging. Karim is a neurosurgeon who is also governor of the Iraqi province of Kirkuk. He oversees Talabani's medical care when he is in Iraq, although the president is currently in Germany for treatment.

"He's improving. He's talking. He's conversing. He understands when he's spoken to. It's a good development," Karim said. "We're very encouraged and excited by this."

Karim said he is in daily contact with Talabani's German medical team. He is hopeful Talabani will be able to return to Iraq, but acknowledged that any decision rests with the doctors treating him in Europe.



"We'll have to just take it one day at a time," he said.

The 79-year-old Talabani was rushed to a hospital late on Dec. 17 after suffering a stroke. Few specific details have been released about his health, fueling intense speculation about the seriousness of his condition and his ability to continue with his job. He was flown to a Berlin area hospital for further treatment shortly after his condition was stabilized.

No images of Talabani have been released since he fell ill, and he has not been heard from personally.

Some Iraqi officials and Baghdad-based

diplomats have said he slipped into a coma shortly after the stroke happened, or was otherwise gravely incapacitated.

Talabani is overweight and has undergone several medical procedures in recent years, including heart surgery in 2008 and knee replacement surgery last year.

On Feb. 18, Talabani's office issued a statement saying the president continues to respond well to therapy. Two presidential officials reached Sunday declined to comment, saying that Karim is the only person authorized to discuss Talabani's condition.

The Iraqi presidency is a largely ceremonial role, with the prime minister acting as the head of government. But Talabani is seen by many Iraqis as something of a unifying statesman, and he has at times played an important role in mediating disputes among the country's ethnic and sectarian factions.

Talabani became ill at a particularly crucial moment in Iraqi politics. His stroke occurred while he was trying to calm an ongoing dispute between the central government and Iraq's Kurdish ethnic minority, from which he hails. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Sunni Muslims have been rallying for nearly two months against the Shiite-led government, increasing sectarian tensions nearly a decade after the U.S.-led invasion.

Daily Press February 27, 2013

Backers of Syrian rebels endanger Iraq: Iraqi minister

SUADAD AL-SALHY / REUTERS

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Turkish and Qatari support for Syrian insurgents is tantamount to a declaration of war against Iraq, which will suffer from the fallout of an increasingly sectarian conflict next door, an Iraqi Shi'ite politician said.

Hadi al-Amiri, transport minister and head of the formerly armed Badr Organisation, said Sunni Muslim Turkey and Qatar had stymied all efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict peacefully.

Iraq is calmer than in the communal bloodletting that killed tens of thousands in 2006-2007, but the war in neighboring Syria is straining its precarious sectarian balance.

Amiri accused Ankara and Doha, which support the opposition to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, of arming jihadi groups in Syria, where



Reuters - Hadi al-Amiri, an Iraqi member of parliament and head of a Shi'ite militia

many Sunni militants are fighting, including the Qaeda-approved Nusra Front, which has links to al Qaeda in Iraq.

"Presenting money and weapons to al Qaeda (in Syria) by Qatar and Turkey is a declaration of armed action against Iraq," Amiri told Reuters in an interview this week. "These

weapons will reach Iraqi chests for sure."

Sectarian-tinged unrest has been on the rise in Iraq. Tens of thousands of Iraqi Sunnis have staged protests against Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shi'ite-led government in their western stronghold of Anbar bordering Syria, and al Qaeda has

urged them to take up arms.

Al Qaeda-linked militants appear to be regrouping in Anbar's caves and valleys, with some moving into Syria to join the fight against Assad, whose Alawite sect springs from Shi'ite Islam.

Scores of Iraqi Shi'ite militants are also fighting in Syria alongside forces loyal to Assad, who is backed by Shi'ite Iran.

Amiri, whose Badr Organisation laid down its weapons in 2004, said he was against militias, criticizing the recent formation of a new Shi'ite militia named al-Mukhtar Army.

Some people in Baghdad's southwestern district of Jihad have received death threat leaflets signed by al-Mukhtar Army telling them to leave the mixed Sunni-Shi'ite neighborhood.

"Using militias again is a big mistake," Amiri said. "If we (Shi'ites) form militia and they (Sunnis) form militia, then Iraq will be lost."

KURDISH-SHI'ITE ALLIANCE

Turning to the Baghdad government's dispute ➤

➤ with autonomous Kurds over land and oil rights in the north, Amiri said this should not undermine traditional ties between Shi'ites and Kurds who were both oppressed under former strongman Saddam Hussein.

"This has nothing to do with

this deep strategic alliance. Technical problems have to be fixed based on the constitution and the oil and gas law," he declared.

Baghdad says it alone has the authority to control Iraqi oil exports, while the Kurds say their right to export from their autonomous northern region is

enshrined in Iraq's federal constitution, drawn up after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003.

New legislation to govern the world's fourth largest oil reserves has been caught up for years in a struggle over how to share power between Iraq's Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish factions, which has intensified

since U.S. troops withdrew a year ago.

"Frankly, we are in the federal government and the prime minister is serious about this issue," Amiri said. "He won't make a concession ... he is a stubborn and won't bargain". ■

the Atlantic

February 28, 2013

Another Problem in Syria: How Do Kurds Fit In?

A major Kurdish group opens talks with the leading Syrian opposition groups. Will this pave the way to a unified Syria after Assad?

By Jonathan Krohn
www.theatlantic.com

With the war in Syria about to enter its third year, many opposition leaders are looking toward the future of a unified Syria after the fall of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. One of the biggest questions facing a post-Assad Syria is what will become of the residents of western Kurdistan (commonly called "Rojava")—which comprises much of northern Syria—once the war is over? Long persecuted under the Assad regime, Syrian Kurds have spent the war protecting their own land rather than taking the battle directly to the government in Damascus. This has put them at odds with some opposition leaders who see the Kurds' actions as helpful to the Assad regime.

Now, however, Salih Muslim, the leader of the biggest Syrian Kurdish Party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), has opened up the possibility that people of Rojava might join the struggle of their fellow Syrians and work toward a more unified transfer of power in post-Assad Syria.

Muslim met with leaders of the Syrian National Coalition on Wednesday in Cairo to discuss joining the umbrella organization of opposition groups.

The PYD is the most powerful political party in Rojava but has so far abstained from allying with opposition forces. While it is openly opposed to Assad's Ba'athist regime—which stripped many Kurds of their rights—and supports his downfall, some Kurds also fought against various opposition groups. A handful of well-trained militia have, for the most part, been successful in keeping both sides of the conflict out of Rojava, but not without opposition forces labeling them as sympathizers of Assad.

The negotiations on Wednesday seemed both amicable and productive compared to this mixed past. "The meeting was to [get to] know each other better," said Muslim in an interview with Radio Sawa afterwards, adding that the goals of the meeting were for, "[President of the Syrian National Coalition] Moaz al-Khateib to listen to us, to listen to what we say directly, who we are, and who we represent."

These meetings come as much of the anti-Assad Coalition (excluding the Syrian National Council) has reversed their initial plan to boycott the Friends of Syria conference, which started Thursday. The conference will include an appearance by Secretary of State John Kerry, who announced an increase in aid to opposition forces.



Syrian Kurds hold flags and portraits of jailed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan during a protest in Derik, Hasakah on November 1, 2012. (Thaier Al-Sudani/Reuters)

Whether or not the PYD joining the Coalition would mean any American aid would go to Rojava as well as the front lines remains to be seen.

Before any such alliance can be brokered, however, Muslim insists that Arab leaders recognize the legitimacy of the Kurds.

"We are not satisfied with the language used by the Syrian National Council [a member group of the Coalition] and we are trying to help the Syrian National Coalition to avoid the same mistakes...Our priority is that we get a recognition for our existence in the constitution or at least written on a paper as a Kurdish people and as a part of the Syrian people."

This isn't the first time that members of the opposition have met with Kurdish leaders. Last summer leaders of the Syrian National Council met with the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, Mossoud Barzani, the Turkish Foreign Minister, and members of the Kurdish National Council. The PYD did not attend those negotiations.

In terms of military cooperation, Muslim points out that the Arab leaders have already brokered a deal with the PYD regarding the liberation of cities with mixed populations of Kurds and Arabs. But this doesn't mean that an arrangement with the Coalition would see Kurdish militias in Damascus: "Kurdish fighters won't go to Damascus to fight," Muslim said, quipping, "If each fighter liberated his city, Syria would be liberated by now."

Negotiations between Syrian Arabs and Kurds are a long way from over, but if Cairo is any indication, there is a place in Syria for discussion between the nations' two biggest ethnic groups as they both work toward the goal of a unified Syria.

"[W]e are away from drawing new borders in Syria or between us or the Arabs," said Muslim when asked about the possibility of an autonomous zone for Kurds in Syria like the one in Iraq, "[W]e didn't demand the partition now or in the past."

Whether or not a deal can be reached before the end of the conflict remains to be seen. ■

Iran talks breed faint hopes

ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

As nuclear negotiations resume, world powers temper their expectations

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

Talks between Iran and six world powers over its nuclear program resume here on Tuesday after a break of eight months, but there is a general atmosphere of gloom about their prospects for success, even if narrowly defined.

Since the last talks in Moscow in June, Iran has continued to increase its stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent, has begun to install a new generation of centrifuges and has not yet completed an agreement on inspection of suspect military sites with the International Atomic Energy Agency, a deal originally advertised as all but done last May.

With presidential elections in Iran scheduled for June, senior Western diplomats involved with these talks expressed skepticism that its chief negotiator, Saeed Jalili, would be willing to make compromises that could be portrayed as weakness at home.

Mr. Jalili is the personal representative of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, considered the dominant voice on the nuclear issue. Ayatollah Khamenei has recently expressed continued mistrust of the United States and its intentions, saying that he would not allow the kind of bilateral talks between Washington and Tehran that most analysts think would be key to any resolution.

At the same time, Iran has taken some of its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium and converted it into reactor fuel, which cannot easily be turned back again. The conversion means that the amount possessed by Iran that would be necessary to create a bomb is higher, reducing the sense of urgency among the six powers, and Israel, that Iran is close to bomb-making capability.

But the total Iranian stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium has nonetheless grown since November from 135 kilograms to 167 kilograms, or from 298 to 368 pounds, according to the most recent I.A.E.A. report — closer to, if still significantly below, the 240 or 250 kilograms many experts consider necessary, once enriched further, to produce a nuclear weapon.

Iran denies that its nuclear program has any military aim. The six world powers — the so-called P5+1 group (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Ger-

many), chaired by the European Union foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton — want Iran to obey Security Council resolutions ordering it to suspend enrichment and open itself up fully to I.A.E.A. inspectors, to ensure that there is no effort to build a nuclear weapon.

To press Iran to comply, the Security Council, the United States and the European Union have created an increasingly painful set of economic sanctions on Iran, as part of a dual-track strategy: negotiations and sanctions. Iran has for its part insisted that as a precondition for serious negotiations, the world should lift all the sanctions and recognize Iran's "right to enrich" as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The negotiations have been tedious, diplomats say, with Iran appearing to them to be playing for time. The six had asked for a resumption of these talks as early as December, but Iran rejected dates and sites before finally suggesting and agreeing upon Almaty. The choice pleased Western diplomats for its symbolic value, since Kazakhstan, when it became independent of the Soviet Union, freely relinquished the nuclear weapons it inherited from Moscow.

A senior American official acknowledged that Iran's presidential elections in June "may constrain their political space."

American officials are holding up Kazakhstan, one of the world's largest producers of uranium and a maker of nuclear fuel, as an example to Iran of the benefits of peaceful nuclear energy and compliance with the I.A.E.A.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan appealed to Tehran in an essay in *The New York Times* in March 2012 to abandon what he suggested was its pursuit of nuclear power status. "Kazakhstan's experience shows that nations can reap huge benefits from turning their backs on nuclear weapons," he wrote.

While expectations are low, the six hope to leave here with some momentum and concrete Iranian willingness to engage in what all have agreed should be a reciprocal and step-by-step process of lifting sanctions in return for Iranian actions to comply.

"Iran needs to understand that there is an urgent need to make concrete and tangible progress" in these talks, said Michael Mann, the spokesman for Ms. Ashton.

He said that the six have together

"prepared a good and updated offer for the talks which we believe is balanced and a fair basis for constructive talks" and that is "also responsive to Iranian ideas."

He and other Western diplomats refused to detail the offer before it is presented to the Iranians, but one senior diplomat called the offer "substantial and serious" and said that recent news reports that suggested only some loosening in sanctions regarding gold sales "do not reflect the full offer." He said the offer "is not a Big Bang deal, more an agreement on a package of confidence-building measures."

"Our main concern is the enrichment over 5 percent," which brings uranium closer to becoming bomb grade, he said.

"Iran has a great deal to gain by engaging," he said. "Once the international community has the assurances it needs, sanctions will start to be lifted."

Another Western diplomat said that the offer had been updated to account for the new enrichment Iran has done in the eight months since Moscow. There, the offer was described as "stop, shut, ship" — demanding that Iran stop enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity, shut the Fordow underground enrichment facility that is heavily protected deep inside a mountain, and ship abroad its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium to be turned into nuclear fuel.

In response, the six said in Moscow that they would reciprocate initially by lifting some sanctions, including on parts for American civilian aircraft that Iran has long sought, and provide fuel for an Iranian nuclear reactor.

The sanctions have hurt the Iranian economy, especially the sanctions on oil exports, which make up a large part of the economy. French officials say that Iran's annual economic output has fallen by 8 percent because of the sanctions, that inflation is very high — officially at 27.4 percent in 2012 but unofficially much higher — and that the value of the Iranian currency, the rial, has dropped by about half over the past year.

While Iranian officials insist that their economy is resilient, a senior American official said: "They're beginning to feel the pressure of the sanctions."

As for Iran's presidential elections in June, the American official acknowledged that the vote "may constrain their political space" but said that the nuclear negotiations had their own pace, which the six would like to accelerate. "We all understand that when it comes to the nuclear file, the key decisions are in the hands of the supreme leader," the official said. "And he is not going to change."

No End in Sight for Iraq Oil Dispute

<http://www.al-monitor.com>

By: Roxana Saberi for Al-Monitor.

ERBIL — Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, is criticizing Baghdad for threatening to cancel the contracts of companies operating in the country's southern oil fields if they refuse to stop dealing separately with the Kurds.

"Instead of warning companies to choose between the KRG or Baghdad, it's in Iraq's interest to cooperate more and ... for the KRG and Baghdad to sit down and find a solution," Barzani told Al-Monitor in an exclusive interview.

His comments are likely to add fuel to the dispute simmering between the KRG and the central government in Baghdad, which argues that the semiautonomous Kurdistan Region has no legal authority to export oil or sign agreements for development. The Kurds, however, maintain that Iraq's constitution gives them the right to do so. They have already signed contracts with a number of multinational companies, including Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Gazprom. In January, Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luabi ordered ExxonMobil to decide between Kurdistan and southern Iraq.

"This approach for Baghdad to tell ExxonMobil to choose between Kurdistan and Iraq, in our view, is a very wrong approach, because... that oil belongs to all of Iraq," Barzani said. "Those companies that now deal with the KRG are aware of our right in the Iraqi constitution. That's why they came to the KRG."

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, however, has argued that the Kurds' oil policy threatens to splinter the country's fragile federal state by tempting its other oil-rich regions to also strike independent deals. This dispute, along with broader security concerns, has undermined Baghdad's drive to boost oil production, now averaging around 3 million barrels per day (bpd), to more than 8 million bpd by 2017.

"If you have one part of the country producing and exporting and selling the oil, then Basra, the southern part, will do the same, and the other governorates will do the same, and this will have no government planning," said Abdullah al-Amir, the principal personal advisor to Hussein al-Shahristani, Iraq's deputy prime minister for energy affairs, in an interview with Al-Monitor. "There will be no [central] government revenues because each governorate will do whatever it wants. This is against



Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (photo by Roxana Saberi)

the constitution of Iraq."

Amir said Kurdistan should submit all its oil contracts to Iraq's Oil Ministry for approval and claimed that at present only one-third of the KRG's oil revenues are being transferred to the central government. "There is no record of what is happening to the [other] two-thirds of production, where the revenues are going, what prices the oil is sold at," he said.

Earlier in February, a dispute over payments to oil companies working in Kurdistan prompted the Iraqi parliament to indefinitely postpone a vote on the national budget. Some lawmakers called for cutting Kurdistan's share of the budget from 17% to no more than 12%. The Kurds say they are entitled to 17% of the federal budget, which is financed largely through the sale of crude oil, including from Kurdistan. They claim that they already receive much less than that.

"Our 17%, after subtracting the budget for the Iraqi president's office, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior ... in fact is 11.5% of the total budget of Iraq," Nawzad Hani Mawlood, the governor of Erbil province, told Al-Monitor. He added that the Kurdistan Region relies on this revenue to pay wages for civil servants and other operating expenses.

Tensions were already on the rise before the budget battle. In December, Kurdistan had stopped exporting oil through a federal pipeline and instead began transporting it by truck across the border with Turkey. These exports are modest, some 10,000 to 20,000 bpd, according to Robin Mills, head of consulting at Dubai-based Manaar Energy. This means Kurdistan has a long way to go to achieve Prime Minister Barzani's goal of exporting around half a million barrels a day by the end of this year and 1 million a day by 2014.

"To have a really self-sustaining industry, they need either a solid agreement with Baghdad on pipeline access or an independent pipeline," Mills said. The KRG has been discussing developing plans to build a pipeline to export Kurdistan oil through Turkey, though Mills questions the likelihood of an agreement taking shape any time soon.

The clash over oil is part of a larger feud between Kurdistan and Iraq's Shiite Arab-led administration over land and autonomy. "[The oil dispute] is just a front to a more existential contest over federalism, land, and authority," said an American oil investor who has worked in Iraq and spoke on condition of anonymity. "I think the oil issue is a symptom and not a cause. So long as it is going to represent itself as a democracy, Iraq cannot be governed as a unitary, centralized state. There is no way Sunnis and Kurds would willingly subject themselves to that level of centralized Shiite control."

Late last year, both the Kurds and Baghdad deployed troops to a disputed area along Kurdistan's southern boundary. In recent weeks, the area has been shaken by a wave of bombings, including a suicide attack that killed at least 15 people in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

Despite the standoff, Kurdistan's prime minister doesn't expect the conflict to escalate into war. "Maybe there will be tensions sometimes, problems everywhere, but war, I don't think so," Barzani said. "We both are not stupid, so war, no. I don't expect it."

Mills, the consultant, agreed that open conflict is unlikely. "[It] would be disastrous for both sides," he said. "It would embolden Sunnis in western and northern Iraq who are opposed to the Baghdad government and would invite intervention by Turkey and Iran."

Baghdad can't afford to fight the Kurds right now, according to Governor Mawlood, because it has its hands full with possible spillover from neighboring Syria. He believes that if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad falls, Sunni Muslims there will come to power and could incite Iraq's Sunnis to rise up against the Shiite-led government.

"So the competition is between Shiites and Sunnis in Baghdad, not the Kurds," asserted Mawlood. "We don't take part in that. [Maliki] needs the support of Kurds because he wants to stay prime minister. So he needs the votes of Kurds for this position, but he is making a mistake." ♦

*Roxana Saberi is an Iranian-American journalist and author of *Between Two Worlds: My Life and Captivity in Iran*.*

Construction of Disputed Turkish Dam Continues

By SUSANNE GÜSTEN

ILISU, TURKEY — Mahmut Dunder raised a remote control toward a flat-screen monitor suspended from the ceiling of his office beside the Tigris River in southeast Turkey.

“These are live,” he said, as he toggled between images of men and machines swarming over a dozen different building sites of the Ilisu Dam project.

The feed goes to the prime minister’s office in Ankara, Mr. Dunder, general manager of the project, said last week. “The prime minister can watch every point of construction 24 hours a day, minute by minute, so he is informed of our progress at all times. He has set the target for completion for 2014, and we mean to make that date.”

About 1,450 workers are laboring around the clock to complete the Ilisu Dam, one of the most controversial public works projects in recent history, by the middle of next year. That would be exactly five years after European lenders pulled out of the €1.1 billion, or \$1.5 billion, project in July 2009, citing concerns about environmental impact, resettlement policies and the destruction of cultural treasures. Undeterred, Ankara quickly raised domestic financing and resumed work in 2010.

“We have now completed 53 percent of the project, and we will complete the rest on time,” said Mr. Dunder, who is also regional director of the state hydraulic works. “We have no funding problems whatsoever, we work day and night, and all relevant agencies are in constant coordination.”

On the construction site, about 40 kilometers, or 25 miles, from the Syrian border and 70 kilometers from Iraq, the roar of machinery drowned out the rushing waters of the Tigris, which has been diverted from its natural bed to flow through three diversion tunnels and emerge roiling and foaming into a new concrete basin.

The surrounding mountain ridges bristled with military sentry posts and surveillance equipment guarding the construction site against the Kurdish rebels roaming the area.



The 15th century tomb of Zeynel Bey, a prince of the Ak Koyunlu dynasty. The Ilisu reservoir will flood more than 30,000 hectares of land, or 74,000 acres, submerging parts of the historical town of Hasankeyf. *Susanne Gusten*

Trucks and earth movers hauled loads of limestone, basalt and clay onto the rising body of the dam, which is to attain a height of 141 meters, or 460 feet, when complete. The crest of the dam will be 2.3 kilometers long, with a volume of 24 million cubic meters of earth and rock.

One-third of that is done, Mr. Dunder said, with the rest scheduled to be finished within the year. “Meanwhile, construction of the spillway and the power plant are going ahead according to plan,” he added.

If the project stays on track, the Ilisu Dam will begin to impound water next year. Filling the reservoir could take anywhere from 5 to 11 months, Mr. Dunder said, depending on the season in which it is begun. “We think the reservoir will be filled in 2015,” he added.

The project appeared to hit a snag last month when Turkey’s highest administrative court ruled that a decree issued by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan last year to accelerate work on the dam was in part null and void.

The court declared invalid that part of the decree that declared all infrastructure projects connected to the dam to be exempt from environmental impact assessment requirements on the grounds that plans for the dam were drawn up before the relevant law came into effect in 1993. Opponents of the project were jubilant and staged a rally in Ankara, calling for the Ilisu construction site to be shut down.

Emre Baturay Altinok, the lawyer who lodged the complaint on behalf of environmentalists, said by telephone from Ankara this month: “It is unlawful to continue work on the project without environmental impact assessments. The construction site must be closed and sealed.”

Mr. Dunder disagreed with that interpretation of the ruling, which he said would not

impede work on the dam.

“The ruling does not even remotely have anything to do with stopping the project,” he said. “It is merely about applying the environmental impact assessment regulations, which we are now doing anyway.”

The state hydraulic works authority has lodged an objection to the ruling, asking for clarification of certain terms, he said. “But in any case,” he added, “the final judgment will definitely not stop the project.”

Mr. Altinok, the lawyer, said he was not surprised that construction was continuing six weeks after the court ruling. “That is the way of justice in Turkey,” he said. “We are accustomed to court rulings against large projects not being implemented.”

The Ilisu project has long inflamed passions in Turkey and beyond. Concerns about its environmental, cultural and social impact forced companies and financial backers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland to pull out of the project under pressure from public campaigns in 2009.

With a capacity of 11 billion cubic meters of water, the Ilisu reservoir will flood more than 30,000 hectares of land, or 74,000 acres, submerging parts of the historical town of Hasankeyf upstream, as well as uncharted archaeological sites along the Tigris. The waters will displace 199 settlements, affecting 55,000 people, according to a report drawn up in 2008 by international experts acting on behalf of European export-credit agencies.

Scientists are at work in Hasankeyf to prepare for the removal of cultural monuments to a safe location across the Tigris and to fortify higher parts of the ancient town that will not be submerged, Mr. Dunder said.

A new town on a mountainside across the river from Hasankeyf is nearing completion and should be ready for

■■■ resettlement of the town's population before the water begins to rise.

Resettlement has been completed in the village of Ilisu near the dam site, where villagers were moved to a new settlement at the end of 2010.

Villagers interviewed in Ilisu this month were unenthusiastic about their new homes, despite the running water in modern kitchens and bathrooms and communal amenities such as a playground and a meeting room.

"It was better in our old village," a woman who gave her name as Zekine said. "Our fields and orchards were there. They are all gone now."

Many villagers complained about the loss of their farmland. "Most people here work on the dam construction site now, but once that wraps up, there will be no place to work," said Mehmet, a young man who did not give his family name. "I preferred our old village, because we had our orchards and our vines and could always make a living if we worked hard."

"We were farmers, now we are workers," said Osman Demir, from the neigh-

boring village of Karabayir, whose agricultural land was nationalized to build the new village of Ilisu.

Like most settlements affected by the dam, his village has not applied for resettlement by the state.

Besides Ilisu and Hasankeyf, only one other village has signed up for resettlement, Mr. Dundar confirmed. "It is up to the free will and democratic wishes of the villagers," he said. "We want to build modern settlements for them. But we can only do it for those who want it."

This is what opponents of the dam have feared all along, said Arif Arslan, president of the Friends of Hasankeyf Association in Batman, who has been monitoring the Ilisu project for 20 years.

"It will be just like when the Batman dam was built and 20,000 villagers were displaced" in the 1990s, Mr. Arslan said in a recent interview. "Villagers will move to the city with their cash compensations, the money will run out, and they will end up leading miserable lives in the slums."

Mr. Arslan is skeptical that the Ilisu project will contribute to the welfare and

development of the region, among the poorest in Turkey. "We have seen 18 dams built in this region already," he said. "Do you see a rise in the standard of living anywhere around here?"

In Ilisu, Mr. Dundar said that "every project has unwanted side effects." Yet the Ilisu Dam is essential to the development of the country and the welfare of its people, he argued. "Our country needs energy, and we are trying to meet that need," he said.

Ilisu's 1,200-megawatt hydroelectric power plant is designed to produce nearly 4 billion kilowatt hours of energy per year, worth an annual \$400 million, according to project managers.

"Our country's weakest spot is its dependency on energy imports," Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek said at the opening of Ilisu's diversion tunnels last year. To partly overcome that dependency, he added, "This jumbo project is of the utmost strategic and economic importance to our country."

TODAYS ZAMAN

28 February 2013

BDP delegation travels to northern Iraq to meet Kurdish officials

TODAYS ZAMAN.COM, İSTANBUL

A delegation from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) including the party's co-chairpersons traveled overnight to the northern Iraqi city of Suleymaniya, arriving Thursday to meet with Kurdish officials.

BDP Co-chairpersons Selahattin Demirtaş and Gülten Kışanak, BDP Diyarbakır deputy Altan Tan and independent Kurdish deputies Aysel Tuğluk and Ahmet Türk were among the delegation that flew to Suleymaniya to meet with Kurdish officials from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which governs the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Speaking to reporters before their departure at İstanbul's Atatürk Airport, Demirtaş said the delegation could also visit Arbil.

Asked whether the delegation would also travel to Kandil -- where the terrorist PKK is headquartered in northern Iraq -- to deliver a letter from Öcalan, Demirtaş said, "No, we already sent the letter."

Reports said on Wednesday that BDP deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder delivered Öcalan's letter on his "roadmap" for the success of the current peace talks between the



BDP co-chairpersons Selahattin Demirtaş (R), Gülten Kışanak (L) and independent deputy Ahmet Türk are seen in İstanbul's Atatürk Airport before their departure to the northern Iraqi city of Suleymaniya.

government and the PKK to the terrorist organization in Kandil Mountains.

Demirtaş also criticized recent military operations carried out by Turkish security forces against PKK targets in the Kandil Mountains.

"It is a contradiction to talk about peace and carry out operations at the same time," he argued.

Tan, Önder and another BDP deputy, Pervin Buldan, met with Öcalan over the weekend on İmralı Island, where he is jailed, to discuss the negotiations. At those talks, the PKK leader signaled the terrorist group may declare a cease-fire and release soldiers and state employees it is holding, according to a statement read by the politicians. Öcalan reportedly penned three let-

ters on his "roadmap" for a solution to be delivered to the BDP, PKK commanders in Kandil and senior PKK leaders in Europe.

The PKK, listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey and much of the international community, has waged a bloody campaign for self-rule in predominantly Kurdish southeast Anatolia since 1984. More than 40,000 people, including civilians and security forces, have been killed in clashes with the terrorist group.

Öcalan, imprisoned on İmralı, south of İstanbul in the Sea of Marmara, since his capture in 1999, has significant influence among PKK members and supporters. The Turkish state believes that talks with the terrorist leader may result in a timetable for the withdrawal of PKK terrorists from Turkey and

AFP

Ankara autorise une visite de députés kurdes à Öcalan en prison

ISTANBUL, 23 février 2013 (AFP)

UNE DÉLÉGATION de trois députés kurdes a pris la mer samedi à Istanbul pour rendre visite au chef des rebelles kurdes Abdullah Öcalan sur son île-prison d'Imrali (nord-ouest) dans le cadre de discussions de paix, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Les trois élus du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), la principale formation kurde de Turquie, ont embarqué à bord d'un navire des garde-côtes pour se rendre à Imrali, une petite île de la mer de Marmara où Öcalan purge une peine de prison à vie, selon Anatolie.

Les députés n'ont pas fait de déclaration à leur départ.

Il s'agit de la deuxième visite d'élus kurdes au chef emprisonné du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) depuis le lancement par les autorités turques de pourparlers de paix avec la rébellion, en décembre.

Le déplacement a été autorisé jeudi par le ministère de la Justice.

Cette visite était attendue depuis plusieurs semaines comme un signe de la poursuite des pourparlers, après le meurtre à Paris le 9 janvier de trois militantes du PKK, qui avait fait craindre un abandon de ces négociations.

Une première délégation s'était rendue à Imrali le 3 janvier.

Les médias turcs estimaient samedi qu'Öcalan pourrait transmettre à la direction du PKK, par le truchement des députés, un appel à cesser le feu, première étape vers un éventuel désarmement de l'organisation au printemps.

Une précédente tentative de négociation avec le PKK en 2009 avait échoué. ■

Le Monde 25 février 2013

Reprise des négociations entre le pouvoir turc et le PKK

Par Guillaume Perrier - Istanbul, correspondance

Le navire turc utilisé pour rallier l'île d'Imrali a repris du service. Samedi 23 février, il a mis le cap vers l'île où est enfermé depuis 1999 Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), condamné à la réclusion à perpétuité. A bord, avaient pris place trois députés du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), la vitrine légale de la rébellion kurde, désignés pour rencontrer pour la deuxième fois "Ap" dans sa cellule.

Après six heures d'entretien, les émissaires sont repartis satisfaits. Les pourparlers de paix pour mettre fin à une guerre de trente ans entre l'Etat turc et le PKK constituent "une étape historique", a rapporté la députée Pervin Buldan, au retour de la délégation. Les négociations peuvent se poursuivre, après avoir été interrompues le 9 janvier par le brutal assassinat de trois militants du mouvement kurde, à Paris.

Selon la presse turque, les trois députés ont rapporté de la prison d'Imrali la "feuille de route" d'Öcalan. Mais le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a déclaré attendre, en premier lieu, que la guérilla marxiste insurgée contre l'Etat turc dépose les armes sans conditions. "Nous avons dit à plusieurs reprises que les

membres de cette organisation terroriste devaient quitter la Turquie", a-t-il ajouté. Une éventualité rejetée par le commandement militaire, à Kandil, dans le nord de l'Irak, que l'armée turque continue de bombarder régulièrement.

Selon la déclaration lue par Mme Buldan, Abdullah Öcalan a fait part de son souhait de voir libérer les otages turcs détenus par le PKK : "L'Etat et le PKK ont tous deux des prisonniers. Le PKK doit bien traiter les siens, et j'espère qu'ils pourront retrouver leur famille." Un officier de police et un sous-préfet sont prisonniers depuis dix-huit mois.

LA QUESTION SYRIENNE, PRINCIPAL SUJET DE LITIGE

Le devenir de ces négociations reste incertain. Le gouvernement est tiraillé entre la nécessité de parvenir à un compromis et l'impopularité du processus d'Imrali. Une majorité de Turcs est hostile à toute discussion avec le "chef terroriste". Ce week-end, dans plusieurs villes du pays, des manifestants nationalistes turcs ont réclamé "du respect pour les martyrs". "Suspendez Imrali ! Pendez ce bâtard d'Öcalan !", scandait l'extrême droite, samedi, à Istanbul.

Plus tôt dans la semaine, des élus du BDP avaient été attaqués dans la petite ville de Sinop, sur la mer Noire. Le



Les trois députés du BDP qui ont pu rendre visite à Abdullah Öcalan, le leader kurde du PKK détenu dans la prison d'Imrali, le 23 février. Les trois députés du BDP qui ont pu rendre visite à Abdullah Öcalan, le leader kurde du PKK détenu dans la prison d'Imrali, le 23 février. | AFP/OZAN KOSE

mouvement kurde craint que ne se répète le scénario de 2009 : 34 militants désarmés s'étaient rendus aux autorités turques, à la frontière avec l'Irak. Certains avaient été emprisonnés.

Cette fois, des signaux positifs ont été envoyés par le pouvoir. Dix militants, dont six maires, accusés d'appartenir à l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK), une administration fantôme mise sur pied dans les régions kurdes, ont été libérés. Et, à Ankara, le Parlement s'appête à voter une série de réformes judiciaires qui assouplirait la loi antiterroriste.

Mais si la question apparaît rarement dans les discours officiels, c'est bien la situation de la Syrie voisine qui constitue le principal sujet de litige entre le gouvernement turc et le PKK, a laissé entendre la députée du BDP Ayla Akat Ata. Ankara réclame le désarmement des Forces de défense du peuple (YPG), la milice du Parti de l'Union démocratique (PYD), la branche syrienne du PKK, qui a pris le contrôle d'une partie de la région kurde de Syrie et qui, sur le terrain, s'oppose violemment aux rebelles islamistes. ■



Turquie: Les rebelles kurdes quitteraient le pays en août

Avec Reuters

Le dirigeant kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan envisagerait le retrait de ses combattants de Turquie avant la mi-août, aux termes d'un projet d'accord de paix envoyé à la direction de son parti et à des hommes politiques kurdes. Emprisonné depuis son arrestation en 1999, Abdullah Öcalan négocie avec le gouvernement turc les grandes lignes d'un accord pour mettre fin au conflit entre les Kurdes et l'Etat turc, qui a fait 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Selon le projet d'accord, auquel le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) doit répondre dans un délai de deux semaines, la guérilla kurde observerait un cessez-le-feu officiel à partir du 21 mars, date du Nouvel an kurde, rapportent mercredi les journaux Sabah et Star, proches du gouvernement. Le retrait des combattants du PKK serait achevé le 15 août, 29e anniversaire du conflit, ajoutent-ils. Ces informations n'ont pu être confirmées. Le PKK avait déjà démenti de telles affirmations.

Un parlementaire du parti pro-kurde BDP (Parti paix et démocratie) qui a reçu le projet d'accord de paix mardi a relativisé

l'importance du calendrier évoqué dans la presse et dit qu'aucune décision n'avait été prise. Idris Baluken a déclaré à Reuters qu'Abdullah Öcalan avait exposé ses idées dans le document et demandé au BDP et au PKK d'exprimer leur avis dans les deux prochaines semaines. «Abdullah Öcalan souhaite juger de la sincérité du gouvernement», a-t-il dit. «Nous souhaitons que les discussions aboutissent mais politiquement parlant, nous n'avons pas beaucoup progressé.»

Le gouvernement turc, de son côté, devra mettre en oeuvre des réformes pour développer les droits des 15 millions de Kurdes. La minorité kurde représente environ 20% des 76 millions de Turcs.

DES LIBÉRATIONS DE PRISONNIERS ENVISAGÉES

Abdullah Öcalan, souligne la presse, proposerait le maintien d'un Etat turc unitaire. Il ne demanderait pas d'autonomie pour les Kurdes.

Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a souligné qu'«aucune réclamation visant à mettre à mal notre unité nationale» n'était acceptable. «S'ils déposent les armes et quittent notre pays, il y a beaucoup d'endroits dans le monde où

ils peuvent aller», a-t-il déclaré mardi soir à la presse. Durant ses dix années au pouvoir, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a mis en oeuvre des réformes pour promouvoir les droits culturels des Kurdes. Mais la classe politique kurde souhaite des réformes plus importantes avec une nouvelle Constitution qui permette une plus grande égalité entre Turcs et Kurdes et le développement de l'enseignement en langue kurde.

Le PKK a pris les armes en 1984 dans le but de parvenir à la création d'un Etat kurde. Il a ensuite revu ses objectifs à la baisse pour revendiquer une certaine autonomie. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne. Selahattin Demirtas, chef du BDP, a déclaré qu'un cessez-le-feu tacite était d'ores et déjà respecté, le nombre d'attaques ayant diminué depuis le début des négociations. Le PKK a pourtant fait état mercredi de la mort de quatre militants tués mardi par des frappes aériennes turques dans le nord de l'Irak.

Parmi les mesures envisagées pour faire avancer le processus de paix, figure la libération d'une dizaine de représentants des forces de sécurité turques capturés par le PKK. Mais, a dit un des commandants du PKK, Duran Kalkan, ces libérations dépendront des mesures prises par la Turquie. «Il ne faut pas s'attendre à ce que nous prenions ces mesures de manière unilatérale», dit-il dans une interview à l'agence de presse Firat, liée au PKK. ♦



Formation d'un bataillon de 150 femmes kurdes

BEYROUTH, 23 février 2013 (AFP)

LES KURDES DE SYRIE ont récemment formé dans la province d'Alep (nord) leur premier bataillon de femmes, avec environ 150 recrues, a annoncé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), relevant le rôle grandissant des femmes dans les combats en Syrie.

Cette annonce intervient quelques jours après la conclusion d'un accord entre les rebelles et les milices kurdes pour cesser leurs combats meurtriers.

"Les comités populaires kurdes ont formé un bataillon composé de quelques 150 femmes, baptisé le bataillon de Rokan", en référence à une combattante kurde, a indiqué l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), en diffusant une photo montrant des femmes en treillis en rang devant leur chef.

"C'est le premier bataillon de femmes qui combat avec les rebelles, les forces du régime et les milices kurdes", a souligné Rami Abdel Rahmane, directeur de l'OSDH.

Le Parti de l'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), la branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes de Turquie), est "dirigé par une femme, Asia Abdallah", a rappelé M. Abdel Rahmane.

"Les femmes se battent sur tous les fronts maintenant" et "jouent un rôle majeur dans les combats en Syrie", a-t-il insisté.

Les deux millions de Kurdes de Syrie, qui vivent pour la plupart dans le nord et le nord-est du pays, ont longtemps cherché à rester à l'écart du conflit, même si les rebelles les ont accusés de faire le jeu du régime.

La Turquie avait aussi accusé Damas d'avoir "confié" au PYD plusieurs zones



du nord syrien, près de la frontière, et dénoncé une mesure "dirigée contre" Ankara.

En janvier, les forces du régime syrien avaient créé la première unité féminine des Forces de défense nationale, une force paramilitaire qui compte 450 combattantes engagée pour lutter contre la rébellion.

Les militants anti-régime ont pour leur part diffusé des photos montrant des femmes combattant avec les rebelles, et dans la province de Damas, la rébellion a une femme pour porte-parole, Samara a-Kuwatli.

Dans la ville côtière de Lattaquié, une militante jointe par l'AFP via internet a déclaré que des femmes, moins soumises aux contrôles des barrages du régime, transportaient souvent des armes, de la nourriture et des médicaments pour les rebelles. ■

Turquie

Le vrai défi des Kurdes est économique

En Turquie, la minorité kurde est à la traîne de l'économie La minorité est à la traîne de l'économie turque. Le fossé entre l'ouest et le sud-est ne cesse de se creuser

Boris Mabillard

Sur le parvis de la mosquée, en réfection, la terrasse ne désemplit pas, même en semaine. Une centaine d'hommes, presque tous dans la force de l'âge, tuent le temps assis sur des tabourets rudimentaires. «Ils sont désœuvrés, sans emploi», explique un homme emmitoufflé dans une gabardine rapiécée. A Diyarbakir, la grande ville du sud-est de la Turquie, le taux de chômage varierait selon les quartiers entre 25 et 60%, contre une moyenne nationale de 8,2%. Le miracle économique turc n'a pas produit ses effets ici: alors que le PNB par habitant à Istanbul est supérieur à celui de la Pologne, à Diyarbakir, il chute au niveau de celui de l'Inde.

Un pays, deux mondes. Le clivage est géographique – l'ouest prospère, le sud-est stagne – mais aussi ethnique: les 12 provinces les plus pauvres du pays sont celles où les Kurdes sont majoritaires. Alors que le gouvernement a ouvert des négociations de paix avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), les difficultés socio-économiques des régions kurdes constitueront un défi de taille. Faute de le relever, Ankara pourrait voir capoter ses efforts pour résoudre le problème kurde.

Les murs sont glabres, peints à la chaux, un canapé-lit, quelques tapis et couvertures constituent le seul mobilier. Les repas sont pris là, mais, le soir, la pièce se mue en chambre à coucher, le père et la mère la partagent avec trois de leurs enfants. Fidan et sa sœur Perda dorment dans l'autre chambre, qu'elles partagent à cinq avec le reste de la fratrie. Comme des centaines de milliers de paysans, la famille a été forcée par l'armée de quitter son village. C'était au milieu des années 1990, le gouvernement avait mis en place une politique de la terre brûlée pour lutter contre les rebelles du PKK: vider les campagnes isolées pour couper l'organisation de ses éventuels supports parmi la population rurale. Trois mille villages ont ainsi été détruits, et leurs habitants contraints de fuir. Un exode a suivi, qui draina près de 3 millions de paysans vers les villes. Les conséquences subsistent aujourd'hui, le tissu économique urbain n'ayant pu absorber les nouveaux arrivants.

«En quittant Goman, notre village, j'ai dû

vendre les bêtes à vil prix, nous n'avons pas touché de compensation. Depuis, sans économies, nous nous battons pour survivre», explique Feman, le père. Son épouse ne s'est jamais vraiment habituée à la vie urbaine: «Ici, je ne fais rien. Chaque année, nous retournons à Goman cueillir les pommes et les amandes. J'y resterais bien, mais c'est impossible sans le retour de la paix.» Perda, 18 ans, et Fidan, 17 ans, sont nées à la maison, à Diyarbakir, où la famille s'est installée, dans le quartier de Sur, le cœur historique de la ville, ceint de murailles en basalte. Elles n'imaginent pas retourner au village. Elles rêvent de ville, voudraient étudier, travailler, avoir une voiture, une vie moderne. Bastion de la résistance nationaliste kurde, Sur est aussi un chef-lieu de la misère. Quelque 100 000 habitants vivent là, dont une majorité de déplacés.

«On m'a proposé un travail, dans le bâtiment, mais c'est loin et mal payé, 600 livres turques [environ 310 francs] par mois. Le prix du bus pour m'y rendre avalerait une bonne partie du salaire.» En attendant, Feman travaille comme journaliste, selon la demande aléatoire: «Nous avons assez à manger. Tous les dix jours, nous avons même un peu de viande.» Mais pour les vêtements et le chauffage, c'est une autre paire de manches.

Abdullah Demirbas, maire de l'arrondissement de Sur, issu du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP, nationaliste kurde), déplore les conditions socio-économiques de la ville: «La mairie n'a pas les moyens de lutter contre le chômage et la pauvreté. Le problème est régional, sinon national. Et lié à la politique gouvernementale à l'égard des Kurdes.» Les maires, élus, jouissent de prérogatives limitées, alors que les gouverneurs de province, appointés par le gouvernement, gèrent la justice, la police, la santé, l'enseignement et l'aménagement du territoire. Cette double gouvernance restreint la marge de manœuvre des autorités locales. Le budget de ces dernières dépend en outre des recettes fiscales locales, d'autant réduites lorsque l'activité économique est anémique.

Abdullah Demirbas risque 493 années de prison pour ses liens supposés avec le PKK et pour avoir promu l'usage de la langue kurde. Un engagement qu'il considère comme essentiel: «L'interdiction de notre

langue dans les écoles conditionne le fort taux d'échec de nos élèves.» Le faible niveau de qualification des Kurdes constitue à l'échelle régionale un obstacle au développement économique.

La mairie a mis en place une petite structure pour assister les élèves, dans un appartement transformé au deuxième étage d'un immeuble vétuste sans chauffage central. Gül (rose, en turc) y donne des cours de rattrapage et d'appui en mathématiques: «Les élèves viennent surtout pour préparer l'examen de fin de scolarité qui leur ouvre les portes de l'université, un examen unique pour tout le pays.» Fidan et Perda sont parmi les plus assidues. Elles viennent en fin de journée, les week-ends et durant les vacances. «A la maison, nous n'avons pas la place pour faire nos devoirs ou réviser», explique Perda, qui prépare l'examen final. Gül se presse contre le poêle à bois: «Au moins, il fait plus chaud ici que dans la plupart des maisons, mais que faire contre la faim qui tiraille certains de nos élèves?»

Atentats, violences et instabilité ont tenu les investisseurs privés éloignés des zones kurdes. Pour Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, président de l'Association de l'industrie et du commerce pour le sud-est anatolien (Günsiad), les mesures incitatives pour stimuler l'économie et attirer les entrepreneurs n'ont pas suffi: «Le fossé entre l'ouest et l'est du pays ne cesse d'augmenter.» Sahismail Bedirhanoglu se démène avec des entrepreneurs pour sortir la région du marasme. Mais leurs projets se heurtent aux réticences du gouvernement: «Equipements et infrastructures manquent, l'Etat investit peu et trop tard. Malgré son retard de développement, notre région ne fait pas partie des priorités du gouvernement. Il semble même y avoir une politique délibérée d'étranglement économique.»

Abdullah Demirbas et Sahismail Bedirhanoglu insistent: la guerre doit cesser et le processus de paix impliquer l'octroi de droits pour les Kurdes, dont celui essentiel de pouvoir suivre une scolarité dans leur langue, et une autonomie relative qui donne aux élus la liberté d'encadrer le développement de leur région. Mais pour l'instant, rien dans l'attitude du gouvernement ne laisse penser qu'il soit prêt à effectuer un aggiornamento de sa politique à l'égard de la minorité kurde. ○

Will Turkey Make Peace With the Kurds?

By HARVEY MORRIS - LONDON

There is growing optimism that a ceasefire in Turkey's three-decade war with Kurdish guerrillas will be declared to coincide with the Kurdish New Year in three weeks.

Under a draft plan reported on Wednesday, the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., would lay down its arms on March 21 and withdraw its forces from Turkish territory by August.

The potential for a breakthrough in ending the conflict, which has claimed 40,000 lives since 1984, came when the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan opened talks late last year with Abdullah Ocalan, the P.K.K.'s jailed leader.

Intelligence agents made a series of visits to the prison island of Imrali near Istanbul to negotiate with the former guerrilla chief, who was once Turkey's



Turkish nationalists marched on Sunday to protest the peace talks.

most wanted man.

In their latest visit, last weekend, they accompanied a delegation of Kurdish legislators from the Peace and Democracy Party, or B.D.P.

Selahattin Demirtas, the B.D.P. co-chairman, said this week that there was already a de facto ceasefire. The P.K.K. was not carrying out armed action and the Turkish army was not conducting significant military operations against the rebels.

He quoted a letter from Mr. Ocalan in which he expressed the belief that the process would lead to an eventual resolution of the Kurdish issue. "Neither we nor the state can abandon that process," he quoted the letter as saying.

The P.K.K. has abandoned its previous demands for independence but continues to seek equal rights for Kurds within the Turkish state.

Mr. Erdogan meanwhile dramatically underlined his own good intentions by telling his parliamentary colleagues he was prepared to drink poison if it meant achieving peace.

There are reports that the P.K.K. is preparing to release 16 Turkish prisoners, possibly as early as this weekend, as part of the peace moves.

Mr. Ocalan has sought the backing of P.K.K. exiles in Europe for the peace initiative, as well as that of guerrilla fighters based in the north of Iraq.

Duran Kalkan, a senior P.K.K. commander based in Iraq, said this week that he is open to the idea of a prisoner release. "However, nobody should expect us to make a unilateral move."

In what appeared to be a positive response to the peace moves, he told the Kurdish Firatnews: "If everybody does what is required to do, I can say on behalf of the P.K.K. that the Kurdish armed movement will never pose an obstacle to the democratization of Turkey and the solution of the Kurdish question."



Iraq budget stalemate deepens over Kurd oil payments

BAGHDAD | February 27, 2013 by Ahmed Rasheed(Reuters)

AN IMPASSE over Iraq's budget deepened on Wednesday after meetings between the country's oil minister and his Kurdish counterpart failed to resolve a dispute about payment for oil companies operating in the autonomous north.

Iraq's cabinet approved the \$118.6 billion budget in October, but infighting between Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish factions has scuttled attempts by lawmakers to pass the draft legislation in parliament.

A Kurdish delegation headed by the region's minister for natural resources, Ashti Hawrami, left Baghdad empty-handed on Wednesday following "tense" meetings with Iraqi oil minister Abdul Kareem Luabi that dragged on for around five hours.

The budget standoff is the latest sign of a long-running row between the central government and the Kurdistan region over how to exploit the world's fourth largest oil reserves and divide the revenues.

Kurdistan says it is owed more than 4 trillion Iraqi dinars, or \$3.5 billion to cover the costs accumulated by oil companies operating there over the past three years, but Baghdad rejects those contracts as illegal and has allocated just 750 billion Iraqi dinars (\$644.33 million).

"Talks over oil company payments have reached a dead-end," said spokesman for the Kurdish parliamentary bloc Muayad al-Tayeb, describing Baghdad's posture as a tactic to scare off oil companies that have been tempted north by better security and better contract terms.

"Oil companies need to be paid and we are not prepared to bargain on payments," he added.

The deadlock could postpone major infrastructure projects and payments to regional authorities in the OPEC producer, whose state coffers are filled almost entirely by the proceeds of crude exports.

A Shi'ite lawmaker from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition said the Kurds were not entitled to compensation because they had not contributed their fair share to national exports.

"They have been halting oil exports for months and now they want payment: that's not acceptable," Abbas al-Bayati said.

Kurdish crude used to be shipped to world markets through a Baghdad-controlled pipeline to Turkey, but exports via that channel dried up last year as result of the payment row.

A year after the last U.S. troops withdrew, Iraq's economy is improving and should grow 9 percent this year as oil production expands, according to central bank projections.

However, it still needs investment in everything from infrastructure to transport to rebuild the economy, and key oil and investment laws languish in parliament because of political turmoil.

"It's difficult to reach an agreement because Baghdad is dealing with this as a political issue rather than a technical one," said Kurdish lawmaker Farhad Atroshi. ●

Kurdish rebel leader airs frustrations in Turkey peace process

By Ayla Jean Yackley

ISTANBUL / Reuters - From his island prison, Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan has accused the fighters he commands of hampering his efforts to end a decades-old conflict and warned the Turkish government against any attempt to dictate terms.

In the transcript of a weekend meeting between Ocalan and Kurdish politicians published in *Milliyet* daily and confirmed by a party to the talks, Ocalan offered a first public insight into his role and apparent frustrations in a frail peace process.

Ocalan, captured by Turkish special forces in Kenya in 1999, expressed impatience with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) military command based in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq, suggesting they were less than enthusiastic about peace efforts.

"Even the PKK does not understand me. They see me like an older brother and father. I share their worries," he said. "Qandil is pessimistic, it would be good if they get over it."

"I'm angry with them," Ocalan said, voicing opposition to their "war system" or strategy.

Ocalan, 63, has been kept largely in virtual solitary confinement for most of the last decade and allowed a television set only recently.

There was no comment from the government on the publication of the transcript, which is reminiscent of the 2011 leaking of recordings of previous talks between the state and Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in Oslo. That leak helped derail efforts at that time to resolve the conflict.

The publication of such a statement of position by Ocalan will certainly anger some in Turkey. There is a strong conservative opposition to anything approaching a public role for someone accused by Ankara of indiscriminate killings and of threatening the fundamentals of the Turkish state.

The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) has denied leaking the transcript, in which Ocalan talks in detail about a withdrawal of fighters from Turkish territory, the release of prisoners linked to the PKK and constitutional reform.

The leader of the PKK, considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, also betrayed unease about the intentions of the ruling AK Party and warned against any attempt to impose a solution on its terms.

"I hope the AKP does not misunderstand us. If they misunderstand there will be disaster. If the AKP tries to dictate to us, we will not accept," he said.

The leaked transcript appeared on the same day that BDP lawmakers were delivering Ocalan's peace plan to the PKK in Iraq and Europe, setting out his proposals for a rebel ceasefire and withdrawal from Turkey to end a 28-year conflict.

BDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Gultan Kisanak were in a group that flew to the city of Sulaimaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan before meeting the PKK leadership, based in remote mountains bordering Turkey and Iran, media reports said.

PKK IN EUROPE

Pervin Buldan, one of the lawmakers at the Ocalan mee-



A flag with the portrait of jailed PKK leader Ocalan is seen in front of the entrance of the Information Centre of Kurdistan in Paris (Christian Hartmann Reuters, REUTERS / February 28, 2013)

ting, traveled to Brussels to deliver a second letter to leading PKK figures in Europe, source of much of the financing of the group,

The missions had the tacit approval of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's government, which has renewed efforts to resolve a conflict that has claimed more than 40,000 lives since 1984, held back Turkey's economy and damaged its human rights record.

Ocalan's leaked comments may cast a shadow over a process that, according to surveys, has tentative public support.

Ocalan, serving a life sentence on the island of Imrali near Istanbul since a death sentence was commuted, has been holding talks with Turkish intelligence officials since last October with the aim of ending negotiations to end the insurgency.

The PKK had originally fought for an independent homeland in the Turkish southeast but is now demanding broad autonomy within Turkey.

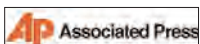
BDP lawmakers met Ocalan at the weekend and his plan was handed over to the party on Tuesday. It contained a three-part solution to the conflict, including a ceasefire, withdrawal of PKK fighters from Turkey and their disarmament before reintegrating some 7,000 rebels into society.

He suggested the planned withdrawal of PKK fighters from Turkish territory would require parliamentary action.

"It will not be a unilateral withdrawal. The withdrawal will be a decision by parliament. It does not happen just by the prime minister saying, 'They will withdraw and we will not interfere,'" he said.

He also warned of greater conflict unless all prisoners linked to the PKK are released.

"There will be no need for house arrest or an amnesty. We will all be free," he said. "If I am successful there will be no prisoners left... If this does not happen there will be a people's war with 50,000 people." ♦



Iran reports death of Revolutionary Guards officer

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) - February 24, 2013 - Associated Press

An Iranian semi-official news agency is reporting that a commander of the powerful Revolutionary Guards has been killed in the country's Kurdish northwest.

The Sunday report by Fars quotes a statement by the Guards as saying

Gen. Hamid Tabatabaei was "martyred" during an engineering assignment.

It was the third reported killing of a ranking officer in the area, home to mostly people of the Kurdish ethnic group. Members of the Guards have in the past fought Kurdish opposition groups in the area.

In recent years the Guards have attacked several bases of the armed Kurdish group known as the PEJAK, which has been occasionally involved in armed clashes with Iranian forces. The rebels say they are fighting for greater rights for their minority community. ○

UNCERTAINTY WITH PEACE PROCESS

Negotiations with imprisoned leader of Kurdish rebels raise many questions

By Azad Amin
The Kurdish Globe

Talks between Ocalan and MIT cannot resolve the Kurdish national question

There are concentrated talks and discussions among the Turkish media regarding the so-called 'peace process' between Turkish state and PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan. For some time the AKP-led Turkish government through Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) has begun talking with Ocalan in order to stop PKK's military warfare in Turkey and get PKK's guerrillas back to Kurdistan region of Iraq. The negotiations or rather the secretive talks between MIT and Ocalan have been classified as the initiation of a 'peace process'.

For so many, including the editorial of this issue by Bashdar Ismael, the so-called peace process is a very necessary and good step that has potential to resolve the Kurdish question in Turkey. For Bashdar 'The Imrali peace process in Turkey has created an environment, support base and sense of expectancy that has never been seen before'. Bashdar optimistically argues that a new Turkey can be built by writing a new constitution: 'A new constitution that recognizes the Kurds and enshrines their rights, including a level of autonomy, is of paramount importance.'

A similar argument is put forward by Abdulkadir Selvi in his column at Yeni Safak on Monday. Selvi is not only a Turkish journalist but also a close adviser of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In that sense his vision and ideas regarding the process is crucial. Selvi like Bashdar argued that this process, if it is crowned with a parallel process of writing a new constitution, definition of a new identity and moral values can lead to the construction of a new Turkey and liquidation of old Turkey that was

established on the outdated principles of Ittihad-i Terakki or Committee of Union and Progress, (Yeni Safak, 25 February).

These optimistic views is not confined solely to a handful of writers whether Turks or Kurds. It is common among the liberal minded intelligentsia in Turkey. Ultra Turkish nationalists and the main opposition party, Republic People's Party, CHP, fiercely opposing the ongoing talks with Ocalan mainly due to the fact that if the AKP government is successful in ending the conflict, they fear this will prolong AKP Party in Turkish politics for some time to come.

This so-called peace process however has to be critically analyzed within the framework of Kurdish national question and solution of that question. Failing to approach the issue through national perspective has potential to deviate from the essence of the Kurdish national question and consequently not lead to an appropriate solution.

Talks between MIT and Ocalan towards the solution of an decades old conflict has nothing to do with the Kurdish national question but it is about the existence of PKK and its problem with the Turkish political establishment. What is at the stake is not the Kurdish national issue but the problematic existence and survival of PKK as an organization spread throughout Turkey, Middle East and Europe. It is also a personal question of Abdullah Ocalan and improving his prison conditions and his possible freedom.

Indeed ending the conflict will open new doors for the discussion on the Kurdish question from a new perspective. The three decades of conflict between PKK and Turkish security forces in reality hijacked the Kurdish question from its true essence and diminished Kurdish national/democratic liberation struggle to a security and terror paradigm. End of conflict and legalization of PKK and its integration into the



Turkish nationalists could misread the legal opinion as pro-PKK feeling, a diplomat said. PRESS PHOTO

Turkish political establishment may open new opportunities to Kurdish national movement to raise the issue back to its right place.

The Kurdish national question is a question of nationality and sovereignty. It is a political question that refers to legitimate national rights of the Kurds over their territory and sovereignty. The Kurdish national question is not about democratization of Turkey but the property rights of the Kurds over their geography and the natural resources over it. Without the Kurds having their sovereign rights and entitlement over the territory, the Kurdish national question cannot and will not be resolved. The Iraqi experience indicates this very clearly.

The so-called peace process and the talks between Ocalan and MIT does not in any way refers to such principles and thus reduces the Kurdish national question to a minority question.

It is also imperative to underline the timing of the talks, which is taking place in a sensitive period in the Middle East and in Iraq particularly. Political chaos and civil war in Syria has potential to disintegrate Syria into national and religious components thus potential for Syrian Kurds to establish a Kurdish political entity similar Iraqi Kurdistan. There are two main currents in Syrian Kurdistan, one led by Kurdish National Council composed of various Kurdish political parties

and groups, and the other People's Council led by Democratic Union Party, known as PYD. PYD is known for its close association with PKK.

While KNC demands federal status of Syrian Kurds in post-Assad period, PYD demands basic cultural and individual rights for Syrian Kurds within a democratic Syria. PYD formulates its argument similar to PKK under the banner of 'democratic autonomy'. PYD's autonomy however does not demarcate Syrian Kurdistan border and does not include any sovereign rights for the Kurds. In other words PYD's policy for Syrian Kurds is to reduce the national question of Syrian Kurds to minority rights.

Turkey's main concern for Syria is to prevent disintegration of the country into its national and religious components and to prevent the Syrian Kurds to have their own sovereign status similar to the Iraqi Kurds. Formation of another federal Kurdish political establishment may jeopardize AKP led Turkish government policy for resolving the Kurdish national question within the paradigm of minority question, in other words integrating and assimilating the Kurds into the political establishment through granting basic individual rights rather than collective and national rights.

In this sense Turkey will be successful in resolving the Kurdish question without jeopardizing →

→ the political establishment that is based on 'one nation, one flag, one state'. Successful talks between Ocalan and MIT or between Turkey and PKK paradoxically means controlling and manipulating political development in Syrian Kurdistan by Turkey through PKK and PYD. Because PYD is nothing but a proxy organization of PKK and follows its footsteps, Turkey through PKK and PYD will try to affect the Kurdish politics in Syria.

Despite the good relations

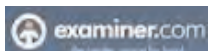
between Turkey and Kurdistan Regional government both entities may face each other in Syria and Syrian Kurdistan mainly because their policies contradict each other. While KRG pursues a federal system in post-Assad regime, Turkey aspires for a centralized political regime for post-Assad regime. The best instrument that Turkey has in its hand is the PYD because it pursues a political objective albeit in a different political jargon.

The talks between PKK and Turkey thus have two intentions:

on the one hand to integrate the northern Kurds (Kurdistan of Turkey) into Turkish political system in a voluntary way through PKK and on the other hand to prevent the Syrian Kurds to establish their own sovereign political regime either by a federal structure or independence.

Here comes a critical question of KRG in this process. KRG expressed its good intention in this so-called peace process and outlined that it is ready to take part towards a peaceful solution. If KRG really believes that the

ongoing talks will resolve the Kurdish national question then KRG makes a historical mistake and digs its own grave. But if it approaches the issue in a pragmatic way to end the PKK's conflict with Turkey, it must follow a very delicate policy. KRG's main concern and concentration should not be about the Kurds in Turkey at this stage but the Syrian Kurdistan because the destiny of the Kurds in Kurdistan will be determined by how the Syrian political development may evolve. □



February 26, 2013

Turkey's language politics

By: Paul Kujawsky

Turkey seems to be loosening its harsh policies on non-Turkish languages, while also casting itself as the patron and protector of other Turkic languages. This is not all good news.

Turkey has long been touchy about national identity. The ideological primacy of "Turkishness" versus the rights of ethnic minorities is a long-standing, sometimes violent, conflict in Turkish society and politics. The infamous Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code, making it a crime to "insult the Turkish nation" (before its 2008 amendment, article 301 prohibited "insulting Turkishness"), is used to harass, for example, journalists who label the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 a genocide.

Since language is intimately bound up with ethnic identity, Turkey has suppressed the Kurdish language in order to suppress Kurdish nationalism. The Kurds, who were promised their own state after World War I, are the largest ethnic minority in Turkey. Kurdish nationalism terrifies Turkey, which has responded by suppressing Kurdish culture, including the language. But the situation may be changing.

The change may be in part the result of outside pressure. On January 22, the European Court of Human Rights fined Turkey for violating the European Declaration of Human Rights. The court considered that Turkey had violated the free expression rights of politicians who were fined and imprisoned for campaigning in the Kurdish language.

On the other hand, the Human Rights court's judgment had something of the character of shooting a dead horse. Turkey's Constitutional Court had already struck down

the law under which the Kurdish politicians had been convicted. That decision came into force on February 7.

Further movement can be seen in the realm of religion. The government announced the lifting of the ban on mosque sermons in languages other than Turkish—now Kurdish and Arabic speakers are allowed to hear sermons they can understand. (Any Muslim congregation fluent only some fourth tongue is still out of luck.) Oddly, Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate head Mehmet Görmez denied that such a ban had existed: "The representatives of religion can preach with comfort in the language understood by the people coming into the mosque, especially in rural areas. It is sad to treat such an ongoing practice as if it just appeared today."

And in the area of criminal procedure, on January 25 the Turkish Parliament enacted a revision to the Criminal Code permitting Kurdish defendants to defend themselves in their mother tongue. The first use of the law is in the ongoing trial of members of the Kurdistan Communities' Union, founded by Kurdish terrorist leader Abdullah Öcalan and considered by Turkey to be a front organization for the banned terrorist group the PKK.

Because the Kurds are the dominant minority, Kurdish issues dominate Turkish language politics. But changing demographics may bring new issues to the fore.

For example, despite the long history of Greek-Turkish hostility, the Greek economy has crashed so thoroughly that Greeks—most with family roots in Turkey—are moving to Turkey. Istanbul Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew notes: "Although Prime Minister (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) invites (the Greeks of Istanbul origin), it is not easy for them to return. But I wish they would return. In Athens, there is a federation for those who are of Istanbul origin. This federation demands the return of their citizenship from the Turkish government." Depending on the size of the influx, Turkey may need to formulate or reformulate a Greek language policy.

A smaller Orthodox Christian group, the Assyrians, is trickling back from Europe. The children all speak German; there is interest in the community in reviving Aramaic, the

Assyrians' former vernacular. Will the Turkish government help, or hinder?

This seems quite positive. But while Turkey works through becoming more accepting of non-Turkish languages and cultures internally, it continues to promote pan-Turkism abroad. One element of this policy is the protection of other Turkic languages.

Consider the Crimean Tatars. The Tatars were among the peoples devastated by Stalin—the entire community was hastily deported in May 1944, with an estimated 45% dying in exile. Today some 250,000 Tatars again live in the Crimean Peninsula, now part of Ukraine. But only 15 schools offer instruction in the Tatar language. Turkey is providing support for the revival of Tatar. Safure Kadzhametova, head of the Maarifchi Association of Crimean Tatar Educators and a Deputy of the Crimean Parliament, said: "After our schools are established and our education system has started functioning, we want to switch to the Latin alphabet and unite with the Turkish World."

The "Turkish World" Turkey is creating is one it would inevitably dominate, because of its superior economic and military strength. Look where this hegemony is headed. The creation of a Turkic-speaking free trade zone has begun. Recently there was a meeting of the heads of state agencies responsible for the diaspora affairs of the members of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking countries (an organization created in 2009 and consisting of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). And on January 23, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia formed the Armed Forces of Turkic States.

Maybe these Turkic initiatives will amount to something, and maybe they won't. And of course, Turkic countries drawing closer together under Turkey's leadership isn't necessarily alarming. It depends on the character of the nations involved, and the character of the institutions they're creating. Unfortunately, Turkey is far down the road of Islamism, while none of its Turkic partners is a liberal democracy. For this reason, Turkey's turn to the east is worrisome, even as its internal language policies become more liberal. ■

Turkey's foray into the Fertile Crescent

TURKEY I

Ankara's undeclared policy for a post-Assad Mideast is a cordon sanitaire across the northern Fertile Crescent.

Soner Cagaptay

The biggest open secret in Ankara is that Turkey detests Iran, which it sees as undermining its interests in Syria and Iraq. Turkish leaders will not admit this publicly, for their country desperately needs Iranian natural gas and oil to continue its phenomenal economic growth.

But Ankara increasingly regards both Iraq and Syria as arenas for proxy conflict with Iran; in the former, Turkey backs the Sunni Arabs and Kurds against the central government in Baghdad under Shiite Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, seen by Turkey as an Iranian puppet; in the latter, Ankara supports the rebels against the Tehran-backed Assad regime.

Turkey has answered Iran's challenge by building influence in the northern parts of both Iraq and Syria. This signals the rise of a yet-undeclared Turkish policy in the Middle East: Anticipating the decentralization of post-Assad Syria, and hoping to take advantage of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish north, Turkey is carving out a cordon sanitaire across the northern Fertile Crescent, building influence in the Kurdish population as well as in large commercial centers such as Aleppo and Mosul.

When Turkey moved to foster closer ties with its Muslim neighbors about a decade ago, it hoped that such relations

would help boost Iraq's stability and improve political ties with Syria and Iran.

But the Arab rebellions have rendered these designs obsolete. At first Ankara provided the Assad regime with friendly advice to stop killing civilians. But the Damascus regime refused, and Turkey's stance flipped in August 2011: Ankara went from being Assad's friendly neighbor to his chief

adversary. Turkey started providing safe haven to the Syrian opposition, and, according to media reports, even arming the rebels.

This policy has cast Ankara and Tehran, Assad's patron, as chief rivals in Syria. And this, in turn, has exacerbated competition in Iraq, where Ankara supported Ayad Allawi's secular Iraqiya bloc in the run-up to the 2010 elections, poisoning relations with Maliki.

In the aftermath of Maliki's reelection, Ankara has favored closer contacts among Sunni Arabs and Kurds in northern Iraq. Turkey's trade volume with northern Iraq has climbed to \$8 billion per year compared to only \$2 billion with the southern portion of the country, and Ankara is seeking lucrative oil deals with Iraqi Kurds.

In short, for all practical purposes, northern Iraq has become part of the Turkish sphere of influence. This is es-

pecially surprising considering that only a few years ago Turkish hostility toward Iraqi Kurdish leaders seemed ready to boil over into an outright inva-

sion of the area.

Today, by contrast, Turkish Airlines offers daily flights to Sulaymaniyah and Erbil inside the Kurdistan Regional Government (K.R.G.) in northern Iraq, and Iraqi Kurds take vacations in Antalya, a Turkish resort city on the Mediterranean.

Mosul, a Sunni-majority province in northern Iraq, is also pivoting toward Ankara. Turkey currently provides safe haven to Tariq al-Hashimi, Iraq's Sunni vice president, whose arrest warrant has become a rallying cause for many Sunnis. At the same time, historic links between Mosul and Turkey, dating back to the Ottoman Empire, are being resurrected: When I last visited Gaziantep, a city in southern Turkey, my hotel was

full of Arab businessmen from Mosul.

Before the Syrian uprising began, a similar development was taking place in Aleppo, another Fertile Crescent city that enjoyed deep commercial ties with Turkey under the Ottoman Empire.

Located only 26 miles from the border, Aleppo had become a focal point of Turkish businesses in northern Syria, and there is no doubt that the strong support the Turks have provided to the rebels in northern Syria will increase Turkey's influence in the city after the end of the Assad regime (it is no accident that the largest contiguous rebel-controlled areas in Syria are around Aleppo).

The missing part of Turkey's prospective influence in the northern Fertile Crescent were the Syrian Kurds — until Turkey announced peace talks with the Kurdistan Workers Party (P.K.K.). This group, which has waged a war against Turkey for over three decades, is also known to be the best-organized movement among the Syrian Kurds.

Ankara hopes that peace talks with the P.K.K. will help heal the bad blood with Syrian Kurds. Indeed, Turkey has reworked its Middle East policy: It now views the Kurds as the foundation of its zone of influence across the northern Fertile Crescent.

Yet not all is rosy for Turkey. The peace talks with the P.K.K. could go awry, driving P.K.K. rejectionists into the arms of Iran or even Baghdad. There is also an emerging threat in allowing radical fighters into northern Syria. This is a dangerous game, for once the Assad regime falls, Turkey might find itself with a jihadist problem in its newly acquired sphere of influence.

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HUSSEIN MALLA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

“Les Kurdes ont besoin de vérité et de justice”

Rusen Werdi, chargée de l'information et du bureau des droits de l'Homme à l'Institut kurde de Paris, livre son analyse sur la situation actuelle.



©Philippe Rochot

Manifestation à Paris. “Demandez à n'importe quel Kurde dans la rue et surtout aux jeunes s'ils veulent l'indépendance, ils répondront oui!”

France-Arménie : Trois hypothèses ressortent sur l'identité des assassins de ces trois femmes. Quelles sont-elles ?

Rusen Werdi : La première possibilité d'un règlement de comptes interne entre Kurdes – évoquée surtout par la presse turque, d'ailleurs – est à écarter. On a appris que Sakîne Cansiz s'était rendue sur les bases du PKK au Kurdistan irakien, il y a quelques mois, et je vous assure que l'éliminer là-bas serait passé comme une lettre à la poste. Elle était sur la même ligne qu'Öcalan et était surtout là ces dernières années pour porter le Mouvement des femmes kurdes en Europe. Elle était plutôt discrète et n'avait pas d'influence sur les mouvements d'argent entre l'Europe et le Kurdistan. Certes, le PKK a déjà exprimé ce genre de violences sur le territoire européen, mais c'était il y a au moins vingt ans.

Deuxième possibilité ?

La deuxième possibilité, évidemment, est qu'il s'agisse d'extrémistes turcs. On sait que les Turcs ont l'expérience, y compris en Europe, d'agir de cette manière. Dans les années 80, par exemple, des assassinats politiques visant des personnalités arméniennes ont eu lieu. Les assassins ont été recueillis en Turquie et protégés par l'Etat turc. Alors évidemment, on parle très facilement de cet Etat profond qui agit impunément depuis de nombreuses années en Turquie. Ce qui profite à cet Etat profond, c'est la déstabilisation de la région et notamment de la Turquie.

On évoque également une piste iranienne ou syrienne...

L'Iran a déjà commis des crimes sur le sol européen à l'encontre de responsables politiques kurdes, comme le président du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan d'Iran, Abdulrahman Ghassemlou, en 1989 à Vienne et certains de ses successeurs en 1992 à Berlin.

En outre, Öcalan a demandé à ses troupes de prendre rang auprès de l'opposition syrienne de manière plus prononcée. Ce qui ne plaît pas du tout au régime syrien, qui avait préféré laisser la gestion du Kurdistan syrien aux partis kurdes et notamment à celui proche du PKK. Les négociations en cours ne le satisfont donc pas du tout.

Qu'attendez-vous des autorités françaises aujourd'hui ?

Qu'elles répondent rapidement à certaines questions. Les Kurdes ont besoin de vérité et de justice. Comment quelqu'un placé sous surveillance policière peut-il être atteint si facilement, par exemple ? On doit savoir s'il y a eu un manque à ce niveau-là, car la presse turque va manipuler la diaspora kurde. J'entends déjà des voix dire qu'on ne peut pas agir ainsi sans l'aval des Français. Ces « informations » doivent être écartées.

L'avenir des négociations turco-kurdes est-il compromis ?

Que ce soit Öcalan ou l'AKP, les deux camps souhaitent que le processus de paix ne capote pas. Le printemps arabe est là, le Kurdistan irakien existe depuis belle lurette et son rayonnement est des plus importants auprès des Kurdes. Le gouvernement turc est bien conscient qu'il sera obligé de donner ses droits aux Kurdes, car la génération à venir peut être beaucoup plus radicale. Demandez à n'importe quel Kurde dans la rue et surtout aux jeunes s'ils veulent l'indépendance, ils répondront oui !

Quel sentiment prédomine dans la diaspora kurde aujourd'hui ?

La population en a vraiment assez de cette guerre qui a fait 45 000 morts, dont beaucoup sont des civils. Les Kurdes dans leur ensemble sont pour une solution politique, mais refusent de donner un chèque en blanc aux autorités turques. Ils veulent une reconnaissance politique et collective de leur identité, tout en sachant qu'ils ne vont pas l'obtenir facilement. Quant au PKK, il n'abandonnera pas les armes sans garantie.

Les Arméniens ont publié des communiqués de soutien, et certains ont même pris place à vos côtés lors de la manifestation du samedi 12 janvier. Qu'en pensez-vous ?

Le soutien des Arméniens est très important pour les Kurdes. J'ai moi-même vu à travers les réseaux sociaux des photos montrant des drapeaux arméniens flotter au côté des drapeaux kurdes. Celles-ci ont été les plus re-tweetées parmi les Kurdes. Le dialogue a toujours existé avec la communauté arménienne. Hélas, nous avons un destin commun, même si celui des Arméniens a été bien plus tragique. Les Kurdes, qui sont les seuls à résister en nombre en Turquie, se rendent compte au quotidien des difficultés vécues par les Arméniens dans ce pays. Plus l'Histoire va parler, plus ils vont se rendre compte de l'ampleur de cette tragédie qu'a été le Génocide.

Propos recueillis par MJM

Tony Blair says Iraq would be far worse today under Saddam Hussein

Former prime minister argues in a BBC Newsnight special that Britain still has a profound role to play in the Middle East

Shiv Malik
The Guardian

Tony Blair has admitted that life in Iraq today is not what he had hoped it would be and the country is still facing "big problems". But he defended the war, saying that failing to remove Saddam Hussein would have entailed far worse consequences for the country.

Speaking to the BBC's Newsnight before the 10th anniversary of the invasion, he said: "There are still terrorist activities that are killing ... innocent people for no good reason, but [Iraq's] economy is growing very strongly, it's got huge amount of oil revenue but, no, there are still big problems."

Blair added that the price of the invasion that saw the death of at least 100,000 civilians and 179 British soldiers was "very, very high" but implored people to ask what would have happened had Saddam not been deposed.

Asked whether he minded if "people call you a liar, some people call you a war criminal, protesters follow you, it's difficult to walk down the street in a country", he replied: "It really doesn't matter whether it's taken its toll on me."

Blair added that he had "long since given up trying to persuade people it was the right decision".

"If we hadn't removed Saddam from power just think, for example, what would be happening if these Arab revolutions were continuing now and Saddam, who's probably 20 times as bad as Assad in Syria, was trying to suppress an uprising in Iraq. Think of the consequences of leaving that regime in power," he told presenter



Tony Blair addressing troops as he arrives in Basra for a surprise visit in 2004 to British soldiers in Iraq. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Kirsty Wark, as part of a one-hour special broadcast on Tuesday night.

"So when you say 'do you think of the loss of life since 2003', of course I do, you would have to be inhumane not to, but think of what would have happened if he had been left there."

"In a sense what I try to persuade people of now is to understand how complex and difficult a decision it was because I think if we don't understand we won't take the right decision about what I think will be a series of these types of problems that will arise over the next few years.

"You've got one in Syria right now, you've got one in Iran to come, the issue is how do you make the world a safer place?"

Blair insisted that there was still a long conflict ahead and that Britain could not avoid getting involved.

"We are in the middle of this struggle, it is going to take a generation, it

is going to be very arduous and difficult. But I think we are making a mistake, a profound error if we think we can stay out of that struggle because we are going to be affected by it whether we like it or not."

Former Liberal Democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell MP said: "Tony Blair's defensiveness over Iraq is easily understood.

"But the fact remains that he made two cardinal errors. First by allying himself too closely to the policies of George W Bush and second by ignoring the fact that Bush's objective of regime change was contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and illegal.

"Ten years on, it is almost impossible to find anyone in this country or even in the United States who is willing to support the military action against Saddam Hussein."